

GHUMAR: HISTORICAL NARRATIVES AND GENDERED PRACTICES OF
DHOLIS IN MODERN RAJASTHAN

By

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I.....	1
“GHUMAR AND FIELDWORK IN RAJASTHAN”	
Introduction	
Ghumar: Past and Present	
Rajputs and Ghumar: Warriors and Women	
Dholis: <i>Jajmani</i> and Gender	
Fieldwork	
CHAPTER II.....	26
“GHUMAR NARRATIVE AND CONTESTATIONS IN THE RANI BHATIYANI TEMPLE IN JASOL”	
Introduction	
The Rani Bhatiyani Narrative in Jasol	
Changing Narratives	
Banning Ghumar	
Conclusion	
CHAPTER III.....	44
“GHUMAR, TOURISM, AND CONTESTATIONS AMONG RANAS IN JAIPUR”	
Introduction	
The Tourism Industry and the Past Retold	
Emulation of Rajputs	
Identity Contestations	
Conclusion	
CHAPTER IV.....	70
“CONCLUSION”	
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	75

CHAPTER I

GHUMAR AND FIELDWORK IN RAJASTHAN

Introduction

Ghumar is the most popular dance in the northwestern Indian state of Rajasthan, and is most commonly performed during religious rituals and ceremonial occasions acclaiming such events as marriages and births, as well as on important Rajasthani festivals such as Holi and Gangaur (Arnold 2000: 647). During such celebratory occasions, female members of the family or community dance in circles to the slow rhythmic beatings of the *dhol* (large drums; from which comes their name, Dholi). Ghumar is also fashionable among professional Rajasthani dancers and musicians, who perform “authentic” Rajasthani art and culture during national and international cultural events. In both ritual and staged performances, Ghumar is strongly linked to its Rajput past – an upper-caste, royal, and warrior community of Rajasthan – where Rajput women danced to the music provided by the formerly untouchable, musician community, the Dholis.

Based on several months of fieldwork in Rajasthan, India, this thesis examines the relationship between the Dholis and the Rajputs, formed by their association with Ghumar, in two contemporary locations in Rajasthan: Jaipur, the capital city of Rajasthan, and Jasol, a small town in the Barmer district of Rajasthan. I argue that, in the performance and historical narratives of Ghumar, Dholi communities in both Jaipur and Jasol claim professional, ritual, and personal ties with Rajputs in order to legitimate their hereditary authority over the history and practice of Ghumar dance and music.

Furthermore, I demonstrate that Dholis seek, at times, to convert such symbolic capital into economic capital; that is, Dholis have used their links to Ghumar and to the Rajputs as a springboard to higher economic and social status.

In the next two chapters of this thesis, I will examine the interrelationships between Ghumar, Dholis, and Rajputs, giving particular attention to the structures of caste, gender, and ritual practices. Chapter 2 focuses on the ways in which Dholis, in their performances of historical narratives, reconstruct their identities and renegotiate their social status as ritual specialists in the Rani Bhatiyani temple in Jasol. Ghumar, which was an important aspect of ritual practices in the temple due to its role in inducing the queen-goddess's possession of pilgrims and devotees, was banned by Rajput administrators nearly ten years ago, thereby detrimentally impacting the Dholis' ritual specialization in the temple. However, Dholis resist the restricting authority of their Rajput patrons through performances of oral narratives and the Ghumar music for pilgrims outside the temple. Thus, Ghumar in Jasol has become a site in which narratives are constructed and negotiated in the power-play between Dholis and Rajputs. Chapter 3 deals with the changing ritual and social practices of Dholis in Jaipur. Now known as Ranas (literally, "kings"), the Dholis in Jaipur maintain strong associations with the Rajputs, either by historical narratives or by emulation, which I conceive of as a technique of resisting their social and ritual status as outcastes. Here, too, Ghumar plays a central role in the process of group identification and resistance, because it is through the performance of and association with the dance that the Rana-Dholis have succeeded in the tourism industry, thus opening avenues toward upward socio-economic mobilization.

In this thesis, therefore, I am centrally concerned with the constitutive role of Ghumar in how songs, historical narratives, and discourses on dance, culture, and ritual in Rajasthan are incorporated into the Dholis' everyday practices. I argue that the Dholis of Jasol and the Rana-Dholis of Jaipur (re)create historical narratives in accordance with changing discourses and practices of dance in order to construct, articulate, and negotiate social hierarchies, economic opportunities, and the politics of space. In the process, I underscore the importance of the tourism industry, both domestic and international, in the ways in which Ghumar is reformulated, repackaged, and then reused, not as a dance primarily associated with Rajput practices, but as a traditional Rajasthani dance intended for mass consumption.

Ghumar: Past and Present

In Rajasthan, Ghumar is remembered as a dance performed predominantly by Rajput women in female circles, and is thus an identifiably female-gendered and caste-specific practice. There are, however, some rare occasions in which professional male dancers perform Ghumar; these instances too are female-gendered, as the men dress and act like women.¹ During Ghumar, two or more Rajasthani dancers move smoothly and gracefully in circles by twirling clockwise and anticlockwise alternatively.² In fact, the name of this dance is derived from the Hindi word *ghumna*, one meaning of which is “to turn around.” The dance is characterized by veiled women, dressed in bright and colorful attire that almost completely drapes their bodies, revealing only their hands, forearms, and

¹ I had neither heard nor read about male Ghumar dancers until I witnessed a troupe of men performing at the City Palace in Jaipur during the week of the Holi festival. Upon inquiry I found out that some Rajput men from the Sekhawati region in Rajasthan have formed professional dance groups to perform Ghumar specifically for the celebration of Holi.

² As far as I know, no scholarly material on Ghumar has been published to date.

occasionally their bare feet. The women also wear expensive and elaborate jewelry consisting of necklaces, bracelets and, most importantly, ankle bells (*ghungru*). These ankle bells are worn by the dancers in order to make rhythmic sounds as they move, in correspondence to the beatings of the *dhol*.

The dance is accompanied by a few Ghumar songs, one of which is the famous “O Mhaari Ghumar Chai Nakharaali Ey Ma.”³ These songs are traditionally performed for the entertainment of royal patrons by low-caste or outcaste musician communities, most commonly the Dholis, the Langas, and the Manganiyars.⁴ Customarily, the upper-caste, royal, warrior community of Rajasthan, the Rajputs, figure as the patrons for whom such musician groups perform. The musicians sing and perform on their harmoniums and *dhol*s while the wives, mothers, and daughters of their Rajput patrons dance to the Ghumar tune. Ghumar is known to have developed among the female Rajput circles and is thus primarily associated with the warrior caste, as well as most prominently with their ritual practices. Although secondarily, the musician communities that worked for the Rajputs are also distinguished in Rajasthan for their role in helping develop the music and the songs for Ghumar. Dholis, the central subjects of my research and this thesis, are one of the low-caste musician communities who associate themselves with Ghumar through their claimed patron-client relationship with the Rajputs. Thus, because of their real or imagined links to Ghumar and the Rajputs, Dholis are often invited to offer their musical

³ Henceforth referred to as the “Ghumar song.” The English Translation of the Hindi title of the song: “O Mother, my Ghumar is so resplendent.”

⁴ As far as I am aware, there has been no scholarly material published specifically on the Dholi community. Barucha (2003), Chaudhuri (2009) and Neuman (2006) mention Dholis in their work, and focus on Langas and Manganiyars. The Langas and Manganiyars are popular Muslim hereditary musician communities in Rajasthan, and like the Dholis are also under the Scheduled Castes, or formerly untouchable castes, in the Indian constitution.

services for the performance of Ghumar in weddings, celebrations, and professional venues in present-day Rajasthan.

Due perhaps to their itinerant past, during which Dholi men and women traveled around Rajasthan to meet with and perform the genealogies of and Ghumar for their royal patrons, Dholis, and certain other of Rajasthan's musician communities, may have had a role in disseminating Ghumar music and dance across the state. However, the recording and distribution of Ghumar songs through cassettes, CDs, and DVDs, especially the collection recently released by Veena Music of Bharati Cassette Udyog, has contributed greatly to the popularity and increasing mass consumption of Ghumar throughout Rajasthan.⁵ Today, Ghumar songs are known and sung throughout the region, and the aforementioned Ghumar song in particular has become a regional favorite. It is thus not uncommon to hear the Ghumar song while visiting houses, marketplaces, restaurants, and hotels in Rajasthan.

Although Ghumar has been primarily associated with the Rajputs, members of all castes and communities today perform and enjoy the dance and its songs during various celebrations and social events. Ghumar is thus the most commonly performed dance among locals in Rajasthan, and has been selected as a symbol for Rajasthani ethnic identity by the state government. Schools, colleges and universities in Rajasthan have begun to offer Ghumar classes to their students, describing Ghumar as one of the most important authentic "folk" dances of Rajasthan. As an extracurricular activity, wealthy and middle-class Rajasthani parents, especially in Jaipur, send their daughters to dance schools or invite dance teachers to their homes to train their children in Ghumar and other

⁵ Bharati Cassette Udyog's main office in Johari Bazar, Jaipur, boasts over 2 million (20 *lakh*) copies sold nationally and internationally, since its "Ghoomar" album release in 2001.

Rajasthani folk dances. During a house visit with dance teacher Rajendra Rao, a parent of one of the children he had been teaching on a weekly basis for 3 years, said “In today’s world, the culture is changing rapidly. It is important to teach our children about the authentic Rajasthani culture. That is why we are making them learn these dances: Ghumar, Gorbhand, and other folk dances.”⁶

Apart from its more ritualized enactments, Ghumar is also popular among professional dancers and musicians, particularly during events and shows that seek to represent the cultures and traditions of Rajasthan. The increase of tourism in Rajasthan and cultural events organized by national movements in the past two decades have allowed various local entertaining communities to make a living by performing dances and music from Rajasthan. These local musicians and dancers, who have now formed professional organizations and dance troupes called “dance parties,” hire female dancers, especially those from the Kalbeliya caste.⁷ While in western Rajasthan the professional male musicians often belong to Langa and Mangainyar castes, in eastern Rajasthan, including Jaipur, the male musicians are hired predominantly from the Dholi community, who are adept at learning and performing the traditional music respective to various castes, communities, and regions. In Jaipur, most of these “dance parties” are owned and organized by members of the Kalbeliya and Dholi communities themselves. During local,

⁶ After Rajendra Rao’s students’ Ghumar practice/performance, I interviewed the mother of two of the five girls in the room, who was also the resident of the house we visited. I started my questions in Hindi, but because this mother chose to reply to me in English, most of our conversation was in English. I also interviewed the children (there were five girls, ages ranging from 6 to 11) as a group and asked them about the dance. Indicative of how Ghumar has been received by middle-class Rajasthanis, it is telling that none of the children called Ghumar an authentic folk dance, nor did they say that they were learning it because it was important for them to learn about Rajasthani culture. They simply said “this is our dance”, “this is how we dance,” and “this is what we do.”

⁷ A formerly itinerant, outcaste community of snake charmers, the Kalbeliyas are famous for their *bins* (gourd flute) and “gypsy” dance, performed as a caste-specific dance by female members of their community. The Kalbeliyas, as demonstrated later in this thesis, share economic and professional space and lifestyle with the Dholis in Jaipur.

regional, national, and international events, these dance parties exhibit a repertoire of songs and dances representing different arts and cultures of Rajasthan: Chari, Kalbeliya, Bhavai, Tera-Tali, Banjara-Banjari, and Ghumar.

As this section has demonstrated, Ghumar has an important role in the lives of different people in the state of Rajasthan. However, it is one of the central arguments of this thesis that Ghumar has been particularly significant to the Dholi community of Rajasthan. Thus this thesis will examine the everyday practices of Dholis through their engagements with Ghumar. In order to appreciate the social and ritual force of Dholi assertions of hereditary links with Ghumar, it is imperative to first present some background to the Rajputs, particularly with regards to their relationships to Ghumar.

Rajputs and Ghumar: Warriors and Women

“Rajasthan, the land of kings is about the story of warriors, and about chivalry, romance, glory and tragedy in fairy tale proportions....Folklore of heroism and romance resound from the formidable monuments that majestically stand to tell the tale of a bygone era.” (“Rajasthan Tourism” 2010)

The above quotes are the first two sentences on the information page of the official website of the Rajasthan State Government’s Tourism Department. These concise descriptions of Rajasthan, used strategically to entice tourists to visit the state, reflect well some common regional, national, and international discourses regarding the region and traditional culture of Rajasthan. Rajasthan, literally “the land of the kings,” is home to the Rajputs, “the sons of kings,” who, unsurprisingly, are the members of the dominant

and most respected group in Rajasthan.⁸ As a warrior caste, the Rajputs' primary duties are conceived of as having traditionally been to rule kingdoms and fight battles. The Rajputs were rulers for centuries and were still in control of many kingdoms until Indian Independence from British imperial rule in 1947, after which the several princely states of the region were brought together to form what is today the state of Rajasthan.⁹ More than sixty years after the abolishment of monarchical governance, the glorification of Rajput valor and martiality still resonates in many of Rajasthan's popular monuments, architectural structures, temples, museum collections, written documents, oral narratives, religious rituals, and gendered practices.¹⁰

In Rajasthan, as in other north Indian states, however, Rajput communities exhibit internal hierarchies whereby not all Rajputs are remembered to have been rulers. Harlan (1992: 6), for example, documents three traditional sub-classes of Rajputs: royal Rajputs, noble Rajputs, and ordinary Rajputs. As the royal Rajputs ruled kingdoms as *maharajas* (kings), the noble Rajputs work under them as noblemen, taking care of the governance and tax-collection in their respective *thikanas* (estates). The members of the third sub-group are the ordinary, non-aristocratic Rajputs referred to as *chota bhai* (little brother) Rajputs, because they claim to be the descendants of the brothers of kings. These *chota bhai* Rajputs generally are not as wealthy or powerful as the other two Rajput sub-groups. Despite the political and economic differences between these three, all Rajputs claim royal blood, identify themselves as a single caste-community, and maintain a higher

⁸ Derick Lodrick (1994) has argued that the idea of Rajasthan as a region that is dominated by the political and cultural hegemony of the Rajputs is an imaginary construct.

⁹ Balzani (2003) argues that although legally no kings exist in Rajasthan, royal power has survived. The descendants of former kings continue to hold social, economic and political power in not just state level, but national level as well.

¹⁰ See Asher (1992), Balzani (2003), Beili (2009), Crill (2003), Harlan (1992, 2003), Huntington (1994), Morris (1983).

social status than other groups and communities in Rajasthan. They acknowledge that they are related to one another, either by marriage or descent, and that they can trace their genealogies back to common royal ancestors. As Harlan (1992: 8) mentions, there is great consistency among the different Rajput sub-classes when it comes to ritual and gendered practices, which can serve to further reinforce the kinship bond among Rajputs in Rajasthan.

One of the prominent features of Rajputs is the way in which Rajput women are demarcated through their gender practices, and Rajput women's socio-ritual practices are the most common ways in which Rajputs distinguish themselves from other castes and communities. *Sati* (self immolation) is one of the most debated and dramatic examples of such gendered practice separating the Rajputs from other non-Rajput communities.¹¹

According to Unninathan-Kumar (1997), Rajputs use their women

As markers of differences and identities especially with regard to the distinctive ways in which they dressed, including the specific kinds of jewelry they wore; their sexuality, behaviour and attitudes, particularly in public places, and their work-tasks and 'value', considered to be reflected in the institution of marriage (Unninathan-Kumar 1997: 20)

In fact, the observance of *purdah* (literally 'curtain') is one of the most important features of Rajput gender identity and practice. Among the Rajputs, *purdah* is both the veil used to conceal women's faces and bodies (*ghunghat*), and the seclusion of married women. Traditionally, among the royal and noble Rajputs, the household was divided into two parts – the men's quarters (*mardana*) and the women's quarters (*zanana*) – and

¹¹ *Sati* is a religious ritual in India where widows are burned on their husband's funeral pyre or right afterwards on a different pyre. It was popularized and sensationalized during the British Raj as a "traditional" practice. Also, under the British government, the practice of *sati* was abolished in 1829 because it was seen, by the westerners, as a crime against women. In 1987, the Indian government made the glorification and worship of *sati* illegal. However, one still gets to hear about women becoming *satis* and *sati* temples flourishing in India. See Hardgrove (1999). For critical arguments and debates on *Sati*, see Mani (2000).

comprised a system that excluded the members of one gender from entering the space of the other, unless for specific visits reserved for specific members of the family. Although *purdah* through such a domestic division has become a very rare observation in contemporary Rajasthan, female members of the Rajput community continue, nonetheless, to wear veils, and most married women do not leave their houses without notifying the family or without an escort. It is particularly important among married Rajput women to cover completely their faces and bodies in front of the male members of their husbands' families; this practice of veiling is not as important when Rajput women visit their maternal household. Hence, despite a certain loosening of exclusionary practices in certain ways, Rajputs still consider *purdah* a distinguishing and important characteristic of their gendered and gendering practices.

The Rajput practice of wearing the veil figures prominently in contemporary performances of Ghumar, and most of my informants explained this by stating that Ghumar developed among the Rajput women in the confines of the *zanana*. Rajendra Singh, a Rajput and my landlord during the last few months of my stay in Jaipur, remembers when Ghumar was performed only by and among circles of Rajput women. According to Rajendra, the only other women present in the room would have been Dholans, female members of the Dholi community who provided music for the dancers. However, today most women perform Ghumar in front of men and guests during social and religious events. Rajendra Singh admitted that his female family members danced Ghumar in front of a huge crowd during his daughter's wedding, which had taken place a few months before I moved into his house. Despite the change of the environment in which Ghumar is performed, however, *purdah* remains a distinguishing feature of

modern-day Ghumar, and various informants told me that Ghumar would not be as such without the veil.

Haridutt Kalla, dance teacher and choreographer for Jawahar Kala Kendra, a prominent center for the performing arts in Jaipur, noted the meaningful centrality of Ghumar in Rajput self-understanding and gendered and gendering identification. According to Haridutt, the dancers inculcate the *laaj* (modesty) characteristic of Rajput women by wearing the veil and moving slowly and elegantly across the dance floor. Because Ghumar was developed in the *zananas*, the veil also symbolizes the important distance that the Rajput women had to maintain from the male members and elders of their husband's family. This *laaj* and distance, two key motifs in the construction of female sexual morality – and through it, of the “good name” of the Rajput community on the whole – are symbolized in the language and bodily adornments of Ghumar, and enacted during the performance itself. As Haridutt explained, Rajput brides and married women were not allowed to verbalize the names of their husbands' elder family members, and as a result these women used various symbolic actions and materials to denote, without naming, each member of the family. These symbolic actions comprised of touching different pieces of jewelry, which were themselves infused with gendered, metonymic meaning. For example, the *bajuband* (armband) is a masculine noun in Hindi and thus symbolized a male member of the family, while the *choori* (bangle) is feminine and referred to female members. During the performance of Ghumar, women sing songs about the various aspects of their lives, but most of the lyrics make explicit and metonymic mention of their family. The main hand movements and gestures of Ghumar are thus those that symbolize the various family members depicted in the song.

While known throughout Rajasthan in its shorthand form, Ghumar, the dance is referenced in Rajput circles by its full name, Rajwara Ghumar (“royal Ghumar”), as one of the ways in which Rajputs have preserved and glorified their royal and martial identity. In addition to family, another central theme in Ghumar’s lyrical poetry is Rajput valor and victory in battle. These two concerns, family and martial valor, are emphasized in a Ghumar song entitled “Lehariyo,” in which the women ask their husbands to buy them expensive, resplendent dresses known as *lehariya*, in order that the women might fit in with their husbands’ regal, martial, and superior families. Throughout the song, the women describe and praise the various royal and martial characteristics of the male member of her husband’s family. Similarly, the famous Ghumar song mentioned above, “O Mhaari Ghumar Chai Nakharaali Ey Ma,” finds Rajput women depicting the various sub-clan communities (*gotra*) of the Rajputs, comparing and contrasting their martial strengths and weaknesses. Himmat Singh, a prominent proponent of the Rajasthani performing arts who worked for Rajasthan’s Tourism Department in the 1980s and 1990s, says that Rajput women sing the latter song to express their preferences for Rajput families known for their valor and strength as warriors. According to Himmat, quoting the words of the song, unmarried Rajput women ask their mothers “Who are the best warriors?” To which the mothers might respond, “The Rathors are.” Then, the unmarried girls will request, “Give me away to the Rathor Rajputs and not the Shishodhiya ones because of so and so martial qualities. I like the way Rathors speak because they have a regal way of talking, and so on and so forth.”

This section has given a brief account of Rajput values and practices in Rajasthan, particularly those which relate to ritual and narrative enactments of gender and sexual

morality. In doing so, the section has revealed that the movements, adornments, and songs of Ghumar have close ties with a female Rajput identity. Some people whom I interviewed argue that Ghumar, when performed by women other than Rajputs, is not genuinely Ghumar. Haridutt Kalla, who has choreographed Ghumar for more than fifty events, admits that his performances, no matter how detailed, do not capture the “true essence” of the Rajput femininity that inheres in improvised *zanana* dances. Haridutt claims that:

The Ghumar performed today by females of other community members is not pure Ghumar: it isn't even 10 percent of what it used to be. Only women who understand *lajja* [“modesty”; an alternative pronunciation/spelling for *laaj*] the way that Rajput women did, can perform Ghumar in its true sense. However, Ghumar cannot be performed [genuinely] without the Rajput upbringing, given the importance of values and traditions. That is why only Rajput women can attain the personality required to dance Ghumar.

Haridutt Kalla's essentialized vision of Ghumar is not the subject of this thesis, nor is the examination of Ghumar as a Rajput dance. For me, the relationship between Ghumar and its Rajput past is important only in order to understand the ways in which Dholis construct their relationships with Rajputs in contemporary Rajasthan.

Dholis: *Jajmani* and Gender.

The Dholis are named after their professional and traditional musical instrument, a double-sided barrel drum called the *dhol*. Customarily, the Dholis have worked for hereditary patrons, maintaining a *jajmani* (patron-client)¹² relationship in which they

¹² *Jajmani* literally means “those supported by the sacrificer” because it is derived from the word *Yajman* which in Sanskrit is the “sacrificer.” The *jajmani* is a system in which the supporter and the ones being supported maintain relationships built on reciprocal exchanges and a complex set of mutual obligations. Although in most cases, *jajmans* are of a higher class or caste than the community that they support, there

kept genealogies for, and provided entertainment to, their *jajmans* (patrons). The Dholis fulfilled such feudal obligations during festivals and rituals, through music and dance, in exchange for remuneration. Although the feudal system in Rajasthan has given way to a predominantly market economy, some Dholi families still work for their patrons as hereditary musicians and occasional laborers. However, in recent times, many Dholis have severed ritual and economic ties with their patrons. Instead they have appropriated new occupations, such as government positions, the police force, rickshaw driving, etc. In urban centers in particular, however, such as Jaipur and Jodhpur, Dholis have met with a fair amount of success refashioning their abilities as hereditary and traditional musicians into professional musicians, dancers, and entertainers in the tourism industry.¹³

This thesis focuses on two communities of Rajasthani Dholis, who each exhibit one side of this oscillation between “traditional, hereditary musician,” and entertainer in the tourism industry. Both the Jaipur and Jasol Dholis work as traditional and hereditary musicians, though differently and for different purposes. The Dholis in Jasol have retained their identities as hereditary musicians for their Rajput patrons in a temple dedicated to the deity Rani Bhatiyani, a Rajput queen who immolated herself on the funeral pyre of a male relative, thereby becoming a *sati*, approximately two hundred years ago.¹⁴ In Jaipur, on the other hand, the Dholis have begun entertaining Indian and international tourists through various forms of music and dance. Among these Jaipur Dholis, most have formed their own “dance parties” and even opened offices in Jaipur, in

are instances where the relationship is mutual or inverse. Most often both parties are linked by hereditary connections, although it is possible to change families.

¹³ Compare similar trends with other north Indian musician caste-communities in Snodgrass (1991), and Thompson (1991, 1992).

¹⁴ I am relying on the interviews that I collected in Jasol in dating the queen.

order to provide entertainment services in hotels, restaurants, marriages, national and cultural events, and for movies, music videos, and CDs.

The Dholis are a performing caste listed under the category of Scheduled Castes in the Indian constitution; that is, as formerly untouchable and thereby deserving of certain governmental services and “reservations.” Because of their formerly itinerant past, the Dholis are also often described as “nomadic.” However, the Dholis, with either the support of the government or through personal funding, have recently built and settled into homes. In Jaipur, the Dholis now live in two main locations: Hasanpura and Kalakar Colony, the latter of which is frequently referred to as one of the “slum” areas in Jaipur. In Hasanpura, most Dholi families have constructed make-shift homes on properties that are privately owned by other people or that belong to the government, while some Dholis have built homes of brick and cement. The plots of land in Kalakar Colony on which Dholis live and have built semi-permanent structures are owned exclusively by the government, distributed to several itinerant performance (including Kalbeliyas and Kathputli-valas, or puppeteers) communities who were squatting on private property nearly twenty years ago. In Jasol, some Dholis who work in the temple have made enough money to either rent or build their own houses, while others live on property owned by the Rajput administrators of Rani Bhatiyani temple, and yet others live in tents and make-shift homes, squatting on others’ properties.

According to the memories of my informants, both male and female members of the Dholi community worked as musicians in the past. Dholi women, known as Dholans, participated, and in some cases still participate, in the *jajmani* system by offering their services to the female members of their *jajmans*. Like their male counterparts, some

Dholans work for people who aren't their *jajmans*, providing music and entertainment for marriages and other religious rituals. While this is certainly the case, many of my Dholi informants in Jaipur claim that their wives and daughters have never worked. This is, however, indicative more of recent transformations in the narrative and gender practices of the Dholis in Jaipur than of their pasts. Following a *pancayat* (caste-council) ordinance, the Dholis who work and make enough money to support the family have, in many cases, begun disallowing female members to work. Although their numbers are declining, there are Dholans, however, who still work as musicians for economic stability.

This *pancayat* decision is similar to the socio-religious mobilizations of low-caste communities described by two scholars associated with the Subaltern Studies collective, which arrived on the scene in the 1980s with a forceful critique of elitist and nationalist historiography. In his historical ethnography on the *adivasi* (tribal) peasants of Gujarat during the national movement, Hardiman (1984) underscores the community's awareness of others' perceptions of their social practices as identifiable "low-caste" and "polluting". Hardiman argues that the Gujarati *adivasis'* caste-wide prohibition of their former liquor-drinking and meat-eating practices at the behest of the goddess who had begun possessing men from this community, served as a subaltern appropriation of the religious symbols of the elite, in an attempt to resist the economic, social, and religious subjection to the local Parsi elite. According to Hardiman, these shifts in ritual and social practices demonstrate the *adivasis'* conscious effort of adapting upper-caste socio-ritual practices to resist their low-caste status. Similarly, Saurabh Dube (1998) examines the pasts of untouchable Camars of the religious sect known as the Satnampanth, who also renounced

meat and alcohol consumption. The Satnamis, in addition to rejecting social behaviors that marked their low-caste status, also implemented identifiably upper-caste Hindu ritual practices in order to claim their status as caste Hindus.

While the Rana-Dholis of Jaipur exhibit certain affinities with the efforts of the *adivasis* and the Satnamis to appropriate upper-caste religious practices, so such organized mobilization is found among the Dholis of Jasol. Yet, these Dholis do not passively accept their out-caste status or their socio-economic subjection to Rajputs. If Haridman's and Dube's work provide a useful framework for understanding Dholi mobilization in Jaipur, then James C. Scott's model of "everyday forms of resistance" (1986) help elucidate power struggles in Jasol. Scott's conceptualizations of resistance (1986) highlight the agency of peasants within their everyday struggles against those in power, yet he points to instances in which peasants rebel without explicitly confronting authority. Instead, peasants performatively espouse the moral values and social practice of the dominant groups in their presence, without actually giving them credence in their practice or ethical code in their absence. In Jasol, the Dholis resist local Rajputs by claiming their authority over Ghumar through everyday narrative practices, arguing that their relationship to the queen is more meaningful and authoritative than the Rajputs'. Additionally, even though the Rajputs have banned Ghumar from the temple complex, Dholis perform Ghumar outside of the temple boundaries, and can even be persuaded by pilgrims and devotees to perform it inside the temple on occasion.

Similar to the Hardiman's and Dube's cases, the newfound insistence that men should act as the primary financial supports for their families, and the erasure of female occupations as musicians, is part of regional caste-wide efforts to emulate the social

practices of upper-caste Rajputs, much of which is the subject for chapter 2. Yet, the organizational resistance of Jaipur's Rana-Dholis is not without its own forms of everyday resistance. In addition to changing their names from "Dholi" to "Rana" (literally "king"), one of the most visible consequences in this transformation has occurred in female gender practices, which now appear congruent with those of Rajputs. For example, like the Rajputs, Rana-Dholi women observe *purdah*, and married women wear veils in the company of older males and strangers. However, older Rana-Dholans, especially those who have had grandchildren, cover their heads with the *ghunghat* without concealing their faces. Yet, even while these women may not always cover their faces, they, like Scott's peasants, often espouse the moral values of the dominant classes – or, in the instance, the men. Married Rana-Dholans who work claim that they wear the veils at all times during their services. Additionally, although Rana-Dholi families with strict observations of *purdah* do not allow their women to leave the house without being escorted by older females or male members of their family, there are those Rana-Dholi women in Jaipur who remember being their family's primary bread-winner, and who defiantly resist their husband's and their *pancayat*'s orders to remain in the house and to cease playing their *dhol* professionally. Before I move on to discuss such transformations in the next chapter, however, I need to layout here my research methods and my areas of fieldwork.

Fieldwork

When I arrived in Jaipur on December 12, 2008, I was very excited to start my research project, which I conceived of as fieldwork on Ghumar in the lives of *chota bhai* Rajputs.

I had started my preparations less than a year before, reading and training for ethnographic fieldwork. I began my research on Rajputs and dance my first semester in graduate school after deciding to apply for the Richter scholarship to support my fieldwork in India. Upon receiving the award, I decided to go to Nepal to assist Dr. Steve Folmar on his research among Dalit (outcaste) musician groups known as Gandharba, in hopes of learning firsthand how to conduct ethnographic fieldwork. After a successful month of collecting data and interviews, my assistantship was over and I left Nepal to visit Jaipur with my partner, Carter Higgins. Carter had gone to Jaipur for the year-long Hindi program offered by the American Institute of Indian Studies (AIIS), and we decided to get a feel for Jaipur before I returned to the United States to complete another semester of course work. During our stay in Jaipur, for a duration of about 10 days, we became friends with a rickshaw driver, Kishan, who claimed that his wife belonged to *chota bhai* Rajput family. He took us to his home, where we met his parents and his wife. Kishan's wife told me that she danced Ghumar and that she would be more than willing to introduce me to her Rajput family when I returned to Jaipur in December to begin my research. I departed for the United States excited that my research had already begun. During the fall semester back in school, I took a class on Ethnographic Research, read more on Rajputs and wrote a term paper on Kathak, one of the most popular Indian classical dances, because I could not find material on Ghumar.

On my first morning in Jaipur, the cleaning lady, Lakshmi, came knocking on my door. I started a conversation with her and told her that I had come to Jaipur to write on Rajputs and dance. She immediately told me that she performed Ghumar, that she was a Rajput, and that she would help me with whatever she could. I couldn't be happier: I

already had two contacts and I hadn't even spent a whole day in Jaipur. However, the following week I found out from my landlord that Lakshmi wasn't actually Rajput. I had also tried contacting Kishan and had failed to get a hold of him. In the following weeks, despite my best efforts, I had made no contacts with any *chota bhai* Rajputs. I did, however, get a chance to watch a performance of Ghumar during this time. A Kalbeliya family that had become close informants of Carter – who was then researching the snake-charming and narrative practices of the Kalbeliyas in Jaipur – were operators of a prominent “dance party,” the women of which frequently included Ghumar in their stage performance. Through the Kalbeliyas, I learned that Ghumar, although associated with the Rajputs, was very popular throughout Rajasthan as a sort of state-identifying “folk” art. In the following month, I also met with various professional dance teachers in Jaipur, who taught Ghumar and other Rajasthani dances to local school and college level students. They all agreed that Ghumar was no longer an exclusively Rajput dance, and that women of all castes and communities danced Ghumar during festivals and other socio-religious events.

During many of my visits to Kalbeliya homes and hamlets in Bhojpura Basti and Kalakar Colony with Carter, I met many people (and made almost as many friends) who worked as professional musicians and dancers. The Dholi community in Kalakar Colony particularly grabbed my attention because they called themselves Ranas, a name commonly associated with Rajputs. This interest led to some initial research among the Ranas, and my first interviews in Kalakar Colony were with Rana men. Because I was not yet comfortable speaking in Rajasthani, and because residents of Kalakar Colony peppered their Hindi with Rajasthani words and phrases, some of my interviews were

conducted with the help of Carter's friend and later research assistant, Kalunath Sapera, a Kalbeliya resident of Kalakar Colony with an ability to mediate between my Nepali-laced Hindi and the Rana-Dholi's Rajasthani-laced Hindi.

Sometime in January, Dr. James M. Hastings, Carter's former professor in the United States and a veteran researcher in Rajasthan, came to know that I was interested in Ghumar, and suggested that I go to a village in western Rajasthan called Jasol, where people claimed that a Rajput princess-turned-deity, Rani Bhatiyani, had written the Ghumar song. Carter and I immediately booked tickets and traveled to Jasol. Upon an early morning arrival to the Rani Bhatiyani temple, we saw the resident Dholi musicians singing devotional songs (*bhajan*) accompanied by harmonium and *dhol* at several spots throughout the temple complex. As we watched the musicians performing, and the small number of early-rising devotees making their way to the main shrine, and then around to the smaller hero-stones placed throughout the complex, we were approached by a man who introduced himself as Devi Singh, the Rajput temple administrator. After explaining myself and my research interests, Devi gave the Dholi musicians permission to sing the Ghumar song so that I could video tape the performance. The reason Devi Singh's permission was required by the Dholi musicians to perform the Ghumar song, Devi told me, was that the recently established Rajput administration of the temple had banned the song from being performed inside the temple: along with the recently enacted prohibitions on blood and liquor sacrifices, once constituting the most appropriate form of worship at the Rani Bhatiyani temple, the new Rajput administration was attempting to curb female possessions, which were more frequently induced by the Ghumar song, and which often resulted in immodest female indifference to the flailing of their limbs and the

falling of their garments. If we wanted to see what the temple was really like, Devi Singh told us, we should come back during the camel festival in Jasol, during which time he promised to gather women outside the temple premises to perform the Ghumar dance for me. As I had made prior arrangements in Jaipur during those given dates, I could not attend the camel festival. However, per Devi Singh's other recommendation, we returned to Jasol during the monthly Rani Bhatiyani festival (*mela*) a month and a half later.

When I returned to Jasol, I stayed in Devi Singh's house with his wife and two children. Everyday around 9:00 am, after my morning chores, I walked to the temple and conducted interviews with the Dholis, temple administrators, and pilgrims until 9 or 10 pm. Throughout the time I spent in Jasol, as in Jaipur, my research consisted of both interviews and participant observation. I tried to integrate myself with, and earn the trust of, both the Dholis and the Rajputs. I visited the homes of the Dholis several times throughout the day, meeting with and interviewing the women and children as well. In addition to direct observation and semi-structured interviews with open ended questions, I also recorded their music, listened to oral narratives, and took videos and photographs.

My average day in Jasol did not stop when I returned home from the temple. I spent the majority of my evenings in extended discussions with Devi Singh's wife, Phul Kanwar, a woman in her mid thirties, after dinner and putting her children, Navadurga and Dasharath, to bed. I would not classify my conversations with her as interviews, because she had as many questions as I did, if not more. She did, however, answer all my questions about Rajput lifestyle as she had experienced it, and much of what I have come to know about Rajput gender practices is a result of my close relationship with her. Concomitantly, I also learned much about caste hierarchy from Phul, who was very open

about her opposition to my visits to the Dholis' homes. At one point, after I had made it clear that I intended on continuing to pursue relationships with Dholis, Phul asked me to refrain from eating food or drinking water at their houses, a request which I simply could not oblige. Because the Dholis are outcastes, their food and water possesses the potential to "pollute" those of higher castes, including Rajputs. Although none of our conversations were recorded, I wrote down everything I could remember the next day in the daily journal I kept during my research in Jasol.

After my trip to Jasol, I decided to focus my research on the Dholi community, and upon my return to Jaipur I began contacting Dholis who worked as professional musicians and performers. Although I spent the majority of my time conducting interviews in Kalakar colony, I also went to Hasanpura, another area in Jaipur where Dholis had settled. My interviews among the Dholis in both Jaipur and Jasol were conducted predominantly among the adult, male members of these communities, although in Kalakar Colony, Jaipur, in particular, I also interviewed and became friends with a number of Dholi women and children.

During my stay in Jaipur, I was able to attend weddings and religious rituals of the Dholis, and observe various festivals. In fact, I was even asked to take photographs of one Dholi wedding. During the multi-day marriage ceremonies for Kalu Rana, the son of Swarupi Rana, my primary female informant in Kalakar Colony, I documented all of the main religious rituals, beginning 9 days before the wedding and lasting a day after the main ceremony. I also witnessed the Gaungar festival celebrated by Rana girls of Kalakar Colony, attending various rituals performed during the three last days of the 18 days festival. The unmarried girls made earthen images of Gauri (Parvati) and Shiva and

worshipped them everyday, praying for future marital prosperity. On the last day, after a full day of fasting, the girls, dancing and singing songs, carried the images on their heads to a nearby river into which they ceremonially threw the images, in conclusion of their worship and prayer. On their way back home some of the girls danced Ghumar in the middle of the street, with Kalu Rana's sister-in-law playing a big *dhol* as she walked. Among the other festivals that I attended were Holi, Shetala Mata, and the Elephant *mela*.

Through the period of my fieldwork, I became interested in certain sets of transformations in the way my three interests – Ghumar, the Dholis, and the Rajputs – were arranged. In Jaipur, the Dholis no longer called themselves as such; they had become “Ranas,” and their ritual, narrative, and gender practices were increasingly emulative of those of Rajputs. It seemed that the Ranas' successes in the tourism industry, built up from their specialization in Ghumar performance, had provided them with the economic means to pursue such socio-religious metamorphosis. In Jasol, the Rani Bhatiyani temple was formerly where Dholis had performed the praises of a Rajput queen and the author of Ghumar; this praise itself often took the form of the Ghumar song, and the Rajput queen enjoyed it so much that she possessed women from various castes when it was played. Now, however, Dholis are restricted from playing the Ghumar song by the same Rajput administrators who have disallowed animal and alcohol sacrifices from the temple premises. I was struck, too, by what appeared to me to be the continued subjection of the Dholis by the Rajputs, for whom the former often engaged in unpaid labor. What are the implications of such transformations or continuities? What are the roles of the tourism industry and the regional importance of pilgrimage to the Rani Bhatiyani temple, in the possibilities and directions of such changes? What might we

learn from such vastly differing configurations of Ghumar, Dholis, and Rajputs? And finally, what do the answers to these questions tell us about how dance, narrative, and gender practices are employed in social programs of reproduction, resistance, and transformation? These questions, then, animate the next two chapters of my thesis.

CHAPTER II

GHUMAR NARRATIVE AND CONTESTATIONS IN THE RANI BHATIYANI TEMPLE IN JASOL

Introduction

One of the important places in which Ghumar is sung and danced is the Rani Bhatiyani temple in Jasol, a small town in the Barmer district of western Rajasthan. This chapter seeks to explore the complex ritual and political relationships of Ghumar performance to ritual musicians and administrators at this temple, in order to demonstrate the ways in which Dholis resist Rajput patrons through historical narratives of their community and the performance of Ghumar for pilgrims beyond the temple grounds. In doing so, this chapter lays out some of the ritual, devotional, legal, and class tensions between Dholis and Rajputs.

This temple in Jasol is the main shrine in Rajasthan dedicated to the warrior princess-turned-deity, Rani Bhatiyani,¹⁵ who lived around two hundred and fifty years ago.¹⁶ Named after the Bhati Rajput community to which she belonged, Rani Bhatiyani is worshipped all over western Rajasthan, where she has numerous shrines. In her Jasol

¹⁵ *Rani* in Hindi means queen. *Rani* is capitalized throughout in cases of Rani Bhatiyani, Rani Swarup, and later Rani Devri because the queens were always addressed as such.

¹⁶ The estimated dates of Rani Bhatiyani are taken from my interviews, a pamphlet printed in Jasol about the deity, and other sources. See Trembath (1999). Another important Rani Bhatiyani shrine is in the village Jogidas ka Gaon, in the Jaisalmer District of Rajasthan. Jogidas ka Gaon is the birthplace of Rani Bhatiyani, whereas Jasol is where the Rani moved after her marriage to the ruler of the village, Kalyan Singh. Whereas the original Rani Bhatiyani shrine and the alleged house of her birthplace in Jogidas ka Gaon was practically unknown for many years, a new shrine has been created and is now well known among pilgrims and devotees (Chaudhari 2009: 104). According to my interviewees, the temple ground in Jasol is also the funeral ground of Rani Bhatiyani. See below for further details.

temple, the resident musicians are members of the Dholi caste-community.¹⁷ As part of their hereditary occupation, Dholis narrate stories and sing praises of Rani Bhatiyani in the temple during its hours of operation. Among the various songs that the Dholis dedicate to the deity, the Ghumar song “O Mhaari Ghumar Chai Nakharaali Ey Ma” is the most important and most popular.¹⁸ Devotees and pilgrims who visit the temple frequently ask the Dholis to sing the Ghumar song as an invitation to Rani Bhatiyani to join in the Ghumar dance.¹⁹ In other words, the Ghumar song, when performed by the Dholis, calls upon the deity to manifest herself in one or more human bodies, after which she may heal people and solve familial and social problems. Thus the Ghumar song plays an important part of the religious dynamics in the Rani Bhatiyani temple in Jasol.

As is the case with most pilgrimage sites (*tirth-sthan*) in South Asia, the road leading to the temple is lined with food stalls and shops selling various ritual accoutrements such as fresh flowers, garlands, and sweets to be presented inside the temple. In addition there were stores that sold cassettes and DVD’s along with consumer products of broader interest (toys, sunglasses, etc.). Among the cassettes and DVD’s were two feature films about the life and miraculous feats of the Rani, as well as recordings of Ghumar songs and dances, which along with other devotional-cum-consumer products sold by street vendors outside the temple were marketed as multimedia aids in the worship and glorification of Rani Bhatiyani. If the goods marketed and sold to pilgrims are any indication, then the view on the street might suggest an established connection

¹⁷ The resident musicians in the Rani Bhatiyani temple in Jogidas ka Gaon are the Manganiyars, a Muslim musician caste-community in Rajasthan. The Manganiyars have similar historical narratives as the Dholis. I have never been to the temple in Jogidas Ka Gaon. My information about the temple at Jogidas Ka Gaon and the Manganiyars comes from a few sources; the Dholis and Temple administrators in Jasol and from written texts by Neuman et al. (2006) and Chaudhari (2009).

¹⁸ “O Mhaari Ghumar Chai Nakharaali Ey Ma” will henceforth be referred to as the Ghumar song.

¹⁹The same is true among Manganiyars in Jogidas ka Gaon. See Chaudhari (2009: 110)

between Ghumar and the Rani. Inside the temple, the Dholis sing most of the songs contained in visual and audio materials sold outside. They sing songs praising Rani Bhatiyani, her brother-in-law Sawai Singh, and her son Lal Singh. They do not normally, however, sing the Ghumar song even upon requests of pilgrims and devotees.

The Rajput temple administrators, who claim direct descent from Rani Bhatiyani's family, banned the Dholis from singing the Ghumar song inside the perimeters of the temple. According to the Dholis and temple administrators, the Rajputs had taken this step in order to stop the possession of devotees, who were mostly women, because the swaying and dancing of the possessed had become unmanageable and chaotic, especially during festivals when thousands of pilgrims visit the temple. However, female (and occasionally male) pilgrims continually become possessed by Rani Bhatiyani at the temple.²⁰ The temple security and temple administrators do not stop people from becoming possessed, unless, that is, the possession becomes too frantic. Furthermore, three local women visit the temple daily in order to serve as ritual specialists, frequently through a state of possession. The administrators, very much aware of the presence and practices of these women, never hinder their frequent states of possession. The central question of this chapter, then, is as follows: If the primary way that the goddess can possess individuals is through the performance of Ghumar, and if the devotees and pilgrims thus need the Dholis to perform Ghumar, then why are Dholis restricted from singing the Ghumar song in the temple? In addressing this question, this chapter will explore the relationship between the resident Dholis, their Rajput patrons, and pilgrims and devotees visiting the temple. I argue that there is a complex contestation of power in

²⁰ During the main days of the *mela*, the frequency of devotees getting possessed escalated to about one approximately every five minutes.

the temple, which is fought on the battlegrounds of historical narrative, ritual practice, and temple legislation. This chapter will thus layout: 1) the various shades of Dholi and Rajput re-imaginings or manipulations of the historical narratives of Rani Bhatiyani; 2) the different ways in which the Dholis' actions reproduce and resist the power structures of caste and authority in the temple; and 3) how the pilgrims' actions reproduce and resist the power structures of gender and caste hierarchies. Here, the Rajput narratives and temple-legislative practices instigate the structures of caste and gender that the Dholis and pilgrims are reproducing and resisting. Although the Dholis engage professionally and ritually with Rajputs in a social world of unequal power relations, and may reproduce various aspects of the unequal power structure, this chapter argues that it is through narrative practices that they are able to argue for their own professional position and ritual authority. In presenting this argument, the chapter is divided into three sections: 1) the Rani Bhatiyani story as told by musicians, devotees, and administrators in Jasol; 2) shifts and changes in the historical narratives of the Rani Bhatiyani story, specifically in comparison with previous publications concerned with such narrative; and 3) the banning from the temple of the Ghumar song along with alcohol, cigarettes, and animal sacrifices.

The Rani Bhatiyani Narrative in Jasol

In 2003-2004, Chaudhari (2009) collected no fewer than six variant narratives of the transformation of Rani Bhatiyani from a Rajput princess into a goddess. Likewise, I have also encountered several different versions of the story of Rani Bhatiyani. Although there are important differences between these versions, there are nevertheless certain common elements in the Rani Bhatiyani narratives. A printed pamphlet that is sold by the temple

trust (composed of Rajputs) and is circulated in the temple, elaborates these accounts, especially the aspects important in what may be called the “Rajput version” of the narrative, and may in part explain the likeness of those tellings. Comprised of the most recurrent themes in the orations from in the temple, the following outline differs in slight yet important ways from the versions that Chaudhari and other scholars tell.²¹ By recounting both versions, I intend to demonstrate the strategic changes in the narrative of Rani Bhatiyani, which will in turn reveal something of the underlying structures in the relationship between Dholis and Rajputs in the temple.

The historical narrative of the deity begins with Rani Bhatiyani as Swarup Kanwar, a Rajput girl born to *thakur* (“lord”; a common title for Rajput men) Shri Jograj Singhji in Jogidas ka Gaon, Jaisalmer district. According to rumors, Swarup was intelligent, beautiful, and enjoyed and performed various forms of music and dance. The rulers of Jasol at that time, Kalyan Singh and his wife, had been unsuccessful in conceiving children. Assuming that his wife was barren, Kalyan pursued Swarup’s hand for a second marriage. Upon marrying Kalyan Singh and becoming his queen, Rani Swarup moved to his palace in Jasol. Although the second queen of Kalyan Singh, Rani Swarup became the mother of Kalyan Singh’s first child and heir to the throne, Lal Singh. Soon after Lal Singh was born, Kalyan Singh’s first wife, Rani Devri gave birth to his second son. Envious of and angry at Rani Swarup, whose son was the successor of Kalyan Singh, Rani Devri poisoned and killed Lal Singh. In the process of grieving her son’s demise, Rani Swarup gave up her life by abstaining from food and water, thus becoming a *sati*.

²¹ The second story illustrated below can be found in: Neuman et al. (2006), Bharucha (2003), and Chaudhuri (2009).

Not knowing that she had died, two Dholis, who served as the musicians for Rani Swarup's father and family in Jogidas ka Gaon, came to seek *bhati* (traditional payment made to the musicians by the house that their patron's daughter gets married to) at the palace in Jasol.²² The palace authorities directed the Dholis to the funeral-site of Rani Bhatiyani, where the Dholis then prayed in grief. Aware of Rani Swarup's love for and interest in music, the Dholis played her favorite music. Pleased with their loyalty, Rani Swarup's spirit appeared, surrounded by thousands of rays of light. She gave them her precious jewelry and clothes, and bestowed to them a boon such that as long as they sing her favorite songs, they would receive all the offerings that were brought by her devotees and pilgrims.

This story, commonly told in the Rani Bhatiyani temple at Jasol and ubiquitous in western Rajasthan, shares with the other versions of the narrative three interconnected themes: 1) Rani Bhatiyani's love for music and dance; 2) how the Dholis came to inherit their position as resident musicians in the Rani Bhatiyani temple; and 3) music and dance as the main link between the Dholis and the deity. These themes are especially highlighted by the Dholis' working in the temple. In addition to these motifs, Dholis also put special emphasis on their connection to the deity by providing details about the Dholi-Rani Bhatiyani encounter after her death, and by pointing out time and again that it was them, *and not* the Rajputs, to whom the deity had chosen to appear and bequeath her blessings. Therefore, by the use of this historical narrative of Rani Bhatiyani, Dholis and non-Dholis in the temple confirm the Dholis' position as the resident musicians, as well as their authority as ritual specialists for the deity.

²² See Bharucha (2006: 143) for further explanation on *Bhati*.

Additionally, in their accounts of Rani Bhatiyani's love for music and dance, Dholis and the temple administrators claim that the queen was particularly fond of performing and singing Ghumar. Some assert that the Ghumar song was written by Rani Bhatiyani herself, who then appointed the Dholis to sing it for her during her lifetime and upon her death. However, the Dholis in the temple disagree, and instead lay claim to the composition Ghumar song written in dedication to Rani Bhatiyani.²³ For instance, Bhawarlal, the main musician at the temple, asserts not only that his forefathers had written the Ghumar song, now popular all over Rajasthan and beyond, but also that his family had sung the song in the temple for generations in praise of Rani Bhatiyani.²⁴ According to Bhawarlal, the goddess had been very pleased with their loyalty and dedication over centuries, and thus "the popularity of the Ghumar song was a result of Rani Bhatiyani's *kripa* (compassion) and *mahima* (greatness)."²⁵ By claiming Dholis as the composers of the Ghumar song and in justifying the popularity of the song and thus possibly the reputation of the Rani Bhatiyani temple as the fruits of Dholis' actions, Bhawarlal clearly seeks to legitimize his position, and the Dholis' status in general, in the Rani Bhatiyani temple. In this way, one can see the contestation of power through the manipulations of historical narratives. Rather than passively accept their subjection to the Rajput administrators through caste hierarchies, Dholis resist their supposedly lowly

²³ I noticed that the Dholis, in their historical narratives of the origination of Ghumar, frequently differentiated the popular Ghumar song from the Ghumar dance that Rani Bhatiyani used to perform. For them, Rani Bhatiyani's *ghumar* was a specific type of dance, performed to the tune of various Ghumar songs; while the *ghumar* song, popular today, has its origins in Jasol.

²⁴ According to my informants, Rani Bhatiyani had originally given the task of temple musician/ritual specialist to two Dholi musicians. The twenty-three Dholi men, who work in the temple according to an annual rotation, are descendants of these two Dholi men.

²⁵ "Yeh sab Majisa ki kripa aur mahima ka kaaran hai, jo ghumar aaj itni prasiddh hai" (Interview with Bhawarlal: April 2009)

status in their narrative practice by claiming intimate ritual ties with a beloved Rajput deity.

Changing Narratives

Among other versions of the story, the most commonly recounted is the narrative in which Rani Bhatiyani commits *sati* by immolating herself after the death of her brother-in-law Sawai Singh. The late Komal Kothari, one of the most influential folklorists of Rajasthan and friend of many international scholars of Rajasthani culture, history, and religion, collected this version in 1989 and presented it after a recording session at the Rupayan Sansthan, Paota, Rajasthan.²⁶ According to this version, following Rani Bhatiyani's marriage to Kalyan Singh, rumors about her affair with her brother-in-law began to circulate within the palace; the king heard this rumor after he and his brother had set off to battle. Upon his brother's death in battle, the jealous and angry Kalyan Singh sent word to Jasol that he, and not his brother, had died. As it was customary for Rajput women to perform *sati* after the deaths of their husbands, Rani Bhatiyani prepared to mount the pyre. However, even after news arrived that it was indeed Sawai Singh who had died in battle, and not Kalyan Singh, Rani Bhatiyani nevertheless carried out the process and became a *sati*. The implication, of course, being that the queen was having a love-affair with her brother-in-law, whom she loved more than her husband. Because the control of female sexuality is, as my introduction indicated, so important in Rajput morality, the oration of this narrative by low-caste communities, and the indictment of Rajput morality, may be seen as an instance of what Scott (1986) has called "everyday

²⁶ See Chaudhuri (2009: 284) and Trembath (1999: 215).

forms of resistance.” It is no wonder, then, that I never heard this version of the narrative endorsed by any of my Rajput informants.

In her collection and commentary on the Rani Bhatiyani songs sung by a Manganiyar woman in the Rani Bhatiyani temple in Jogidas ka Gaon, Trembath (1999) argues that this version of the story, though common and popular among the Manganiyars, is in all probability far from the truth. She provides other instances of women performing *sati* for male members of their family other than their husbands and agrees that there may have been some precedence for this account (1999: 220). However, she says that “given the strict codes of behavior” among Rajput women in Rajasthan, it would have been highly unlikely for Rani Bhatiyani to have had an “affaire” with her brother-in-law (1999: 220). While Trembath’s observation here is mere speculation, it is interesting to see her drawing a contrast between the alleged affair and the Rajput ideal of the sexually controlled female body. In her concluding remarks, Trembath claims that, contrary to this version, the story presented in the pamphlet distributed by the Rajputs in Jasol, in which Rani Bhatiyani is depicted to have committed *sati* after the death of her son, Lal Singh, was perhaps the closest to the truth (1999: 220-221).

Although the speculation and debates regarding the original and true story of Rani Bhatiyani may be of interest to some scholars, this issue does not concern my argument. Instead, this section examines the various reasons why the first story presented above (in which Rani Bhatiyani commits *sati* after the death of her son by fasting) has become increasingly important and common in Jasol, whereas the second story (Rani Bhatiyani’s *sati* after Sawai Singh’s death in battle by throwing herself onto the funeral pyre) is consciously denied and discarded by the Rajput administrators and Dholis. In doing so,

this chapter reveals the ways in which the main narrators of the story, the Rajputs and the Dholis in the temple, continue to negotiate their identities through the changes and appropriation of the first Rani Bhatiyani story. In line with the arguments of this chapter, I noticed various ways in which both Rajputs and Dholis use the narrative of Rani Bhatiyani in their claims for professional positions in the temple, as well as the location of ritual authority. My argument here is that Rajputs in the temple administration and Trust attempt to control gendered and legal practices in the temple through their manipulations – both oral and written, as in the pamphlet – of the narrative of Rani Bhatiyani. In response to recent legislation passed in the Indian parliament, Rajputs attempt to secure their administrative role in the temple by re-imagining what it means for Rani Bhatiyani to be a *sati*. Furthermore, by denying the affair between the queen and the king's brother, and in restricting possession (which entails a loss of social control over female bodies), Rajputs attempt to enact their visions of morality onto the bodies of women and their narratives.

Along with Kothari, Chaudhari (2009) cites the second story, in which Rani Bhatiyani has an affair and then throws herself on a funeral pyre, as the most common version of the Rani Bhatiyani narrative. Collected and recorded in the 1980s and therefore decades before my research in spring of 2009, Kothari does not even bring up any of the other versions. Chaudhari (2009) on the other hand, referring to her research in 2003-2004, briefly mentions narratives more similar to those I heard and read. However, she highlights the fact that the second version of the story was more popular and more common than the first among the ritual specialists, devotees, and caretakers of the Rani Bhatiyani temple (Chaudhari 2009: 100). In fact, Chaudhari hypothesizes that the

pamphlet, published within the last decade by the Rani Bhatiyani Trust, may be the only reason why the first version might gain popularity and authority in the future (2009: 100). Indeed, by 2009, when I went to Jasol, the first story was the most common, if not the only version, circulating in the temple. Thus, looking chronologically at the data available on the Rani Bhatiyani narratives in Jasol, from Kothari's records in the 1980s, through Chaudhari's in 2003-2004, and to the period of my research in 2009, it is apparent that the story has been transformed from the second version to the first.

Devi Singh, the Rajput manager of the Rani Bhatiyani temple, denies any truth in the story in which Rani Bhatiyani committed *sati* on the funeral pyre of her brother-in-law. According to him, any information on Rani Bhatiyani obtained through sources other than the temple authorities was wrong. In the midst of our conversation, he sent one of the security guards to bring the pamphlet on Rani Bhatiyani from one of the stores located outside the temple. Presenting me the pamphlet as a gift, as well as several *ghumar* CDs, Devi then told me that it contained all the right information: from Rani Bhatiyani *bhajans* (devotional verse/songs) to the story of the life of Rani Bhatiyani, and details of her previous incarnations as goddesses. He also indicated that there was no need to interview pilgrims, local devotees, or Dholis, because everyone in the temple would give the same, if less, information about Rani Bhatiyani. In terms of my interviews, in fact, Devi Singh was basically correct. All the Dholis, the Rajput administrators, and other workers in the Rani Bhatiyani temple (e.g. sweepers and *bhopas*, or non-Brahman priests), give accounts of the Rani Bhatiyani story whose

structure resemble that published in the pamphlet.²⁷ Particularly important in these similarities, as will be described below, are the exclusion of the queen's affair, and the re-imagining of *sati* as fasting instead of as widow-burning. Certainly, as predicted by Chaudhari (2009), the Rani Bhatiyani Trust has achieved success in popularizing the first version of the Rani Bhatiyani story in Jasol, as well as achieved an agreement in these two respects. However – and this is an important point – structural or even thematic similarities in narratives say nothing regarding the strategic and argumentative uses of narratives in their performative contexts. Whether or not he was correct, Devi Singh's assertion that I need not ask others about the narrative seems to indicate the *process* of this conflict: although the first narrative was largely dominant in Jasol, what might be the effects of the occasional, defiant second narrative in the hands – or notebooks and voice-recorder – of an ethnographer?

The Rani Bhatiyani Trust was started in 1989-1990, and is managed and controlled by the Rajput descendants of Rani Bhatiyani's husband's family. The accounts in the pamphlet therefore are no doubt informed and influenced by the socioeconomic interests of the Rajputs who seek to maintain their power relative to low-caste groups such as the Dholis. Indeed, in a 1997 interview with Trembath (1999), Nahar Singh, a descendant of Rani Bhatiyani and the then current president of the board of trustees of the Rani Bhatiyani trust, denied the affair between Rani Bhatiyani and her brother-in-law. He said that the story was a complete fabrication, traceable to the Manganiyars of Jogidas ka Gaon.

²⁷*Bhopa* is a term used for a non-Brahman priest in Rajasthan. *Bhopas* are “specifically attached to a particular deity who devotes his (Bhopa) or her (Bhopi) life in the service of the deity, performing the ritual performances associated with the deity in question” (Neuman et al. [2006]: 64).

Given certain stereotypes of the norms of regulated gendered behavior among Rajput women in Rajasthan, which include the wearing of veils, not stepping outside the house unaccompanied by a family member, etc., it seems likely that the Rajput administration tried to deny the story in which a Rajput queen (their ancestor nonetheless) may have had an affair with her brother-in-law.²⁸ Therefore, by publishing an authoritative story in which Rani Bhatiyani gave up her life for the sake of her son, the Rani Bhatiyani Trust seeks to suppress what it considers the immodest sexual behavior of Rajput women, and depicts the queen, instead, as an ideal, moral Rajput woman.

There is, however, more to such a publication. As stated above, the worship and glorification of *sati* was made illegal by the Indian Government in 1987. By appropriating the story in which Rani Bhatiyani mounts the pyre after the death of her brother-in-law, the members of the Rani Bhatiyani Trust, the temple administrators, and the Dholis, would all be facilitating an illegal act. Instead, the story in which Rani Bhatiyani gives up food and water in grief of the death of her son upholds Rajput ideals while saving the Rani Bhatiyani temple, and the people associated with it, from defying national laws. Therefore, by seeking to control authoritative versions of the narrative of Rani Bhatiyani through the publication of pamphlets, the Rajput administrators and Trust of the temple are attempting to streamline possible and appropriate gendered, devotional, and legal practice. That is to say, the character of the historical narrative of the queen is contested in its reflection of and influences on social action. This is also affirmed in Dholi narratives of the life of Rani Bhatiyani, which is molded with Dholi status and ritual authority in mind. By claiming that *they* were most intimately connected to the goddess, whose death and deification was the result of unquestionably moral and legal

²⁸ See Harlan (1991), Joshi (1995), and Kasturi (2002).

character, and through their relationship of ritual servitude with the queen, Dholis argue for their own professional position and ritual authority within the temple, against that of the Rajput administration.

Banning Ghumar

Within the vicinity of the Rani Bhatiyani temple, it is evident that Ghumar is very popular and important. More than half of the cassettes and CDs sold in the stores and stalls outside and on the way to the temple are named “Majisa ri Ghumar,”²⁹ and at least a few of these stores have the Ghumar song playing in the background, at any given time during the day. Some of the paraphernalia available in these stores have pictures or illustrations of women dancing. Additionally, the Rani Bhatiyani pamphlet includes the lyrics of the Ghumar song and a line under the title indicating that the Ghumar song “was frequently sung by Rani Bhatiyani during her childhood.”³⁰ Inside the temple, devotees constantly ask the Dholis to sing the Ghumar song; sometimes the devotees even offer large sums of money to hear the Dholis sing Ghumar .

Outside the temple, in Jasol and elsewhere in Rajasthan, devotees of Rani Bhatiyani as well as non-devotees who have merely heard about the queen, are aware of her connection to Ghumar. In fact, I was initially introduced to the Rani Bhatiyani temple because of its association with Ghumar . While living in Jaipur, I was conducting fieldwork on Ghumar among professional stage-musicians and -dancers working in the tourism industry. I had heard from a few sources that Rani Bhatiyani had composed the Ghumar song, and that since her death around two hundred and fifty years ago, she

²⁹ The English Translation of the Hindi title is “Mother’s (Rani Bhatiyani’s) Ghumar”

³⁰ Avasthi (date unspecified). The Hindi from Avasthi’s text I have translated above is: *Yah Geet Rani Bhatiyani Aksar Apne Bachpan Mein Gaya Karti Thi.*

continues to perform the dance by manifesting herself in the bodies of female devotees. Almost all of Rani Bhatiyani's devotees that I interviewed, who lived outside Jasol, remarked that Ghumar was not just important, but necessary in the religious practices oriented toward Rani Bhatiyani because of its power in enticing the deity. A Jain woman living in Balotra, a small town nearby to Jasol, claimed to sing the Ghumar song daily, though only at certain hours during the day, to invite the deity in her body. A Dholi family originally from Jasol and recently settled in Jaipur, who had turned a portion of their house into a shrine dedicated to Rani Bhatiyani, organized *bhajan* sessions every week, a number of which I attended while I was living in Jaipur. They claimed that the apex of their sessions was when the goddess entered one of the married women during the performance of Ghumar.

Although there is an apparent connection between the life-story of Rani Bhatiyani and Ghumar, a strong interest among devotees in the performance of the popular song, and the religious signification of Ghumar among devotees of Rani Bhatiyani, the Rajput administration has banned the singing and dancing of Ghumar inside the Rani Bhatiyani temple. The rationalization behind this prohibition is obscure. According to both the Dholis and the Rajput administrators, the singing of Ghumar, along with the offering of cigarettes, alcohol, and animal sacrifices, caused too much hassle and chaos in the temple. Dealing with drunken devotees, the chore of having to clean up the remains after animal sacrifices, and trying to manage the dancing women throwing their bodies wildly during possession, had all become unmanageable.³¹

³¹ Although drinking and offering alcohol to the deity is not allowed in the temple, there is, however, no set rule for drunken devotees entering the temple.

Despite the attempt to ensure control over women's bodies, women, whether to the tune of Ghumar or not, are frequently possessed by the queen, sometimes alone and sometimes in groups. While the administrators rarely prevent the devotees from becoming possessed, or stop them during their possession, there are instances on which the administration does. For example, one time I witnessed Devi Singh yelling at the parents of an 8 year old girl who was possessed. A large crowd (around fifty or more people) had gathered and surrounded the little girl who was screaming, frantically swaying to and fro, crying and tearing at her clothes. Devi Singh waited until the girl calmed down and then ordered the parents to leave the temple premises, taking their child with them. His scathing remarks to the parents had to do with the way in which the girl had behaved and the attention that the performance had received. After the scene, Devi Singh pulled me aside and told me that he had a tough job, and that ninety five percent of possessed persons were acting. This incident illustrates something of the complex contestation of power described in this chapter's introduction. Here, both Rajput attempts at control over the bodies of female devotees, and pilgrims' and devotee's resistance to these attempts through continued possession practice are both visible. Yet, indicating the resistance to Rajput strategies of power in pilgrim "possession practices" assumes that Rajputs are correct in their assessment of the falsehood of possession. Without offering any definitive answer, I would like to propose another way to read this encounter, one that perhaps represents how devotees and pilgrims might conceive of such a contest: between the Rajput attempts to control or stop the goddess from descending into the female bodies of pilgrims and devotees, and the goddess' insistent defiance of Rajput power.

Despite the fact that the attempts of the Rajput administration to stop completely possession have not been successful, a number of consequences have nevertheless come to effect the ritual and professional practices in the temple. The Dholis' position as ritual specialist, which they assumed by playing the Ghumar song as an invitation for Rani Bhatiyani to manifest herself, has clearly declined. While the goddess continues to possess pilgrims, she now no longer needs the help of the Dholis' music to do so. For the Dholis, this means a decrease in ritual authority and money. Furthermore, the Dholis used to receive remuneration for beckoning the goddess's presence with their performance of the Ghumar song, from the devotees who desired the manifestation of the deity. Today, the Dholis have settled with the remnants of the offerings presented to the deity. This further illustrates the point that, although Dholis resist the attempts of the Rajput administration to control gendered and ritual practices within the temple, the Dholis nonetheless do so in an environment of unequal power relations. This often entails reproduction of the ritual-cum-socioeconomic order in which the Dholis take part.

In addition, the Ghumar song has been replaced by songs dedicated not only to Rani Bhatiyani, but those written for the glorification of Sawai Singh and Lal Singh for their valor and Rajput warrior attributes. Thus, the songs that the Dholis sing in the temple of Rani Bhatiyani uphold Rajput characteristics of valor and martiality. Hence, the story I have tried to tell is one of both reproduction and resistance of power structures in the threefold encounters – between Dholis (ritual specialists), Rajputs (temple administrators and Trust), and pilgrims and devotees. Just as indicating the Rajput or Dholi manipulations of the historical narrative of Rani Bhatiyani does not tell the whole story, neither does reproduction or resistance in the conceptualization of the normative

authority: both are equally important in surveying the multi-sited contestations over the power and authority of ritual symbols and practice.

Conclusion

In his article on the linguistic representations of religious experiences, Yamane (2000) writes that “narratives are a primary linguistic vehicle through which people grasp the meaning of lived experience by configuring and reconfiguring past experiences in ongoing stories which have certain plots or directions and which guide the interpretation of those experiences” (183). The transformations of the Rani Bhatiyani narrative reflect Rajput and Dholi attempts to reconfigure past experiences in efforts to negotiate their identities in relation to one another and to the changing socio-political climate.

Additionally, the banning of the Ghumar song, and its subsequent effects on the socio-economic standing of the Dholis, also demonstrates the new configuration of the Dholi and Rajput claims to power in the professional and ritual milieu in the Rani Bhatiyani temple, in which power is unequally distributed, but where subjection is nonetheless no simple matter.

CHAPTER III

GHUMAR, TOURISM, AND CONTESTATIONS AMONG RANAS IN JAIPUR

Introduction

In Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan, the Dholis are known as Ranas, and their involvement with Ghumar is associated far less with Rani Bhatiyani. Most Dholis have settled in Jaipur some time in the recent past, and have renamed themselves “Ranas” in attempts to associate themselves with the warrior caste, the Rajputs. In contrast to the resident Dholis in the Rani Bhatiyani temple, the Ranas in Jaipur do not necessarily claim composition of the music, movements, or words of *Ghumar* music and dance. However, like the Jasol Dholis, they do emphasize their role as carriers of Ghumar and other genres of music for generations, and thus, as preservers of the essence of the past.

Of the different performance communities in Jaipur, the Ranas are the most insistent upon their past and current associations with Rajputs. As Ghumar is traditionally a dance associated with Rajput women, Ranas assert their role as hereditary musicians and singers of *Ghumar*, claiming former and existing ties of patronage with Rajputs. In fact, many of the Ranas I knew in Jaipur claimed that they have actually always been Rajputs – not fighting Rajputs, per say, but the male musicians who played the rhythms to which armies marched into battle. According to certain other narrative accounts, however, Rana women, generally referred to as “Dholans,” were, and in some occasions still are, the main singers and *dhol* players for events organized for and by Rajput women, especially those which featured the performance of Ghumar. Most Ranas are

quick to emphasize the first narrative – Rana men as martial musicians – and slow to acknowledge the second, if even discount it altogether. Although it is most certain that many Ranas participated in the *jajmani* system, it is hard to detect which Ranas actually did work as hereditary musicians for the Rajputs, and which families did not, because the majority of the Ranas now living in Jaipur have only recently moved from the villages which served as their homes during the more settled periods of their itinerant annual schedules. While the majority of my informants maintained their historic occupation in Rajput armies, others pointed to different pasts. The elderly Ram Prasadji Rana, for example – whom most performers and musicians in Jaipur hail as the best Dholi poet and storehouse of knowledge regarding Rana history, ritual, and religious traditions – argued that there existed no formal *jajmani* relationship between Jaipur Ranas and Rajputs. The Ranas of Jaipur, according to Ram Prasadji, are composed of different sub-caste communities that worked for patrons other than the Rajputs, and moved from one place to another providing music and entertainment for remuneration. I will show in what follows that this narrative, because of its denial of ties to Rajputs and of unified caste organization, is less popular among the Ranas of Jaipur.

Aside from the itinerant musical occupations referenced in the Rana’s multiple caste narratives, Ranas have more recently assumed roles as specialists of popular “folk” and “authentic traditional” Rajasthani music in the burgeoning tourism industry in Jaipur. Many Ranas have started “dance parties,” and perform in hotels, restaurants, and other locations that attract domestic and foreign tourists. These “dance parties,” organized, managed, and comprised entirely of members of one or more performance caste (Dholi,

Kalbeliya, or Kathputli-vala, for example),³² travel both domestically and internationally to perform individual concerts, and to partake in shows, festivals, films, and seminars celebrating and exposing the “folk art” of Rajasthan and India.

Concomitant to their increasing participation in dance and music ensembles in the tourism industry, Ranas have also sought to refashion themselves, through their social identities and practices, as Rajputs. In addition to their change in name, for example, the Ranas have also begun adopting certain values and customs emulative of those of Rajputs. As noted in the introduction, perhaps the most striking among these transformations in values and practices have been those concerned with gender, particularly with female sexual morality. Here, for the Ranas, the story of accumulated economic wealth has been entwined with that of their attempts to accrue more social prestige. This endeavor has explicitly meant an appropriation of the socio-ritual symbols and practices of the elite, upper-caste Rajput community. In the introduction to this thesis, I drew from the writings of two scholars from the Subaltern Studies collective, whose work describes similar instances of outcaste communities resisting the socioeconomic domination of the upper classes by means of religious reform. Part of my following exploration, however, asks how this move to argue against one’s low- or outcaste status via an adoption of upper-caste values and practices reproduces the very structure of hierarchy which has made one’s status low in the first place. Hence, I will be interested in the *successes*, or lack thereof, of such resistance.

In the following sections, I will first provide an introductory sketch of the contours of the tourism industry in Rajasthan. Additionally, I will examine the narratives

³² The only non-performance-caste member of a ‘dance party’ in Jaipur of whom I am aware was from a carpenter caste, initiated into the Kalbeliya (snake-charming) caste-community, via his marriage to Gulabo Sapera, the most popular Kalbeliya dancer.

of the past and present situation of the Jaipur Ranas, paying specific attention to their professional journey from itinerant *jajmani*-style patron-client occupations to their recent foray into the tourism industry. In doing so, I hope to demonstrate the ways in which Rana narrative practices attempt to construct – or, as they would say, maintain – intimate ties with Rajputs and their appointed task of preserving and disseminating the “traditional” and “authentic” musical traditions of their ancestors. In this way the Ranas, position themselves as an integral component in the social fabric and tourism industry in Rajasthan. Connecting to the overall concerns of this thesis, I will uncover the centrality of Ghumar in such narratives, caste-status, and economic claims. Because of its popularity as a traditional Rajput dance among Rajasthanis, and following the economic and social viability of “folk” musicians in the tourism industry, the Ranas’ specialization in the performance of Ghumar stands as a necessary link between the two communities, and positions the Ranas well in the running for jobs, wealth, and acclaim in the tourism-focused music industry, which now supports the majority of Ranas in Jaipur.

In the second section of this chapter, I explore the Rana’s recent attempts to refashion their social identity. More specifically, the Ranas’ association with Ghumar has helped them acquire upward economic mobility, resulting from new opportunities as “folk” musicians in the tourism industry. The second section will be concerned with the ways in which this new economic status has created the possibilities for various forms of caste mobilization. The predominant form such mobilization has taken is the result of a *pancayat* (caste-council) decision and ordinance that Dholis, having become Ranas, should emulate the socio-ritual practices of Rajputs, particularly those relating to female sexual morality and the control and protection of women. I interpret such reform as Dholi

attempts to resist their low socio-ritual status. This type of resistance, because of its caste-wide organizational efforts, is different from the “everyday” resistance I described in the previous chapter. Like the Dholis of Jasol, however, the Ranas of Jaipur, too, live in a world of unequally distributed power, and their attempts at resisting their low-caste status are mocked by their neighbors as disingenuous, and may ultimately end up reproducing the structure of caste hierarchy which they are resisting. What is more, the new restrictions placed on women in the process of adopting upper-caste gender practices create new arenas of power contestation, in which men’s claims to dominance are sometimes met with the more “everyday” resistance of Rana women. Hence, whereas the last chapter was concerned with the role of Ghumar and its limitations in the narrative, ritual, and musical performances of Dholis, particularly as they related to Rajputs, this chapter addresses questions of the creative possibilities for the Rana-Dholis resulting from their association with Ghumar in narrative, musical, and socio-economic practices, and what this means for transformations in Rana identifications with Rajput practices.

The Tourism Industry and The Past Retold

The following section examines the ways in which the Rana-Dholis of Jaipur have secured a place in the tourism industry as guardians of Rajasthan’s royal and traditional past, both of which are primary reasons why the majority of both domestic and international tourists in India flock to Rajasthan. This section addresses the ways in which heritage, “folk,” and “authentic traditional” cultures are familiar and desirable among tourists to Rajasthan. In doing so, I underscore the importance of the concept of traditional and folk culture as a marketable commodity in the everyday lives of those who

participate in the tourism industry, desiring an increase in both social and economic capital. In this way, the tourism industry provides a point of entry for an examination of the Ranas' associations with the Rajputs, and a questioning of how their concern with cultural memory and historical narratives help them achieve higher economic and social status than their itinerant, lower-class, and untouchable musician counterparts.

Rajasthan has emerged as one of India's top tourism destinations since the 1990s, and Jaipur, the capital of the state, has become the most popular of Rajasthan's cities for tourists to visit.³³ Since then, the number of domestic and international tourists visiting Rajasthan has escalated at the rate of five to seven percent every year (Henderson and Weisgrau 2007). Commanding one-third of India's tourist population, Rajasthan earns one-third of the nation's earnings due to the tourism industry. For a state with little natural resources, and as one of the three poorest states in India,³⁴ it is needless to say that tourism is one of Rajasthan's main industries and sources of income. In their edited volume on tourism encounters in Rajasthan, entitled *Raj Rhapsodies: Tourism, Heritage and the Seduction of History*, Henderson and Weisgrau (2007: xxvii) state that Rajasthan's tourism income "in a growing state economy, is a precious commodity and like each drop of water in a drought-prone environment, has many players battling over its control."

The increase in travelers to Rajasthan has much to do with its advertising and self-representations as "the most heritage-laden, traditional and authentic of India's states"

³³ Road, rail, electrical and water infrastructure development helped improve Rajasthan's tourism industry in the 1990s. Before, the lack of infrastructure, deficient transportation, hotels, water supplies, and especially electricity (no air conditioning) limited the tourist visits to this dry, hot state. (See Henderson and Weisgrau 2007; xxxi). Other cities that are important tourist destinations in Rajasthan are Pushkar, Udaipur, Jodhpur and Jaisalmer.

³⁴ According to national statistics, Rajasthan falls in the bottom third, among other states, in terms of household income and standard of living.

(Henderson and Weisgraw 2007: xxv). Indeed, the tourism industry, with its brochures, websites, videos, travel agencies, travel packages, feeds into the idea that Rajasthan is the land of the kings and the place of preserved traditional culture. Forts, architectural sites, paintings, desert art, and temples, are appealing and thought of as historically significant by tourists, both domestic and international. Edensor (2007: xvii) claims that Rajasthan's appearance as "a distillation of Indian-ness in which visions of an unchanging culture, sweeping sand dunes, elephants, bejeweled tribal women, elaborate royal palaces and notions of decadent luxury persist" relies on and reproduces Orientalist imagery of India.

As one example in the orientalist construction and presentations of Rajasthan, tourism discourse most often uses the concept of 'heritage' and its accompanying, assumed historicity, as a marketable commodity. According to Chhabra, Haely, and Sills (2003: 703), heritage "...is representative of many contemporary visitors' desire ...to directly experience and consume diverse past and present cultural landscapes, performances, foods, handicrafts, and participatory activities." Scholars working in tourism studies conceive of heritage as a continuously recapitulated story that people tell about themselves, others, and the past. In fact, the people who are directly linked to the tourism industry in Jaipur – tour guides, musicians and performers, local rickshaw and taxi drivers, and hotel and restaurant employees – all have various stories to tell of the Rajasthan's royal and exotic past and the unchanged folk and traditional present.

The use of strategically chosen historical narratives in tourism discourse also has a lot to do with editing out the realities of Rajasthani past and present. Most tourists are unaware of the socio-economic conditions of most of the people in Rajasthan. This, of course, is the intended effect of the nature of the information made available to the

tourists about Rajasthan, generally by agents promoting tourism in order to gain economic benefits. For example, the information available to tourists frequently filters out the stark realities of poverty, illiteracy, and oppressive hierarchies in rural Rajasthan, which covers the majority of area and population of the state. Rajasthan is instead represented as a state with a “mystical landscape of ancient customs, romantic history, ‘traditional’ and ‘folk’ peoples, and monuments” (Edensor 2007: xv).³⁵ Urban development, factories, and the industrial progress are also erased from the representation of Rajasthan, because any mention of urbanism or cosmopolitanism in tourism discourse would curb the appeal for tourists of the imagined “old.” In fact, all that “which was once locally and proudly heralded as ‘modern’ is now bulldozed to create an imagined vision of the past, as occurred in Rajasthan’s state capital of Jaipur in 2000, with the destruction of retail stalls in the city center to restore it to its ‘old’ look” (Henderson and Weisgrau 2007: xxxv).

The production of such limited and limiting narratives and discourses is tied in many ways to local elites, and to the state. For example, Himmat Singh, the former cultural head of the Rajasthan State Government’s Tourism Department in Jaipur, recalls how he, with his partner in the Tourism Department, Tripti Panday, used various strategies in the 1980s to attract tourists to Rajasthan in general, and to Jaipur in particular, by demonstrating to tourists the world of the various “authentic” and “folk” cultures in Rajasthan. Himmat admits that he (and thus the Tourism Department) has continuously presented Rajasthan as the ‘heritage’ state of India, the bustling of ‘traditional’ and ‘folk’ people, arts, and cultures. He further boasts of the various

³⁵ Searching “Rajasthan” on the Google internet search engine demonstrates the proliferation of information presenting the “imagined Rajasthan.” See Henderson (2007).

adventures he took with Tripti Pandey around Rajasthan in order to “look for people and culture,” to produce a “package for tourists” that represented the various aspects of Rajasthan. In fact, the very first musicians and performers in Jaipur belonging to the Dholi and Kalbeliya communities, remember when Himmat and Tripti first “discovered” their communities’ talents. According to these Dholis and Kalbeliyas, it was Himmat and Tripti who brought them to Jaipur from various parts of Rajasthan to form dance and musical programs. Puran Nath Dagla, of the Kalbeliya community, remembers when Himmat and Tripti found Gulabo Sapera dancing and begging during the Pushkar *unt mela* (camel festival) in 1980. According to my Kalbeliya informants (Kalbeliyas live and work with Dholis, and I conducted many interviews with Kalbeliyas and other performance communities in Jaipur), although their girls and women used to dance and play the *cang* (large, tambourine-like percussion instrument) while they begged during the month of Phagan, in preparation and celebration for Holi, Gulabo was allegedly the first full-time, professional Kalbeliya dance performer, accredited with the codification of the Kalbeliya “gypsy” dance. Following the economic success of Gulabo, many Ranas and Kalbeliyas made various trips to Jaipur for events organized by Himmat and Tripti, and subsequently moved their make-shift homes from various parts of Rajasthan to settle in unclaimed plots of lands in the city of Jaipur in the early 1980s. Indeed, I heard countless times how Himmat Singh and Tripti Pandey brought these musicians and dancers to Jaipur, taught them how to “behave” in elite social settings, and booked performances for them at several tourist hotels and restaurants. Himmat and Tripti thus claim sole responsibility of introducing a new way of life for many poor, itinerant caste-communities like the Dholis and the Kalbeliyas.

Since their early recruitment preempting, and perhaps participating in, the tourism boom in Rajasthan in the 1990s, many members of formerly tribal and itinerant groups, including the Ranas, have found a place for themselves performing for tourists in various locations in Jaipur and other cities in Rajasthan. They perform in big hotels and restaurants as dinner entertainment, in forts, and spaces for cultural exhibition, such as festivals and the “cultural villages”³⁶ located on the outskirts of Jaipur and other cities. In each of these locations musicians and performers, having now formed their own “dance parties,” or working for hire in those of others, perform the various songs and dances that were included in Himmat Singh’s cultural “package” for tourists.

The “package” performance that Himmat Singh and Tripti Panday devised and made popular in the early 1980s was intended as an indexical exhibition of several different types and genres of both culture and a taste of what was marketed as “traditional” Rajasthani life. The music and dance performances, which were the bulk of this “package,” were strategically placed in a line of succession that mirrored the performers’ socio-economic status, although Himmat Singh claims to have placed them in order ranging from “tribal” to “folk” to “royal.” Since the main thrust of all the various presentations of Rajasthan culminated with supposedly epitomizing the rich and royal culture of Rajasthan, it is needless to say that the itinerant dancers and musicians, most of whom are formerly untouchable, performed long before the Rajputs in these exhibits, codifying in some ways certain upper-caste perceptions of the order of caste hierarchies. Among these musicians and performers, the Dholis, because of their hereditary occupation as musicians, were chosen to perform the music for the last dance associated

³⁶ The “cultural villages” are similar to amusement parks, except that these fake villages (called Dhanis, or “caste hamlet” in villages) try to emulate the various ways in which Rajasthani villagers live/lived. These Dhanis are accessible to all tourists, local and domestic.

with the royal Rajputs, which was Ghumar. Although Himmat Singh, born and raised a Rajput, claims to have trained the dancers and musicians for the Ghumar himself in the 1980s,³⁷ my Rana informants claim to have known the music and dances themselves from performing for and entertaining their Rajput patrons. Omi Rana is the owner and operator of one of the most successful Rana “dance parties,” popular especially among Jaipur’s tourism agencies, and has recently begun a performing agency called Rangilo Rajasthan. According to Omi, his family members, in addition to their work in his “dance party,” have been teaching the Ghumar dance to female performers for decades; particularly important here is Omi’s insistence on teaching the women of *other* caste-communities (i.e. non-Ranas) how to dance Ghumar in order to perform in his “dance party.”³⁸ According to Omi, the Rana women have been performing Ghumar for centuries, the same way Rajput women have, because of their past *jajmani* relationships with the Rajputs. Rana and Rajput women, however, do not perform Ghumar in “dance parties,” or in any way on a professional basis; this is the job of other castes, such as Kalbeliyas and Kathputli-valas.

The Rana’s claimed historic association with Ghumar, and the intended subsequent linkage between their community and the Rajputs, have helped achieve a venue for a regional caste-wide organization of social mobilization, connected in many ways with other ongoing social transformations. The possibilities of the transformations and narrative re-configurations are due, in part, to the socioeconomic benefits acquired by

³⁷ Rajput women did not participate in the Ghumar performed in the “packages.” Due to social restrictions, Rajput women did not perform in public. Furthermore, performing in public, especially in the 1980s in Rajasthan, was considered morally and socially objectionable, especially for females. Those who lived on the margins of society, and in some cases in extreme poverty, like the Kalbeliya women, found the opportunity to work in the tourism industry as a fruitful foray into socio-economic betterment.

³⁸ Omi Rana claims to have enough resources to form various ‘dance parties’ to send to various locations and events which require Rajasthani dance and music for entertainment of either tourists or local guests, like in weddings and other such celebratory occasions.

their success in the tourism industry in Rajasthan. The effects of tourism on musician and performer communities are demonstrated in various academic writings (Thompson 1991, 1993). In his ethnography of bardic, puppeteering communities in Jaipur and Udaipur, known as both Bhats (bards) and Kathputli-valas (puppeteers), Snodgrass (2006) underscores the importance of Bhat manipulations of their exterior portrayal of cultural memory and historical narratives, particularly in their socio-economic and ritual practices, in order to meet the tourists' desires of experiencing the 'traditional' and 'royal' Rajasthan. Snodgrass's Bhats, like the Ranas in Jaipur, moved from different parts of Rajasthan to Jaipur (and Udaipur, Rajasthan's other important 'heritage' city.)³⁹ Also like the Ranas, they have changed their names from 'Nat' to Bhat, in order to associate themselves to Rajputs, and claim patronage of Udaipur's former ruling Rajputs, rather than continue to identify themselves as the bards of an untouchable, Muslim leather-working caste.

As true for the Ranas as it is for the Bhats of Snodgrass's work, the effects of the tourism industry on the everyday lives of musicians and performers in Rajasthan is very powerful, because it has the ability to "reconfigure local power struggles, often resulting in ongoing battles between different groups, and the attempts to maximize opportunities for gaining political and economic influence. There are, quite clearly, winners and losers in the global tourist industry" (Henderson and Weisgrau, 2007: xviii). Thus, in order to survive in the tourism industry, the Ranas have to continually assert their associations with the Rajputs, and display their claim to both 'traditional' and 'folk' expertise, and

³⁹ Kalakar Colony, where I conducted the majority of my fieldwork in Jaipur, is home to many Bhats/Kathputli-valas, in addition to Ranas and Kalbeliyas.

their constructed links with Rajputs, in both their narrative practices of cultural memory, and in their ritual, gender, and socio-ritual traditions.

Emulation of Rajputs

Ranas' constructed associations with the Rajputs go beyond their retelling of their historical narratives. The Ranas try to enact everyday social practices of the Rajput.

Ranas emulate the Rajputs in many ways, most of which have to do with how the morality, restrictions, and practices of women. An accumulation of economic and social status through the dance parties, enabled by their remembered roles as patrons of Rajputs and performers of music for Ghumar, has in turn created possibilities for their emulation of Rajputs. Although tourism has been a major influence in Ranas' attempts at upward social mobility, it is important to underscore the social context of the Ranas, in which they continuously find the need to emulate, and thereby resist, certain high-caste institutions and practices; the intention behind doing so, I argue, is to rid themselves of their former untouchability. Hence, Rana emulation of Rajputs is in no way a rejection of caste; on the contrary, it is a formidable assertion of the legitimacy of caste hierarchy, only one in which Ranas claim a higher position than they previously occupied.

This section argues that the different perceptions of Rana identity must all be seen in the context of their low-caste status as well as in the strategic use of kinship and gender relations. Here, I examine the ways in which Ranas emphasize their origins as Rajputs through their narratives of the past. Secondly, this section demonstrates how they have increasingly established rules and regulations in their communities in order to control the lives and bodies of women. Finally, this newfound insistence upon female

modesty and protection has certain consequences for their interactions with their formerly itinerant and untouchable neighbors and co-workers, which I approach through a discussion of how Ranas' attempts to distinguish themselves from the snake charming Kalbeliyas, with whom Ranas share social and professional space, has resulted in an ongoing antagonism regarding the Kalbeliya women's participation in professional dancing. While Ranas clearly need the Kalbeliya women to work in their "dance parties," the former often regard the latter as immodest and sexually immoral. In this way, I am most concerned in this section with some of the effects of Rana resistance of their untouchability in their socioeconomic, and particularly gender, practices.

In their practices of cultural memory, Ranas tell stories and narratives of their origins, which trace their community back to the times when they themselves were Rajputs. Ram Prasadji Rana, an elderly poet and lay historian, delineated to me the mythical origins of the Rana community among the ranks of Rajputs. Ram Prasadji claimed that the following narrative, although familiar because of its similarities to several other Hindu stories of the origins of caste, contrasts with these more normative tellings of the creation of caste hierarchies. According to the popular Hindu myth, dating back to the Rigveda, the different *varnas*, or broad classifications into which several thousand castes are frequently squeezed, came into existence from the separation of the parts of the body of the primordial man, Purusha, following his sacrifice. From Purusha's head or mouth came the Brahmans (scholar-priests), from his arms came the Kshatriyas (warriors and kings), from his loins came the Vaishyas (merchants, farmers, and most "clean" peasant castes), and from his feet were born the Shudras, or servants. According to Ram Prasadji Rana, however, all the different castes in Rajasthan originated from the

head of Vishnu as Rajputs, after which they were asked to pay respects and bow to all the other demigods. The Dholi caste refused to do so, and in consequence one of the demigods, Narad, cursed the whole community by giving them the occupation of bowing at every doorstep to beg for alms. Ram Prasadji places an emphasis on their birth rather than their occupation, and says that “although a king’s son is exiled from his kingdom, he is still known as the king’s son,” claiming that their identity as Rajputs is still intact.

Presenting a different historical narrative, however, many of my Rana informants claim that like the Rajput warriors-caste, their ancestors too went out to battle in the past: they served as drumming soldiers in battle, and were every bit as Rajput as the kings and fighting warriors, only with a slightly different task. Hence, the only fundamental difference between the Ranas and the other Rajputs was that the latter were trained in the arts of weapons, while the Ranas expertly played the *dhol*, an important medium in making military announcements, calling the start and end of battles, and directing large armies when speakers, microphones, and walky-talkies were not available. It was also their job, moreover, to recount the stories of the battles after they returned, whether victorious or in defeat, singing the praises of those who fought bravely and died as heroes. The Ranas later became the preservers of all the brave deeds of war heroes, which they memorialized through their music. Subsequently, the Ranas started documenting the genealogies of various warrior families, which along with their musical services had transformed them from Rajputs to Ranas, a title that nonetheless retains something of their past status as Rajputs.

Apart from claiming Rajput identities through myths and historical narratives, Ranas are increasingly adopting Rajput social practices as well. Ranas particularly

emulate Rajput practices with reference to women, which is a common way in which differences between communities in eastern Rajasthan are constructed and displayed. Indeed, as is commonly perceived of as the distinctly Rajput practices of “traditional female identity,” Ranas now require that their women uphold a level of distinction and distance from public spaces. Most of my male Rana informants claim that their wives and daughters stay at home, wear veils, take care of their households, and perform ritual practices like Ghumar, which demonstrates the ways in which a Rajput woman embodies a modest and traditional identity. This new insistence on female modesty, however, stands in stark contrast to other narratives of Dholi and Rana pasts, in which women in particular, the Dholans, are remembered to have traveled and performed the *dhol* with more economic success and social acclaim than the men. Comparing these disparate narratives throws into relief the extent of the organized Rana effort to resist their outcaste pasts, set in motion following the above mentioned *pancayat* ordinance.

According to one successful Rana musician, Ram Sharan Rana, who manages several “dance parties” and was one of the first Rana musicians to travel abroad for performances, women are not meant to work outside the household to economically support their families. Although there may have been some Dholans who worked as musicians in the past, and some even at present, Ram Sharan argues that the woman’s job is to stay safely at home, away from the hard life outside. Gone are the days when some men did not have the necessary resources to take care of his family and protect his women. Furthermore, Ram Sharan says that in the world today, where there are no restrictions in choosing one’s profession and plenty of opportunities for men to work, these men have no excuse for immodestly and immorally sending their women to work.

He declares that he has, as an important and influential member of the community, tried to demonstrate in many *pancayats* (judicial meetings carried out among caste-community members) that the condonable and moral way of living is characterized by female protection and seclusion, which he references through the example of his family. His wife and daughter-in-law both cover their faces with veils at all times, and are accompanied by male family members whenever they need to leave the house. Similarly, Omi Rana vehemently denied that Rana women work, stating adamantly that Rana women do not, in any circumstances, play the *dhol* or appear in public for any kind of performances.

According to most Rana men, Rana women perform Ghumar during celebratory occasions such as weddings and family rituals, just like their Rajput counterparts. However, after attending two weddings, one of which I recorded on camera, covering all the rituals associated with the wedding over 9 days, I did not witness any women dancing Ghumar. It is important to note, however, that in both the weddings I attended, I was with the groom's side, and perhaps the bride's side may have performed it. Nevertheless, I was struck by the disparity between Rana discourse on their association with Rajputs through Ghumar, and the lack of Ghumar performances at these weddings.

As mentioned in the introduction, Haridutt Kalla, the director of performance at the Jawahar Kala Kendra in Jaipur, described to me the ways in which Rajput women dance Ghumar. Ghumar is performed for specific purposes and utilizing very strategic techniques of communicating ritual and gender symbols, and in enacting in the performer a certain level of modesty (*laaj* or *lajja*). Haridutt said that the most common use of Ghumar, particularly in its performance by non-Rajput women, is celebration, entertainment, and ritually oriented, but that these women fail to perform the female

modesty required by a truly authentic instance of Ghumar. He said that it is only Rajput women who can perform Ghumar in its right form and content, because they are the only ones who can accurately follow the very strict codes of body language that allows them to express the modesty required in the dance. With the bodily and spatial restrictions recently mandated on Rana women, it is no doubt that the Ranas claim that the female members of their community perform Ghumar in the correct way. In fact, Omi Rana said that their women have preserved the Ghumar even better than those of the Rajput communities, because they can sing and play the music themselves, having born into a hereditary musician community, and thus do not require the need of caste “outsiders” in their dances.

Ranas have also changed some of their wedding traditions in the process of emulating the Rajputs. According to traditional Rana custom, and as is true with other low- and outcaste communities, the grooms offer various amounts of money and gifts to the brides’ families during the wedding, in order to demonstrate that they will be able to take full care of their women, to thank the brides’ families for giving their daughters’ hands in marriage, and, perhaps most importantly, to cover the expenses of the wedding and to lessen the economic loss of having the able-bodied female who often provides crucial family labor. Ram Sharan Rana disagrees with the tradition whereby the male members have to pay in order to take care of the women for the rest of their lives. He agrees with the conventional and more popular Hindu marriage, for which the bride’s family provides the dowry and takes care of all wedding expenses. He boasts of how he has been saving to have a lavish wedding (costing at least \$25,000 USD, or 10 *lakh* rupees) or his daughter Ram Sharan claimed that he would arrange his daughter’s

wedding in such a way that it will transpire “appropriately, like the way Rajputs do it,” setting an example for the others of his community as to how a wedding “is really done.”

One of the ways in which Ranas claim higher status and associations with the Rajputs is by setting them apart from other low- or outcaste communities, and particularly from the Kalbeliyas, with whom Ranas share both domestic and professional space. Although living next door to one another in Kalakar colony,⁴⁰ many, but not all Rana women maintain a distance from the Kalbeliya women. This distance was often explained to me as a necessary step in avoiding the “immoral” or “ill-mannered” Kalbeliya who work as professional dancers in the tourism industry. The problem for Ranas with such an occupation lies in the lack of male surveillance and protection of these women – what kind of a man would allow his wife to travel and perform with a group of men who are not part of his family, without his supervision? Furthermore, rumors were frequently spread through Kalakar Colony regarding the degraded morality of professional dancers, who were often depicted to me by both Ranas and Kalbeliyas as alcohol abusers, spoiled, and, occasionally, as sexual deviants and prostitutes. Yet, not all Ranas were averse to Kalbeliyas. Indeed, almost every Rana “dance party” featured at least two female Kalbeliya dancers, and many Ranas were friends with some of their Kalbeliyas neighbors. This was particularly true, I discovered, when the Kalbeliyas in question also avoided and criticized professional dancing in the tourism industry. My closest female informant in Kalakar Colony, Swarupi Devi, for example, has maintained

⁴⁰ Kalakar Colony is a neighborhood established by the Rajasthan State Government for what was originally conceived of as temporary land plots for itinerant performance communities, particularly the Ranas, Kalbeliyas, and Kathputli-valas. In what in the past twenty years since its establishment has now become a more permanent neighborhood, still owned by the government nonetheless, the Ranas and the Kalbeliyas live with other casts like Gujars and even low-income Brahmins, who bought off the property (illegally) from other Scheduled Castes.

a long term brother-sister relationship with one of the Kalbeliya men, Kalu Nath Sapera, and spends more time with his family than she does with most other Ranas. Swarupi states that Kalu Nath's family was unlike other Kalbeliya families, because the women did not perform in public, did not wear clothes that were inappropriate (i.e. they cover their faces), and did not travel with men other than their husbands to places far from their homes. A consequence of this statement of the sexual morality of Kalu Nath's family is an indictment of those families who allow their daughters, wives, or sisters to perform in public, show their faces to strangers, and travel sometimes to countries as far as the United States, where, as everyone in Kalakar Colony knows, women lack a sense of modesty: all characteristics of Kalbeliya women who work in "dance parties." Yet, these sorts of friendships are not shared by all Ranas. Shanti Devi, the wife of Ram Prasadji's grandson Lalit, who lives across the alley from Swarupi Devi and Kalu Nath, complained to me about the immorality of the Kalbeliya women work in "dance parties." Shanti Devi claims that the Kalbeliya men have absolutely no control over their women, especially when their women sell their bodies to other men during their international performance travels. According to her, Kalbeliya men stay at home and drink, while their women go out and work. Rana men, in Shanti Devi's estimation, were far better than the Kalbeliyas because they protect and seclude their women. Rana men took care of their families, were in control over their women, and did not tolerate infidelity. This moral superiority connects in many ways to the Ranas' caste associations with Rajputs, and means for some people, like Shanti Devi for example, that Ranas must distance themselves from lower- and outcaste communities. Inculcating Rajput feminine modesty and restrictive and protective patriarchy is not only a strategy of association, with Rajputs that is, it is

also a means of exclusion, a dis-identification with those morally questionable communities often associated with the low caste and ritual status of Dholis. In their transformations from Dholis into Ranas, then, the Ranas of Jaipur actually end up perpetuating stereotypes and discrimination against low- and outcaste communities.

Identity Contestations

Although the Ranas in Jaipur have instituted transformations in their narrative and gender practices, in accordance to their *pancayat*'s ordinance and modeling these practices on those of Raputs in order to uplift their socio-ritual identities, Ranas still nonetheless belong to a marginal community. The majority of the Ranas in Jaipur are poor, have very little socio-political power, are considered by their neighbors and acquaintances to be a low-caste community, and are still listed among the Scheduled Castes in the Indian constitution. Their current claims of higher caste status are often derided by members of their own community as well as those of other communities, particularly by those belonging to other Scheduled Castes. These people claim that changing one's name and social practices do not effect the reality of who the Ranas really are. This section examines a few accounts of these confrontations. Here, I demonstrate some of the internal and external resistance to the newly fashioned Rana social practices, particularly the resistance from women within the Rana community. In presenting these instances, I argue that the importance that Ranas place on Rajput practices and identity through their appropriating attempts to achieve a higher social status simultaneously reproduces the same social hierarchy that the Ranas are trying to resist.

Puran Nath Sapera, who owns his own “dance party”, successful because of the notoriety of his wife Rajki Sapera, a famous Kalbeliya dancer, has been working professionally with the Ranas since the 1980s. Aware of the Rana’s past identity as an itinerant musician caste-community, Puran Nath claims that the Rana’s were never known as such thirty years ago. In a confrontation I witnessed between Puran Nath and a Rana musician, who was claiming to have worked for Rajput patrons in the past, Puran Nath dismissed this Rana’s claim as a complete fabrication. Puran Nath claimed to have known the Rana’s family even before they had moved to Jaipur, and remembered that they had never worked for the Rajputs. According to Puran Nath, “Rana” was never the title given to hereditary musicians working for the Rajputs: “Rana means Rajput. As a *dhol* drummer and a musician, and thus a Dholi, how then are you a Rajput, “Puran Nath asked the Rana. In clarifying the Rana’s identity, Puran Nath declared that there was no shame in belonging to low-caste community, because “After all it is because we are from this low-caste community that we have achieved such success and fame in Rajasthan today.”

Puran Nath, knowing that I was interested in Rana-Dholi society, Ghumar, and Rajput dance practices, frequently encouraged me to meet with an “old Rana” who would tell me the “truth” about Ranas. When I met this man, the elderly Ram Prasadji Rana, he recounted many narratives of the connections between the Ranas and Rajputs, although they differed significantly from those I most frequently heard. Ram Prasadji – whom most performers and musicians in Jaipur hail as the best Dholi poet and storehouse of knowledge regarding Rana history, ritual, and religious traditions – argued that there existed no formal *jajmani* relationship between Jaipur Ranas and Rajputs. The Ranas of

Jaipur, according to Ram Prasadji, are composed of different sub-caste communities that worked for patrons other than the Rajputs, and moved from one place to another providing music and entertainment for remuneration. He says that although his community has adopted the Rana title, they are originally “Nats,” whose main occupation is remembered to have been entertainment through music and acrobatics, often the walking on ropes and bamboo. According to Ram Prasadji, then, most of the Ranas in Jaipur belong to the Nat section of the society.

Accordingly, Tejpal Bhat, one of the most successful Dholi musicians and dancers in Jaipur, and the caretaker of the Kali temple in Kalakar Colony, says that Rana is not the community’s original title, and he thus out-rightly refuses to change his name to Rana (although he has changed his name to “Bhat,” following many of the Kathputli-valas). Like Puran Nath, Tejpal states that changing one’s name does not ultimately transform the community’s or personal identity, nor does it change the perception that other castes hold of Rana identity. Tejpal says “We are not fooling anyone. We are only fooling ourselves when we change our names.” Changing names and titles is just a way of denying their reality. Tejpal is also highly critical of the social changes among the Ranas, and denies any truth in the representation of their past. In his recollection of his life before moving to Jaipur and securing a position in the tourism industry as a dancer and an organizer of dance programs, Tejpal says that he lived an itinerant life, moving from one place to another, one state to another, playing music and begging for money and food. According to him, neither his family nor any of the other people in his community ever worked for Rajput patrons: “We did not have anyone taking care of us. We had to take care of ourselves. We went days without eating. It was a very hard life” says Tejpal,

who vehemently emphasizes the fact that hiding and denying this reality would be unfair to his life and his struggle to achieve economic success.

Furthermore, Tejpal also recalls a time when the Dholi women, like their male counterparts, played the *dhol* for female patrons, and traveled around singing songs in exchange for food or money. The Dholi mothers of the current Ranas, who require their daughters and daughters-in-law to wear veils, once walked around the Rajasthani countryside with their veils covering only their heads. Tejpal Bhat remembers that it was a rare occasion when Dholans covered their faces completely. Similarly, some older Dholans refuse to cover their faces with the *ghunghat* even today. Bichhu Devi Rana, for example, the mother of Swarupi Devi and a recent great-grandmother who lives in Kalakar Colony, says that she has never covered her face and has no intention to start. Bichhu Devi supported and raised her entire family as a single mother by working in a farm and playing the *dhol* during weddings and festivals when she lived in a village outside Jaipur. She and her children moved to Jaipur around 50 years ago in the hopes of making a better living, without having first established many contacts. Bichhu Devi struggled to achieve success on her own and thus says that she doesn't owe her community anything because they weren't the ones who fed her children when they were hungry. She therefore does not conform to the changing practices initiated among the Jaipur Dholis: she still plays the *dhol* at weddings and festivals, when her health permits, and takes her daughter and daughter-in-laws with her. She has even begun training her granddaughters and granddaughters-in-law in singing and *dhol* performance. Hence, although the Rana's resistance to their low status may end up reproducing the structures of caste hierarchy, and even initiate new forms of domination over women, this is not met

with mere approval and submission on all fronts. In all senses, the multi-sited power contestation constituted by reform, reaction, and rumor is highly complex: neither does the resistance ultimately free Ranas from their low socio-ritual status, nor do the reforms transpose easily into the lives of all Rana Dholans.

Conclusion

This chapter has charted the shifting ways in which Ranas use the tourism industry as a site and medium through which to (re)present themselves, (re)negotiate their identities, exercise certain forms of internal socio-political influence, acquire status, and make money. The economic capital that they gain from the tourism industry has made possible the ways in which Ranas construct their resistance to social structures, and how they utilize their abilities to provide for their families to create economic situations in which their wives don't need to work. Hence, this encounter with the tourism industry has also been important in how Ranas have opened up for established a new form of control over their women's bodies and lives, modeled after the ways that Rajputs did. In this way this chapter has demonstrated the centrality of gender in representing, conceptualizing and evaluating identities, both among communities as well as at various individual levels within them. The Ranas also have tried to construct a higher social status by othering themselves from similar low-caste groups, which creates a tension between the Rana sexual ethic and the economic support for its maintenance.

I have also tried to reveal that these changes and transformation are not without criticism. While some members and non-members of the Rana caste-community bemoan the decisions of the *pancayat*, other members, particularly females, resist them. The Rana

women's resistance against the injunctions of the ordinance to wear the veil over the face, to remain in home, and refrain from musician's work, demonstrate what Scott (1986) has termed "everyday forms of resistance." Ultimately, neither the caste-wide reform organizations, nor these instances of everyday resistance, cause any earth-shattering transformations; no one is breaking free from social entanglements, or ridding themselves of the embedded micro-politics of everyday life. What these examples do offer us, however, is a view of the contested and transforming nature of what we think of as social structures. Hence, even if these forms of resistance inevitably end up reproducing various aspects of hierarchy, and even perpetuating new forms of inequality, they do afford us an opportunity to see individual and collective agency.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined the lives of Dholis of Rajasthan, a formerly untouchable musician caste-community, in both social and religious arenas: as musicians and ritual specialists in Jasol, and as professional musicians and performers in Jaipur. In doing so, I underscored the importance of Ghumar in Dholis' everyday lives, particularly in their relationships – real or imagined – to Rajputs, and in the ways in which they partake and transfigure in dynamic contemporary economic, social, and political transformations transpiring in Rajasthan, particularly in the wake of the liberalization of the Indian economy in the 1990s. I argued that Ghumar provides a site in which Dholis have reformulated and reconstructed historical narratives, often performed orally or set to musical accompaniment, a move which in turn allows them some room in which to negotiate their socio-ritual statuses in the changing configurations of caste and community in contemporary Rajasthan. In the process, this thesis also demonstrated the importance of the tourism industry and regional pilgrimage circuit in providing Dholis with sites in which such negotiation of status and power can take place.

Ghumar plays an important part in the religious practices and experiences of the devotees of Rani Bhatiyani in the goddess temple in Jasol. More specifically, dancing to the music of Ghumar often incites possession among devotees, who act as temporary mediums through which Rani Bhatiyani delivers messages, heals sick and handicapped people, helps barren women conceive children, and solves social and familial problems.

Because of the centrality of Ghumar in beckoning the goddess to possess her devotees, Ghumar then becomes an important tool for Dholi musicians who hope to gain prestige and ritual status both within and outside of the confines of the temple. Recently, the institutional administrators of the Rani Bhatiyani Trust and the alleged descendants of Rani Bhatiyani have banned Ghumar, one result of which has been the Dholi musicians' loss of opportunities for garnering their former distinctions. Despite such odds, however, Dholis find new ways to negotiate power and status in the temple and in their everyday lives. For instance, many Dholis continue to pursue their hereditary connection to ritual power in their narrative practices, linking their caste-community to Rani Bhatiyani via their musical-cum-ritual specialization (i.e. their performance of Ghumar, the Rani's favorite musical style) and superior devotion to the queen-goddess. Their devotion resulted in her bestowal of the boon to the Dholis, allowing them to perform Ghumar within the temple, and to keep a portion of the offerings made to the goddess. In addition to continued pursuit of previous specialized status by means of historical narratives, Dholis also continue to meet the ritual demands of various pilgrims and worshippers on their own time, apart from their responsibilities inside the temple. For example, they offer their musical services to Rani Bhatiyani devotees outside the temple, where they are free to perform Ghumar, and hence to seek to maintain their status as ritual specialists. One of the arguments of this paper is that, while Dholis are certainly subjected to multiple structures of power, and frequently reproduce these structures in their everyday and ritual practices, historical narratives of Dholi ties to Rani Bhatiyani and continued performance of Ghumar music outside the temple are two instances in which the Dholis are actively trying to resist the authority and domination of their Rajput patrons. In accordance with

the ritual specialization of the Dholis, from one point of view, the female devotees and pilgrims to the Rani Bhatiyani temple who take part in possession, despite the ban enacted by the Rajput administrators, also resist Rajput attempts to assert control over female bodies. From another perspective, however, it is in fact the goddess who is resisting the Rajput temple administrators: although many of the Rajputs discredit the possessions, another view, closer to the ground, would see the goddess utterly unencumbered by the administration's meager attempts to restrict her ability to possess her devotees. Unlike those pilgrims who are occasional visitors to the temple, the resident Dholis are continuously subject to Rajput power and authority, both because Dholi prestige somewhat depends on their ability to perform Ghumar for the goddess, and because their primary source of income is drawn from playing music, singing songs, and orating narratives in the Rani Bhatiyani temple. Hence, I also argued that both through their services as musicians for the temple, and through their performance of songs that praise their patron's ancestors, the Dholis of Jasol reproduce the social hierarchy, ultimately securing their continued domination.

According to Bhawar Lal, one of my Dholi informants, poverty and illiteracy are primary factors in the degraded political, social, and economic state of temple-musician Dholis in general, and Bhawar Lal's family in particular.. In addition, Bhawar Lal says that it is almost impossible for the resident Dholis to survive economically on what they earn from Ghumar performances outside the temple, because those men "are stuck here. After the two months that I spend singing in the temple, I have to work for the family [of his Rajput patrons] for the next year and a half, until the next rotation [of singing in the temple]. We are like servants." In other words, if the Dholis don't offer their services to

the Rajputs, they don't get to work in the temple anymore, thereby cutting themselves off from their positions as ritual specialists, and reducing their chances of getting hired by the devotees. Thus, the Dholis in the temple remain subjected to multiple forms of power by the Rajputs.

In Jaipur, the tourism industry has increased in the last couple of decades, creating new jobs and opening up new financial and occupation avenues for people from various backgrounds, including the musician and performer communities. This thesis has examined the ways in which the Dholis in Jaipur, now known as Ranas, have not only benefited economically from the tourism industry, but have also used their new positions in the tourism industry to endeavor to transform themselves socially. The niche that the Ranas have created for themselves in the tourism industry relies heavily on their remembered and imagined associations with Ghumar. The performance of Ghumar in turn also allowed Ranas to link themselves to Rajput pasts, variously conceived, and to claim knowledge of Rajput ritual and gendered practices. The Ranas' real or imagined links to Ghumar and to the Rajputs have helped them accumulate a certain relative amount of wealth, which has subsequently allowed the Ranas to give up various ritual and social practices associated with their low-caste status. As has been common among lower-status South Asian caste-communities for centuries (Dube: 1998; Hardiman: 1984; Pinch: 1996), the Ranas replaced these identifiably low-caste ritual and social practices with those often associated with high-caste Rajputs. In particular, the Ranas of Jaipur have sought to adopt the ritual and gender practices of the Rajputs. I argued that through the emulation of certain Rajput practices, particular those of women – veiling, seclusion, ban on widow re-marriage, etc. – but also including the performance of Ghumar and

reform of funeral practices, the Ranas try to resist their low-caste status. However, because Ranas still remain poor, marginalized, and recognizably low-caste to others, it is necessary to remind the reader that these forms of resistance are not revolutionary, and do not instantaneously, or perhaps even eventually, transform the lives of individuals and the community in any radical sense. Rather, these instances point to cracks in the hegemony of caste practices, realms in which Dholis and Ranas are able to subvert the dominant practices and symbols of the temple administrators and the structure of caste hierarchy, even if only for a moment, and even if these actions end up reproducing these power structures, and creating new forms of inequality and domination.

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