Ḍholā: A North Indian Folk Genre

By

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"And oh brother, all the chiefs are sitting
Give the order, only then will Ḍholā commence,
And swords will clash with the enemy, brothers . . . "

Throughout northern India, from the deserts of western Rajasthan eastward to the hills of Chhattisgarh is found Ḍholā-mārū, or more simply Ḍholā, a genre viewed both as folk literature and as " literature " in the more classic sense.[1] Authors have variously called it a love lyric (Bedi 1971); a ballad (Bailey 1938); a legend (Temple 1963); a romantic lay (Kothari personal communication); a folk opera (Gargi 1966); or an epic. None is completely inaccurate, for it is most often sung or told in meter; it has fictive historical overtones; it is romance; it is sometimes performed as a folk opera; it has epical proportions. Thus, although there is a common attribution of the term " ḍholā " to a diverse set of texts found in a number of performance settings and in a variety of linguistic styles or textures, the nature of the genre itself remains unclear. Hence, the first task in understanding Ḍholā-mārū is to systematically define the genre itself: " what is Ḍholā-mārū? "

The format for comprehending the genre that I will propose in this paper emphasizes the importance of performance. The critical role of the performance event to any understanding of folk literature has been recognized in recent folklore studies (see Bauman 1977; and for South Asia, Blackburn 1981). Likewise, Ḍholā-mārū cannot be understood as a genre of north Indian literature, folk or classic, without a clear explication of the performance contexts in which it occurs. As

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I shall demonstrate, variations in the text (content) and linguistic textures of Ḍholā-mārū occur with the types of performance events in which it is found.[2] These performance events range from 16th century literary texts written by Jain poets attached to the courts of Rajput kingdoms to folk dramas performed by professional troupes in modern Rajasthan and Utter Pradesh.[3] After surveying the main variants of Ḍholā-mārū, I proceed to show the relationship of these to both the linguistic textures in which they are manifested and the performance events in which they are enacted.

Ḍhola—Four Textual Variants

In scanning the various items called Ḍholā or Ḍholā-mārū, we find a wide range of characters, actions, and moods. Yet these form a continuum, ranging from simple to complex, a continuum that corresponds to changes in the performance contexts of each item. In its simplest form, Ḍholā is a song of an absent lover, sung to several distinct melodies and metrical forms (Bedi 1971: 107–108). Sung in the villages of western Punjab (now Pakistan), these songs are apparently unrelated to a more complex narrative tradition. Bedi classifies these songs of Ḍholā with other genres that are lyrical, sentimental, and full of the torments of separation. Here is one example:

I. Hing[4] sells in the bazar,
My love revolves round you alone,
Stay before my eyes, and live long, *my love*[5]
Oh my love, my light,
What need of a lamp when you are here.
(Bedi 1971: 103, emphasis added)

In this example, the term *ḍholā* (*ḍhol*) translates as "lover," with a concern for the presence or absence of the lover. No doubt the connections of the songs known as Ḍholā to the theme of forlorn love derives from the strong association in Rajasthan and U.P., as in Punjab, of the term *ḍholā* with the absent lover or vagabond (Vaudeville 1962b). In fact, Vaudeville suggests that the essential meaning of the term *ḍholā* is that of wanderer or absent husband. This Punjabi song tradition confirms her hypothesis.

In Rajasthan and eastern Punjab, we find a related but more complex form of Ḍholā. (See Vaudeville 1962a; Williams 1976; Temple 1963.) Here Ḍholā-mārū is the narrative of the marriage, separation and ultimate union of Ḍholā, son of Rājā Nal of Navargaṛh and Mārū, daughter of the Rājā of Pingal/Pūgal. The essence of the story is this:

> Ḍholā and Mārū are married when both are very young (she only a week in some versions). They each grow to adulthood in their natal

family and Ḍholā, forgetting his youthful marriage to Mārū, marries again. Mārū meanwhile begins to pine for her absent husband. She resorts to sending messages to him, across the deserts separating their homelands; unfortunately, Ḍholā's second wife, Mālavaṇī, intercepts them. After much torment and more effort, a message reaches Ḍholā who vows to join Mārū, only to have Mālavaṇī try physically to restrain him. Finally, many adventures later, he reaches Mārū in Pingal and they are reunited.[6]

Although this love story is considerably different from the Punjabi "lost-love" song, the connections between the traditions are clear.

The third variant of Ḍholā-mārū is found in Punjab, modern Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh. (See Elwin 1946; Temple 1963; Duggal 1979.) This variant, while focusing on the separation and union of Ḍholā and Mārū, provides introductory episodes that concern Ḍholā's father, Rājā Nal. In these versions, some or all of the Nal(a)-Damayantī story, derived from the Mahābhārata, is provided as background to the birth of Ḍholā and his marriage to Mārū. In these cases, Ḍholā is born when Rājā Nal has been banished from his kingdom and has sought refuge in the kingdom of Pingal. There his son Ḍholā is married to the Rājā's daughter, Mārū. Ḍholā and Mārū are then separated and the story of their reunion follows.

The history of the association of Nal-Ḍholā and Nal-Damayantī remains dim, but some speculation is possible. Kuśalalābh, a Jain poet who authored a version of Ḍholā-mārū in the 16th century in Rajasthan, notes in his prologue that Ḍholā's father's name is Nal and alludes to the Nal-Damayantī story from the *Mahābhārata* (Williams 1976: 68). Temple (1963) also remarks on this coincidence in *Legends of the Punjab*. Further, in modern Rajasthan, Ḍholā-mārū and Nal-Damayantī both form parts of the repetoires of *khyāl* (a form of folk opera) troupes, with Ḍholā-mārū being considered romantic and Nal-Damayantī religious (Gargi 1966). At some point, the association of Nal-Ḍholā and Nal-Damayantī became firmer. This should not be surprising, for as Temple himself aptly stated in 1885:

> The tendency of bards is to make their stories run in cycles. They love to connect all their heroes in some way or other . . . Stories are indiscriminately told of several heroes, and if one calls to mind the names of the most celebrated, they are sure to be found to belong to a group all geneologically connected with each other (1936: ix).

Thus a chance association of Nal as father of Ḍholā and Nal as husband of Damayantī allows two apparently distinct tales to be merged into one, with the appropriate geneologies constructed. (See figure 1)

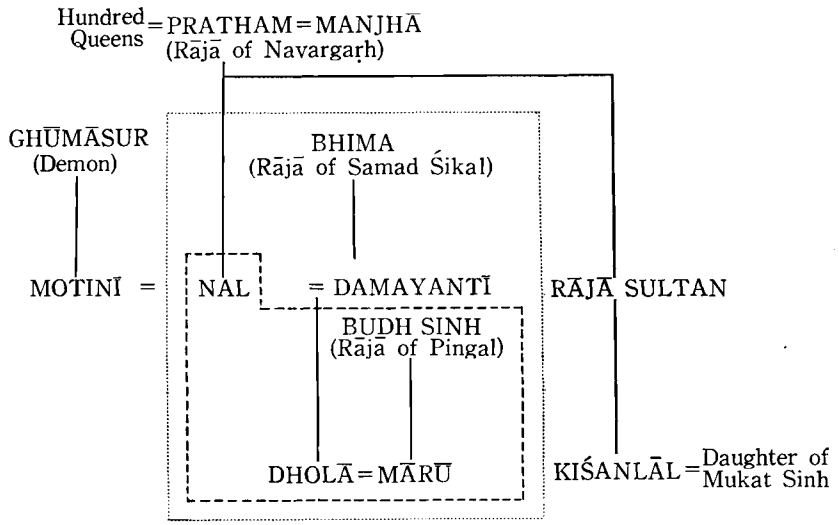

Figure 1. GENEALOGY OF ḌHOLĀ

All characters included in this genealogy are found in some modern Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, and Punjab versions, discussed as Variant 4.

..... includes those persons found in some Punjab, Chattisgarh and modern Rajasthan versions, discussed as Variant 3.

------- includes those persons found in medieval Rajasthan and Punjab versions, discussed as Variant 2.

It is the fourth variant of Ḍholā, found primarily in Punjab and Uttar Pradesh, that appears to be the most recent and complex. This variant is a three-generational epic of the family of Navargaṛh, headed by Rājā Pratham, his son Rājā Nal, and *his* son, Ḍholā. Moreover, the focus shifts from Ḍholā and Mārū to the father, Rājā Nal, and his many adventures.

Let me provide a summary of this longer narrative.[7]

Rājā Pratham was the wise and just king of Narvargaṛh. But he had one sorrow: he had no offspring, despite his 101 queens. After many penances, a guru awarded him one grain of rice which he gave to his queen Manjhā. Manjhā was soon pregnant, and the other 100 queens fiercely jealous.

The jealous queens turned to Pandit Gangadhar, whom they enticed with great offers of wealth into approaching Rājā Pratham and getting him to do away with Manjhā. The Pandit told Rājā Pratham that the son that would be born from Manjhā would kill him: that to protect himself, he should kill them both. So Rājā Pratham, with great sorrow, called his *bhangī*, Chintāman, and told him to take Manjhā to the forest (Santivan) and kill her there. Chintāman did as he was told, while the people of Narvargaṛh lined the streets

in sorrow. But in Santivan, as Chintāman went to kill Manjhā, the gods interceded in the form of a deer. Killing the deer and taking its eyes, Chintāman returned to Narvargaṛh. Meanwhile, pregnant, Manjhā is left alone in the forest, naked and "quaking like a cowardly man at war." Finally Nārad comes to her and enters her body and cuts the umbilical cord, allowing the child, Nal, to be born. Parvati and Bahmātā both come and provide other services for the new child and its mother, acting as midwives and kin. Then Manjhā and the child are left alone in the forest.

A wealthy merchant, Lacchī Baniyā, returning home from a trip, is enticed by the gods to change his path and finds Manjhā and the child in the forest. Having no daughter, he takes her home with him to Dakṣinpur. There she is eventually warmly welcomed. Lacchī has two sons, Pannā and Phūlā. With them on a merchant venture, he finds a beautiful cowrie shell used for gambling. He decides to give the shell to Rājā Pratham. Rājā Pratham, however, wants the other fifteen shells of the set and throws Lacchī and his sons in jail. Nal, growing up to be a mischievous child, goes to Narvargaṛh and says that he will obtain the other fifteen shells, if only his grandfather is released. Lacchī is released and Nal, taking leave of his mother, goes with his maternal grandfather and two uncles to retrieve the other cowrie shells.

The original shell had been left on the beach of an island by a beautiful woman bathing there. Lacchī remembers the locale and they return by ship. Nal goes ashore, vowing to meet them again in two weeks. Shortly after his arrival onshore, he comes across an old woman, Bahmātā, who instructs him on his future and tells him that he will find the cowrie shells with Motinī, daughter of the demon (*dāne*), Ghūmāsur, who rules the island. Making his way through the forest, Nal reaches the castle, which has no entrance. Eventually Nal defeats Motinī in *causar* (a gambling game) and she agrees to marry him. When Ghūmāsur returns to the castle, Motinī turns Nal into a fly and hides him in her hair. This occurs for several days, with Motinī and Nal gambling and playing when Gūmāsur is absent. Finally Nal convinces Motinī to find out how her father can be killed. Ghūmāsur's life is dependent upon that of a heron hidden in the innermost of seven rooms surrounded by snakes. If the heron dies, Ghūmāsur will die. Nal reaches the heron and brings it back to the castle. As Ghūmāsur returns, Nal breaks the heron's leg, and Ghūmāsur's leg is likewise broken. Ghūmāsur and Motinī beg Nal not to kill him, but Nal persists and Ghūmāsur dies. Then Parvati and Bahmātā arrive and conduct a marriage ceremony for Nal and Motinī. Both return to the shore, where Lacchī waits in his ship. On ship, Pannā and Phūlā are bewitched by Motinī's beauty. Scheming, they grab Nal while he sleeps and throw him overboard.

Nal, however, does not drown in the ocean, but is protected by snake gems and eventually reaches the kingdom of Bāśik (Vāsukīdev), king of the snakes. At first scorned, he eventually wins acceptance from the snakes, but manages to avoid a marriage with Vāsukī's daughter. Meanwhile, back

in Dakṣinpur, Manjhā is weeping over the absence of her son and Motinī is avoiding the perils posed by her alleged kin, finally telling them that she is a true sister and they should leave her alone. Then as the six months allowed by Pratham end, Lacchī and the sons take Motinī to Pratham's court, offering her in place of the fifteen cowrie shells. Pratham too is entranced by Motinī and sets out to marry her. But she refuses to marry anyone unless the *Nal kathā* or *Nal purāṇa* is told. They search far and wide, sending messengers to Benaras and other holy spots, but are unable to find a Pandit who can tell the *Nal purāṇa.*

Nal, returning from Patāl Lok (the underworld of the snakes), learns of these doings. In Patāl Lok he had acquired a ring that turned him into an old man of 80 years when worn on his right hand and a youth of twelve years when worn on the left.

Dressed as an old man Pandit, Nal goes to the court of Rājā Pratham and tells him the *Nal purāṇa.* The court realizes the true story and he is reunited with his wife Motinī and his father Pratham. Pratham then sends a cart for Manjhā and the family is reunited.

Then Pratham, Manjhā and a large retinue proceed to Hardwar to bathe in the Ganges. There they meet Phūl Sinh Panjābī, Rājā of Kampilāgaṛh. Phūl Sinh had fought with ghosts and men since his birth. At the *melā*, he fights with Rājā Pratham over who will bathe first, and ends up turning Pratham's army into stone. Pratham and Manjhā are jailed in Kampilāgaṛh and forced to grind wheat.

Nal, back in Narvargaṛh, hears of his father's troubles and sets out, aided by Mansukh and an army of snakes, to free his father. Arriving at the border, Motinī turns herself into a kite (bird) and seeks out the locale of Pratham and Manjhā. Then she and Nal dress as *Naṭs* (acrobats/dancers) and go into Phūl Sinh's kingdom. Nal calls upon Durga and Phūl Sinh calls upon Kālī and the battle rages until Nal is victorious. The family returns to Narvargaṛh and Pratham gives his throne to Nal.

Meanwhile, in Samad Śikal, Rājā Bhīm realizes that it is time that his daughter Damayantī was married and sends a swan with a message to Indra seeking his hand in marriage. Instead, the swan falls into Nal's kingdom where it is tended (fed pearls) and Nal decides to accept the invitation of marriage found on the swan's neck. Many months later when the swan returns to Samad Śikal, Raja Bhīm learns of the mislaid wedding invitation. He sends yet another message to Indra, who arrives to claim his bride. Nal too proceeds to Samad Śikal to marry Damayanī. Damayantī meets Nal and falls in love with him: through the aid of the gods, she is able to choose Nal as her groom. But Indra is angered.

Indra's anger results in twelve years of trouble for Nal under the influence of Sānicār (Sanidev). As his kingdom whithers and dries, he is forced to depart, taking Damayantī with him. First they go to Mansukh's home where, under Sānicār's influence, they are accused of taking a necklace. Various adventures befall them, and they arrive in Pingal. By now neither has

any clothing and Nal's body is covered with the pus sores of leprosy. In Pingal, they are given refuge in the home of a Telī named Ragghu. With Nal driving his press, Ragghu, renamed Raghunadan, prospers. One, two, three, four, five years pass, each bringing wealth to the Telī until he owns many villages, 1200 horses and men, elephants, houses, and mills. Rājā Budh invites the whole of Pingal to his house to celebrate the birth of his child and includes a special invitation to the Telī. Nal refuses to go and says that instead he will take the bullocks to the tank to drink. Arriving at Bhamartāl with the Telī's many bullocks, Nal comes across the Rājā's men bringing horses to drink. His bullocks force their way to the pond and a battle ensues. Eventually the king's men return to the court to tell Rājā Budh Sinh of the horrid behavior of the Telī's servant.

First Budh Sinh gambles with the Telī, winning all of his wealth. Then Nal and Rājā Budh Sinh meet in Phūl Bāg. A gambling match, the winner gaining the other's daughter, follows. Nal wins and Budh Sinh suddenly realizes that he cannot marry his daughter to a Telī's servant. In order to prove his royal status, Nal is required to defeat the demons inhabiting Lakhiyabān. He is successful, and his son Ḍholā is married to Mārū, daughter of Budh Sinh. (Somehow Ḍholā and Mārū are then separated: this varies considerably, as does of course all of the above!) Dholā's brother/cousin, Kiśanlāl, joins him.

Mārū is left in Pingal, separated from her husband Ḍholā. She is able to get a message to him reminding him of his forsaken wife. Ḍholā is reunited with Mārū.

Of particular interest in this variant is Rājā Nal's birth and early history. No scholar has mentioned Nal's earlier history and his father Rājā Pratham. However, we appear to have here a growing epic, with episodes added as necessary. The story of a king without a son is popular in western U.P., but I cannot begin to say when the king was named and the story added to the growing Ḍholā. The Ghūmāsur-Motinī and Nal-Basīk episodes are also hazy in origin though features of these are common to many north Indian folk tales. Let me give one example: in Ḍholā, Ghūmāsur, a demon and father of Motinī, dies when Nal finds a heron hidden in a cage in an inner room surrounded by snakes. As Nal slowly breaks the legs, and eventually the neck of the bird, Ghūmāsur's legs and neck are likewise broken. The Thompson-Roberts *Types of the Indic Oral Tales* lists 54 instances of this tale type (302) for South Asia; and Mayeda, working with materials collected by Norman Brown in Kashmir, finds another six versions of it (Mayeda and Norman Brown 1974).

This fourth variant is best understood as a modern, twentieth century epic, sharing many features with other Indian epics. Writing on Indian epics, Claus (n.d.) states that the folk epic is a compilation

of loosely knit parts or episodes, rather than a single extended narrative or story line. Focusing on a popular hero or heroine, the epic contains many episodes that can be performed separately. And these episodes are most probably pieced together from independent sources. Further, even when a single episode or fragment is performed, there is a conceptual reality to the epic as a whole that allows the audience to respond to that piece in the context of the larger whole. It is only when epics appear in literary traditions that a more fixed narrative series emerges.

South Asian epics also have similar components: most critically, as they grow, they tend to cover three generations of family history, often with the third generation being the most significant. Later versions of epics give more importance to female characters (Beck 1978), and many Indian epics involve important pairs of brothers. Smith (1980) contends that epics will follow a process of development that goes from being hero-oriented, to mythological, to the hero becoming deified. In this shift from romantic epics, morality assumes a greater significance: the romantic heroes tend to be unconcerned with morality and the deified heroes to represent the moral standards of the region.

This brief discussion of the Indian folk epic immediately highlights the epic features of the modern U.P. versions of Ḍholā. I have heard Ḍholā performed four times in lengthy renditions: while there were common features of meter and *rāga* (melody), each presented a different episode in the family history of the rulers of Narvargaṛh. I also have seven complete examples of modern printed versions of Ḍholā. The number of episodes given in these varies from two to eighteen and internal evidence clearly shows that each episode can be performed independently. And I have no doubt that the people flocking to the tent of the Ḍholā-wālā set up at district fairs in southwestern U.P. know the outlines of the epic—that they are able to provide the broader conceptual framework.

Aside from the loose linking of episodes, Ḍholā presents other features found in South Asian epics. Ḍholā as an epic is three-generational, but unlike most Indian epics (Beck 1978), it is the second generation, that of Nal, which is most critical. Possibly this story, borrowed from the Mahābhārata and popular in clapbooks in the late 19th century (Temple 1963: 204), provides more opportunities for creativity by performers. Ḍholā-mārū becomes decreasingly important as the epic enlarges because the love-forsaken Mārū provides little opportunity for the excitement and drama that engages the attention of the audience at a folk opera, the primary performance mode in U.P. and Punjab. In fact, one printed version, called *Nal-Purāṇa*, clearly demarcates this shift.

Indian folk epics also often have important females, females who act forcibly. In the epic of the Three Brothers from South India, Draupadi is the sister of the heroes, not their wife as in the *Mahābhārata*, thus allowing her to play a more active role (Beck 1982). In Ḍholā, two of the four critical women are largely acted upon—Manjhā, mother of Nal, and Damayantī, his second wife. Both are obedient and suffering, hardly ever questioning their husbands, though Damayantī does outwit her father and the gods to obtain Nal as a husband. It is Motinī, daughter of the demon Ghūmāsur, who provides an image of an active, forceful and imaginative woman. Motinī protects herself from the lust of Nal's step-uncles and from her father-in-law. And she finds and leads the rescue of Nal's parents, Pratham and Manjhā, when they are captured by Phūl Singh Punjābī. While forceful wives are not unknown in Indian traditions, Motinī as a wife appears able to take such an active role because of her unique origins as Ghūmāsur's daughter.

Mārū too acts, but it may be significant that she acts as a daughter seeking her husband, and not as a wife. Folk traditions are very clear that if father and husband are unable to properly nurture and protect their women, the woman may act for herself.

Finally, we have the morality question. As a romantic epic, we can expect from the Indian paradigm that the actors have little concern for the propriety of their actions. This in fact is the case: to cite one example, Motinī begs Nal not to kill her father for she will have no place to return during the monsoon month of Savan. Ghūmāsur likewise pleas for his life, but Nal persists and Ghūmāsur dies.

The fourth variant of Ḍholā, then, is a modern epic, quite possibly a 20th century phenomenon. In fact, one 1970 printed version is titled *Ḍholā Nai Tarj*, " Ḍhola New Style." It is built on a variety of themes and motifs from the common stock of North Indian folklore which are loosely linked via their association with named heroes, heroines and locales. As such it provides us with an interesting on-going example of the epic process.

In terms of form, the genre of Ḍholā ranges from single stanza songs of lost love to a three-generational, multi-episodic epic. The most immediate and prominent feature of Ḍholā is its variability, the fact that there is little consistency aside from the theme of lost love and the ultimate union of Ḍholā and Mārū, their home kingdoms, and Ḍholā's father's name. Clearly genre distinctions, borrowed from western traditions and based on textual style (e.g. song, ballad, legend, epic), provide little insight into the genre named Ḍholā.

ḌHOLA: TEXTURE AND PERFORMANCE

It is only when we recognize that Ḍholā continues to be a vital, living tradition throughout much of northern India that this immense variability can be understood. The bards of Rajasthan, the women in Chhattisgarh, and the villagers of U.P. all know it as an oral tradition, not as a written one. And because it remains an oral performed tradition, variability endures, with each region enacting it distinctively and providing new interpretations.

I should note here that Ḍholā is never performed in a religious or ritualistic context. Without the potential of religious constraint, where there is concern for accurately reproducing sacred texts, Ḍholā has more freedom to remain fluid and to pick up on new themes and topics. Hence in one printed version from the 1970s, Rājā Pratham reigns under the rule of Congress! And in an oral rendition from 1968, Rājā Nal seeks some of his adventures in the wars of Kashmir, while a 1975 rendition has him fighting in Bengal/Bangladesh.

Two aspects of the performance of Ḍholā are critical: first, the type of performance event varies considerably, ranging from written manuscripts to folk operas; and to the extent that we can factor out performance mode, we gain insight into the genre. Second, Ḍholā is everywhere metrical:[8] it is either sung or told/written in some poetic meter. Moreover, all but the single stanza songs are constructed by linking a series of songs: this string of songs, often in a variety of meters and *rāga*, allows for greater flexibility than does a genre fixed by meter and content, e.g. *Ālhākhand*. The prevalent Rajashtani association for Ḍholā is not unfounded, for it is linked to a centuries-long Rajasthani metrical romance tradition.

In discussing the range of performance events in which Ḍholā is found, let me begin with the earliest known versions—the manuscripts and textural styles of the Jain poets of the medieval Rajput courts. These literary compositions, often illuminated, present the core (variant 2) of the Ḍholā-mārū story. We can only speculate on the motivations of these authors, but it is plausible to assume that they were composing for their royal patrons, using themes and stories from the region, while modifying them to adhere to accepted literary standards. Moreover, in other parts of north India in the same period, other heroic stories are being turned into literary masterpieces by yet other authors under royal patronage. For example, in a process that appears remarkably similar to that which must have occured for Ḍholā-mārū, the eastern U.P. epic of Loriki (Canaini) becomes a poem of love in the hands of Sufi poets during the 14th to 17th centuries (see Pandey 1982).

Richard Williams, writing on the Rajasthani literary versions,

defines Ḍholā-mārū as part of the medieval *prabandha kāvya* literature. More specifically, it is a *lok khaṇḍakāvya*, building on popular idioms and vernacular lyrics (1976: 104 ff). Williams notes also that folk songs were vitally important in the *khaṇḍākavya* of the Hindi literary tradition, for the *khaṇḍākavya* was a verse-bound story, generally of one meter with interspersed folk songs. It is certainly not unusual for Indian literary traditions to adopt and refine folk themes, songs, and verses. And we must view the Rajasthani literary versions of Ḍholā-mārū as original compilations by given authors of lyrics and verses familiar to them or newly created following known metrical conventions.

The Rajasthani poems are composed primarily in the meters known as *dohā*, (*dūhā*), *soraṭhā*, *caupāī*, and *gāthā*.[9] These meters are used by the poet to mark aspects of his text. In the recension given by Vaudeville (1962 a: 1), the first verse is in *gāthā* (*gāhā*)[10] and sets the stage for the poem itself.

II. In Pūgal there lived Rājā Pingal,
in Narwar town ruled Rājā Nal.
Their kingdoms distant, they had never met,
yet by fate a bond was established.
(Williams 1976: 173)

The remainder is in *dohā*, a meter composed of 24 *mātrā*'s (short syllables) with a ceasura after 13.

Williams provides evidence of a more sophisticated use of meter for cueing the reader. Here there are shifts to *soraṭha* meter, the inverse of *dohā* with the caesura after 11 *mātrā*'s (the two feet of the *dohā* line are 13/11 *mātrā*'s; of *soraṭha* 11/13, with rhyme in the first and third and second and fourth feet mandatory). These shifts occur at moments of heightened feeling or to change the scene (Williams 1976: 183). In the following example, Mārū is tormented by her absent love and speaks to the *kumjha* birds on the nearby lake.

III. Mārū (*dohā*)
" In the midst of the lake you build your twig nest
from water you're born, from water you're reared,
What blemish, O *kumjha*, could color your life
and make you sing so sadly all night? "

The *kumjha* flock so sweetly sang,
and Mārū heard the beat of their wings.
She who from her love is parted,
falls never in peaceful night's sleep.
The *kumjha* flock so sweetly sang,
on the far shore of the lake.
All night love thoughts haunted her,

as tears fell from her eyes.

(*sorathā*)
Lost in desire only love could fulfill,
Māravanī wandered out on the path,
And she saw on the shore the *kumjha* flock,
huddled close as they walked the smooth sand.

(Mārū (*dohā*)
" His home is far and mountains rise high.
The region's not fit for traveling.
Yet here for that meeting with my love,
my eager heart hopefully waits."

(Williams 1976: 188–189)

In addition to drawing on appropriate metrical forms, the medieval authors used folk song forms common to the region. The songs most prevalent in Ḍholā-mārū are *virah-gīt*, songs of separation, and *bārah māsī*, songs using the twelve months of the year to develop a theme or narrative. Here is a fragment of a *bārah māsī*, used by Mārū to describe her absent love.

IV. " In Phāgun[11] month, by start of spring
should I hear you have not come,
Then as I step the *cācari* dance,
I shall leap into Holi's fire! "

" If you do not come, O Ḍholā,
in Phāgun or in Caitra,[12]
Then I will saddle and ride to you,
when the Kārtikka[13] crops have ripened! "

" If, O master, you have not come
by the clouds' first burst of rain,
Dry beds will break into torrents,
while the distance grows yet wider! "

" O husband, as the month of Sāvan[14] comes
the treasure house of earth is brought forth.
The flood of *viraha* surges on,
who now will there be to contain it? "

(Williams 1976: 206)

The literary Ḍholā-mārū are then a series of loosely connected lyrics, modeled largely on popular songs, bound by narrative verses that fluctuate and are easily replaced. The songs, the meters, and the themes themselves are drawn from those current in the region, adapted for the poet's purposes.

It is precisely this textural feature—loosely connected lyrics based on popular songs with some binding narratives adapted for a particular performance—that describes the modern Ḍholā of U.P., Rajasthan, and Punjab. Here Ḍholā is most often performed as a type of folk opera, a *sangīt*, *svāng*, or *khyāl*. Temple's version of Nala-Damayantī in *Legends of the Punjab*, recorded in the 1880s, is from a *svāng* performance, and the printed versions of Ḍholā-mārū available in north Indian bazaars today are scripts for solo or group performances.[15] It is noteworthy that no modern literary version of Ḍholā is available in the marketplace: it remains an oral genre.

Ḍholā was performed regularly in the late 1960s and 1970s in western U.P. where I was doing field work. The performance itself was termed Ḍholā, and the performer, the *ḍholā-vālā* (" the one who does *ḍholā* "). The troupe whose leader lived in Karimpur performed at the request of local patrons in surrounding villages during the major festival and marriage seasons and in addition made the rounds of nearby district fairs, setting up a tent and performing daily for the two or three week period of the fair. The performances followed the model described by the Vatuks (1979) for *svāng* performances in districts to the north of Mainpuri. However, unlike *svāng* troupes, the Ḍholā troupes perform only Ḍholā, using the many episodes of the epical Ḍholā for variety. The performers were professionals, though they did not work full time at Ḍholā, most often farming for additional income. The performers were male, and the audiences, too, were dominantly male.

While some men and boys of Karimpur could sing a stanza or two of Ḍholā, only the troupe leader (a Watercarrier, *kahar*, by caste) and one budding professional singer (a blind teenager of the Farmer, or *kāchhī*, caste) could sing complete episodes. In addition to performances of the troupe, the Ḍholā leader would sometimes give a solo performance at the insistence of his village mates. One such performance occured during the monsoon in July of 1968 when the men could not work in the fields. Instead, they gathered one morning in the village Dharmasala to hear Ḍholā. Payment was made by individual donations throughout the performance, and the solo singer was accompanied by a drum (*dholak*), cymbals (*cimatā*) and a folk *sarangi* that he played himself.

In Rajasthan too the performers of Ḍholā are professional or semi-professional singers: not everyone has the expertise to perform. In Chhattisgarh, Ḍholā is not performed by troupes or by professionals, yet not everyone knows it, indicating that some expertise is needed to sing Ḍholā. I suggest that it is precisely the professionalism and the folk opera performance context that have aided in the development,

variability and durability of this genre. Professional singers generally command a variety of song styles and in creating any one ballad/legend/epic are able to draw from this repetoire. Ḍholā performers in various regions of modern India, like their medieval counterparts, the Jain poets, draw from their respective regionally and socially defined pools of melodies, meters, themes and motifs in creating afresh each version of Ḍholā.

The skills demanded of the modern Ḍholā performer can be illustrated through a brief examination of an actual performance. The performers for this example were the troupe leader and blind teenager mentioned above: they performed on my verandah during the Holi season in April, 1975. Accompanying them were a *darjī* (Tailor) playing the *dholak* and a *kāchhī* (Farmer) playing the *cimatā*. A group of men, primarily middle caste, provided the refrain. Ḍholā as performed is a loosely connected series of songs, speech and chants, tied together by the thinnest of narrative threads, presenting us with a rich tapestry of interwoven forms.

In the first 270 lines of this performance, there were 35 shifts in texture, using 19 different styles of speech, song, or chant. There are three speech styles: a declarative sentence, a question to the audience, and a conversation between characters in the story. Seven song styles are found, including *ḍholā*, *ālhā*, *sāvan*, and *lahar*. Finally, there are nine different modes of chanting, three with identifiable meters and/or rhyme patterns. In addition, there are changes in pitch, speed, melody and rhythm.[16]

The performance opens with eight lines in *dohā* meter. Lines in *dohā* typically serve as invocations to a variety of North Indian traditions and their use here is not at all surprising.

V. *Dohā*:

(1) Aaah . . . Rejoice, rejoice, Devi, victory to the *bel*. Give me boons.
I want to have four things: *tāl* (beat), throat, voice and knowledge!
May Bhavānī always be to my right, and Gaṇeś remain before me.
May the three gods protect me, Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Maheś.
The name of Rām is uttered, Have patience.
He himself will take care of things, the ocean of mercy, Raghuvīr.
Rām causes one's strength to grow, no one can grow on his own.
On his own Rāvan gained power, (but) in a second he lost everything.

At line 9, the style shifts to the song type *ḍholā*, a form marked more by musical structures than by linguistic style, except for the emphatic stanza marker, ***bhāī***. This song style is found only in Dholā performances and is most characteristic of it. In the portion given here, the singer continues to introduce the story itself.

VI. Song (*ḍholā*):

Oh the bell of Bhagavatī is tolling, tolling,
(10) The Mother's bell is pealing.
My Mother, oh, (is) in the temple,
Pūjā is being performed, brothers....

And Mother, your form is as beautiful as the moon,
I have performed jobs of deceit, brother,
In all such play there are obstacles,
The grandfather examined the necklace,
The form of the moon turned to stone.
Then brother, all the chiefs are sitting, brothers....

And oh Mother, we are remembering you,
(20) My Mother of the Mountain,
Mother, there will be victory, victory, victory, victory.
In your temple is Saraswati,
Then Mother, the bells are pealing, brothers....

And oh Giver of Life, remembering your beauty,
Then I offer flowers of jasmine.
Your mansion is made of a net,
On it are spread the flowers of the gardener.
Mother, rejoice, rejoice, rejoice, rejoice.
The people will sing *arati*.
(30) And with it the ghosts of the mother's house will die, brothers....

And, oh brother, all the chiefs are sitting.
Give the order, only then will Ḍholā commence,
And swords will clash with the enemy, brothers....
And, oh, my Sārdā Mother came,
Give the order, for all are assembled.
With that now (we) will go to war.

Spoken: One Two Three.

At the conclusion of the introductory verses, the singer states the actual episode that he will be singing, followed by a section in heightened speech that initiates the story.

VII.

Spoken: The War of Bengal and the Engagement of Kiśanlāl.

Heightened
Speech: Aaah . . . In this I tell of Ḍholā Kumar
In the center of the Rangmahal: So, " Mother, quickly dress me as a groom,

(40) " Just make me a groom,
" If you don't prepare me as a groom,
" Mother, then I'll kill myself with a knife."
At this Damayanti said, " Son, listen carefully,
" Behind you my sons are thousands, but I am exhausted by heavy breath.

" Son my darling beloved,
" Listen, oh listen to this song: Today my eyes are overflowing with tears."

He then returns to the dominant *ḍholā* song style, interspersed with chants. Later in the performance, starting with line 183, there are ten lines in the *ālhā* meter of 31 ***mātrās***. Here is a sampling:

VIII. Song (*ālhā*):
(183) " Oh, don't go brother to Phulbag, I have told you the state of affairs.
" Go quickly instead to Bengal, Why are you being so tardy?
" Why are you taking your time on the road? I have told the complete truth."

And lines 244–49 are sung in the style known as *sāvan*, a women's genre associated with the monsoon.

IX. Question:
(243) And in what fashion did Nal leave there?

Song (*sāvan*):
(244) " Oh slowly, slowly Nal went from the garden.
Oh slowly, slowly Nal went from the garden.
Oh brother, Nal was very sad at heart,
The king of Narbar, brother, went from the garden.
Oh seeing him come, oh brother, the Gūjar said.
Oh seeing him come, oh brother, the Gūjar said.
Oh listen to my request brother, listen to my request, listen carefully.
King of Narbar, oh brother, fix your mind on the forest.

Here is one last example of a clearly defined poetic form used in Ḍholā. Called *lahar*, " wavy," it contains a varied number of ***mātrās***, with the distinctive cadence of three long syllables concluding each line.

X. Song (*lāhār*):

(334) Oh he said to the king, " Brother this is the garden of of the rich."
He said to the king, " Son, this is the garden of the rich."
" In it are ripening sweet and sour fruits,
In the garden are ripening sweet and sour fruits."
In the garden, the *papiya* and peacock cried out, the *bhamiri* flew off....

That these performers control a variety of metrical forms, melodies, and themes and are able to combine them effectively is evident. But they must not only be effective: they must produce an aesthetically pleasing event, for if the audience is not retained by the performance, the event will wither and die. So too would the genre. Thus each performance, in response to its audience, is enacted distinctively: some audiences desire humor, others laments. The astute performer, attending to his audience, knows when an additional song will be rewarded, or when the narrative should be speeded up with long prose passages.

Audiences in different regions of India apply varying aesthetic criteria to performances of Ḍholā. Hence the Ḍholā of the medieval Jain poet, the modern Rajasthani bard, the Karimpur troupe leader and the men of Chhattisgarh all look and sound very different, for what is acceptable to their audiences, in both content and textural style, varies. Forlorn love is emphasized in one place, and battles engaging thousands of soldiers in another. A performer may use one meter, or many; one melody or many. And they do retain their audiences, for the genre lives on, sung today in villages throughout northern India.

Conclusion

From the earliest written Rajasthani versions of Ḍholā-mārū to the present day, the nucleus of Ḍholā-mārū has been the folk lyrics that make up the major portion of any performance. Binding these lyrics into a cohesive whole are a variety of narrative and descriptive elements. Not surprisingly, Williams (1976), in the conclusion to his discussion of the medieval literary Ḍholā-mārū, refers to it as a textual drama, for the dramatic element of the text cannot be obscured. Unfortunately, we know little of the interrelation of drama and poetry in the medieval period, but it is not implausible to assume that the Ḍholā-mārū compositions of Kuśalalābh and other Jains were more closely linked to performance than has been recognized. Medieval poetry, like the genre Ḍholā, may be fully understood only in the context of performance.

Three interrelated factors allow us to comprehend this genre, and its variability and durability. First there is a common textual association: the theme of the tormented lover allied with a chance content similarity—Rājā Nal—in two distinct narratives found in the same regions of northern India. As folk poets merged the two traditions, the text of the genre became enlarged and an epic was created. Second, there is the textural tradition of Ḍholā—a tradition based on the creative linking of songs, literary and folk, with narrative threads to bind them. Ḍholā is dominantly metrical and it does not appear in prose renditions. Third, there is the oral performance mode, most particularly as a folk opera, further contribuing to the importance of song. For Ḍholā is, in terms of text, texture and performance, drama, and most critically, a drama to be performed. But we still know little about this drama. Questions that remain unexplored include: " What is the manner in which the parts are articulated? " " What function does each serve in the context of the greater whole? " " How is performance created? " " What are the significant regional differences and how are these related to other folk genres in that region? " To answer these requires a detailed analysis of form and content, one outside the bounds of this paper. Unguided by the goddess, we lack the skills of the Ḍholā performer, whose invocation begins:

" . . . Give me boons.
I want to have four things: *tāl*, throat, voice and knowledge."

NOTES

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1. The term Ḍholā, or Ḍholā-mārū, refers to a variety of actual folk items in the North Indian context. Comparable to other native terms defining genres, such as *bhajan* or *kavvālī*, it is a genre designator, though perhaps not of the sort most familiar to western scholars.

2. The use of the terms " text ", " texture " and " performance context " in the following pages is a variant of Dundes' use of these terms (1980). Seldom am I dealing with a specific text, with one particular telling or version, but rather have

analytically grouped various " texts " (a la Dundes) to seek patterns. Textural features are, like Dundes, linguistic features, including rhythm, rhyme, pitch, etc. Unlike Dundes, I feel that text and textural analysis must be merged and carried out simultaneously. Finally, since I am seeking broad patterns ranging over time and space, I am not referring to specific social contexts for these items, but to general trends in performance contexts.

3. And most recently by Delhi puppeteers specializing in performances for the urban elite.

4. *Asfoetida.*

5. Bedi's translation excludes this phrase, contained in the original. See Appendix I for the Hindi original of this and other examples, when they are available. (Williams does not provide Hindi originals for examples III–IV.) The translations are all mine, unless otherwise indicated.

6. There is no such thing as " the " story of Ḍholā-mārū, for no two versions are alike. I have tried here to present a basic " core," rather like the tale-types of Aarne and Thompson, that will allow the reader to recognize the genre in its various garbs.

7. This summary is based on published performance scripts from western U.P. as well as on orally performed renditions taking place in the village Karimpur.

8. Of the major translations readily available, only Elwin's (1946) is manifestly not metrical, but I suspect that the Chhattisgarhi original was. The Chhattisgarhi version given by Kavyopadhaya in Grierson (1890) is metrical, with interspersed prose narrative.

9. See Vatuk 1979 for a discussion of Hindi meters.

10. *Gāthā* is an ancient meter used by medieval poets primarily for instructive passages.

11. Phāgun is the month falling in March–April. Holi, the primary spring festival of northern India, occurs at the end of the month.

12. Caitra is the month following Phāgun.

13. Kārtikka comes in the fall (October–November).

14. Sāvan is the month of the beginning of the monsoon, July–August. It is known too as the month of lovers, so that separation during Sāvan is especially tormenting.

15. Temple (1963: 204) mentions clapbooks of the Nal story and the British records of publications for the late 19th and early 20th centuries record numerous instances of versions of this story under the category of play or drama. Appendix II contains a listing of modern printed versions of Ḍholā.

16. See also Wadley 1982.

APPENDIX I

I. Bazar vikendi hing ve
Meri tussan de butt vichch jind ve,
Butt rakh sahmne, jiven dhola,
Dhol chananna,
Sadi gali aven diva kahnu balnan.
(Bedi 1971: 130)

II. pūgali pingal rāū, nal rājā narvare nayre
adiṭhā duriṭṭhā ye, sagāī daīy sanjoge
(Vaudeville 1962a: 1)

V. 1) jai jai devī jai latā mujhe diyo vardān
cāri cīj māṅge mile, tāl kaṇth svar gyān
sadā bhavānī dāhinī sanmukh rahāl gaṇeś
tīn dev rakśā karen so brahmā viṣṇu maheś
rām nām japte raho dhare raho mandhīr
kāraj veī samhāri ye kripā sindhu raghuvīr
rām baṛhāye te baṛhe balu kari baṛhe na kāy
balu kari kai rāvanu baṛhe chin men ḍāro khoy

VI. 9) aaa . . . are ghanṭā bhagavatī kā ghānana ghānana
ghanṭā maiyā ghānana ghānanana
merī mātā re mandir men
pūjē hai rāhā, bhāī . . .
aur maiyā candra rūp ayalabelā
tose kāry kapaṭ kī bhaiyā khelā
sār khilat jāme pari gayī rorī
dādā parkho gale ko hār
rūp candra pathrā kari ḍāro
tau dādā sab baiṭhe re sardār bhāī
aur re maiyā ham samirat hai toy

20) māt merī parvat vārī
maiyā jai jai jai jai hoy
tere mandir men sarasvatī
to maiyā ghanṭan ki re ghānanā bhāī . . .
aur re jannī sumirat main alebelī
to pai caṛhi rahe phūl camelī
tero bhavan bano re jālī ko
to pen phūl caṛhat mālī kē
maiyā jai jai jai jai hoy
bandā karienge ārate re

30) aur jape bhūt marige mātārī nīr bhāī . . .
aur re bhaiyā sab baiṭhe sardār
hukum sunāo tahī ko hoy ḍholā
aur vairī se bajaigī talvāri bhāī
aur re merī āy gayī sārdā māy
hukum sunāo sabhā ke baiṭhaiyā
tahī ab ghūmi bajaigī talvāri, ek do tīn

VII. Talk: 37) deś bagāle kī laṛāī aur kiśunlāl kī sagāī
Heightened Speech: āā . . . itmen ḍholā kumaru raho batlāy
rangmahal ke bīc men tau māy varnā dev mātārī jaldī

40) āge varnā dev banāy
jo nāy varnā banāo mātārī tau
mari jāū kaṭārī
it ne men bālī damiyantī beṭā suni lev kān lagāy
tere pichelā mere kumar hajārī main hā phī kelū kī
beṭā so mere praṇon se pyāre

VIII. *ālhā*

45) suni suni bāte are kumar mere bainon se calta āj panāre

183) (are) tum mati jāvo bhaiyā phūl bāg ko, tun ko hāl rahā batlāy.
jaldī cala tum bagale ko, ab dyon rakhī der lagāy.

ab kyon der karo, marg me, sācī hāl rahā batlāy.

IX. *Sāvan*

244/5) are ṭarkatu ṭarkatu bāgn se nalu cal dayo rī.
e jī nalu man men are bhaiyā nalu man men hotu man hin
narbar vāro bāgan se maiyā cali dayo jī
are āvat dekho are bhaiyā gūjar kahe rajo jī
e jī merī suni laiyo bhaiyā, merī suni laiyo dhyanu lagāy
narbar vāro are bhaiyā ban se lage raho rī.

X. Song (*lāhār*)

334) are kāū rājā ko bhaiyā bagu tau amīrī re
kāū rājā ko beṭā bāgu tau amīrī re
khaṭā aur miṭṭhā jāme pakati jamīrī re
khaṭā aur miṭṭhā bāg me pakati jamīrī re
bole papiya moṛ bāg me uṛati bhamīrī re . . .

Note: Hindi originals unavailable for songs III and IV.

APPENDIX II

Hindi:

Anon. Rājā Nal (A Famous Harayana Sangit). Delhi: Dehati Pustak Bhandar. n.d. (2 parts, each 22 pages).

Anon. Aslī Nal (Nal kathā). Bulandshahar: Bhagavat Book Depot. (2 parts, 33 pp., 88 pp.).

Anon. Rājā Nal kā Janm. Delhi: Garg and Co. (39 pp.).

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