

# ***Bhojalī*: Song, Goddess, Friend**

## **A Chhattisgarhi Women's Oral Tradition**

By

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*Bhojalī gīt* is a women's oral tradition performed in the Chhattisgarh region of eastern Madhya Pradesh, India. An initial overview of the song tradition as it is performed in two contiguous areas of Chhattisgarh reveals certain stable structures which help to give definition to the genre of *bhojalī gīt* (literally, "*bhojalī* song"). A closer examination of the performance contexts, however, reveals that as the tradition has moved from one area to the other, there are changes in at least three components of the performance context: (1) the marital status of the participants, (2) the structuring of the relationships between participants, and (3) the related oral folklore genres available in each area.

The context for the performance of any folklore genre is multi-dimensional. The dimension most often associated with the word "context" is the immediate performance "event," such as a particular festival or ritual which provides a setting in which performance of the genre is appropriate. A second dimension is the identity of the participants. This dimension considers the question: to whom is a particular folklore genre available as a means of communication? A third dimension, often ignored in studies of performance context, is that of the repertoire of folklore genres available to the particular folklore community under consideration and the interaction between these genres.<sup>1</sup> The same folklore genre may occur in two different folklore communities, between which there may be variation within one or more of these contextual dimensions. A shift in any one of these will affect the text being performed. In this paper, I explore the nature of such shifts in performance contexts of a Chhattisgarhi oral tradition performed in two different folklore communities, and the affect of such shifts on

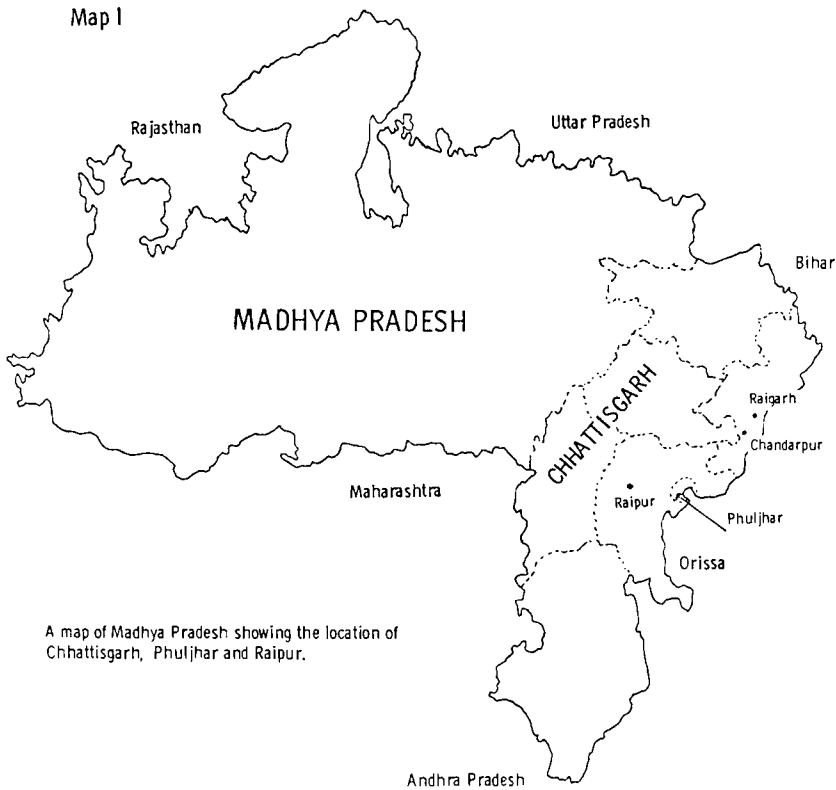
the verbal tradition.

My study of *bhojalī gīt* centers on two areas of Chhattisgarh—the Raipur area and Phuljhar (see Map 1). By “Raipur area,” I refer to the rural area around the city of Raipur and not the city itself, since the *bhojalī* festival seems to be an exclusively rural phenomenon. The city of Raipur is situated in the heartland of the Chhattisgarhi rice-growing plain. Phuljhar is an area approximately eighty miles east from Raipur on Highway 6 connecting Bombay and Calcutta.<sup>2</sup> Phuljhar was formerly the name of a *zamīndārī* (a landed estate) and before that of a petty kingdom; the ruins of the old fort still stand in the village of Garh Phuljhar. But today, many residents of the area define Phuljhar as that area where both Chhattisgarhi (locally known as *lariyā*) and Oriya are spoken. Although Oriya is the dominant language, most members of the Chhattisgarhi-speaking castes speak or at least understand Oriya, and many Oriya native speakers speak some form of Chhattisgarhi. Thus, Phuljhar presents a point of contact between Oriya and Chhattisgarhi dialects and their corresponding oral traditions.

#### THE GENRE DEFINED

The word *bhojalī* has several connotations: a women’s festival, the accompanying verbal tradition, a goddess, and a friendship. The image of women carrying baskets of wheat or barley seedlings on their heads as part of a festival procession is a common one in many parts of India. *Bhojalī* is one such festival, centering around the planting of wheat seedlings (also called *bhojalī*) in small shallow baskets, which are then placed in a home or temple.<sup>3</sup> The festival is celebrated in the Hindu month of *bhādon* (August–September). The actual dates of planting and immersing the *bhojalī* may vary between villages or even within the same village. However, the dates usually coincide with another auspicious or festival day in *bhādon*.<sup>4</sup>

The *bhojalī* seedlings are allowed to grow in a dark place for nine days after planting. During this time, they are worshiped by the women as a manifest form of the goddess, *bhojalī dāī* (*bhojalī* mother). Every evening the women gather to sing *bhojalī gīt* and do *pūjā* (ritual homage; worship) to the goddess. This worship is referred to as *sevā* (service) to the goddess. On the last of the nine days, the seedlings are carried in procession by the unmarried participants to the village pond and immersed. After the soil is washed off from their roots, the *bhojalī* seedlings are distributed as *prasād* (sanctified offerings distributed to worshippers). Often these seedlings are then exchanged between two participants to formalize a ritual friendship. Thereafter, the two friends will call each other “*bhojalī*” rather than by their



given names or fictive kinship terms.<sup>5</sup>

This much of the performance “event” (or “reference” in Jakobsonian terms) is stable between these two areas of Chhattisgarh. The festival context is the major determining factor in defining the genre of Chhattisgarhi oral tradition called *bhojalī*. There are also formal and thematic features which identify the genre. These formal features are “framing devices” (see Goffman 1974); that is, they signal the introduction of this particular genre of Chhattisgarhi song and elicit certain patterns of expectations from the participants and audience of the performance. A *bhojalī* performance may employ only one of these framing devices or all of them.

The most stable of these formal framing devices is the melody line (*rāg*) of the *bhojalī gīt* and the refrain after every verse. In Indian folk song traditions, the number of *rāg* is relatively limited; and often the *rāg* are associated with a particular performance event or context. Many “different” songs may thus be sung to the same *rāg*. The *bhojalī rāg* is one such melodic structure. The “songs” are loosely

connected verses which may logically follow one another or may stand alone. There is no logical ending to the series of verses; verses are simply added to one another until the women want to stop. However, although *bhojalī gīt* may be sung to other *rāg* (for example, that of the *vihā gīt*, or wedding song), only *bhojalī gīt* are sung to this *rāg*. If the *rāg* does change from the *bhojalī rāg*, the refrain is left out, for the two are inextricably intertwined. When the *bhojalī rāg* is used, each verse ends with the phrase, “Hām̄ ho, Devī Gangā” (“Oh, Goddess Gangā”), followed by the refrain:

1. Devī Gangā, Devī Gangā  
A wave as your horse  
With your waves  
Soak the eight limbs of the *bhojalī*.<sup>6</sup>

A second framing device is an introductory verse pattern with which many *bhojalī gīt* performances begin. The formula for the verse remains stable between the Raipur and Phuljhar areas of Chhattisgarh; however, the specific details inserted into the formula vary. The verses identify the principal “props” of the festival celebration: the basket, the mixture of cowdung and soil which fills it, and the *bhojalī* seedlings planted in the soil. A Phuljhar example is:

2. From where is the cowdung and soil  
From where is the basket  
From where is Pīlī Bāī<sup>1</sup>  
Oh, we’ve installed the *bhojalī*.  
  
The cowdung and soil are from Raigarh.  
The basket is from Chandarpur  
Pīlī Bāī is from Phuljhar  
Oh, we’ve installed the *bhojalī*.

From the Raipur area, the following example:

3. From where is the cowdung and soil  
From where is the basket  
From where is the new *bhojalī*  
Whose water drops are pearls.  
  
The cowdung and soil are from the potter’s house.  
The basket from the weaver’s house.  
The new *bhojalī* is from the house of the king.  
Whose water drops are pearls.

This Phuljhar example, like many others, lays out an abbreviated geographic map, centering the festival in a specific geographic context. It first names towns inside Chhattisgarh, but *outside* Phuljhar, those

of Raigarh and Chandarpur, from where the cowdung and basket have come (see Map 1). But, it is from Phuljhar that the most essential “prop” comes, the goddess herself, Pīlī Bāī. Hence, the verse sequence emphasizes both the connection Phuljhar has with the rest of Chhattisgarh as well as a separate Phuljhar identity.

The Raipur area is located in the heartland of Chhattisgarh and is not part of any smaller cultural or geographical unit. Therefore, there is not the same concern for geographic centering, to set the Raipur area off from any other surrounding area. Here the mapping is a social centering, from the potter’s and weaver’s houses to that of the king. This time it is from the king’s houses that the essential prop, the *bhojalī*, comes. It is significant that in the Raipur area, it is the husbands (often called “kings” in Chhattisgarhi oral traditions), and never the women themselves, who plant the *bhojalī* seeds into the cowdung and soil. The primary reproductive power is seen to lie within the male. The verse itself suggests this reproductive power when it suggests the transformation of the water drops (semen) on the *bhojalī* into valuable pearls (children).

Some thematic concerns shared between the *bhojalī gīt* of Raipur and Phuljhar give further consistency to the genre. Many verses describe the physical setting where the *bhojalī* seedlings are placed, the preparation of the site where the baskets will sit, the planting and immersion of the seedlings, and the actual worship of the *bhojalī dāī* with the lighting of incense, offering of water, and the performance of *artī* (flame offering).

#### REGIONAL VARIATION IN THE GENRE OF *BHOJALĪ GĪT*

The festival/performance context, framing devices, and thematic similarities help us to identify *bhojalī gīt* as performed in the Raipur and Phuljhar areas as a single genre. However, these similarities mask essential differences between the *bhojalī* tradition as it is found in the two areas. While the same framing devices may be used, the expectations they raise differ in the two performance contexts. The expectations are influenced by the other oral genres available in the respective folklore communities and by the difference in the marital status of the primary participants.

*Raipur.* In the Raipur area, *bhojalī* is identified primarily as a goddess festival and is associated with other goddess festivals celebrated in the area. In conversations with villagers, *bhojalī* is most often mentioned in connection with the festival of *javārā*. *Javārā* is celebrated in the Raipur area during both *navrātrī*, the ritual periods of nine nights

which fall in the months of *caitra* (March–April), and *kunvār* (September–October). During *javārā*, wheat seedlings are also planted and worshiped as the goddess. The goddess possesses some of her devotees, as she does during *bhojalī*. In this festival, however, her primary *sevā* is provided by men singing *javārā gīt*; women participate as audience at the song fests and by carrying the baskets of *javārā* to the tank for immersion. The structural similarities between *javārā* and *bhojalī* are obvious: the nine days/nights, planting of seedlings, possession, and *sevā* to the goddess through song.<sup>8</sup> It is significant that *javārā* is not celebrated in Phuljhar, nor is any other goddess festival associated with the planting of seedlings. Hence, in Phuljhar, the festival is not commonly identified as a goddess festival, but rather as a festival associated with ritual friendships. In Raipur, although *bhojalī* friendships may be formed at the end of the festival, this aspect of the tradition is overshadowed by the goddess *sevā*.

In the Raipur area, both married women and unmarried girls participate in the *bhojalī* tradition. Unmarried girls bring the soil from the field to place in the baskets, and again carry the baskets with the seedlings growing in them to the tank to be immersed after the nine days. When ritual friendships are formed, they are formed only between these unmarried participants. Married women, however, are the principal participants in the singing of the *bhojalī gīt*, although unmarried girls may sing along. It is also married women who become possessed when goddess possession occurs.

The primary relationship in the ritual context of the Raipur area *bhojalī* festival is between the goddess and the individual participant. The goddess depends for her very life breath upon the service given by the women during the festival through *pujā* and the *bhojalī gīt* (the plants quite literally depend on the water offered by the women during worship for their survival). The women sing:

4. A fish without water  
Grain without a breeze  
*Bhojalī* without service  
Longs for breath.

The service given by the women is reciprocated by the goddess granting her favor through possession of some of the participants. Informants say that when a woman hears these *bhojalī gīt*, which are filled with devotion towards the goddess, that woman may become so full of the *bhāvā* (emotion) of the goddess that she can no longer bear it (*sahanā*). The devotee will then become possessed by the goddess (*devī us par atī hai*).<sup>9</sup> The presence of the possession reinforces

the primacy of the relationship between the individual participant and the goddess.<sup>10</sup> It is interesting that though *bhojalī gīt* are what incite the possession, in none of the *bhojalī gīt* I heard was there any mention made of this possession. In fact, when I witnessed *bhojalī* possession, the non-possessed women began to sing songs sung at another festival associated with possession, *gaurā*,<sup>11</sup> in which both the words and *rāg* are different. This may suggest that possession is not inherent to the *bhojalī* tradition per se, but occurs in the Raipur area due to the influence of the other goddess traditions involving possession, such as *javārā* and *gaurā*.

The goddess also grants her favor by granting fertility, both to the land (in the form of abundant crops) and to the participating women. The growth of the seedlings is associated with the fertility of the rice fields, the plants of which are in the growth process during this season. The verbal tradition accompanying the festival makes explicit the association of the goddess and crops, the growth of the *bhojalī* and the growth of the crops in the fields:

5. The corn is full of starch  
The sugarcane is ready to serve  
Hurry, hurry and grow, oh *bhojalī*  
That you, too, may become mature.

On one level, the verse associates the growth of the corn, sugarcane, and *bhojalī* as various kinds of crops. However, *bhojalī* is not only the name of the wheat seedlings, but also of friends who have formalized a friendship. The verse can be metaphorically understood as a call for the festival participants to be fruitful.

In the following verse, there is metaphorical reference again to both the fertility of the crops and the fertility of the women participants. The *bhojalī dāī*'s sari and crown are likened to the ripening, golden rice crops, after the flood of Monsoon rains.

6. The flood has come; the waste has been swept away  
The sari border of our *bhojalī dāī* is golden.  
The flood has come; the small boats have floated away  
The crown of our *bhojalī dāī* is golden.

On a second level, the *bhojalī* (woman) has reached her maturity. The flood is an image for menstruation, ridding the body of potential products of conception now wasted, the egg and uterine lining. Menstruation is an indication that the woman is again "ripe" for conception.

Finally, the women ask directly for the blessing of fertility; more specifically, for the blessing of a son:

7. We asked for milk; we asked for a son  
 And we asked for a blessing  
 Queen Kauśalyā is standing there  
 She gives a blessing.

In the Rāmāyana story, Queen Kauśalyā was herself infertile for many years. Finally, her husband, Daśaratha, performed a sacrifice, the *prasād* of which his three queens partook and became pregnant. Thus, her blessing is especially appropriate. It is still the custom in Chhattisgarh today for married women with children to confer the blessing, "May you have sons," on married women without children.

It is perhaps the strong association with maternal fertility in the *bhojalī* festival and verbal tradition in the Raipur area which results in the association of the singing of *bhojalī gīt* with primarily married women. Unmarried girls often sing along, but are included in the "married" category by virtue of their potential married status. Widows are excluded from direct participation. They are no longer eligible for fertility, and their presence is considered inauspicious for those ritual occasions which emphasize women's fertility, such as the singing of *bhojalī gīt* and certain wedding rituals. Where fertility is a dominant theme in the songs and where, through possession, the goddess-participant relationship is primary, the ritual friendship associated with *bhojalī* is down-played. Not even all of the unmarried participants form such friendships.<sup>12</sup>

*Phuljhar.* The *bhojalī* tradition in Phuljhar has taken an interesting turn from the "mainstream" tradition of the Raipur area. In Phuljhar, *bhojalī* is always referred to in the context of ritual friendships, and rarely as a goddess festival. Most Oriya castes of the area have little awareness of the festival and its verbal tradition unless it is celebrated in their own village.<sup>13</sup> However, they do know about the friendship. They associate it with their own ritual friendship tradition called *mahāprasād*,<sup>14</sup> and say it is only a matter of different terminology for the same thing.<sup>15</sup> But the Chhattisgarhi castes of Phuljhar, who form both *bhojalī* and *mahāprasād* friendships, note that *bhojalī* is only for unmarried girls; after marriage, women form *mahāprasād*.

The emphasis on ritual friendships in the Phuljhar *bhojalī* tradition results partially from a shift in the nature of the social group to whom this "means" of folklore communication is available. In Phuljhar, *only* unmarried girls participate fully in the festival and the singing of the *bhojalī gīt*. The girls whom I observed planting *bhojalī* in Phuljhar were between the ages of eleven and fifteen or sixteen. Participation



is further limited to those girls who will formalize a friendship by planting their *bhojalī* together in one basket (here it is *not* men who actually plant the seeds, but the girls themselves). The subsequent growth of the seedlings is associated with the strength and life of the friendship. Formalization of the friendship becomes the primary focus and purpose of the festival. The seedlings are still worshiped as the goddess, but this aspect of the festival and the relationship with the goddess become secondary. This is confirmed by the absence of goddess possession. The Phuljhar participants were unaware of such possession during the *bhojalī* festival as it is celebrated in the Raipur area.

The change in marital status of the participants and the emphasis on the relationship between the girls through friendship is reflected in the thematic content of the *bhojalī gīt*. In comparison with the songs of the Raipur area, there is a noticeable lack of direct reference to the fertility of either the land or the participants. It is natural for the songs to reflect the immediate concerns of unmarried girls, particularly when they are being sung among female peers, between whom close friendships have been formed. At this point in a woman's life, she is not yet supposed to be actively fertile. In Chhattisgarh, it is inappropriate for a girl to speak directly even about her forthcoming marriage, much less her child-bearing potential, especially in front of her elders.<sup>16</sup> However, at this age, marriage *is* of immediate concern; and that concern is given expression in some of the song traditions of the unmarried girls, including *bhojalī gīt*.

One verse sequence identifies first the *bhojalī* and then the singer herself as the bride, homologizing the goddess, participant and bride. The third verse expresses some of the reluctance and apprehension of a young bride to go to her in-laws' home, where the wedding palanquin will carry her:

8. Someone mounts an elephant  
 Someone mounts a horse  
 Someone mounts a palanquin  
 Someone mounts a wedding palanquin.

The king mounts the elephant  
 The chief minister mounts the horse  
 The queen mounts the palanquin  
 The *bhojalī* mounts the wedding palanquin.

In which village is the young girl  
 In which village the betrothal  
 Only when the instruments begin to play  
 Will I mount the wedding palanquin.

Other verses describe the actual wedding ceremony:

9. The *tulsi* platform<sup>17</sup>  
 A crown in the courtyard<sup>18</sup>  
 Round and round the Brahman circumambulates  
 The wedding hour is auspicious.

We have mentioned as an element of context the other folklore genres available to a folklore community, or more specifically, to particular folk groups within that community. In this case, the folk group under consideration consists of unmarried Chhattisgarhi-speaking girls in Phuljhar. There are several Oriya traditions in Phuljhar whose performance is restricted to this same folk group among the Oriya-speaking castes. These Oriya traditions have influenced the *bhojalī gīt* performed by the unmarried girls of the Chhattisgarhi castes.

The girls of the Chhattisgarhi castes do not participate in all of these Oriya traditions; but one in which they do (singing in Oriya) is the popular dance-game called *homo*. The genre is a kind of repartee between two groups of girls who try to "outsmart," or otherwise appropriately respond to, the verse just sung by the opposite group. The themes of these songs are secular and often concern the relationship between teenage boys and girls, their flirtations and arrangements to meet each other.<sup>19</sup> The following *bhojalī* verses are illustrative of the *homo* influence:

10. *Ghir, ghir*,<sup>20</sup> the car came  
 It was locked from the inside  
 The police took away  
 The boys from Jarra village.<sup>21</sup>
- From where is the *dāl* and rice<sup>22</sup>  
 From where the brass bowl  
 From where the unmarried boy  
 Who wanders about in the afternoon.
- Narsingpur's *dāl* and rice  
 Jagdishpur's brass bowl<sup>23</sup>  
 Jarra's unmarried boy  
 Who wanders about in the afternoon.

Another *bhojalī* verse suggests a potential sexual relationship between the singer and a male visitor:

11. *Jhan, jhan* plays the *mṛidang*<sup>24</sup>  
 The cymbals also play  
 There is no master in our house  
 Come, take some *prasād*.

The girl here is offering *prasād* to her visitor, since there is no authority figure present to prevent the taking. *Prasād* may be any offering to a deity which is then distributed as a sanctified substance to the worshippers; but it is usually associated with food offerings. The metaphoric connection between food and sex is a strong one in oral and written Indian literary traditions.

The theme and imagery of fertility are not altogether absent in the Phuljhar *bhojalī* tradition. After all, the central symbol of fertility—the planting and growth of the wheat seedlings—has been retained, although on a conscious level the girls may have given it different significance. The refrain previously mentioned as a framing device (Song 1) is also retained in Phuljhar:

Devī Gangā, Devī Gangā  
A wave as your horse  
With your waves  
Soak the eight limbs of the *bhojalī*.

The central image in this refrain has several dimensions. The soaking of the *bhojalī* on one level refers to the soaking of the seeds before planting them, to insure quick sprouting. With such soaking, the seeds become soft and swollen, readying to split and “give birth” to the new sprout. The image extends to one of a woman about to give birth. Further, in many Indian traditions, the horse has strong associations with masculine virility. The horse and waves are suggestive of the rains, essential for the productivity of the earth, the *bhojalī*, and to all feminine fertility and productivity.

In addition to the refrain, some of the verses sung by the unmarried girls in Phuljhar retain hints of the fertility theme; however, explicit references to the crops and fertility of the land are few. One verse sequence mentions the newly harvested rice and the fragrance it emits:

12. In a bamboo storage bin  
They have filled rice  
The strong wind of the *bhojalī dāī*  
Brings sweet fragrance.
- In a bamboo storage bin  
A colored braid for the *bhojalī dāī*<sup>25</sup>  
Her forehead decorated  
We will sow the *bhojalī dāī*.

The lines of the first verse are identical to a verse recorded in the Raipur area, except for dialect differences. However, the second verse diffuses the focus on productive fertility of the land (the harvested rice) by

referring to the *bhojalī dāī*'s colorful braid and decorated forehead. The *bhojalī dāī* here is being depicted as a bride, not a mother.

Another Phuljhar verse is similar to the one sung by the Raipur women in which Kauśalyā gives the blessing of a son. But here in Phuljhar, it is Kauśalyā who is asking for a son, and not the participants themselves, thus distancing the fertility reference one step from the unmarried girls singing the song:

13. In the brass plate, a little rice  
In the brass jug, some milk  
Kauśalyā is standing  
Asking for a son.

I have been told that childless women in Phuljhar may plant *bhojalī* in hopes of receiving the boon of fertility. Their service to the goddess, however, consists only of *pujā* (worship); they do not participate in the singing of *bhojalī gīt* with the unmarried girls.<sup>26</sup> The folklore community of Phuljhar considers the *bhojalī* verbal tradition and the festival of which it is a part as "belonging" to the unmarried girls.

#### CONCLUSION

A community's aesthetic organization often reflects in some way its social organization (Abrahams 1976: 194). In the Raipur area, the aesthetic organization suggested by participation and non-participation in the *bhojalī* tradition divides the female community into married women and widows. The married women lead in the singing of *bhojalī gīt*; and they receive the boon of fertility from the goddess. The category of unmarried girls is distinguished for purposes of carrying the *bhojalī* in procession; but if they participate in the singing of *bhojalī gīt*, they are included in the "married" category by virtue of their potential married status. In Phuljhar, participants are unmarried girls only, and non-participants are all women who have been married, including widows. This difference in aesthetic organization may suggest differences in social organization between the two areas. The fact that unmarried girls in Phuljhar have several oral traditions exclusively available to them as a means of communication, while unmarried girls in the Raipur area have few oral traditions uniquely their own, suggests that this stage of the life cycle is given more prominence in Phuljhar than in the Raipur area.

An ethnographic analysis of the *bhojalī* verbal and festival tradition in the Raipur and Phuljhar areas of Chhattisgarh has shown us that this genre of folklore is not available as a means of communication to all members of the folklore communities in which it is performed, nor even

to the same folk group within these communities. We have seen how the shift in the identity of the participants is correlated with a shift in the thematic focus of the songs sung by the participants and the structuring of relationships between participants. These differences in the *bhojalī* tradition as found in the two folklore communities are schematically summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Chhattisgarhi *Bhojalī Gīt*

Location	Partici- pants	Primary relationship in bhojalī context	Thematic emphasis of songs	Life-cycle emphasis
Raipur area	Married women	With goddess: possession	Fertility of land and women	Woman as mother
Phuljhar	Unmarried girls	With female peers: ritual friendship	Emerging sexuality and forthcoming marriage of girls	Woman as bride

The *bhojalī* verbal tradition and the structuring of the relationships within the festival context reflect the concerns of the women at their particular stage of the female life cycle. During puberty and before marriage, girls are most concerned with their relationships with their peers. The importance of the relationships with other girls is reflected in the primacy of ritual friendships in the *bhojalī* celebration in Phuljhar;<sup>27</sup> the verbal tradition which the girls share provides an indication of their interest in relationships with their male peers. The girls are concerned with their emerging sexuality and forthcoming marriages and express these concerns in the *bhojalī gīt*, but they are not yet focusing on their own fertility and child-bearing potential. In Chhattisgarh, a woman's central concern after her marriage becomes her fertility and the birth of a son. Providing service to the goddess *bhojalī dāī*, and thus strengthening their relationship with her, is one way for married women to try to insure this fertility.

## NOTES

The fieldwork upon which this paper is based was conducted in 1980–81 in Madhya Pradesh, India, under a doctoral dissertation grant from the Fullbright-Hayes Foundation. An earlier version of this paper was read at the fourth annual South Asian Languages Roundtable, 1982, held in Syracuse, New York. I wish to express my gratitude to V. Narayana Rao, Susan S. Wadley, and A. K. Ramanujan for their suggestions and critical readings of earlier drafts.

1. I have been influenced in my formulation of these dimensions of context by Dell Hymes' work on the ethnography of speaking. His methodology for the analysis of speech can be adapted to the study of folklore if one considers folklore

communication as "speech," and the various genres as speech varieties. See Hymes 1962: 14-53 and Hymes 1974. There are other dimensions to "context." I have identified these three since they correlate with the three primary changes in performance context between the Raipur and Phuljhar areas.

2. Phuljhar literally means "falling flowers"; residents say this name comes from the fact that there are flowering trees in Phuljhar during every season.

3. Other types of seeds may also be planted, such as barley, rice and various kinds of pulses; however, wheat seeds are the most common.

4. In the Raipur area, it is most common to plant the *bhojalī* on *rakṣā bandhan*, a festival celebrated on the full-moon day of the month of *śrāvan* (July-August). It is customary on this day for sisters to tie amulets or tinsel-decorated threads on the wrists of their brothers, thereby binding the brother to protect her. If the *bhojalī* are planted on this day, they are immersed nine days later on the festival day celebrating the birth of the god Kṛṣṇā, *janamṣtamī* (the eighth day of the dark half of *bhādon*).

In Phuljhar the planting or immersion of the *bhojalī* is often associated with the festival of *ganesh caturthī* (the fourth day of the light half of *bhādon*). This is an important festival in Maharashtra province, honoring Ganesh. It is still relatively new in Chhattisgarhi villages; however, in those villages where it is celebrated, it has quickly been absorbed into the village festival cycle. In the Phuljhar village in which I witnessed the *bhojalī* festival, the girls had placed their *bhojalī* baskets underneath the platform on which the Ganesh image had been seated, on the veranda of the village headman.

5. See Edward Jay (1973) for a fuller discussion of ritual friendships in Chhattisgarh.

6. Appendix I contains transliterations of the Chhattisgarhi original for each verse translated into English in the body of this paper. All translations are my own.

7. "Pīlī Bāī" literally means "yellow woman." The reference is to the *bhojalī* seedlings, which are a yellow-green color from having been sprouted in a dark place. The reference may also be to a bride, who has been bathed in tumeric and oil prior to her wedding day, leaving a golden hue on her skin.

8. There are also significant differences between the festivals, including the presence of animal (goat) sacrifice at *javārā*. For a detailed discussion of *javārā* as it is celebrated in the Raipur area, see Babb 1975: 132-140.

9. Certain women are more susceptible than others to this possession. Usually, when a woman has once become possessed, she will become possessed whenever she hears a *devī gīt* (goddess song) associated with one of the goddess festivals in which possession takes place. Perhaps this is why the women say they are hesitant to sing these songs outside of the festival context.

*Bhojalī dāī* is not necessarily the goddess who possesses. When I asked who the possessing deity was, I was given a variety of names of local goddesses. The distinction of which goddess it was did not seem to be as important as the fact that she was *devī*, the unmarried goddess. See Babb 1975: 133 for a similar discussion of the variety of names under which the goddess is worshiped during *javārā*.

10. The fact that the festival is associated with possession limits participation to low-middle or low castes, since high-caste women would avoid participation in any event in which there is possession by a deity.

11. *Gaurā* is a Chhattisgarhi festival celebrated in *kārtik* (October-November), commemorating the marriage of Siva and Parvati.

12. This follows the common pattern of formalizing friendships in Chhattisgarh. That is, the *prasād* of various rituals or festivals may be exchanged to formalize a friend-

ship, without the friendship being the focus of the ritual or even being mentioned in the ritual.

13. This is not true of other Chhattisgarhi traditions found in Phuljhar. In fact, the Oriya castes often participate in some manner in several of these traditions, as immediate audience if not as participants.

14. *Mahāprasād* means "the great *prasād*" and generally refers to the *prasād* brought from the Jagannath temple at Puri, Orissa. However, for purposes of forming *mahāprasād* friendships in Phuljhar, the *prasād* from any festival may be exchanged.

15. The nature of these friendships is, however, different in the minds of the Chhattisgarhi castes of the area. They do not see the *bhojalī* friendship to be as serious and lasting as *mahāprasād*, perhaps because of the age and sex of the participants. *Bhojalī* does not carry with it as many responsibilities, nor does it involve the families, in the way *mahāprasād* does.

16. See the discussion in Wadley 1980: 153-169, for the differences between north and south Indian cultural attitudes toward puberty, puberty rites, and the pubescent girl's fertility.

17. *Tulsī*: a basil plant grown in the courtyards of most high and middle caste homes. The plant is a goddess, and is worshiped daily by the women of the household.

18. The "crown" refers to the headdress worn by both bride and groom, a tinsel-decorated diadem.

19. In one Phuljhar context in which I heard young girls singing *bhojalī gīt*, they seemed to be having difficulty in getting started and in remembering entire verses. An elderly woman sitting nearby finally intervened. She sang out a line at a time, and the girls repeated after her. It is interesting that all of her verses concerned marriage; there were no examples of themes of pre-marital flirtatious relationships as illustrated below.

20. *Ghīr, ghīr*: onomatopoeic sound for the coming car.

21. Jarra: the village in which the song was being performed.

22. *Dāl*: a type of lentil.

23. Narsingpur and Jagdishpur: two villages within two miles of Jarra village.

24. A drum-like instrument. *Jhan, jhan*: the onomatopoeic sound of the drum.

25. Many of these storage bins for grain are made from twisted bamboo strips, resulting in a braid-like design.

26. There is another Oriya festival in Phuljhar called *ḍalkhāī*, which is also primarily a festival for unmarried girls. Barren women may also participate on a limited scale in this festival, in hopes of thereby becoming fertile, in much the same way they participate in the *bhojalī* festival.

27. The nature of *bhojalī* friendships differs somewhat from the ritual friendships of married women. Unmarried girls chose other girls who are already good friends of theirs. The reason for married women's friendships often begins with the fact that they have the same number of children and children of the same sex.

#### APPENDIX:

##### Chhattisgarhi Transcription of Songs

Song 1

devī gaṅgā, devī gaṅgā

lahar turāṅgā ho

tumhar lahar bhojalī

bhije āṭho aṅgā

## Song 2

kaharñ ke to khātu māti  
 kaharñ ke to cañghoriyā  
 kaharñ ke to pīlī bāi  
 bhojalī jamoiyā  
 rayagarñ ke to khātu māti  
 candarpur cañghoriyā  
 phuljhar ke to pīlī bāi  
 bhojalī jamoiyā

## Song 3

kaharñ ke khātu māti  
 kaharñ ke ÷uknī  
 kaharñ ke javā bhojalī  
 cūhaya motī pāni  
 kumhār ghar ke khātu māti  
 karrā ghar ke ÷uknī  
 rājā ghar ke javā bhojalī  
 cūhaya motī pāni

## Song 4

jal binā machalī  
 pavan binā dhān  
 sevā binā bhojalī  
 ke tarasthay parān

## Song 5

māmñī bhar jonðhari  
 poris kuñiyāre  
 jaldī, jaldī bārñā  
 bhojalī huñiyāre

## Song 6

āi gañs pūrā bohāi gañs kacra  
 hamro bhojalī dāi ke sone sone añcarā  
 āi gañs pūrā bohāi gañs malgi  
 hamro bhojalī dāi ke sone sone kalgi

## Song 7

dūdh mārñgen pūt mārñgen  
 aū mārñgen āñs  
 ÷hārñe hai kosilyā  
 devathya āñs

## Song 8

kaunav ceghe hāthiyā  
 kaunav ceghe ghorvā  
 kaunav ceghe pāluki  
 kaunav ceghe ÷olvā  
 rājā ceghe hāthiyā

devānā ceghe ghorvā  
 ranī ceghe pāluki  
 bhojalī ceghe ÷olvā

kaun gārñ ke kāri ÷uri  
 kaun gārñ ke sagāvā ho  
 jabhe ānbe nādhik nādhi  
 tabhe ceghav ÷olvā

## Song 9

tulsi ke camurā  
 mukut bhaige añganā  
 phire phire bāmhan devtā  
 bhari hai laganā

## Song 10

ghīr ghīr moñar āye  
 bhitar lage tālā  
 jarra gārñ ke tūrāman lā  
 lege pulis wālā

kaharñ ke to dār cāur  
 kaharñ ke to bañganiyā  
 kaharñ ke to ÷iñvā chokrā  
 bulthe mañjhiniyā

narsimhpur ke dār cāur  
 jagdishpur ke bañganiyā  
 jarra ke ÷iñvā chokrā  
 bulthe mañjhiniyā

## Song 11

jhan, jhan murduñg bājā  
 bāje bāje kartāle  
 hāmar ghar ke mālik naithe  
 lebo parsāde

## Song 12

bāmseke ÷oñā me  
 bhari dāren cāur  
 kahar mahar karthe  
 bhojalī dāi ke rāhū

bāmseke ÷oñā me  
 rañga coñi dāi ke  
 māthe he rañgoiyā  
 bhojalī bonā dāi ke

## Song 13

thāri nā ākā cāur  
 gārñulā me dūdh  
 ÷hāre hai kausalyā bāi  
 mañgthe putr



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