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"The Woman Waylaid at the Well" or *Paṇaghaṭa-līlā*

An Indian Folk Theme Appropriated in Myth and Movies

This article seeks to contribute to studying the manifold and interesting ways Indian popular movies have appropriated folk and mythological materials by focusing on the *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* or the theme of "the woman waylaid at the well." This theme is an important one because it raises the issue of so-called "eve-teasing," a form of sexual harassment of women omnipresent in public spaces in South Asia. The article in turn discusses the folk and the mythological treatments of the *paṇaghaṭa-līlā*, before analyzing its adaptations in song in three popular Hindi movies: the recent remaking of *Devdas* by Sanjay Leela Bhansali (2002), P. L. Santoshi's *Barsaat ki Raat* (1960), which deploys the theme in a Qawwālī context, and finally the classic *Mother India* by Mehboob Khan (1957). Each movie illustrates a different type of contextualization of the theme.

KEYWORDS: Women folk songs——well—sexual harassment—Hindi popular movie—Qawwālī—Bhakti

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This article studies the interface between folklore, mythology, and movies. Hindi popular movies often evoke folk and mythological themes. This is well-known, but has attracted little research. This article seeks to contribute to studying the manifold and interesting ways popular movies have appropriated folk and mythological materials with reference to gender. It looks at the transformations women's folk songs undergo, first when they are adopted in religious contexts, and then when they spill over into the popular domain. The focus is on the theme of the *paṇaghaṭa-līlā*, or the play (*līlā*) at the *paṇaghaṭa*, or steps (*ghāṭa*) leading to the well, pond, or river where women come to fetch water (*pānī*).[1] Typically, this involves an encounter with a male who harasses the water-fetcher, hence my translation as "the woman waylaid at the well."

The *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* is relevant for gender studies because it raises the issue of "eve-teasing." This Indian-English term refers to a form of sexual harassment of women, omnipresent in public spaces in South Asia, which can go from milder annoyance, like staring, whistling, and passing comments, to scary physical actions like groping, molesting, and stalking.[2] Feminists often dislike the term "eve-teasing," as it seems to make light of the phenomenon by implying that women, "eves," naturally invite the playful attention of males. This lays bare the underlying problems with this form of sexual harassment. In popular misperceptions the experience itself is construed as harmless, youthful flirtation that does not hurt anyone and is simply natural male behavior. There is a set of assumptions about women's subjectivity: that women enjoy eve-teasing, even ask for it, just by appearing in a public space; that when they say "no," they actually mean "yes," proven by the fact that they do not really protest it so they must actually like it (as outlined with regard to sexual harassment in the workplace by Patel 2007, 112–13). Women may feel very harassed by the behavior, but, to some degree, have internalized such interpretations and realize all too well that no one takes it seriously or is prepared to assist a woman who protests (Baxi 2001). Paradoxically, at the same time as society excuses this type of behavior for males, it takes very seriously the woman's personal responsibility and self-monitoring of her sexuality, and is quick to point fingers at the victim of eve-teasing as being of loose morals. Her perceived lack of moral opprobrium, or *lāja,* is considered to be a "black mark," not only on her own honor, or *izzat,* but on that of her family and indeed her whole community.

Thus, while the men's behavior is made light of, the women's is taken very seriously. When girls and women talk about their experiences, they are well aware that any complaint about harassment will reflect worse on them than on the perpetrators (and will likely result in restriction of their own movements), hence they seldom complain, but that does certainly not mean they enjoy the experience (Puri 1999, 87–102; Liechty 1996).[3]

Central to understanding eve-teasing, then, is the construction of women's subjectivity. It is imperative to study the discursive and historical processes that position subjects and produce experiences of eve-teasing. This article will focus on the question of how women's subjectivity is constructed in retellings of cases of eve-teasing. Sociological and ethnographic work has tended to situate the eve-teasing phenomenon in the context of modernity, referring to urbanization and the resulting anonymity in a city environment (Anagol-McGinn 1994), or class tensions with regard to employment opportunities, which leads to targeting Westernized women (Rogers 2008, 81–83), or political changes, such as democratization in Nepal (Liechty 1996). Apart from the discourse of modernity, though, others play a role too. It is these folk and mythological discourses of eve-teasing, and in turn, their film avatars, that I want to highlight in this article.

Several discourses that color the experience relate to the theme of the "woman waylaid at the well." In the folk domain, this represents a scenario of eve-teasing of a rustic belle in a traditional rural environment. In its mythological representations too, the setting is bucolic: the idyllic world of rural Braj, where the god Krishna is growing up incognito, sporting with the local milkmaids, or Gopīs. In popular movie discourses, the theme may also be quoted in non-rural contexts, as the hero and heroine are often situated in an urban setting, but the references to the *paṇaghaṭa* occur in dreamlike fantasy sequences. The theme is drenched with a certain nostalgia for an idealized simple rural life where relationships between men and women can be playful and straightforward, unencumbered by the complexities of city life.

As a folk theme, the *paṇaghaṭa* circulates par excellence in the domain of women's songs. These songs are restricted along gender lines: though they may be overheard by males, still, the performers are mainly women, and so is the assumed audience. Once the theme gets appropriated by religious agents, it circulates in *bhajana* (Hindu devotional song) and Qawwālī (Sufi devotional song), thus entering a wider domain, and now both male and female devotees join in, listening and singing. When it appears in film, the context is secular and the audience overwhelmingly male.[4] Notwithstanding the broadening of the audience in this way, the songs often retain the convention of explicitly addressing a woman, a sympathetic girlfriend or *sakhī*, even if the male is the main target of the performance.

What is going on when women folk songs from a rural setting get adapted for devotional purposes, and then appropriated in popular movies for a broad male audience in towns big and small? What messages are sent about sexual harassment, and how do they change in the different milieus? How is women's subjectivity

construed in each of these retellings of cases of eve-teasing? And what types of experiences of victimization are produced?

Interestingly, the movies often evoke the *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* with explicit reference to its mythological interpretation by the Krishna tradition rather than as a folk theme per se. I will in turn discuss the folk and the mythological treatments of the theme, before studying selected movie renderings. I will look at three popular Hindi movies, each exemplifying a particular contextualization of the theme, significant for the construction of the woman's subjectivity. In case the *paṇaghaṭa* might seem archaic, I start with a recent movie, the remaking of *Devdas* (2002). This film has an interesting double use of the theme in song, once to illustrate innocent first love and once seduction by a courtesan. Neither of these elements appear in the older *Devdas* movies. The second movie is a Muslim social (a secular movie depicting South Asian Muslims), *Barsaat ki Raat* (1960), which briefly deploys the theme in a Qawwālī context to celebrate forbidden love.[5] Finally, the classic *Mother India* (1957) prominently figures the theme. Significantly for our purpose, this movie's portrayal is exceptional: whereas in all other movies the perpetrator of the eve-teasing is let off the hook with impunity, here he is severely punished.

The folk songs of the *panihārin*

The theme of the woman at the well is an ancient one. It shows up in Sanskrit poetry with reference to the *prapāpālikā*, the guardian of the well, who provides water to thirsty travelers, while her beauty slakes the thirst of the eye (for example, in a poem ascribed to the seventh-century poet Bāṇa collected by Vidyākara in 1130 in *Subhāṣitaratnakoṣa* 514; see Ingalls 1965, 187, and Kosambi and Gokhale 1957, 94). References to women singing at the well are found in vernacular epics, such as the ancient Rajasthani Ḍholā-Mārū, where, in some versions, the lovers also meet at a well (Vaudeville 1996, 324 n. 87 and also v. 664). Apparently, seeing women on their way to the well is regarded to be an auspicious omen, or *śakuna* (for instance in the sixteenth-century epic of Padmāvatī by Muhammad Mālik Jāyasī, in a verse enumerating positive omens*: bhareṃ kalasa tarunī cali āī*, 135.2). It seems likely that folk songs on the topic have a long pedigree, and in particular that women have been singing such songs for a long time. Unfortunately, we do not have records to form an idea of what such songs were about, but we have contemporary folk songs.

An interesting part of the folk repertoire of women is constituted of the songs of women on the way to and from the well, or *panihārin*, "water-fetcher." These songs are especially popular in the drought-stricken areas of western India, such as Gujarat and Rajasthan.[6] They are dialogue songs, sung in chorus by the women who often have to travel quite a distance and do so in groups to lighten the tediousness of the task. The Rajasthani version of the songs has been studied by Saraswati Joshi (2000).[7] The songs have diverse themes, including the scarcity of water, the arduousness of the task of fetching it, and complaints about the unsym-

pathetic relatives who have sent the young women out to the well. In some songs, the complaints take on a broader scope, generally dwelling on the unhappiness of the woman in her *sasurāl* (the house of her in-laws), especially if her husband is away from home, maybe working in a nearby city or town. One type of these songs talks about the dangers the women encounter on the way: scorpions (*bīchūṛo*), snakes (*nāga*), and most significantly, the "stranger at the well" (*jogī*, *saṃrāj*, *pardesī*). The songs often feature a passerby or traveler who first asks the *panihārin* for water to quench his thirst. In some songs, the women initiate a conversation by asking a passerby to help them lift the heavy pot of water. The stranger then goads the woman into telling him her woes and follows up by making a pass at her. He offers her solace out of her life of misery at her *sasurāl*, if only she were to come with him and mount his camel or horse as the case may be, a very suggestive phrase. Usually, the woman responds negatively to such offers, well aware of the damage to her good name even such verbal exchanges may have:

ghaṛo e na ḍūbe tāla meṃ e, īḍoṇī tira-tira jāya
sāṃga kī sahelyāṃ pāṇī bhara calī e, paṇihārī rahī re taḷāva
jāvtā oṭhī ne helo pāriyo re, lañjā oṭhiṛā e loya
paradesījī e loya, ghaṛiyo uṃcāvtā jāya
aurāṃ ke kājaḷa ṭīkiyāṃ e, thāroṛā kyūṃ phīkā lāgai naiṇa?
aurāṃ re oḍhaṇa rātī cūṃdaṛī re, thāroṛo mailo besa
kai thārī sāsū ākarī e, kai thāro pīyariyo paradesa?
nahīṃ mhārī sāsū ākarī e, lañjā oṭhījī e loya, nahīṃ mhāro pīyariyo paradesa
aurāṃ rā piyujī ghara basai re, mhāroṛā basai paradesa
ghaṛo to paṭaka de nī tāḷa meṃ e, paṇihārījī e loya, cālaina mhāṃkī lāra
bāḷūṃ to jhāḷū thārī jībhaṛī re, ḍasjo re thanne kāḷo nāga

Her pot does not go under in the pond, her pot-holder is afloat
The friends who came along have filled their pots and are gone,
only the water-fetcher remains at the pond.
She calls out to a passing camel driver, "O dear camel-driver,
O foreigner, [help me] lift the pot."
"Other women have eye makeup and a *bindi*,
why do your eyes seem lusterless?
Other women are wrapped in a red shawl, but you wear old clothes.
Either your mother-in-law is unhappy with you,
or your dear family is abroad?"
"Neither is my mother-in-law unhappy, O dear camel-driver,
nor does my dear family live abroad.
But the others have their beloved husband at home, and mine lives abroad."
"Throw your pot in the pond, O water-fetcher, come and keep me company."
"I'll light and burn your tongue, may a black snake bite you"
(Joshi 2000, 73–74)

Vehemently opposing the stranger's request pays off, because in this song, as in others, he turns out to be the water-fetcher's own husband, returning after many

years abroad, intent on testing his wife's virtue.[8] So in the *paṇihārin* songs, women have cast the eve-teasing at the well as a test of their virtue.

Sometimes, though, the man at the well is really a stranger who abuses the situation to take some liberties and accost the woman: breaking her waterpot or even tearing her clothes, all with obvious sexual intent. With very few exceptions, his attentions are unwelcome. In one song, though, it seems that the water-fetcher falls for the stranger's promise of a better life. She is delighted to find a sympathetic ear in the stranger, going on at length about her marital problems with an impotent husband, in fact a child-husband. By the end of the song, she decides to smash her pot and join the stranger:

Maṭakī phoṛūṃ paṇaghaṭa ūpara, dekho saba nara-nāra
Choṭā kant kī khātir jāsyūṃ iṇa chailā kī lār, āvo cālo mauja uṛāvo jī

I smash my pot at the well! Watch, all you men and women!
Because of my child-husband, I'll go with this dandy man.
Come, let's go, let's have a good time!

It is possible though to interpret these lines as sarcastic, especially because of her word choice "out of respect for my child-husband" and because she clearly sees the stranger as a dandy (*chailā*). In any case, this scenario, where the woman gets seduced and follows the stranger, is rare.

Joshi (2000) has analyzed the symbolism of the songs: the full waterpot (*ghaṭa*, *gagarī*, *kalaśa*) stands for the auspiciousness of the *suhāginī* (virtuous married woman), and the broken pot is a bad omen and symbolizes the breaking of the rules of *maryādā* or normative constraints on women. The arduous road (*ḍagara*) is the difficult path of life for the young *bahū* or daughter-in-law in a joint family. The basic images that occur in the songs then stand for concerns with which women are confronted in their daily lives. Obviously, there are also sexual implications, with the broken pot symbolizing lost virtue (or virginity), and possibly also signifying fertility.

In summary, these scenarios depict scenes of seduction, where the women are usually portrayed as victims, mostly as subjected to a test of their virtue, which they pass. At the same time, the songs offer an outlet to vent frustrations with the patriarchal norms the women labor under. In very few songs does the stranger at the well offer a possible way out of the *paṇihārin*'s bleak existence, and mostly he just complicates the woman's life with his unwanted attention. The *paṇihārin* songs make for a fascinating case study for the poetics of protest, traditional ways of expressing "cultural dissensus" and possibly contestation of gender norms. They could fruitfully be studied along the lines of what Gloria Raheja and Ann Gold (1994) have done for other Rajasthani and North Indian folk genres, which is what I plan to do with ethnographic work on the topic in collaboration with Swapna Sharma. In addition, it would be interesting to study the folk dance genre based on these songs, and its current adaptation for the tourist industry. In this article, though, I will look at how the theme is appropriated first in mythology and

then in the movies. Interestingly, the movies often evoke the theme with explicit reference to its mythological interpretation by the Krishna tradition rather than as a folk theme per se. Thus we should first look at religious treatment of the theme and in particular how the Krishna bhakti tradition has appropriated it.

Religious appropriations and the krishnaite *paṇaghaṭa-līlā*

Several religious traditions have adopted the motif of the *paṇihārin*. In Tantric traditions, there is the story of the woman perfected being, or Siddhā, Maṇibhadrā, as memorialized in the (possibly twelfth-century) cycle of stories of eighty-four Siddhas, told by the Indian guru Abhayadatta Śrī to the Tibetan monk sMon grub shesh rab (Dowman 1985, 313–16). Her story is that of a happily married woman whose waterpot breaks one day on her way back from the well. The incident makes her understand the fleeting nature of *saṃsāra*. It reminds her of the words of wisdom of her guru, from whom she received initiation before her marriage, but whom she had not fully understood then. The breaking of her pot triggers the breakthrough of her spiritual awakening. She immediately decides to leave home and hearth and go in search of her guru. In visual arts, she is depicted as flying off, as Siddhas do, with her in-laws gazing up at her, the broken pot left on the road (Linrother 2006, 32–33 and 278). The Tantric appropriation thus focuses on the breaking of traditional *maryādā*, something which is hinted at in the folk songs quoted above, but evaluated negatively, whereas for Tantra it represents a rather spiritual breakthrough. The breaking of the vessel stands for the break with the material world and the body, which is often imagined as a vessel.[9]

Similarly, in the yogic tradition of the Nāthas, such imagery appears, for instance in the old Hindi poem attributed to Gorakhnāth, with the cryptic refrain *avadhū gāgara kaṃdhe pāṃṇīṃhārī gavarī kaṃdhai navarā* ("O ascetic, the water-carrier, pot on shoulder, spilled it, from her shoulder, the young lady"; Callewaert and Beeck 1991, 403–404, *pada* [song] 25). This is the refrain of a song in a secret language (*saṃdhyā bhāṣā*), filled with contradictions. It may be a reference to the Siddhā Maṇibhadrā. It is likely that the spilling of the water from the pot symbolizes the shedding of mortal inhibitions.

In the devotional or bhakti traditions of North India that are also directed to a God without qualities (*nirguṇa*), there are references to the water-carrier, often a milkmaid, who turns mad and smashes her own pot. Kabīr alludes to this in his poems: *Kahai kabīra gujarī baurāṃnīṃ maṭukī phūṭī joti samāṃnīṃ* "Says Kabīr: that milkmaid has gone crazy, her jar smashed, she was absorbed into the light" (Vaudeville 1993, 258).[10] He seems to refer to apparently crazy behavior, which, however, is a sign of liberation. Like many other Kabīr songs, this one too is preserved in the corpus of the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* (abbreviated *GG*), the sacred book of the Sikhs.[11] The Sikh gurus have also used the imagery of the *paṇihārin* in verse of their own (for example guru Arjan, Rāg āsā panca-*pada* 91.1, 393), but there it frequently signifies a lowly servant, devoted to her service.

Kabīr's poetry has also entered the repertoires of Qawwālī or Sufi devotional performances, and with it the theme of the *paṇihārin*.[12] Recently, Karachi-based Farid Ayaz and Party (sons of the late Munshi Razi ud-Din) have enjoyed success with the Qawwālī *bhalā huā morī gḥagharī phūṭī* ("It's just as well that my pot is broken").[13] The parts relevant to our theme involve the refrain and a couplet or *dohā* attributed to the bhakti poet Kabīr:

bhalā huā morī gagarī phūṭī
maiṃ paniyā bharani se chūṭī re
more sar se ṭalī balā

kabīrā kuāṃ eka hai, pānī bhareṃ aneka
bhāṃḍe hī meṃ bheda hai, pānī saba meṃ eka

It's just as well that my pitcher has broken.
I am free from hauling water!
An obligation removed from my head!
Kabīr says: there's only one well, but many come to fetch its water,
The vessels may differ, but the water in each is the same.

The *dohā* reinforces a symbolic interpretation of the theme: the water in the well is God; all humans are the water-fetchers, and their containers may differ, but God is manifest just the same in all of them. The pots are to be broken to see the underlying unity. This can be understood to refer to the Sufi concept of *fanā'* or "absorption" in God. The broken pot then is not something negative but a positive indicator, signifying transcendence above worldly concerns.

In short, religious traditions that express themselves in the vernacular have readily adopted the folk theme of the song of the *paṇihārin* whose pot gets broken.[14] There are some commonalities in the Tantra *nirguṇa* bhakti, and Sufi reinterpretations of the *paṇihārin* folk theme. The stress is on the broken pot—there is no interest in how it was broken or by whom, and no mention of an encounter at the well. What counts is the relief from the tediousness of the task of fetching water and domestic drudgery. Contrary to the folk tradition, the broken pot is evaluated as positive in that it symbolizes the possibility of transcending the dreariness of daily life; the woman does not cling to her domestic duties or the comfort of a well-worn path of daily routines; instead, she is ready to leave her pot and start a new life. The accoster remains anonymous, if indeed there was an accoster at all. There is no interest in who has broken the pot, just that it was broken and thus freed the carrier.

This is in contrast to the *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* of the Krishna tradition,[15] where all focus is on the accoster, who is Krishna himself. The theme of the woman meeting with a stranger at the well is turned into an episode in Krishna's divine play: it becomes the *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* or "water-fetching play." The tone of the songs is transformed, and it becomes a celebration of a *līlā*, a playful manifestation of God, no longer a serious complaint. The episode is turned into a metaphor for the meeting of the human soul with God. While Krishna's *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* is not

described in the "Bible" of Krishna devotion, *Bhāgavata-purāṇa*, it is a favorite of the (overwhelmingly male) old Hindi poet-devotees who started pouring out songs on the topic at least from the sixteenth century onwards. Most notable are the songs incorporated under the rubric in the *Sūr Sāgar* (hereafter *SS*; the references are to the edition by RATNĀKAR 1972, vol. 1, 588–601), a voluminous collection of poems attributed to the sixteenth-century poet Sūrdās.[16]

In these devotional songs, the herdswomen of Braj, the Gopīs, are the heroines. They initially resist the handsome and enchanting stranger at the well who obstructs them in their daily tasks and who turns out to be Krishna himself. As in the folk songs, they complain to each other that he breaks their waterpots and gets physical with them. Indeed, Krishna molests the women physically: he tears their clothes, breaks their necklaces and jewelry, kisses them, and gropes them. However, against their better instincts, they find themselves irresistibly drawn to him. They admit that they enjoy his pranks and join him in secret trysts, giving up all concern of *loka-lāja*, or patriarchal norms of decency for women.

The theological reading of these poems insists that this is an image for the meeting with God, an out of the ordinary experience that leaves the devotees baffled and which deeply transforms their lives. The introductory poem to the cycle in *SS* illustrates the theologian's interpretation:

hari triloka-pati pūranakāmī, ghaṭa ghaṭa byāpaka aṃtarajāmī
braja-juvatini ko heta bicāryau, jamunā kaiṃ taṭa khela pasāryau
kāhū kī gagarī ḍharakāvaiṃ, kāhū kī iṃḍurī phaṭakāvaiṃ
kāhū kī gāgarī dhari phoraiṃ, kāhū ke cita citavata coraiṃ
yā bidhi sabake manahiṃ manāvaiṃ, sūra syāma-gati kou na pāvai

Hari is the Lord of the world. He has all desires fulfilled and fulfills all desires.
He is all-pervasive, dwelling within each being [in every vessel].
Considering the love of the young ladies of Braj,
he extended his sports along Yamunā's banks.
He spilled one girl's little waterpot, and snapped the pot carrier of another.
He grabbed and broke the big jar of one girl and
stole another's heart with flirtatious glances.
Thus he won the hearts of all. No one can fathom Sūr's Syām's ways.
(*SS* 2017/1398)

Basically, the line of argument is that, though it might appear so, Krishna is not a lecher. The motivation of his acts is not his own desire. He is God, so without desire himself. However, he fulfills the desires of his devotees. He performs this *līlā*, moved by love for his devotees. In the end, such behavior is incomprehensible for humans.

For our purpose, what is striking is that the desire for the harassment is squarely located within the women, the victims. This contrasts with the strong affirmation of the virtue of the *paṇihārin* that was so central in the folksongs. In the bhakti interpretation, we see the opposite: not only the extradiegetical theological voice, but also the women within the story admit as much. They consciously break the rules of conventional morality (*maryādā*) and choose for love of Krishna. In one

of the poems attributed to Sūrdās we hear a *paṇihārin* struggle with her feelings and decide dramatically to give up her *loka-lāja*:

kaisaiṃ jala bharana maiṃ jāuṃ
gaila merau paryau sakhi rī, kānha jākau nāuṃ
ghara taiṃ nikasata banata nāhīṃ, loka-lāja lajāuṃ
tana ihāṃ mana jāi aṃṭakyau, naṃda-naṃdana-ṭhāuṃ
jau rahauṃ ghara baiṭhi kai tau, rahyau nāhiṃna jāi
sīkha taisī dehi tumahīṃ, karauṃ kahā upāi
jāta bāhira banata nāhīṃ, ghara na naiku suhāi
mohinī mohana lagāī, kahati sakhini sunāi
lāja aru marajāda jiya lauṃ, karati hauṃ yaha soca
jāhi binu tana prāna chāṃḍe, kauna budhi yaha poca
manahiṃ yaha paratīti ānī, dūri karihauṃ doca
sūra prabhu hili mili rahauṃgī, lāja ḍārauṃ moca.

How can I go to fetch water?
My path is blocked, O friend, by a boy of the name Kānha.
I can't slip out of the house. I'm restrained by what people might say.
My body is here, but my heart has gotten stuck where Nanda's son appears.
I can't stand to remain sitting here at home.
You should give me some good advice, so I'll find a way out.
I can't go out, but neither stay inside the house.
Mohana has put a spell on me, I tell you for sure, friends.
Propriety and good name, give my heart pause before I act.
Without him my body is lifeless, so what's this brain for? Worthless!
I am getting convinced in my heart: I need to stop this quandary!
I'll go and make love with Sūr's Lord. I'll nip this sense of shame in the bud.
(*SS* 22071/1453)

In contrast to the folksongs of the *paṇihārin*, then, for the devotional poets, the meeting with the stranger at the well becomes a consensual affair, imbued with theological meaning. Although the women are shown to complain to each other and notably to Krishna's mother, Yaśodā, there are hints that they actually enjoy the experience.

sunahu mahari terau lāḍilau, ati karata acagarī
jamuna bharana jala hama gaī, tahaṃ rokata ḍagarī
sira taim nīra ḍharāi dai, horī saba nagarī
geṃḍuri daī phatākārī kai, hari karata ju laṃgarī
nita prati aise ḍhaṃga karaiṃ, hamasauṃ kahai dhagarī
aba basa-bāsa banai nahīṃ, ihi tuva braja-nagarī
āpu gayau caṛhi kadama para, citavata rahīṃ sagarī
sūra syāma aisaiṃ hi sadā, hama sauṃ karai jhagarī.

Listen mother, your dear boy has gone over the line with his teasing.
We go to fetch water from the Yamunā. He stops us on the path.

Makes our water spill from our heads, breaks all our waterpots.
Throws away our pot carriers. What Hari is doing is harassment!
All the time he acts like that and he calls us sluts.
Now there's no place to live here in your township of Braj.
He went and climbed on the *kadamba* tree, and we all kept an eye [on him].
Sūr's Syām forever keeps quarreling with us like that.
(*SS* 2038/1420)

These women argue that Krishna is harassing them, but they undermine their own case when adding that he calls them sluts (*dhagaṛī*). Inadvertently this gives voice to Krishna, whose interpretation of the events runs counter to that of the Gopīs. The slur compromises the Gopīs and raises the suspicion that they may have been "asking for it." Moreover, all the while, as they are voicing their complaints, they keep an eye on Krishna in the nearby tree, which, as it turns out, betrays that they cannot keep their eyes off him.

Yaśodā is initially inclined to believe their outrage and ready to punish her son. However, she quickly changes sides when her son convinces her that it is in fact the Gopīs who tease him rather than the other way around:

tū mohīṃ kauṃ mārana jānati
unake carita kahā kou jānai, unahiṃ kahī tū mānati
kadama-tīra taiṃ mohiṃ bulāyau, gaṛhi-gaṛhi bātaiṃ bānati
maṭakata girī gāgarī sira taiṃ, aba aisī budhi ṭhānati
phira citaī tū kahāṃ rahyau kahi, maiṃ nahiṃ tokauṃ jānati
sūra sutahiṃ dekhatahī risa gaī, mukha cūmati ura ānati.

You know whether to beat me!
Who knows about their character? But you accept what they say!
They call me from the *kadamba,* down on the banks,
and start their sweet talk.
While flirting their waterpots fell from their heads.
Now they are intent on such a scheme!
She turned and saw him: Where were you? Say, don't I know you?
Sūr: as soon as she saw her son, her anger dissipated.
She pulled him to her chest and kissed him.
(*SS* 2046/1428)

In this poem, Krishna manages to escape his mother's punishment. He turns the tables on the Gopīs who had come to complain to his mother. He does so by casting doubt on their character (*caritra*). He implores his mother to hear his side of the story and depicts himself as innocent and the Gopīs as flirts. They called out to him, they were the ones who started a flirtatious conversation and while being coquettish, the pots fell from their heads. And now they try to blame him. So, in addition to the extra-diegetical theological explanation that we saw at work at the beginning of the cycle of *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* poems, here we find that even within the story Krishna's desire is denied, and that of the women foregrounded.

Krishna gets away with it. Yaśodā is taken in and her anger now is directed to the women, rather than her son. She says in a rather misogynistic tone:

jhūṭhahiṃ sutahiṃ lagāvatiṃ khori
maiṃ jānati unake ḍhaṃga nīkauṃ, bātaiṃ milavatiṃ jori
vai saba jobana-mada kī mātī, merau tanaka kanhāī
āpuna phori gāgarī sira taiṃ urahana līnhe āī
tū unakaiṃ ḍhiga jāta katahiṃ hai, vai pāpini saba nāri
sūra syāma aba kahyau māni tū, haiṃ saba ḍhīṭhi gaṃvāri.

They falsely blame my son, these cheats!
I know their ways well, they get together and make up something.
They're all crazed with youth's excitement. My Kanhāī is still small.
They broke the pots on their heads themselves, and come to complain here.
Why do you go near them, they are bad, each and every woman!
Sūr's Syām: now take to heart what I said, they're all insolent peasant women.
(*SS* 2047/1429)

Interestingly, then, in the bhakti interpretation, the seduction at the well is squarely attributed to the women's desire, not Krishna's. The women do complain, but these are taken to be mock complaints, or at least ambivalent. The male accoster goes scot-free with the ultimate defense line: "They were asking for it, and now they blame me."

If we compare the folk songs and the Braj devotional tradition, we find important shifts. While the folk songs focused on women's complaints, as victims as much of their in-laws as of the "stranger at the well," the Braj songs reduce complaints about in-laws: the mother- and sister-in-law only figure inasmuch as they restrain the women from meeting their beloved. The scarcity of water is no longer an issue, now that the scene is transplanted to lush Braj with the Yamunā always nearby. Similarly, domestic abuse becomes irrelevant, as the Gopīs are totally transfixed by Krishna and can think only of him. Most significantly, the women are no longer victorious in their virtue. They admit to being totally taken in by Krishna. The accoster now gets what he wants, gets away with it, and his victims come back for more.

Movie appropriations of the *paṇaghaṭa-līlā*

In light of this transformation, it is highly significant that many popular movies adopt not the folk theme per se of the *paṇihārin*'s complaint, but instead the mythological appropriation of the *paṇaghaṭa-līlā*, where the women's role in the seduction is at best ambiguous. This may be because the perpetrator of the harassment in the myth is actually not a potentially dangerous stranger, but Krishna, God himself. In the movies, it is by and large the hero or a "good" character that is cast in the role of the "eve-teaser" (or "Road Romeo"). The identification with Krishna immediately contextualizes the scene as permissible. The *paṇaghaṭa* scenario is rarely evoked when villains harass women sexually, and

other mythological scenarios, such as the Rāvaṇa abduction of Sītā, come into play.[17]

I cannot exhaustively treat all movie adaptations of this theme here, but want to indicate some patterns that can be discerned when the theme shows up in the movies' songs or is enacted as a little Krishna *līlā*. These general trends of course do not account for all occurrences, as there is a wide variety of individual creativity of directors and their teams of songwriters and scriptwriters.

Roughly, there seem to be three different contexts in which the theme is applied in song, and I will discuss each in turn. A first is that the "meeting at the well" theme is contextualized romantically to celebrate in song the first meeting or to suggest the first sexual encounter of the hero and the heroine. Though there may be an element of voyeurism, usually this love is legitimate, or at least there is an expectation that this love will acquire marital status. A famous example of this kind is the song *bhora bhaye paṇaghaṭa pe* ("When dawn comes at the well") in *Satyam Shivam Sundaram* (1978).

A second contextualization is more risqué, that of the courtesan's seduction, where the theme of sexual harassment at the well is evoked in a song performed by a courtesan to titillate her audience (and included by the film director to titillate his). A famous example of this kind (though not strictly speaking involving a courtesan) is Anarkali's performance of *mohe paṇaghaṭa pe nandalāla cheṛa gayau* ("At the well, Krishna teased me") in front of the Mughal emperor and his entourage on the occasion of Krishna's Birthday Festival (Janmāṣṭamī) in *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960).

A third evocation of the theme in song occurs in a context of forbidden love, where the hero is shown to be trespassing on societal rules by desiring a woman who is higher in social status. Here the stress tends to be on the "arduous path of love," as in the song *bahuta kaṭhina hai ḍagara paṇaghaṭa kī*, which is evoked as part of the song-sequence with the refrain *yah iśq hai iśq* in *Barsaat ki Raat* (1960). I will discuss this movie in the next section, but first I want to look at the first two types of quotations of the *paṇaghaṭa* scenario using examples from a single film, *Devdas* (2002).

First love and courtesan's seduction: *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* diptych in *Devdas*

Bhansali's recent remake of *Devdas* (2002)[18] contains a wonderful musical diptych: both of Devdas's love interests are celebrated in song with reference to the *paṇaghaṭa-līlā*. First, his love for his childhood sweetheart Paro represents romantic first-love contextualization for a song of the water-fetcher, which they both enact. Second, when he first meets the courtesan Chandramukhi, she sings and performs a dance to a *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* song, which represents the contextualization of the courtesan's seduction. I will discuss each in turn and then compare.

The first scenario is visualized as a sub-song within the song *More Piyā* (sung by Jaspinder Narula and Shreya Ghosal). The frame-song is performed by Paro's

mother (Kiron Kher), who is delighted about the blossoming romance between her beloved daughter Paro and the neighbor boy Devdas. She has approached Devdas's family about solemnizing the match in wedlock, and under the (mistaken) impression that her proposal is being accepted, she is induced to dance to celebrate the occasion. Her song casts the love of Paro and Devdas in mythological Rādhā-Krishna terms, evoking the Rāsa-līlā theme, or the Round Dance of Krishna with the herdsmaids of Braj.[19] At the same time, Paro (Aishwarya Rai) and Devdas (Shahrukh Khan) are actually having a rendezvous. This is acted out in a dream-like sequence as a meeting at the river. While those scenes are shown, the lighting changes—it is filmed in deep blue tones—and the song also changes tone: it becomes plaintive. At first we see Paro and Devdas teasingly splashing each other with water from opposite sides of the river, then he approaches her and in slow-motion tears off her necklace and anklet. The song voices her complaint about this harassment, though Paro seems more than willing:

na bayān dharo, ātī hai mujhe śaram
hāṃ, choḍ do, tumko hai merī kasam
na, zid na karo, jāne do mujhe balam
dekho, dūṃgī maiṃ gāliyāṃ bhāṃvare
calo haṭo, satāo na more piyā
more piyā, ḍarta hai dekho morā jiyā.

Don't talk so much, I'm feeling shy.
Yes, leave me alone, I swear by you.
No, don't insist, let me go, my love.
Look, I will scold you, crazy.
Go, off with you, don't torment me, my beloved.
My beloved, look, my heart is afraid.

The song may be one of complaint, resistance, or at least hesitation, but its picturization shows us differently. The water-fetcher is spellbound by the man's passionate approach and gives in willingly to his advances. The complaints are only voiced in the supertext, so to speak, as her behavior clearly contradicts this. One should note that in this contextualization, the love portrayed is understood as legitimate, since the scene is embedded in Paro's mother's celebratory song, which renders an aura of parental consent to the couple's erotic escapade.

Unfortunately, Paro's mother was mistaken: Devdas's parents strongly oppose the match, as they feel their family is of higher social status. Devdas is not strong enough to resist his parents' pressure. He flees the situation by returning to Calcutta, where he was studying. He even writes Paro a letter denying his love for her.

The second reference to the *paṇaghaṭa* theme is in Calcutta, where Devdas seeks to forget what had happened by accompanying his friend, Cunni Lal Babu, in drinking and visiting brothels. It is there that he meets the courtesan Chandramukhi (Madhuri Dixit). Her first performance for Devdas is a *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* feature.[20] The song starts as Candramukhi approaches Devdas,[21] performing several

pirouettes right in front of him. Her veil slaps his face with each turn she takes. Irritated, he grabs it. At this point, she begins her song with an appropriate line, quickly reversing the situation as if he is harassing her, instead of the other way around:

dhāi śyāma roka le roka le, aura acaka mukha cūma le
sara se morī cunarī ga̱ī, saraka saraka saraka
kāhe cheḍa mohe ga̱haravāla ga̱ī, kāhe cheṛa mohe
nandakumāra aiso ḍhīṭha, barabasa morī lāja līnhī
brindā śyāma mānata nāhīṃ
kā se kahūṃ maiṃ apane jiya kī sunata nāhīṃ māī.
dadhi kī bharī maṭakī le jāta rahī ḍa̱ga̱rī bīca
āhaṭa suna jiyā ra̱ga ga̱ī aura dha̱ṛaka dha̱ṛaka
kara paka̱ṛata cūṛiyāṃ saba ka̱ṛakī ka̱ṛakī o māī

Śyāma ran up and stopped me, suddenly kissed my face.
My shawl slipped from my head, lower, lower, and lower…
Why did he tease me?," she sang to her family, "Why did he tease me,
Nanda's prince, so brazenly?
He forced himself on me and took my honor (*lāja*).
Brindā's Śyāma did not heed [my words].
Whom to tell this to? I can't even listen to my own heart, friend.
With a pot full of curds I was walking the path.
I hear a sound, my heart stopped, and pounded, pounded…
He grabbed my hands and broke all my bangles, o friend.

As Chandramukhi is mimicking the action of her song (*abhinaya*), she smiles seductively. This suggests that the outrage that the heroine is voicing is only for show: she really enjoys the game of cat and mouse that her seducer is playing with her. In the last line of the song, she starts complaining about Krishna's more physical action. The broken bangles are an allusion to passionate lovemaking.

This song too is steeped in Krishna mythology, due to the references to *Śyāma* and *Nandakumāra*, both epithets of Krishna. The song describes a case of repeat-offense. It starts out with a beautiful woman walking seductively to the well. Krishna does what he always does: stages a surprise attack and embraces the woman, "taking her honor." In the second half, the woman is carrying a pot of curds on her head.[22] Again, he sneaks up on her, she is helpless, standing with her heart beating as she anticipates what is coming, and he forces himself on her. All this is framed as a Gopī's complaint to another Gopī. She is baffled, and still does not know what to make of it. Yet, through the dancer's *abhinaya*, we suspect the speaker may have enjoyed what happened, an impression the premodern poetry also conveyed. And, as in those medieval songs, we suspect she will come back for more.

Within the movie, this is part of a seduction scene. The repeat-offense theme invites yet another repetition of the seduction, this time with the patrons watching the performance. Screen reality mixes with the script evoked by the song. When Chandramukhi acts the last line, she approaches one of the drunk patrons of her

performance, who sees his chance to grab her hand. In the playful introduction, the obverse had taken place. Devdas grabbed her veil and she compared it to Krishna stopping Rādhā on the way to the well. There, the roles were reversed. Whatever the song said, we could see that the woman was teasing the man. Poor pursued Devdas was the one who really felt harassed. The courtesan made a show out of being harassed, but she signaled she enjoyed it.

When the risqué topic of seduction at the well is contextualized with the courtesan's performance, the tale of the seduction of a woman is appropriated to seduce men. The complaints of the Gopīs are used to titillate reel-life (and by extension, real-life) patrons. This may say something about the performance context of the *paṇaghaṭa* songs, and the way they spill over in "secular" domains and are adapted for commercial ends. The scene looks like a filmic version of the light-classical genre of *ṭhumrī*, typically associated with a courtesan milieu that seems to have peaked in the nineteenth century. *Ṭhumrī* compositions featured similar song texts on the *paṇaghaṭa* theme (see DU PERRON 2007, 136, 145, 148, 158–59, 183–90, and 200–205). Chandramukhi's song may well have been lifted right out of that domain. It contains a signature, Brindā, which may well stand for Bindā, the pen name of Bindādīn Mahārāj, a nineteenth-century Kathak dancer and performer of *ṭhumrī* (for more information on him, see DU PERRON 2007, 27). Whatever the actual provenance of this particular song, the occurrence of this type of song in film in the context of courtesan performance illustrates the abiding influence of this theme on the imagination and its easy interpretability—notwithstanding its divine resonances—in terms of sexual relationships between mortal men and women.

In the film, the seduction ends up not working. Devdas spoils all the fun by rudely leaving the performance. When Chandramukhi tries to hold him back, he gives her a piece of his mind with a sermon: "You are a woman, Chandramukhi. Recognize yourself. Woman can be mother, sister, wife, or friend. When she is nothing else, then she is a courtesan. You can be something else, Chandramukhi."[23] A reform agenda has intruded. This sermon is not found in the original literary work by Śarad Candra Chaṭṭopādhyāy on which the movie was based, but it could have come straight from the pen of the Gandhian Hindi writer Premcand. The Hindi film has it both ways: using the Braj lyrics for titillation as well as incorporating modern Hindi reform themes through the hero's attempt to reform the courtesan. Remarkably, it is the hero who resists seduction. The heroine, on the other hand, will enact a reverse scenario. Attracted as irresistibly to Devdas as the Gopīs are to Krishna, she will break with her former life, just like they did with theirs. Instead of leaving behind *dharma* for love, though, her love will motivate her to choose the path of *dharma*. She will give up her profession and lead a simple life.

There is a direct link between the two *paṇaghaṭa-līlā*s in that immediately after Chandramukhi's performance Devdas tells his friend that he realizes now that he made a big mistake by writing Paro a letter denying his love for her. It is as if the courtesan's representation of a seduction at the well has reminded him of what happened between him and Paro and made him see his own seduction of Paro in

a different light. Maybe he now realizes that he bears a responsibility for having seduced her and potentially set her up for a future similar to Chandramukhi's. It is as if he wants to distinguish his own seduction scenario from the one the courtesan describes and cynically exploits for commercial ends.

The director has marvelously worked these two songs in a symmetrical unit like a diptych, contrasting the two kinds of love the hero enjoys. This is not something we find in the classic *Devdas* (1955), even though there too the well figures importantly, among other functions as a meeting place for Devdas and Paro, and their relationship was at several points marked with Rādhā-Krishna mythological allusions. In the 2002 remake, the commonality of the theme of the seduction at the well in the songs sets Chandramukhi's love up as similar yet contrasting to Paro's. The Devdas-Paro encounter was private and intimate and the dialogue was directly between the woman and her accoster. The Devdas-Chandramukhi encounter is a public one, where she is the spectacle and he one among many spectators, and the *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* here is a past violent sexual encounter at the well that is reported by the courtesan in indirect voice. In Paro's case there is happy fulfillment in love, not so in Chandramukhi's. In both cases, the women pretend to complain about the rough treatment they meet, yet their actions and facial expressions belie that. They are actually enjoying the seduction. While in the case of Paro's seduction, the hero is in charge, in Chandramukhi's case, the heroine is in control, at least of the performance. However, she fails to seduce him and after the song is over, her agency is restricted by the hero's sermon impressing upon her the need to reform. The same hero, who was unable to stand up to his parents to defend his love for Paro and take responsibility for seducing her, is able to shoulder the responsibility of societal reform and can self-righteously appeal to the courtesan to stop seducing him. Both *paṇaghaṭa-līlā*s then are framed by intrusions of orthodoxy that downplay the potentially scandalous effect of the scenario depicted: Paro's by her mother's plea for marital union that would legitimize the seduction, and Chandramukhi's by the hero's appeal that she conform to patriarchally-sanctioned womanhood.

The movie then has it both ways: it has appropriated the Krishnaite scenario with its consensual interpretation of the *paṇaghaṭa-līlā*, but taken care to frame this within the value system of conventional virtue, also proclaimed by the folk songs of the *paṇihārin*. From a male point of view we see violent seduction as glamorized, aestheticized and justified as something that women may protest, but actually enjoy. From a female point of view we see a powerlessness, a helplessness in front of the male agent and a strong suggestion that in fact the woman may well enjoy this kind of violent passion, although she should not admit this openly. There is also the clear message that if any transgression has taken place, it is not the man, but the woman who will be reproached for this. She will end up taking the blame, which may potentially set her up for a life of continuous seductions as a courtesan. It is the woman who is asked to reform, and no such appeal is made to males.

However, there is one movie that uses the *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* in a different way and shows the harsh punishment of a male accoster. That is, surprisingly, a movie that

is half-a-century old yet still a much-viewed and discussed classic, *Mother India* (1957). Before we turn to that movie, though, I want to briefly discuss the third contextualization of the *paṇaghaṭa* theme, namely, where it is used in the context of forbidden love, as it occurs in *Barsaat ki Raat*. Here, interestingly, the *paṇaghaṭa* theme is deployed as part of a Qawwālī performance.

Forbidden love: qawwālī *paṇihārin* in *barsaat ki raat* (1960)

The third context in which the *paṇaghaṭa* theme is quoted is that of the forbidden love between a lower-class man and a higher-class woman. This time the example comes from a "Muslim social," *Barsaat ki Raat* (1960). This movie features several excellent Qawwālī sequences, and one of them has a brief *paṇihārin* song. The story line is about forbidden love. The impoverished poet Aman Hyderabadi (Bharat Bhushan) falls in love with a stranger whom he meets by chance as they both take shelter from the rain one monsoon evening. He meets her again, and finds out she is Shabnam (Madhubala), the daughter of a powerful Police Commissioner.[24] He wins her heart, but her father opposes the match. They elope but she is forcibly brought back by her father's police forces. Aman expresses his desperate love in poetry, which he recites during a competitive Qawwālī performance in the shrine of Ajmer, which is broadcast live on the radio. The song, titled *Yah iśq hai iśq* ("This is love, love"), asserts that love for God transcends organized religions, the differences between Hindu and Muslim, and indeed caste. The poet himself poignantly expresses his belief that love is stronger than all conventional morality, which of course we understand to refer specifically to his unhappy love affair with Shabnam. This is also how Shabnam herself understands the song, which she happens to hear on the radio (just at the moment as he sings *iśq majnūn kī vah āvāz hai jiske āge koī lailā kisī dīvār se rokī na gayī* ("Love is the voice of Majnun [the proverbial lover], at the call of which no Laila [his proverbial beloved] can be stopped by any wall"). Though locked up in the lodge in Ajmer where she and her family also happen to be staying, she finds a way out, and joins her lover in the shrine. However, someone else also heard Aman's song and understood what it was about: Shabnam's father. He recognizes the voice as that of the unwanted suitor of his daughter, and violently disagrees with the message. Just after Aman has sung about the transforming power of love, which can make even a stone come to life *but ko devtā kartā hai iśq* ("Love turns a stone into God"), we see him angrily throwing down his radio. He too sets out to the shrine, but with the purpose of silencing this voice that dares challenge patriarchal norms. Meanwhile, at the Qawwālī contest, the competing party starts a line on the theme of the *paṇaghaṭa*:

bahuta kaṭhina hai ḍagara panaghaṭa kī
aba kyā bhara lāūṃ maiṃ jamunā se maṭakī
maiṃ jo calī jala jamunā bharana ko, dekho sakhī rī
nandakiśora mohe roke jādūṃ to

kyā bhara lāūṃ maiṃ jamunā se maṭakī
aba lāja rākho mere ghūṃghaṭa paṭa kī [25]

The road to the well is very rough.
Now how can I fill my pitcher with water from the Yamunā?
I had set out to fill it with Yamunā water, see friend,
When Krishna stopped me with magic!
How can I fill my pitcher with water from the Yamunā?
Now protect the honor of my *purdah*.

This application of the *paṇaghaṭa* theme within a Qawwālī is a good illustration of the complexity of the interrelation between Hindi film songs and the main plot. Within this fragment of the song, the speaker is the *paṇihārin*, who laments that Krishna impedes her in carrying out her task with his magic. From our background of medieval Krishna songs, we know this may be a mock lament, but still she pleads for her honor to be protected.[26] Within the Qawwālī sequence as a whole, though, these lines are contextualized within a celebration of boundary-breaking love (*yah iśq hai iśq*), which asserts the primacy of love over duty. Furthermore, if we relate the fragment to the framework of the story, it comes to refer to Aman and Shabnam's forbidden love. Thus, what is on the surface a plea for protecting conventional *loka-lāja* is recoded as deeply subversive.

After this little intrusion of the *paṇaghaṭa* theme, the Qawwālī continues with mythological references from bhakti imagery to the effect that love overcomes all obstacles, such as Rādhā's fearless love for Krishna *jaba jaba Krishna kī baṃśī bājī nikalī rādhā sajake, jāna ajāna kā dhyāna bulāke, loka-lāja ko tajake* ("Whenever Krishna's flute resounds, Rādhā appears, dressed up, forgetting everything about the known and unknown, disregarding worldly censure"), Sītā's love for Rāma (*bana bana ḍolī janakadulārī, pahanake prema kī mālā*, "Janaka's daughter roamed from forest to forest, garlanded with love's necklace"), and the saint Mīrā's drinking a poison cup for the sake of her love *darśana jala kī pyāsī Mīrā, pī gayī bisa kyā pyālā* ("thirsty for the sight of her beloved, Mīrā drank the poison cup"). At the very moment Aman sings the line that Rādhā joined Krishna *loka-lāja ko tajake* ("giving up all fear for worldly censure"), his beloved Shabnam arrives in the shrine to join him.

How do we read this appropriation of the *paṇihārin* theme? For one, Muslim Qawwālī and Hindu *bhajana* melt together in a celebration of love divine. Indeed, the boundaries between sacred and secular love are porous, as the song seems to be about both at once. We can read this on one level as an indication that the filmmaker and songwriter resort to religious imagery to justify the love affair across class lines. One can see the movie then as having a subversive aspect, a plea for the acknowledgement of cross-class love marriages, justified by resorting to religious sanction. Yet, in the end, there is no confrontation between conventional morality and love. The movie's storyline veers off in a different direction: Shabnam's fiancé is the one who saves the day. He happens to be a friend of Aman, and when he realizes what is going on, he chivalrously steps out of the way to

make the lovers' union possible. He convinces Shabnam's father that she should be allowed to marry Aman. In this happy denouement, then, the love marriage can be accommodated within the traditional family. The tension inherent in the *paṇaghaṭa* lines that values conventional notions of chastity, with its contextualization in a broader song about convention-transcending love, is also apparent in the framework of the story. There is a delicate tension between an appeal for change, and a desire to embed this change within traditional norms.

This example illustrates how film can creatively adapt folk themes as mediated through Sufi Qawwālī as well as Hindu *bhajana*.[27] The subjects here are positioned as on the side of love, and in opposition to patriarchal normativity. Whereas the voice of the *paṇihārin* in the film's Qawwālī is one that stresses conformity to the norms, the bhakti examples that are evoked voice a challenge to patriarchy. What is conspicuous in its absence in this scenario is the eve-teasing aspect. Throughout the film, Aman's behavior is perfectly chivalrous, never transgressing lines of propriety and ever-concerned for Shabnam's good name. For more musings on eve-teasing, we have to return, as promised, to *Mother India*.

The accoster punished in *Mother India*

There is one movie that addresses the issue of eve-teasing in the *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* by meting out a harsh punishment for the male accoster. Surprisingly, this is not a modern movie,[28] but the classic *Mother India*. Of course, there is much else going on in this epic movie, and by foregrounding the *paṇaghaṭa* motive, I do not seek to detract from its multi-layered richness, but rather the opposite, I wish to highlight an element that has not been studied yet.[29] *Mother India* has been characterized as "an arena within which a number of discourses around female chastity, modern nationalism, and, more broadly, morality intersect and feed on each other, with significant political effects" (Thomas 1989, 13). So far, what has not been noticed in analyses of this film is how the *paṇaghaṭa* theme figures importantly as a focus for these discourses, and how the discourses related to it from folk and bhakti milieus are brought into play in the movie.

Given the current polarization of religious communities, one might be surprised that Hindu mythology would figure prominently in a movie directed by a devout Muslim. When confronted with that apparent paradox, Mehboob Khan is reported to have said that those stories are "in our blood" (Gayatri Chatterjee, personal communication, 18 February 2006). This illustrates again the futility of reading cinema through the lens of communal division. As we will see, Khan shows a deep and insightfully productive engagement with Hindu mythology.

The *paṇihārin* theme surfaces in the first half of the movie, when Radha (Nargis), the heroine, as a young peasant woman, first arrives in her husband's village. On her way to the well, the village's moneylender, Sukhilala (Kanhaiyalal), has a lecherous eye on this pretty new bride. He is an old lecher, far from a romantic and alluring flute player. He pretends to be concerned about Radha's safety, tell-

ing her to watch out not to slip lest her clay pot be broken, a statement full of sexual innuendo.[30] But Rādhā's friend (Sheela Naik) gets back to him with quick repartee: *are lālā yah mard kā nahīṃ, aurat kā pair hai* ("Hey, Lala, women do not slip like men do"). She proceeds to criticize his practice of moneylending, asking rhetorically: "With you around, who can afford copper pots?" Radha does not speak to the moneylender and asks her friend not to pay attention to him (the scene is described in CHATTERJEE 2002, 41). Here the movie playfully adopts the folk *paṇihārin* theme, where the virtuous woman puts the lecher at the well in his place by using sharp repartee.

In the second half of the movie, the theme returns, now explicitly as a *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* with reference to Kishna mythology. Interestingly, the roles are reversed: the woman on her way to the well is now Sukhilala's daughter, Roopa (Chanchal, Madhubala's sister), and the accoster is Radha's youngest son, Birju (Sunil Dutt). Radha has now assumed more and more the role of doting mother. Like Yaśodā, she is indulgent towards her favorite son, happy-go-lucky Birju. Birju was the rebellious child, a little trickster, whose name as well as his pranks evoked Krishna's *līlā*. Now that he has grown up, he has become quite the Krishna playboy character, forever teasing girls. In good Krishna tradition, we see him breaking their pots of water as they come back from the well, making passes at them, and indeed succeeding in stealing quite a few hearts, including that of Sukhilala's daughter. Roopa proudly threatens Krishna-Birju with consequences for his actions, secure in her position as the daughter of the village's richest man. Roopa and her friends go to complain to Radha about Birju's behavior. In a scene meant to evoke folk performances of the Krishna story, the girls complain (as far as we can tell, falsely) that Birju spied on them while they were bathing, and (rightly) that he always breaks their pots, each in turn testifying "he broke three, four, five, six … pots of mine." The last girl sadly remarks he has not broken any of hers.[31] The disappointment in the last girl's voice, who has escaped Birju's pranks, makes it clear that the girls actually secretly cherish Birju's teasing.

Radha reacts very much like mother Yaśodā. At first she takes the women's complaints seriously and is ready to punish her son with a good thrashing. However, Birju appears on the scene of this "women's *pañcāyat*" (or village judicial committee) and turns the tables, accusing the girls instead of teasing him. He casts doubt on the women's character, and Radha believes him right away. However, unlike what happened in the medieval songs, that is not the end of the story. In private, after the women are gone, *Mother India*-Radha takes quite a different position. She makes it clear to Birju that she cannot tolerate this behavior. She is adamant that Birju should not sexually assault girls from his own village: *āj maiṃ sacmuc uskā sar toṛ ḍālūṃgī. gāṃv kī laṛkiyoṃ ko ciṛhtā hai, apnī bahinoṃ ko ciṛhtā hai* ("Today I truly will split his skull. He's teasing the girls of the village, he's teasing his own sisters!"). Ironically, mother Radha insists on his behaving properly, whereas in the medieval songs Rādhā is, of course, Krishna's secret lover, herself transgressing boundaries of propriety. From comedy, the tone has now changed to seriousness as Radha warns her son that she will kill him if he damages the honor

of one of the village women: *magar yah marte dam tak nahīṃ māf karūṃgī ki tū gāṃv ke kisī laṛkī kī izzat par hāth ḍāl le. terī aur apnī jān ek kar dūṃ* ("I will not forgive you as long as I live if you stain the honor of any girl of our village. I will kill myself and you"). That warning will prove providential.

First though we revert to comedy in a good-natured reversal of roles. In a delightful scene, Birju offers to go to the well instead of his pregnant *bhābhī*, his brother's wife. As he comes back with several pots full of water on his head, the village girls are waiting for him and take their sweet revenge by breaking *his* pots. This scene is a wonderful Indian answer to the classic *L'arroseur arrosé* (1895).

So far, things are friendly and the *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* is playful and non-threatening. However, Roopa makes it a game to egg on Birju. She knows she can really make him mad by wearing the golden bangles (*kaṃgan*) that Birju had bought for his mother, but which Sukhilala had confiscated. This is a constant reminder for Birju of his mother's poverty and his own impotence at doing something about it. The bangles totally spoil the relationship with Roopa. Even the celebratory Holī song (*Holī āyī re kanhayī*, also with Krishna references) ends in a fight when Roopa taunts him by sporting his mother's golden bangles.

His mother thinks he has harassed the girl and is ready to beat him mercilessly, but luckily his brother Ramu speaks up for him. Radha again, like mother Yaśodā, accepts that it was Roopa who provoked her son. In this case, we know that the mother is right not to blame her son. Yet again, Birju is not let off the hook so easily. Wily Sukhilala points out that Birju has been teasing all the girls of the village and that not all of them have provoked him. This turns the villagers against Birju. Sukhilala senses victory and provokes Birju, taunting him that he has noble dreams of giving his mother golden bangles, but that he just should ask him, Sukhilala, to do that job. He is insinuating that Birju cannot protect his mother's sexuality and she should just give in and become the moneylender's mistress. Predictably, this sets off Birju who tries to attack Sukhilala. Sukhilala has cleverly managed to deflect attention from the sexual character of his daughter to the collective honor of the village and in addition has cast doubt on the propriety of the perpetrator's mother, knowing full well that doing so will cause Birju to become enraged.

This is an interesting variant on the scenario of complaints about sexual molestation from the Krishna mythology. Krishna is always playful about warding off complaints about his molesting women. However, here the complaint is turned around, and the suggestion is that his mother can be sexually molested. This is not to be taken in jest. Birju's anger now turns murderous. The mood of the movie has changed. It turns serious, and the acting no longer evokes folk theatrical conventions but becomes more realistic: we have shifted back to melodrama.

When Birju tries to attack Sukhilala, the whole village beats him up and decides to exile him. But Radha makes her plea, promising *agar isne kisī laṛkī ko ceṛhā, to maiṃ uskī jān le lūṃgī* ("If he teases any girl, I myself will kill him"). The warning she had given Birju in private has now been solemnized in front of the village. This Yaśodā has stepped out of the traditional script. Her role is no longer only

doting on her beloved son, the savior-to-be of the village. Instead she takes on the strong role, that of the parent who sets rules and determines what the framework is within which the village's women are protected. Radha here sets her son limits. He can under no circumstance molest a woman of the village. The perpetrator of the *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* now has to grow up. He can no longer get off scot-free and will have to submit to societal norms.

Birju is too enraged though to listen to reason. He steals a gun and a horse and becomes a bandit, robbing wedding parties on their way with bride and dowry to the groom's house. On the day of Roopa's wedding, Sukhilala anticipates trouble. He approaches Radha, begging her to stop her son from attacking his daughter's wedding party. Radha is determined to do this in the firm resolve that her son should not break the rules she has set him. In her eyes, not so much Sukhilala's *izzat,* but her own and that of the whole village, is at stake. She goes off and tries to stop Birju on the road to the robbery, but he does not listen. He races past her to take his revenge on Sukhilala. Birju succeeds in recovering his mother's golden bangles and sets afire all the moneylender's papers that record the villagers' debts. Eventually he kills the man who brought his family to penury and preyed on his mother's honor. All this seems justified and no one really makes a move to stop him. However, when Birju tries to abduct Roopa, he meets with stiff opposition, not the least from his own brother who explicitly says he does so because he wants to help his mother keep her word of honor. Still, Birju manages to capture the bride and gallops off with her on his horse.

Now comes the amazing climax. Birju is on the road to freedom, only to find his mother blocking his path, gun in hand. She threatens to kill him, but exhilarated by his revenge, he just laughs, saying she will not do that, as she is his mother. She answers, *maiṃ ek aurat hūṃ* ("I am a woman"), to which he restates, *maiṃ terā beṭā hūṃ* ("I am your son"). She retorts: *rūpā sāre gāṃv kī beṭī hai. vah merī lāj hai. birju*, *maiṃ beṭā de saktī hūṃ lāj nahīṃ de saktī hūṃ* ("Roopa is a daughter of our whole village. She is my honor. Birju, I can give a son, but not my honor"). He brushes it off and rides away, the veiled Roopa in his arms. Radha aims the gun and shoots him in the back, her own beloved son. Roopa runs off to safety, leaving mother and son alone for the apotheosis. Birju dies in Radha's arms as the golden bracelets he had recovered for her fall out of his lifeless hands.

The *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* theme here has undergone an amazing transformation. From playful enactment of mild eve-teasing, where the roles can be reversed to teach the teaser a lesson, it has turned into deadly serious abduction that has been punished with death. The acting has moved from folk theatrical to melodramatic. The whole atmosphere has moved from bright-colored to dark and somber. Radha has changed from the excessively doting mother into the fierce protector of the village women's honor. Radha makes the horrible sacrifice of killing her beloved son. We know what that sacrifice costs her personally. We know how much she dotes on this son in particular, and he on her. His last act was to give her back her bangles. The sacrifice of the one who was ready to sacrifice so much for her is all the more

terrible. Yet the filmmaker suggests that Radha has become truly Mother India, as she is covered in the blood of her own son, killed by her own hand.

In the last scenes of the movie, we return to the beginning. The movie started with the opening of a new irrigation canal that was hoped would bring prosperity to the village. Respected village elder Radha was asked to inaugurate the canal, which she did reluctantly. When she was garlanded, the smell triggered memories of her marriage, which started the movie-long flashback. Now, at the end of the movie, the flashback has ended. In a dissolving shot, the hands of Rādhā, with the blood of her own son, dissolve in those of Radha as an old woman, inaugurating the irrigation canal. Her son's blood colors the water of the new irrigation canal as it is released by those same, now older, hands. What statement did the director seek to make with this memorable way of editing? In the blood of the son spilt to preserve the honor of the village that is now enabling progress, are we to see the blood spilt at Partition, the division of the subcontinent in two nations upon its independence? The trauma of the mass murders and rapes that occurred at Partition was certainly still vividly on people's minds ten years later, upon the release of this film in 1957.[32] Is the director's intent to herald a new epoch, a call to leave the unspeakable past behind and press on to a bright and better future? Yet at the same time the film is wholly about the past. It can be read as an attempt to come to terms with the haunting memories of Partition, an exercise to exorcize past sins. Among those figured most horribly is the rape of one's own sisters that had rocked the newly independent state: Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims murdering and raping each other's women. In 1957, the wounds were still raw. The movie does not provide a soothing balm. The horror is transferred, its scale reduced to one village, but it is still there. It is as if by watching the film we can see the nation struggle with its recent past as we gaze on the cathartic story of unspeakable sacrifice.

What enabled Radha to preside over the future is the sacrifice of her own son. Radha becomes Mother India by killing her Krishna. Mother India eats her own sons. Hindu goddesses like Durgā are known to require terrible blood sacrifices for victory. Here it is the Goddess who makes the sacrifice herself. One could nearly read it as a Christian solution: God herself makes the sacrifice to atone for our sins. There is definitely something of Christian iconography in the most popular poster for the film, a still from the movie which shows Radha shouldering a wooden plow, suggesting a woman lifting a cross. In the film, this visual reference to Christ and his cross comes at the end of the song *O jānevālo* ("Oh you who are departing"). This song represents Radha's appeal to the villagers to stay their ground and not migrate away from their land, when they are leaving in a mass exodus after a disastrous flood has ruined their fields and homes. Radha and her boys are staying on and starting the work of rebuilding, and their example turns the tide. This scene evokes the mass migrations of Partition. At the end of the song, Radha falls under her plow-"cross." However, this Christian imagery is truly Indianized in a wonderful transformation. The next shot is of her now-grown boys lifting her out of the mud. The image has reverted to the Hindu iconography

of the incarnation of Vishnu, Varāha, who saves the earth by pulling her out of the mud after a cosmic flood. Here Radha is firmly identified with Mother Earth or Bhūdevī. Ten years after Partition, when Khan's movie was made, the new generation is to "pull India out of the mud." The optimistic message seems to be that her sacrifice will not be in vain.

We have come a long way, from playful *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* to the horrors of Partition and its violation of women in communal violence. Compared to the previously discussed scenarios, this movie positions the female subject quite differently. Radha is a strong heroine, not the willing, weak victim. In the first half of the movie, when she herself is accosted, it is made clear (in the words of her friend) that women do not fall easily for seduction. Here she is more in line with the folk *paṇihārin* tradition than the Krishnaite *paṇaghaṭa-līlā*. In the second half of the movie, when her own favorite son becomes the perpetrator, she takes on the role of punisher. She takes his transgressions seriously from the start and gives him several warnings that she will punish him. When he does not heed her warnings, she has no choice but to follow through. The "honor" (*lāja*) of the community is central. Remarkably, this honor is embodied in the character of the moneylender's daughter, the most unworthy of all women in the village to be "saved" from Birju's hands, as we know she is secretly in love with him, and moreover, her father is the oppressor of all. Is the honor of such a girl worth sacrificing one's sons for? Emphatically the movie says "yes," in linking the release of this woman with the release of the waters that bring abundance, not devastation. The threat to Radha's *lāja* in the first half of the movie was tied up with a devastating flood; Roopa's release is connected with life-giving channeled waters.

In this movie, the prize is the Nehruvian nation and its agricultural self-reliance, symbolized in the opening shots in irrigation canals, dams, and tractors. But the price is steep: a terrible sacrifice is required from Radha. She is to struggle and toil for those she loves, and eventually to kill her own son with her own hands. Radha has to kill her Krishna. Only in that way can the dainty medieval heroine of erotics be transformed into a truly modern goddess for this age: Mother India. The transformation was apparently successful and Khan's Radha became the symbol of the nation.

The strong heroine of *Mother India* certainly represents a very different take on eve-teasing. Remarkably, this highly successful movie insists on a punishment for the accoster. However, the responsibility for punishing the young man's transgressing actions is squarely placed on the shoulders of none other than his doting mother. We could read this as holding women responsible, rather than the men, for the violation of other women. Morover, the punishment asks the ultimate from the mother, an inhuman sacrifice that turns her into a divine character and sets her apart from ordinary women. This undermines the message that mothers should raise their sons not to harass women and that tolerating minor harassment can lead to that of a more serious type.

It is also worth pointing out that it is not the man's sexual harassment per se that is condemnable, but his approaching women who are not available to him,

the women of his own village. The film then seems to leave open the question of the impropriety of harassing women from other communities, which is problematic in its post-Partition scenario. Moreover, though it is never made explicit, we might well note that Roopa is of higher class and caste status than Birju, so Birju has transgressed another taboo: that of sexually desiring a woman of higher social status.[33] Even within these limits, *Mother India* remains a remarkable movie with a strong statement on eve-teasing and harassment of women, one that potentially allows for a different positioning of women as subjects in the all-too-well-rehearsed harassment scenarios.

Conclusion

Even in this short survey it becomes clear that there are multiple ways in which folk themes are appropriated in popular Indian culture as exemplified in the Hindi movie. The folk theme of the *paṇihārin* has subversive potential in that it allows women to voice complaints about the patriarchal system they have to operate in, both at home and in public. The scenario of the "encounter with a stranger at the well" is only one of many themes surfacing in the *paṇihārin* songs. Here, usually the seduction attempt is not successful. Women typically resist their accoster and insist they pass the test of their virtue. Yet, it is this theme that has been adapted as a Krishna *līlā*, where it becomes a story of a consensual seduction: the stranger is Krishna, and the *paṇihārin*, the Gopī. The *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* becomes an encounter between God and his devotee. The desire is the devotee's, the woman's, and God merely responds to what she wants. The Gopī may complain, but it is a mock complaint. In this appropriation, *paṇaghaṭa-līlā* becomes a metaphor for irresistible attraction to the divine.[34]

In turn, this scenario is adopted by the filmmakers with reference again to secular love. One could see here a gradual shift of a theme out of a "private" genre performed by women for women, something that Ramanujan (1999, 10–11) would call an *akam* genre, into an ever more "public" or *puṟam* genre. We see a move from "the home" to "the world," whereby an anonymous meeting of "*paṇihārin* waylaid by a stranger," through the mythologized encounter "Gopī waylaid by Krishna," is transformed in a specific context of a named film heroine and hero enacting or remembering the mythologized scenarios.

What then has happened when, say, Shahrukh Khan takes on Krishna's role of accosting a woman on her way to the well? Though individual filmmakers inflect this theme in a variety of interesting ways, what unfortunately remains constant is some of the more harmful interpretations of the action. The messages sent mostly confirm stereotypes about sexual harassment, namely that women enjoy harassment, that they mean "yes" when they say "no," and that their complaints are not sincere. Moreover, the harassment is portrayed as playful, not harmful, even if it may get violent, and in any case the perpetrator mostly gets away with it. On the surface, women's subjectivity is given a lot of airtime, but it is exploited for male

voyeuristic benefit. There is no serious scope for resistance, and the possibility that the women might not enjoy the experience is undermined by the depiction of their protests as mock complaints. When the women express enjoyment of the experience, they are reprimanded. The only movie where the perpetrator of eve-teasing is punished,[35] *Mother India,* reserves the punishment for when the harassment has escalated into abduction. The burden of punishment falls to the mother of the accoster and is a superhuman feat, hardly inviting imitation. Still, it is significant that in this movie there is a direct line drawn between the "innocent" eve-teasing and the more "serious" abduction, indicating an awareness that eve-teasing is not really so innocent. What starts out as a playful Krishna *līlā* can escalate into a (melo)dramatic attack on women's virtue, which is understood as a threat to the community's honor.

We see then that the material of women's folk songs, which has subversive potential, is inflected in ways that confirm male self-serving stereotypes in the milieus of mythology and popular film. While the variants are well worth studying to fully understand the nuances of individual *bhajana*s and films, however, the creative inflections seem to remain within the "grammar" determined by a patriarchal outlook.

Notes

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1. For ease of translation I use only "well," although one should probably make a distinction between man-made and natural bodies of water. I thank Kalyanakrishnan (Shivi) Sivaramakrishnan for making this point.

2. On how such cultural categories get translated into legal categories, see Baxi 2001. The issue of eve-teasing has been little studied; there is mostly legal action directed literature focusing on harassment in the work place (for example, Patel 2007). Several feminist researchers have written up their reflections on the legal progress on the issue in symposia published by the monthly *Seminar* (see especially Baxi 2001 and Krishnan and Arasu 2008). There are a few articles reconstructing the history of eve-teasing in the past century (Anagol-McGinn 1994), documenting the portrayal of sexual violence (including eve-teasing) in popular Indian cinema (Ramasubramaniam 2003), an ethnographic study of middle class women in Kathmandu (Liechty 1996), and a reflection on the ethnographer's position when confronted with this type of harassment (Chopra 2004). Also relevant is one book chapter about middle-class women in urban India (Puri 1999, 75–102).

3. Recently, activists headed by Jasmine Patheja have started an organization called Blank Noise, seeking to counter this hideous form of sexual harassment in all kinds of creative

ways. They have put up a website and blog at http://blog.blanknoise.org/ (accessed 10 July 2009).

4. At least, such has been the case in cinema halls before the mid-1990s. Since then, there is more female attendance at cinemas, and of course the video and VCD/DVD audience has all along also included women.

5. I am grateful to Philip Lutgendorf for drawing my attention to this movie.

6. The social context of water-fetching in time of drought in Rajasthan is the subject of a recent documentary movie, *Panihari: The Water Women of India* (dir. Abhi DEVAN and Sudhi RAJAGOPALAN, 2006).

7. For an ethnographer's experience in Gujarat of women's collective gathering to sing songs on drought, see MUKTA 1994, 7–11. Similar songs are found in Braj (SATYENDRA 1953, 88–89 songs 4–5; SINHA 1978, 142). I have worked with the collaboration of Swapna Sharma (Yale University) on similar songs in the Braj area, particularly the Candrāvalī songs from the rainy season (research carried out in 1995; results as yet unpublished). Similar songs are sung during Holi in the Avadh region (SINHA 1978, 78–79, 91). In Garhwal too, this genre is found (SINHA 1978, 287–88), and there are some songs about water scarcity, but a better parallel to the stranger-as-confidant motif studied in this article may be found in the Garhwali women folk genre of Baju-Band, which consists of conversations with strangers when cutting grass away from home (CAPILA 2002, 122–24, and 184–90; see also 176–77).

8. A longer version of this song is also translated in BRYCE 1964, 151–53.

9. Tamil Siddha traditions of the south also refer to breaking waterpots as spiritual breakthroughs, but not for a woman, but a man, who begged for a waterpot for ten months, probably symbolizing the human body (KAILASAPATHY 1987, 400).

10. KG *pada* 127; *GG* Rāg āsā 10. The references to Kabīr's poems are to the Western redaction as in the edition reproduced by CALLEWAERT and BEECK, the so-called *Kabīr-Granthāvalī* (abbreviated *KG*) and the northern redaction in the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* (*GG*), for which, see below. The references to the *Gurū Granth Sāhib* are to the verse numbers and pages in the online edition found at: http://www.srigranth.org/servlet/gurbani.gurbani?S=y (accessed 10 July 2009).

11. Some other Kabīr poems that include well symbolism, but of a more esoteric kind, with reference to Yoga praxes are: *kuaṭā eka paṃca panihārī, ṭūṭī lāju bharai mati hārī*; *kaho kabīra ika budhi bīcārī*, *nā ohu kūaṭā nā panihārī* ("There is one well and five water-carriers, and even though their rope/shame is shattered, they fill up, racking their brain. But Kabīr says, looking at it from the point of view of oneness: there is no well and no water-carrier"; *GG* Gaüṛī 12.3–4, 325); and *oha ji disai khūhaṛī kaüna lāju vahārī*, *lāja ghaṛī siū tūṭi paṛī uṭhi calī panihārī* ("Into this visible well-world, who lowered the rope-breath? The rope-breath breaks away from the pitcher-body, and the water-carrier gets up and leaves"; *GG* Gaüṛī panca-*pada* 50.2, 333).

12. While a historical survey of such occurrences would be interesting, it is outside the scope of this article. I hope a student of ethnomusicology will take up this theme in the future.

13. I am grateful to Shabnam Virmani for bringing this performance to my attention and for sending me a pre-publication text accompanying the CD with translation by Homayra Ziad. I used her apt translation of *bhalā huā* as "it's just as well."

14. In a certain sense this is an anachronism, as of course the specific songs given as illustration in the previous section are much more recently attested than the religious appropriations I quote here. However, it is quite clear that the vernacular religious tradition adopted a genre in existence at the time, which would have been very similar to what women sing today.

15. The divide between these traditions is not watertight, as the Krishnaite version has also entered for instance the Qawwālī repertoires, as we will see with a song attributed to Amīr

Khusro Dehlavī (see under Qawwālī in film beginning on page eighteen of this article, and note 25).

16. For a full analysis with quotations and translations of these poems on the topic, see PAUWELS 2008. It should be noted though that most of those poems are not attested in early manuscript material (Kenneth Bryant, personal communication, 27 March 2008). However, similar poetry is also found in the (as yet not critically edited) works of other sixteenth-century poets, such as Nanddās (also translated in PAUWELS 2008) and Harirām Vyās.

17. I hasten to add that I do not wish to reduce the movies to replaying an eternal religious tradition, but rather the opposite: I want to call for a more precise understanding of how movies creatively and playfully select from religious traditions, which in turn have adopted folk themes.

18. For more on the *Devdas* phenomenon and Bhansali's movie in particular see CREEKMUR 2007 and BOSE 2007.

19. *Dhumak dhumak kar nāc rahī thī merī rādhā pyārī hāṃ, jāne kahāṃ se rās racāne āyā chaila girdhārī* ("My sweet Rādhā was dancing, swinging to the beat when out of nowhere a mischievous Krishna arrived to dance a Rāsa-līlā") and *kare kṛṣṇa rās rādhā ke saṅga* ("Krishna danced the Rāsa together with Rādhā").

20. This scene seems to be filmed deliberately as an ode to the Anarkali's dance in *Mughal-e-Azam*.

21. As a prelude, Devdas's friend Cunni Lal Babu describes the courtesan poetically: *māltī gundhāī kaisī pyārī ghūṅghar bhare, mukh dāminī sī damakata cāl matvārī* ("Braided with jasmine, her sweet curls crowding her face, flashing like lightning, her gait is intoxicating").

22. Presumably, this is more of a *dānalīlā* context, wherein Krishna extracts his tax from the Gopīs when they are on their way to sell their milk goods in town.

23. The original Hindi: *tum aurat ho candramukhī. pahcān jā apne āp ko. aurat mā hotī hai, bahin hotī hai, patnī hotī hai, dost hotī hai. aur jab vah kuch nahīṃ hotī, to tavāif hotī hai. tum kuch aur ban saktī ho candramukhī.*

24. I leave out here for brevity quite some meaningful twists of the plot. For an entertaining description and analysis of the complete movie, see "Barsaat ki Raat" at Philip Lutgendorf's website at http://www.uiowa.edu/~incinema/BarsaatKiRaat.html (accessed 10 July 2009).

25. This seems to be an adaptation of a Qawwālī attributed to Amīr Khusro Dehlavī. There is no textual evidence for the attribution, but it is understood to be his by many performers; see for instance the recording on the website of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts at http://tdl.mit.gov.in/CoilNet/IGNCA/amir 0001.htm (accessed 10 July 2009).

26. Here we should also take into account the multi-vocality of the song rendering: both leaders of the rival parties, one male and one female, repeat each of the lines, and the chorus of each, again one group male, one female, repeats each line. However, the final line, the plea to protect the *paṇihārin*'s honor, is rendered only once by the elder male lead singer of the party rival to Aman.

27. In turn, the line *bahuta kaṭhina hai ḍagara panaghaṭa kī* is taken up by the movie *Anjaan* in a song about voyeurism: *Yuṃ ghūr ghūr ke nihārā na karo* ("Don't keep staring that way") from the movie *Zindagi Ek Juaa* (1992), sung by Kumar Sanu.

28. There is a modern movie that would qualify as ultimately punishing the accoster, and surprisingly, it does not belong to the popular Bollywood fare, but the "new cinema" or "Parallel Cinema," namely *Mirch Masala* (1987). At the beginning of the movie, the first encounter of the low-class village woman Sonbai (Smita Patel) and her accoster, the subedar, or tax collector (Naseeruddin Shah), occurs at the *paṇaghaṭa*. He approaches with his followers on horseback, and all the women at the well flee. Only Sonbai remains and defiantly asks the subedar to have his men's horses drink not at the well, but at the place reserved for animals. He

does so, attracted to her beauty, but he asks that she slakes his thirst first. She acts somewhat ambiguously, serving the haughty subedar water on condition he kneel down, which allows him later to claim that she sent mixed signals, and gave him initially a "come on." However, it becomes clear later, when the subedar starts to pursue her obsessively, that she absolutely does not want anything to do with him. The matter escalates when she publicly resists him and slaps him in the face, making him the laughing stock of the village. He cannot tolerate such an insult to his *izzat*. In his pursuit he pulls out all stops, which makes his offense go well beyond sexual harassment of one woman alone. Still, the punishment he receives seems to be calculated by his original crime. He ends up being attacked with bagfulls of hot chili pepper by the women of the chili powder factory where Sonabai had sought shelter, his male gaze effectively blinded for its transgression.

29. For a wonderfully insightful analysis of the movie, see Chatterjee's book-length study (2002), which also deals with some mythological elements. I want here to take up Chatterjee's invitation to study the mythological references (2002, 73–74).

30. He says: *zarā sambhālke calā kar, kahīṃ pair na phisal jāe*.

31. *Merī ghaghṛī to phoṛtā hī nahīṃ*.

32. On the topic of the suffering of women during Partition, see Menon and Bhasin 1998.

33. I am grateful to Ramya Sreenivasan for raising this point.

34. The picture is in fact not as clear-cut as it may appear from the examples provided: the Krishna theme also appears in the folk songs (for example, Joshi 2000, 69–70, 74–75; Sinha 1978, 21 in Bhojpuri and 179–80 in Bundelkhandi). One can see it as a re-borrowing from the milieu of *bhajana*, although it is of course impossible to determine which folk songs are "authentic" and which ones are "secondary." Moreover, folk songs often carry the signature of a bhakti poet; see Hawley 1988. Remarkably, Krishna is cast as a daring and very physical accoster, more so than the average "stranger at the well." Thus we see that some of the devotional transformations trickle back into the folk song milieu. Similarly, film songs may be sung by women together with folk songs.

35. I should qualify this statement with reference to the recent Tamil movie, *Righta Thappa* (2005), by a woman director, R. Bhuvana. This movie explicitly addresses the issue of eve-teasing in a serious way. It highlights how the hero's life is ruined due to his participation in a case of eve-teasing, although he is not actually guilty of the escalation that leads to the death of the victims and ensuing criminal persecution of the perpetrators. It is meant to be a warning not to take eve-teasing too lightly. The state of Tamil Nadu has in the past decade introduced legislation with jail sentences for harassment of women. Another interesting development is that the movie star Aamir Khan recently has put out some ads to raise awareness about India's heritage and its tourism potential, in one of which he comes to the help of foreign tourists who fall victim to eve-teasing, part, it seems, of a public awareness campaign on the topic; the video can be viewed on the internet at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-T2qtEu9e5o&NR=1 (accessed 17 May 2010).

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