6.4 Folklore

Jassal, SmitaTewari: Taking Liberties in Festive Songs: Gender, New Technology and a 'Joking Relationship'. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 41, 1 (2007): 5-40.

This paper analyses the gendered impact of technological change by focusing on song recordings associated with the colour festival, Holi, as celebrated in Eastern Uttar Pradesh. It explores the questioning of gender hierarchies, the constitution of the erotic and the way in which the songs work to uphold the social order. These recordings hint at ever increasing social hierarchy, a process that demands the urgent attention of social scientists.

The recordings serve to reinforce established cleavages and hierarchies and to bolster gender stereotypes, rather than threatening them in any significant way. In fact, the traditional Holi song genre did not challenge the social order even before the advent of recording technologies. But a fundamental difference today is that the recorded genre has now usurped the space that was traditionally available to women. With increasing commercialization and market expansion, Holi song recordings have altered the sensibility of Holi. In an attempt to evoke the mood of bawdy revelry characteristic of Holi, it is the feminine gender that often becomes the butt of sexual jokes.

The recorded Holi songs reflect the stereotypical images of women, as for instance in their representation of the *devar-bhabhi* (brother-in-law / sister-in-law) bond, customarily a sexually charged 'joking relationship'. Commercially recorded songs recast women as objects of a male gaze, and express lower-caste masculine resistance to sanskritization. All this is accomplished through the licence that Holi provides, although the existing social order is ultimately reinforced.

See also Narayan (24.1)