

ALEKSANDRA SZYSZKO

(University of Warsaw)

The *Ḍholā-Mārū* in Rājasthānī Folk Theatre**Abstract**

The aim of my paper is to present the popularity of the *Ḍholā-Mārū* tradition in Rājasthānī folk theatre. *Khyal*, the folk theatre of Rājasthān belongs to one of the least researched areas of the arts in this region and the most famous Rājasthānī love story about Ḍholā and Mārū has not been studied in the form of the folk theatre. Since the *Ḍholā-Mārū* story is deeply rooted in folklore and oral traditions, my attempt is to show that this narrative tradition is also present in the folk form of theatre.

The great popularity of the Rājasthānī story of Prince Ḍholā and Princess Mārū¹ is thanks to the presence of this history in various artistic forms. Due to its folk origin, the tradition of *Ḍholā-Mārū* has survived from the Middle Ages till today and continues to grow in various new media. Originally, it was found in folk songs (probably describing the separation of lovers) that were combined into one story with a plot or story line added to it (Gahlot 1986: 24).

It seems proper to discuss two parallel developing traditions of *Ḍholā-Mārū*. First is the literary tradition, consisting of courtly poems written in the Middle Ages and contemporary works in prose and poetry that relate the *Ḍholā-Mārū* story.² The second is the folk tradition, which has developed into diverse and richer forms of the story. For example, there are songs, ballads, legends, dance and folk-theatre. Songs about Ḍholā and Mārū are still sung throughout Rājasthān, including the tribes in the Aṛāvalī mountains. Ballads and folk stories have crossed the boundaries of their original territories, sometimes under other names. However, comparison shows that they are nonetheless part of the same tradition. Territories where the same *Ḍholā-Mārū* story is found include Sindh, Gujarāt, Madhya Pradeś and Chattisgarh.

¹ For more information about the *Ḍholā-Mārū*, see Rāmsinh et al. 1995; Vaudeville 1962; Vaudeville 1996: 273-334.

² For example Rāmsinh et al. 1995; Jośi 1956; Cūṇḍāvat 2004; Rāv 2002.

The story spread throughout the Pañjāb (in both modern Pakistan and India) is called *Sammi-Ḍholā*. In Uttar Pradeś, Hariyāṇā and the Braj region it became a unique narrative tradition, generally known simply as *Ḍholā*. A new artistic form, a dance called *sammi* performed only by women, appeared in the Pañjāb. Women dance in a circle and in the centre one woman stands and sings the *Sammi-Ḍholā* story.

It is important to note at this point that the forms mentioned here do not exhaust the entire repertory and styles of *Ḍholā-Mārū*. Contemporary styles have become more commercialised.³ For example, at least two video films, entitled *Ḍholā-Mārū*, are available in the Gujarātī and Rājasthānī languages.⁴

Khyāl

It is not surprising that the story of *Ḍholā-Mārū* has found a place in the repertory of the Rājasthānī folk theatre, *khyāl*. Considering the limited sources and lack of research in this area and the sparse references to it, one assumes that *Ḍholā-Mārū* is present in the repertory of *khyāl*. We shall thus begin with this style of theatre in Rājasthān.

Let us note here that the folk theatre, *khyāl*, belongs to one of the least researched arts in Rājasthān. Even though *khyāl* has a shared tradition with other forms of folk theatre in North India, such as *naṭṭāṅkī* in Uttar Pradeś, *māc* from Madhya Pradeś, and *tamāśā* in Mahārāṣṭra, it has never been thoroughly researched. Very few *khyāl* troupes remain in Rājasthān today.

The genesis of *khyāl*

The origins of *khyāl* are difficult to determine. The majority of those who have researched it have agreed that this style of folk theatre appeared in Rājasthān around two hundred to two hundred and fifty years ago (Kallā 2000: 96; Vatsyayan 1980: 159). Some scholars put the beginning of *khyāl* back as far as four to five hundreds years ago.⁵ However, the presence of the stories in the older works of that time does not mean that *khyāl* comes from the same period. There are a few theories of the genesis of *khyāl*.

According to Udayvīr Śāstrī, a new style of poetry which became known as *khyāl* spread in the 18th century from Āgrā and the surrounding area. Its linguistic base began with the local language and became mixed with Urdū and Persian. There were a few *khyāl* groups at that time and they had members from every social class. They were

³ The stories about *Ḍholā-Mārū* are available on audio cassettes, such as *Ḍhol kūvar kā vivāh*, Trimūrti kaisē rikārdīng kampanī, Āgrā 1995.

⁴ *Ḍholā-Mārū*, Mehul Kumār (director), Ultra Video 1988.

⁵ Such is the opinion of Sohāndān Cāraṇ and Devīlāl Sāmar (Ault 2006: 3). It is worth mentioning here that the book written by Cecil T. Ault will be the first publication on *khyāl* outside India. D.R. Ahuja states that the tradition of *khyāl* is 300 years old (Ahuja 1980: 132).

structured differently, sometimes competing with each other (Menāriyā 1996: 163; Vatsyayan 1980: 160).

Nandalāl Kallā subscribes to the same theory but says that this new style of poetry began in Āgrā in the 17th century and in the 18th century it was developed as a performance art in Rājasthān. He adds that the term *khyāl* came into being at the same time and originally the exact meaning of this term was ‘a poetic composition’ (Kallā 2000: 87).

Agarcand Nāhaṭā believes that *khyāl* developed from popular entertainments in the Middle Ages, such as *rās*, *carcarī*, *phāgu*, etc. (Menāriyā 1996: 163; Vatsyayan 1980: 160). These forms gave rise to the social drama (Vatsyayan 1980: 160). *Rās* was a style of performance in the Braj region that included dance, dramatic performance, music and songs. It was primarily a performance style that glorified Kṛṣṇa, his youthful companions and the Gopīs. *Carcarī* in the Hindī language means joy, fun, dancing and singing, jokes, arguments and ridicule.⁶ In the Rājasthānī language the meaning is different, designating, among other things, folk songs connected with the celebration of *Holī* and *carcarī* dance.⁷ *Phāgu* or *phāg* is the month (February-March) during which *Holī* is celebrated. *Phāgu* and *phāg* also refer to the erotic songs sung during this festival, which are very often indecent (McGregor 1997: 680; Lālas 1969: 2731). What we have written above deserves consideration, as *khyāl* is a fusion of poetry, music (mainly folk ragas),⁸ dance and song in performance.

Folk performances differ, depending on the region in Rājasthān. In some areas *khyāl* is dominated by songs, while in others it is music and dance. In certain regions, *khyāl* was performed only twice a year, including performances during *Holī*. C.T. Ault emphasises the dominant role of the joker, vulgar language and the general comic aspect of performance in the majority of the folk styles he knows (Ault 2006: 18). He also indicates yet another possibility for the development of this genre, namely the songs *khayālī* sung by drovers and transport men in their work that became folk shows.⁹ However, this is another typical hypothesis for Rājasthānī folk songs being sung by drovers and shepherds in dialogue with their camels, by women with nature, animals, birds, or presenting the conversation of lovers.

Female roles in *khyāl* performance are played only by men. They travel from village to village and carry with them everything they need for performance. Frequently, they only play one performance of a particular play with one troupe of players. Performance stages are only used in some forms of *khyāl*. Performances are mainly enacted in a convenient,

⁶ *Carcarī* – *cācar*, *carcikā*, *phāg*, *gānā bajānā*, *raṅgraliyā manānā*, *āmod-pramod* (Prasād 1997: 364).

⁷ *Cācar* / *cācarī* / *cācarī* – *holī sambandhī lok gīt*, *carcarī nṛtya viśeṣ* (Lālas 1986: 390).

⁸ Quoting the example of Manganiyars’ music, Komal Kothārī explains that folk raga is not the same as the raga of classical music. He writes: “The Manganiyar’s repertoire of ragas differs from that of North Indian classical music. Some raga names – Kalyan, Jog, Paraf, Sindhi Bhairavi, Bilawal, Todi, Salang (Sarang) – resemble those of certain classical ragas. However, with the exception of Sindhi Bhairavi, these ragas do not have the same characteristics as the classical ragas. (...) Though they use the seven-note scale of classical music, at the conceptual level they recognize only two notes.” For more information, see Bharucha 2003: 332-334.

⁹ Ibidem. The author uses the words: “transport men” and “drovers”. Keeping in mind the fact that Rājasthān is mainly a desert region, the proper meaning will be not cattle but camel drovers.

open space in the desert, a cross-roads, or in front of a temple. Performances begin at night and last till the early morning hours. *Khyāls* are always performed in verse. They are melodramatic dialogue-songs, sung in a loud, nearly screaming pitch (Raj. *tek*, H. *ter*). Prose dialogue is rare and found only in a few *khyāls* (Menāriyā 1996: 162-163; Kallā 2000: 107).

Types of *khyāls*

There is no agreement about the classification of *khyāls*. Here are a few types, distinguished by their features, which will demonstrate the diversity of the genre. Their division into absolute categories would be extremely difficult because there is always one that does not fit entirely into any category. Dr. Satyendra tried to categorise *khyāl* as a genre dominated either by dance, dialogue, acting, music or singing. Devīlāl Sāmar classified *khyāls* into three categories:

1. *khyāl* dominated by dance and acrobatic display;
2. *khyāl* dominated by poetry (including *turrā kalaṅgī*, *rammat*, *kucāmaṇī* and *ciṛāvī*, which I shall address later);
3. *gavrī*; the mimetic *khyāl* (without dialogue) of the Bhīls (Menāriyā 1996: 163-164).

The various regions of Rājasthān have developed their own style of folk theatre. Below we shall discuss the traditions that are best known in critical literature on the subject.

Turrā kalaṅgī

This name describes the *khyāl* from south Rājasthān (Mevār) that is very popular in the regions of Chittaurgaṛh, Ghosūṇḍā and Jhālāvār. This style was created by two poets from Chittaurgaṛh, namely Tukhangīr Gosāi and Śāh Alī. They both competed in poetry contests and the local rājā gave names to their individual styles (i.e. *turrā* and *kalaṅgī*). The students of the forms of *turrā* were Hindu and those of *kalaṅgī*¹⁰ were Muslim. The former wore red clothing and the latter wore green. The followers of *turrā* worshiped Śiva and performed male characters on the stage. The *kalaṅgī* were Śakti followers and they played female characters.¹¹ During performance they competed in poetry, music dance

¹⁰ *Turrā*, *kalaṅgī* – kinds of ornament worn on the turban, e.g. on the turban of a groom etc., a crest.

¹¹ One can see here some inconsistency. However, it is only apparent. For an Indian it is not surprising that, e.g. a Muslim is a follower of Śakti or any other Hindu deity. It should be noted here that Rājasthān is a region of cultural and religious mixture. Even today there are communities of dual religious identity, who have not fully transformed from one religion into another. It is a result, among other things, of the intense activity of the Ismaeli missionary sects (including Nizari Panth) in medieval Rājasthān. They propagated a synthesis of religions differing from each other in essence. For more information on this subject, see Khan 2003.

and acting (Menāriyā 1996: 164; Kallā 2000: 101; Ahuja 1980: 132; Maheshwari 1980: 192). This style was born from poetic competitions, which is in agreement with one of the theories of the origins of *khyāl*. However, these examples appear to be more a matter of tradition than actual history. Again, there are no genuine historical sources.

Rammat / Rāmat

The folk arts from Bīkāner and Jaisalmer or the deserts of Mārvār are called *rammat* or *rāmat*. Originally, Bīkāner was famous for its heroic songs, mainly about Rājasthānī heroes. Many people sang together, some in strident voices (*tek*), and ostensibly, these performances became an art of the stage. Bīkāner *rammats* were performed from the eighth to the tenth night of the bright half of *phāgun*, i.e. before and after the celebration of *Holī*. All the provinces of Bīkāner organised such performances. There was no stage. Performances took place on the bare ground, sometimes covered with a canvass or mats. Some parts of the town, mostly squares and/or crossroads, were named after famous *khyāls* played there. *Rammat* was performed by all classes of people. The most famous play was *Amar Sinh Rāthaur* by Motīlāl of Bīkāner (Kallā 2000: 102-103; Menāriyā 1996: 164; Ahuja 1980: 132). Jaisalmer *rammats* were different as they used a roofed platform stage that was richly decorated. However, the artists performed on the ground in front of the stage, while the latter was only used for the artists to sit on. In Jaisalmer, *khyāl* performances were also related to the celebration of *Holī*. Performing *rammat* after *Holī* was believed to be very auspicious (Kallā 2000: 103).

Kucāmaṇī khyāl

Lacchīrām of Kucāmaṇ created this style and it is one of the newest types. Lacchīrām died in 1994 at the age of sixty, which may account for this style of *khyāl* being the most recent in currently written plays.¹² His plays were published and they were played exclusively by the Bhāt caste. His work became famous and now it is synonymous with *Mārvārī khyāl*.

This style has a few characteristic features. When in performance, the characters are introduced in *tek* and then the actors begin to dance (Menāriyā 1996: 164). The actors introduce themselves as they appear on the stage. There are many comic characters in Lacchīrām's plays. The melodies played during performance are very long, which is why the Kucāmaṇī style was also called the "plays of crying tones."¹³ Lacchīrām used many folk tales and stories as sources for his plays as well as current music. We cannot exclude the possibility that he also used *Dholā-Mārū*.

¹² The date of Lacchīrām's death is given only by P. Menāriyā (Menāriyā 1996: 164).

¹³ *Rovaṇī dhun ke khyāl* (Kallā 2000: 97).

The *Cīrāvī* stage and *Śekhāvaṭī khyāl*

This style is widespread throughout the Śekhāvaṭ region of Rājasthān (the north-east part of Mārvār and north of Jaypur on the Hariyāṇā border). N. Kallā says that this style was started about one hundred years ago by Prahlādīrām Jhālīrām of Fateh (Kallā 2000: 96).¹⁴ Songs from these *khyāls* are very popular. The most famous plays come from Cīrāvā and thus the plays originating there are known by the same name. Rāṇā Nānūlāl (1823-1905)¹⁵, whose real name was Bakhtāvar Rāṇā was the most popular writer of *khyāls* from that region. He was a drum player by profession and belonged to the Muslim caste of singers and jewelers, Maṇiyār-Mirāsī. Though Muslim, he dressed and lived according to the Hindu customs. He had three gurus, Haridattrāy, Śivbakhś and Govindrām, who passed their knowledge of *khyāl* on to him. Haridattrāy taught him poetry, Śivbakhś taught him music and Govindrām dance. As Rāṇā was short of stature, Śivbakhś gave him the name, Nānū ('dwarf').¹⁶

Around 1875 Rāṇā Nānūlāl began to create and play *khyāls*. Very quickly he became popular. His *khyāls* include songs and dances, and are character plays, not dominated by a plot or theme. The actors compete with each other in dancing skills, and costumes are not an important element (Kallā 2000: 98). In performance, his *khyāls* began with an invocation to the gods.

It was also Rāṇā Nānūlāl who created *Ḍholā-Maruvaṇ*, which was published in 1905.¹⁷ This *khyāl* is based on the story about Ḍholā and Mārū, also called Maruvaṇ or Marvaṇ, which is the most popular version of the heroine's appellation in Rājasthānī oral tradition. The play focuses on the most important aspects of the story, with dialogues that illustrate them, and concentrate on the feelings and emotions of the characters rather than on the details of the story. It is Rāṇā's own feelings and sentiments that make up the substance of his plays. For example, when Mārū writes a letter to Ḍholā, she explains that she became an expert in writing poetry due to the generosity of Haridattrāy, Śivbakhś and Govindrām (Rāṇā 1976: 8-9). Without doubt, we can ascertain that this character learned poetry from the same masters.

Perhaps because Śekhāvaṭ borders Hariyāṇā and the Braj region, Rāṇā Nānūlāl wrote his story based on the versions found here rather than that of Mārvār. It is also possible that he may have used a very popular (variant) version of *Ḍholā-Mārū* that began in the Braj language region, started by the poet Madārī, who was a folk artist from the village of Lohban, close to Mathurā. In 1949, Dr. Satyendra wrote in his book that Madārī had flourished around 150 years earlier, thus at the beginning of the 19th century. Madārī died at the age of 90 years (Satyendra 1949: 106).

¹⁴ Vasantlāl Śarmā states that *Śekhāvaṭī khyāl* tradition was started and begun to be played about 150-200 years ago (Śarmā 1995: 36).

¹⁵ *Nānūlāl Rāṇā śekhāvaṭī khyālā rā śreṣṭh sirjaṇhār hā* (Koṭhārī 2005: 17).

¹⁶ *Nānā, nannā, nānho* – 'little, small, tiny' (Śarmā 1995: 37).

¹⁷ In the present article the new edition of this play is used (Rāṇā 1976).

It is very likely that Rāṇā Nānūlāl used the popular stories of his days in his performances to communicate better with the local people. A close analysis of the plots of *Ḍholā-Marvaṇ* indicates that he did so. This *khyāl* is very closely related to the version created by Madārī. For example, there is a new character, Revā, who is the second wife of Prince Ḍholā. In the Mārvārī version, this wife is the princess Mālvaṇī from Mālvā kingdom. Revā imprisons Ḍholā, all the time offering him alcoholic beverages. In both stories, there is also a new character, Mārū's sister, called Kārū by Madārī and Tārū by Nānūlāl. The details of Ḍholā and Mārū's marriage are also different as a result of the curse that should he go to her parents' kingdom, Pūgal, the gates would fall on him and kill him. But, as Mārū takes a "victim" with him (a camel), he passes the gates safely and the gates fall on the camel's back only. That is why camels have had short tails since then.

Thus, it appears that further research into *Ḍholā-Marvaṇ* will not only increase our knowledge of it as a story and its spread, but also of the process by which *khyāl* itself was created and of the ways that patterns have developed in the oral traditions. Madārī went on eight pilgrimages to the Goddess at Nagarkoṭ. To get there, he went through the Mārvār desert. It is probably there that he heard the stories or songs about Ḍholā and Mārū (Satyendra 1949: 109-110). From these, Nānūlāl created new adventures for the characters to be used in *khyāl*. Based on the Braj language versions, Madārī started a new narrative tradition called *Ḍholā*.

Ḍholā-Mārū in different types of khyāl

There is also another type of *khyāl*, called *māc* (H. *mañc*), in Rājasthān. Plays of this type are performed near to temples in the presence of or close to the gods. On these occasions the stage is very carefully decorated. During the performance the spectators sit on three sides of the stage. The actors are followed by book-holders. *Khyāl Ḍholā-Marvaṇ* is also played in these performances (Kallā 2000: 98). It should be noted here however, that Kapila Vatsyayan describes the stages used for *khyāl* plays (Vatsyayan 1980: 160-161), although much more often folk theatre in Rājasthān is simply played on the ground. Only in a few forms of *khyāl* are stages built as they are in *māc* performances. C.T. Ault, who has been studying Rājasthānī *khyāls* for the last thirty years, has never seen plays performed on a stage.¹⁸

There are mentions in literature about *Ḍholā-Mārū* performances in south Rājasthān. *Māc* performances begin with an invocation to the gods. In Jhālāvār, an invocation was recited by a priest before an image of the god and the performers on the stage repeated the invocation. The style of acting in the Koṭā plays is different from others in that the actor goes through the audience singing a summary of the story in the form of a ballad and then the play begins on the stage (Kallā 2000: 99-100). The story of Ḍholā and

¹⁸ Personal communication (November 2006).

Mārū appears to have been well known in the Hāṛautī region of which Koṭā is the capital city. In Bundī, a town 39 kilometers from Koṭā, there is a fort called Tārāgarh, in which there is a wall painting of Ḍholā and Mārū. Guides in the fort tell the visitors that this painting is of Ḍholā and Mārū, attesting to its authenticity.

So far we have addressed plays that are found only in literature. Apparently the *khyāls* dealing with *Ḍholā-Mārū* were based mainly on traditional tales or oral traditions. Consequently, these sources are not easily accessible. Thus, it is hard to conclude that the *Ḍholā-Mārū* plays were only performed in some areas. K. Vatsyayan also mentions the popularity of the story of Ḍholā and Mārū in *khyāl* tradition in general (Vatsyayan 1980: 163).

***Kāṭh-putlī* – Rājasthānī puppet theatre**

A discussion of the performance of *Ḍholā-Mārū* in the folk theatre of Rājasthān would be incomplete without mentioning *kāṭh-putlī* (*kāṭh* means ‘wood’, *putlī* – ‘puppet’), in the form of which, our heroes, Ḍholā and Mārū, are represented. Marionettes are the only type of puppets used in *kāṭh-putlī*. They are manipulated directly with the hand¹⁹ of the puppeteer and have very few strings, sometimes only one if the puppet is only a mute player in the scene. We know nothing about the origins of the *kāṭh-putlī* theatre (Bharucha 2003: 199). We can only suppose that, just as in *khyāl*, the stories are not far removed from the oral traditions of Rājasthān. This supposition is confirmed by the story narrated by the puppeteers. The artists working in this profession are called *putlīvālā*.²⁰ During the time of the Mughal rulers (in some stories Akbar, Śāh Jahān or Aurangzeb appear), Rājasthānī puppeteers petitioned the emperor for a ruling on who was entitled to perform *kāṭh-putlī*. This arose from a dispute between local artists and puppeteers who claimed to be Persian²¹ and they alleged that their puppets were immortal and would live for ever. The local Rājasthānī people took this challenge to the emperor and asked him to have all the puppets of both groups thrown into a well and the artists whose puppets survived would be the only artists allowed to perform *kāṭh-putlī*. The Rājasthānī puppets won the contest as their puppets were made from wood while those belonging to the Persians were made from *papier-mâché* and were immediately destroyed by contact with the water. The local puppeteers, however, were not as skilled as the Persian artists so they took instructions from them. In the 1960s, when Komal Kothārī was working on his research, the older puppeteers still paid to Delhi the yearly stipend owed to their Persian teachers (i.e. *khalifā*) for learning from them this tradition (Bharucha 2003: 199).

¹⁹ String brackets, such as those used by Western marionette manipulators, are not used in *kāṭh-putlī*.

²⁰ I.e. Rājasthānī puppeteers.

²¹ Bharucha 2003: 199. Komal Kothārī describes them as “so called Persian artists.” The fact of addressing somebody in India – Persian – does not need to mean that such a person originally comes from Persia. This appellation designates rather the religious identity of these artists. Because these artists were present in the court of the Mughal emperor and they were called Persian, we can only describe them in a general way as Muslims.

This story lends credence to the relatively new origins of *kāṭh-putlī*, albeit it has not been thoroughly researched. Nevertheless, even if this tradition was created as a result of a Mughal court performance, it was spread in Rājasthān by folk artists of the Nāt caste who are now associated mainly with acrobats and dancers rather than puppeteers.

As in the past, *kāṭh-putlī* puppeteers come from the Nāgaur district (the central part of Rājasthān including Mārvār) (Bharucha 2003: 208; Ahuja 1980: 156; Kallā 2000: 104). The most important and most often performed of these puppet plays is *Amar Simh Rāṭhaur*, named after the Rājput nobleman, heir to the area of Rājasthān called Nāgaur during the reign of the emperor Śāh Jahān to whom he was directly subordinated.²² This evidence confirms the genesis of *kāṭh-putlī* and explains the main repertory and tradition of its origin. However, the performance mode also indicates that the tradition itself, was never wholly developed. Given the technical limitations of the mode, it was never possible to provide total animation of the puppets. They are mute and there is no dialogue. One man, seated to the side of the puppet stage, narrates the action of the play to the accompaniment of a drum. Sometimes there are also musicians. There is no attempt to imitate the voices of the characters in the play. This is a pure narrative of the action performed by the puppets on the stage and the first person is never used by the narrator, for example, “Amar Simh says...,” and “Salāvāt Khān answers,” etc. Consequently, aesthetic distance between the narrative and the actions of the puppets on the stage is intensified. Amar Simh, for example, is not represented as an individual in the plays nor is his court as a group (e.g. *Amar kī tasvīr*) (Bharucha 2003: 205). Due to the highly contextual sensitiveness of Indian culture, the actions in the play are very simple and rudimentary. The entire story of the play is not related because it is not needed by the audience who, it is assumed, know all the details themselves.

The performance is mainly a display of manipulations of the marionettes doing tricks, such as dancing, juggling, or a trapeze act. Also, the chopping off of heads and the disemboweling of bodies through the use of strings unravelled from a puppet's body can be a part of the performance (Bharucha 2003: 202-207). The manipulations of the puppets are the main feature of the performance, with little regard for character. *Kāṭh-putlī* is performed at night on a very simple stage with draw-curtains (Bharucha 2003: 215; Kallā 2000: 103). The puppeteers are itinerant players who travel from one village to another. When they arrive at a performance site, they walk through the village with puppets on their hands to advertise the evening performance. This type of theatre is very popular in Rājasthānī villages.

These puppeteers also give performances of *Ḍholā-Mārū*. Considering what has just been described, one can imagine how they are performed. *Ḍholā* and *Mārū* would be represented by two puppets sitting on a camel. The puppeteer would move the puppets in a way to imitate travelling on a camel. This is the most popular way *Ḍholā* and *Mārū* are represented in Rājasthānī paintings and this simple form is the most characteristic of it as well. In the materials about *Ḍholā-Mārū* performance available to the present

²² He was actually banned from Nāgaur by his father and went to serve in the emperor's army where he distinguished himself as a warrior.

writer, there is one newer version that includes an episode of *Ḍholā* riding through the falling gate, while running away from his second wife, the witch *Revā*.²³

Is the fact of the presence in *kāṭh-putlī* theatre of a new, modified scenario, a proof that the puppet tradition is still young? Or, perhaps, due to its colourful aspect, is this version more amenable to puppet theatre performance? Also, is it perhaps that because the puppeteers of *kāṭh-putlī* are one of the most itinerant of Rājasthānī performers (Bharucha 2003: 214), they picked it up from Braj? Given the present evidence, it is difficult to answer these questions.

Svāṅg – the art of imitation

Svāṅg is a type of Rājasthānī theatre that involves changing costumes and imitating more than one character. It is a popular entertainment for wedding celebrations and *Holī* (Vatsyayan 1980: 159). There are professionals of the Bahurūpiyā caste²⁴ who play *svāṅg* but they are not our concern here. We shall discuss *svāṅg* as it is played by ordinary people on special occasions. During the time that precedes the wedding as well as during the ceremony, a woman may dress as a man by making a turban from her sari or other wearing apparel. Dressed this way, she may sing songs of an erotic or salacious nature. Also, one woman may play a man and another play a woman and they perform a mock wedding ceremony. In some regions of Rājasthān, one may see a prostitute dressed as a man perform a special dance for the occasion (Kallā 2000: 93-94).

Svāṅg is another type of theatre performed during *Holī*. It is usually performed on the 4th or 5th day before and after *Holī*. There are other types of *svāṅg* performed in Udaypur and Mevār in South Rājasthān. In this region, it was also very popular to perform *Ḍholā-Mārū*. It was performed by Muslim *Sāḍīvāls* (Kallā 2000: 93-94) as well, demonstrating the popularity of this celebration beyond the limits of Hindu society. A parade passed through the city. A man dressed as Prince *Ḍholā* seated on a camel was followed by two *Mārū*(s). This is probably an allusion to Prince *Ḍholā*'s two wives, *Mārū* and *Mālvanī*, from the *Mārvārī* story. The women had bottles of coloured water in their hands. This procession went to the palace to pay tribute to the *rājā*. To celebrate *Holī* in Jodhpur, people with sticks of wood in their hands did a round dance, or dance in a circle, called *daṇḍiyā ger*. Apart from cross-gender dressing people wear costumes to impersonate Rājasthānī heroes, including *Ḍholā* and *Mārū* (Kallā 2000: 95; Vatsyayan 1980: 159). The presence of *Ḍholā* and *Mārū* in *svāṅg* demonstrates an even wider social context of the story.

It was common among Hindus to dress as their gods for religious celebrations. Doing so, they became closer to the sacred aspects of the celebrations. They would also dress as their favourite secular heroes, such as *Ḍholā* and *Mārū*.

²³ <http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/moynihan/programs/sac/Outreach/rajasthan/dhola.asp>.

²⁴ For more information about Bahurūpiyā, see Emigh et al. 2001: 278-313.

Conclusions

Our evidence clearly indicates that *Dholā-Mārū* developed on many levels and in diverse circumstances as is demonstrated by the various examples we have given. This is evident by the fact that it was the most popular folk-story in Rājasthān. This is also a very interesting example of how one traditional story can become diversified into many different performance modes, ranging from *khyāl* and *kāṭh-putlī* to *Holī* celebrations, and still remain a vital social text for more than a few hundred years.

Since the *Dholā-Mārū* story is deeply rooted in folklore and oral traditions, it easily passes from one performance mode to another. Neither is the story, itself, consistent in its various modes of expression. *Dholā-Mārū* is a love story, universal in its social contexts, not limited to either religion or region. One version relates that the story of *Dholā-Mārū* was given to the emperor, Akbar, who was delighted by it (Rāmsinh et al. 1995: 6-7). Muslims not only know the story, but use it to perform, e.g. *svāṅg*. Dressing as a character is not only a theatrical phenomenon, but common for social events. According to the theory of M. Bakhtin, one may conclude that the celebration is not just an accidental moment during which one can become *Dholā* or *Mārū*; it is a time for inverting the social order, or a “carnivalisation” of the performance event.²⁵ During this time one may change gender or become an incarnation of a favourite hero. One becomes someone else for just an instant. In this example, love overcomes all in the symbolic representation of *Dholā* and *Mārū* as the perfect lovers. The fact of its social origin makes the story closer to the people who use it in their local dramatic representations. The diversity of the *Dholā-Mārū* stories adds to the already rich culture of Rājasthān. It is not only a strong feature of Rājasthānī culture but is also expanding beyond its original boundaries and continues to evolve as a vital social text.

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²⁵ For more information about carnivalisation, see Bakhtin 1984.

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