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Women, Music, and Migration between India and Trinidad

TEJASWINI NIRANJANA

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unexpected benefits for those intervening in issues of modernity and gender in Trinidad, providing for analysts a different purchase on the production of normative femininities and their complicity with discourses of racial difference.

And what of Trinidad? A popular calypso (some called it a soca because of its lilting rhythms; others called it a chutney because of its extensive use of Hindi) sung during Carnival 1996—the first Carnival after the political victory of the East Indian-dominated United National Congress over the African-led People's National Movement in late 1995—was "Jahaji Bhai" by Brother Marvin, an Afro-Trinidadian who also claimed some Indian ancestry. The music for the song, drawing heavily on East Indian rhythms and instruments, was arranged by two other "Africans," Carlyle "Juice Man" Roberts and C. B. Henderson. The song dramatized the notion of fictive kin, or "brotherhood of the boat" (in Hindi, *jahaji bhai* means "ship brother") invented by the indentured laborers who formed communities of friendship on the long journey from India across what they called *kala pani*, or the black waters. The burden of Brother Marvin's song was to demonstrate that Indians and Africans shared, in a metaphorical sense, an ancestry; that "Ramlogan, Basdeo, Prakash [East Indian men's names] and I / Jahaji bhai." Although the calypsonian came under sharp criticism from many Africans and Indians (see chapter 4), the song was also appreciated by many across political boundaries. But some people, even while applauding Brother Marvin's attempt to envisage a common past and future for the two major racial groups in Trinidad, asked the question: "Where are the women in Brother Marvin's story? Were there no *jahaji behen* (ship sisters)?"

The intention in relating this concern is not to suggest "adding women" to an already well-defined story. Rather, it is to underscore that projections of racial harmony in Trinidadian popular music seem to rest on the possibility of men's friendships across race, whether in Brother Marvin's song or in "Sundar," a tribute to the chutney singer Sundar Popo, by Black Stalin's (Leroy Calliste) or Black Stalin's and Rikki Jai's "My Brother My Friend." When East Indian women take the initiative to create new music out of the combination of African and Indian rhythms, their effort is seen as a threat or disruption to relationships between the races. In the next chapter, I investigate the controversy around chutney-soca and its diva Drupatee Ramgoonai, taking the discussion from indentured women and nationalism in India to the descendants of those women and their invocation by Indian nationalism in Trinidad.

THREE

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"Take a Little Chutney, Add a Touch of Kaiso": The Body in the Voice

"Going to Trinidad? You must check out those Indian women there dancing up a storm." It was in Kingston, Jamaica, in 1994. My new friends, Hubert Devonish from Guyana and Pat Mohammed from Trinidad, were telling me what I might find on my visit to the eastern Caribbean. I gathered that the dancing women constituted an early-1990s phenomenon that had enraged East Indian men in Trinidad. At the time I had no way of knowing why this should be a scandal, working as I was with a notion that all Caribbean people regardless of ethnic origin loved music and dance. "You don't understand," said my friends. "There are only women there, and even the singer is often a woman." During my short stay in Jamaica, I had been exposed to the controversies around dancehall music, where at downtown venues the mostly female dancers "carried on bad" in their responses to the male singers. I wondered if something like this was happening in Trinidad to arouse

the ire of middle-class moralists. Apart from this fuzzy notion that the chutney singing represented in some sense a women's space, I did not know anything about the music, its lyrics, or its performers when I first went to Trinidad.

My main purpose in going to Trinidad was to witness the Carnival that has assumed such mythical proportions in Caribbean literature, in calypso music, and in the tourist trade. I went to watch the incredible spectacle with a couple of new acquaintances, an "Indian" woman and an "African" man. Dazzled by the brilliant colors and costumes, my ears filled with the thumping Road March music, I had no eyes for the differences between the "mas" players who were "wining" down the streets.[1] In hindsight, one could tell that there were not many "Indians" out there, but this did not seem strange, since I had mistakenly assumed that they were in the minority in Trinidad. There in the Carnival music, and in the pageant of winners I attended a few days later, I looked out for the chutney I'd been told about, but none of the performances that year sounded even remotely Indian (assuming I knew what that was).

Later, while questioning the women at the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action, I acquired some information about what they told me was called "chutney-soca" and about the controversies surrounding the singer Drupatee Ramgoonai in particular and the phenomenon of chutney dancing in general. I listened to an East Indian male academic's fulminations about the denigration of Indian history and culture; about how Africans in Trinidad were trying to insult the notion of the grandmother—"Nani"—which all Indians held in love and veneration, by encouraging Indian women to sing about their "nani," which in Trinidadian street slang was another word for vagina (punanny). I remember thinking fleetingly that Indian women in India were highly unlikely to sing in public about vaginas and that "Indians" in the Caribbean clearly occupied a different expressive register. A Trinidad Indian woman who had studied in Europe and had a classmate from India mentioned in passing, but with some puzzlement, that her friend had been very different from her in terms of her sexual choices and constraints. The Indian women I saw on the streets of Tunapuna, St. Augustine, and Port-of-Spain seemed different from me, although I couldn't immediately grasp why that was so. Clothing, I thought: In India, one would not see so many older women in "Western" clothes. But it was more than clothing that constituted the difference. A complicated semiotic of facial features, complexion, movement, and speech positioned the Trinidad Indian woman as unlike her counterpart in India. These were not things obvious at first glance; they insinuated themselves gradually into the naïve gaze of the amateur ethnographer.

My hosts sent me to Rhyner's record shop in Port of Spain to buy Trinidadian music. After I had stocked up on all the Carnival hits of the year, I asked for chutney and was shown an audiocassette of Drupatee's songs, including a number called "Lick Down Mih Nani." Guessing that this song was at the center of the chutney controversy, I purchased the tape immediately, although I didn't get to listen to it until I returned to Kingston some days later. What, then, might have drawn me to chutney-soca even before I had heard the music? An anticipated sense, I suppose, of its outrageousness, its sauciness and irreverence. An awareness of the controversy, in which so many women's groups had participated. The possible significance of the form and expressive space for African-Indian relations configured differently than the persistent rumblings about racial tension seemed to suggest.

When I bought the audiotape, I had no idea that most chutney singers were men, although as I found out much later there were many more female singers in chutney than in the African-dominated calypso. I listened to "Lick Down Mih Nani"—to Drupatee's rich, exuberant voice reaching out into the audience, a voice filled to the brim and spilling over; the gaiety of her intonation; the sheer wickedness and humor of both her words and the mode of rendering the song; the infectious rhythms; the distinctive Trinidadian dialect and lilting accent; the musical beat remembered from Carnival and post-Carnival performances (the soca beat, here combined with "Indian" drums). Clearly here was a woman who had what African Americans would call "attitude." The thought of hundreds of women dancing to this irreverent song, an ostensible lament for a grandmother's accident that conveyed in its tone a totally different meaning, was a delightful one. I had a vague idea then that the dancers might be a bunch of teenagers, trendily dressed and middle class, somewhat like the young women students I had seen on the University of the West Indies' St. Augustine campus.

I had also brought from Trinidad a copy of the slim book *Women in Calypso*, with profiles of a handful of Trinidadian singers, including Drupatee.[2] Seeing a picture of her on stage, dressed in shimmering green, I remember asking myself: "What on earth is she wearing? What kind of clothes are those?" Diaphanous, shiny, sequined, and "Oriental," the costume did not seem like anything that a leading singer in contemporary India would wear. On a subsequent visit to Trinidad, I saw young Indo-Trinidadian women in simi-

lar outfits at the Indo-Caribbean Music Awards function, the grandest and most formal cultural occasion I ever witnessed there. It seemed to signal an attempt to connect not to an alien present-day India but to a history that was now insistently being inscribed on the dominant "Creole" imaginary. In the late nineteenth century, furious letters to the editor had complained about the Indians' supposed fondness for their native clothing. As the historian G. I. M. Tikasingh puts it, "One writer advocated fines to compel the Indians to wear 'Creole clothing' rather than 'the wild indecent costumes of the East.' "[3]

This chapter and the next two analyze the invocation of the "Indian" in Trinidadian popular music in the context of debates about sexuality and cultural identity. The music ranges from what has come generically to be called "chutney" (including folk-derived Bhojpuri lyrics and rhythms at the one end and Trinidadian English and Afro-Caribbean beats at the other) to calypso and soca. East Indian women, whether as performers or as narrativized characters, are central to this music, with their centrality being commented on, criticized, or celebrated by the various interlocutors in the discussion.

Tracking Chutney-Soca

Chutney-soca eludes definition, partly because there are so many different varieties of song called "chutney" in Trinidad. Especially in the aftermath of the widespread success of chutney-soca in the 1990s, any Caribbean music with even a hint of "Indian" rhythm or a couple of Hindi words is likely to be labeled chutney, a tendency about which many of the practitioners of the music complain.

Calypso, which emerged in the late nineteenth century as a mode of social-political commentary, is one of the most popular musical genres, making its seasonal appearance around Carnival. Sung, with a few rare exceptions, solely by Afro-Trinidadian men, calypso engages in explicit discussion of current, often highly local, politics. However, there has always been an important strand in calypso that comments on relations between women and men. Several Afro-Trinidadian calypsonians have also sung about East Indian women, who appear in the songs as exotic objects of desire.[4]

In the 1980s, a new form called soul-calypso, or soca, emerged, claimed by its inventor Lord Shorty (later Ras Shorty I) to have its inspiration in East Indian music. Shorty's songs "Indrani" (1973) and "Kelogee Bulbul" (1974) provided the genesis of the soca, marking clearly the Indian influence on calypso.[5] In "Kelogee Bulbul," East Indian instruments like mandolin and dholak are used. The Trinidadian sitarist Mungal Patasar, an important experimenter with fusion music, provided this background:

> Soca really originated from chutney. Ras Shorty I, who is the father of the soca, was singing calypso, and he went to practice in the bandroom, and the music arranger was playing reggae, and when he asked him how come you playing reggae, because there is a little thing about reggae and calypso, reggae taking over in Trinidad, although reggae originated in Trinidad. That much I can tell you, if you study the beat. Anyway, the guy say "Calypso is dead now, man, let's go for reggae." And that hurt him [Shorty] in a way, so he went back home. But he grew up amongst Indians, and he had a neighbor who used to play dholak and dhantal and ting. And he called me—that time I had a band called Sangam Sangeet in La Romain—and there's a drummer named Robin Ramjitsingh who used to play dholak, and he called me and asked for a dholak player, and I sent Robin, and he did his first recording with Robin Ramjitsingh. The bass guitarist was trying to imitate the dhol, the left side of the dholak, and *in trying to do that they created the beat with the bass guitar* out of the dholak, and that's what they call "soca." The word was "so-k-a-h," the soul of calypso and an Indian beat. They used the word "kah" because it is the first letter of the Indian alphabet. . . . The Africans try to say it is "soul" and "calypso." But it is not that. It is soul of calypso and Indian chutney. That would be the definition of soca.[6]

Shorty, too, spelled the name "s-o-k-a-h" to indicate the East Indian influence, but the spelling did not stick, and other singers and those who wrote about music—disinclined to mark the East Indian input and suggesting instead a derivation from the African American musical genre soul and from calypso—assigned the new form the name "soca." Soca is different from calypso in that it is usually seen as music to dance to and for the most part, and unlike one of the key strands of calypso, does not talk about the political situation.[7]

An important popularizer of chutney was Sundar Popo. He was one of the early singers to use a good deal of Trinidadian English along with some Hindi, a trend reflected in some of the folk music derived from wedding songs sung by East Indian women in Trinidad. One of the first of these

East Indian music group. Collection of Eric Scott Henderson.

women's songs sung in English went: "Rosie gal, whey [what] you cookin for dinner / She makin' *choka*, it ent [doesn't] have no salt." (*Choka* is any mashed cooked vegetable, like tomato or eggplant, with seasoning.) Already we see the suggestive connection made by the singer between cooking and eating and sexuality, a theme prevalent in much of the subsequent music, as well.

Confusion often reigns in the media and public perception about chutney. There are some who argue that soca comes out of chutney, while others decry what they see as the movement of chutney (according to them, a purely East Indian form) toward soca (a Creole form). Those who condemn chutney—and, in particular, chutney-soca—often seem to be criticizing the lyrics and the behavior of the audience, not the form of the music itself. One can speculate, however, that the form is also contentious, even when the objection appears to sideline this issue. I return to this point later in the chapter.

Chutney draws from the folk forms brought to Trinidad by the indentured laborers from rural northern India. It is related especially to the ceremonies of the *maticore* or *matti korwah* (which refers to the act of "digging dirt" and burying betel leaves with flowers and *sindur*, or auspicious vermillion powder, for the gods on the Friday night before the wedding; most East Indian Hindu weddings in Trinidad are held over an entire weekend); the cooking night ("farewell night" before the actual wedding); and *laawa* (Sunday morning of the wedding; *laawa* is parched unpolished rice exchanged during the marriage ceremony). All of these were occasions for singing and dancing by women. The participants in the ceremonies were all female, except for the young boys who played the drums, and the songs and "performances" (like miming the sexual act with a prop like a melongene or aubergine) were known to be full of humor and sexual explicitness. The ostensible reason for this was to assist the sexual initiation of the bride. Contemporary chutney draws its melodic and textual inspiration from these ceremonial songs.[8]

One of the early pieces of scholarly writing on the topic seems to share the prejudices of the present-day East Indian urban middle class. In a thesis titled "Some Aspects of Hindu Folk Songs in Trinidad," Niala Maharaj makes the following observations:

> In all of the jokes there are overtones of sexuality and some often come close to being obscene. But a certain laxity in these matters (as far as conversation is concerned) prevails on this occasion which is normally absent from Hindu family life. [Here the reference is to the ritual teasing of the bridegroom by the bride's female relatives.] These intrusions of the sexual element occur at several points during the drawn-out wedding preparations especially at all-female rituals such as the "matte (dirt or soil) korwah" and "going for kwah" occasions, where normally quite reticent women, stimulated by the drums (and sometimes alcohol) depict the sex act in dance and sing sometimes quite obscene songs. But this sexuality is of such a customary and institutionalised nature that modesty is at these times at a minimum and different standards of behaviour obtain.[9]

Another young scholar points out that, after the rituals for the bride and bride's mother were completed, women "erupted into erotic folksongs, accompanying themselves on the dholak." Old lyrics were sung with relish: "Boom, boom tack, tack, doh bite me in meh pomerack," or "Higher the mountain cooler the breeze / Sweeter the lover, tighter the squeeze."[10] A

Hindu wedding. Surabhi Sharma/R. V. Ramani.

former plantation worker now in her eighties could remember lyrics that went: "I beatin' my drum / An' singin' mih song / De only ting missin' / Is a bottle of rum."[11] Other lyrics could be in Bhojpuri Hindi, such as the following: "Deeya mange batti aur batti mange tel / Ankhan mange nsendya jebanwa mange khail (The lamp wants the wick and the wick wants the oil / Man's eyes are heavy and want to sleep but the breasts need fondling)."[12] A seventy-year-old woman, well known for her singing prowess at weddings, gave the example of the song "Mor laawa tor laawa eke me milaawe" (roughly translated as mixing together the parched rice from the girl's side and the boy's side), which is a "bad song" with "real cuss": "When yuh have your drum, and shak shak, and two drinks inside, yuh can really sing."[13]

Lyrics similar to those made famous by the controversial "Marajhin" series by Mighty Sparrow (Slinger Francisco) were also first sung at weddings:

> Gimme the pepper
> Make sure the *sada* [plain roti] have plenty *choka* [hot oil seasoning]
> Put *ghee* [clarified butter] and *jeera* [cumin] and make it sweeter
> Then ah want you leggo fire in meh *kutiya*.[14]

Mungal Patasar says that the wedding and childbirth lyrics come from the songs of the *hijras* (eunuchs) who in India would have sung on these occasions. These songs later came to be known as chutneys:

> When you make a mango chutney, you grind mango and you put dhania leaf in it and plenty pepper and garlic and that makes the spicy thing we are talking about. Chutney only means masala, and the word originated only twenty or thirty years back. My father was a singer, and I recall they used to sing whole night for a wedding. And when it's about one-two in the morning, and the people started feeling sleepy, they would sing what is called a breakaway. Meaning breakaway from the classical traditional sort of songs, and that also became chutney later.[15]

The eminent Trinidadian musicologist Narsaloo Ramaya writes that in the 1940s, women sang *sohar* after a child was born. Sohar songs were like lullabies, "delivered in a slow tempo with measured beats and rhythms." The sohars were followed by "spicy" songs, called chutney because of their faster beat.[16] Helen Myers, an ethnomusicologist who did fieldwork in the Trinidadian village of Felicity, comments that, according to her informants, "hot" songs, chutney, and lachari have a "nice taste."[17] A contrast to these

Hindu wedding. Surabhi Sharma/R. V. Ramani.

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"bawdy and abusive songs known in different districts [of India] as lachari, lachi, nakata, and jhumar" are the *byah ke git*, "the serious wedding songs, relating events from the [Hindu epic] Ramayan." On all three days at different times there were dancing and lachari. On the Sunday afternoon, there was even an exclusive Ladies' Party.[18] It would be difficult to reinscribe here in an unproblematic way the ethnographic present tense that is found throughout Myers's text on "Hindu music" in Felicity.[19] The space that chutney music now occupies is considerably different from the private and domestic sphere of the wedding, and we need other kinds of information to understand the larger context in which the phenomenon of chutney-soca emerged.[20]

The broader musical and performative context of chutney-soca would have to include the calypso, Carnival, Hosay (drumming and dancing at the Muslim festival of Muharram or Hosein), Phagwa (dancing at the Hindu spring festival of Holi or Phagwa), Mastana Bahar (the East Indian talent show and TV program launched in the 1970s), "Indian dance" (dance dramas based on mythological themes and solo performances inspired by Hindi cinema), Indian and Hindi films (which have been showing in Trinidad since the 1930s and are immensely popular among East Indians), Hindi film music (which is immensely popular over the radio and has influenced some aspects of chutney singing and calypso in terms of both melody and instrumentation), Ramlila (the performance in the weeks before Divali, the festival of lights, showing the victory of good over evil, Rama over Ravana, from the Indian epic the Ramayana), and Indian tent singing (presumably inspired by the Carnival-season tents for calypso music).

In the early twentieth century, East Indians began to settle in areas like Barataria and St. James and some parts of Port of Spain that traditionally were controlled by French Creoles and their ex-slaves. This was the beginning of their exposure to urban cultural forms after many decades in the canefields of rural Trinidad. While calypso and steel band dominated the national cultural stage and provided entertainment to all Trinidadians, East Indians also had access to other kinds of performance, including "Indian" dance drama ("film dance" in which the most famous names were Alice Jan and Champa Devi until the 1950s), instrumental music played on the dholak, dhantal, harmonium, and, later, the sitar; and, of course, the drumming and dancing involved in various Hindu and Muslim festivals and religious rituals such as weddings.[21] The constant stream of popular Hindi films from India from 1935 on was seen as one kind of inspiration for the emergence of distinctly Trinidadian East Indian cultural forms, although not all East Indians think of the films as a positive influence. There was also local classical Indian dance and music, many of whose proponents had training in India, sometimes under scholarships from the post-Independence government of India.

Popular East Indian music that was not confined to the domestic space began to take shape with the advent of the widely appreciated *Mastana Bahar*, started in August 1970 by the Mohammed brothers, well-known promoters and impresarios, as a half-hour TV show on Trinidad and Tobago Television. The popularization of the name "chutney" is in fact attributed to Moean Mohammed by singers such as James Ramsewak and Cecil Funrose. The show encouraged local compositions, and through the 1970s Indo-Trinidadian folk songs with English lyrics became common.[22] But in 1971, only five of the eighty-eight compositions at a *Mastana Bahar* audition were local; the others were renditions of Hindi film songs. This was the situation in which Sundar Popo began to make his mark. Popo's music had precursors in Suriname, where the singer Dropati had released her 1968 album *Let's Sing and Dance*, with songs like "Gowri Puja (special worship for a Hindu goddess)" and "Laawa" (a reference to the parched-rice ceremony at a wedding), to major popular acclaim. Dropati's album followed the 1958 release of her compatriot Ramdeo Chaitoe's *King of Suriname*. Both albums had many religious songs, accompanied by the strong beat of the dhantal and dholak, but, as commentators suggest, their wide circulation fueled the need for popular nonreligious music.[23] Although chutney shows became widespread only in the 1980s, chutney as a public dance phenomenon might well go back to 1963, when the Mohammed brothers organized well-attended performances by Drupati and Chaitoe, whose fast-paced songs became popular in Trinidad.[24] Sundar's first album was *Nani Nana* (1969); on it, he used instruments like the dholak, dhantal, guitar, and synthesizer to back catchy lyrics such as, "Nana smoking tobacco and Nanee cigarette / The rain started falling the both of them got wet / Nanee tell meh Nana old man ah feelin cold / Give me some white one to warm up me soul." The song, which drew on local chutney as well as Indian film music, became a big hit in Guyana and Trinidad, and Sundar Popo began to be called the King of Chutney.[25]

The phenomenon represented by Sundar would not have been possible without Harry Mahabir, leader of the British West Indian Airways National Indian Orchestra.[26] Using Western musical instruments, Mahabir tried to play melodies that were recognizably non-Western. Through the *Mastana*

Bahar TV *show, Mahabir extended his support not just to Popo but to many other East Indian singers. Along with the Western instruments, notes the journalist and music critic Kim Johnson, there was "some characteristically Indian instrumentation, tassas or a harmonium. Lyrics, even when in English, were sung in the nasal way of Hindi phrasing. Certain melodic lines had a distinctive Indian flavour, but even when they didn't they could be played with an Indian lilt." Johnson does not elaborate what "Indian flavour" and "Indian lilt" refer to.[27] These broad descriptions seem to have a specific reference in Trinidad and are used by East Indians and others.*

Popo's songs, some of them his own compositions, were in Trinidadian English and in Bhojpuri Hindi; he recorded "traditional" wedding songs and several others about Indo-Caribbean life. Sharda Patasar, also a musician, points out that "generally any man singing chatti or sohar songs [post-childbirth, on the sixth day and the twelfth day] together with the women was branded as leaning towards homosexuality. It is however interesting to note that it is from these very tunes that the present Chutney songs have evolved and are sung by men in a public forum. . . . As children, boys learnt these songs which they later gave expression to in public. Sundar Popo said that he was unable to compete with the classical singers so whenever he got the opportunity he would sing these songs. He was chastised by the classical singers who called him, amongst other things, 'dog.' He learnt these songs from his mother and mausie *(mother's sister)."[28]*

Another important input for the formation of chutney and chutney-soca came from the Indian singer Kanchan and her husband, Babla, the well-known arranger of film music from Bombay. Having first visited Trinidad with the renowned Indian film playback singer Mukesh in 1967, Babla returned to Trinidad to do music shows with his singer wife Kanchan and his orchestra. Introduced to Sundar Popo's chutney songs, Kanchan and Babla started doing versions with added instrumentation and melodies from the musical circuit of Hindi films, generally smoothening out Popo's "folk" style.[29] Kanchan sang "Kuch Gadbad Hai" in calypso style in the early '80s, using the calypsonian Arrow's hit song "Hot Hot Hot," a song that became popular in India, as well. Babla and Kanchan remained frequent visitors to the Caribbean and gained fame as chutney performers across the Caribbean diaspora. Their remixes (compiled, along with a few of Babla's own compositions, in something like fifteen albums) became so well known as "Caribbean" songs that most audiences did not know the duo were actually from India.[30] The Revue and Sparrow's Young Brigade calypso tents tried to employ Kanchan to sing with them during the 1985 Carnival season, but not until Drupatee Ramgoonai's career took off did Trinidadians see an "Indian" woman on the Carnival stage.[31] By the end of the 1980s, several East Indians, including the versatile Drupatee, began to perform on stage their own blend of Indian folk music and soca, which has come to be known as chutney-soca. (Drupatee's 1989 hit, "Indian Soca," contained these lyrics: "Sounding sweeter / Hotter than a chulha / Rhythm from Africa and India / Blend together in a perfect mixture.")

One way to trace the growth of chutney-soca is to see how it derives from chutney; another is to look at the history of its relationship to calypso and soca. According to both Gordon Rohlehr and Zeno Obi Constance, calypso has had a long history of the incorporation of "Indian" elements. Winsford "Joker" Devine composed the "Marajhin" series for Mighty Sparrow, with songs that are heavily backed by Indian melodies and instruments. Devine also composed "Indian Party" for K. D. in 1981. Then there were ghost-writers such as the Indo-Trinidadian Mohan Paltoo, mentioned earlier, who wrote hits such as "Raja Rani (King and Queen)" in 1986 for Baron and "Roti and Dhalpouri" in 1989 and "Bombay Ladkee (Bombay Girl)" in 1991 for Sugar Aloes. The final ingredient, says Constance, was khimta, *or chutney, "into the already douglarised soca," referring to the Indian-African mix, as in Drupatee's "Chutney Soca" in 1987.[32] Another beginning for chutney-soca is in the recordings of tent singing by Windsor Records in the 1970s. Albums such as "Tent Singing by Abdool 'Kush' Razack," "Tent Singing by Yusuf Khan," and "Tent Singing by Sharm Yankarran" later became a kind of Indian soca.[33]*

In the 1980s, chutney came to be performed in public, sometimes with five thousand or ten thousand people present, both men and women, and with many of the women dancing to the music.[34] That this sort of spectacle did not always obtain is evident from the account of Hardeo Ramsingh of the village of Felicity, who writes that until the 1980s, public dancing by women in Felicity was taboo despite the exploits of performers like Champa Devi, Baby Susan, and Baby Sandra. In the period from the 1880s to the 1960s, says Ramsingh, there were male drama, singing, and dancing troupes that performed at weddings, Ramleelas, Hosays, and Carnivals. There were also "court" dances ("Sarwar/Neer type") and caste dances, such as Ahir, Kaharwaa, Dhobi, but none of these had female dancers.[35] In the mid-1980s, the Mohammed brothers began to organize weekend chutney dancing "fetes" that attracted hundreds of participants, including a large

number of women. Once a segregated dance form, chutney now became a public event. Instead of a performance watched by an audience, like the older forms of "Indian dance," chutney turned dancing into a public participatory form for both men and women. "Long time we used to have real Indian singing, with all these old ladies singing, but now nobody don' sing dem kind of song again. The younger gyuls ain't wan' to learn to sing, dem only wan' to go and jump up," said Miriam Gajadhar, who still sings chutney at weddings.[36] Drupatee Ramgoonai, the first female Indian singer in the calypso tents, became one of the most popular singers of chutney-soca. Like those of other well-known East Indian singers, her repertoire spans chutney, Hindi film music, and chutney-soca. Unlike them, but like her colleague Rikki Jai, Drupatee also sings calypso.

It has been suggested that after the Black Power Movement of the 1970s more space appeared for black women to sing calypso, the exposure of the "talent and beauty of black women" being upheld as part of the agenda of a wider political movement. After the advent of soca, the participation of women in calypso increased even more in the late '80s, with women of varied races finding the calypso arena more accessible. Women like Denyse Plummer, who is French Creole, and Drupatee Ramgoonai came onto the calypso stage for the first time. It is possible that soca, with its focus on danceable music, destabilizes the male and Afrocentric perspective from which calypso is usually composed and sung, thus making room onstage for other kinds of performance.

Drupatee had had a long singing career before she came to chutney-soca: "From small, I started singing. My mum used to play de drum, and sing those folk songs at weddings, and she used to tag along me."[37] Although she never took formal lessons in music ("it came natural to me"), she did work with Ustad James Ramsewak, who sang Indian "classical songs." At age twelve, Drupatee sang in school choirs and with religious groups at weddings and functions, as well as for Charleau Village in the Best Village competition, and she was a backup singer with Sundar Popo on prizewinning songs for the Indian Cultural Pageant and for *Mastana Bahar*. "If Sundar Popo asked me to do chorus, he knew I could sing," says Drupatee with some pride. The experience of working with Sundar helped her get used to being on stage. "It made me more show off myself," she says. She experimented with *parang* soca (soca with Latin American strains) in Harry Mahabir's orchestra. In 1983 and 1984, Drupatee won the competition at *Mastana Bahar*, the Indian Cultural Pageant, singing in chutney style. Referring to her mother and aunts who sang at weddings, Drupatee commented on the element of masquerade that goes into cooking-night frolic:

> She would be putting on hat, and big shirt and big pants. Only ladies used to be upstairs, and they used to have their singin' and their jokes. I never like how they used to dress up, I never never like how they do those things. I didn't like how my mother danced. I used to swell up mih mouth when I saw them. Now I know how they used to enjoy themselves, I now find myself with all de old ladies doing de same ting!

In 1987, Drupatee sang "Chutney Soca" and "Nau Jawaan," composed by Kenny Phillips, both of which brought her some success. "Chutney soca, yeh chutney soca / Is dat weh hav' mih winin' fe so," sang Drupatee. "Nani say don' party in Arima / I decide not to listen to her." With this song, Drupatee claims to have invented, and named, the genre chutney-soca, with the credit shared by her schoolteacher husband and her producer, Kenny Phillips.

Drupatee's first big hit was the single "Pepper Pepper" (1987), which presented the travails of an East Indian housewife seeking revenge on her husband for his lack of interest in their marriage. According to the song, the wife will solve her problem by putting pepper in her husband's food so that he will say, "Pepper, I want Paani [water] to cool meh, Pepper I want plenty Paani." The hapless husband screams:

> Pepper burning me—all in meh eye
> Pepper burning me—making me cry
> Pepper burning me—all in meh nose
> Pepper burning me—look take off meh clothes.

Although the song did very well on the soca charts, it brought Drupatee the criticism of conservative East Indians. In the following year, Drupatee sang "Mr. Bissessar, or Roll up the Tassa" (1988), composed by Wayne MacDonald, which reached the top position on the soca charts in "every country in the English speaking Caribbean, from Antigua to Guyana" and repeated the success in the United States, Canada, and England.[38] The song enabled Drupatee to become the first East Indian soca best-seller. She was also voted Top Female Recording Artiste of the Year in 1988.[39] When she was young, Drupatee watched the Carnival competitions on television and told herself

Drupatee Ramgoonai in concert. Surabhi Sharma/R. V. Ramani.

that she would be singing there one day. Although she did not participate in the contests until much later, she became a regular performer in the Carnival calypso tents. "I have my biggest audiences in Port of Spain—all mix-up people. All de Negro, all de African people acceptin' me. The people really really love me. They like how I does move."[40]

Curiously, Drupatee has always been a central target in the attacks on chutney-soca, although she doesn't compose the music or write the lyrics to the songs she performs. The attacks may indeed be associated with her role in performing these songs, and with her exuberant performing style, which includes dancing to her own music. The last section of this chapter will propose a hypothesis that attempts to account for Drupatee's success as well as the outrage she has provoked.

"Lick Down Mih Nani, or Careless Driver" (1988), the double meanings of whose central term, "Nani" (grandmother and vagina), has scandalized some East Indians, also plays on the term "lick," which can mean both to give a blow or beating and to lick with the tongue.[41] The ballad-like narrative tells of a grandmother's accident at the hands of the careless driver of a maxi-taxi, the common mode of public transport in Trinidad:

> The driver was ruthless and drivin too hard
> He bounced down mih nani right so in she yard.

While the main text of the song relates the details of the accident in gruesome detail (grandmother's leg was broken, she's now in a coma, etc.), the refrain, sung by the female chorus, is fast-paced and almost joyous:

> I-man lick up mi nani
> I-man lick up mi nani oi
> I-man lick up mi nani
> I-man lick up mi nani oi.

Adding to the suggestiveness of the refrain is the repeated call to the protagonist's "neighba": "Neighba come and see what he do to me nani"; "Neighba you ent see [haven't seen] what he do to meh nani"; "Neighba you ent see what e [his] maxi do to she." The sexualization of the older woman draws on an established tradition in the calypso, a precursor to Nani's being Lord Shorty's insatiable old East Indian woman in "Indrani" (1973). The song ends with the whole town hearing about Nani's accident:

> All over town
> De talk around
> Nani get jam
> From maxi man.[42]

Drupatee's manager, Simone Ragoonanan, has talked about the double meanings in chutney and chutney-soca. She says that, because Trinidadians don't speak Hindi or Bhojpuri, "most of the people . . . don't have a clue what's in the song; but when they hear it in English they get mad," suggesting that "Nani" was not very different from the cooking-night songs. Drupatee herself insists laughingly that the phrase is "lick down mih nani" (although the chorus sings "lick up mih nani"), but, she admits, "it's double meaning," adding that "the audience love that song."

Drupatee's other major hits, "Mr. Bissessar" (1988) and "Hotter Than a Chulha (Indian Soca)" (1989), both repeatedly draw the listener's attention to the unique and unprecedented form of the music. "Mr. Bissessar," a tribute to a tassa drum player, is a song about an actual "Indian" fete where a new kind of music is being played and sung. In addition to tassa, dholak, and tabla, the drum set or trap set was used for instrumentation. Here the chutney-soca stands as a performative; it is the very thing it sings about. There are frequent references to how the event is a "soca tassa jam":

Drupatee Ramgoonai at home, with manager and songwriter. Surabhi Sharma/R. V. Ramani.

A section from Debe
Join and start to play
Indian lavway
And dey jammin de soca, jammin de soca.

The dancers don't want the drummer to stop playing ("hear how people bawl / Bissessar don't stop at all"); everyone is wining and sweating ("Is first time they gettin dis kinda soca tassa"). As Drupatee herself puts it, "When the song came out, no one would stand still. Every [radio] station had it playin,' from the Indian to the English." Here, too, there is a Nani "getting on bad," and Phagwa (Holi or Spring Festival in the Hindu calendar), Hosay, and *laawa* all invoked as occasions for the tassa to be played.[43]

"Hotter Than a Chulha" declares that Indian soca is sweeter than conventional soca, since in this new form, "Rhythm from Africa and from India / Blend together in a perfect mixture."[44] Addressing her audience directly, Drupatee sings:

Cos we goin an interfere wid de soca
And we add a little curry and some jeera [cumin]

And you know you goin to like me wid dis style
It go send you wild.

From the hills of Laventille, the "African" slum near Port of Spain that gave birth to the steel band, the song continues, the skills of the pan man (steelband player) must "spill into Caroni," the rural sugarcane belt in Central Trinidad, which is predominantly East Indian:

For we goin and cause a fusion wid de culture
To widen we scope and vision for de future
And the only place to start is wid de art.

Why this seemingly innocuous call for racial harmony and cultural "fusion" should arouse so many different reactions will be discussed later.

In the brief period from 1995 to 1999, more chutney and chutney-soca artists and albums appeared than in all three of the previous decades combined. As the success of the new form spread rapidly throughout the Caribbean, it came to include several singers of African origin, with "Khirki Na Din" (1996),[45] performed by the Afro-Trinidadian singer Cecil Funrose, earning the second highest amount ever.[46] When the privately sponsored Chutney-Soca Monarch Competition was instituted in 1997, about a third of the audience and half the performers were non-East Indian.[47] Kim Johnson suggests that "the coupling of chutney and soca is like a dance, drifting now in the soca direction, now in the chutney direction, the partners none too skilled as yet. In the calypso season they move, in numbers such as Drupatie's [*sic*] 'Mr Bissessar,' towards the Afro-creole side of the floor (although that's changed since Sonny Mann's 'Lotay La'). As Rikki Jai sang in a tune which was, like 'Bissessar,' written by an Afro-Trini, 'Hold the Lata Mangeshkar, give me soca.' Other times, at the large chutney shows in Central and South [Trinidad], in the music of men such as Anand Yankaran and women such as Geeta Kawalsingh and Prematie Bheem, the movement drifts towards the Indian side."[48] Appreciation of chutney-soca, it would seem, includes the fact that it is *not* calypso or soca or even folk-style chutney. It reminds you of all these forms even as it disavows them.

The resemblance between chutney and soca is asserted by some Afro-Trinidadian singers, however—for example, by Delamo in "Soca Chutney" (1990), with its strong refrain about "the same jam":

When the synthesizer ramajay in the key—
The same jam . . .

And the dhantal man—the same jam
With the iron in hand—the same jam
An interesting similarity. . . .
People doh [don't] understand
Chutney and soca go hand in hand
You wine up and grind up ingredients
Like a chulha
But the spicy, spicy chutney
Is the same as soca.[49]

Another example is a song written by Ras Shorty I for Leon Coldero (no date available), with its injunction to "squeeze them tighter" and "wrap them up closer" sexualizing the creation of the new music:

Take the rhythm of India, then take some of Africa
Take the dhantal and tabla, with the fine bay
And dambala
Join them together, one with the other
And squeeze them a lil tighter,
Wrap them up closer, closer, closer and closer
And call that chutney soca.[50]

The acclaimed calypsonian and soca singer David Rudder is supposed to have remarked that saying "chutney-soca" was actually saying "double chutney," because soca is already chutney to begin with.

Chutney and Soca: Beat and Structure

There are differing interpretations of the musical structure of chutney. According to Helen Myers's informant Amar, the *kirtan*, or devotional songs on which the chutney beat is based, are short and repetitive, with a fast tempo, usually *kaharwa tal* (rhythmic cycle of eight beats divided into 4 + 4) or *dadra tal* (six beats divided into 3 + 3).[51] According to the musicologist Peter Manuel, the chowtal, which exemplifies East Indian folk song, relies more on "linear intricacies than on African-style simultaneous layerings of interlocking patterns. One common feature of Indian music is the use of 'additive' meters, often involving measures of odd-numbered beats." Chowtal uses such a rhythm, also common in North Indian styles and in Indo-Caribbean *tan* singing (*tan* is an idiosyncratic version of North Indian classical and semiclassical genres). "The *chowtal* meter," says Manuel, "can be regarded as in seven beats, divided into three plus four (hence the term *additive*). You can get the feel of it by counting 'one-two-three-one-two-three-four' repeatedly, clapping on the underlined beats." The chowtal is commonly sung during the Phagwa or Holi festival and has received new impetus in a competition for original English-Hindi compositions organized by the Hindu Prachar Kendra. Manuel also points out that, "in studios and concerts, the rather sparse chutney instrumentation is sometimes jazzed up with soca rhythms and instruments (synthesizers, pressure drums, and whatnot). The soca beat mixes quite easily with the funky, heartbeat chutney rhythm (what Indians would call *kaherva*), and the result is called 'chutney-soca.' While generally lacking calypso's textual interest, chutney-soca has a flavor quite distinct from mainstream soca because of its Hindi lyrics, ornamented vocal style, often minor-sounding modal melodies, and the thumping and pumping *dholak*."[52] Since the 1990s, however, there is increased use of English lyrics and the soca beat, which might eventually affect even the structure of the old-time chutney.[53] There is also the difference in approach to chutney singing and presentation between singers like Heeralal Rampartap, who come out of an East Indian singing tradition, and Rikki Jai, who comes out of calypso.[54]

Some scholars argue that there is nothing "new" about the kind of fusion represented by chutney. Kusha Haraksingh says that every Indian village always had a band that played chutney and included one or two Africans to play guitar and drum ("their" instruments). So the musical mixing has been going on for a long time, although it is only now being "recognized" by Creole society. What is different about the contemporary scene, he says, is the commercialization of chutney and the lack of embarrassment about being "Indian," the ability to "wear your culture on your sleeve" that marks the emergence of the East Indian into "so-called larger society."[55]

Audience, Language, Industry

The commercialization of chutney in the 1990s has led to its wider availability as recorded music and in the form of regular stage performances. New state policies allowed the establishment of privately owned Indian-oriented radio stations in the mid-1990s, and East Indian music and dance forms found a space for the first time in events like Carifesta, the official pan-Caribbean festival of the arts. Chutney-soca cassettes and CDs can now

be found not only in music shops in "Indian" areas but also in "African" dominated Port of Spain. It has been noted that earlier audiences were almost homogenously East Indian and that many of them were lower class. The majority of female chutney patrons are older and working-class women, "cane cutters, hucksters in the market, doubles [fried dough sandwich with chickpea filling] vendors, domestics, cleaners and suitcase traders."[56] Writing in the early '90s, Sharon Syriac observed that chutney attracted a "predominantly female audience," although she also noted that more young adult men recently had started attending chutney fetes, saying that they "come to see the women 'wine.'" Syriac's research also revealed that, in rural areas, the audiences consisted more of families who came in groups and that near urban areas there were more young adults. She proposed that chutney offered "social and mental release for the working class East Indians," since underprivileged Indians participated only marginally in an event like Carnival, which, according to Syriac, served a cathartic function for other groups in Trinidad.[57] The question that can perhaps be asked here is why a chutney fete, and not other cultural forms, should serve this function. Why can only a form parallel to the Creole Carnival be represented as offering "release" for East Indians of different class backgrounds in Trinidad?

There is indeed some evidence indicating changes in the class (and for some time, race) composition of the chutney audience. I have been told that in the late 1980s and early '90s, chutney performances had plenty of wild dancing by everyone present. Men often danced with ("wined on") men and women with women, and most of them were working class. Since the late '90s, however, chutney has been sought out also by the East Indian middle class, although at special performances where chairs are provided (such as Mother's Day concerts) this kind of audience will sit without dancing. At other venues, such as Skinner Park, which hosts the Monarch competitions, the audience—which can sometimes reach twenty thousand people—does not sit still but dances, waves, and cheers on the singers.

The increased legitimacy gained by chutney has resulted in public recognition of its performers. The past few years have seen the institution of the Chutney Monarch Competition, the Chutney-Soca Monarch Competition, and the Indo-Caribbean Music Awards, all of which honor contributions to the development of East Indian Caribbean music. Chutney and chutney-soca fetes are now held almost every Saturday night in predominantly East Indian areas. These areas are mainly in central and southern Trinidad, where performances are held at the Rienzi complex (Couva), the Hi-way Inn (Charlieville, Chaguanas), the Himalaya Club (San Juan), Lall's Cultural Complex (Debe), Simplex Cultural Centre (New Grant, Princes Town), and other venues.[58] The anthropologist Daniel Miller has written about the capacity crowds on Sunday that gather at shopping malls in areas of East Indian concentration such as Chaguanas, where the public spaces are turned into auditoriums for music events.[59]

The lyrics are now as often sung in Trinidadian English as in Bhojpuri or Hindi, which accounts for their greater accessibility to people outside the East Indian community—and, indeed, to young East Indians, most of whom do not speak any "Indian" languages. Earlier in the twentieth century, both wedding songs and religious music such as bhajans were likely to be in Hindi and its dialects, such as Bhojpuri, Braj, or Avadhi. However, by the 1970s, chutney songs in English were becoming common. Another turnaround is observable by the 1990s, when Bhojpuri or Hindi seemed to witness a sort of revival—spearheaded by singers such as Anand Yankarran and Sonny Mann—alongside the popularity of English-language chutney-soca.

Some people hold strong opinions on the language of chutney, especially purists such as Satnarine Balkaransingh, a well-known dancer and teacher. In a recent essay, he remarked: "The current presentation is a mish-mash of Trinidad English dialect, some Indian Bhojpuri dialect, and some Hindi words. Ignorance of the language has led to incorrect pronunciations, hence incomprehensible meanings and sometimes the introduction of nonsensical words in the text of the songs." Balkaransingh claims dismissively that the music is plagiarized from Hindi films, religious songs, and old folk tunes, without giving any credit to the improvisatory quality of chutney (and chutney-soca) and the inventiveness of its practitioners.[60]

Debates about what really is chutney sometimes pivot on the language question, with the amount of English and Hindi in a song determining what is chutney and what is not. In 1996, when the popular hit "Jahaji Bhai (Brotherhood of the Boat)" by Brother Marvin (Selwyn Demming), to be discussed in chapter 4, was excluded from the Pan Chutney Festival on the grounds of not being a chutney song, Marvin explained: "Chutney/soca is more chutney music mixed with soca, while soca/chutney is a soca song mixed with a little chutney. It is like *anchar* and *kuchela* [sweet mango pickle]. They are the same thing, yet different. One has a big piece of mango and the other has the mango shredded."[61] Others, like Vijay Ramlal, who is quoted in the same article, argue that "Some Hindi in a song doesn't make it a chut-

ney," while Carl "Beaver" Henderson, the producer of "Jahaji Bhai," had this to say: "Chutney is just the beat you put to a song. Chutney is a hybrid and is still in transition. Who among us has the musical authority to hear a song and say it is not now or cannot be a chutney?"

If soca can pass for chutney, then sometimes chutney passes for soca. The surprise hit of Carnival 1996 was a Bhojpuri chutney song about a man seducing his sister-in-law, "Lotay La": "Roll, roll, roll de Bhowji, roll nicely / Bhowji took up a piece of soap / And bathed me for a long time / When Bhowji drinks and gets high, she rolls me."[62] Its singer, Sonny Mann, reached the National Soca Monarch finals. Mann's detractors argued that people did not object to the obscenity of the lyrics of "Lotay La" because the words were not understood by the general public, including most East Indians.[63] Afro-Trinidadian calypsonians like Denise Belfon and General Grant did immensely popular "re-mixes" of Sonny Mann's song, which was also used in the 1995 general election campaign of the People's National Movement, the African-dominated party. This was the election, incidentally, that brought to power for the first time an Indian-dominated party, the United National Congress, and its leader, Basdeo Panday, who became prime minister of the country in late 1995.[64]

More than one commentator has pointed out that the return of a predominantly East Indian government in Guyana in 1992 and the ascendance of East Indians to political power for the first time ever in Trinidad in 1995 led to different kinds of cultural manifestations, including a "tidal wave" of recordings in which the performances of hundreds of local artists in both countries began to circulate on tape.[65] Commentators have related this phenomenon, and the increased popularity of chutney-soca, to the growing Indo-Caribbean communities in the United States and Canada, which have established their own record companies, such as the enormously successful Jamaican Me Crazy (JMC) records and many others. New Caribbean nightclubs in New York and Toronto have become significant outlets for the music. It has been pointed out that about a third of all Indo-Caribbeans now live in Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom. However, Peter Manuel, writing in the early 1990s, commented that the Indo-Caribbean recording industry was in its infancy, being "merely an appendage to the live performance scene," especially the wedding and chutney show circuit.[66] Manuel has mentioned elsewhere that most cassettes sell about a thousand copies, with hits selling up to five thousand copies.[67] Figures for 1992 indicate that five thousand to six thousand cassettes of chutney as a broad

category sold in the domestic market, and an equal number sold abroad. Since this figure includes different kinds of Indo-Caribbean music, from chutney to chutney-soca, it would be somewhat difficult to disaggregate it. Some shopowners quote ten thousand copies (domestic) for well-known artistes. This number is equal to, and sometimes surpassing, calypso and soca sales.

Chutney Performance

CHUTNEY SHOW AT THE TRIANGLE, ARANGUEZ, AUGUST 30, 1998

It is the Independence Day Special soca and chutney jam at "D" Triangle, Aranguez (San Juan). We reach at 8:15 p.m. Families with little children and lots of teenagers, overwhelmingly East Indian. A few dougla children seen.

From the time we enter, 6–7 items are Hindi film songs—one bhangra, sometimes preceded by rap. Then a chutney dance with an African-looking girl with braids, wearing red and black (colours of national flag). Followed by five young girls—the Cutie Kuchi dancers, approx 7–12 years old, in white and sequins, dancing to Rudder's Carnival 1998 hit "High Mas." Then the Shiv Outar dancers—three tall East Indian women, one very fair, dance to a chutney song with much wining.

After this is a "winer competition," where the audience is invited onstage. Half a dozen young girls in their early teens go up and start wining. All the girls are East Indian. In the middle is the African chutney dancer. The winner is a girl with a long plait, looks about 12 or 13, white sleeveless tank top and blue jeans with no make up. Winner is given $100 by someone in the audience. She holds the note in both hands and shows it off to the audience. Her face is completely expressionless throughout the wining.

Marcia Miranda comes on stage (a well-known singer of mixed race, from Tobago)—sings about the Hindu god Krishna. Then a chutney called "Bulwasie." The programme runs on as follows—Hindi film songs and bhangra; chutney with dancing, including a hijra [trans-gendered person]; romantic American pop; Jamaican dancehall.

The audience dances in the same fashion to all the music—a little faster to the dancehall beat. An old couple, the man at least 65, the woman in her 50s, wearing the same designer shirts with big alphabets on them, hold each other and dance slowly to the pop songs and the old Hindi film songs, and

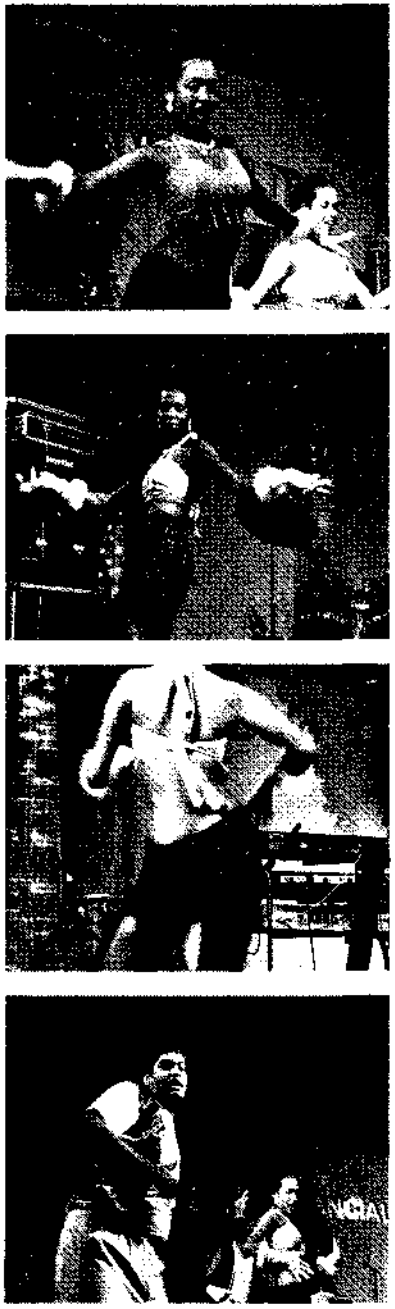
facing each other—faster—to the rest. A Surinam family, very light skinned, one woman has permed and dyed blonde hair, facing the stage and drinking whisky out of paper cups—they keep reaching out to touch the performers—especially the blonde, to upcoming young singer Richard Ramnarine.[68]

The Controversy

The flurry of discussion in the early '90s about the East Indian woman and chutney-soca kept coming back to issues of female sexuality, much like the discussions about indentured women in the nineteenth century. Today one cannot speak of how the sexuality of the East Indian woman in Trinidad is constituted except through the grid provided by discourses of racial difference (the question of "the opposite race"); cultural and ethnic difference (the supposed cultural attributes of the "Indian" woman as opposed to the "African" woman),[69] and caste-class or "nation" ("low nation" and "high nation" are terms I have heard older Trinidadians use to refer to what they see as caste differences).

These discourses intersect in various ways with that of "East Indian nationalism," which is often seen as being at odds with "Trinidadian" or "West Indian" nationalism. Unlike in the nationalist discourse in India in which East and West were thematized by the race and culture of the colonized and the colonizer, respectively, in Trinidad the presence of the "Afro-Saxon" (the term used by some Trinidadian scholars, such as Lloyd Best, to refer critically to the culture of the ex-slave society, which is part Anglo-Saxon and part African) indicates that in many ways, the "African," who had been in contact with the West a couple of centuries before the Indians who migrated to the Caribbean, came to stand in for the West as far as the Indians were concerned.[70]

We may speculate that contact with the European in India did not affect labor to a great extent partly because the Western master belonged to a different social class, and his ways of life were not part of the milieu of the Indian laborer. In Trinidad, however, the African (already part of the "West" in the New World) was presumably of *the same class* as the Indian, occupying a similar social position. The transformations among Indians, therefore, had to do with finding ways to inhabit, and change, their new home through a series of complex negotiations with other racial groups, the most significant of which was the African. Exposure to "Western" ways,



Chutney dancers. Surabhi Sharma/R. V. Ramani.

therefore, came to the Indian through interaction with the Afro-Caribbean rather than through contact with the European. Even today, when Trinidad Indians speak of Westernization, they often treat it as synonymous with "creolization," the common term for the Afro-Trinidadian still being "Creole."[71] It is not surprising, then, that the controversy over the phenomenon of chutney-soca tends to be structured in terms of creolization and the consequent degradation of "Indian culture."

As the cultural critic Gordon Rohlehr points out, to be "visible" in the Caribbean is literally to be on stage, to perform.[72] When East Indian *women* take to the stage as singers or dancers, or as politicians, the protracted struggle over "culture" and "authenticity" takes a new turn, not only in the national arena between different ethnic groups, but also among East Indians themselves.[73] In the chutney-soca controversy, which may have provoked some rethinking of what the claim to Indianness involves in Trinidad, the singers, and the participants in the chutney dances, have been denounced by many East Indians for what is termed their "vulgarity" and "obscenity."[74] The objection has been directed partly at the spate of "Nani" calypsos, starting with "Dolly Nanee" in 1972, sung by Clipper (of East Indian descent), a song about his girlfriend's habit of not washing her genitals. The word acquired new popularity in the mid- and late 1980s, with "Nanny" (Scrunter, 1985), "Love Meh Nanny" (Sharlene Boodram, 1987), "Nani Wine" (Crazy, 1989), "Nanny" (Oliver Chapman, 1989), a host of songs with or without sexual connotations, and, of course, Drupatee's controversial "Lick Down Mih Nani."

Prominent East Indians have indicated that their objection has to do with the display in a public space of a cultural form that used to be confined to the home. The public sphere here is considered to be an "African" realm, so the making public of chutney (and its rendering in English) necessarily involves making it available to the gaze of Afro-Trinidadians. The disapproval of "vulgarity" can be read also as an anxiety regarding miscegenation, the new form of chutney becoming a metonym for the supposed increase in relationships between Indian women and African men. When Drupatee sings in "Hotter Than a Chulha" about the blending together "in a perfect mixture" of African and Indian rhythms, it is almost always assumed by her critics that she is talking about interracial marriage.

The East Indian responses to the public appearance of chutney have been diverse. "Chutney is breaking up homes and bringing disgrace," proclaimed a letter writer in the *Sunday Express*.[75] "Culture means refinement, and this is not culture," declared a participant in a seminar on the chutney phenomenon.[76] The Hindu Women's Organization (HWO), a small but vocal urban group, demanded that the police intervene at chutney performances and enforce the law against vulgarity. The "Indian secularist" position, however, was that chutney was "functional," that it represented "Indian cultural continuity and persistence." Social interaction between boys and girls in an "exclusively Indian environment" was only to be encouraged, argued the self-identified "secularist." Not only was chutney an East Indian alternative to Carnival, it was also a way of establishing "cultural unity with India."[77] Others accused the "Muslim producers" of some chutney festivals, an obvious reference to the Mohammed brothers, for using tunes from Hindu bhajans, an act they considered sacrilegious.[78] A few East Indian men expressed alarm at what they called the "creolization" and "douglarization" of "Indian culture" and alleged that African men were writing the songs for the chutney performers in such a way as to "denigrate" East Indian cultural values. One letter writer who had attended the opening ceremony of the World Hindu Conference protested against "the lewd and suggestive behaviour of the female dancer" during the chutney part of the cultural program. "This standard of behaviour," he said, could not be sanctioned by Hinduism, which he claimed had "high moral and spiritual values."[79] In a hurt response, the dancer in question, Sandra Beharry, said that for her chutney dancing "is a very sensual dance which involves the use of every fibre of the body from eyes, neck, shoulders, waist, hip and feet either separately or together." Although it was a dance with "hot and spicy movements," it was not "a vulgar dance. . . . [V]ulgar dancing is when the dancer strips herself. I do not strip myself when I dance."[80]

Others stated flatly that "no Indian woman has any right to sing calypso" or that "Indian women have been a disgrace to Hinduism."[81] An acerbic writer proclaimed that "for an Indian girl to throw her upbringing and culture to mix with vulgar music, sex and alcohol in Carnival tents tells me that something is radically wrong with her psyche. Drupatee Ramgoonai has chosen to worship the God of sex, wine and easy money."[82] Practitioners of "classical" cultural forms, like the well-known dancer Rajkumar Krishna Persad, described chutney in contrast to their own style of performance. In an interview, Persad said, "[You] wouldn't want to send your child to do any old kind of dance. You want to send your child to do something of class and

people realised that I was trained so they send their children by me. They realise is no wining down thing, no chutney thing, disgracing yourself like prostitutes: you are going to do something of class."[83]

While one writer contended that chutney represented a unique new Trinidadian cultural form,[84] yet another argued that it was self-deluding to think of chutney as creative or unique: "No creation whatsoever has taken place in chutney. The form and content have simply moved from the private domain to the public and from a female environment to a mixed one."[85] "Indianness" is seen in many of these responses to be inextricable from cultural purity, which in turn is seen to hinge on questions of women's propriety and morality. In the global context of the reconfiguration of a "Hindu" identity, the chutney phenomenon is inserted by elite Trinidadian Indians into the process that disaggregates Hindus from other "Indians" while redescribing a "Hindu" space as inclusive of all that is Indian, as being identical with Indianness. Curiously enough, this formation of elite Trinidadian Indian identity today is facilitated not only by religio-political organizations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (World Hindu Forum) but also by the professedly secular Indian state, which intervenes in Trinidad in the academic and cultural spheres.[86]

A news item in the *Trinidad Guardian* of April 22, 1991, reports the speech of Pundit Ramesh Tiwari, president of the Edinburgh Hindu Temple, who says that "the concept of the liberated woman" has created a "crisis in womanhood" that threatens the Hindu religion, which is "taking steps to reintroduce values to the Hindu woman." Indrani Rampersad, a leading figure in the HWO, writes that it is "Hindus" (and not "Indians") who form the largest ethnic group in Trinidad. The HWO condemned chutney performances for their "vulgarity," claiming that "as a Hindu group the HWO is best placed to analyse the chutney phenomenon from [a Hindu] perspective, and as a women's group they are doubly so equipped."[87] The HWO, however, was not supported by some who otherwise shared their position on chutney-soca. The East Indian academic and senator Ramesh Deosaran elsewhere questioned one of the objectives of the HWO, which was to "advance" the status of women. Deosaran objected to the use of this word in a context of "increasing sexual freedom."[88] This freedom, he argued, had resulted in such things as the "intense gyrations" of chutney dancing, "a serious cause for concern by members of the Hindu and Indian community."

Taking issue with this kind of position are some East Indian feminists who see chutney-soca as a positive development, symbolic of the attempts

of women to overcome inequality in many spheres.[89] The feminist activist and scholar Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen urges middle-class and upper-class East Indian women not to take the stand taken by their men against chutney, which she sees as "clearly a movement by lower class Hindu women against male control, and towards greater personal and communal freedom." She suggests that all Indian women will benefit from "the independence of women expressed in chutney dancing," which represents that "my body and sexuality belong to me, and nobody has the power to prevent my expression."[90] This appears to be an assertion made against the stereotyping of East Indian women described this way by the anthropologist Aisha Khan: "Many depictions of Indo-Caribbean women have tended to implicitly (or otherwise) assume docility, obedience, shelteredness, and being ruled with a vengeance by a socially anachronistic patriarchy."[91] However, Baksh-Soodeen's view of feminism is criticized by another writer who also calls herself a feminist—Indrani Rampersad of the HWO—who wrote in a column in the *Trinidad Guardian*, "If the ability to manipulate the pelvic area were any indication of the independence, freedom and happiness and control that women have over their lives, then the . . . chutney gyrators in TT [Trinidad and Tobago] would be amongst the happiest in the world. . . . Superficial outward actions of showing the body to be free to make all kinds of movement is not necessarily linked to a similar freedom in the condition of women."[92] Here is an incipient debate on what constitutes women's autonomy that may well be taken up not just by Indo-Trinidadians but also by the larger women's movement in the Caribbean.

In the wake of the chutney-soca controversy, a Pichakaree Competition was started in 1992 by the East Indian theologian Raviji, with the aim of encouraging local compositions as an "Indian alternative to Carnival music."[93] The competition was hosted during the Phagwa or Holi (Spring) festival. Use of the "Indian language" was encouraged, although it was not specified what that referred to, with the preference being for "limited and imaginative use rather than bulk," presumably intended not to discourage listeners who for the most part did not understand Hindi or Bhojpuri.[94]

Going back twenty years in the newspaper archives, one finds the following letter about Phagwa not being like Carnival, although the writer also adds: "A sad thing, there were men and women who participated in the Phagwa celebrations who were disgustingly drunk. Young boys and girls were not far behind."[95] The same author wrote elsewhere that everyone was to be blamed for low sexual standards: "It is true that Indian girls in par-

ticular are today 'singing songs of love in the mud,' for which there is no forgiveness. Formerly fathers, grandfathers, husbands and brothers would let young wayward Hindu females know they are misbehaving."[96] Continuing the complaint against the unacceptable behavior of East Indian girls, another letter writer had this to say: "In recent *Indian Variety* and *Mastana Bahar* shows, I have seen girls in maxies [ankle-length dresses], but with their necks, arms and backs exposed. I do not think this is right for any girl who participates in Indian culture. To me it looks too unfeminine. Therefore, I would appreciate very much, if the organisers of these Indian programmes, could encourage our Indian girls to dress in a more decent and graceful manner."[97]

Talking to a range of Indo-Trinidadian women of different ages, I came across several negative responses to chutney and chutney-soca, focusing in particular on Drupatee, the most visible female Indo-Trinidadian performer:

> I do not like Drupatee. I don't know if it's the way she expresses herself or the way she sings. . . . But her stage performance, I don't like what she performs as an artist. It's not appealing to me then. I believe it's more the way she carries on . . . the way she wines . . . is more chutney, and I don't like chutney music from the time I was a young girl growing up. I never danced to that type of music. (Mabel, in her forties)[98]

> My family is very, very religious, and they would not approve of going [to a chutney-show]. . . . They would just call it a waste of time, but I have a lot of friends who just live to go to a "chutney" where they could party and drink and have a good time. It's no big deal, right? My mom, she really, really finds Drupatee distasteful—the way she dresses and carries on, on the stage gyrating, and this woman, she has no respect for herself. And there are other women, other people who enjoy her and appreciate her and think she's really, really a great performer. Personally, I didn't appreciate her. (Vashnie, in her twenties)[99]

At the beginning of the new century, the discussion still finds purchase. In an article titled, "Carnival Not for Indians," Kamal Persad argues that "Carnival is *adharmic* and cannot be condoned by Hindu spirituality. The chutney challenge to Carnival is real. For those Indians in pursuit of pleasure (*kama*), chutney is providing that alternative to Carnival fetes and the Carnival culture. It heralds Indian cultural solidarity and the Indian withdrawal from Carnival. . . . Carnival is hostile to Indians."[100] The idea of a hostile Carnival seems to find resonance among the ideologues of the "neo-Indianists," such as Kumar Mahabir (formerly Noor Kumar Mahabir) and Rajnie Ramlakhan. In contrast to the viewpoint that chutney has to be posited against Afro-Trinidadian and Western music is the daily auditory experience of many young Indo-Trinidadians who listen to and enjoy several kinds of music. These young people claim to like chutney-soca for its innovative beat and English lyrics as well as for the possibilities it provides for interactive singing.[101]

Speaking out against these fans of the music, the columnist Indira Maharaj, invoking the Nani figure, writes that "Soca chutney [is] sinking":

> *Refrain:*
> Nanee, nanee, run for yuh dignity,
> Is again time for Soca chutney.
> . . .
> Lang time we coulda complain
> About dem calypsonian
> But what we go say when we hearin worse
> From we own Indian!
> . . .
> Dey cyah go beyon de bailna [rolling pin], de Bhougie [sister-in-law] an de Nannie!
> . . .
> Ah tink ah de tears ah meh Nannee.
> Ah tink ah de anger ah meh Bhougie. . . .
> Wit dis kinda ah Chutney Soca, Ah worried
> about we culture.[102]

Maharaj launches an attack on "Carnival culture" in an article titled "The Wining Must Stop." Referring to what she calls Carnival and calypso culture, she contends that "the expression and exhibition of female sexuality, wining, has been an acceptable part of that culture." Indian women adopted this from the "hegemonic culture," so much so that it has become a matter of pride for "young Indian females to say 'who tell yuh Indian cyah wine [who said Indians cannot wine]?' " Maharaj further suggests that this imitative hedonism has the support of certain feminists in Trinidad: "A western, feminist stream of thought which sees the expression of female sexuality in the public domain as legitimate, as a woman revelling in her own sexuality,

is also conducive to Indian women wining in the public domain."[103] Critical of this approach is the Indo-Trinidadian feminist Sheila Rampersad, who sees it as an expression of upper-caste "Brahmin culture":

> In fact chutney music is incredibly popular among Indians, and among young people who go because chutney allows them to behave in a Hindu or Indian framework in the way they really would want to behave. And if they're in Carnival they'll say you're being bastardised or something. . . . You are doing it in your own context and this is the context we have evolved to do it in. So there is a class discussion that must happen there, there is the generational discussion that must happen, . . . because those are the kind of dynamics influencing chutney. Nobody's stopping to say all these things. Why is it so popular? What is it moving in people? Nobody has stopped to ask those questions and that's where our analysis will have to be directed. It really is an outlet for people. And to celebrate in the way we see Africans celebrating. We wanted to celebrate and have not had the framework to do it.[104]

Rhoda Reddock points to the ambivalences in the upper-class East Indian denunciation of chutney:

> A few years ago, Sat Maharaj [head of the Sanatan Dharma Mahasabha, which claims to represent Trinidadian Hindus] said that chutney dancing was worse than carnival dancing. But when Sundar Popo died, he grabbed the whole limelight of Sundar Popo's funeral, took it over. I remember Mahasabha was organizing the funeral, to the shock of everybody. He spent his whole life saying chutney was wrong and bad, and now he took over the funeral and decided who could sing and who could go and who couldn't go. So people were writing in the newspapers saying, what is this? We can't believe this! . . . So, on the one hand, there's this ambivalence . . because [chutney] presents a crisis of representation, in that it represents Indian women as just . . . like African women, liking to dance and wine, and liking sex, and so like everybody else. But at the same time, chutney is a symbol of their location and their contribution in the local space. So it's a Catch-22 situation. And I think that there's no doubt that especially women, grassroots women, identify with chutney. They are the vast majority going to these big events. And even though the men dance, it is the women who really become totally absorbed and enthralled and carried away with the music.[105]

The Body in the Voice

In this chapter I have provided a historical analysis of chutney-soca both as a musical genre and as a cultural practice. Listening to the songs, or seeing them performed, impels us also to construct a conceptual frame that plots the relation of the listener to the voice. What do we hear when we hear chutney-soca? I suggest that Roland Barthes's distinction between pheno-song and geno-song, from the essay "The Grain of the Voice," could be usefully deployed here.[106]

But first we should look at the "cultural body" of the East Indian woman —or should we say, the encultured body—and ask what proliferating discourses converge on chutney-soca. The controversy seemed to indicate an intimate connection between the musical form and the East Indian woman's sexuality. I would argue, however, that chutney-soca does not express or provide a statement of an existing sexuality. Instead, it represents the point of convergence of a multiplicity of discourses around sexuality, serving in turn as a node from which such discourses proliferate. Further, the sexuality question cannot be separated from the question of racial difference.

A series of popular conceptions about "Indians" and "Africans" circulate in the performative space of chutney-soca, just as they do in other aspects of the public sphere in Trinidad. One idea is that of the rampant sexuality of the Indian woman. "Ride an Indian or walk": A non-East Indian woman told me that this was a phrase commonly used among Trinidadian men, referring to the Indian woman's allegedly insatiable sexual appetite as well as her sexual skills and suggesting that if you hadn't slept with an Indian woman, you didn't know what you were missing. This notion may have a history that goes back to the days of indenture and some of the representations that prevailed then of the promiscuous Indian woman. Another idea relevant to an understanding of both calypso-soca and chutney-soca is the supposed liking of the Indian woman for "kilwal" (Creole or Negro), where the representational tradition includes 1950s calypsos like Killer's "Moonia" ("What's the matter beti [daughter]? / That kilwal standing like jankey [donkey] / You got am speed / So you like am that nigger breed") and Sparrow's "Marajhin" calpysos of the 1980s. A related idea, discussed in chapter 4, is that of the emasculation of the Indian man and the corresponding enhancement of the African man's sexuality, especially that of the calypsonian. Then we have the notion of the African woman's threatening

sexuality (the Afro-Trinidadian calypsonian's endless complaint is about the woman from whose attempts at entrapment he must escape) as also stories about the sexual appetite of young East Indian women. (As one of my interviewees told me, these girls behaved "worse" than "the other race" in order to appear "modern.")

The reactions to chutney-soca obliquely invoke all of these intersecting notions of sexuality. Without separating out the semiotic elements of chutney-soca—music, lyrics, body language of dancer and performer, voice—and operating therefore what Barthes in a different context called an "expressive reduction," we might want to ask why chutney-soca as it is performed arouses such varied reactions from its audience, which range from the ecstatic to the hostile, from the celebratory to the denunciatory. But the answer may not be as obvious as the media controversy suggests, especially since the most successful chutney-soca songs all seem to refer to chutney-soca itself, reflecting on what it is and what it does and on its physical, cultural, and political effects.[107]

Barthes regrets the inability of language to interpret music except by piling on adjectives and argues for a displacement of the "fringe of contact between music and language."[108] To achieve this displacement, he proposes a distinction between pheno-song/text and geno-song/text so that the "grain" of the voice can emerge as a signifier. While the pheno-song includes the rules of the genre, the performer's interpretive style, the mode of communication and expression—in short, the "tissue of cultural values" that involves tastes, fashions, and so on—the geno-song refers to the "volume of the singing and speaking voice" and the generation of signification from the very materiality of language.[109]

How might chutney-soca work at these two levels? The "grain" of the voice, according to Barthes, would be the friction between the music and the particular language (not the "message"). In chutney-soca, the music is the fusing of *tassa* (a goatskin drum) with trap-set and keyboards and of *dhantal* (long iron rod hit by a curved piece of iron) with horn (saxophone). The language is Trinidadian English and Bhojpuri-Awadhi-Hindi, with a few stray Punjabi words thrown in—the vocabulary of Trinidadian English being shared with other communities in the society, such as African, Chinese, French Creole, Portuguese, Syrian, with different cultural-social histories. Given that the majority of the population, including the East Indians, know very little Bhojpuri or Hindi, the "signifying play" of the use of this vocabulary is clearly unrelated to "communication" or direct ex-

Cassette cover: The "Nani" tape.

pression.[110] Rather, it is an attempt to let the melody and language work at each other.

Unlike in the monolingual French context of which Barthes speaks, in Trinidadian chutney-soca we have the coming together of English and Bhojpuri, with the former language being more widely understood. The "grain" of the song, then, would be "the materiality of the body speaking its mother tongue; perhaps the letter, almost certainly *signifiance*."[111] Here the mother tongue, I would argue, is Trinidadian English and not Bhojpuri, just as the cultural/encultured body of the female East Indian is not simply an "Indian" body. This could be a plausible explanation for why the English-language chutney and chutney-soca songs are so much livelier than the songs sung exclusively in Bhojpuri or Hindi, languages that are rarely spoken now in Trinidad. A puzzle—not just to be put down to my lack of immediate understanding of the lyrics—is why conventional chutney as a genre is so monotonous, so musically and textually lacking in innovation. Taken out of the context of worship or wedding ritual, detached from the functions it seemed to serve, East Indian music seems somewhat static.

But listen to Drupatee's "Lick Down Mih Nani," "Mr. Bissessar," or "Real Unity" (with Machel Montano), in which the "volume of the singing and

speaking voice" fills the head, the room, the auditorium. What Barthes calls the "voluptousness of [the] sound-signifiers" is evident in Drupatee's voice as it "sways us to *jouissance*."[112] As we hear "Lick Down Mih Nani" it is not just the double entendres that pleasure us, but something spilling over, perhaps—as Barthes would have it—into pure signification.[113] For Barthes, "grain" is the body in the singing voice, marking the passage of work into text.[114] From the fixable meanings of the bounded song, we move into the space where meanings are fluid and resist capture. Perhaps this is far more threatening than the literal or textual meaning of the chutney-soca song. In cultural spaces in which identities are being refigured with some urgency, and new boundaries are being drawn, the body in the voice disrupts mere mellifluousness, and the seemingly simple referentiality of the song begins to gesture at the possibility of meaning itself.

Reading Indenture and Chutney-Soca

I wonder how much my feeling of strangeness and difference in relation to East Indian women has to do with the unfamiliarity of bodies and tongues. South Indians were approximately only 5 percent of immigrants, and their original languages, which would have made some sense to me, disappeared long ago into plantation Hindi. The bulk of the immigrants were from northern India, and the dialects of these communities, which sometimes surface in the chutney songs and words from which might lurk in Trinidadians' everyday speech, for the most part are unintelligible to me, trained as I am only in school-level, homogenized Hindi. To my eyes, Trinidad Indian women's bodies are not encoded like Indian ones; neither are they Westernised. (The Indo-Euro-American tonalities are familiar ones to us in India because of the continuous contemporary migration to North America and some parts of Europe.) Perhaps, as suggested earlier, modernity for the East Indian has been Creole and not Western modernity. Consider the possibility of the encounter of Indian indentured female laborers of varied castes (predominantly the middle and lower castes) with the West refracted through the "Creole," and consider what formations of "Westernization" it might result in, as opposed to the upper-caste-dominated professional migration to the West and the resultant convergence of Indian elite subjectivities with Western habits and aesthetics.[115] I think of the Indian computer engineer from Madras (now Chennai) who studied in Canada in the 1970s and dated Indo-Trinidadian girls, there being a substantial Trinidadian population in that country; he said it took him two years to figure out they were "not Indian."

The resemblance between the vocabulary of the anti-indenture campaign, discussed in chapter 2, and that of the critics of chutney-soca may allow us to conclude rather misleadingly that what is asserting itself in both is "Indian patriarchy." This is misleading because, as phenomena, elite nationalism in India in the early twentieth century and elite assertions of "Indian" ethnic identity in late-twentieth-century Trinidad are somewhat different from each other. Although there may be a historical connection between Indian nationalism and indentured labor in the British colonies, the analysis of contemporary Trinidadian discourses of East Indian women's sexuality has to be placed in the framework of the predominantly biracial society of the island. Indian tradition (and Indian women) in Trinidad come to be defined as that which is not, cannot be allowed to become, African. While the assertion of a separate and unchanging "Hindu" or "Indian" identity in Trinidad is enabled in part by the colonial and Indian nationalist reconstructions of ethnic and racial identities in which definitions of women and what is "proper" to them occupy a crucial position, such an assertion is today part of a Trinidadian reconstruction of such identities, a process whose participants include both "Indians" and "Africans." And while the chutney-soca controversy could be read as marking an attempt to reconstitute East Indian patriarchy, perhaps it could also be read as a sign of patriarchy in crisis. The East Indian attempt to "resolve" the question of women, just as Indian nationalism in the early twentieth century sought to do, can be seen as aligned with the effort to consolidate the meanings of cultural and racial identity at a time when the new political visibility of "Indians" is providing newer spaces of assertion for women as well as men. Both of these projects, however, are rendered impossible precisely because of the need to continually refigure the distinctions between the two groups, signified as "Indian" and "African," that dominate the postcolonial space of Trinidad. The next chapter looks at the representation of East Indians in calypso and soca, where the majority of performers are Afro-Trinidadians. My attempt will be to analyze how notions of African masculinity depend on characterizations of East Indian women, as well as of East Indian men, and to emphasize the significance of representing the "Indian" to political-cultural assertions of Creole nationalism.

1 The Road March refers to the music played by the bands on the floats at Carnival, consisting of the hit songs of the season. Mas' is short for masquerade, referring to the Carnival convention of processionists' dressing up in various elaborate costumes, depending on the band they are playing with. Wining refers to dancing that emphasizes pelvic movements, perhaps from "winding."

2 Ottley, *Women in Calypso*.

3 *Port-of-Spain Gazette*, September 19, 1874, as cited in Tikasingh, "The Establishment of the Indians in Trinidad, 1870–1900," 215–16.

4 An extended discussion of the representation of East Indians in the calypso can be found in chapter 4.

5 Lord Shorty, "Indrani" (Shorty S-002, 1973, LP), also on the album *Shorty's Gone, Gone, Gone* (Island Series FP-1006, 1973); Lord Shorty, "Kelogee Bulbul" (1974), on *The Love Man, Carnival '74 Hits* (Shorty SLP-1000, LP).

6 Mungal Patasar, interview, June 19, 2003.

7 As with other musical terms in the Caribbean, however, there is some controversy as to the exact distinction between calypso and soca, although there are separate annual competitions for National Soca Monarch and National Calypso Monarch during the Carnival season.

8 While singers like Rikki Jai insist it is the melody that distinguishes chutney from calypso (filmed interview, May 4, 2004), some performers, according to Tina Ramnarine, insist that chutney refers to music made by a group with voice, dholak, dhantal, and harmonium. The addition of any other instruments, brass or electronic, makes it a different branch of chutney: Ramnarine, *Creating Their Own Space*, 15.

9 Maharaj, "Some Aspects of Hindu Folk Songs in Trinidad," 64.

10 Ribeiro, "The Phenomenon of Chutney Singing in Trinidad and Tobago," 15.

11 Khempatie Rampersad, interview, May 3, 1997.

12 Ribeiro, "The Phenomenon of Chutney Singing in Trinidad and Tobago," 7.

13 Miriam Gajadhar, filmed interview, May 4, 2004.

14 " 'Kutiya' is a Hindi word meaning temple. There is no connotation whatever to sexuality or the sexual organs. The use of 'kutiya' in [the] context [of Sparrow's songs], taken literally, is ludicrous and highly irreverent, but its use as an element of calypso's famous double-entendre is effective": Espinet, "Representation and the Indo-Caribbean Woman in Trinidad and Tobago," 52. However, in contemporary Hindi, "kutiya" means "hut."

15 Patasar, interview, June 19, 2003.

16 Ramaya, "Evolution of Indian Music," 22–23.

17 Myers, *Music of Hindu Trinidad*, 109.

18 Ibid., 155–56.

19 The ethnographic present tense also underwrites the argument about "cultural persistence" advanced by Myers's mentor, Morton Klass, in his well-known *East Indians in Trinidad*. Those who find Klass's description of that community politically pernicious, as well as insufficiently historicized, have taken issue with that work. Klass defends his use of the term "persistence" as opposed to "retention" in the 1988 preface to his book: see Klass, *East Indians in Trinidad*, xxx.

20 Curiously, Myers's book on music in "Hindu" Trinidad has on its cover page a Bhojpuri woman in a village in *India*, clad in a sari, listening to a cassette player. In the other pictures inside the book, the women of Felicity are seen wearing Western dress but singing *bhajans* (Hindu religious songs). It might be worth asking what the academic stakes are in the mobilization of notions of Indian authenticity in relation to Trinidad.

21 Calypso and steel band were dominated by Afro-Trinidadians, with few exceptions. One of them is Mohan Paltoo, a major calypso songwriter. Another is Jit Samaroo, celebrated arranger of pan (steel band) music, whose arranging for the Amoco, (now BP) Renegades steel orchestra won the group the top prize in the Panorama Championships throughout the 1980s and '90s. There have been others—singers and musicians of East Indian descent—from as early as the 1940s, like Jap Beharry and Selwyn Mohammed and the calypsonians Rajah, Hindu Prince, and Mighty Dougla. For a full account, see Constance, *Tassa, Chutney and Soca*.

22 Ali, "A Social History of East Indian Women in Trinidad since 1870," 154.

23 Saywack, "From Caroni Gyal to Calcutta Woman." Bassant and Orie ("Understanding the Chutney Phenomenon," 27) indicate a different date for the release of the Surinamese album from Saywack: "[Twenty] years ago . . . [the] Surinamese singer, Drupatee, launched her first record of breakaway songs. This marked the opening of what was formerly a very closed-door affair."

24 Manuel, "Chutney and Indo-Trinidadian Cultural Identity," 26.

25 No good discography is available for Sundar Popo or for chutney music in general. A selection of Popo's songs can be found in the following albums: *The Ultimate Sundar Popo* (Masala Records, 2004, CD); *Classic: Sundar Popo and JMC Triveni* (JMCCT 1082, 1994, audio cassette); Babla and Kanchan and Sundar Popo, *Musical Voyage: East Meets West* (JMCCD 1185, 1988, CD).

26 BWIA (British West Indian Airways), the Trinidadian national airline, is affectionately known as BeeWee but also as "But Will It Arrive?"

27 Johnson, "The Beat of a Different Drum."

28 Patasar, "The Evolution of Indian Musical Forms in Trinidad from 1845 to the Present," 29.

29 In an interview, Babla said: "That music is very raw. Their singing is in their own style. They don't speak Hindi, and their accent is more Trinidadian accent." When I asked him what sort of changes he and Kanchan had made in the original compositions, he replied that the melody remained more or less the same, but "the singing style" became different. Kanchan and Babla also changed some of

the words, because "they [Indo-Trinidadians] have no grammar, and the words have no meaning sometimes": interview with Tejaswini Niranjana and Naresh Fernandes, Mumbai, October 27, 2003.

30 Kanchan's and Babla's albums *Kaise Bani* and *Kuch Gadbad Hai* are popular in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, in northern India, but are not known elsewhere. Babla claims that some of those chutney songs are now sung at weddings in Bihar.

31 Mohammed, "Women Who Sang Calypso," 27. My research in the West Indiana collection of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine campus, yielded a couple of brief news items that mentioned East Indian female performers: The *Daily Express*, June 6, 1975, had on its front page an article about the Guyanese singer Mark Holder, who was detained at the airport for debt on his way to Grenada, "where he was to have performed along with popular Trinidadian singer Hazel Rambaransingh [an East Indian name] who sings at the Chaconia Inn hotel." Another item was a front-page photograph from the *Express* on August 22, 1977, showing "A Songbird from Penal"—Gangadaye Latchuram—in the Indian song competition in San Fernando's Skinner Park. The photograph shows Gangadaye as a young woman in conventional India-style sari and puffed open-sleeve blouse, with bangles on her wrists—an appearance very different from that of Drupatee in the late 1980s. There is a tabla player on a chair next to her, and no other accompaniment is visible.

32 Constance, *Tassa, Chutney and Soca*, 66.

33 Myers, *Music of Hindu Trinidad*, 377.

34 Much of this information comes from conversations with Patricia Mohammed and Hubert Devonish in Jamaica and Rhoda Reddock in Trinidad, February–March 1994. I also thank Rikki Jai for his insights into the Trinidadian music and performance scene. For access to newspaper accounts of the chutney controversy, I am indebted to Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen and the Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) archives in Trinidad. See also Baksh-Soodeen, "Power, Gender and Chutney," 7.

35 Ramsingh, *The History of Felicity Village (1838–1996)*, 104–5.

36 When asked if there was no dancing earlier, Gajadhar clarified that it was a different kind of dancing ("They could dance good," and it was not "vulgar dance an' ting"). Also, that dancing took place in the "private" space of the wedding: Miriam Gajadhar, filmed interview, May 4, 2004.

37 All quotations in this section of the chapter are from the filmed interview with Drupatee, May 10, 2004.

38 Drupatee Ramgoonai, "Mr. Bissessar, or Roll up de Tassa" on *Chutney/Soca* (JMCCD 1228, 2000).

39 Constance, *Tassa, Chutney and Soca*, 70.

40 Drupatee accounts for her stage success by saying that her "presentation" was good, "plus what I wore and the movement, the dancing, I give them the works!" When asked what she wore, she said it was something "Indianish."

41 Drupatee Ramgoonai, "Lick Down Mih Nani, or Careless Driver," on *Chutney/Soca* (JMCCD 1228, 2000).

42 In a reading of the same song, Shalini Puri points out that the "cultural nationalist" outcry displaced the "narrative of rape and violence," which is another aspect of the lyrics. She suggests that this other meaning is "glossed over in that nationalist discourse which subordinates class, feminist, and formal and aesthetic considerations to a racial-cultural nationalist agenda": Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, 197–204. Without intending to make any apology for Indo-Trinidadian cultural nationalism, I will stress (1) that the song as it is *sung* as well as its performance are saucy, playful, and mischievous, like other Drupatee songs; and (2) that it was the song's suggestion of interracial sex that caused the outcry—a suggestion that is implicit in the form and performance but not necessarily in the lyrics. A less textual focus, and a contextualization of the song as part of Drupatee's larger body of work, would, I believe, yield a different interpretive frame from the one Puri offers. I would also be hesitant to accept that the violence narrative is self-evidently more "feminist" than the playfulness narrative.

43 "Mr. Bissessar" was also unique because it included for the first time the recording of live tassa drums, which are very difficult to capture mechanically. According to Drupatee, tassa drummers were taken on stage for song performances, creating the sound one hears both at Matikor and Muharram (Hosay).

44 Drupatee Ramgoonai, "Hotter Than a Chulha," on *Chutney/Soca* (JMCCD 1228, 2000). Selections of Drupatee's chutney songs are on *Drupatee in Style* (JMCCD 1224, 2000) and *Explosive Moods* (Masala Records, MAS-1202, 2002, CD).

45 Interestingly, the Bhojpuri and Hindi lyrics indicate that it is a bhajan, a popular religious song. To translate, "All of us should sit together in a group / And sing Sita Ram / Who will play the dholak and the dhantal?" Cecil Funtrose, "Khirki Na Din," on *Chutney Party Mix* (MC Records, MC-0015, 1995, CD).

46 Saywack, "From Caroni Gyal to Calcutta Woman."

47 Manuel, "Chutney and Indo-Trinidadian Cultural Identity," 40.

48 Johnson, "The Beat of a Different Drum," http://209.94.197.2/jan99/jan17/features.htm.

49 As quoted in Aziz, "Indian Culture as Portrayed in Calypso," 30.

50 As quoted in Smith, "Chutney Soca," 12.

51 Myers, *Music of Hindu Trinidad*, 107.

52 Manuel, *Caribbean Currents*, 217–18.

53 Rikki Jai, who performs chutney, chutney-soca, and calypso, asserts that the melodic line in these forms is quite distinct. Chutney and Hindi film songs have an "Indian *gamak*," he says, a different vocal style from that of soca or calypso: Rikki Jai, filmed interview, May 4, 2004. He would perhaps argue that chutney-soca is more like soca than like chutney.

54 Rikki Jai was one of the first singers to hire a dance troupe and a drama troupe

to perform the background narrative for his chutney and chutney-soca performances. He felt that the chutney industry was "too dormant" compared with the more interactive performances in the "soca industry." Before he introduced soca performative elements, he said, there were "no hands in the air, no rags, no towels [being waved]": ibid.

55 Kusha Haraksingh, personal conversation, April 25, 1996.

56 Syriac, "The Chutney Phenomenon," 44.

57 Ibid., 28–29.

58 Ribeiro, "The Phenomenon of Chutney Singing in Trinidad and Tobago," 29.

59 Miller, who is professor of anthropology at University College, Oxford, writes that "chutney" is "a syncretic form, based on Indian film and classic [sic] music but with elements that emulate black dancing, including its lasciviousness." This statement is both factually incorrect and sweeping in its cultural generalizations. As the preceding discussion and the music show, chutney does not derive primarily from either Indian film music or "classic" music. And why "lasciviousness" should be a peculiar Afro-Trinidadian trait remains unexplained: see Miller, *Capitalism*, 298.

60 Balkaransingh, "Chutney Crosses over into Chutney-Soca," 48–49.

61 Cuffy, "Soca Song with a Little Chutney," 7.

62 The English translation from the Bhojpuri is by Anita Sharma. Sonny Mann, "Lotay La," on *Chutney Party Mix* (MC Records, MC0015, 1995, CD).

63 Although Sonny Mann reached the Soca Monarch finals, he was booed off the stage by a predominantly Creole audience without being allowed to sing.

64 It is a measure of racial polarization in Trinidadian political life that the two major parties, the PNM and the UNC, have come to be identified as the "African" and "Indian" parties, respectively, although both have candidates as well as voters from the other race.

65 Saywack, "From Caroni Gyal to Calcutta Woman."

66 Manuel, *Caribbean Currents*, 218.

67 Manuel, "Chutney and Indo-Trinidadian Cultural Identity," 30.

68 Author's fieldnotes.

69 According to colonial writers such as J. A. Froude, the bejeweled Indian woman presented "quite a contrast to the ordinary coarse negro woman:" as quoted in Tikasingh, "The Establishment of the Indians in Trinidad, 1870–1900," 369. In chapter 2, I discussed how the "African" jamette woman of Carnival is contrasted with the Indian woman, whose femininity is shaped in contrast to that of the former.

70 I owe this insight to Kirk Meighoo, with whom I have had many useful discussions on the topic of Afrocentrism in the Caribbean. The term "Indo-Saxon" is employed to refer to "Westernized" Indians, but it does not seem to be used as frequently as "Afro-Saxon."

71 While a whole spectrum of ethnic identities is subsumed under the term "Creole," in common usage it seems to refer to all that is not Indian—in particular, the African.

72 Gordon Rohlehr, personal conversation, February 1994.

73 A 1993–94 controversy surrounds East Indian Member of Parliament Hulsie Bhaggan, who became the target of political satire in the calypsos of the 1994 Carnival in Trinidad (see chapter 4). In 1996, Occah Seapaul, an East Indian woman who was then speaker of Parliament, was the subject of calypsos.

74 Female East Indian singers and dancers, however, are not necessarily a new phenomenon. As mentioned in the earlier sections of this chapter, there appears to have been a tradition of women who took part in public performances, such as Alice Jan in the early twentieth century and Champa Devi in the 1940s. But for the reasons addressed partially in this section, their performances clearly did not evoke the kind of response that chutney-soca did in the 1990s.

75 "Indian chutney is breaking up homes and bringing disgrace. . . . Quarrels break out in the home when the wife or children are not allowed to go. Some run away, not caring if they are not allowed back into the home. Their only concern is to be at the show. . . . I see young girls drinking and some of them are not dressed properly. I see respectable married women, women separated from their husbands and widows bringing down shame on their families and themselves": Michael Ramkissoon (Wizard Drummer), letter to the editor, *Sunday Express*, December 16, 1990, 46.

76 The musician Narsaloo Ramaya, as quoted in "Critics Rage over Chutney Wine," *Sunday Express*, December 9, 1990, 17.

77 Kamal Persad, Indian Review Committee, Viewpoint column, *Sunday Express*, December 16, 1990, 43. See also L. Siddhartha Orie, letter to the editor, *Trinidad Guardian*, January 8, 1991, 8.

78 Jagdeo Maharaj, letter to the editor, *Trinidad Guardian*, July 30, 1990, 9.

79 Kelvin Ramkissoon, "A Brand of Dancing Not Associated with Hinduism," *Express*, July 14, 1992.

80 Danny, "Chutney Chulha Still Hot, but Sandra Cool."

81 The quotes are from unnamed informants in Danny, "No Culture Barrier for Drupatee," 10.

82 Mahabir Maharaj, "Drupatee—Queen of Local Crossover," *Sandesh*, February 19, 1988.

83 Persad studied Bharatanatyam with Rukmini Devi Arundale in India in 1965–67 and in 1967 founded the Krishna Dance Group, later renamed Trinidad School of Indian Dance: as quoted in Mayers, "Rajkumar Krishna Persad," 61.

84 Baksh-Soodeen, "Power, Gender and Chutney," 7.

85 Indrani Rampersad, Hindu Women's Organization, "The Hindu Voice in Chutney," *Trinidad Guardian*, December 25, 1990, 10. In this chapter, I draw mainly on textual sources for East Indian views on chutney. These probably represent a range from lower middle class to upper middle class. Most of my conversations

with women and men from this class background indicate that these views are representative. My 1997 fieldwork, however, suggested radically different attitudes toward chutney on the part of working-class women, who frequently went to chutney fetes.

86 The government of India funds two professorships at the University of the West Indies, one in sociology and the other in Hindi. The sociology position was converted a few years ago into a history position, with its first occupant being a historian of medieval India. The Indian High Commission also has a Hindi professor to conduct language classes for Trinidadians. In addition, the High Commission helps bring exponents of classical "Indian culture" to Trinidad.

87 Rampersad, "The Hindu Voice in Chutney."

88 John, "Controversy Reigns."

89 See Baksh-Soodeen, "Power, Gender and Chutney," 7.

90 Baksh-Soodeen, "Why Do Our Hindu Women Break Out and Break Away," 24.

91 Khan, "Purity, Piety and Power: Culture and Identity among Hindus and Muslims in Trinidad," 170.

92 *Trinidad Guardian*, January 15, 1991.

93 Ibid.

94 *Sunday Guardian*, February 16, 1997, 21.

95 Mahabir Marajh, Barataria, opinion column, *Express*, March 21, 1972, 15.

96 Mahabir Marajh, *Express*, September 29, 1972, 23.

97 "'Backless' dress won't do": H. M., Point Fortin, *Express*, July 19, 1976.

98 Interview, August 29, 1998.

99 Interview, April 30, 1997.

100 *Sunday Express*, March 5, 2000, 16.

101 See Robin Balliger's discussion of her fieldwork in "Popular Music and the Cultural Politics of Globalisation among the Post-Oil Boom Generation in Trinidad."

102 *Express*, February 11, 2000, 17.

103 Indira Maharaj, *Express*, March 10, 2000, 17.

104 Interview, April 30, 1996.

105 Interview, August 20, 2000.

106 Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice."

107 They also talk about its *newness*. See, for example, some of the songs by Drupatee Ramgoonai and Rikki Jai—in particular, Drupatee's "Hotter than a Chulha" and Jai's "Jump Like an Indian."

108 Barthes, "The Grain of the Voice," 181.

109 Ibid., 182.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid., 183.

113 "The song must speak, must *write*—for what is produced at the level of the geno-song is finally writing" ibid., 185. Perhaps writing is another word for signification?

114 Ibid., 188. In the famous essay "From Work to Text," in the anthology *Image—Music—Text*, Barthes suggests that the transformation of "[literary] work" into "text" involves the movement beyond seeking the equivalence of meaning to understanding its ungraspability.

115 This is not to downplay the large populations of working-class Indians who are part of the new migrations to the United Kingdom and the United States, but only to make a point about the specific Indo-African cultural forms in the Caribbean. Musical genres are emerging in the United Kingdom that bring together the Punjabi bhangra rhythms of working-class Indian migrants with Jamaican dancehall, which are beginning to have an impact on film music in India. However, an engagement with British Asian music is beyond the scope of this study.

FOUR *Jumping out of Time*

1 Hundreds of calypsos are composed and sung every year. There is no authoritative account of how many of them deal with East Indians, but more than one hundred songs explicitly referring to them are listed in Constance, *Tassa, Chutney and Soca*. In the 1990s, songs about East Indians increased in number along with their cultural and political visibility. I am indebted to Gordon Rohlehr for his informal compilation of "Indian calypsos" (hereafter, cited as GRIC), which I have drawn on extensively for this chapter. Every attempt has been made to trace the original release date of songs quoted in this chapter. This is an effort that has met with only some success. A valuable but still incomplete discography for calypso and soca is www.calypsoarchives.co.uk. See also www.calypsoworld.org for pre–World War II recordings.

2 Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad*, 3–4.

3 Hosay is the Muslim festival of Muharram; obeah is a form of African worship often castigated as "black magic"; Shango is an Afro-Caribbean religion that combines the worship of several Yoruba deities; the Shouter Baptists represent a form of Afro-Caribbean Christianity.

4 According to the calypsonian and academic Hollis "Mighty Chalkdust" Liverpool, Africans celebrated the end of slavery by "applying Carnival traditions and rituals to their victory celebrations": see Liverpool, *Rituals of Power and Rebellion*, 127.

5 Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad*, 8.

6 On February 27, 1881, in the early hours of the first day of the Carnival celebration, Jouvert morning, the inspector-commandant of the police, the Englishman Arthur Baker, and his Barbadian policemen clashed with revelers carrying sticks, stones, and bottles, causing injuries to both sides. The governor of the colony had to intervene before ruffled feelings subsided.