

The Localized History Project Presents



INDO-TRINIDADIAN MUSIC, MIGRATION & RESISTANCE IN NYC



RESEARCHED & WRITTEN BY: GUINEVERE WOLSKI
ZINE BY: EMMA O'LEARY

GUINEVERE WOLSKI YOUTH RESEARCHER

GUINEVERE WOLSKI IS A 16-YEAR-OLD STUDENT AT BROOKLYN TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL WHO IS MAJORING IN LAW AND SOCIETY. GROWING UP IN THE NYC PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM, SHE NOTICED THE LACK OF INDO-CARIBBEAN REPRESENTATION IN THE SCHOOL CURRICULUM. THIS PROMPTED HER INTEREST IN THE LOCALIZED HISTORY PROJECT AND CONTRIBUTING TO NYC'S FIRST AAPI CURRICULUM AS A YOUTH RESEARCHER. HER RESEARCH FOCUSES ON ANALYZING HOW INDO-TRINIDADIAN MUSIC HAS EVOLVED THROUGHOUT THE INDO-CARIBBEAN DIASPORA AND MIGRATION TO NYC. OUTSIDE OF SCHOOL, SHE SPENDS HER TIME PLAYING THE HARP FOR BROOKLYN TECH'S ORCHESTRA, WHICH SPARKED HER INTEREST IN THE ROLE THAT MUSIC HAS PLAYED THROUGHOUT HISTORY ACROSS VARIOUS COMMUNITIES.

THE LOCALIZED HISTORY PROJECT (LHP) IS A NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL FUNDED, YOUTH PARTICIPATORY HISTORY COLLECTIVE WORKING TO BRING LOCAL ASIAN AMERICAN, NATIVE HAWAIIAN, AND PACIFIC ISLANDER HISTORY INTO K-12 CLASSROOMS.

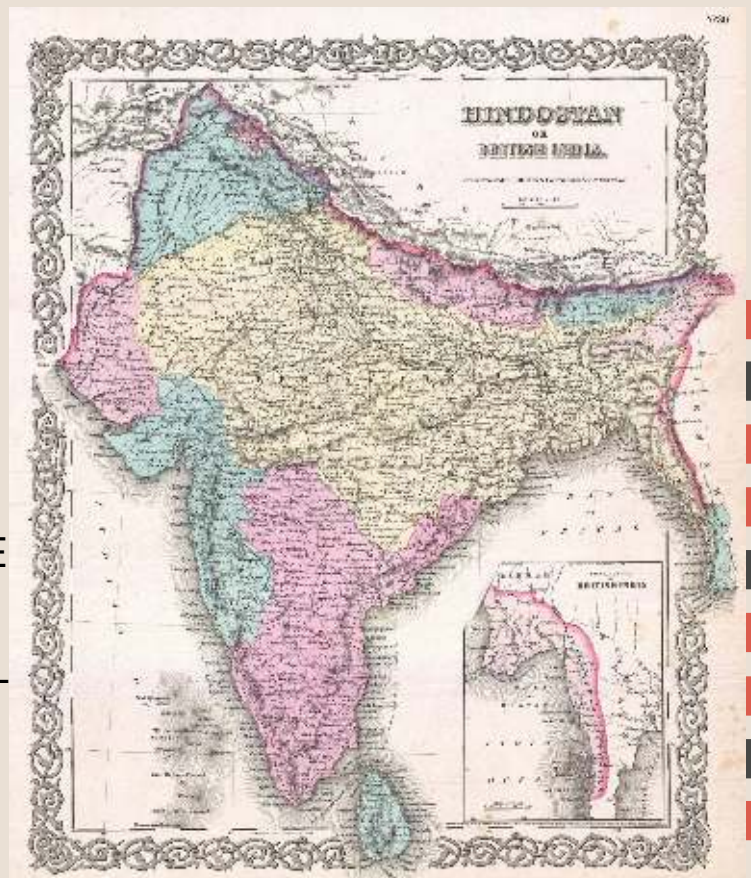


LIFE IN INDIA

BY THE EARLY 19TH CENTURY, INDIA WAS UNDERGOING PROFOUND ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION. POLITICALLY, THE DECLINE OF THE MUGHAL EMPIRE HAD COMPLETELY FRAGMENTED AUTHORITY ACROSS THE SUBCONTINENT. REGIONAL POWERS SUCH AS MARATHAS, RAJPUTS, AND OTHER PRINCELY STATES COMPETED FOR CONTROL, CREATING INSTABILITY THAT THE BRITISH EAST INDIA COMPANY EXPLOITED THROUGH MILITARY FORCE, POLITICAL MANIPULATION, AND DIVISIVE ALLIANCES. THE BRITISH INSTALLED POLICIES THAT DISRUPTED EXISTING POWER STRUCTURES. THESE TENSIONS EVENTUALLY LED TO THE INDIAN REBELLION OF 1857, WHICH BEGAN AMONG INDIAN SOLDIERS IN THE BRITISH ARMY. A MAJOR TRIGGER WAS THE INTRODUCTION OF THE ENFIELD RIFLE CARTRIDGES, BRITISH RETALIATION WAS PARTICULARLY BRUTAL. **THE AFTERMATH MARKED A TURNING POINT: THE BRITISH CROWN REPLACED THE EAST INDIA COMPANY AND FORMALLY ASSUMED DIRECT CONTROL IN 1858**, ESTABLISHING THE BRITISH RAJ AND STEERING IN A NEW CHAPTER OF CENTRALIZED COLONIAL RULE OVER INDIA.

ECONOMICALLY, INDIA HAD LONG BEEN A CENTER OF GLOBAL TRADE, PARTICULARLY IN SPICES, TEXTILES, AND AGRICULTURAL GOODS.

HOWEVER, UNDER BRITISH RULE, THE INDIAN ECONOMY WAS EXPLICITLY RESTRICTED TO SERVE IMPERIAL INTERESTS. HEAVY TAXATION, A LAND REVENUE SYSTEM WHICH IMPOVERISHED A LOT OF FARMERS DUE TO HIGH DEMANDS AND COLLECTION PRESSURES, AND IMPOVERISHED RURAL POPULATIONS.



WHAT IS INDENTURE?

IN 1833, THE BRITISH PARLIAMENT PASSED THE SLAVERY ABOLITION ACT, WHICH FORMALLY ENDED SLAVERY IN ALL BRITISH COLONIES. HOWEVER, A NEW SYSTEM OF "APPRENTICESHIP" EMERGED IN ITS STEAD, WHICH FORCED FREED PEOPLE TO WORK FOR THEIR FORMER MASTERS FOR AN ADDITIONAL 4 YEARS INITIALLY. ORIGINALLY INTENDED TO FACILITATE A SMOOTH TRANSITION TO A FREE ECONOMY. INSTEAD, IT SERVED AS A "FALSE PROMISE FOR EQUALITY" & PERPETUATED SLAVERY-LIKE CONDITIONS UNTIL ITS ABOLITION IN 1838.



AFTER THE LEGAL ABOLITION OF SLAVERY, THE BRITISH SOUGHT TO ESTABLISH A NEW MODE OF CHEAP LABOR TO SUSTAIN PLANTATION ECONOMIES. THIS NEW PRACTICE WAS CALLED INDENTURE, A SYSTEM OF CONTRACTED LABOR IN WHICH INDIVIDUALS AGREED TO WORK FOR A FIXED PERIOD, USUALLY FIVE YEARS, IN EXCHANGE FOR WAGES, HOUSING, AND EVENTUAL RETURN PASSAGE.² IN PRACTICE, INDENTURE FUNCTIONED AS A NEW FORM OF COERCION THAT CLOSELY RESEMBLED SLAVERY, BUT WAS STILL DISTINCTLY DIFFERENT. RECRUITERS, KNOWN AS ARKATIS, SPECIFICALLY TARGETED POOR INDIANS LIVING IN RURAL REGIONS SUCH AS PRESENT-DAY UTTAR PRADESH AND BIHAR, AS WELL AS PARTS OF SOUTH INDIA.

THE SHIP'S JOURNEY TO BRITISH COLONIES LIKE TRINIDAD, JAMAICA, SURINAME, GUYANA, AND SOUTH AFRICA WAS LONG AND GRUELING. MORTALITY RATES ON THE SHIPS WERE HIGH: OUTBREAKS OF DISEASES LIKE CHOLERA AND MEASLES WERE COMMON, SANITATION WAS POOR, AND THE WOMEN WERE CRAMMED TOGETHER BELOW DECKS. IN THE CRAMPED AND HUMID SPACES WHERE THEY SLEPT, THE WOMEN WERE ALSO VULNERABLE TO THE GAZE AND THE GRASP OF THE CREW.



IN COOLIE WOMAN, BAHADUR EXPLAINS THAT "THE VOYAGE STRIPPED EMIGRANTS OF CASTE AND VILLAGE HIERARCHIES, FORCING NEW SOLIDARITIES TO MERGE FROM SHARED SUFFERING." THE JAHAJEE BOND REPLACED THE SOCIAL STRUCTURE THEY HAD LOST AND GRANTED THE MEANS TO PRESERVE FRAGMENTS OF IDENTITY TO COMBAT SYSTEMS OF ERASURE. REFLECTING ON THIS, THE IMPORTANCE OF JAHAJEE EXTENDED FAR BEYOND THE SHIP ITSELF. IT BECAME A FOUNDATION OF INDO-CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY, SURVIVAL, AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION.

WOMEN IN INDENTURE



FOR WOMEN, INDENTURE CARRIED ITS OWN UNIQUE DANGERS. THEY ARRIVED AS A MINORITY WITHIN THE INDENTURED MIGRANT POPULATION, WHICH CONTAINED A **LARGE GENDER DISPARITY: A RATIO OF 4 MEN TO 1 WOMAN.** ADDITIONALLY, AROUND TWO-THIRDS OF INDENTURED WOMEN WERE SINGLE WOMEN. THIS WAS THE RESULT OF COLONIAL LAWS AND PATRIARCHAL CONTROLS THAT RESTRICTED WOMEN'S MOBILITY AND AUTONOMY. **WHILE WOMEN WERE NOT UNIVERSALLY PROHIBITED FROM EMIGRATING, SOCIAL EXPECTATIONS, FAMILIAL CONTROL, AND COLONIAL REGULATION MADE MIGRATION FAR MORE DIFFICULT.** RECRUITERS AND COLONIAL OFFICIALS OFTEN REQUIRED PROOF OF MARITAL STATUS OR MALE CONSENT, AND WOMEN WHO ATTEMPTED TO MIGRATE INDEPENDENTLY FACED HEIGHTENED SCRUTINY AND DANGER.

CONSEQUENTLY, THE INDIAN EMIGRATION ACT OF 1883 ONLY MAGNIFIED THESE RESTRICTIONS BY INCREASING COLONIAL OVERSIGHT OVER WOMEN'S MOBILITY, TARGETING MARRIED WOMEN WHO FALSELY CLAIMED TO BE WIDOWS OR SINGLE TO FLEE ABUSIVE MARRIAGES. THIS LAW SUBJECTED WOMEN TO INVASIVE INSPECTIONS AND SURVEILLANCE BY AUTHORITIES. OFFICIALS FREQUENTLY ASSUMED THAT SINGLE WOMEN WERE MORALLY SUSPECT, AND USED THE LAW TO POLICE WOMEN'S BODIES AND MOVEMENTS. THESE POLICIES ENSURED THAT WOMEN'S MIGRATION SERVED PLANTATION LABOR NEEDS WHILE ALSO LIMITING THEIR AUTONOMY.

WOMEN WERE EXPECTED TO PERFORM BOTH PLANTATION LABOR LIKE CUTTING SUGARCANE WITH A CUTLASS, PREPPING THE LAND FOR PLANTING, AND CLEANING AND SORTING THE SUGAR CANE STEMS AND UNPAID DOMESTIC LABOR LIKE COOKING MEALS, MAINTAINING THE HOUSE, AND FAMILY WORK. **THIS TRANSFORMED INDENTURE INTO A UNIQUELY GENDERED FORM OF LABOR BY HAVING WOMEN BEING SEEN AS "HOUSEWIVES" INSTEAD OF WORKERS.** ULTIMATELY, WOMEN FACED VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AT THE HANDS OF BOTH MANAGERS AND OTHER LABORERS.⁴ THERE WAS LITTLE TO NO LEGAL ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THIS ABUSE, WHICH BECAME COMMON AND EMBEDDED WITHIN THE SYSTEM.

NATIONAL ARCHIVES
OF INDIA AND TRIBES

WOMAN'S EMIGRATION PASS. HEALTHY CLAIM.

Pass No. 1227

For ship *Almoran* PROCEEDING TO TRINIDAD

No. *6*

2402 British Navigation Agency, CALCUTTA, IN. 17. 9. 1870

FATHER-NAME OF BIRTH (Place..... *Patna*)
(Date..... *21.7.70*)
(Register No..... *443*)

Name..... *Shamshad Jagan*

Father's name..... *Ramdoyal*

Age..... *25*

Caste..... *Kurmi*

Name of next-of-kin..... *Ramchandra Khatun*

If married, name of husband.....

District..... *Gerachpur*

Thana..... *De*

Village or Town & Mohalla..... *Bardaha*

bodily Marks..... *Letter marks both feet*

Height..... *5 feet* *1 inch*

Witnessed that we have examined and passed the above-named woman as fit to emigrate; that she is free from all bodily and mental disease; and that she has been vaccinated since engaging to emigrate.

DATE..... 18.9.70

[Signature]
Surgeon Superintendent.

DOOLARIE'S STORY

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES IN ST. AUGUSTINE, TRINIDAD, POSSESSES THE TRANSCRIPT OF AN UNPUBLISHED ORAL HISTORY WITH A 109-YEAR-OLD WOMAN NAMED DOOLARIE, WHO TRAVELED FROM INDIA TO TRINIDAD AS AN INDENTURED LABORER IN 1913. **DOOLARIE'S INTERVIEW IS A RARE FIRST-HAND ACCOUNT THAT DESCRIBES THE DEGRADING EXPERIENCE OF INDENTURE THROUGH THE LENS OF A FEMALE LABORER.** SHE DESCRIBED WORKERS BEING LOADED INTO TRUCKS "LIKE FLOUR BAGS," THEN TAKEN TO THE PLANTATION. WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES IN INDENTURE HAVE CONTINUOUSLY REMAINED HIDDEN IN THE ARCHIVES OF HISTORY: **PARTLY BECAUSE OF THE LOW STATUS THEY HELD, BUT ALSO BECAUSE OF THE GENDER IMBALANCES WITHIN INDENTURE THAT PUSHED THEM OUT OF THE NARRATIVE ENTIRELY.**

DOOLARIE BEGAN HER INDENTURE CONTRACT ON AUGUST 23, 1913, ON THE 26SS SUTLISS. SHE EXPLAINS THE MAJOR PUSH FACTORS FOR HER LEAVING INDIA: SHE HAD NO ONE TO STAY WITH OR SUPPORT HER IN INDIA, AND THERE WAS LITTLE TO NO ACCESSIBLE FOOD. DOOLARIE WAS AGAIN QUICK TO MENTION THAT FOR THOSE REASONS, SHE WOULD NEVER GO BACK. HER MOTHER DIED IN INDIA, WHILE HER FATHER DIED ON THE SHIP'S JOURNEY. THROUGH TIMES OF LONELINESS AND THE UNKNOWN, DOOLARIE FOUND HERSELF PRAYING EVERY NIGHT TO HER GOD, BHAGWAN. SHE RECALLS THE HARD AND GRUELING WORK SHE HAD TO COMPLETE WHILE IN TRINIDAD, AND HOW SHE WAS PAID "SIX DOLLARS A NIGHT." **DOOLARIE'S STORY IS COMPLEX AND INCREDIBLY POWERFUL. IT HIGHLIGHTS HER STRUGGLE AND RESILIENCE AS A FEMALE LABORER, AS WELL AS ACKNOWLEDGING THE LACK OF INITIATIVE TO PRESERVE STORIES LIKE HERS.**

DOOLARIE WAS A WOMAN, DAUGHTER, WIFE, MOTHER, AND ORPHAN WHO WAS SUBJUGATED TO THE INJUSTICES OF INDENTURE FUELED BY COLONIAL EXPLOITATION. **HER STORY CANNOT BE FORGOTTEN.** LIKEWISE, "NO ACCOUNT OF THE COOLIE EXPERIENCE CAN EVER BE COMPLETE, FOR THEY ARE BUT THE SCRAPS OF HISTORY." (DABYDEEN XI)

WHAT IS BHOJPURI MUSIC?

BHOJPURI IS A LANGUAGE PREDOMINATELY SPOKEN IN THE WESTERN REGION OF BIHAR, EASTERN UTTAR PRADESH, AND PARTS OF JHARKHAND. DURING THE 19TH CENTURY, FOLLOWING THE ABOLITION OF SLAVERY, INDENTURED LABORERS WERE SENT TO BRITISH COLONIES TO PERFORM MANUAL LABOR ON PLANTATIONS. THE AREA BETWEEN EASTERN UTTAR PRADESH AND WESTERN BIHAR WAS A MAJOR BHOJPURI-SPEAKING BELT. THE BHOJPURI LANGUAGE HAS A HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION WITH LOW-INCOME, RURAL, AND INDENTURED COMMUNITIES, LEADING TO ITS STIGMATIZATION AS A LOW-LEVEL “DIALECT” INSTEAD OF A LANGUAGE. ROOPAM MISHRA, A BHOJPURI SPEAKER, SHARED THAT, **“BHOJPURI WAS ALWAYS HUMOROUS TO THE PEOPLE OF T.V. EITHER THE PEOPLE SPEAKING DIALECTS LIKE BHOJPURI, AWADHI, MAGADHI, BRAJ, ETC. WERE SHOWN AS POOR, HELPLESS, DYING PEOPLE, OR PEOPLE WITH CRUDE MANNERISMS, AND SEVERELY LACKING CULTURE. I COME FROM A BHOJPURI-SPEAKING BACKGROUND. HOWEVER, I WAS NEVER ENCOURAGED TO SPEAK THE LANGUAGE.”**

BHOJPURI FOLK MUSIC SERVED AS A COMMUNAL EXPRESSION OF DAILY LIFE, SPIRITUALITY, AND SOCIAL BONDS. THESE SONGS WERE PRIMARILY SUNG BY WOMEN DURING WEDDINGS, FUNERALS, AND FESTIVALS, REFLECTING GENDERED EXPERIENCES OF EMOTIONAL AND SOCIAL EXPRESSION. SOME COMMON FORMS OF BHOJPURI INCLUDE BIRAHA (SONGS OF LONGING AND SEPARATION), KAJRI (MONSOON SONGS), CHAITI (SPRINGTIME SONGS), AND SOHAR (BIRTH SONGS). WOMEN WERE CENTRAL FIGURES IN SUSTAINING THESE MUSICAL TRADITIONS AND USED INSTRUMENTS LIKE THE DHOLAK, MANJIRA (HAND CYMBALS), KHARTAL, AND OCCASIONALLY THE HARMONIUM. THIS MUSIC EVENTUALLY FORMED THE FOUNDATION OF INDO-CARIBBEAN MUSICAL FORMS LIKE CHUTNEY.



THE ORIGINS OF CHUTNEY, CALYPSO & SOCA

CHUTNEY MUSIC ORIGINATED IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO IN THE MID-20TH CENTURY, EMERGING FROM BHOJPURI FOLK MUSIC CARRIED BY INDIAN INDENTURED LABORERS.¹ INITIALLY, EARLY CHUTNEY WAS A FEMALE-DOMINATED FOLK FORM SUNG AT WEDDINGS AND IN HOMES (BEHIND CLOSED DOORS), FOCUSING ON THEMES LIKE BIRTH, MARRIAGE, AND DAILY LIFE. THE SONGS CARRIED FAST TEMPOS, CONSISTENT ONE-TO-TWO LINE REPEATED PHRASES, AND LIGHT LYRICS.



CALYPSO MUSIC IN TRINIDAD ORIGINATED IN THE LATE 18TH TO EARLY 19TH-CENTURY AMONG ENSLAVED AFRICANS DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD. IT FOLLOWS A CALL-AND-RESPONSE BEAT, RHYTHMIC STORYTELLING, AND SATIRICAL LYRICS. KEY INSTRUMENTS INCLUDE THE STEEL PAN, PERCUSSION LIKE BONGOS AND CONGAS, BASS GUITARS, AND MORE. IT DEVELOPED AS A MODE OF ORAL RESISTANCE AGAINST SLAVERY, AS CALYPSO SONGS WERE OFTEN USED TO COMMUNICATE NEWS AND MOCK PLANTATION OWNERS.

SOCA MUSIC ORIGINATED AS A FUSION OF CALYPSO WITH INDIAN RHYTHMS, THUS COMBINING MUSICAL TRADITIONS OF THE TWO MAJOR ETHNIC GROUPS IN TRINIDAD.⁴ "SO" IN THE WORD "SOCA" REPRESENTS SOUL, WHILE "CA" REPRESENTS "CALYPSO" WITH INDIAN RHYTHMS. SOCA WAS INVENTED BY RAS SHORTY 1, ALSO KNOWN AS LORD SHORTY, TO IMPROVE CALYPSO AS IT WAS "DYING" AND PEOPLE WERE IN NEED OF "UP-BEAT RHYTHMS."

SHORTY WAS HEAVILY CRITICIZED FOR CREATING SOCA BY BOTH EAST INDIANS AND AFRICANS. EAST INDIANS CLAIMED HE WAS DISRESPECTING THEIR MUSIC, WHILE AFRICANS CLAIMED HE WAS SOLELY PLAYING INDIAN MUSIC. IN RESPONSE, HE REPLICATED INDIAN RHYTHMS ON INSTRUMENTS SUCH AS THE TRIANGLE AND GUITAR, AND INCLUDED DISCO ELEMENTS THAT EVENTUALLY LEAD TO HIS HIT SOCA ALBUM, ENDLESS VIBRATIONS, IN 1974. THIS ALBUM BECAME A FOUNDATIONAL SOCA TRACK AND REVOLUTIONIZED THE GENRE.

CHUTNEY-SOCA AND FUSION MUSIC

CHUTNEY-SOCA MUSIC EMERGED IN THE LATE 1980S, BLENDING TRADITIONAL INDO-CARIBBEAN CHUTNEY MUSIC AND CARIBBEAN SOCA AND CALYPSO. IT MERGED BHOJPURI FOLK SONGS WITH HINDI/ENGLISH LYRICS WITH ELECTRONIC BEATS, TASSA DRUMS AND INSTRUMENTS LIKE THE DHOLAK AND DHANTAL. THIS NEW MUSICAL FORM BECAME A BRIDGE FOR YOUNGER GENERATIONS TO CONNECT WITH THEIR HERITAGE WHILE STILL ADAPTING TO MODERN CARIBBEAN LIFE.



QUEEN OF CHUTNEY-SOCA

DRUPATEE RAMGOONAI IS AN INDO-TRINIDADIAN CHUTNEY AND CHUTNEY-SOCA MUSICIAN. SHE WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR COINING THE TERM "CHUTNEY-SOCA" HER 1987 ALBUM BROKE SIGNIFICANT CULTURAL & GENDER BARRIERS IN TRINIDAD. CHALLENGING PATRIARCHAL AND AFRO-CENTRIC MUSICAL NORMS AND TO BRIDGE THE DIVIDE BETWEEN INDO- AND AFRO-TRINIDADIANS. MOVING CHUTNEY MUSIC FROM THE MARGINS OF CULTURAL LIFE TO MAINSTREAM CARNIVAL FESTIVITIES, PAVING THE WAY FOR THE LATER ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHUTNEY-SOCA MONARCH COMPETITION.



RAMGOONAI FUSES CHUTNEY RHYTHMS WITH SOCA'S CARNIVAL-STYLE, SIGNALING A DELIBERATE SHIFT FROM PRIVATE COMMUNITY-BASED SPACES TO PUBLIC NATIONAL CULTURE. DEMONSTRATING THAT CULTURAL FUSION COULD BE A FORM OF CULTURAL SURVIVAL. THIS WAS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT IN A POST-INDEPENDENCE SOCIETY WHERE PEOPLE WERE GRAPPLING WITH RACE, SENSE OF BELONGING, AND WHOSE CULTURE COUNTED AS "TRINIDADIAN."

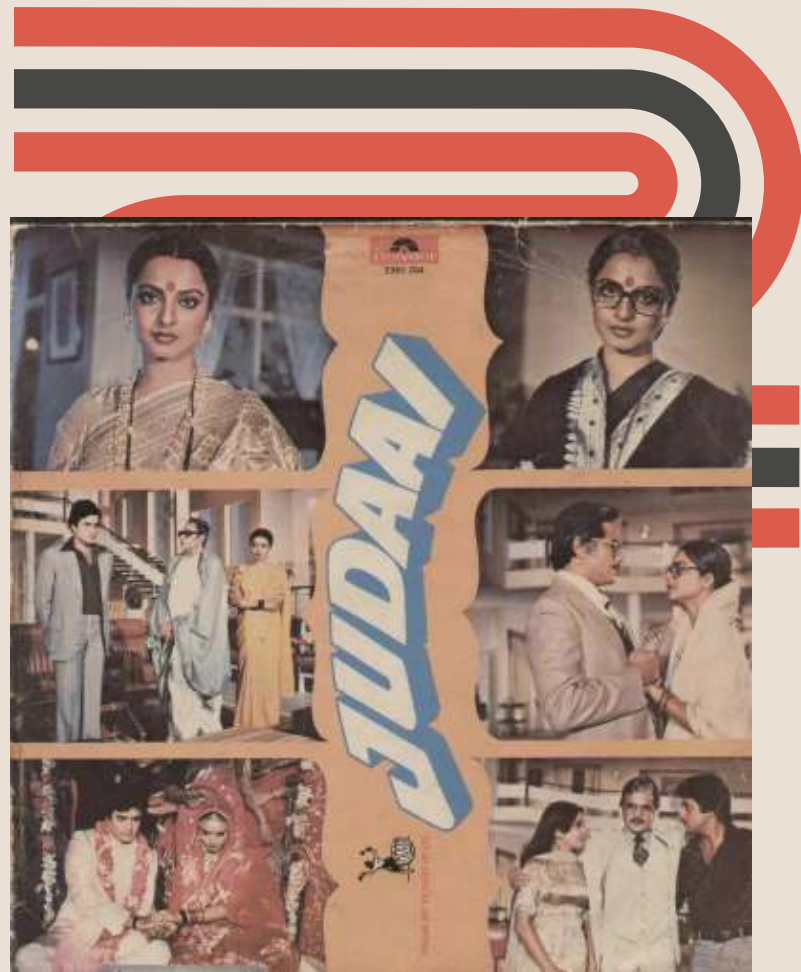
MUSIC IN AN INDO-TRINIDADIAN MUSIC

THE INTRODUCTION OF HINDI FILMS TO THE CARIBBEAN DURING THE MID-1930S ADDED A NEW LAYER OF INDIAN CULTURAL PRESENCE IN THE DIASPORA. BY THE EARLY 1940S, HINDI MOVIES BECAME WIDELY SOUGHT AFTER AMONG INDO-CARIBBEANS, PROVIDING FOR MANY A DIRECT LINK TO A CHERISHED YET DISTANT HOMETLAND. MANY INDO-CARIBBEANS VALUED THESE FILMS FOR THEIR DIASPORIC CONNECTION. EVEN THOUGH HINDI MOVIES WERE USUALLY BROADCAST ON TRINIDADIAN AND GUYANESE TELEVISION WITHOUT SUBTITLES, MEANING THAT DETAILS OF THE PLOT MAY HAVE BEEN LOST ON THE MANY VIEWERS WHO UNDERSTOOD VERY LITTLE HINDI, MANY NEVERTHELESS ENJOY THESE FILMS AS CULTURAL ICONS.

HINDI FILM MUSIC HAS SINGLEHANDEDLY BEEN THE MOST POPULAR GENRE OF MUSIC AMONG INDO-TRINIDADIANS AND GUYANESE, DESPITE LIMITED ABILITY TO UNDERSTAND SONG LYRICS. ARTISTS LIKE LATA MANGESHKAR SERVED AS A BRIDGE TO “MOTHER INDIA” FOR MANY INDO-CARIBBEANS. SHE SANG MELODIES THAT EXPRESSED JOY, PATRIOTISM, SORROW AND MORE, WHICH FOSTERED A SENSE OF BELONGING AMONG THE INDO-TRINIDADIAN COMMUNITY. HER VOICE INVOKED POWERFUL NOSTALGIA FOR A LAND THAT MANY TRINIDADIANS HAD NEVER SEEN, BUT FELT CONNECTED TO THROUGH FILM AND SONG. MANGESHKAR’S 1979 HIT, “DAFLI WALE DAFLI BAJA” BECAME AN OUTLET FOR NUMEROUS FAMILIES, LIKE MY OWN, TO FIND CONNECTION.

**“DAFLI WALE DAFLI BAJA
O DRUMMER, PLAY THE DRUM
DAFLI WALE DAFLI BAJA
O DRUMMER, PLAY THE DRUM
MERE GHUNGHRE BULATE HAI,
AA
MY ANKLETS ARE CALLING
YOU, COME ON
MAIN NAACHUN, TU NACHA
I’LL DANCE AND YOU MAKE ME
DANCE”**

**SONG : DAFLI WALE DAFLI BAJA
MOVIE : SARGAM (1979)
SINGER(S): LATA MANGESHKAR,
MOHAMMED RAFI**



INDO-TRINIDADIAN MUSIC IN QUEENS

MY GRANDFATHER IMMIGRATED FROM TRINIDAD TO NEW YORK CITY IN 1981, FOLLOWING MY MOTHER, AUNT, AND GRANDMOTHER'S IMMIGRATION IN 1982. AT FIRST, HE LIVED IN PARK SLOPE, BROOKLYN, BUT THEN MOVED TO SOUTH OZONE PARK FOR A GREATER SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND AFFORDABILITY. **INDO-TRINIDADIAN MUSIC HAS FOUND ITS NEW YORK HOME IN QUEENS NEIGHBORHOODS LIKE RICHMOND HILL AND SOUTH OZONE PARK.** SPECIFICALLY, LIBERTY AVENUE HAS PLAYED A VITAL ROLE IN SUSTAINING INDO-CARIBBEAN CULTURE AND MUSIC. **THIS ENCLAVE HAS PROVIDED A SPACE FOR BUSINESSES, RELIGIOUS, AND CULTURAL PRESERVATION.**

REFLECTING ON THIS, AN INDO-TRINIDADIAN RESIDING IN SOUTH OZONE PARK REFLECTS, "WHEN YOU GO TO LIBERTY, THERE'S THIS ONE GUY I NORMALLY GO TO, RISHI VIDEO. THAT'S WHERE I WENT TO GET ALL THE MOVIES FROM. I GET ALL THE INDIAN MOVIES AND SONGS AND EVERYTHING. SO HE ALWAYS PLAY INDIAN MUSIC. BUT IF YOU GO IN ANY STORES, LIKE FOR INSTANCE, IF YOU WALK INTO A INDIAN STORE RIGHT NOW IN THERE ON LIBERTY, THEY WOULD PLAY INDIAN MUSIC. THEY WOULD PLAY BHAJANS [HINDU RELIGIOUS SONGS]. THEY WOULD PLAY RELIGIOUS SONGS."



THE AUTHOR'S GRANDFATHER IN AN NYC GROCERY STORE IN THE 1980S.

ADDITIONALLY, ASSIMILATION HAS CREATED A "DOUBLE MIGRATION" EXPERIENCE, FORCING THOSE TO NAVIGATE UNIQUE IDENTITIES ACROSS TRINIDADIAN, INDIAN, AND AMERICAN CULTURES. THE FIRST PERIOD FOLLOWS THE JOURNEY OF EAST INDIAN LABORERS' MIGRATION TO THE WEST INDIES, SPECIFICALLY TRINIDAD. THIS DIASPORA IN ITSELF CREATED A UNIQUE, SYNCRETIC CULTURE THAT BLENDED EAST INDIAN AND CARIBBEAN INFLUENCES TO FORM THE "DUAL IDENTITY." THE SECOND AND MOST RECENT PERIOD REFERS TO THE INDO-TRINIDADIAN MIGRATION TO PLACES LIKE NEW YORK CITY FROM 1962 TO THE PRESENT.

MY MOTHER'S EXPERIENCE WITH HER INDO-TRINIDADIAN IDENTITY HAS CHANGED OVER TIME. WHEN SHE WAS YOUNGER, **SHE FELT PRESSURE TO ASSIMILATE TO AMERICAN CULTURE AND TO SILENCE PARTS OF HERSELF THAT MADE HER "OTHER."** MY EXPERIENCE AS A **FIRST-GENERATION INDO-TRINIDADIAN AMERICAN WAS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT.** THERE WAS NEVER A PRESSURE TO ASSIMILATE. I ALWAYS WANTED TO SHOWCASE MY FAMILY'S STORIES, PERSEVERANCE, AND DIVERSE IDENTITY. OVER THE YEARS, MY MOTHER'S IDENTITY DEVELOPED INTO PRIDE. SHE FOUND A SPACE FOR HERSELF AS AN INDO-TRINIDADIAN AND AS AN AMERICAN. NOW, INSTEAD OF LOWERING THE VOLUME OF OUR IDENTITY, WE TURN IT UP. **EACH TASSA BEAT AND CHUTNEY RHYTHM BECOMES A DECLARATION OF DETERMINATION, PROOF THAT DESPITE DISPLACEMENT, INDENTURE, AND ERASURE, OUR IDENTITY REMAINS.**

WHAT IS THE EAST INDIAN MUSIC ACADEMY?

THE EAST INDIAN MUSIC ACADEMY IS A PIONEERING INDO-CARIBBEAN NON-PROFIT BASED IN SOUTH OZONE PARK THAT TEACHES INDIAN MUSIC, CULTURE, AND INSTRUMENTS. FOR OVER TWO DECADES, THEY HAVE BEEN DEDICATED TO PROMOTING EAST INDIAN CULTURE THROUGH THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF MUSIC TO "BRIDGE HEARTS" AND "CONNECT SOULS." THE LANGUAGE OF MUSIC SPEAKS VOLUMES ABOUT TRADITION, INSPIRATION, AND TIMELESS CULTURAL PRIDE.



CONCLUSION

LEARNING ABOUT THIS HISTORY IS IMPORTANT BECAUSE REPRESENTATION IS ESSENTIAL. IT SHAPES HOW STUDENTS UNDERSTAND BOTH THEMSELVES AND THE WORLD AROUND THEM. **TEACHING INDO-CARIBBEAN MUSIC IN SCHOOL DISRUPTS THE TRADITIONAL ERASURE OF INDENTURE** AND CHALLENGES THE NARROW WAY CARIBBEAN HISTORY IS OFTEN TAUGHT, WHICH FREQUENTLY OVERLOOKS THE PRESENCE AND CONTRIBUTION OF INDO-CARIBBEAN COMMUNITIES. BY INTEGRATING MUSIC INTO "MAINSTREAM EDUCATION," **THIS PROJECT OFFERS A MORE ALTRUISTIC AND ACCESSIBLE WAY OF UNDERSTANDING THE PAST, EMPHASIZING CULTURAL SURVIVAL, RESISTANCE, AND IDENTITY.**

MUSIC HAS BECOME AN ARCHIVE OF MEMORY AND CARRIES PRECIOUS STORIES OF MIGRATION, RESISTANCE, AND SURVIVAL. THIS HISTORY IS LIVING WITHIN FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES TODAY. **INDO-CARIBBEAN STUDENTS SEEING THEIR HISTORY ACKNOWLEDGED AFFIRMS THEIR IDENTITY, SENSE OF BELONGING, AND TELLS THEIR AMERICAN STORY.** FINALLY, THE IMPORTANCE OF REPRESENTATION CHALLENGES DOMINANT HISTORICAL NARRATIVES AND ENSURES THAT THE RESILIENCE AND SACRIFICES OF INDO-CARIBBEAN COMMUNITIES ARE FINALLY RECOGNIZED AS INTEGRAL PARTS OF CARIBBEAN, AMERICAN, AND LOCAL HISTORIES.

WORKS CITED

- BAHADUR, GAIUTRA. *COOLIE WOMAN: THE ODYSSEY OF INDENTURE*. CHICAGO, IL: UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS, 2016.
- BLACKWELL, FRITZ. "THE BRITISH IMPACT ON INDIA, 1700–1900." *ASIA IN WORLD HISTORY: 1750–1914, VOLUME 13:2* (FALL 2008).
- CARTWRIGHT, MARK. "THE FALL OF THE BRITISH EAST INDIA COMPANY IN THE 19TH CENTURY." BREWMINATE, JULY 31, 2024.
- GHOSH, AMITAV. *SMOKE AND ASHES: OPIUM'S HIDDEN HISTORIES*. NEW YORK: FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX, 2024.
- HENRY, FRANCES, AND DWAIN PLAZA, EDS. *CARNIVAL IS WOMAN: FEMINISM AND PERFORMANCE IN CARIBBEAN MAS*. JACKSON: UNIVERSITY PRESS OF MISSISSIPPI, 2020.
- KLEIN, ALISON. "TANGLED UP: GENDERED NATIONHOOD IN INDO– CARIBBEAN INDENTURE NARRATIVES." *ANTHURIUM: A CARIBBEAN STUDIES JOURNAL*, VOL. 12, NO. 2 (DECEMBER 2015).
- LATIMER, JAMES. "THE APPRENTICESHIP SYSTEM IN THE BRITISH WEST INDIES." *THE JOURNAL OF NEGRO EDUCATION*, VOL. 33, NO. 1 (WINTER 1964).
- MANUEL, PETER. "CHUTNEY AND INDO–TRINIDADIAN CULTURAL IDENTITY." *POPULAR MUSIC*, VOL. 17, NO. 1 (JANUARY 1998).
- MANUEL, PETER. "MUSIC, IDENTITY, AND IMAGES OF INDIA IN THE INDO–CARIBBEAN DIASPORA." *ASIAN MUSIC*, VOL. 29, NO. 1 (AUTUMN 1997/WINTER 1998).
- MISHRA, YASH. "HOW BHOJPURI FOUNDED CHUTNEY MUSIC IN THE CARIBBEAN." PEEPULTREE, JANUARY 18, 2022.
- MISHRA, ROOPAM. "BHOJPURI: AN INTEGRAL PART OF MY IDENTITY." CAFE DISSENSUS EVERYDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2020.
- MITRA, SUDIPTO. "ARKATIS, RECRUITERS, INTERMEDIARIES: THE PEOPLE AND PRACTICES IN INDENTURED LABOUR RECRUITMENT IN NINETEENTH CENTURY INDIA." DOCTORAL THESIS, ROYAL HOLLOWAY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON, 2026.
- MOHAMMED, PATRICIA. "CARNIVAL IS WOMAN: FEMINISM AND PERFORMANCE IN CARIBBEAN MAS." *NEW WEST INDIAN GUIDE / NIEUWE WEST-INDISCHE GIDS*, VOL. 95, NO. 1-2 (MARCH 2021).
- NIRANJANA, TEJASWINI. *MOBILIZING INDIA: WOMEN, MUSIC, AND MIGRATION BETWEEN INDIA AND TRINIDAD*. DURHAM, NC: DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2006.
- RAMSAWAK, JESSICA. "TWICE MIGRATION AND INDO–CARIBBEAN AMERICAN IDENTITY POLITICS." *POLITICAL SCIENCE* (SPRING 2020).
- REDDOCK, RHODA E. *WOMEN, LABOUR AND POLITICS IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO: A HISTORY, 'BRAVE DANCE.'* LONDON: ZED BOOKS, 1994.
- SOKA TRIBE. "'HANDS IN DE AIR': IDENTIFYING A BLACK CARIBBEAN FEMINISM IN SOCA MUSIC." SOKA TRIBE BLOG, OCTOBER 26, 2020.
- VATS, RUCHI. "COLONIAL CODIFICATION AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: AN EXAMINATION OF BRITISH INTERFERENCE WITH THE INDIAN CASTE SYSTEM." *AFRICAN JOURNAL OF BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH*, VOL. 27 NO. 5S (2024).
- WOLPERT, STANLEY A. "BRITISH RAJ." ENTRY IN *ENCYCLOPEDIA BRITANNICA*, PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 24, 2019.
- ORAL HISTORIES:**
- BATCHOO, CINTRA. "ORAL HISTORY WITH CINTRA BATCHOO" INTERVIEWED BY GUINEVERE WOLSKI. 01/20/26. 10:21.
- BATCHOO, VISHNU. "ORAL HISTORY WITH VISHNU BATCHOO" INTERVIEWED BY GUINEVERE WOLSKI. 01/25/26. 39:08.
- MANUEL, PETER. "ORAL HISTORY WITH DR. MANUEL" INTERVIEWED BY GUINEVERE WOLSKI. 01/23/26. 14:18.
- WOLSKI, STEFAN. "ORAL HISTORY WITH STEFAN WOLSKI" INTERVIEWED BY GUINEVERE WOLSKI. 02/08/26. 05:36.