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most intense identification (Indianness embodied in womanhood) that the incoherence of a certain diasporic claim to Indianness comes to the foreground. "Woman," then, might also be seen as the ground for the contestation and transformation of that claim. It would be important in this regard for both East Indians and India Indians, then, not to disavow chutney-soca as derivative or hybrid, but to grant it the name "Indian," for this gesture would inscribe the continuity and discontinuity of such an identity (making it "Indian" and "Trinidadian" at the same time). In clearing a space for an insistent new visibility, the female chutney-soca performer represents an "Indian modernity" in Trinidad that could profoundly challenge the dominant formations of modernity in postcolonial locations.

TWO



"Left to the Imagination":

Indian Nationalism and
Female Sexuality

This business about the women is the weakest and the irremediable part of the evil. . . . These women are not necessarily wives. Men and women are huddled together during the voyage. The marriage is a farce. A mere declaration by man or woman made upon landing before the Protector of Immigrants that they are husband and wife constitutes a valid marriage. Naturally enough, divorce is common. The rest must be left to the imagination of the reader.

— Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, "Indentured Labour"

The aim of this chapter and the next one is to investigate a conjuncture of modernity—"Indianness" and woman that is radically different from the one in India—in the hope that it will defamiliarize that formation as well as throw some new light on the elements that led to its consolidation. This chapter attempts to alter the lens, in both scholarly and popular idioms, through which we have been accustomed to viewing or framing the emergence

of that discursive subject, the modern Indian woman. In analyzing the formation of "woman" in India, we often use, almost as if by default, the implicit comparisons with Western or metropolitan situations. I want to ask whether our frameworks might look different when the points of reference include other, nonmetropolitan contexts—in particular, those that are historically imbricated with our own even if in ways that are obscured by later developments.

My investigation proceeds through an analysis of the early-twentieth-century campaign against indentureship in the tropical colonies by nationalists in India. I follow this, in chapter 3, with an investigation of a contemporary controversy around East Indian women and popular music in Trinidad. I have chosen these moments for their foregrounding of the question of female sexuality, an issue that increasingly is being seen as central to the formation of gendered citizenship and to dominant narratives of modernity and nationhood. Historically, the moments are also those of "Indian" political assertion as well as of the availability of new possibilities for "Indian" women. I use the quotation marks for the term "Indian" to signal its double use here: marking in my first "moment," a (future) nationality in South Asia, and in my second, an "ethnic" category in the Caribbean. Much of the writing in the media tends to blur the difference between the two usages, a blurring that could well serve to make Indo-Trinidadians invisible in India as well as in Trinidad, marking them simultaneously as "not Indian enough" in the first location and as "not Trinidadian enough" in the second.

The otherness of the Indian—or, sometimes, "Eastern"—female body is a common enough trope in Orientalisms of various kinds that have been the focus of much postcolonial feminist theoretical intervention in recent years. A more central preoccupation in the women's movement in India in the past decade or two has been to understand the gendered nature of our (non-Western) modernity and its specific concerns with maintaining Indianness or cultural authenticity in the midst of social transformation. Attention has been drawn to the reformulation of patriarchal authority at different moments in the history of anti-imperialist struggle and to the re-composition of "Indian women" through the contests between colonizer and colonized. This process is commonly envisaged as part of an Indian history that unfolds in India. My task will be to show that the constitutive outside of what we in India see today as normative femininity are figures

such as the indentured female laborer who was part of the subaltern Indian migration to the Caribbean.¹

The formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 signaled the beginning of a new phase of organization in the movement against British rule in India. Accommodating a wide spectrum of ideological strands and reconciling a host of conflicting interests, the congress was able, in the space of the next few decades, to provide focus and direction to the anti-colonial struggle, culminating in the final hand over of political power in 1947. Among the many successful initiatives of the nationalists was the early-twentieth-century campaign against indentureship, which contributed in significant measure to building up a moral case against colonialism. However, in the late nineteenth century, indenture did not yet figure as a significant anticolonial issue. On the contrary, as B. R. Nanda points out, in 1893 the leading nationalist M. G. Ranade actually wrote an article titled "Indian Foreign Emigration," in which he argued that emigration provided some "relief" to the growing population of India and that the expansion of the British Empire could be seen as a "direct gain" to the masses of this country.² Eventually, however, due in significant measure to the efforts of an Indian involved in agitations in South Africa, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, a figure who was to rise to great prominence in the nationalist struggle, indentured emigration became an important issue for Indian nationalism.³

Born in India and educated as a barrister in England, Gandhi had gone to South Africa in 1893 to work as a lawyer for a prominent Indian business family and ended up staying there for nearly twenty-one years.⁴ Although the early agitations initiated by Gandhi did not involve indentured workers in Natal, many of them came to participate in Gandhi's passive-resistance (*satyagraha*) campaign against the various legal disabilities imposed on Indians in South Africa. Closer interaction with the indentured increased Gandhi's awareness of their specific problems, which he tried to bring to the attention of nationalists in India.

The *satyagraha*, stretching from 1906 to 1914, was for Gandhi a direct ancestor of the anti-indenture agitation. When Gandhi began the *satyagraha* campaign in South Africa, the Imperial Indian Citizenship Association, a group which expressed explicit concern for Indian immigrants, was founded in Bombay.

From the 1890s on, Gandhi attempted to enlist the help of the Indian

National Congress leaders. Gopal Krishna Gokhale in particular supported his endeavors. In 1894, Gandhi drafted the first petition protesting against the indenture system. After constitutional reforms in 1909, a Legislative Council with Indian members was formed in India and was dominated by the Indian National Congress. As a member of the Legislative Council, Gokhale in 1910 moved a successful resolution to stop the recruitment of indentured labor for Natal. In spite of his failing health, Gokhale not only visited South Africa on Gandhi's invitation but also aroused public opinion in India. "Eventually all India was deeply stirred, and the South African question became the burning topic of the day."⁵ The focus of Gandhi and his European Indophile colleagues (C. F. Andrews, William Pearson, Henry Polak) was hardship among the indentured in Fiji and South Africa, and while Indian indentured laborers in the West Indies seldom got special mention in this narrative, it was usually assumed that they were included in the criticism of the British Empire's government-controlled labor migrations.

Indentured Women in the West Indies

The nationalist description of the situation of indentured women drew from missionary accounts, government of India and colonial administrators' reports, and firsthand accounts of sympathetic Europeans such as Andrews, who wrote about Fiji. The central concern of all these writers seemed to be the "immorality" caused by the disparate sex ratio of the immigrant laborers. There was also more than a suggestion that the inconstancy of Indian women could be traced to the social composition of the female migrants.

Women evangelicals of the Canadian Presbyterian Church, which began proselytizing among the Indians in Trinidad in 1868, interacted closely with the indentured women and recorded their impressions of what they saw as barbaric "Indian customs" and the reprehensible behavior of the women in particular:

There are no zenanas [women's quarters] in Trinidad. Our women immigrants are not recruited from the class that in India are shut up in zenanas. In Trinidad they find themselves of added importance through the small proportion of their sex. They have great freedom of intercourse and much evil example around them. Sad to say they often shew themselves to be as degraded as they are ignorant. On the other hand many are beautiful and

lovable, faithful to their husbands and devoted to their children. This, however, is by no means the rule.⁶

While the planters did not want a permanent community of laborers at first, preferring young male workers who would return to India at the end of their indenture period and make way for a new batch, colonial officials recommended that a certain proportion of women to men be maintained to avoid what they saw as social complications. For a variety of reasons, however, recruiters were often unable to obtain a sufficient number of women.

Rhoda Reddock addresses the implications of this problem in her important early work on women under indentureship. Modern historians, according to Reddock, do not pay sufficient attention to the disparate sex ratio, although it was a crucial point of contention during the entire period of indenture. In 1884, Act 21 of the government of India authorized the resumption of emigration to the West Indies after a long break, laying down as one of its conditions that at least 12 percent of the emigrants should be female—a legal proportion, says Reddock, that was rarely enforced. She points to how, in a period of twenty-two years between 1857 and 1879, the recommended ratio of women to men changed about six times, "ranging from one woman to every three men in 1857 to one to two in 1868 and one to four in 1878-79." Reddock is of the view that these changes in the proportion of men to women reflect the contradictions in recruiting "the right kind of women." She concurs with other historians that as early as 1851 there was a recognition of the need for women as a "stabilizing factor" on the male laborers, and that by the late nineteenth century, planters were convinced that they needed a stable workforce that would not return to India and were therefore willing to create the conditions for the reproduction of Indian families in Trinidad. This need for domestic units coincided, as we shall see, with the Presbyterian initiatives regarding education for Indian women and the range of housewifely skills they were expected to acquire. Among the efforts to increase the number of female emigrants was the 1890s reduction of the indenture period for women from five years to three and the promise to recruiting agents of an increased commission for women, sometimes 40 percent higher than that for men. Emigrants were also encouraged to take female children, preferably between age ten and fourteen.⁷

As historian K. O. Laurence suggests, one of the reasons for the lack of women was that few wives emigrated, since their husbands preferred leaving them behind in the protection of their joint family to taking them

to a strange country, especially since the indenture period was presumed to be a short one.⁸ The government of India tried to set the proportion of women to men at 50:100, but that was opposed on various counts, including the argument that it would, according to a former emigration commissioner, result in recruiting “bad women” who would “do more harm than good.”⁹ The concern about immorality arising because of the small number of women seemed to go hand in hand with the idea that these women were innately depraved to begin with and that the real solution was to obtain enough virtuous wives to offset the other kinds of women, who seemed most likely to want to emigrate.

If we look at the number of married women among the female emigrants, it becomes obvious that they were often a minority. Here are some random figures for Indian female immigrants registered as married on arrival in Trinidad from 1882 to 1900, taken from G. I. M. Tikasingh’s tables from the General Registers of Immigrants and the Register of Indian Marriage. In 1882, the total number of female immigrants was 662, among whom 133, or about 20 percent, were married. In 1890, of 713 female immigrants, 291 (40.8 percent) were married. In 1891, of 1,091 female immigrants, 470 (43 percent, the highest figure in the period under consideration) were married. And in 1898, of 371 female immigrants, 59 (15.9 percent, the lowest figure) were married.¹⁰ In 1900, at the beginning of the new century, of 188 female immigrants, 46 (24.4 percent) were married. The rest of the women, from 57 percent (in 1891) to nearly 84 percent (in 1898) were single, being unmarried, widowed, or deserted. Family legends are often invoked in present-day Trinidad to trace the history of foremothers. A woman now in her seventies who was born in Trinidad told me that her parents had migrated from India. Her father was a young Muslim who spent his time doing “kusti” (wrestling). One day he went to a dance and was waylaid by recruiters who treated him to *channa* (chickpeas) and lured him to migrate. “Dey fool dem from Indya and bring dem to Trinidad,” she said. Her mother was Hindu, of the Chattri caste. She had lost her husband and was being taken to have her head shorn—to “cut hair and break bracelet,” as befitted an upper-caste widow—when a recruiter got her to go away to Trinidad. She felt that her parents would never accept her if she went back and decided to stay on in Trinidad, even though her second husband was keen to return. She also converted to Islam. “All o’ dem come dung on de same wite man estate, and so she met my fader,” the woman said.¹¹ Another woman, a young telecommunications worker, claimed that she was “a descendant of the Mughals. . . .



Indentured Indian woman. Collection of Eric Scott Henderson.

[S]ome of those who came to Trinidad were stolen or some of them were sold by their own relatives and my great grandmother, she was a Mughal princess and she eleven years old and she was being transported back from her home to her husband’s house. Her brother-in-law was taking her and she had all her jewels on and everything and she was going and he took her and sold her. She got away and she was captured and sold again and when she came to Trinidad, she didn’t know how to work.”¹²

The planters demanded not only more women but the “right kind of women,” who would be not only productive laborers on the estates but also faithful wives to the male workers. In response to these demands, the recruiters pointed out that a better class of women could not be induced to emigrate and that, in any case, they would be no good as field laborers. As an emigration agent in Calcutta put it in 1915: “In considering this matter it must be borne in mind that genuine field labourers such as the planters require can be obtained only from among the lowest castes, i.e. from among

the non-moral class of the population. A more moral type is found higher in the social scale, but such women would be useless in the fields."¹³ Recruiters also warned that if more women were demanded, they would be sending "non-effective" ones or "objectionable characters."¹⁴ As Basdeo Mangru points out in the case of British Guiana, Trinidad's neighbor, "Criticisms regarding the type of women imported had not been wanting. Immigration officials and others often referred to their 'loose and depraved character' and condemned the Emigration Agents for shipping 'the sweepings of the Bazaars' of Calcutta and other large Indian cities."¹⁵

Evidence from another destination of indentured emigrants, the Dutch colony of Surinam, suggests the diversity of occupations of the women who decided to migrate. An emigration agent for Surinam wrote in 1877-78 about the recruits gathered in the depot prior to departure: "Their number was considerably augmented by a batch of dancing girls and women of similar description with their male attendants. These people laughed at the idea of labouring as agriculturalists." Other descriptions of female migrants to the same colony indicate close similarities with the British West Indies. The protector of emigrants, writing in 1880, says, "The class of women willing to emigrate consists principally of young widows and married or single women who have already gone astray and are therefore not only most anxious to avoid their homes and to conceal their antecedents, but are also at the same time unlikely to be received back into their families."¹⁶ James McNeill and Chimman Lal, authors of a 1915 report on the situation of the indentured, state that the female migrants "consist as to one-third of married women . . . the remainder being mostly widows and women who have run away from their husbands or been put away by them." They go on to say that a small number of the women were "ordinary prostitutes." Given this general profile, it was difficult for the commissioners to "elicit from the women themselves a full and frank account of their antecedents."¹⁷

Oral histories of early-twentieth-century Trinidad provide the story of Maharani, a young Brahmin widow who ran away to Trinidad, fearing ill treatment in her in-laws' house:

Maharani
I married
me husband dead.
...



Indentured woman (1890s). Collection of Eric Scott Henderson.

Milk boiling

dem go want de milk to eat
an ah cat coming to drink
an ah hit im an de milk fall down
I say dem go beat me
because I getting too much lix [beatings]
I say dem go beat me
well I run
I no tell nobody I leaving
only me modder-in-law.¹⁸

Given the disparity between wages for male and female laborers, young women like Maharani often found it difficult to manage on the small amounts that they earned. To avert indebtedness to grocers and traders, the agent-general ordered in 1879 that rations be given to all first-year im-

migrants, to be deducted from their wages. (On some estates, the rations were given free of charge.) However, as Judith Weller points out, "The immigrants, especially women, frequently embarked on the second year of their apprenticeship saddled with a considerable debt for the first year's rations. The newly-arrived immigrant was the 'fag' and given the hardest work to perform."¹⁹ There were skilled "men's" tasks (millwork, forking, truck loading) and less-skilled "women's" tasks (such as weeding, manuring, supplying, and cane cutting, which were also the lowest-paid tasks). Even when women did heavy men's tasks like truck loading, they were paid the same as other women. In 1870 and 1875, a fixed minimum wage was set for men at 25 cents; for women, it was always less.²⁰ Low wages drove women to increased dependence on male partners, although they sometimes were able to negotiate the terms of such dependence.

Maharani, the Brahmin widow, for example, did not particularly want a partner but was pressed to acquire one:

An e carry me go
 e carry me he room
 I no want nobody
 I say
 I stop alone
 but she fadder say
 I like you
 but I say
 me nuh like you
 [but he takes her all the same].²¹

Missionary Travails

The Canadian Presbyterian missionaries who came to Trinidad to work with the indentured Indian laborers were the first to build schools for them.²² Access to Western-style education was accompanied by exposure to Christianity, to which the missionaries often found the Indians quite resistant. A Girls' Training Home was established in 1890 "for the protection and training of Indian girls." Christian girls age twelve and older were admitted to the home to be instructed so that they would become good wives for "our helpers" (Christian teachers). At the home, apart from Hindi, English, arithmetic, and Bible classes, the girls were taught "washing, ironing,

starching, scrubbing, gardening, sewing, and all the housewifely arts."²³ While some of them turned out to be apt pupils, other Indian women presented a puzzle to the Presbyterians, as the following extracts from the Mortons' (the missionary couple among the first Canadian Presbyterians to come to Trinidad) writings²⁴ show:

The women, as a rule, are quite as wicked as the men and more ignorant and prejudiced; thus their influence for good or evil is very great.

Soobhie knocked at Juraman's (two Indian converts) door and was taken in. Both had become Christians. Subsequently, in March 1878, she wanted to leave him and live with another man on the estate. Despite the intervention of the Mortons and others, Soobhie finally went to live with the other man:

She must be crazy as well as wicked. Some of these Indian women are hard to understand and I fear are not much good when you do understand them. But then it is the result of long ages of ignorance, mistrust, and degradation. And we cannot hope to raise them in a day. . . .

July 1878—Soobhie wishes now to come back to Juraman, but he will have nothing to say to her. [She never returned to her husband.]

The following extracts, most likely dating from 1893, indicate the difficulties the Mortons had to deal with:

S. E. M.—The loose notions and prevailing practices in respect of marriage here are quite shocking to a new-comer. I said to an East Indian woman whom I knew to be the widow of a Brahman, "You have no relations in Trinidad, I believe." "No, Madame," she replied, "only myself and two children; when the last [immigrant] ship came in I took a papa. I will keep him as long as he treats me well. If he does not treat me well I shall send him off at once; that's the right way, is it not?" This will be to some a new view of women's rights.

S. E. M.— . . . A group of women newly returned from field work salute me thus: "Your disciple is going to church now." There is a spice of malice in this, for the woman indicated [as a disciple was not baptized with us and] has left her married husband for another. I answered, "That will do her no good unless she change her living." "What can she do?" says one, "This husband takes better care of her than the other one did."

S. E. M.—A few weeks ago a poor little girl was deliberately stabbed through the heart by her would-be husband; he said he had paid \$200 to get her, and since she would not live with him no one else should have her. [These are extreme cases, but it will be understood that there was great need for improvement in the conditions of home life among the people.] A woman who had left her husband because he had taken another wife, said to me in the calmest possible way, "You know, it would not be pleasant for two of us in one house." "And where are you now?" Unhesitatingly she mentioned the name of her newly-adopted husband. "And where is your boy?" (Quite cheerfully) "With his father." But enough; or you will be thinking Trinidad the hell the East Indians sometimes call it.

It should be added that in some Indian nationalities women are treated with much greater consideration than by others, and that in more than one Sanskrit drama, read and sung every day by the priests among the people, and revered by all Hindoos, beautiful and touching love stories are related with pictures of unspotted purity and supreme devotion in married life.

And from a report from 1891:

S. E. M.—In connection with our Bible class I have read and explained each day to the girls, in Hindi, a lesson from the Zenana Reader, used by lady missionaries in India, each chapter containing a separate lesson on some subject suitable for wives and house-keepers. . . . Nothing but the power of the Word could ever have subdued the evil passions that made the experience of the first few months the most soul-trying we have ever gone through.

A new girl of about seventeen, who had studied in a mission school in Calcutta and could read Hindi and Farsi, came to the home. She was married off to a teacher and taught sewing in the Presbyterian school in Arouca. Once, in a rage, she took a broomstick to her husband:

That broom-stick, however, was a grave source of dissatisfaction around; it was feared that other wives might hear of it and do the same.

Sad to say Rachel left her husband permanently; he was proved to have been unkind to her. We last heard of her in Venezuela.

About the difficulty of training Bible women:

It must . . . be remembered that, with few exceptions, Indian girls are married at a very early age . . . and also that moral conditions in Trinidad render it altogether inadvisable, if not unsafe, for young women to visit from house to house, nor are the husbands willing.

About a teacher who was Christian but disregarded the clergy and "took unto himself a wife and a heathen to boot":

With a sad heart I had to dismiss him. In three months' time she had become another man's wife. After due repentance and full confession of his wrong-doing he was taken back into the school.

Marriage and Morals

The rapidity with which Indian women formed new relationships in Trinidad was a matter for comment by contemporary writers as well as later historians. Late-nineteenth-century visitors to the West Indies like Charles Kingsley tended to see women's behavior as stemming from practices like child marriage, which Kingsley called "a very serious evil" but attributed to customs brought from India:

The girls are practically sold by their fathers while yet children, often to wealthy men much older than they. Love is out of the question. But what if the poor child, as she grows up, sees some one, among that overplus of men, to whom she, for the first time in her life, takes a fancy? Then comes a scandal; and one which is often ended swiftly enough by the cutlass.²⁵

Kingsley talked of child brides, although many of the examples in the missionary writings are those of older women who seem to have constructed for themselves spaces of negotiation to offset their lack of privilege in the wage system of the plantation.

As Tikasingh remarks, the most common type of union was the "keeper union, . . . whose stability depended primarily upon the satisfaction of the female partner." He cites the legal case of a woman named Mungaree, who had an arrangement with a man named Namoomarlala on Orange Field Estate. Namoomarlala had given Mungaree one hundred fifty dollars in clothes and silver, and she had lived with him for eight years. She then went to live with another man, Nageeroo, "with the understanding that she could return to her former keeper at any time." Subsequently, at the time

of the court case mentioned here, she was living with yet another man, a shopkeeper. "As soon as females were ill-treated by their 'papa,' . . . they were quite ready to break the existing union and form another."²⁶

Speaking about British Guiana, Mangru points out that the "paucity of women made polyandry almost an acknowledged system. Very often an Indian woman was found to have two husbands and to be unfaithful to both."²⁷ That these kinds of relationships were also common in Trinidad is borne out by the experiences of Sarah Morton and other missionaries. Mangru cites official correspondence that expressed concern about the "loose domestic relations" among the indentured laborers: "It is not uncommon for a woman of this class to leave the man with whom she has cohabited for another, and then for a third, perhaps for a fourth, and sometimes to return to one of those she had previously deserted; and this she does in most cases with impunity."²⁸ Citing the work of B. L. Moore, K. O. Laurence gives the 1887 example of a woman at Bush Lot, British Guiana, who was "married with Hindu rites to three different men in a single year." He also points out that "in Guiana polyandry with two or three, sometimes even four men became fairly common. Similar situations were also known in Trinidad, though probably not widespread. Keeper unions however were very common there."²⁹ Evidence from Fiji and South Africa, other destinations for indentured laborers, indicates that there, too, women entered into the sorts of relationships described by commentators on the Caribbean.³⁰

The Anti-Slavery Society in England proposed banning the recruitment of single women to avoid what it saw as inevitable immorality, but it was pointed out that, to circumvent this rule, recruits would pretend to be married to each other at the time of emigration. In any case, some opponents of indentureship believed, as Gandhi did, that marriages between recruits were often fictitious. The point is not whether the marriages were false or real, or whether single women were entirely responsible for "immoral relations," but why critics and commentators chose these as the causes of a situation clearly related to the displacement of men and women into a diasporic condition. In the diaspora, new opportunities would have presented themselves to married people as well as unmarried ones. Colonial officials, however, persisted in seeing the "notoriously lax morals" of the indentured as due to the significant proportion of "sexually permissive women" on the estates, where they claimed the general "level of sexual morality" was lower than in a typical Indian village.³¹

Wife Murders

The prevalence of "wife murders" by indentured Indians in Trinidad and British Guiana in the nineteenth century was represented as due to the inconstancy of the women. David V. Trotman presents the following factual information: Between 1872 and 1880, 27 percent of all murders in Trinidad were committed by East Indian immigrants; subsequently, East Indians accounted for 60 percent of the murders between 1881 and 1889 and 70 percent between 1890 and 1898. Tikasingh gives figures between 1872 and 1900 of 87 murders of Indian women, of which 65 (74.7 percent) were murders of wives.³² The majority of the murderers were men, and those killed were women who were wives, concubines, or fiancées. Although there are quite a few court cases involving men who had killed their child brides whose fathers had promised them to several men for a hefty bride price each time, many of the cases were against men who had murdered their wives for having taken up with another man. It was also not uncommon for Indian women to form relationships with overseers and white estate managers, as depicted, for example, in A. R. F. Webber's 1917 novel *Those That Be in Bondage*.³³ Trotman contends that the women received very little sympathy, in spite of their difficulty in resisting the advances of their employers, most officials choosing to blame "the very loose character of the majority of coolie women, and the temptations to which men in the positions of managers and overseers are subjected."³⁴

"Wife murders," D. W. D. Comins wrote in 1891, "form the foulest blot on our whole immigration system."³⁵ A variety of explanations was offered for this phenomenon, ranging from the cultural (wife murder as proof of the moral depravity of heathens as resulting from "Asiatic idiosyncrasies" or from the "constitutional jealousy of Orientals") to the materialistic (Indian men outraged at having the woman they had paid for become the wife of another man), the psychological (envy, jealousy, rage, and revenge), and the demographic (the disparity between the numbers of men and women). Whatever they saw as the causes of wife murder, the only possible remedy for the problem, according to some colonial officials, was the introduction of larger numbers of women.³⁶

Other colonial officials, however, refused to accept the idea that the shortage of female recruits was at the root of the trouble, suggesting that "it was a question of quality rather than numbers: that the women were of

such 'low class' that the men regarded them as chattels and treated them as such. Much was ascribed to 'Asiatic ideas' of the low value of female life."³⁷ Prison authorities in Trinidad were of the view that, "so long as there shall be in the Colony a large body of Asiatics who live as a race distinct from the rest of the labouring classes, keeping their own style of dress and observing their own peculiar traditions, it is useless to expect that the mere risk of death upon the scaffold will prevent their holding in Trinidad the same views with regard to their womankind that exist in the country from which they come."³⁸

Kingsley seems to concur: "Wife-murder is but too common among these Hindoos, and they cannot be made to see that it is wrong. 'I kill my own wife. Why not? I kill no other man's wife,' was said by as pretty, gentle, graceful a lad of two-and-twenty as one need see. . . . There is murder of wives, or quasi-wives now and then, among the baser sort of Coolies — murder because a poor girl will not give her ill-earned gains to the ruffian who considers her his property."³⁹ There is an additional hint here, perhaps, that the woman's "ill-earned gains" may be money obtained from a man other than her husband.

Oral histories confirm the prevalence of wife murder, as in Fazal's testimony in *The Still Cry*:

If e run way nex man daughter
 e go beat e arse too
 if you have to run way wid man wife
 leave one time
 dat man go kill e wife
 kill two a dem.⁴⁰

Much of the information about the nature of the relationships that led to wife murder comes from anecdotal sources. It is not easy to obtain statistical data about wife murder, since, as Judith Weller suggests, the crime was often recorded as murder only when a conviction was obtained, and very often there was not enough evidence to convict the murderer.⁴¹ It is perfectly possible to imagine, then, that the incidence of wife murder was even higher than the records indicate. Early punishments for those caught enticing women away from their husbands included flogging, shaving, transfer of guilty parties to other estates, fines, and imprisonment, but the penalties did not bring down the number of wife murders.

The eventual solution to the problem was sought in legislation about

marriage, not just in punishment on the scaffold. Colonial authorities and the immigrant men seem to have agreed on this score. Take, for example, a petition from Indian immigrants, signed by 274 Indians and witnessed by the Canadian missionaries Reverend Morton, Reverend Grant, and Reverend Christie, seeking enactment of an ordinance for registration of Indian marriages. The purpose of the registration was to enable "any person . . . [to] prosecute an unfaithful spouse and their partner in guilt either in the Magistrates' Court, the Complaint Court or the Supreme Court, according as damages are laid at [ten pounds], at [twenty-five pounds] or upwards, with provision for imprisonment if the damages be not paid, for the imprisonment of the wife if she refused to return to her husband, and also for the continued prosecution of the parties if the offence be persisted in."⁴² Interestingly, the petitioners did not demand divorce but "the preservation of their households." Ordinance 6 of 1881 was passed to make the necessary provisions for the marriage and divorce of Indian immigrants. This applied only to Hindus and Muslims among the immigrants, since Christians were already covered by the existing laws of the colony.⁴³ Tikasingh, however, speaks of the problems connected with registration under the Immigrants' Marriage and Divorce Ordinance 6 (1881) and Ordinance 23 (1891), suggesting that part of the difficulty lay in the framing of the ordinances. "For example, the marriage ordinance of 1881 was really concerned mainly with the prevention of wife-murders rather than with the recognition of Indian marriages." He goes on to say that "the act of registration itself was subject to numerous difficulties such as the age of the bride, the lack of accurate information concerning the former marital status of either party, and the refusal or neglect of either party to apply for registration of the marriage."⁴⁴

Other kinds of solutions were also sought. In 1879, for instance, William Young, acting governor of Trinidad, demanded measures to improve the "moral status of the Coolie woman." Only by recognizing their traits of character, among which he included thrift and industry, and initiating measures to develop them, Young contended, could "civilization and morality" be substantially improved among the Indian population. He maintained that the Indian woman was not strong enough for strenuous plantation labor but could exert a "civilizing and humanizing influence" if she devoted herself to domestic duties.⁴⁵ This impulse coincided with that of the Canadian missionaries who started the first schools for Indians in 1869. The schools had distinctly different curricula for boys and girls. The schools for girls focused primarily on the production of housewives.⁴⁶ Just a couple of

years before Young's statement, the planters had passed a resolution asking for the indenture-free importation of Indian widows and "betrothed women" who had lost their intended husbands. This proposal had been suggested by the emigration agent in Calcutta, who commended the "pure and blameless lives" of these women; other colonial officials agreed that bringing in a higher class of women would ameliorate the cause of the problem of wife murder: the immorality of immigrant women. This new scheme of emigration did not find support among recruiters in India and eventually had to be dropped.⁴⁷

The shameless Indian woman was being increasingly represented as a matter of grave concern not just to colonial officials but also to Indian men, as can be seen in a letter written by Mohammed Orfy, the author of numerous letters to the secretary of state for the colonies, the Indian government, and other authorities "on behalf of destitute Indian men of Trinidad": "Another most disgraceful concern, which is most prevalent, and a perforating plague, is the high percentage of immoral lives led by the female section of our community. They are enticed, seduced and frightened into becoming concubines, and paramours to satisfy the greed and lust of the male section of quite a different race to theirs." Having mentioned the women's susceptibility to seduction, Orfy goes on to say that "they have absolutely no knowledge whatever of the value of being in virginhood and become most shameless and a perfect menace to the Indian gentry."⁴⁸

Between Sarah Morton's comment about the Brahmin widow who took a new "papa" and the reasoning of educated East Indian men as exemplified by Orfy, the difference might not be that the first stresses the wilfulness of the Indian woman and that the second is inclined to emphasize her susceptibility to "enticement," as did the colonial authorities who framed the marriage laws. Both Orfy and the colonial authorities were in agreement on the lax morals of the female Indian immigrant. We could see the emerging East Indian middle class in Trinidad and the colonial rulers as complicit in the reconstitution of patriarchal structures that had become visible by the early twentieth century.⁴⁹ However, it might not be accurate to assert, as Reddock appears to do, that "Indian tradition" simply comes to the fore once indentureship ends.

I will now briefly examine two approaches to the culture of Indians in Trinidad. The pioneering work of Morton Klass, discussed in chapter 1, typifies one approach, in which classical anthropological paradigms prevail and indenture is seen as a temporary disruption in well-established pat-

terns of living. The emphasis here is on cultural persistence and survival, since culture is framed as that which continues through time and includes characteristics of people—for example, the supposed docility and submissiveness of Indian women (a prevalent stereotype even today among Afro-Trinidadians and other Creoles). The work of Rhoda Reddock typifies the second approach, which employs a consciously historical paradigm and, in her case, provides a nuanced understanding of women's lives under indenture. The emphasis, however, is on the twentieth-century reconstitution of the Hindu and "Indian" family, with all its patriarchal features, including prescriptions for women. The suggestion here is that "tradition" won out in the end and was able to subjugate women, so that their options today are not much different from those of women in India who have not shared their history. The stories about immoral Indian women result, in Reddock's analysis, in the construction of a new patriarchy and to the closure of the question of women's agency, or "freedom denied." The implicit argument here concerns East Indian women in the present and Reddock's perception that, like women in India, they do not live lives that are "free."

It is interesting to note how historians and anthropologists are able to document changes in areas such as caste, religion, and customs but seem to insist that with regard to women there were no changes at all, or that if they did occur, they were eventually reversed. Commonly, they make a series of culturalist assumptions, where "Indians" no matter where they are continue to manifest certain behavior patterns. Against both these approaches, I argue that the displacement caused by indenture brought about irreversible transformations. The discursive deployment of the East Indian woman in the realm of popular music that I discuss in chapters 3 and 4, for example, is an indicator of some of these changes.

Abolishing Indenture

In 1896, Gandhi, who was still living in South Africa, met with Gokhale to try to interest him in the cause of overseas Indians. In 1901, Gandhi again spent time with Gokhale, who was to become one of his earliest admirers and supporters in India. On Gandhi's urging, in February 1910 Gokhale piloted a resolution through the Imperial Legislative Council, of which he was a member, calling for a complete ban on the recruitment of indentured labor. In 1911, a ban was imposed on recruitment for Natal, and finally in 1917 it was extended to all overseas colonies, but not before a large-scale

campaign had been mounted against indenture by Gandhi and a host of other nationalists.

As historian Hugh Tinker points out, the campaign was in fact Gandhi's first big political intervention in India. He gave anti-indenture speeches all over the country, wrote about the topic at length in newspapers, and was able to get an Anti-Indenture Resolution passed at the Lucknow Congress meeting in December 1916. By 1915, "The indenture issue became the central question of Indian politics."⁵⁰ Even as emigration itself declined for a variety of reasons, there was widespread nationalist protest, with meetings organized in Hyderabad, Sind, and Karachi (then in northwestern India); Allahabad (in the central region); Madras (in the south); and parts of Bengal (eastern India).⁵¹ The agitators called for an end to a system that they said was a "moral stigma" for the country. As Reddock reiterates, issues of low wages or poor working conditions were of far lesser importance than "women's moral condition" in the campaign to abolish indentureship.⁵² The historical significance of the anti-indenture campaign, Tinker suggests, lies in the fact that "this was the first major Indo-British political and social issue to be decided in dependent India, and not in metropolitan Britain."⁵³

An examination of the nationalist discourse on indenture would reveal the crucial place occupied in it by the question of women's sexuality, helping us understand why it was believed to be something unspeakable, and why—paradoxically—it needed to be spoken about so interminably. Given this campaign's centrality to nationalist thought, it would be interesting to see how women were represented in the criticism of indentureship. I will take as my point of departure some aspects of Partha Chatterjee's well-known argument about the nationalist resolution of the women's question. Chatterjee has tried to account for the relative insignificance of the "women's question" in the late nineteenth century by suggesting that nationalism was able to "resolve" the question by this time in accordance with its attempt to make "modernity consistent with the nationalist project."⁵⁴

In constructing a new woman—the middle-class, upper-caste *bhadramahila* (Bengali for bourgeois lady)—nationalism in India was able to produce and enforce distinctions between the material might of the colonizer and the spiritual superiority of the colonized. Chatterjee suggests that the distinctions were embodied in new oppositions between public and private, the "world" (*bhaire*) and the "home" (*ghare*). In the former realm, the Indian man acquired English education and took on the manners and dress of the

British, while in the latter realm the Indian woman took on new markers of ethnicity and new responsibilities for maintaining the sanctity of the home, which was now also seen as a refuge from the world in which the colonizer held sway, a point also made by Sumanta Banerjee in his study of nineteenth-century popular culture and the emergence of the *bhadralok* (the respectable classes).⁵⁵ Although both Chatterjee and Banerjee write about the Bengal case, there are enough parallels in relation to women and nationalism in other areas of India directly ruled by the British. The new woman envisaged by nationalism was "modern" but not heedlessly Westernized. Neither was she like the uneducated, vulgar, and coarse lower-caste or lower-class working woman.⁵⁶ The lower-caste woman would be a central figure in the labor migrations of the nineteenth century.

The processes of differentiation of the upper-caste woman from the lower-caste woman unfolded in a variety of spheres as the qualities assigned to each were naturalized. A comment in a nineteenth-century *Brahmo Samaj* newspaper opposed a proposal to educate respectable Bengali women so they would become self-reliant, saying, "They did not have to be self-reliant since they were being looked after by their menfolk." The writer then added, "Only among the women of the lower classes in this country, we come across some sort of self-reliance."⁵⁷ Banerjee's argument is that throughout the eighteenth century, lower-caste groups in Bengal climbed up in the social hierarchy in the process distancing themselves from their poor or rural kinfolk and becoming a new middle class through their access to English education. "The stratification was ideologically buttressed by the *bhadralok* concept of *itarjan* and *chhotolok*—the pejorative terms used to describe the lower orders and evoke the picture of a lifestyle that was to be scrupulously avoided by the educated and privileged Bengalis."⁵⁸

Among the features of a lifestyle to be avoided by the educated *bhadralok* was the close interaction between middle-class women and the wandering female artistes from the lower castes who were a source of entertainment and education for those confined to the inner space of the courtyard. There was a concerted attempt by the *bhadralok* in the late nineteenth century, for example, to eliminate from the *andarmahal*, or women's quarters, the *panchalis*, or folk songs described as "filthy" and "polluting" by missionaries. This description was echoed by Indians, too, like Shib Chunder Bose in a book titled *The Hindoos as They Are*: "The Panchali (with female actresses only) which is given for the amusement of the females . . . is sometimes much too obscene and immoral to be tolerated in a *zenana* having any pretension

to gentility. . . . Much is yet to be done to develop among the females a taste for purer amusements, better adapted to a healthy state of society."⁵⁹ By the end of the nineteenth century, panchali performance had disappeared. We may speculate whether the deskilling of large numbers of performers led some of them to join the indentured migration to the Caribbean and elsewhere, as shown by the report on the dancing girls and their troupe waiting to embark for Surinam. The historian Kusha Haraksingh remarks that as late as the 1960s, one could hear village women in Trinidad referring to each other jocularly as "randi."⁶⁰ The earlier etymology of this Hindi word can be traced to a variety of courtesan in the precolonial kingdoms, while the later meaning in several Indian languages is "prostitute."

That the making of the *bhadramahila* involved a new domestication is evident from the effort to dissuade women from attending public recitals of epics, or *kathakata*. It was feared that descriptions of the erotic affairs of the gods, as in the Krishna-leela, for example, would be a bad influence on respectable women. According to a commentator in the Bengali journal *Somprakash* in 1863:

Since it [*kathakata*] has become a source of so much evil, it is not advisable for *bhadraloks* to encourage it. Those who allow their ladies to go to *kathakata* performances should be careful. . . . If, during *kathakata* performances, women stay home and are provided with opportunities to listen to good instructions, discussions on good books and to train themselves in artistic occupations, their religious sense will improve and their souls will become pure and they will be suited to domestic work.⁶¹

The genealogy of the domestic woman has been traced in Indian contexts other than Bengal, as the nationalists attempted to fashion a purified civilizational essence in the face of missionary and colonialist criticism. As Susie Tharu and K. Lalita argue:

In India . . . the middle-class woman's propriety was also to be vindicated under the glare of the harsh spotlight focused right through the nineteenth century on what was described as the moral degeneration of the Indians. Bureaucrats, missionaries, journalists and western commentators of various kinds filed sensational reports about Indian culture and made authoritative analyses of Indian character, which was invariably represented as irrational, deceitful and sexually perverse. The ultimate thrust of these decriptions . . . the situation in India was so appalling that

it called out for intervention by rational and ethical rulers [such as the British].⁶²

Tharu and Lalita wrote this in the context of the controversy about reprinting *Radhika Santwanam* (*Appeasing Radhika*) by the eighteenth-century Telugu poet Muddupalani, a *ganika* (courtesan) at the royal court of Thanjavur. In 1911, another learned woman in the tradition of Muddupalani, Bangalore Nagaratnamma, reprinted her predecessor's poem, only to be charged with obscenity. The poem that Nagaratnamma appreciated so much described the relationship of Radha and Krishna and the nature of their intimacy, and it was considered a fine literary work in its time. Copies of the book were seized and their sale forbidden. In an earlier edition of the poem published in 1887, Venkatanarasu, a linguist and associate of the lexicographer C. P. Brown, had removed verses regarded as sexually explicit and obscene. Nationalist initiatives led by the upper castes such as the construction of the good Indian woman sometimes found unlikely allies, such as the non-Brahmin Self-Respect Movement, which in the 1920s provided support to the "anti-nautch" campaign, which was also setting up as normative "the virtuous domestic woman."⁶³ The anti-nautch campaign, which reached its peak in 1911, had been initiated by Western-educated reformers in the early 1890s, who wrote about the degradation of women and the "threat posed by *devadasis* [temple and court artists]," who were often derogatorily referred to as "nautch girls," to the purity of family life. The bill prohibiting dedication of women in temples was finally passed in 1947.⁶⁴

Another figure that evolved to complete the picture of virtuous womanhood was that of the upper-caste widow. The historian Tanika Sarkar contends that the Hindu widow emerges as a significant figure in nineteenth-century Bengal because her "purity," chosen consciously, "becomes at once a sign of difference and of superiority, a Hindu claim to power." Women's monogamy, then, makes possible the existence of the Hindu nation.⁶⁵ As Srinibas Basu, a contemporary writer, puts it: "This so-called subjection of our woman produces this sacred jewel of chastity which still glows radiantly throughout the civilised world despite centuries of political subjection."⁶⁶ Sarkar argues that the ascetic widow was seen as gaining moral and spiritual energy through her "voluntary abdication of all earthly pleasures," thus ensuring "a reservoir of spirituality in each home and for the Hindu order as a whole."⁶⁷

Although in the nineteenth century and later various forms of remar-

riage and cohabitation were prevalent among widows, ascetic widowhood and sometimes sati (immolation with the husband's corpse) came to be seen as the norm in nationalist discourse. This would serve to illuminate Sarah Morton's annoyance and bewilderment at the behavior of her prospective Indian converts in late-nineteenth-century Trinidad who seemed so far removed from ascetic upper-caste norms.

The period in which indentured emigration to the other colonies began, the 1830s, is also the period of the initial formation, via the social-reform movements, of nationalist discourse in India. Since for the nationalists official modernity came to be produced through the project of the future nation, there was no room for formations of modernity other than those that involved as its subjects middle-class, upper-caste Indians. The problem with indentured laborers, both men and women, was that their geographical displacement and the new context they came to inhabit was enabling them also to become "modern." The transformations caused in the lives of the indentured by displacement, the plantation system, the disparate sex ratio, racial politics, and so on had to be made invisible by nationalist discourse so that the indentured could be claimed as authentically Indian. This was accomplished, I suggest, by erasing the difference between the agricultural laborer in Bihar and the one in Trinidad ("Chinitat," as the indentured called it) or in other parts of the subaltern diaspora and imaging the agricultural laborer in Trinidad in particular as victimized, pathetic, lost, and helpless. Even when the changes in the emigrant were acknowledged, they were criticized as "artificial" and "superficial," loss rather than gain. Gandhi writes that the laborer came back to India "a broken vessel," robbed of "national self-respect."⁶⁸ Any "economic gain" he might have obtained could not be set off "against the moral degradation it involves."⁶⁹

The indentured woman in particular could not be accommodated in the nationalist discourse, except as a victim of colonialism. By 1910 or so, when the campaign against indenture was gathering momentum, nationalism had already produced the models of domesticity, motherhood, and companionate marriage that would make the Indian woman a citizen of the new India. The question of what constituted the modernity of the Indian woman had been put forward as an *Indian* question, to be resolved in *India*. What, then, of the Indian women who were "becoming modern," but elsewhere? For nationalism, their modernity would have to be considered an illegitimate modernity because it had not passed through, been formed by, the story of the nation in the making. By the late nineteenth century, the route

to modernity—and emancipation—for the Indian woman in India was a well-established one: education, cultivation of household arts, refinement of skills, regulation of one's emotions. The class-caste provenance of this project, and of the new woman, should require no further reiteration here.

What sort of ideological project, then, did nationalism envisage for the indentured female laborer who was shaping her own relationship with the "West" in a distant land? Reform was not practicable. Disavowal of this figure would not have been possible while the system of indenture still existed. The only solution, therefore, was to strive for the abolition of indenture. The manifest immorality and depravity of the indentured woman would not only bring down the system but also serve to reveal more clearly the contrasting image of the virtuous and chaste Indian woman at home. As Gandhi asserted, "Women, who in India would never touch wine, are sometimes found lying dead-drunk on the roads."⁷⁰ The point is not that women never drank in India and started doing so in Trinidad or British Guiana. It is that, for Gandhi and others, this functioned as a mark of degraded Westernization and "artificial modernity." The nationalist reconstitution of Indian tradition, I suggest, was a project that was still incomplete when the new phase of the nationalist struggle, marked by the anti-indenture campaign, was inaugurated.

Although, according to Chatterjee, the nationalists had "resolved" the women's question without making it a matter for political agitation, with the anti-indenture campaign there seems to have been a refocusing on women. At the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, a political campaign was undertaken—mobilizing "a wider public than any previous protest"⁷¹ against the colonial rulers—to dismantle a system that was said to be turning Indian women into prostitutes.⁷² As Gandhi wrote, "The system brings India's womanhood to utter ruin, destroys all sense of modesty. That in defence of which millions in this country have laid down their lives in the past is lost under it."⁷³ The nationalist discourse on indentured women's sexuality, however, veered time and again from denouncing the women as reprobate and immoral to seeing them as having been brought to this state by colonialism.⁷⁴ The Indian nationalists were joined by the European critics of indenture, led by C. F. Andrews, Gandhi's associate, who had worked with Gandhi in South Africa and had been mobilized by him to prepare a report on Indians in Fiji. As the anthropologist John Kelly puts it, Andrews and others "portrayed indenture . . . as a degenerating force and blamed it for the moral condition of the 'helots of Empire.' But they

accepted the claim that the 'coolies' were degraded, and they agreed especially about what we might call the 'harlots of Empire.'"⁷⁵ Gandhi's focus on the alleged sexual availability of women can also be read as a strategic move to counter the colonial administrative reports, which, as Susan Bayly puts it, defined "the dependent status of unclean menial groups . . . in terms of the sexual availability of their womenfolk."⁷⁶ In this case, by ending indenture and providing the conditions for chastity, women would cease to be available, for instance, to their white employers in the colonies. Thus, nationalism could refuse menial status for Indians versus the colonizer.

The nationalist campaign to end indenture was supported by a series of developments in Trinidad. By 1870, voices were being raised in the Creole press against importing Indian laborers. There was public criticism of the size of the subsidy for immigration, especially by cocoa interests (who used free labor, as opposed to the sugarcane planters, who used indentured) and the professional middle class. The Creole middle class also sought to diminish the influence of the planters during the campaign for constitutional reform in the mid-1880s. Creoles who feared the influx of Indians into the political system they hoped to capture found new reasons to attack the system of immigration.⁷⁷ After the Hosay riots of 1884, when Muharram processionists in Trinidad were killed by the colonial police, the interest of the Indian press in the conditions of indenture began to grow. The Anti-Slavery Society in England, which had long criticized indenture, renewed its attacks after the 1884 riots.⁷⁸

On March 4, 1912, after immigration to Natal and some other countries had been stopped, Gokhale moved in the Legislative Council that indentured emigration be wholly prohibited. He spoke eloquently of the misery of the immigrants, of the "immorality" resulting from the disparate sex ratio, and of the blow to national self-respect. The agitation to end indenture was fueled by the publication of reports from Fiji. An Anti-Indentured Emigration League was formed in 1914. "Centred in Calcutta, it organized public lectures and the distribution of pamphlet against emigration and tried to discourage recruits on their way to Calcutta from continuing their journey. Soon it also began to operate in the United Provinces."⁷⁹ Leaflets were distributed in towns and villages; recruiters were molested; and relatives were brought to Calcutta to secure the release of recruits from the depot.⁸⁰

In 1915, Gokhale died, but Gandhi had returned from South Africa by then to provide leadership to the agitators. On March 20, 1916, Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya's motion was discussed in the Legislative Coun-

cil. He listed all of the evils of the immigration system, drawing extensively on the situation in Fiji, and spoke of indenture as "a horrifying record of shame and crime," demanding that "the system . . . be abolished root and branch."⁸¹ In February 1917, Malaviya sought permission to introduce a bill for immediate abolition, which was disallowed. Unable to obtain a clear assurance from the government about ending indenture, Gandhi toured the country and addressed public meetings, demanding that the abolition be announced before the end of July.⁸² Large demonstrations were held in Madras and Bombay. The viceroy was "pelted with telegrams," and his wife received many "asking her whether she approves of Indian women being converted into harlots and imploring her to help." Attempts were made to mobilize the opinion of Indian women. An appeal by Andrews to Indian women was printed in several languages and widely distributed in the United Provinces.⁸³

As the final phase of the campaign against indenture gained momentum, among the delegations that met Viceroy Charles Hardinge to press for action were several organized by Indian women's associations. At a meeting between representatives of the Colonial Office and the India Office on May 9, 1917, James Meston, representing India in the War Cabinet, spoke about how "the women of India" felt "deeply on the question [of indenture]." Satyendra Sinha, the other India representative, declared that "there was an intensely strong feeling of concern, . . . [which included] ladies who lived in purdah, but read the news."⁸⁴ In spite of Englishmen such as Alfred Lyall, governor of the North-West Provinces, and G. A. Grierson, who reported on emigration from Bengal and recommended it for its benefits to women, giving a chance for a new life to "abandoned and unfaithful wives,"⁸⁵ Hardinge was not willing to keep supporting a system whose "discussion arouses more bitterness than any other outstanding question." Hardinge was convinced that Indian politicians firmly believed that indentureship "brands their whole race . . . with the stigma of helotry" and condemns Indian women to prostitution.⁸⁶

By mid-1917, the end of indenture was certain. Historians tend to see indenture as an issue that brought a new focus to nationalist politics in India and gave it a wider base. I would argue that it was not simply that. We need to reframe the indenture question so it can be seen as marking the consolidation of the early national-modern; a setting in place of new (nationalist) moralities, new ways of relating between women and men, appropriate "Indian" modes of sociosexual behavior, the parameters for the

state's regulation of reproduction as well as sexuality, and the delineation of the virtues that would ensure for Indian women citizenship in the future nation. It should be obvious that the historical formation of these virtues, for example, and the contemporaneity of their description was obscured by the nationalist presentation of them as the essential, and "traditional," qualities of Indian women.

While it is evident that the immigrant woman was an important figure invoked by Indian nationalism in India, the centrality of this figure to "East Indian nationalism" in Trinidad has not yet been systematically elaborated.⁸⁷

With regard to the indentured woman, too, the immediate contrasting image for the colonialist was the African woman, the ex-slave, the urban *jamette* of Carnival whose sexuality was othered, and sought to be regulated, by the European ruling class.⁸⁸ The *jamette* was seen as vulgar, promiscuous, loud, and disruptive, and the removal of this figure from Carnival and related activities became part of the project of creating a new urban middle class in Trinidad. Charles Kingsley, visiting Trinidad in the late nineteenth century, sketched his impressions of African and Indian women: "[The] average negro women of Port of Spain, especially the younger . . . their masculine figures, their ungainly gestures, their loud and sudden laughter, even when walking alone, and their general coarseness, shocks, and must shock." In contrast to the "superabundant animal vigour and the perfect independence of the younger [African] women" is the picture of a young Indian woman "hung all over with bangles, in a white muslin petticoat . . . and green gauze veil; a clever, smiling, delicate little woman, who is quite aware of the brightness of her own eyes."⁸⁹

Much of the elite's anxiety about the *jamette*, or even about the rural Creole woman, seemed to hinge on the fact of her being seen as independent in both sexual and economic terms. The East Indian woman in postslavery society, then, brought in to compensate colonial planters for the loss of captive labor, had to be imaged as completely different from the African woman. For this, "Indian tradition" was invoked by different groups, and the lack of conformity of indentured women to the virtuous ideal of Indian culture was deplored. In post-indenture society, the need to differentiate between the African and the Indian woman would take on a new kind of urgency, both for the emerging Indo-Trinidadian middle class and for the dominant Creole imaginary. One important mode of differentiation would have to do with denying the obvious similarities between women of

all races in Trinidad and emphasizing instead the similarities between indentured women and women in India. However, as I have argued, the indentured woman was a figure that the nationalist construction of Indian womanhood had to disavow precisely to ensure its own coherence. If one set of reasons for the disavowal arose from the non-upper-caste provenance of the indentured woman, another set had to do with her incorporation into Creole modernity. But clearly it was not one set of reasons rather than another but the combination of both that placed indentured Indians outside the normative frameworks that were being assembled in India.

Thinking about Trinidad might be interesting to those of us investigating the processes by which contemporary feminism in India comes to rest on the historical disavowal of lower-caste and lower-class women even as it claims to speak for them. The Trinidad example shows that for Indians in India this also involves a disavowal of other forms of modernity that have not passed through the anticolonial struggle or participated in its inevitable outcome. As Mrinalini Sinha contends, "The nationalist construct of the modern Indian woman also created the climate both for women's reforms and for women's entry, under male patronage, to the male-dominated public sphere."⁹⁰ Sinha describes the early initiatives of Indian feminists as being linked to the "unprecedented mobilization of middle-class women" in the nationalist movement, manifested, for example, in the all-India women's organizations of the early twentieth century,⁹¹ many of which would have petitioned the viceroy in support of the campaign to abolish indenture. While nationalism provided the language and the spaces in which the middle-class woman could become modern, it also made her a representative—one who spoke for all other Indian women; who became, as Sinha puts it, "the transmitter of the fruits of modernization."⁹² The indentured woman in the subaltern diaspora could never be seen in India as this kind of figure, given her caste-class characteristics and the tangentiality of her modernity to the project of the future nation. It is not just the notion of the woman in India today, therefore, that rests on a disavowal of the indentured woman. The feminist has also crucially been implicated in the project of nationalism even as she tried to formulate a critique of it.

In this chapter, I have tried to suggest that present-day critical interventions in relation to the formation of the Indian national-modern might be strengthened by an examination of its illegitimate and disavowed double: "Indian" modernity in the Caribbean. I hope that this exercise will also yield

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.

work helps create a picture of (1) relationships between East Indian men and women; (2) the caste, class, and gender composition of the indentured laborers; and (3) the relationships between the two main racial groups, "African" and "Indian."

- 91 Initial work in this regard has been done, among others, by Espinet, "Representation and the Indo-Caribbean Woman in Trinidad and Tobago," and Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad*. See also Kanhai, Matikor, and Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial*.

TWO "Left to the Imagination"

Epigraph: Gandhi, "Indentured Labour," *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, 249.

- 1 The term "constitutive outside" is used in Judith Butler's sense, as referring to that "domain of abject beings" who are not subjects but nevertheless are necessary to the process of formation of the subject: see Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 3.
- 2 M. G. Ranade, "Indian Foreign Emigration," *Sarvajanic Sabha Quarterly* (October 1893). See Nanda, Gokhale, especially chapter 37.
- 3 At the Calcutta meeting of the Congress, Gandhi had Gokhale's assurance that a resolution on South Africa would be passed, and when his name was called, Gandhi read the resolution. As Gandhi wrote about that moment: "Someone had printed and distributed amongst the delegates copies of a poem he had written in praise of foreign emigration. I read the poem and referred to the grievances of the settlers in South Africa." Since all resolutions passed unanimously, Gandhi's also passed, but that did not mean that the delegates had read and understood it. "And yet the very fact that it was passed by the Congress was enough to delight my heart. The knowledge that the imprimatur of the Congress meant that of the whole country was enough to delight anyone": Gandhi, *My Experiments with Truth*, 341.
- 4 Some of the famous biographies of Gandhi include Erikson, *Gandhi's Truth*; Fischer, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*; and Rolland, *Mahatma Gandhi*.
- 5 Gandhi, *Satyagraha in South Africa*, 428.
- 6 Morton, *John Morton of Trinidad*, 185.
- 7 Reddock, *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago*, 27-29.
- 8 Laurence, *A Question of Labour*, 119.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 123.
- 10 Tikasingh, "The Establishment of the Indians in Trinidad, 1870-1900," 262.
- 11 Sahidan, interview, May 4, 1997.
- 12 Yasmin, interview, May 4, 1997.
- 13 CO 571/5, 27680, 1917, as cited in Reddock, *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago*, 30.
- 14 Laurence, *A Question of Labour*, 124.

- 15 Mangru, "The Sex Ratio Disparity and Its Consequences under the Indenture in British Guiana." Longden to Carnarvon, no. 218, October 20, 1875, CO 384/106, is cited *ibid.*, 223-24.
- 16 Emmer, "The Meek Hindu," 192-94.
- 17 McNeill and Lal, "Report to the Government of India on the Conditions of Indian Immigrants in Four British Colonies and Surinam," 313.
- 18 Mahabir, *The Still Cry*, 79; the words in brackets are my glosses.
- 19 Weller, *The East Indian Indenture in Trinidad*, 63.
- 20 An investigator in 1891 wrote about one estate where women earned from 10 cents to 25 cents, and men earned 25 cents to 40 cents. On another estate, men earned between 50 cents and 70 cents per day, and all women earned 25 cents. In 1913, when the last two commissioners, McNeill and Lal, visited Trinidad, and women were indentured technically for three years, they earned half to two thirds of the men's wage—that is, half a crown to three shillings weekly: Reddock, *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago*, 36-38.
- 21 Mahabir, *The Still Cry*, 84-85.
- 22 Around 1914, just a few years before indentureship was abolished, it was noted that the Canadian Presbyterian schools accounted for about 90 percent of school-going Indian children: see McNeill and Lal, "Report to the Government of India," 44.
- 23 Morton, *John Morton of Trinidad*, 349.
- 24 All of the excerpts are from Morton, *John Morton of Trinidad*, 187-88, 342. The text in square brackets is in the original; S. E. M. is Sarah E. Morton, editor of the volume.
- 25 Kingsley, *At Last, a Christmas in the West Indies*, 192.
- 26 CCCB (1878-79), 158-59; *Mungaree v. Nageeroo*, 13 July 1878, as cited in Tikasingh, "The Establishment of the Indians in Trinidad, 1870-1900," 270.
- 27 *Daily Argosy*, March 23, 1913, and April 24, 1913, as cited in Mangru, "The Sex Ratio Disparity and Its Consequences under the Indenture in British Guiana," 227.
- 28 Scott to Kimberley, no. 100, Aug 15, 1870, CO 111/376, as cited *ibid.*, 227.
- 29 Laurence, *A Question of Labour*, 236-39.
- 30 See Andrews and Pearson, "Report on Indentured Labour in Fiji," 34-35, and Meer, *Documents of Indentured Labour*.
- 31 Discussed in Laurence, *A Question of Labour*, 126.
- 32 PTR for 1897, CP 76/1898, 5, as cited in Tikasingh, "The Establishment of the Indians in Trinidad, 1870-1900," 272.
- 33 Webber, *Those That Be in Bondage*.
- 34 Longden to Kimberley, no. 161, August 21, 1873, CO 295/269, as cited in Trotman, "Women and Crime in Late Nineteenth Century Trinidad," 253.
- 35 Comins, "Note"; Minutes of the Legislative Council, October 21, 1890, as cited in Tikasingh, "The Establishment of the Indians in Trinidad, 1870-1900," 272.

- 36 Ibid.
- 37 Laurence, *A Question of Labour*, 239.
- 38 TRG, LV, no. 23, June 9, 1886, CP 47, Prison Report for 1885, 618, as cited in Weller, *The East Indian Indenture in Trinidad*, 66.
- 39 Kingsley, *At Last, a Christmas in the West Indies*, 192.
- 40 Mahabir, *The Still Cry*, 56.
- 41 Weller, *The East Indian Indenture in Trinidad*, 66.
- 42 TRG, L, no. 6, February 2, 1881, Minutes of the Legislative Council Meeting of January 28, 1881, as cited *ibid.*, 74.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 69.
- 44 Tikasingh, "The Establishment of the Indians in Trinidad, 1870-1900," 266; emphasis added.
- 45 Young, letter to M. Hicks Beach, 24 May 1879, cited in Mangru, "The Sex-Ratio Disparity," 224-25.
- 46 According to Reddock, in 1891 only 6.2 percent of the female population of Indians were officially "housewives" (not estate workers). The later years of indenture saw women's withdrawal into the domestic economy. Depressed wages for Indian laborers were accompanied by permission to produce cane and food crops on a piece of land that would be looked after by wives and children. Women who worked for the family thus received no wages, although they were involved in "cane farming, market gardening, rice production and animal husbandry": Reddock, *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago*, 36-39.
- 47 Mangru, "The Sex Ratio Disparity and Its Consequences under the Indenture in British Guiana," 224-25.
- 48 CO 571/4 W.I.22518, 1916, as cited in Reddock, *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago*, 44.
- 49 For insights into the process by which the representation of women by colonial officials and nationalist critics converged, see Kale, *Fragments of Empire*, especially chapter 7.
- 50 Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*, 334.
- 51 *Ibid.*, 334-47.
- 52 Reddock, *Women, Labour and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago*, 45.
- 53 Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*, 288.
- 54 Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 121.
- 55 Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets*, 76.
- 56 Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, 127.
- 57 *Tattwabodhini Patrika*, 1880, as cited in Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets*, 56.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 71-72.
- 59 *Ibid.*, 172.
- 60 Kusha Haraksingh, filmed interview, May 7, 2004.
- 61 Cited in Banerjee, *The Parlour and the Streets*, 171.

- 62 Tharu and Lalita, "Empire, Nation and the Literary Text," 208.
- 63 Tharu and Lalita, *Women Writing in India, 600 B.C. to the Present*, 13.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 12-13.
- 65 Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, 41.
- 66 *Hindur Achar Vyavahar*, 60, as cited in Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation*, 42.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 42.
- 68 Gandhi, "Speech on Indentured Indian Labour," 133.
- 69 Gandhi, *Collected Works*, Vol. 13, 249.
- 70 Gandhi, "Indenture or Slavery?" *ibid.*, 1467.
- 71 Kelly, *A Politics of Virtue*, 48.
- 72 Note that after the end of indenture, the women's question in India became a social issue to be resolved through legislation, not political mobilization.
- 73 Gandhi, *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, 349.
- 74 Kelly (*A Politics of Virtue*, 30), for instance, points out that in the case of Fiji, the critics of indenture stressed the sexual abuse of Indian women.
- 75 C. F. Andrews, Gandhi's emissary on the indenture issue, wrote in 1915, "Vice has become so ingrained that they have not been able to recover their self-respect. . . . The women of India are very chaste; but these women, well, you know how they are, and how it can be different, situated as they are, living the lives they do, brought up in this atmosphere of vice and degradation?" as cited *ibid.*, 33-34.
- 76 Bayly, *Caste, Society and Politics in India from the 18th Century to the Modern Age*, 196.
- 77 Laurence, *A Question of Labour*, 432-34.
- 78 *Ibid.*, 448-54.
- 79 *Ibid.*, 465.
- 80 *Ibid.*, 465.
- 81 *Ibid.*, 476.
- 82 Gandhi, "Abolition of Indentured Emigration," in *My Experiments with Truth*, Vol. 2, chapter 11.
- 83 Laurence, *A Question of Labour*, 477-78.
- 84 Tinker, *A New System of Slavery*, 350-52.
- 85 *Ibid.*, 267-68.
- 86 *Ibid.*, 340-41.
- 87 Recent unpublished work by Rhoda Reddock and Patricia Mohammed makes interesting beginnings in this direction.
- 88 Rohlehr, *Calypso and Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad*, especially chapter 1.
- 89 Kingsley, *At Last, a Christmas in the West Indies*, 72.
- 90 Sinha, "Gender in the Critiques of Colonialism and Nationalism," 477-504.
- 91 *Ibid.*, 483.
- 92 *Ibid.*, 494.

THREE "Take a Little Chutney"

- 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 Orié ("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 Gadbai 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 Funrose, “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, MCO015, 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 "Cre-

ole," 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.