'I am Trini, I am Indian, I am Hindu': Diaspora Identity and Creating Culture through *Pichakaree*

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Abstract
A few days before Phagwa 2019, a Hindu leader described her identity: 'I am three parts - I am Trini, I am Indian, I am Hindu. I am equally patriotic. I have the same love and reverence for the land, but I am Indian...I am also Hindu, that's my identity.' She explained that negotiating this trio of identities is a theme often appearing in pichakaarees, a local song form performed during Phagwa in Trinidad. Named after the instrument used to spray abeer [colored water], pichakaree songs were envisioned as a metaphor for ingesting from one's locality and spraying it out to impress upon the audience's minds with constructive messages. Based on interviews with pichakaree artists and organizers, as well as local intellectuals and scholars, I present preliminary analysis of pichakaaree's value for community members, the negotiation of creating a space for the artform and recognition within national culture, and participants' hopes and recommendations for its future.

Keywords: Phagwa, diaspora identity, pichakaree, cultural practices, Trinidad

Introduction

'*...when I was dancing near the [Carnival] band...the people used to laugh at me and say I don't have timing. So when my father had put me out and I went Couva to live, there was a band of clowns, Carnival time, and I joined them, but the music was tassa, Indian drums. That time I was dancing good. Everybody [else] out of time. And those guys would stop and watch me, amazed at how I was dancing in Couva. So I related this, and he [Colin] tell me something very significant....Colin is the person who could see it. He said, 'Boy, you not out of time, your timing is different.' Ha!'* (Bhodiji).

Bhodiji, an Indo-Trinidadian Hindu spiritual leader and cultural activist recalled this key moment in the evolution of his triad of identities – Trinidadian, Indian, and Hindu. He was speaking with his friend, Colin, an Afro-Trinidadian artist, scholar and educator. Bhodiji was telling Colin how, as a boy dancing to the typical Carnival music with African-inspired drums and tempos, he felt out of step. But when the drums and tempos were Indian-inspired, his ethnic identity and history led him to be naturally in-step. Colin pointed out that Bhodiji's dancing efforts weren't wrong before, rather his timing (and thus his identity and methods of cultural expression) were simply different. Bhodiji explained that this was an important realization for him and his understanding of his trio of identities. He elaborated on this story, 'I think people have to be who they are, and people have to let the people be who they are, that is what this thing [pichakaree] is teaching us'.

Culture is a critical tool for processing and representing identity production and self-expression. In this paper, I show how a Hindu Trinidadian community's development of an original artform – the song genre known as *pichakaree* has become a significant cultural expression for people who feel that their voices are not heard. Informed by Stuart Hall, I understand cultural identity to be a production that is 'always in process' and created within representation (1990: 222). Identity is always a complex topic, but in the Caribbean, identity has unique nuances characterized by 'becoming' and 'being' as well as 'rupture' and 'discontinuity,' and who gets to do the representing of culture has power (Hall, 1990).

Based on interviews with pichakaree artists and organizers, as well as local artists, intellectuals and scholars, I present an analysis of pichakaaree's value for community members, the artform's contributions to national culture, and participants' hopes and recommendations for its future. This analysis is timely because tense elections in 2020 reignited racial tensions throughout the nation (Baboolal, 2020), meanwhile the nation struggles with the global pandemic

that is likely to have many long term effects, and a series of tragic cases of gender-based violence have sparked the nation to look inward and reflect on needed changes (Doughty, 2021). At such a crossroad, there may be an opportunity to engage with questions of what constitutes national culture and how might society be more inclusive of different cultural voices, identities, and expressions of what it means to be a Trinbagonian. Pichakaaree has been a venue for such voices for almost 30 years. It is a crucial artform and representation of cultural identity ready to take on such challenges and help pave an inclusive path ahead.

Literature Review

As Stuart Hall has written, representation and who gets to do it is a form of power. Pichakaree music is a form of representation that comes from within - a way to assert one's own knowledge and power rather than be subjected to someone else's representations and knowledge. For Hall, there are two broad ways to think about cultural identity. One is as an essentialist representation of people with common history - such a perspective has benefits of 'imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation' typical of forced diaspora such as enslaved people and indentured laborers of Trinidad's past (Hall, 1990: 224). While this type of identity orientation can inspire art and activism, it 'cannot comprehend the trauma of 'the' colonial experience' (Hussey, 2014: 201). The second definition of cultural identity is about continuity with the past while simultaneously 'ruptured by difference and discontinuity' (Sheller, 2003: 190).

In the context of cultural identities that characterize the Caribbean, attempts at capturing an essentialist identity struggle to grapple with the violent fractures with which colonial powers subjected enslaved people and indentured laborers (Hall, 1990). The second definition of cultural identity recognizes that identities are rooted in history, and 'they change in and through power relations that are temporal, placed, spatial, and situational' (Hussey, 2014: 203). It is a perspective that invites, and is capable of negotiating and investigating the ongoing trauma of colonialism.

Although colonial authorities tried to make subjects internalize feelings of otherness and inferiority (Fanon, 2008), Trinidad's history has many examples of people asserting the power to represent themselves, celebrating their culture, and claiming space for themselves – e.g., Kambule riots, Hosay riots, and Ramdilla. Cultural identity in this context is 'not an essence, but a positioning' in the political and historical roots of the Caribbean (Hall, 1990: 226). More specifically, diaspora identities are created and recreated through representation and cultural expression. They are 'those which are constantly produc-

ing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference' (Hall, 1990: 235).

In postcolonial Trinidad efforts to harness, support, and cultivate national culture and the histories behind it have tended to center on Carnival, Afro-Trinidadian identities, and the artforms that had 'emerged after a century and half of resistance and assimilation' (Riggio, 2004: 241). These cultural expressions are rich, dynamic, and vital to nurture. However, many expressions of Indo-Trinidad and Hindu Trinidad have not gained wide acceptance as being part of national culture. Contestations between the two largest racial identities – African and Indian – are common in the dual-island nation where 'multiple cultural identities [are] in covert or open competition with one another for iconic representation and visibility' (Rohle, 2004: 225). With the necessity of representation as a tool for producing and reproducing diaspora identity, being excluded from ideas of national culture is a painful erasure.

Pichakaaree music is an effort to claim the right to assert a Trinidadian identity that is also equally Indian and Hindu, and just as Trinidadian as any other form of local cultural expression. Pichakaaree is a cultural claiming of space, an effort to revise conceptions of national culture, and a community perceiving its own absence within national culture and using their voice to rectify their exclusion from it.

The research question guiding this analysis is: In what ways may diaspora identity, and its inherent continuity and rupture, inform and be informed by local forms of cultural expression?

Method

This preliminary analysis is based on fieldwork done in Trinidad, largely in March 2019, but also informed by prior knowledge, experience, and relationships built and maintained for about 20 years. I conducted 21 interviews with 17 individuals. Participants are Trinidadian artists, cultural leaders, scholars, pichakaree artists, singers, composers, and Hindu leaders. Most interviews were conducted between 19 and 26 March, 2019 while I was in Trinidad, and other interviews were done via phone through November 2019 while I was in the United States. In total, there are about 19 hours of interviews, which I transcribed between 2019-2020. This project also incorporates participant observation and document analysis of local newspaper coverage and other relevant documents. However, the primary source of data for this paper is interviews. Scholarship on pichakaree remains limited; this analysis is meant to help fill this gap by establishing fundamentals of the song genre.

In line with ethical research guidelines and maintaining confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for all participants as well as the *mandir* [temple] that is

central to the pichakaree genre and annual competition. Pseudonyms were either chosen by participants or the individual directed me to select a name. Below I present a preliminary thematic analysis of interview transcripts. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used for 'identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 79). It involves six phases from familiarization with data, identifying and refining codes to developing and reviewing themes. I am working within a constructionist framework and am interested in the 'sociocultural contexts, and structural conditions' that frame participants' experiences with pichakaree (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 85).

As a cultural outsider, I must position myself in the context of this research. I am not Trinidadian, or Hindu or Caribbean. I was privileged to learn from this community as a young person, and the story of pichakaree, the songs, their messages, community members, and their drive to claim space for themselves made a 'permanent mark on me,' to put it the way Rona, an Afro-Trinidadian artist and cultural activist expressed in an interview. As a middle class Irish-American girl growing up near Philadelphia in the United States, I perceived the Caribbean as a beach paradise where the wealthy went for vacations. The people who traveled there, as I later learned, indulged in networks of capitalism and consumption that reduce the region to beach paradises and rum bacchanals. But having the privilege to live in Trinidad, learn about the rich histories and diverse cultures, I became compelled to better understand this dual-island nation and to reject and correct the erasure of this region in American institutions of higher education. Like Mimi Sheller reflected, I have consumed the Caribbean and I have been consumed by it (2003: 199).

The story of pichakaree and Indo-Trinidad, from my American position, is one of multiple erasures – American ignorance of the complex histories in the dual-island nation and Trinidadian neglect of a powerful artform that captures the voice of a people who often feel marginalized in their own country. This research project is a humble effort to contribute to scholarship aimed at rectifying these errors.

Analysis

I present an analysis of the interviews. I focus on conveying what pichakaree means for community members, the artform's position in the wider national culture, and participants' hopes for the future of the forum. Before addressing these three topics, I being by providing some background on pichakaree.

In Trinidad and Tobago pichakaree has two meanings. It is both the instrument (like a water pistol) used during Phagwa to spray *abeer* [colored wa-

ter] and it is a genre of music unique to Trinidad established in 1991. Pichakaree songs were envisioned as a metaphor for ingesting from the place where one stands, re-interpreting it, and spraying it out, vocalizing one's thoughts, marking one's cultural environment with one's voice to impress upon the audience's minds with constructive messages. Bhodiji conceptualized the musical genre and named it pichakaree.

Although the spirit of pichakaree began long ago with indentured foremothers and forefathers blending languages of India with English as one way to make sense of their new circumstances (Ravi-Ji, 1998), the formal iteration discussed here began in 1991 within the mandir, HIMICE (Hindu Missionary Centre). It was a small project to get young people writing about issues of concern to their community. It began with just a few young people and a handful of community members listening to their songs. The following year they made it a formal competition. From there the forum has grown into a highlight of HIMICE's annual Phagwa festival. Over the 30 years since, the annual pichakaree competition has moved to different venues, large and small, and is now established at the HIMICE grounds within a local village.

There are rules for songs and participation in the event. For one, no alcohol is permitted. Kira, an Indo-Trinidadian pichakaaree artist, explained, 'one of the conditions was pichakaaree must be alcohol free. Even if a contestant drink and come, they will be disqualified.' Sunitaji, a Hindu leader and pundit, explained that there are three categories of songs: (1) *festives*, which celebrate Phagwa; (2) *theme*, each year a theme is selected (e.g., family, environment, etc., often inspired by the United Nations theme of that same year; and (3) *social-political commentary*, which tend to be popular for their critique of social and political issues of the day.

As for the music, Govinda, a composer and performer, explained that the 'melody must be Indian based' and use 'traditional Indian instruments,' a goal being to not 'soca-ize by having these electronic rhythms and these, too much of a up tempo base beats and so on because it changes the whole mood, the whole feeling of the song.' Musicians do use electrical equipment nowadays, but the sound remains traditional. Sangeeth, a Christian Indo-Trinidadian musician with the forum, explained how they blend traditional instruments with modern technology: 'So we maintain having the harmonium, the dhantal, the dholak. What we incorporated was the electronic synthesizer, where you got the traditional tones that came out.'

Lyrics are among the key markers of what makes a song a pichakaree vs. other kinds of music. Pichakarees must be written in English with Hindi or Bhojpuri words mixed in. As stated in the official forum rules, each song 'must include words or phrases from Indian languages, or Indianised words.' A composer can take a word from Hindi and modify it, say by adding an -ing at the

end to make it work in an otherwise English song, and/or take an English word and add -waa at the end to give it a Bhojpuri ending. One such example comes from a pichakaree written in March 2020 as the nation entered lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The refrain goes:

> 'Stay home Bhaiwaa [brother], stay home Bahinwaa [sister] / Stay home is the mantra [sacred chant], to stop Corona / Doh ainthay [fuss] and doh tarpay [make tantrum] / Yuh better samjhay [understand], or we will suskay [cry/whimper].

This example illustrates the blending of languages, along with the poetic skill involved in the compositions, the relevance to current events, and a lyrical invitation to simultaneously reach for an ancestral past and embrace the community's current place, culture and condition.

The goal of these language rules is that the songs can be understood by the local community whose primary language is English and are not fluent in these other languages. Continuing the use of these languages supports cultural preservation and keeping the community connected with their Indian heritage. It is a creative expression of the past and present/future, of 'being' and 'becoming' (Hall, 1990). The languages of pichakaree link participants to Indian heritage, but the use of English reflects the rupture of indentureship that separated Indo-Trinidadian ancestors from their original home. This musical genre illustrates how a representation of diaspora identity can position itself within an honored heritage that simultaneously acknowledges the postcolonial realities that separated people from their ancestral languages and empowers them to negotiate their current identities.

Community *Voice*

The rules and structure of pichakaree provide a foundation that is designed to connect participants with the past while also providing tools and an outlet to negotiate what they can and will become. But what do participants actually say about pichakaree? What does it mean to them? In this first theme, I discuss the value of pichakaree for community members and what is means for them.

Voice is one of the words I heard most often associated with pichakaree. Pichakaaree is a 'community voice…[a means for] critiquing one's own self, for giving a voice to what are your issues in your region, in your space, in your place' (Sunitaji). Govinda has developed his own mantra to explain what pichakaree is: 'pichakaree is we own unique way to say what we have to say.' Sunitaji has been involved in pichakaree since 1991, starting out as a composer and performer, and now heads the festival committee. She recalled that the idea behind pichakaree was:

> to give a voice to the community, to express their views, to sing about themselves, to critique themselves.' She also pointed out that another purpose is 'to recover our poetic traditions because we are from a civilization where poetry is very strong, very dear part of our sacred texts, our shastras, of teaching and all of that. So it, it, served several things - to give a voice, to encourage writing, encourage poetry. We did have other Indian local song competitions, but they were not addressing issues, not conscious about the issues of the day and so on. So this was why pichakaaree was conceptualized.'

A crucial characteristic of pichakaree is that the lyrics are educational and constructive. Some songs, especially social-political commentaries, can be sharply critical of politicians, society, national culture, etc., but criticism must be based on facts and songs must not denigrate. Govinda explained:

> In terms of Trinidad culture, we have like for instance calypso, chutney, soca, many other genres of music. But the difference is pichakaaree seeks to elevate and educate, and not denigrate the people. Whereas…it's clear with the other artforms, that is what happens in some instances. At no point is a pichakaaree allowed to be labeled as a pichakaaree song…if it has lewd, inciting lewd conduct, lewd behavior. If it has any racial remarks, if it has any slander, libel, you know? Promoting hatred. No way it is allowed to be labeled as a pichakaaree.

Cari is an Indo-Trinidadian supporter of pichakaree and participates as a chorus singer. She is passionate about pichakaree. She explained that pichakaree is:

> a voice. It may not have a big listenership, but it's playing a major role as far as I am concerned…At least documenting. If it's just documenting what is happening, as the years go by, giving people a voice, the people who want a voice. And want a voice that is not necessarily this negative, full of hate voice. Because calypso has turned into something that is so racist and hateful.

In fact, pichakaree organizers send song lyrics to two lawyers who evaluate them to ensure 'no one gets in trouble' and that lyrics follow the 'laws of the land', emphasized Sunitaji.

Pichakaaree exists in a culture with rich musical traditions. Trinidad and Tobago is the birthplace of the world renowned and nationally lauded genre, calypso. Many Indo-Trinidadian participants, as indicated in the quotes above,

feel excluded from calypso and that some calypsonians include anti-Indian racist lyrics in their songs. Cari recalled a frightening moment at a calypso event when the singer, Cro Cro, made racist remarks about an Indo-Trinidadian activist. Cari said she stood up to him during the performance,

> and he stopped the song, and he [verbally] attacked me.' It was the last time she attended a calypso event, but 'I have no regrets…because, 'yuh sitting there and 'yuh being insulted…through song…I don't listen to calypso. Because it's insulting me. Just like chutney, I can't listen to it. It's degrading. It's…not of us.

Although pichakaree wasn't envisioned as an answer to calypso, the fact that Phagwa falls about a month after Carnival means that oftentimes pichakaree winds up doing just that.

I interviewed an artist who performs both in calypso and pichakaree. She compared the different experiences of participating in the two forums:

> In calypso the respect for calypsonians, the standard is not as high. You find that there is always, like you can never have a decent meeting in calypso. There will always somebody to raise their voice and somebody always have to be corrected or something like that but in the pichakaree family, when there is a meeting or so, everybody, it's a lot of respect for one another. There is no sort of bickering and so on this platform. You know, you doing your song, you make an error, you are corrected in a nice, polite way.

Family is the word participants often used to describe how it feels to participate in pichakaree. Kira said, 'when you come into the pichakaaree forum, you become part of the pichakaaree family. Right. Everybody will be helping everybody to improve what they doing and what they singing.' Indhi, an Indo-Trinidadian supporter and former pichakaree performer, recalled that it is a:

> 'family oriented type of competition. It was not just win the pichakaaree, it was more than that to me… it was the love and the ambience that we shared with all the, I don't know if you should say colleagues or, how I should say they are…we developed a relationship. It was not friendship, it was more like family.'

Aarati, another Indo-Trinidadian pichakaaree singer/performer, said, 'I look forward to pichaakaree every year because, I consider pichakaaree like a family. It's not just a competition that we enter, you know. We get here and we are all loving to each other. It's like a reunion, you know, when you have a family reunion.'

Although pichakaree emerged as a way to give voice to a Hindu Trinidadian community and Indo-Trinidadians more broadly, the forum is not restricted to individuals who identify as Indian or Hindu. Multiple participants explained that Afro-Trinidadians, Muslims, and Christians, among others, participate in the forum as performers, musicians, etc. True to its goal, pichakaree is a 'community voice,' a way to express one's identity/identities in their own way. For those that feel excluded from other musical genres in the country and/or who are looking for an alternative to some of the more popular genres, pichakaree is a forum for people to express themselves, to 'document', as Cari put it, what is going on their community that isn't being addressed elsewhere. In fact, Rona talked about one of the things that she values about pichakaree - it's a window into seeing her country from a different point of view. As a member of the cultural majority, she doesn't know what it is like to live in Trinidad as an Indian or Hindu identifying person. She explained:

> 'There was a way that they saw things that would have never occurred to me because [I] belong to the cultural majority. Right... here is a change of perspective… it's not necessarily that you agree with the perspective, but they presenting their perspective that is not getting space in the national conversation. So it's important to at least have that conversation happening.'

Rona reflected on how she feels 'privileged to be able to hear and engage with that' by attending pichakaree.

Funding and Fighting for Recognition

In this second theme I explore participants' concerns about funding for pichakaree, a certain amount of in-group disagreement about acceptable forms of cultural expression, and the desire for greater national recognition for the forum's contribution to national culture.

Rona's reflection above as well as comments by others indicate or imply that the experiences of Indo-Trinidadians and Hindus are often excluded or not fully recognized as part of national culture. She reflected later in our interview:

> there's a perception that Trinidad Indians are like the…outside child…specifically culturally. You know. There's a constant othering of Indian culture. So it's East Indian culture, it's not Trinidad and Tobago culture. And the things that are identified as Trinidad and Tobago culture are specifically African…it's not good for Africans and it's not good for Indians. It's not good for anybody in this society.

National culture has largely focused on Afro-Trinidadian and Carnival-

related cultural artifacts and representations. Although Trinidad and Tobago is not as dependent on tourism as other Caribbean nations, it is still big business. Carnival, calypso, steel pan, etc. are cultural artforms known and celebrated worldwide, and they tend to be the focus of drawing tourism to the nation.

Where there is revenue, state funding tends to go. The most common challenge that participants identified was lack of funding for pichakaaree. I have not yet been able to access documentation from the government on funding allocation, but lack of funding was identified by nearly every participant in this study as a challenge that pichakaree faces. The issue is also often brought up in news media articles. Kira reflected how 'the government sponsors a lot of programs, but for pichakaaree, they have nothing to give.' There is a sense of resentment that the government provides funding for many arts and cultural events, especially those related to Carnival that generate revenue, but the funding is not readily available for Indian or Hindu events like pichakaree, a resentment that reflects Rohlehr's observation of competition for visibility between the two dominant racial groups.

Bhodiji and Rona both expressed how the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and the Arts seems incapable of fully understanding the value of pichakaree. Rona said: 'they [the Ministry] wouldn't understand why it's important to fund pichakaaree. They wouldn't understand why an organization like the HIMICE needs to have support.' Bhodiji reflected on the Ministry's prioritization of crafting cultural policy focused on generating revenue: 'they missing the point. I told them the culture was creating a better nation, a better mind, that is what we should think, but they wanted to create revenue.'

The state isn't the only avenue for obtaining funds. Corporate sponsorships with alcohol companies are another avenue, but one that is counter to HIMICE's values.

While state funding is inconsistent and minimal and certain corporate sponsorships are incompatible with the values of pichakaaree, Sunitaji offered hope because of the community support they receive. She said:

> The funding Ministry of Culture has always been miniscule and it has largely succeeded because of community support, and the support of friends…we have had really, we've a fair amount of good will from our community. If we didn't have that, a lot of volunteerism, community business, our friends and supporters giving whatever little they can to put in the Phagwa fund, and so. And this is how we have been able to manage.

The challenges of pichakaree aren't solely around funding. Another challenge the forum has faced comes from within. With the potential to be a major contribution to national culture, reluctance and disapproval from within the

Hindu Trinidad community is a complicated hurdle.

Although Sunitaji discussed the support from their community, some members of the Hindu and/or Indo-Trinidadian community are not supportive of pichakaree, although this seems to be changing in recent years. In fact, Kira stated that she thought pichakaree is 'well-received.' But, Bhodji expressed disappointment with the wider community, saying:

> The Africans see calypso and the calypso stage as an institution to protect and they'll fight for it. But not our community. So this is, for me, a big let down. That the community hasn't risen equal to our needs that we would have to help to sustain ourselves.

One reason for disapproval seems to have been the use of English in religious songs. Conservative positions were/are that spiritual songs should only be sung in Hindi or Indian languages, possibly an effort to retain authenticity. Govinda recalled that singing pichakaree was the first time he sang a religious song in English and 'back then [it] was sort of frowned upon.' He thinks pichakaree makes Phagwa more enjoyable, as opposed to other Phagwa events that only feature traditional music. He said, 'Who really wants to go and stand in the hot sun and listen to all Hindi, pure Hindi songs…and they don't know what is being said?'

But attitudes appear to be changing, as multiple participants said that one of the conservative Hindu organizations is now sponsoring 'local folk song competitions' where participants sing in English. The organization won't call it pichakaree, but the songs have all the characteristics of pichakaree. One song writer said teachers at those schools have reached out to him to help compose songs for the children.

With a national culture focused on other forms of cultural expression and a certain amount of in-group tensions around the pichakaree forum, the genre has not yet achieved the kind of wide national acceptance that it has the potential to achieve. Pichakaree is a performance of the trio of identities that Sunitaji and Bhodiji identify – Trinidadian, Indian, and Hindu. It helps people embody, express, and analyze what that identity means to them. It empowers people to assert an identity that is just as Trinidadian as calypso, soca, and steel pan. More funding, both from the state and other sources, as well as wider acceptance from within the Hindu Trinidad community will be important for the forum to not only continue, but to thrive and grow.

Looking to the Future

I asked participants what they see as pichakaaree's future and what they hope for the future of the artform. In this final section, I share how participants

responded.

Professional recording of songs and distribution on various networks and online was identified as a future goal. At certain points in its history, pichakaree was broadcast on local television and radio, but beyond the annual pichakaree competition during HIMICE's Phagwa celebration, pichakaarees are not commonly heard or played. Whereas soca and calypso are professionally recorded, heard year round, and historical songs are easily accessed, pichakaree is 'just not there. There's no record of it' (Rona). This music is created and performed every year, but without a recording 'it doesn't really stick in your consciousness' (Rona). The challenge of recording and distribution ties in with funding, of course – it costs a lot of money to do professional music recording.

Not having an opportunity to experience pichakaree outside of Phagwa also ties in with the interracial and in-group tensions. Kira points out, 'We don't have a forum for it after pichakaree. Apparently it doesn't fit in anywhere.' People like to listen to chutney, an up tempo genre of Indian music from Trinidad, but pichakaree is 'serious,' as Kira said, and seemingly not appealing to many locals for a bacchanal. The serious, intellectual nature of pichakaree is seemingly unappealing for local radio stations as well. In fact, Sunitaji recalled a time when she was invited to speak on a radio program and the station 'just went off the air because we are addressing serious issues in our commentary songs.' Under such circumstances, choosing which songs to try distributing over radio will require strategy to determine, as she pointed out, which songs could be played and not cut off from the airwaves. A local conservative Hindu organization that owns a television and radio station does not air pichakaree music, perhaps a reflection of resistance to the song genre and the perception that it is not 'pure' due to the use of English in a religious context.

There is hope that recording and distribution can be more accessible today with affordable digital technology and social media. Although the president of HIMICE noted that they had 'faltered' on developing a stronger online presence at the time in 2019, since COVID hit, the organization has developed weekly and special event programming that is streamed on social media. The increased online activity may be helping the community become more comfortable with disseminating their activities on digital platforms. HIMICE creates many different cultural programs, pichakaree is just one of them, and establishing a committee to focus solely on pichakaree is another goal.

Although funding is needed, turning a profit is not the intention for HIMICE. Cultural celebration, preservation and expansion is their goal, and the community's strategies and choices for growing this artform in the future are being informed by that larger purpose. They work to strike a balance among three areas – (1) standing out and having their voices heard; (2) speaking out in

a way that is distinctly Trinidadian and relevant to their national and cultural contexts; and (3) not allowing their cultural activities to be co-opted and contaminated for someone else's profit. They do not want to become dispossessed from their own cultural expressions. As Bhodiji warned, 'don't let our riches become our burden' – meaning cultural artforms and activities like this have become commodified, often resulting in profits for others and nothing for the community itself. He went on to say, 'In modern days, people who never reach out to you are now going to reach out to you because they see it as capital.' The concern is that their voices will become further marginalized, and their cultural practices become reduced to resources extracted and woven into global markets as commodities, thus erasing the culturally-situated agency of their community. Much like their *jahajee* ancestors who were persuaded or manipulated to go to Trinidad, dispossessed from their homeland, and sold into a labor system that did not benefit them, a concern now is that their local forms of cultural expression could be dispossessed from them and woven into cultural economies that do not benefit them. There is a sense of needing to protect pichakaree from such a fate.

Conclusion

What we can learn from pichakaree is the value of a community developing and cultivating forms of cultural expression that are relevant to them. As Stuart Hall has written, representation and who gets to do it is a form of power. Pichakaree the music is a form of representation that comes from within – a way to assert one's own knowledge and power rather than be subjected to someone else's representations or erasures. There is immense value in seeing one's own voice and one's own culture represented on a national stage, and expanding this medium across digital media and beyond is a delicate task in order to protect this cultural artform from becoming disconnected from its roots.

Pichakaaree is an innovative gem of national culture, but not widely recognized. With the latest National Tourism Policy and the stated interest in showcasing cultural activities 'characterized by local innovation' (Tourism 2), pichakaree fits the bill but needs to be nationally recognized, supported and cultivated. As stated in the policy draft, one of the tourism issues that Trinidad and Tobago faces is the perception that it is an unsafe destination. Pichakaaree is designed to be a safe, family-friendly event that could contribute to mitigating that negative national image. However, getting steeped in tourism has the potential to corrupt the artform, and so must be done carefully, if the community wants to pursue it.

Ultimately, pichakaree is a musical expression of the diaspora identity

and community from which it emerged. Back to the guiding research question – how may diaspora identity, and its inherent continuity and rupture, inform and be informed by local forms of cultural expression? In the case of pich-akaree, it is specifically Trinidadian in the way it links heritage with the present and future. Pichakaaree is culturally, melodically, and linguistically linked to an India of the past, memories of an India that have been passed down by generations of elders, that can be heard in the Hindi and Bhojpuri words that pepper the otherwise English songs. The rupture and disconnect of indenture is heard in the use of English and the ways songs address issues of concerns to the community in Trinidad. The similarity and difference created by an oppressive colonial system that turned Indians and Africans against each other can be felt in the very fact of a community creating this song form to fill a perceived void and establish a voice for themselves where there was none. If you listen closely, each pichakaree song reveals these dialectics of continuity and rupture, similarity and difference, past and present/future. This unique form of cultural representation gives voice to a diasporic trio of identities – Trini, Indian, and Hindu – that celebrates difference and heterogeneity while boldly claiming the right to national space and pushing society to broaden notions of national culture.

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