

**Gendering Through Songs: An Analysis of Gender
Discourse and Performativity in Indo-Fijian Vivah Ke Geet
(Wedding Songs)**

By

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Thesis submitted for Master of Arts in Literature

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Declaration

Statement by Author

I, Vicky Vishal Shandil, declare that this thesis titled “Gendering Through Songs: An Analysis of Gender Discourse and Performativity in Indo-Fijian Vivah Ke Geet (Wedding Songs)” is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge, it contains no material previously published, or substantially overlapping with the material submitted for the award of any degree at any institution, except where due acknowledgement is made in the text.

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Statement by Supervisor

The research for this dissertation was performed under my supervision and to my knowledge is the sole work of Mr. Vicky Shandil.

Signature

Date

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Designation

Acknowledgement

The Lord is my Shepherd [to feed, guide, and shield me], I shall not lack. (Psalm 23: 1 AMP).

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God will bless you all richly.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of a friend, colleague and most importantly a feminist:

Joytika

26th February 1982 – 27th June 2013

Of whom it can be said:

A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house.

(Matthew 5:14)

Abstract

This thesis will provide an insight into the Indo-Fijian gender situation through an analysis of one of the discursive practices that is instrumental in the construction and sustenance of gendered identity. The analysis will be founded on Judith Butler's theory of Gender Performativity as outlined in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*. This thesis will focus on *Vivah ke Geet* or wedding songs which is a form of Indo-Fijian folklore and also provides a comprehensive viewpoint of its female performers. A close reading of the songs will be done to identify its gendered content and the gendered nature of the various premises like religion, culture and history from which these songs are sourced. This thesis aims to expose the intrusion and existence of patriarchal notions of femininity within this art-form and how it has historically been mechanised as a manipulative medium to reproduce subservient women. The thesis will particularly focus on the creation and performance of these songs by females whose very attributes and perceptions indicate a patriarchal alignment. Since the female element in these songs is being examined there will be a focus on the concept of female voice and how it has historically been used in a complicit fashion to reinforce rather than challenge androcentric ideologies. Then the thesis assumes a historical perspective and outlines the development of folklore studies mainly the female element in it. The discussion will then move onto a more concise approach in analysing from a feminist perspective the performance of folksongs in the Indo-Fijian context. Later the thesis will elaborate on the subversive potential and emergence in both real life and folksong performances and the threat it poses to patriarchy. The thesis will also analyse *Vivah ke Geet* as texts that have been and still are being performed by past and contemporary singers in wedding situations to meet entertainment and pedagogical needs. The views and opinions of singers will consistently intertwine with the discussions to perspicuously depict how the songs symbolise the deliquescent perceptions and insights of their composers and performers. The thesis will conclude that these songs have represented gendered and asymmetrical views historically because those foundations on which the songs were based were also gendered to begin with. However, the thesis will assert that due to social transformations much of these views have been disproved. Thus, *Vivah ke Geet* is in need of rewriting and resignification to represent women as autonomous, powerful and able as they have proved themselves to be in real life. The hope is that such rewriting will not only alter this particular discursive practice but cause a widespread overhaul of all discursive processes as it is within the confines of these that identities form.

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Introduction

Books and loud noises, flowers and electric shocks – already in the infant mind these couples were compromisingly linked; and after two hundred repetitions of the same or a similar lesson would be wedded indissolubly. What man has joined, nature is powerless to put asunder.¹

In Aldous Huxley's 1931 novel *Brave New World* the Director of The Hatcheries and Conditioning Centre thus summarises how individuals were moulded into obedient citizens through repetitions. From biological sex to likes and dislikes, each human was predetermined to meet the expectations of society and its governing authority. While the story and the setting are fictional, the idea of pre-determining life and living for individual beings is apparent in contemporary society as well. People are gendered along binaries of sex and sexuality with the adamant expectation that they will live and perform in compliance with specified gender scripts regulated by social and cultural norms. Gender is established within individuals through *in situ* training and repeated practice to the extent that individualities are suppressed to achieve gender uniformity. The potential of a body to perform diverse gender forms is nullified by social preconditions that allow extremely limited eventualities. It is more or less socially established, for instance, that a body that is sexed as female based on certain physical or biological features is a *girl* – with all that word implies. The consequence is that this *girl* must adapt to contextualized social regulations and internalize specified traits, characteristics and attributes. Similar to Huxley's fictional society where conditioning occurs via the hypnopædic process so that all individuals' choices appear natural, our societies also manipulate beings into denying the very existence of the conditioning process. This results in the acceptance of factors like gender as natural rather than cultural adoptions. The conformity of individuals additionally proves the power vested in such a process where the aim is to align each female being to a stereotypical form of what the society deems to be a *girl* or *woman*. Subsequently, other roles and labels come into play, namely, daughter, sister, wife, daughter-in-law, mother, grandmother and many others that result from kinship and marriage. Thus, both kinship and marriage have proven to be fundamental aspects of many societies, especially where they have been mechanised as tools of

¹ Aldous Huxley, *Brave New World* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1932), 16.

social ordering. Social organisation and harmony are widely used as justification for the heavy investment by societies into such conditioning processes. The Director from Huxley's text clarifies this when he states: 'No civilisation without social stability. No social stability without individual stability'.²

This thesis considers gender as a social concept that influences and orders life in the Indo-Fijian³ community, specifically for those Hindus belonging to the *Sanatani* sect.⁴ The thesis argues that folksongs sung during weddings form an essential discursive element that is sanctioned by patriarchal authority to reinforce societal values and principles that are male-centred, leading to a stereotyped Indo-Fijian womanhood. The treatment of folksongs as texts that represent discourse is derived from Joan Scott, who clarifies that a 'text is not limited to written material, but rather refers to "utterances" of any kind and in any medium, including cultural practices'.⁵ *Vivah ke Geet* or wedding songs are *utterances* that provide an insight into Hindu beliefs, Indo-Fijian customs and traditions and deep-seated social values.

Indians have been in Fiji since 14th May, 1879, when 498 indentured labourers arrived in the *Leonidas* from Calcutta. Since then they have become a part of Fiji's social fabric. While most of the first generation arrived as indentured labourers under the British from different parts of India, many other smaller groups like the Sikhs and Gujaratis also came as travellers or traders. The effect of the resettling of Indians in Fiji after the end of indenture has led to the permanent transformation of Fiji's social landscape. Ensuing political upheavals that taint Fiji's history have also often been blamed on the Indo-Fijian population, who have been portrayed as a

² Huxley, *Brave New World*, 33.

³ While the term Indo-Fijian refers to all descendents of indentured labourers permanently residing in Fiji, for this thesis the term is restricted to those Indo-Fijians who are descendents of labourers who originated from the Northern States of India. More particularly the term refers to North Indians who follow the *Sanatan* religious belief system. This demarcation is necessary because not all Indo-Fijians are *Sanatanis* and there are obvious differences between North and South Indians. One example is that South Indian girls can marry their mothers' brother (*mama*) but this will be a serious breach of social conventions for North Indians.

⁴ For more information on Hindu religious organisations see: John Kelly, *A Politics of Virtue: Hinduism Sexuality and Counter Colonial Discourse in Fiji* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), Ian Somerville, "The Ramayan Mandali Movement: Popular Hindu Theism in Fiji 1870-1979". (Master's dissertation, University of Sydney, 1986).

⁵ Joan Scott, 'Deconstructing Equality Versus Difference: or, The Uses of Post Structuralist Theory for Feminism.' *Feminist Studies* 14, No. 1 (Spring 1988), 35, accessed May 23, 2013, http://www.ekologiasztuka.pl/think.tank.feministyczny/kurs/scott_1988.pdf.

political threat due to their increasing economic and educational prowess, and numbers that at one time matched that of *I-taukei*'s.⁶

While they are in many ways different from the Indians in India, many aspects of Indo-Fijian life continues to reflect their past as Indian migrants. The 2006 ADB Country Gender Assessment Report identified that as far as gender relations were concerned among Indo-Fijians, these were 'influenced by various traditional cultural values originating from South Asia'.⁷ The same report stated that these value and belief systems 'emphasise formal male authority in decision making and over property' and to a great extent impacts the cultural status of women in accordance with 'considerations of their manageability'.⁸

The Hindu religion and related cultural practices have remained with the Indo-Fijians, together with a hybridised form of folklore. One change, for instance, is the use of Fiji Hindi, also known as *Fiji Baat*,⁹ in the performance of folklore. In an investigation of Indo-Fijian folksongs Donald Brenneis asserts that when analysed as a text it can be concluded that these songs do not differ from the Indian forms from where they originate. However, he maintains that categorising these two forms as the same 'would be a misrepresentation, for though the texts have not changed dramatically, how they are sung, when, where, by whom and, most important, why they are sung have all changed remarkably'.¹⁰ This thesis considers *Vivah ke Geet*, the wedding songs that have been part of Indo-Fijian folklore since the re-establishment of Hindu traditional wedding ceremonies in the post-*girmit* era. Wedding songs have been chosen for this thesis because weddings are one of the most significant rituals in the Indo-Fijian Hindu way of life. This is because this event overlaps cultural, religious, art and kinship aspects of society. A wedding ceremony makes social relationships and groupings manifest in the rites performed. Adrian Mayer notes in the context of Indo-Fijian society that:

⁶ For more on the history of Fiji Indians or Indo-Fijians see (Ahmed Ali, 'Indians in Fiji: An Interpretation,' in *The Indo-Fijian Experience*, ed. Subramani. (St. Lucia, Queensland University Press, 1979); Ahmed Ali, *Girmit: The Indenture Experience* (Suva: Fiji Museum, 1979); Brij Lal, *Broken Waves: A History of the Fiji Islands in the Twentieth Century* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1992).)

⁷ Asian Development Bank, *Country Gender Assessment: Republic of the Fiji Islands*, (Philippines: Pacific Regional Department and Regional and Sustainable Development Department of ADB, 2006), 4.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ A detailed analysis of *Fiji Baat* is found in: Jeff Siegel, *A Survey of Language Use in the Indian Speech Community of Fiji* (Honolulu: East West Centre, 1973).

¹⁰ Donald Brenneis, 'The Emerging Soloist: "Kavvālī" in Bhatgaon.' *Asian Folklore Studies* 42, No. 1, (1983): 64, accessed November 17, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1178366>.

Only two stages in a person's life were ritually observed – marriage and funeral. Of the two, the former was structurally more important, since by it social ties were created as well as reaffirmed, and it followed a procedure of match-making involving parents and other kin.¹¹

Mayer's quotation represents canonical views of Hindus which impact all facets of their lives and which were materialise in social events like marriage. Within the Indo-Fijian patriarchy folksong performances portray the male dominance and gender stereotypes that exist in society.

Kevin Miller also assents to this when he states that 'musical performance offers an ethnographically distinct site of cultural production, constitutive and revelatory of multiple points of suture that informs an individual's sense of self in society'.¹² Thus, folksongs have been analysed within this project to identify patriarchal and gendered notions. Furthermore, songs portraying gender subversions are also analysed to reflect on how the potential for non-conformity to social norms exists within this genre.

Richard Bauman points out that performances of any form in cultural contexts create a need in performers to assume a responsibility towards their audiences, thus they have to display a level of competency which 'rests on the knowledge and ability to speak in socially appropriate ways'.¹³ For performers to gain that competency they have to be submerged in the knowledge and ideology surrounding the lore they perform. Since folklore emerges out of life and living life in socially specified ways, it is not erroneous to assume that much of what is performed on stage is a depiction of a community's belief and value systems. Lia Littosseliti and Jane Sunderland believe that 'when we speak we are always telling listeners something about ourselves'.¹⁴ Therefore, folksingers are also revealing their own selves when they utter (sing) their songs and this helps in the tracing of the social context from which they emerge. Thus, a combined analysis of nine female folksong performers is also presented in this thesis; to document the various

¹¹ Adrian Mayer, *Peasants in the Pacific: A Study of Fiji Indian Rural Society* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), 62.

¹² Kevin Miller, 'A Community of Sentiment: Indo-Fijian Music and Identity Discourse in Fiji and Its Diaspora.' (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2008), 4.

¹³ Richard Bauman, 'Verbal Art as Performance.' *American Anthropologist New Series* 77, No. 2 (June 1975), 293, accessed May 8, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/674535>.

¹⁴ Lia Litosseliti and Jane Sunderland, 'Gender Identity and Discursive Analysis: Theoretical and Empirical Considerations,' in *Gender Identity and Discourse Analysis*, ed. Lia Litosseliti and Jane Sunderland. (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002), 22.

influences that lead women to practice this art form, reveal those social, cultural and religious factors that constitute the thematic scheme for the songs, establish the overlapping factors among these women singers from different geographic locations within Fiji, and elaborate on how these women narrate socially sanctioned gender expectations in the songs they perform.

The songs depict the subservient nature of women in the Indo-Fijian society, at least in the realm of matrimony. John Kelly argues that the presence of the Hindu concept of *Satitva* (loosely translated as *chastity*) in early Indo-Fijian women is responsible for their subordinate nature. He claims that the English term *chastity* does not do justice to what the actual concept of *Satitva* entails, since it requires self-sacrifice to the point of killing oneself to protect one's ideals and values. He states that nowhere was this notion more applicable than in Indo-Fijian marriages. He asserts that:

The husband-wife relationship is itself a type of devotional relationship. He is her God and protector, she devotes herself to him. The woman is a vessel of power requiring control; out of control she can be quite harmful and dangerous. Within marriage, her power is creative – she takes semen from her husband, she makes children combining it with her own fluids, and she gives milk to her children. Her life is oriented by her relation to husband and children, her place in family.¹⁵

Mayer states that 'the obeisance of the bride's representative to the groom's (a subordination which is present throughout the wedding)'¹⁶ is one of main items of interest in the *Sanatani* Indo-Fijian wedding rituals. The apparent asymmetry in this scenario along gender lines is grounds for feminist reviews and scrutiny which will be used to show that there are no hereditary foundations that can defend these unequal social, religious and cultural statuses.

A Hindu *Sanatani* wedding is a significant time when individuals affirm their socio-religious affiliations and also become part of the cornerstone of the kinship system and the social duties and obligations which result from it. Folk singers accompany the entire process since wedding songs continue to be sung until the time the bride leaves with the groom's procession as womenfolk weep and bid their daughter farewell. A brief outline of the Hindu marriage protocol

¹⁵ John Kelly, 'Discourse About Sexuality and the End of Indenture in Fiji: The Making of Counter-Hegemonic Discourses,' *History and Anthropology* 5 (1990): 46-47.

¹⁶ Mayer, *Peasants in the Pacific*, 67.

is provided here since the songs that are performed relate to these diverse rituals. The wedding proper is a complex ritual spread over three days, even though preparatory activities including some customary prayers and gatherings begin long before this and continue afterwards. The wedding is a significant time when individuals affirm their socio-religious affiliations and also become part of the cornerstone of the kinship system and the social duties and obligations which result from it. The first day is called *Telwan* (application of oil) when the altar where the wedding will take place is constructed and consecrated at the bride's home or wherever the function was to take place. The bride and groom are rubbed with purificatory oil and turmeric at their respective homes. Relevant folksongs are sung as various rituals take place. The second day is called *Bhatwan* and on this day the bride's parents worship at the wedding altar and the rubbing of oil and turmeric continues. The wedding shed/hall is also decked with decorations and the altar goes through final preparations for the wedding the following day. Folksongs are continuously sung to narrate the events taking place. The third or final day is called *shadi* (wedding) and the actual singing begins with the arrival of the groom at the wedding venue, which marks the official beginning of the wedding. The groom is traditionally welcomed by the bride's father and subsequently by the bride's mother and her female relatives. While traditionally as many as four to five hours were given for the bride's final preparations after the groom's arrival, more recently this wait has been minimized greatly to economize on time and expenditure. Once the bride arrives at the altar her parents perform an official transfer of responsibility through the ritual of *kanyadaan* (gift of the virgin) to the groom. This ritual involves the washing of the groom's feet by the bride's father for the second time after his official welcome. This is followed by a gift presentation ritual that requires the bride's parents and relatives to give gifts to the groom at the altar. The most important ritual follows after when the priest ties the end of the bride's *sari* to the groom's sash and they circle the altar seven times, of which the first three are led by the bride and the last four by the groom and the priest continues to chant the holy vows of the wedding in Sanskrit. Upon the completion of this the bride is asked to move to the groom's left, which is meant to be his weaker side. The couple is then covered with a large sheet when the husband places a little red powder in the bride's hair parting or forehead. The wife must continue to place this red powder as a sign of her marital status and the husband's life. Wedding songs continue to be sung right until the time the bride leaves with the groom's procession as women weep and bid their daughter farewell. Songs are

also sung during other related but minor events, one of which is the *matthi chuye* (soil touching) ceremony when women take a walk away from the wedding shed and dig a lump of soil to be used at the wedding altar. This is a form of thanksgiving to ‘mother earth’. Songs of a subversive nature are also sung by women at the groom’s house once the procession departs for the wedding ceremony and are accompanied by lewd dance performances. Thus, the Hindu wedding constitutes of fragments of rituals, most of which are narrated through folksongs, and are reflections of social values, beliefs and ideologies.

For this thesis I draw on Judith Butler’s understanding of gendered subjectivity, which she believes to be constituted through performative acts. Some assumptions have been instituted to better determine the scope of this thesis, and they are; firstly, that gender is performative and is not linearly dependent on biological features of agents. One of the focuses of this thesis is to depict the manner in which women appear to be complicit narrators and enforcers of stereotypical gender performances. It must be iterated at this point that this project does not attempt to demonise female folksingers for being purveyors of pro-patriarchal doctrine, but works to create awareness on how certain ideologies have been internalised by individuals despite the gender-biased nature. While a sex-gender system exists in the wider social context, the analysis in this dissertation is based on the point of view that gender is acted out through repetitive acts and in many instances assumes a ‘natural’ disposition whereby certain gender forms become accepted as originals to be emulated.

Secondly, gender construction is a social phenomenon, thus, the interactions with other individuals in one way or another has bearing on the final gender outcome. In the Indo-Fijian context the social environment is regulated by culture, religion and social norms, all of which have historically recognized only two opposite genders and their union through heterosexual matrimony. While this may appear similar to many other societies, Fiji’s Indo-Fijians stand unique in some aspects. The colonial rule and resettlement in a foreign land alongside many different ethnic groups has hybridised their lifestyle and belief systems. However, while a stringent social structure like the caste system has failed in Fiji, gender hierarchies have persisted, proving its strong position within Indo-Fijian culture.¹⁷

¹⁷ See (Elizabeth Grieco, ‘The Effect of Migration on the Establishment of Networks: Caste Disintegration and Reformations Amongst the Indians of Fiji,’ *International Migration Review* 32, No. 3 (1998), 704-736, accessed November 13, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2547769>.)

Thirdly, gender discourses play a significant role in the formation of gender, as the agent is submerged in the discursive sphere that reflects social expectations. The individuals absorb all notions of gender from here as Laura Shepherd points out that ‘discourses are recognisable as systems of meaning production rather than simply statements or language, systems that fix meaning, however temporarily, and enable us to make sense of the world’.¹⁸ Folksongs as cultural heritages are also poetic representations of social discourses covering almost all aspects of society such as notions of gender, relationship and religion thus they become vital threads of the larger discursive net.

Furthermore, the formation of gender is context-specific, that is, geographic and cultural differences have major impact on the acceptability and non-acceptability of gender traits. For instance, within the Indo-Fijian community women were initially expected to replicate the concept of womanhood as conceived in India. This was significantly visible during the indenture (*girmit*) period but experienced a loss in intensity over the years due to the economic progress of women through formal education and also through affirmative action which raised the social and political status of women. The distance from India has allowed a certain hybridization of gender norms as Fijian society is comprised of diverse ethnic groups that causes mingling as well as subversions of values due to the colonial past that formed a thoroughfare for Western ideologies and values. For example, in his personal narrative on the *girmit* experience, Totaram Sanadhya, who has been described as ‘Hinduism’s most trusted custodian in Fiji’,¹⁹ notes that it was because of the difficult conditions for indentured Indians in the British administered Fiji that instances of adultery became common.²⁰ To counter this, the custom of remarriage started, although it was ‘not approved in *shastra* (traditional law)’.²¹ Even though infidelity was an unimaginable quality in an orthodox Indian woman from religious and social viewpoints, the circumstances in Fiji led to non-conformity with pre-existing social expectations. Kenneth Gillion states that ‘the drudgery and joylessness of lives without proper homes where daily religious rites could be performed and the weakening of the traditional form of marriage

¹⁸ Laura Shepherd, *Gender, Violence & Security: Discourse As Practice* (London: Zed Books, 2008), 20.

¹⁹ Kelly, *A Politics of Virtue*, 94.

²⁰ Totaram Sanadhya, *My Twenty-One Years in the Fiji Islands and The Story of the Haunted Line*, trans. John Kelly and Ultra Kumari Singh (Suva: Fiji Museum, 1991), 68.

²¹ *Ibid.*

contributed to immorality',²² and the blame for such moral decay was placed on the changed social context of Indians. The allowance of remarriage thus serves as an apt example of how new norms were adopted due to altering social circumstances. However, writers like Gillion, who belonged to the colonial era, are often criticised for presenting biased views on social realities in colonies. In this case Gillion is seen as providing justification for the revival of Indian customs and traditions, some of which prove to be oppressive of female individualities and freedom. These result in beliefs and practices that limit female existence to the domestic sphere and render them devoid of a public voice.

The final assumption of this thesis is that gender subversion is a possibility due to the performative nature of gender. This is also evident in folksong performances by women who deliberately act outside of their gender norms. While these subversions are endorsed by patriarchal authority there are historical and contemporary evidences of actual gender subversiveness and patriarchal retribution to maintain the status quo. The fourth chapter titled *Gender Subversions and Folklore Performances* elaborates on this issue in depth.

Butler argues that gender is not in any way a constant identity, a starting point or the core of a multi-layered structure. Neither is it a finished mould that demands everything poured into it to assume a delimited form. For Butler, gender is an identity that takes shape through patterned repetitions of acts. Over time the patterns become categorized to represent specific gender types. This implies the potential for multiplicities of gender. This is why the application of this theory to analyse gender patterns in a social group that recognizes only two extremes of gender makes for interesting research. The explosive nature of gender mandates that the gendering process has to be heavily regulated in order to maintain conformity to the binary. Indo-Fijian patriarchal society instituted various mechanisms to control gender formation and one of these was to create and sustain a discursive environment that supports this polemic structure. The use of folksongs was part of this strategy to discursively standardize and manage gender. Social events became significant stages for the performance and display of sanctioned gender scripts. The portentous voice of woman was masterfully turned into complicity by patriarchy to enforce the very ideologies that entail female subordination. However, awakening female subjectivity and emotion continue to create fissures in the social structure's surface as is evident in the increasing

²² Kenneth Gillion, *Fiji Indian Migrants: A History to the End of Indenture in 1920* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 125.

incidences of gender subversions. Any society that is riddled with asymmetrical cultural, social and religious ideologies is arable grounds for discrimination and human injustice. It can only be in the exposition of these notions and their mechanisms that humanity can be rid of such predicaments. This thesis reveals one of the sources of gender stratification among Indo-Fijians with the hope that this exposure will cause a rewriting of social conception of gender.

Although feminist theory is used as the core analytical tool for this thesis, an extensive review was conducted of relevant texts and theoretical constructs which are duly presented in the thesis. The aim was to analyse those factors that influence the song content rather than taking a narrow view of the songs alone. Gayle Rubin, for example, is constantly cited to validate the ideologies surrounding kinship which is extensively integrated in *Vivah Geet*. The literature review also indicates a major achievement of this thesis as it amalgamates folklore and feminist research. While independent research has been previously done on Indo-Fijian folklore and Indo-Fijian feminism there was no relative evidence of any feminist reading of folklore. Thus, while adding to two existing bodies of knowledge, this thesis creates a third avenue for social and literary investigation.

Consecutively, to reveal how these songs reflect social perceptions I interviewed experienced and practicing folksingers in Labasa, Suva, Nausori, Rakiraki, Ba and Sigatoka. This helped cover the three main regions in Fiji and helped ascertain how despite of geographical differences the singers portrayed similar viewpoints. While a copy of the transcripts has not been attached to this thesis due to its size, it can be made available for citing when needed. Rajni, a folksinger for twenty-seven years, asserts that ‘these songs are very closely related to our religion and culture. We are Indo-Fijians and our religion is *Sanatani* and this we cannot forget. What actually happens in the wedding is dictated by our religion and since religion is vital to us so are these songs’.²³ Thus, in the evaluation of the material it became expedient to analyse the contribution of those who perform the materials. The number of years these women have been performing ranged from ten years to seventy years. Bindu has been singing for ten years and unlike most of the other singers she took up the art of folk-singing after marriage. Durgama, on the other hand, learnt this art form as a child of eight years and has been performing at weddings for over seventy years. Even the youngest participant, who is only twenty-six years old, has been singing for over twenty years because she started performing at weddings when she was still in

²³ Rajni Kaur, Interviewed by Vicky Shandil, Robertson Road Suva, 18 August 2013, Question 11.

primary school. All the other participants had been singing for more than twenty years when this interview was conducted. The range for the total number of weddings these women performed in was between 150-500 weddings. This coupled with the numerous years that they have been surrounded by social conventions on marriage defines the wide experience these selected women have had when it comes to *Vivah Geet*. These recorded interviews were translated from Fiji Hindi to English when the sessions were being transcribed. Two clarifications need to be made here; firstly, gender related barriers were noted in the interview sessions as I, the researcher, was a male interviewing females on notions related to women in their songs. In a few instances the spouses of the singers were also present for the sessions as it was not socially viable to leave a strange male and female alone together. However, the fact that most of the interviewees were matriarchs allowed the conversations to flow as their age permitted them more discursive liberty. Secondly, direct quotations from interviewees are consistently provided in the text to validate the existence of the gendered ideologies and mind-sets. However their names have been altered to save them from unnecessary criticism since these comments appear highly complicit with patriarchy.

Furthermore, I had to listen to countless number of song albums and read through photocopied versions of the singers' song books to select appropriate songs for the analysis presented in Chapter 5. Once selected, these songs had to be translated from Fiji Hindi into English and both these versions are provided in the appendix. Many phone calls also had to be made to the singers in instances where meanings of certain words, jargons and phrases had to be clarified and confirmed. Thus, this thesis is the culmination of the survey of existing research, the scrutiny of primary folksongs as texts and the inclusion of field research.

The first chapter, entitled *Female Voice* explains how the female voice has been construed as powerless and complicit of patriarchal values and the need for it to be directed towards the empowerment of women. The chapter dwells on the work of feminists in securing a social recognition of the female voice as an independent and autonomous entity. The second chapter, *A Feminist Scrutiny of Folklore Performances*, traces the history of the study of folklore, its social functions, its performance nature and the female element in folk literature. The main focus will be on the performance aspect of folklore as it is vital to its very survival. Chapter three, entitled *Intractability of Gendered Identity*, problematizes gendered identity, which is at the core of the *Vivah ke Geet* themes. This chapter takes a theoretical approach to

disproving the pillars on which gender stereotypes are created and internalised. Chapter four, which is *Performing Gender and Folklore in the Indo-Fijian Patriarchy*, takes a more specific look at patriarchal values existent in the Indo-Fijian society and the various means through which they are enforced on individuals. The focus here is on folksongs as it is one of the most prominent means of such manipulation. The fifth chapter, entitled *Gender Subversions and Folklore Performances*, highlights gender subversions in society and subversive portrayals in *Vivah ke Geet*. This chapter argues the factors explained in the chapter four which enforce normative gender forms by justifying subversions. The final chapter, *A Feminist Perspective on Vivah ke Geet*, analyses gendered content in the wedding songs to highlight gender stereotypes of Indo-Fijian womanhood. The songs' contents are explained using the outlined theories, interviewees' comments and social, religious and cultural beliefs.

Why women remain silent is neither about being inferior, being less knowledgeable, nor economically disadvantaged. It is a combination of many factors such as religion, culture, upbringing, the fear of retaliation, the lack of protection – the dynamics which attributed to people's expectations of an ideal female in a patriarchal society such as Fiji.¹

Voice denotes the expression or utterance of one's views, paying particular attention to tone and stance. Mikhail Bakhtin gives recognition to the multiplicities of voices in discourses through his use of the terms *heteroglossia*² and *polyphony*,³ which he uses to state that many voices exist in varied registers and do not necessarily conflate into a unified consciousness. This he attributes to the 'non-official viewpoints, those of the marginalized, the oppressed and the peripheralized'⁴ that continue operating regardless of the denial of their presence. The voice of feminism belongs to the once marginalised but now growing category of voices in Fiji providing expressive potential to Fiji's women.

A Misconception

*Her voice was so soft,
Gentle, and low, an excellent thing in a woman.*⁵

The above quotation from Shakespeare's *King Lear* reflects the stereotypical image of women's voice. The depiction resonates with historically created notions of a female voice that was meant to submit rather than resist. It was a mark of femininity meant to sustain rather than challenge hegemonic discourses, depicting a specific idea of the female voice in manner, capacity and potency. Such a voice was fenced within the need to sound *pleasant* or express *quietness*, for the

¹ Chandra Reddy, 'Women and Politics in Fiji,' in *Fiji Before the Storm – Elections and the Politics of Development*, ed. Brij Lal (Canberra: Asia Pacific Press at the Australian National University, 2000), 155.

² Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Micheal Holquist and Caryl Emerson, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), xxi.

³ Ibid, xix.

⁴ Judith Baxter, *Positioning Gender in Discourse: A Feminist Methodology* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 38.

⁵ William Shakespeare. *King Lear*, ed. Ken Muir (London: Methuen, 1961), 251.

patriarchal structure only granted intelligibility to silent women and silence in women as this ensured women's adherence to attributes posed as the binary opposition to masculinity. This binaried definition of women is portrayed by Lyn Pykett as 'a system of differences which marks off woman as essentially different from man and whose meaning depends on a series of excluded terms'.⁶ Janet Kourany argues that 'women and men are still raised in our society to see women as less capable and less valuable than men'⁷ in terms of intellect, physic or morality. Stereotypes structured on such notions would hardly corroborate the cultivation of independent feminist voices. Hence, women's voice in such contexts would be deemed baseless and redundant by patriarchal administrators. To counteract this paradigm the feminist movement aspired to enable the female voice to initiate and sustain the discourses on women's issues, mainly by women but also by men who could empathize with them and depart from androcentric stances. Judith Baxter asserts that one of the most significant of feminist objectives was to unify women against 'patriarchal oppression by expressing its arguments and demands for change with a common voice'.⁸ She further justifies this by stating that:

Female subjugation or challenges against patriarchy need to have an unambiguous, univocal coherence so that they simultaneously work internally to address both feminists and the broader category of women, as well as externally to confront male-dominated power structures. In terms of political impact, a unified feminist message is considered to have a greater likelihood of penetrating the monolith of male power than the babble of competing viewpoints.⁹

Baxter's idea of a *common voice* does not necessarily mean that all women in every context would demand the same thing, but that whenever and wherever these female voices rise they collectively demand the empowerment of women. Cameron writes:

⁶ Lyn Pykett, *The "Improper Feminine": The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (London: Routledge, 1992), 16.

⁷ Janet Kourany, 'Philosophy in a Feminist Voice,' in *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice: Critiques and Reconstructions*, ed. Janet Kourany (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 11.

⁸ Baxter, *Positioning Gender*, 20.

⁹ Baxter, *Positioning Gender*, 20.

One of the ways in which women have been kept in a subordinate place is through a denial of our right to equal linguistic actors. Women are *silenced* whether explicitly, through restrictions on the contexts and roles in which they speak of, or implicitly through less formal social practices which effectively restrict women in many everyday contexts; disparagements of our ability to tell jokes, refusal to recognize our contributions in discussions, disapproval of girls who are not *quiet and good listeners*.¹⁰

Women need to speak beyond patriarchally sanctioned language to alter normative discourses and demystify the misconception of women as inherently silent. Puleng Hanong categorically states that ‘the claim that women are silent or silenced cannot mean that they are always and everywhere literally silent, nor that they lack the capacity to use language’.¹¹ He claims that silence in this context refers to the relegation of women’s speech ‘to non-prestigious genres’¹² such as gossiping and folklore. While gossiping largely belongs to the private sphere, folklore performances do take public forums but are classified as low art or craft.

Problematizing Voice

Unifying women, as suggested by Baxter, is vital in getting all women to identify realities behind the masks, such as tradition and history, won by patriarchy. This would permit a departure from the patriarchally sanctioned, subdued female voice. The advent of Feminist Literary Theory created an intellectual space for women to address polemically varied perspectives on a wide range of topics that were directly and indirectly concerned with women. This opened up intellectual and emotional spaces for women to articulate their experiences, thus, enabling personal and political transformations. Thus, advancements in feminist literary theory and politics culminated into implicit and explicit improvements in women’s lives and their rights, not only in the West but in other parts of the world. Fiji, for example, is presently still benefitting from the global amelioration of women’s positions economically, politically and academically.

¹⁰ Deborah Cameron, ‘Feminist Linguistic Theory,’ in *Contemporary Feminist Theories*, ed. Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 1.

¹¹ Puleng Hanong, ‘Culture, Voice and the Public Sphere: A Critical Analysis of the Female Voices on Sexuality in Indigenous South African Society,’ in *Speaking Out: The Female Voice in Public Contexts*, ed. Judith Baxter, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 201.

¹² *Ibid.*

Margaret Mishra notes ‘a Fijian feminist movement, one that advocated women’s social, cultural and political rights on the grounds of sexual equality, was born out of these embryonic convergences with and divergences from Western feminisms’.¹³

Feminist discourse and action was also criticised for failing to represent all women in the absence of a consensus on what being a woman meant. Black Feminist Literary Studies and Black women have had reservations about the larger umbrella of feminism, citing a ‘history of elitism and exclusion’ and that mainstream women’s rights movements of the nineteenth century were unconcerned about the plight of marginalized women who were not ‘white, middle to upper class and based in the eastern portions of the United States’.¹⁴ This scenario illustrates how a complication in adopting a particular identity could result in further ostracisation from social and political representation.

Finding a voice that is always focused on empowering all women proves to be problematic as the concept of ‘woman’ itself remains under contention. Decades of debate around the concepts of *sex*, *sexuality*, *gender* and *woman* have failed to achieve consensus regarding these terms. Mary Poovey, in her summary of feminist literature, clarifies that ‘woman is only a position that gains its (provisional) definition from its placement in relation to man’.¹⁵ Poovey bases her notion on Jacques Derrida’s philosophical program of deconstruction, who demonstrated that ‘the idea of presence depends upon language, which simultaneously stands for and stands in the place of the things words represent’.¹⁶ Derrida’s demystification of presence is achieved with the problematizing of binary oppositions that usually provide the grid for the definitions of terms. Binary oppositions that pertain to the classical laws of thought, that is, the law of identity, the law of contradiction and the law of the excluded middle, has historically formed the polemic structure used to qualify abstract and concrete objects. The binary structure implied a unified definition of women which understood them as ‘not-men’. According to deconstruction’s program this was highly inaccurate due to the existence of various other influential factors not considered in a binary opposition.

¹³ Margaret Mishra, ‘The Emergence of Feminism in Fiji,’ *Women’s History Review* 17, No. 1 (2008): 39-40.

¹⁴ Ann Ducille, ‘On Canons: Anxious History and the Rise of Black Feminist Literary Studies,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Feminist Literary Theory*, ed. Ellen Rooney (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 29.

¹⁵ Mary Poovey, ‘Feminism and Deconstruction,’ *Feminist Studies* 14, No. 1 (1988): 51, accessed April 7, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3177998>.

¹⁶ Poovey, ‘Feminism and Deconstruction,’ 51.

Within Indo-Fijian communities women have historically been defined as the binary opposite of men. Such definitions of women have relied on the portrayal of lack or deficiencies to emphasise their inferiority within the gender hierarchy. In some cases female advancements have been deliberately ignored as these threatened to undermine the validity of the gender binary structure. For example in the depiction of brides in *Vivah ke Geet* their employment status is not considered important although it clearly has a bearing on the way they live their lives post-marriage. Lalita, one of the wedding singers, states that ‘there are no differences in the songs because the expectations of women are the same despite the employment status of a woman’.¹⁷ Minakshi, another singer, adds: ‘it would probably be more difficult for a working bride who would have to work both at home and then outside at her workplace. Most often they are expected to perform all her tasks at home just like a housewife would be. There is still no difference in the songs’.¹⁸ Despite the apparent variation in situations of employed and non-working women, within a binary definition women are reduced to a stereotype as Priya Chatterjee explains that within social expectations ‘working for an income does not alter the fact that a woman’s primary source of security is the family, marital entitlements and social recognition within family’.¹⁹

The definition of woman within deconstruction’s program states that:

“Woman” is *only* a social construct that has no basis in nature, [...] “woman,” in other words, is a term whose definition depends upon *the context* in which it is being discussed and not upon some set of sexual organs or social experiences. This renders the experience women have of themselves and the meaning of their social relationships problematic.²⁰

If feminist theory seeks to analyse the diverse conditions which shape women’s lives and to explore cultural understandings of what it means to be a *woman*, then the deconstructive viewpoint would be more practical. Even though there are those who distinguish between gender and sex, there is still a tendency to find parallelisms and correlations between the two. There

¹⁷ Lalita Prasad, Interviewed by Vicky Shandil, Siberia Labasa, 7 August 2013, Question 29.

¹⁸ Minakshi Wati, Interviewed by Vicky Shandil, Tuatua Labasa, 12 August 2013, Question 30.

¹⁹ Priya Chatterjee, ‘Sita’s Virtue, Streedharma and Shakti: Politics of Gender in Rural Fiji Indian Society,’ *Intersections: Gender and Sexuality in Asia and the Pacific*, Issue 30 (2012), accessed September 4 2013, <http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue30/chatterjee.htm>.

²⁰ Poovey, ‘Feminism and Deconstruction,’ 52

remains a permeating perception of associating certain behaviours, attitudes and actions to certain sex categories. The sole purpose of this association is accumulating a set of characteristics that could be specified to a particular sexed body with the goal of producing a specific stereotypical gender form. These accumulated characteristics are in turn reflected in social discourses such as in *Vivah ke Geet*, where women are depicted in a specific way and men in another, where brides have to fit specific criteria and grooms others, such as ‘man is the sun and woman the moon [...] women should remain one step behind the husband’.²¹ Durgama exposes a typical androcentric view when she states that as a wife

You should not talk at the same level as your husband. I mean if your wife starts talking back to you, you may end up beating her. To maintain the peace the woman should obey and submit to her husband. This is how it was in the olden days. Women today do not give that same kind of respect to their husbands like before.²²

Failure to comply with such expectations lead to labels of ‘abnormality’ on non-conforming individuals even though these same individuals could represent normative gender forms in different communities. This is because while some communities allow specific actions and traits in women, other communities deny them. For example, in some societies women are allowed to smoke publically whereas in others like the conservative Indo-Fijian community, this would be a violation of social norms. A level of theoretical flexibility would allow for the inclusion of these differences in political, social, legal and personal evolutions in regards to women and gynocentric opinions in the definition of woman. By virtue of having been brought up in a male society, many feminists have themselves ‘internalized the male culture’s definition’²³ of woman. This is why the concept of ‘woman’ is problematic for contemporary feminist theorists. However, it is a problem that mandates resolution as *woman* is at the centre of feminist discourse. Linda Alcoff suggests that this concept is radically problematic because ‘it is crowded with the over-determinations of male supremacy’,²⁴ a causal consequence of being formed in a

²¹ Durgama, Question 40.

²² Ibid, Question 40.

²³ ‘Radical Lesbianism: The Woman Identified Woman,’ in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1997), 156.

²⁴ Linda Alcoff, ‘Cultural Feminism versus Post-Structuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory,’ in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1997), 330.

culture built on the control and suppression of females. Thinking as a feminist involves challenging much of what has been deemed to be ‘knowledge’, since much of this knowledge was created in ‘male-dominated societies’ where women have more often been ‘objects of knowledge than producers of it’.²⁵ Someone advocating for women’s issues would miss the mark if they largely relied on a definition of *woman* generated on patriarchal principles, unless that definition was being used to expose patriarchy’s suppressive agendas. It would also be politically and academically naïve to delimit studies on a *one size fits all* definition. While women have substantial commonalities, it would be a grave mistake to ignore the crucial differences because ‘these are not merely differences which can be acknowledged and passed over; these differences are often hierarchical, producing inequalities among women which intersect with gender inequality.’²⁶ In Fiji, for instance, the social liberty accorded to rural dwelling women is considerably lower when compared to educated urban dwelling females. This is because in many circumstances different geographical locations support different cultural and social beliefs.

Alcoff’s idea of positionality serves as a theoretical solution as she assures that women can be analysed ‘not as a particular set of attributes’ but by a particular ‘position’.²⁷ Based on such perspectives a woman gains intelligibility through her position as an agent within the interplay of social and cultural factors by internalizing gendered attributes through repetitions of specified acts enforced and indicated by social norms. Thus, women differ from society to society due to the social and cultural divergences that form the discursive backdrop on and through which they are imprinted into existence.

Gendered Identity: A Cultural Construct

It is clear that gender and sex rely on a culturally accepted set of social behavioural codes that outline the parameters within which individuals act their gender. For example, until the last fifteen or twenty years, wearing jeans and trousers by Indo-Fijian females was classified as culturally disrespectful as such behaviour did not comply with social dressing codes. Girls and women not abiding with these conventions were subjected to gossip or tagged *besarum*

²⁵ Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones, ‘Thinking for Ourselves: An introduction to Feminist Theorising,’ in *Contemporary Women’s Fiction*, ed. Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 1.

²⁶ Jackson and Jones, ‘Thinking for Ourselves,’ 5.

²⁷ Alcoff, ‘Cultural Feminism,’ 349.

(shameless) and ostracized. They were compelled to wear full-length dresses or *sari(s)* as was socially ascribed to their gender. Minakshi assents that ‘we did not even have girls wearing jeans and shorts before but it is increasingly common now and I do not agree with that idea. We never wore trousers or shorts’.²⁸ As cited such thinking was rife in the Indo-Fijian culture since the arrival of Indians to Fiji as indentured labourers until these were slightly eroded by modern education and Western influence. Even today such codes exist in conservative families in rural locations, mainly since the practice of using biological sex for determining gender within a rigid binary is prevalent. The existence of such ideologies is evidenced in discursive practices of Indo-Fijians where language itself carries undertones of gendered identity. Kinship ties for instance are established in binaries and are extensively present in all social events. Even domestic chores and vocations are reserved along gender lines. Minakshi again validates this when she states that ‘in the olden days boys and men were not expected to learn these things [household chores]. They would only enter the kitchen to eat and then leave the utensils and go. My mother and we sisters would cook and clean while the boys would go out for the farm work’.²⁹ These perceptions and norms formed the strict guidelines for gender formation as Helen Haste explains that:

What is believed about gender tends to become real. For example, the belief that females are incapable of making decisions may become true in a society where girls are not given the opportunity to develop such skills. The belief that males are unable to sew become true when the culture makes sure that no boy ever gets his hands on a needle. So something which is socially constructed within the culture’s theory of gender may become reality.³⁰

Vivah Geet as a representation of discursive practices also embodies these ideologies in order to sustain the gender status quo. Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs note that ‘oral narratives, whether song, poetry, story, or autobiographical narrative, are always situated communicative

²⁸ Minakshi, Question 42.

²⁹ Minakshi, Question 42.

³⁰ Helen Haste, *The Sexual Metaphor* (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 23.

practices that may serve to reproduce a social order'.³¹ Gloria Raheja, through analysing women's oral tradition in India and other places in the world, assents that traditional practices were used to create certain identities in individuals and that it was not necessary that these identities were unchangeable.³² Thus, the normative image of Indo-Fijian womanhood is culturally constructed and imposed rather than natural and fixed.

Problem in Theory

Simone de Beauvoir problematizes the discussion of *woman* by declaring that 'every female being is not necessarily a woman' and to be considered a woman within society one 'must share in that mysterious and threatened reality known as femininity'.³³ De Beauvoir thus argues that terms such as female, femininity, gender and sex have been conceived within male dominated and patriarchal societies to represent male perceptions of a *real woman*, that is, a woman who quietly performs 'society's non-profit making functions'³⁴ like the reproduction of children and mothering. Correspondingly, Judith Butler argues that such ideologies could not be more misguided. In *Gender Trouble* she claims that 'if sexes appear to be problematically binary in their morphology and constitution, there is no reason to assume that genders ought also to remain as two.'³⁵ This theoretical construct breaks the heterosexual bind that only permits man and woman as viable gender types. Chavez Karma reveals that 'early feminist standpoint theories and theories of sexual difference located women in a fixed place in relation to men, whether biologically, culturally, or economically'.³⁶ He claims that such models do substantiate the essentialist claims that effect the oppression of women by reifying innate differences between

³¹ Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs, 'Poetics and Performance as Critical perspectives on Language and Social Life,' in *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990), 61, www.jstor.org/stable/2155959.

³² Gloria Raheja, 'The Paradoxes of Power and Community: Women's Oral Traditions and the uses of Ethnography,' *Oral Traditions* 12, No. 1 (1997): accessed June 24, 2013.

http://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCoQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fjournal.oraltradition.org%2Ffiles%2Farticles%2F12i%2F1e_Raheja_Introduction.pdf&ei=w4ySUtn8GMS4iAfXxICgAw&usg=AFQjCNEitYa-WbC_v8spph8BNJiesBkn4Q&sig2=EMJaCePzhPrRmsRParfsSA&bvm=bv.56988011,d.dGI.

³³ Simone de Beauvoir, 'Introduction to *The Second Sex*,' in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1997), 11.

³⁴ 'Radical Feminism,' 156.

³⁵ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1999), 9.

³⁶ Chavez Karma, 'Spatializing Gender Performativity: Ecstasy and Possibilities for Liveable Life in the Tragic case of Victoria Arellano,' *Women's Studies in Communication* 33, No. 1, (2010): 4, accessed April 16, 2013, 10.1080/07491401003669729.

men and women. Shannon Sullivan also adds that an urgent need exists to ‘rethink dominant contemporary Western conceptions of gender and the notions of sex and sexuality’ to soften the rigidity with which these concepts are categorized into having binaries of starkly contrasting poles.³⁷ Catharine Mackinnon elaborates that ‘woman’ is defined by ‘what male desire requires for arousal and satisfaction’ and that these definitions are used synonymously for ‘female sexuality’ or ‘the female sex’.³⁸ To achieve any substantial progress feminist discussions will need to break free of patriarchal ideologies which saturate the social discursive arena with male-centred views. The silencing of women in these contexts occurs by causing disturbances to their speech or through theoretical means by establishing a language that fails to signify them. In such a framework the feminist voice would caricature a spirit that seeks a body to possess and gain materiality but finds none. Therefore, Butler sets out to temporalize and open such ‘fixed and determinate’³⁹ subjectivating norms to create the necessary environment to help dismantle perceptions that empower patriarchal ideologies, heteronormativity and gender stereotypes. These norms have been misinterpreted and embraced as natural and the conflation of sex, gender and sexuality has become engraved into language and society. Jude Browne states that ‘today, the terms *gender* and *sex* are deployed indiscriminately, or, to be more precise, *gender* is increasingly being used to cover both terms’.⁴⁰ The semantic blending of these terms has resulted in social perplexities due to opposing views portrayed within patriarchal ideologies and feminist debates. Patriarchal notions are supported through historical and cultural stances that depict regulated and socially established expectations of individuals. Feminist viewpoints rely on discursive transformations resulting from the influx of feminist and human rights movements demanding egalitarianism. Considering the conflation of the terms *gender*, *sex* and *sexuality* as a minor oversight entails ignoring the applicability of these terms as human traits, as Surya Munro explains that ‘we live in a world that is deeply structured by sex and gender. The categorization of people as *male* and *female* permeates our society on every level, including our language, relationships, social institutions, and the academic debates’.⁴¹ Michel Foucault also elaborates

³⁷ Shannon Sullivan, ‘Reconfiguring Gender with John Dewey: Habit, Bodies, and Cultural Change,’ *Hypatia* 15, No. 1, (2000): 24-25, accessed 8 April 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810510>.

³⁸ Catharine Mackinnon, ‘Sexuality,’ in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1997), 161.

³⁹ Karma, ‘Spatializing Gender,’ 4.

⁴⁰ Jude Browne, introduction to *The Future of Gender*, edited by Jude Browne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 1.

⁴¹ Surya Munro, *Gender Politics: Citizenship, Activism and Sexual Diversity* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), 10.

that the term *sex* has been historically employed to artificially unify ‘anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations and pleasures’.⁴² Foucault states that such a unification enabled the term to function as ‘a unique signifier and as a universal signified’,⁴³ a term that has been utilized to qualify human bodies within a binarism. This qualification initiates the cultural reproduction of corporeality which becomes the most significant ingredient in this process. *Vivah ke Geet*, for example, portray women in specific images based on social expectations and it is in the repetitions and reiterations of such images that these expectations become internalised and adopted as hegemonic discourses. Baxter emphasizes that ‘the problem with mainstream discourses is that they seek to univocally silence, displace and suppress the interplay of alternative or oppositional voices’,⁴⁴ which in this case happens to be the voice of feminism. Eileen O’Neill suggests that one must write from the body:

*A sexuate being pervades one’s identity, and [...] the pretence of shedding one’s sex when writing or speaking requires the feminine to disappear into the masculine/neutral discourse that dominates the patriarchal order. Writing from the body potentially overturns this order. It is radically disruptive writing that would elude the structures of patriarchal discourse, an order that has defined the feminine as non-masculine, lacking subjectivity of its own.*⁴⁵

Such overturning of social order and evasion of hegemonic discourses occurs in the performances of *Vivah ke Geet* when women indulge in adopting non-feminine images in their dance moves and sing invectives and insults publically. When women utter subversive words that go beyond the sanctioned limits, offense is taken by men and their female relatives where there is normally supposed to be pleasant exchanges of words and money as will be thoroughly explained in chapters four and five. Lalita points out that ‘nowadays the swears and insults have become more offensive [...] in the past when women sang slight invectives their targets would

⁴² Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 154.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Baxter, *Positioning Gender*, 37.

⁴⁵ Eileen O’Neill, ‘Disappearing Ink: Early Modern Women Philosophers and their Fate in History,’ in *Philosophy in a Feminist Voice: Critiques and Reconstructions*, ed. Janet Kourany (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 20.

smile and give *neg*⁴⁶ but with the kind of songs that are sung now this is becoming more difficult'.⁴⁷

Redefining Female Voice

The female voice is the voice that embodies a counter-narrative to patriarchally sanctioned gender scripts that manage individuals and their social acts. It is 'feminine' because it embodies female expression and experience, yet it boasts subjectivity and authority. It inverts the culture of silence and concocts the forum for the revelation of subjugated voices. Luce Irigaray maintains that 'when women's movements challenge the forms and nature of political life, the contemporary play of powers and power relations, they are in fact working toward a modification of women's status'.⁴⁸ Societies are discursively materialized, thus, transformations in discourses eventuate in real life consequences.

Since patriarchal ideologies create the concept of *woman*, feminist discourses should prioritise the dethroning of patriarchy. Marylyn French describes patriarchy as 'a way of thinking, a set of assumptions' that hails 'males as superior to females' to the extent that females have to 'make themselves male' to join the hierarchy.⁴⁹ She emphasizes the fact that as women had control over biological requirements for reproduction, an institutionalized power needed to be established to keep them in control. Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* explains how for the sake of curtailing economic and political problems created by uncontrolled population growth, sex was made into a central issue of discussion. He states that social survival and strength was dependent on 'the manner in which each individual made use of sex'.⁵⁰ Foucault emphasized that it was important to manage 'birth-rate, the age of marriage, the legitimate and illegitimate births, the precocity and frequency of sexual relations [...] the effects of married life or of the prohibitions, the impact of contraceptive practices'.⁵¹ Women were central in all these matters and a control of their sexuality could immensely regulate entire social mechanisms. Women became the focus of subjection and repression. Their state was justified as the means to

⁴⁶ Money that is presented as *neg* is not any form of payment but a customary gift that is given respectfully.

⁴⁷ Lalita, Question 24.

⁴⁸ Luce Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Porter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 81.

⁴⁹ Marilyn French, 'Is There a Feminist Aesthetic?' *Hypatia* 5, No. 2 (1990): 36, accessed 5 April 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3810154>

⁵⁰ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 26.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 17.

achieving political and economic good. The gendering of individuals along the heterosexual binary became a matter of significance to maintaining social order. With the recognition of gender construction as a public affair, concepts like sexuality and sex also assumed centrality in gender discourses due to their relevance (both deliberate and mistaken) to this particular process. Foucault mentions that ‘sex was not only a matter of sensation and pleasure, of law and taboo, but also of truth and falsehood’.⁵² Societies built regulatory frames stationed around sex and sexuality and the compliance to these parameters brings social ease, while non-compliance invites punitive consequences. Consequently, a number of strict regulations are built around the concept of marriage, mainly in relation to the choice of spouses for females. The wedding singers express a similar sense of control over their daughter’s marital lives: Lalita lamenting that ‘nowadays girls prefer to choose their own husbands. They don’t really care about the family and relatives of the husband they choose [...] when girls want more freedom they may not make the right decision. This is why the girls need to take more instructions especially from the (wedding) songs’.⁵³ Babita adds:

I have a daughter and I am already training her to listen to and abide by the expectations of her father. We have to do this so that she recognises herself and gets to learn what is expected of her from a cultural perspective. I do not want to see my daughter marrying a man from another ethnic group. If I do not guide her she may end up doing such things. We cannot let our daughters marry outside of our religion and ethnic group.⁵⁴

Where such notions prevail female autonomy of choice is depleted or non-existent, not only in relation to sexuality and marriage but in other aspects of life like education and employment. However, even formal education may not always result in social independence, as Bindu’s comments depict:

I have three daughters and other girls are the same. We teach them that no matter how educated you are you need to know how to cook and how to look after a family. This is because when they go to their husband’s home, the parents-in-law will be there so she has

⁵² Ibid, 56.

⁵³ Lalita, Question 39.

⁵⁴ Babita Chand, Interviewed by Vicky Shandil, Ba, 7 September 2013, Question 41.

to be smart enough to get up early in the morning and get the meals ready and then prepare herself for her work (employment).⁵⁵

The above comment illustrates how gender expectations constrict female autonomy. If freedom is the absolute ability to choose then it is obvious that the version of freedom available to young Indo-Fijian girls is superficial. Stevi Jackson believes that gender should not be taken lightly because it widely encroaches into humanity. If it is treated ‘merely as cultural distinction or as a neutral term denoting social difference’⁵⁶ then it brings to naught litigation by feminists regarding male supremacy. Linda McDowell identifies ‘the construction and significance of sexual differentiation as a key organizing principle and axis of social power’⁵⁷ and the locus of feminist scholarship. Reference to some theoretical groundwork on gender could prove useful.

There were primarily two lines of thought in relation to gender; one relied on essentialist principles of biological difference while the other took into consideration cultural factors. Sigmund Freud credited much of gender formation and retention on biological factors and the interplay of infantile observations and deductions. His explanation of fixed identities formed as a result of the Oedipal phase does not account for cultural artifices that undoubtedly affect gender development and performance. Many feminists contested this theory on account of notions like *penis envy* in girls and *castration complex* in boys and ascription of gender on innate conditions. Freud’s theory exalted man as the original gender and woman as the *second sex*, where the implication was a uniform epistemological position of women that homogenized their experiences. Butler argues that any theory that promotes such ideas ‘has effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social and political intersections in which the concrete array of women are constituted’.⁵⁸ Cixous and Irigaray, both of whom have opposing arguments to Freud’s, offer conceptions of women where they ‘are not defective males, but have their own drives and object’.⁵⁹ That definition is based on their bodies but is not formed through childhood phobia or trauma. Reproductive functions that previously restricted gender roles have also turned out to be

⁵⁵ Bindu Lata, Interviewed by Vicky Shandil, Question 42.

⁵⁶ Stevi Jackson, ‘Theorising Gender and Sexuality,’ in *Contemporary Women’s Fiction*, ed. Stevi Jackson and Jackie Jones, (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 139.

⁵⁷ Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 8.

⁵⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 19.

⁵⁹ Rachel Bowlby, ‘The Feminine Female,’ *Social Text*, No. 7 (1983): 57, accessed 4 April 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/466454>.

less rigid now with technology's provision of alternatives like test tube babies, which replace orthodox child-bearing methods and nullify the need for a linear structure where anatomy and gender have to correlate in a specific manner. Rosalind Morris states that 'in the age of surgical plasticity and prosthetic extension, it becomes necessary to rethink the nature of sexed bodies and gendered personhood on a new level'.⁶⁰ Nonetheless, while it is increasingly becoming apparent that biological sex and gender need not be conflated, social perceptions continue to iterate the contrary. An example of such a perception is found in Gauri's comments:

We teach girls to think about family and home. If they do not think about these things they will not be able to build anything in life. There are a lot of controls on girls like what to wear and so forth and this is from cultural and religious point of view to ensure that they grow up appropriately so that there are no problems in finding them husbands.⁶¹

The notion of cultural influences is advanced by de Beauvoir with her idea that one is not born a woman but becomes one. Although she willingly affirms that 'one is born with a sex, as a sex, sexed, and that being sexed and being human are coextensive and simultaneous',⁶² sex has no influence on the gender that one acquires. She claims that 'sex does not cause gender' and it would be erroneous to conclude that gender is a reflection of one's sex. Monique Wittig develops this by stating that 'we might say, one is not born a woman, one becomes one; but further, one is not born female, one becomes female, but even more radically, one can, if one chooses, become neither female nor male, woman or man'.⁶³

The point of departure between de Beauvoir and Wittig is on the status of sex. De Beauvoir is of the thought that sex is invariant but Wittig believes that it is nothing but a political use of the term that serves the purposes of reproductive sexuality. The only function this division of humanity into male and female serves is that it fortifies heteronormativity. The most radical of Wittig's claim is that lesbians are not women as they 'transcend the binary opposition between man and woman'.⁶⁴ Such claims further problematize the already complex concept of woman but

⁶⁰ Rosalind Morris, 'All Made Up: Performance theory and the New Anthropology of Sex and Gender,' *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 568, accessed 8 April 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/215595>.

⁶¹ Gauri Wati, Interviewed by Vicky Shandil, Rakiraki, 15 August 2013, Question 42.

⁶² Beauvoir, 'Second Sex,' 11.

⁶³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 153.

⁶⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 153.

to end the criteria of being *other*, ‘a new framework’ is needed to change the way of ‘looking at the female self’.⁶⁵ Some feminists suggest a structure where women draw upon the community of other women for self-definition. However, from within these very communities certain women are classified as not ‘real women’⁶⁶ due to their sexuality that does not align with normative heterosexuality. Thus, to construct inclusive frameworks women themselves have to first liberalise their mind-sets and break out of prevalent stereotypes.

Monique Wittig’s discussion offers a definition of woman as someone who was either born female and is culturally nurtured into a woman, or who was born male and culturally constructs into a woman (with or without a surgical change in sex). A woman also decides her own sexuality by choosing who she prefers as a sexual partner independent of heterosexual/homosexual boundaries or labels. Bringing into play a new framework for women’s definition mandates cessation of historically implied traditions such as prophetic decrees of a child’s gender; Butler, for example, notes that ‘the naming of the *girl* is transitive, that is, it initiates the process by which a certain *girling* is compelled’.⁶⁷ Butler states that performative acts are forms of ‘authorized speech’ since ‘most performatives are statements that in the uttering also perform a certain action and exercise a binding power’.⁶⁸ Accompanied by a network of authorization and punishment, performatives assume substantial power to turn a locutionary act into illocutionary and perlocutionary acts respectively. Jonathan Culler explains that these concepts are developed by J. L. Austin in his work *How To Do Things With Words*, where he defines performatives as statements ‘that actually perform the action to which they refer’.⁶⁹ Austin states that the ‘uttering of the words is, indeed, usually a, or even the, leading incident in the performance of the act, the performance of which is also the object of the utterances’.⁷⁰ Culler also adds to this discussion by identifying that the ‘first result of the performative is to bring to centre stage a use of language previously considered marginal – an active, world-making use of language’.⁷¹ To be a performative, Austin elaborates, the utterance must be spoken during

⁶⁵ Haste, *Sexual Metaphor*, 204.

⁶⁶ Jackson, ‘Theorising Gender,’ 141.

⁶⁷ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, 232.

⁶⁸ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 225.

⁶⁹ Johnathan Culler, ‘Philosophy and Literature: The Fortunes of the Performative,’ *Poetics Today* 21, No. 3 (2000), 504.

⁷⁰ John. L. Austin, ‘How To Do Things With Words,’ in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, ed. Julie Rivkin and Micheal Ryan (Blackwell Publishing: Oxford, 2004), 164.

⁷¹ Culler, ‘Philosophy and Literature,’ 507.

particular socially acceptable circumstances and must be voiced with intention and authority. For example, in the Butlerian sense, when the gender of an individual is pronounced at birth on the basis of patriarchal authority, this pronouncement serves as an internal compass that directs that particular individual to abide with the appropriate social expectations of the specified gender.

Irigaray argues that gender has to be created by individuals on their own terms, and not handed to them at birth since in her opinion:

Gender is not a point to start from in the sense of being a given thing but is a posit or construct, formalizable in a non-arbitrary way through the matrix of habits, practices, and discourses. Further, it is an interpretation of our history within a particular discursive constellation, a history in which we are subjects of and subjected to social construction.⁷²

Accepting such social transformations require modifying deep rooted perspectives and reverently held value systems which have to be challenged by a powerful medium founded on solid theoretical and practical foundations. Butler offers that gender ‘is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being’.⁷³ Her well-known illustration based on drag opens up the view of how gender performance can be outside of social norms, and these actions in turn transform the norms, forming in a sense a new edition or an updated version of the one those actions were performed in. In that sense the body as the biological component of any subject also has a vital function in the absorption and display of identity traits. The body could be deemed the stage on which the performance of gender is staged for the wider social audience since gender formation cannot occur in a vacuum; it requires society’s play and a body to be played. The performance is a reflection of the internal perception of self as it has been stencilled out by external forces. Butler sees the body as ‘an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities’⁷⁴ a process of appropriation that itself compels careful evaluation.

⁷² Irigaray, *This Sex Which is Not One*, 330.

⁷³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 43-44.

⁷⁴ Judith Butler, ‘Performative Acts and Performative Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory,’ *Theatre Journal* 40, No. 4 (1988): 521, accessed 25 April 2013, <http://links.jstor/sici?sici=0192.2882%28198812%2940%3A4%3C519%3APAAGCA%3E2.0.CO%3B2.C>.

Gender is thus the bodily acts themselves and these bodily acts are gendered. For example, dancing was one of the bodily acts that appeared to be gendered in the way the interviewees depicted them. It was clear from their comments that females who wanted to dance in public had to seriously consider the context and purpose for dancing. Dancing could easily turn subversive if not acted out as socially sanctioned. Babita points out ‘even though women are not allowed to dance with men publically at weddings they still do it. Such things are only permissible with certain kinship ties so a woman can only pull out men who are specified relatives’.⁷⁵ Such rules only apply to women and when women abide by these they also acknowledge kinship while substantiating the power in such norms. It is the social discursive context that stipulates the necessary conditions for certain acts to gain intelligibility and acknowledgment as specified gender attributes.⁷⁶

Colette Harris asserts that the ‘first criterion necessary for social intelligibility is a correctly sexed body’⁷⁷ which has to be one of two normatively permitted by social norms. The second condition ‘is that individuals must carry out gender performances as prescribed for their type of sexed body within their social group’.⁷⁸ Girls and boys begin to be moulded into a socially appropriate form of womanhood and manhood from birth, beginning with their sexing and continuing through the monitoring of their behaviour and social acts in relation with social conventions. Savita states that ‘we teach girls from a young age all the work needed to be done around the house like cooking and cleaning [...] we also control their behaviour and how they should behave before elders’.⁷⁹ All this is done in an effort to prepare a girl for the role of a wife to manage domestic work and deal with in-laws. Gender is, therefore, dependent upon its social construction within and over time through repeated acts that entail re-enacting and re-experiencing socially established set of norms.

Butler insists on the body’s plastic nature. Its flexibility, nonetheless, is delimited by previous bodies. Butler’s aim is to remodel these constructs to liberate bodies from appearing as

⁷⁵ Babita, Question 25.

⁷⁶ For more on the role of discourses in the formation of gendered identity see; (Bethan Benwell and Elizabeth Stokoe, *Discourse and Identity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006)., Allyson Jule (ed.), *Language and Religious Identity: Women in Discourse* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007)., Deborah Tannen, *Gender and Discourse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994)., Eleonor Marcussen, ‘Gender as a Genre in Women’s Oral Tradition in India, (Master’s Thesis, Uppsala University, 2009).)

⁷⁷ Colette Harris, *Control and Subversions: Gender Relations in Tajikistan* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 18.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Savita, Question 42.

pre-sexed and pre-destined for certain gendered roles and identities. Portraying sex as fundamental to bodies leads to the ‘production of duality of bodies that sustains reproductive heterosexuality as compulsory order’.⁸⁰ Butler asserts that ‘one is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense one does one’s body’.⁸¹ She goes on to clarify that when one does one’s body, that *one* does it differently from those of ‘one’s contemporaries and from one’s embodied predecessors and successors as well.’ The body does not exist as a bounded entity but has the capability to absorb and become a whole range of possibilities presented to it by its surrounding. There is, therefore, no justification in curtailing this fluidity by erecting it securely on a polarized gender schema.

The Need for the Voice

To reform traditional ideologies and to enable women to achieve consensus on their own social representation to later practically materialize its potentials, a bold and vivid voice is required. Alcoff mentions that when women become feminists the central metamorphosis in them is not that they ‘have learned any new facts about the world but that they come to view those things from a different position, from their own position as subjects’.⁸² Change in position here alludes to moving from seeing things from the perspective of suppressed non-entities to empowered custodians of knowledge and from being mere recipients and objects of knowledge to being its producers. This transformation grants women the prerogative to shed light on personal experiences of struggle under the power that patriarchy wields over them. Michel Foucault claims that ‘where there is power, there is resistance’,⁸³ and the performative nature of gender presents the option of subversion at least of hegemonic discourses through the utterance of counter-narratives. Where *Vivah ke Geet* have traditionally been used to enforce certain gender traits, the same medium could be used as a form of resistance to oppressive cultural practices and beliefs. Angelyn Mitchell and Danille Taylor illustrate this trend when they describe the inauguration and rise of African American women’s literature, where language was used as the weapon to establish centrality in an environment where Black literature was once

⁸⁰ Gill Jagger, *Judith Butler: Sexual Politics, Social Change and the Power of the Performative* (Routledge: London, 2008), 7.

⁸¹ Butler, *Performative Acts*, 902.

⁸² Alcoff, *Cultural Feminism*, 350.

⁸³ Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 36.

‘marginalized, if not ignored, by mainstream America’.⁸⁴ Foster and Davis identify ‘male dominance’⁸⁵ in the fields of literature and journalism in the nineteenth century as a further barrier to women’s admittance into this arena. But women writers persevered until they also made their mark as authors, journalists, critics and literary commentators. Critiquing the role and song content of female Indo-Fijian folksingers using Alcoff’s concept of positionality proves interesting. While in the above mentioned scenarios the marginalised groups successfully achieved recognition for their views through their persistence in claiming it, these folksingers, even after being given a public voice, have not used their art and skills to create counter-narratives against patriarchal discourses. In fact, they have used their positions to further strengthen the social conception of Hindu Indo-Fijian femininity. They have continually used the same androcentric language and this has fuelled patriarchal dominance and made them complicit in and rewarded by a male-centred system. Minakshi points out that

There were very few ladies like us who were able to read the *Ramayana* in public gatherings, apart from men who normally had this responsibility. We were often admired for our ability to speak publically, read the holy book and be able to sit with men in the important position.⁸⁶

This admiration and opportunity only eventuate as reward for female subservience and these women end up being examples of how submitting to patriarchy brings more benefits than if one were to resist it. The folksingers are able to materialise the ‘linguistic creativity’ that Deborah Cameron claims to be ‘the birth right of everyone who speaks, signs or writes’ but this expression lacks the feminist stance.⁸⁷ Cameron exposes the patriarchal ruse of superficial endorsements of such rights and privileges while blocking avenues to their real life application by portraying that the men by default were the possessors of the public voice.

⁸⁴ Angelyn Mitchell and Danille Taylor, introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women’s Literature*, edited by Angelyn Mitchell and Danille Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

⁸⁵ Frances Foster and Larose Davis, ‘Early African American Women’s Literature,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to African American Women’s Literature*, ed. Angelyn Mitchell and Danille Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 20.

⁸⁶ Minakshi, Question 9.

⁸⁷ Deborah Cameron, ‘Feminist Linguistic Theory,’ in *Contemporary Women’s Fiction*, ed. Stevi Jackson and Jackie (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 1.

Women need a new linguistic voice as existing languages experience semantic slippages in relation to women. Expressing women in culturally pre-established languages is analogous to observing them through lenses tampered by patriarchal codes. Elaine Showlater suggests employing gynocriticism, which entails operating independently from ‘the linear absolutes of male literary history’⁸⁸ where women were fitted within the net of male tradition. Poovey outlines that the new language should be imagined out of an ‘organization of fantasy, language, and reality other than one based on identity and binary oppositions which is currently the dominant mode and therefore equated with the dominant sex’.⁸⁹ Irigaray is adamant that ‘if we keep on speaking the same language together, we’re going to reproduce the same history. Begin the same old stories again’.⁹⁰ When folksingers continue to declare that the ‘husband is the image of god. The woman has to give respect to the husband since he is the godly image [...] women have to remain submissive to their husbands and not try to rule over them. If they respect their husbands they will also be respected’,⁹¹ it becomes evidence of internalised, patriarchally aligned discourses. The same ideas are then portrayed in songs to the wider public, thus continuing this vicious cycle of female manipulation. While not denouncing religious beliefs a dose of reality would problematize such ideologies; how could a wife be expected to revere a husband who strikes her and fails to reciprocate her socially enforced respect for him? Savita confesses that ‘a wife has to give respect and honour to her husband. She has to keep his name reputable as well as her parents. These are weakening now though we *continue to sing the same themes in our songs*. People are not following what these norms have always been’ [emphasis added].⁹² This confession makes it apparent that social transformations have not been duly denoted in songs and this needs to be done. Female folksingers’ voices should be founded within the depths of female knowledge; a knowledge built on their personal and contemporary circumstances and experiences and not one inherited from patriarchy. All research participants consented that they ‘mostly do not give much advice to the grooms but there are a lot of things for the bride’,⁹³ which implies the fundamental purpose of *Vivah ke Geet* in influencing female perceptions. Bindu adds ‘even the unmarried girls that are present at the wedding can also learn from these

⁸⁸ Elaine Showlater, ‘Towards a Feminist Poetics,’ in *Women Writing and Writing about Women*, ed. Mary Jacobus (London: Harper & Row Publishers Inc., 1979), 28.

⁸⁹ Poovey, ‘Feminism and Deconstruction,’ 56.

⁹⁰ Irigaray, *The Sex Which Is Not One*, 205.

⁹¹ Gauri, Question 40.

⁹² Savita Prasad, Interviewed by Vicky Shandil, 16th August 2013, Question 40.

⁹³ Durgama Lal, Interviewed by Vicky Shandil, 8 August 2013, Question 30.

songs'⁹⁴. In activating the feminist female voice it is vital that society and marriage relationships begin to get reflected in the songs as they are in reality and that appropriate and balanced teaching is provided to both spouses on their matrimonial responsibilities.

Indo-Fijian Feminine Voice

Conservative Indo-Fijian women have been historically portrayed as quiet and passive. However, there are records of considerable rebellion against colonial and patriarchal systems that denied them their rights. In 'The Emergence of Feminism in Fiji' Mishra refutes claims of an Australian Methodist Missionary's representation of Indo-Fijian women. Hannah Dudley, who wrote during the colonial era, depicted Indo-Fijian women as 'timid, fearful and dumb'.⁹⁵ Mishra asserts that history proved otherwise, since 'the indentured women were articulate and in many instances, fearless, as they challenged their exploitation in the 1920s'.⁹⁶ She mentions that their rebellion took the form of protests and the confrontation of 'Indian and European men who sexually and/or physically violated women',⁹⁷ in most cases executing physical revenge. Mishra's research presents illustrations of the demonizing of women's political and economic efforts by the male-dominated media during that era. The absence of objective female opinion in journalistic reports resulted in a negative picture of Indo-Fijian female consciousness since the mainly male reporters 'did not take too kindly to this female (feminist) voice and took every opportunity to undermine it'.⁹⁸ Mishra goes on to explain how the deportation of a forerunner in this movement, Jaikumari Manilal, to India and the ensuing imprisonment of her supporters by the colonial rulers led to the reinstatement of the patriarchal rhetoric. However, the movement remained suppressed only momentarily. The Indo-Fijian female voice resurrected after the 1920s but assumed a more 'moderate and peaceful demeanour'⁹⁹ in the form of cultural, religious and social groups, of which the most notable was the *Stri Sewa Sabha* (literally: Women Service Assembly). As the name suggests, this group did social work and this gained them public support that became leverage to improve women's welfare, of which raising the legal marriage age of

⁹⁴ Bindu, Question 40.

⁹⁵ Mishra, 'Emergence of Feminism,' 41.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid, 45.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 46.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 50.

girls to sixteen was a significant contribution. However, Mishra noted the greater damage the suppression of the initial rise in feminist voice had caused. She states that ‘women began to adopt and perpetuate stereotypes of femininity restored to them by patriarchal (Indian) religious and cultural discourses’.¹⁰⁰ Over the years the Indo-Fijian community has played host to the opposing principles of feminist movements and patriarchal systems. Feminism has taken root in Fiji with the influx of formal education, the increasing influence and presence of Women’s groups and Westernization. Minakshi notes this social change when she says that ‘women were expected to listen to and obey the husbands at all times. But this is very rare nowadays. Women have become more and more out-spoken and equal to men’.¹⁰¹

One of the most important things patriarchy has on its side is religion, the dominant one among Indo-Fijians being Hinduism. Arti Dhand notes that ‘early scholarly writing on women in Hinduism was prone to broad generalizations about the duties of married Hindu women, about the status of girls and women in society’¹⁰² and these have had enormous impact on the symbolic representation and expectations of women. She maintains that this has created a ‘monumental stereotype of the Hindu woman’¹⁰³ and that those ‘particular values undergirding Hindu women’s lives’¹⁰⁴ have been carefully masked from revealing the ‘historical, social, political and legal strictures’¹⁰⁵ that have dominated even Indo-Fijian women’s lives. The singers interviewed for this project were confident of the relationship between *Vivah ke Geet* and Hinduism. One singer described wedding songs as ‘part of religion and culture’ and ‘traditional inheritance’.¹⁰⁶ Another asserted that ‘according to the Hindu religion there is a lot of interrelationship between the songs and the religious teachings’¹⁰⁷ while another claimed that ‘whatever teachings we are giving to the bride comes from religious books. Some of the themes come from our traditional thought and whatever we teach our children is what we sing in the songs’¹⁰⁸. The most interesting comment came from Bindu, however, who mentions that ‘our songs are meaningful

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 50.

¹⁰¹ Minakshi, Question 40.

¹⁰² Arti Dhand, *Woman on Fire, Woman as Sage: Sexual Ideology in the Mahābharata* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008), 5.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Durgama, Question 11.

¹⁰⁷ Minakshi, Question 11.

¹⁰⁸ Savita, Question 11.

because the songs are backed up by our religious teachings'.¹⁰⁹ For the Indo-Fijian community one of the aspects of life that are held in highest regard is religion. When the source of *Vivah Geet* like religion appears culpable within a feminist inquiry than the resulting art form of *Vivah ke Geet* cannot be innocent of female manipulation.

Thus, these songs by their very virtue of being the discursive arm of religion and culture depict social realities pertaining to gender and other aspects of the society. Song performances are examples of language in use, and Butler maintains that 'what happens in linguistic practices reflects or mirrors what happens in social orders'.¹¹⁰ Indo-Fijian feminism should also aim at transforming language, as Rachel Bowlby claims that if it is 'in language that the constraints which work against women are set in place'¹¹¹ then that should be the medium for women's liberation. She goes on further to suggest that appropriate linguistic interpretations could demystify the oppressive properties of language to then offer devices that help overcome restriction to altering 'the thinking of women and how women are thought'.¹¹² However, it should also be clarified that not all female writing and speech takes on a feminist voice as reflected in *Vivah ke Geet*. Toril Moi emphasizes that 'the very fact of being female does not necessarily guarantee a feminist approach'.¹¹³ Complicity in women should not be written off and should be pointed out, as this thesis does.

With the magnitude of the battle feminists need to fight against mainstream patriarchal systems and ideologies, the female voice cannot afford to be gentle, soft, repressed and easily assimilated. Cameron points out that 'women have been socialized to display their femininity in language whose main characteristic is ineffectualness or lack of force'.¹¹⁴ This she claims to be the result of the imitation of male approved behaviour as well as the reinforcement of a style of speaking in women 'that is designed to earn approval rather than exert authority'.¹¹⁵ Norman Alarcon explains how the curtailing of woman's freedom from childhood harms a woman's confidence in displaying herself as someone who can create knowledge instead of just being an

¹⁰⁹ Bindu, Question 11.

¹¹⁰ Judith Butler, 'Performativity's Social Magic,' in *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 122.

¹¹¹ Bowlby, 'Feminine Female,' 55.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Toril Moi, 'Feminist, Female, Feminine,' in *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, ed. Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1989), 117.

¹¹⁴ Cameron, 'Feminist Linguistic,' 154-155

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 155.

object of it. As per this construct only women writers and intellectuals have the relevant consciousness of their abilities and privileges and this remains elitist or unavailable to less educated and politically suppressed women like Indo-Fijian folksingers.

Folklore and the Folk

Folklore as a concept ‘was introduced by William John Thoms to describe all studies focusing on anything old; old buildings, old legal documents, old artefacts, old tales, old songs, old customs’.¹ The term depicted the materials that had been passed down through generations after being produced and reproduced over time in cultural and traditional contexts. William Thoms in his essay *What is Folklore?* writes that ‘although folklore is probably as old as mankind, the term “folklore” is of comparatively recent origin’.² His comments indicate the initiation of folklore studies that established a demarcated space for the analysis of aesthetic, abstract and tangible materials. The materials that were previously left out of academia as a result of their origins in stereotypically rural, illiterate and unstructured societies, became the focus of studies in numerous communities. It was immediately proven that the thoughts and attitudes surrounding folk literature had been misguided as this field proved to be rich with its own structure, content and values.

William Bascom states that ‘Folklore is the material that is handed on by tradition, either by word of mouth or by custom and practice’.³ His criteria for defining folklore was based on origin and source which required materials to have been developed as part of historical culture and then passed on to subsequent generations. Thoms also subscribed to this notion, emphasizing that ‘the most common criterion for definition of folklore is its means of transmission. Specifically, folklore is said to be in oral traditions’.⁴ Thus, anyone looking at any form of folklore should be aware that what they are studying (for example, folksongs), is in effect, the culmination of many years of creation, reproductions, performances, and evolutions. Let us consider some other definitions that point to other aspects of folklore. Jonas Balys offers that:

¹ Elliot Oring, ‘On the Concepts of Folklore,’ in *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*, ed. Elliot Oring (Utah: Utah State University, 1986), 6.

² William Thoms, ‘What is Folklore,’ in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc, 1965), 4.

³ William Bascom, ‘Folklore and Anthropology,’ in *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*, ed. Elliot Oring (Utah: Utah State University, 1986), 33.

⁴ Thoms, ‘What is Folklore,’ 1.

Folklore comprises traditional creations of peoples, primitive and civilized. These are achieved by using sounds and words in metric form and prose, and include also folk beliefs or superstitions, customs and performances, dances and plays. Moreover, folklore is not a science about a folk, but the traditional folk science and folk poetry.⁵

MacEdward Leach presents a more detailed view that encompasses the diverse art forms whilst considering folklore's intimate function of defining a people. Leach suggests that:

Folklore is the generic term to designate the customs, beliefs, traditions, tales, magical practices, proverbs, songs etc; in short the accumulated knowledge of a homogenous unsophisticated people, tied together not only by common physical bonds, but also by emotional ones which colour their every expression, giving it unity and individual distinction. All aspects of folklore, probably originally the product of individuals, are taken by the folk and put through a process of re-action, which through constant variation and repetition become a group product.⁶

Some of the aspects that are common in these definitions have to do with *tradition*, *repetition* or *performance* and *people*. Thoms offers that 'the primary materials of folklore must be certain categories of creative ideas which have become traditional among the people of any society and which may be recognized as their common property'.⁷ The criterion set here acknowledges the imaginative art and creation by individual communities in their various forms. Leach's definition presents a common misconception of folklore as being the creative art of the *unsophisticated*. Nichole Kousaleos elaborates that in some contexts people and their folklore is highly esteemed and in others 'the folk were wrongly identified with the illiterate in a literate society and thus the folk as a concept was identified exclusively with the vulgar and the uneducated'.⁸ Furthermore, tastes change, and folksongs are often regarded as old fashioned; Rajni, one of the wedding singers interviewed for this thesis, laments that the younger Indo-Fijian generation has

⁵ Jonas Balys, 'Definitions of Folklore,' *Journal of Folklore Research* 33, No. 3 (1996), 255: accessed May 5, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814683>.

⁶ MacEdward Leach, 'Definitions of Folklore,' *Journal of Folklore Research* 33, No. 3 (1996): 261, accessed May 5, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814683>.

⁷ Thoms, 11.

⁸ Alan Dundes, 'Folklore As a Mirror of Culture,' *Elementary English* 46, No. 4 (1969): 472, accessed May 9, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41386525>.

Very little interest towards this form (*Vivah ke Geet*) of singing. Especially when we sing traditional types of songs then we hear comments from the younger crowd to sing more modern songs [...] but I do not want to distort the meaning in my songs by adding Bollywood tunes to please them.⁹

Folklore can be further divided into two parts, that is, *folk* and *lore*. Elliot Oring suggests that *folk* ‘can refer to any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor’.¹⁰ He elaborates that this sense of ‘identity can be based upon such salient social factors as ethnicity, occupation, kinship, religious belief, sex, age, or an almost limitless number of other factors such as health, spatial proximity, or personal habit’.¹¹ Oring explains the *folk* as any and every group of people in whichever setting as long as they have some similarities among themselves. This leads him to conclude that it is the *lore* that has to be emphasized in its role, function, structure and content in different communities. A study of folk materials can help diagnose the life styles, attitudes and truths of past and present generations. However, studying *lore* in isolation from the *folk* would be an oversight since the essence of the materials is heavily reliant on the people who perform them. For this chapter, folklore will be seen as the historically created oral traditions of people that have many forms and structures and which are passed on from one generation to the next through practices and performances, holding a generic shape but constantly evolving in content and style through contact with new ideas. These fluctuations could be results of different cultures merging and conflating by coming into close proximity of each other, such as the presence of *i-taukei* words in Indo-Fijian folksongs, which substantiates the juxtaposition of two dominant ethnicities in a close knit society. For instance, Babita declares that she sings using:

The normal conversational Hindi but I do use English and *i-taukei* words. I include words like ‘Facebook’ in my songs and also characters from television series. When we say such words

⁹ Rajni, Question 16.

¹⁰ Oring, ‘On the Concepts of Folklore,’ 1.

¹¹ Ibid.

or mention certain names people pay attention to the performances and that is why we use them. I even take Bollywood tunes.¹²

Folksongs

Barre Toelken claims that:

A folksong begins its life like any other song: as a musical and poetic expression of some person's feelings or ideas. A song becomes a folk song when it begins to be passed along and rephrased or used by others for whom it also functions as a way of articulating shared attitudes or feelings.¹³

Songs help arouse particular emotive responses from the audience and this embodies their paramount usefulness. *Vivah Geet* are of various forms. Some create an atmosphere of reminiscence, for example, the songs sung at the bride's farewell. There are also songs for various occasions to create a jovial mood. Most often the performers have the prerogative of manipulating the overall audience's frame of mind and this vitalises their position within the wedding context. Mostly folksingers sing compositions that have been sung by other performers, and add in their own compositions when they want. Only attentive followers or those with deeper than usual knowledge of folksongs may know which songs are self-authored and which are reproductions from former performers. The self-composed items still qualify as folksongs because their thematic schemes correlate with past compositions. The songs also follow the same styles in structure and the content draws from the same sources as past songs; historical events or in most cases holy books and their characters. Toelken attributes the acceptance of new folksongs into dominant folk culture to the persistence of folk performers in singing and transmitting them. He notes that a folk song 'picks up the colorations, nuances and styles of the group among whom it circulates, and gets continually rephrased to suit their responses to time, place, rhetoric, and performance'.¹⁴

¹² Babita, Question 19.

¹³ Barre Toelken, 'Ballads and Folksongs,' in *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*, ed. Elliot Oring (Utah: Utah State University, 1986), 147.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Indo-Fijian folksongs have been around for more than 130 years.¹⁵ These songs were based on folksongs sung in India by immigrant Indians, most of whom arrived in Fiji under *girmit*. What differentiated these songs from the India-based songs were the contents and contexts of singing. The performers translated their personal experiences on ships, cane farms, *line* living and the difficulties they faced, into songs. These made their songs hybrids of the ones they had been singing in India and today these songs are deemed solely Indo-Fijian folksongs. The fact that these songs have survived through all these years indicates the importance they have held for the performers. Through years of battling with new modes of entertainment such as television, movies and recorded songs, live folksongs' performances have declined but not eliminated. *Vivah Geet* as a form of folksongs resonates with old Hindu traditions as well as elements of Indo-Fijian culture that have their origins in India but have been nurtured within the Fiji society. Durgama, in relation to Indo-Fijian *Vivah Geet* assented that 'the people from India came and started these, my paternal grandmother came from India during indenture and she got this art with her. There are many differences between how they used to sing then and now'.¹⁶

Functions of Folklore

Folklore continues to thrive in modern, literate and academic-oriented societies today as a result of the vital social functions it fulfils. According to Brij Lal there were instances during the *girmit* era when labourers would gather to sing few songs on the days they were not expected to work. These practices continued even after the end of indenture until today where these performances have come to represent Indo-Fijian folklore. The length of survival validates that

¹⁵ A detailed analysis of Indo-Fijian Folk Music can be found in; (Peter Manuel, 'Transnational Chowtal: Bhojpuri Folk Song from North India to the Caribbean, Fiji and Beyond,' *Asian Music* 40, No. 2 (2009): 1-32, accessed January 5, 2014, <http://muse.jhu.edu/journal/amu/summary/v040/40.mauel.html>., Donald Brenneis, 'Aesthetics, Performance and the Enactment of Tradition in a Fiji Indian Community,' in *Gender, Genre and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions*, ed. Arjun Appadurai, Frank Korom and Margaret Mills (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 1991), 362-378., Kevin Miller, 'A Community of Sentiment: Indo-Fijian Music and Identity Discourse in Fiji and Its Diaspora,' (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2008).)

¹⁶ Durgama, Question 10.

‘beneath a great deal of humour lies a deeper meaning’¹⁷ in the sense that folklore had more to offer than just enjoyment.

Folklore also served as the medium through which societal value systems were emphasized. Oring notes that one of the many functions of folklore is ‘aiding in the education of the young’.¹⁸ Folklore is developed and centred on the values of a particular community, thus learning it and through it makes the pedagogical process more interactive and important for students. This is mainly due to the learner’s ability to identify at a personal level with the content and the strategies of learning. This role of *Vivah Geet* was constantly highlighted by the song performers who were confident that ‘there are many teachings and values in those songs and if people can get that out of the songs then it will surely be beneficial to them’.¹⁹ Lalita comments that ‘we give advice and instruction to the bride and groom through the songs. We do all this through songs which is a better medium compared to giving speeches or having someone list all the instructions to them’.²⁰ The lyrics in these songs emphasize stereotypical roles of women as wives and daughters and offer them instructions upon marriage while mostly praising the groom. Durgama claims that ‘there are many teachings in the songs for the girls mainly, for example, the daughters are constantly reminded to abide by her duty to her family and her in-laws’.²¹ Meena adds that ‘mostly the girl is asked to serve her in-laws and family members. The groom is really praised when he arrives at the wedding venue but there aren’t many lessons for him’.²² Savita meanwhile expands the value of these songs by noting that ‘we do not only have lessons for the bride and groom but also for the general public’.²³ An example of a wedding song is given below with English translation to illustrate how folksongs function in a wedding context.

Folksong	Translation
<i>Beti Kul ka Dharam Nibhanna</i>	Uphold the (religion) principles of our clan
<i>Siksha bhul na janna ji</i>	What you have been taught, do not forget

¹⁷ Elliot Oring, ‘The Functions of Folklore,’ in *The Study of Folklore*, ed. Alan Dundes (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1965), 290.

¹⁸ Lalita, Question 11.

¹⁹ Oring, ‘The Functions of Folklore,’ 277.

²⁰ Gauri, Question 14.

²¹ Durgama, Question 22.

²² Meena, Question 22.

²³ Lalita, Question 14.

<i>Saas Sasur ke agya mano</i>	Follow the commands of your mother and father-in-law
<i>Beti Unki sewa karma ji</i>	Treat their service as deeds of importance
<i>Jet Jethnai ke badh kar mano</i>	Hold your sister in law and brother in law in high esteem. (elder brother of groom (husband) and his spouse)
<i>Beti unka adap jano</i>	Know how to be respectful to them
<i>Dewar nanad ko balak jano</i>	See your brother and sister in law as children. (younger brother of husband and his spouse).
<i>Beti unko godh khilana</i>	Daughter nurse them on your lap.
<i>Apne pati ko dev as mano</i>	Esteem your husband as God himself.
<i>Beti unki agya mano</i>	Daughter, obey his instructions.

The song emphasizes what Hindu Indo-Fijians believe as life principles. Respecting and obeying the husband and in-laws was paramount for women married in this cultural context. The view of husband as god was reiterated to ensure an unquestioning attitude by the wife. Her submissive behaviour was justified by her religion and abiding by these guidelines ensured that she continued to bring honour to her natal household, who were always seen as responsible for the socially acceptable upbringing of their daughters. Rajni explains that ‘we pay more attention to the girls because they eventually have to belong to two homes and they are responsible for the upkeep and image for both’.²⁴ Songs sung during weddings sanction these values to retain the sacredness of the marriage institution. These songs could also evoke guilt in women who fail to conform to these expectations. Married wedding guests would also receive fresh doses of these principles reiterated through songs. The performers note the importance of these songs when they state that ‘the marital problems that we see today are the result of the modernised society that has come now. The messages that we give in the songs are ever present but let alone follow, people do not even bother to listen to them’.²⁵ Meena adds that ‘whatever teachings are given in the songs are very useful and if they are followed a lot of good can be achieved in families. A lot of girls nowadays *hear from one ear and take it out from the other*, that’s why there are so many problems’ [emphasis added].²⁶

²⁴ Rajni, Question 42. (*Two homes* refers to the natal and the husband’s homes and this is a widely accepted notion among Indo-Fijians).

²⁵ Niranajan, Question 41.

²⁶ Meena, Question 42.

Bascom mentions that ‘folklore is used in some societies to apply social pressure on those who would deviate from the accepted norm’.²⁷ His comments hold true for Indo-Fijian folksongs, since in many circumstances folklore works simultaneously to patronize and discourage unacceptable attitudes and actions. This remains a vital role of folklore which Oring feels is ‘often overlooked’ but its function of ‘maintaining conformity to the accepted patterns of behaviour’ continues.²⁸ In one of the very few studies on Indo-Fijian folklore Donald Brennis and Ram Padarath focus on challenge songs, which were once a very common feature of Indo-Fijian rural settlements. The challenge songs were sung by two groups against each other and these groups constituted individuals from different religious backgrounds, mainly Muslims, *sanatanis* or *samajis*.²⁹ Brennis and Padarath describe these songs as ‘witty’ and ‘complex pieces’ and ‘the subject matter of the songs often illuminates moral and social issues which are important to the villagers’.³⁰

Folklore is also important for the connection it establishes with the past of a particular group of people. Oring stated that the ‘distinctive tales, songs, speech forms, and customs reflected the past, they were the fragments of philosophy and way of life of an ancient people’.³¹ Edwards and Sienkewice also state the importance of folklore to people who do not have access to writing. They emphasize that the only way such communities ‘can achieve immortality is for their words and deeds to be enshrined in the praise or blame of the singers, orators and poets of their own and subsequent generations’.³² Roger Abrahams also defines folklore as ‘an expression of the means by which membership in a community is established, maintained, and celebrated’.³³ His definition highlights the importance of folklore to identifying individuals with their communities. William Wilson asserts that:

²⁷ Bascom, ‘Folklore and Anthropology,’ 33.

²⁸ Oring, ‘The Functions of Folklore,’ 294.

²⁹ *Sanatanis* and *Samajis* were Hindus but of different sects, and they had many variations in their styles of worship. For a detailed distinction see (John Kelly, *A Politics of Virtue: Hinduism Sexuality and Counter Colonial Discourse in Fiji* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991)., Ian Somerville, ‘The Ramayan Mandali Movement: Popular Hindu Theism in Fiji 1870-1979,’ (Master’s Thesis, University of Sydney, 1986).)

³⁰ Donald Brennis and Ram Padarath, ‘You and Who Else: Challenge Songs In Bhatgaon,’ in *The Indo-Fijian Experience*, ed. Subramani (Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1979), 57.

³¹ Oring, ‘On the Concepts of Folklore,’ 6.

³² Viv Edwards and Thomas Sienkewice, *Oral Cultures: Past and Present* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1990), 92.

³³ Roger Abrahams, ‘Towards a Sociological Theory of Folklore: Performing Services,’ *Western Folklore* 37, No. 37 (1978): 163, accessed May 7, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1498062>.

Surely no other discipline is more concerned with linking us to the cultural heritage from the past than is folklore; no other discipline is more concerned with revealing the interrelationships of different cultural expressions than is folklore; and no other discipline should be more concerned with discovering what it means to be human.³⁴

The reflections depicted in *Vivah Geet* substantiate Wilson's comment as these songs embody the religious marital traditions, images of Indo-Fijian women in the domestic sphere and the interplay of kinship and communal ties developed through time.

Vladimir Propp sees the two genres of folklore and literature as very closely related. He notes that 'folklore is the product of a special form of verbal art. Literature is also a verbal art, and for this reason the closest connection exists between folklore and literature'.³⁵ He asserts that there are overlaps between these two fields mainly in their poetic genres, and uses these overlaps to prove that there are similarities 'in some of their tasks and methods',³⁶ leading him to conclude that there is every possibility of extending strategies of either field towards the other, if and when applicable with the rationale to enhance comprehension. However, he stresses that authorship is clear in the case of most works of formal literature as writers are named but with folksongs individual ownership can be problematic as they are created communally. In present circumstances where folksong singers copyright their productions, they still cannot restrict the styles, contexts and sources of the songs which could be re-worded and sung. Rajni says that she composes some of her songs and 'I also sing other people's songs. This is the way it is with most singers. We compose some songs, some we have learnt from our ancestors and some we copy from other singers'.³⁷ Propp also draws on the aspect of performer, where the performer of folklore cannot assume herself to be the creator of the work she performs even though she is also not reciting someone else's work. However, the most intriguing difference Propp establishes regards the power held by audiences of literature and addressees of folklore: 'If a reader of a work of literature is a powerless censor and critic devoid of authority, anyone listening to folklore is a potential future performer, who in turn, consciously or unconsciously will introduce

³⁴ William Wilson, 'The Deeper Necessity: Folklore and the Humanities,' *The Journal of American Folklore* 101, No. 400 (1988), 158, accessed May 5, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/540106>.

³⁵ Vladimir Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 6.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Rajni, Question 21.

changes into the work'.³⁸ Apart from the fact that spectators could take the mantle of performers later, they could also provide feedback to current performers and effect changes to the live performances of folklore. Meena states that 'we feel better when the audiences listen to us and provide comments and encouragement as this helps us improve our performances'.³⁹ Thus, the interrelationship between audiences and performers seems to be more closely knit in the genre of folklore than in formal literature.

Folklore does not operate in a vacuum and that it is heavily reliant on social contexts. Gender, ethnicity, nationality, geographic placement and the economic position of social groups are depicted in the performances of folklore. The Indo-Fijian community, for example, is an ethnic group, with a history that entails the indenture system and colonial administration, with traces of cultural practices belonging to one of the oldest civilizations in the world: India. Oring maintains that 'members of an ethnic group share and identify with historically derived cultural tradition or style, which may be composed of both explicit behavioural features as well as implicit ideas, values and attitudes'.⁴⁰ The situation becomes more fascinating when women performers are brought into the equation. The study of women-centred folklore provides a distinct view due to the substantially different experiences of women in a culture that is patriarchal and androgenic in nature, compounded by their colonized status. Hence, comprehending the context of performers of folklore is essential to the conception of folklore itself as is done below.

Spatial Contextualizing

Deborah Kapchan states that performances exceed the standard uses of language, thus 'it is necessary to take account of the space of performance and the role of the senses in connecting performers to a somatic experience of place'.⁴¹ Oring outlines the criteria for perceiving the socio-cultural contexts in which folklore is performed. To begin with, the location or space in which the performance takes place is significant. The space in this instance implies more than the

³⁸ Propp, *Theory and History of Folklore*, 8.

³⁹ Meena, Question 32.

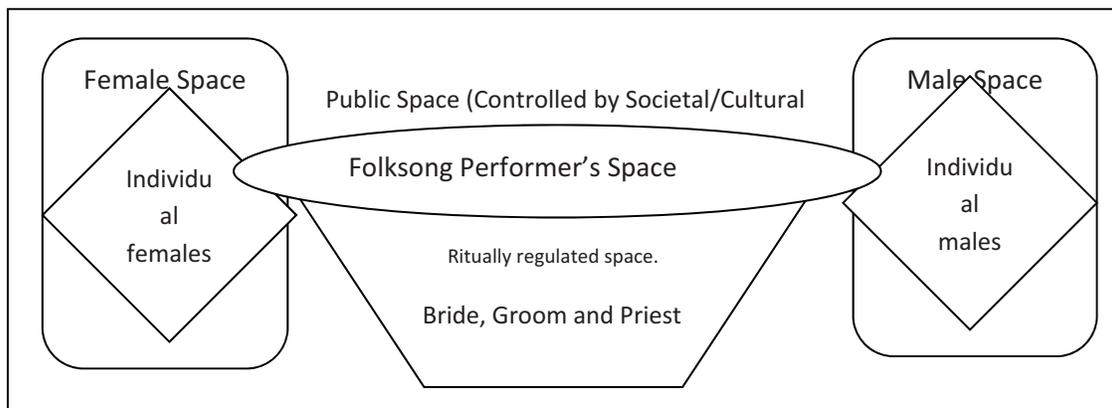
⁴⁰ Elliot Oring, 'Ethnic Groups and Ethnic Folklore,' in *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*, ed. Elliot Oring (Utah: Utah State University, 1986), 32.

⁴¹ Deborah Kapchan, 'Performance,' *The Journal of American Folklore* 108, No. 430 (1995): 483, accessed May 8, 2013, <http://jstor.org/stable/541657>.

geographical make-up, it encompasses the temporal aspect, while considering the wider social atmosphere of the performance. This idea can be clearly illustrated with a brief analysis of folk wedding songs. The wedding serves as the wider social context in which specific folk songs are performed. The performers occupy a certain physical and conceptual position in these weddings. Physically they are positioned close to the *mandap*⁴² as they closely monitor the rituals. Their abstract position is that of narrators who mediate the space between the actual wedding ritual participants (groom, bride and priest) and the witnesses (spectators) at the wedding. Babita explains that

We are given a special stage so that is where we base ourselves. We sit in a central place where the crowd is able to see us from all the directions and we also have to be close to the *mandap* so that we can see the rituals taking place and narrate them.⁴³

The figure below displays the spatial location of folksong performers in such a wedding context.



Richard Schechner presents a Performance Time/Space/Event Chart⁴⁴ in which diverse events and social occurrences are designated based on the play of these factors. Hindu weddings would fall into a category defined by *transformed space*. It is classified as transformed because weddings normally take place in halls, temples or homes where the ordinary space is converted

⁴² A square area allocated within the hall or shed where the wedding is conducted. This area is heavily decorated with flowers and clothes and adorned with idols and photographs of gods and goddesses. The area is meant for the bride, groom and officiating priest where the actual wedding rituals are conducted. The area is situated in such a way that it is visible by all spectators.

⁴³ Babita, Question 17.

⁴⁴ See (Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (London: Routledge Classics, 1988), 292-293.) for the complete Performance Time/Space/Event Chart.

into an area which is pronounced suitable for sacred rituals of marriage to be conducted. This sanctum is pivotal in the utterance of the illocutionary vows and prayers of marriage. It is also within this space that the normatively transgressive acts and subversive songs are interpreted as customary rather than offensive.

Further to the spatial aspect, Oring questions the ownership of the performance, which asks if the performers are coerced to perform or it is part of their personal desire. As Lal mentions in *Bittersweet*, there were many instances when people would gather to play musical instruments and sing just for the enjoyment as it helped lighten the labour intensive tasks that they had to perform in their indenture contracts. The context was also defined by ‘dramatic devices employed by the narrator, such as gestures, facial expressions, pantomime, impersonation or mimicry’⁴⁵ as not all features were always applicable and performers have to consider the social contexts of their performance. Meena, for instance, explains

We do a bit of dancing. I don’t usually just sit and sing but I rise up while singing and make certain gestures. We have to change our tone. We ladies, however, have to be a bit more reserved and this is why I mostly focus on my voice and singing abilities rather than exaggerated actions to get the audience's approval and compliments. I also dress up in my *sari* or *kameez* and adorn all the ornaments.⁴⁶

Oring ends his list of criteria by mentioning that the folklore performances are only successful when audiences are able to recognize their objectives. Within specific contexts conscious audiences can relate to the performances’ portrayals, as Edwards and Sienkewice maintain that:

Any listener can hear the words spoken but not every listener hears these words in the same way. Not only is the terminology of oral events contextually specific, so is the event itself. Understanding a performance in an oral culture requires a special mind-set, a cultural harmony which excludes from the oral world any outsider, whether literate or not.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Oring, ‘The Functions of Folklore,’ 281.

⁴⁶ Meena, Question 32.

⁴⁷ Edwards and Sienkewice, *Oral Cultures*, 3.

They attribute the need for contextual knowledge to three factors. Firstly, oral literature is *kinetic* in that it continues to change. One of the causes of these changes is the rapid transformations that languages go through. Secondly, the very nature of most folklore performances is interactive, with audiences constantly expected to engage in them. These interactions are, however, dependent on the audience's awareness of these practices and when and how acceptable engagements should be attempted. Thirdly, the *rhapsodic* quality of folklore should also be treated vitally in this discussion. Oral literature such as a song is not just the rhythmic and melodious pronouncement of words and sentences. Many of these are stitched together by various forms of linguistic ingredients like proverbs, idioms, riddles and quotes. Without the acquaintance of these features and their specific meanings and uses, audiences are at a loss, as they may fail to grasp what the folksongs are all about. These features can be illustrated in relation to *Vivah ke Geet* which are sung specifically for the bride's farewell. Song 10 in the list of wedding songs in the appendix is an example of such a song. Firstly, line 7 states '*the brothers carry her doli*'⁴⁸ implying that the bride's brothers carry her towards the groom's residence. Despite the social change where this tradition is by large not practiced it still continues to be used in songs. Secondly, at the performance of such songs the audience mostly cry with the bride, who is traditionally expected to do so. Babita mentions that

Unfortunately sometimes we note brides walking away with a smile from the wedding, they do not cry a bit. I feel that such behaviour is disrespectful to her parents, it is wrong. At such moments we still sing the same emotional songs and the bride is the one who should feel embarrassed for her actions.⁴⁹

Bindu adds that when songs 'require me to cry then I actually cry. This really touches the crowd and makes them more sympathetic and attentive',⁵⁰ which proves the interactive nature of folksongs. Furthermore, line 10 states that '*her father's house breaks*' and this is traditionally mentioned in most farewell songs indicating that the father's household suffers as a result of the bride's departure. As this marks the official departure and distancing of the daughter from her family: all her preceding relationships will now be second to her marriage kinship ties. The

⁴⁸ Palanquin.

⁴⁹ Babita, 30.

⁵⁰ Bindu, 32.

bride's natal family suffer emotionally but in cases where the brides had been employed there is also a loss of income for the family as well.

Furthermore, it is also worth noting the expectations audiences have towards male and female singers, as a recent transformation in this field has been the emergence of male wedding singers. This change has not been taken well by the women performers, who are adamant that singing *Vivah Geet* is primarily a female duty. Bindu states that 'by its very nature these songs have been associated with women and it just sounds really inappropriate for men to be singing them'.⁵¹ Charles Potter justifies this closeness by stating that 'there is also a strong feminine element in folklore [...] women have always been the savers and conservators of beliefs, rites, superstitions, rituals and customs.'⁵² This is noted in the Indo-Fijian community where women have traditionally performed and safeguarded the respect with which *Vivah ke Geet* was perceived. The influx of male singers who usually subvert social conventions of speech through their songs has caused a generic alteration in the themes used in songs to the extent that even some female performers have adopted such subversive content. Minakshi adds that 'the men are more open in their singing meaning they are not always respectful of the listeners while singing as they prefer to entertain'⁵³ which in her view shifts the focus away from imparting knowledge. Savita, also provides an interesting comment when she claims that

I try to keep my songs similar to the mothers in the past but the male singers have all the modern and fast paced songs. Some men even pretend to sing like women. They deliberately soften their voices to sound like a woman but it is easily detectable that something is amiss.⁵⁴

In her view such acts by men erode the prestige in the songs. All the interviewed singers were certain that it is the declining number of female performers that is leading men to enter this predominantly female field. This is fascinating because this appears to be a last ditch effort by patriarchal authorities to get their androcentric ideologies across to the public when women are generally opting out of this traditional role. Thus, the materialization of male singers and their

⁵¹ Bindu, Question 31.

⁵² Charles Potter, 'Definitions of Folklore,' *Journal of Folklore Research* 33, No. 3 (1996). 255, accessed May 5, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3814683>.

⁵³ Minakshi, Question 31.

⁵⁴ Savita, Question 31.

acceptance by audiences is seems to be more of a strategic move rather than a mere social transformation.

Edwards and Sienkewice maintain in their work that connections between performers and spectators are vital as they have far reaching effects. They assert that:

There is the close bond which exists within the community of the oral artist, a bond which allows unspoken communication and understanding among members of the community. This bond between artist and audience is inevitable in any oral performance and can radically affect the nature of the performance.⁵⁵

For a holistic comprehension of folklore, then, it is essential to rope in context with actual materials of folklore. Many folklorists would actually refuse to perceive folklore divorced from context, as Diana Taylor emphasizes folksongs ‘are always in *situ*; their meanings come from the context in which the actions take place’.⁵⁶

Folklore and Performance

The analysis of context stresses the performance nature of folklore and re-establishes that folklore as oral literature lives through performance. While it can be preserved in a mummified form through inscriptions and audio recordings, its true essence only appears in live performances. Oring concludes that ‘some folklorist’s emphasis on social context in the recording and analysis of folklore expression has contributed to a conceptualization of folklore as performances’.⁵⁷ He goes on to assert that when analysing a ‘text’ the scope of study is delimited and restricted since he feels that such a study ‘is the report of only the verbal behaviour of a single person’.⁵⁸ For Oring an ideal study is one where the performance is under review, as this ‘would attend to the full range of ideas and behaviours that bear upon a communicative interaction. Narration is conceptualized as an event taking place in time and space. It is more

⁵⁵ Edwards and Sienkewice, *Oral Cultures*, 67.

⁵⁶ Diana Taylor, ‘Performance and Intangible Cultural Heritage,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, ed. Davis Tracy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 94.

⁵⁷ Elliot Oring, ‘Folk Narratives,’ in *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*, ed. Elliot Oring (Utah: Utah State University, 1986), 138.

⁵⁸ Oring, ‘Folk Narratives,’ 138.

than a text and its constituent elements'.⁵⁹ A good example would be of the Female Clowns in Rotuma who were the focus of Vilisoni Hereniko's study in 1995. Clowning by females is part of folk culture that was evidenced in many communal based events as a means of bringing entertainment and fluidity to the running of the programs. Hereniko notes:

Ritual clowning is customary and has religious significance that transcends existing circumstances. Whereas secular clowning is impulsive, ritual clowning is programmed by society, although it employs many of the performative techniques as well as the form and structure of secular clowning. However, the juxtaposition of humour with serious ritual, as well as beliefs in the supernatural, transform these performances into symbolic communication.⁶⁰

Many of folklore's characteristics run parallel with mainstream music and drama. Nonetheless, folklore presents combinations of supernatural aspects and historically related beliefs that place it in a more enriched category. Hereniko points out that 'celebrations associated with social disjuncture that mark important transitions in life-birth, death, and marriage, for example – are institutionalized forms of play'.⁶¹ Play or performances, these folk based activities present a vital part of cultural life and its survival. Roger Abrahams asserts that through folklore performances 'the words of the past are given new voice and are renewed in a contemporary context'.⁶² In the performance of *Vivah Geet*, for instance, the singers note a strong supernatural element that in many ways is an inheritance of Hindu beliefs and Indo-Fijian customs. Babita explains how all Hindu 'families have *pitṛ deota* (patriarchal gods) which the eldest male in the households have to lead in worship and I as the singer have to appease these gods before I enter their homes to begin my performances'.⁶³ This act by Babita does two fundamental things. Firstly, it shows the patriarchal alignment in Indo-Fijian beliefs and secondly it reiterates a past tradition as Abrahams mentions folklore does.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Vilisoni Hereniko, *Woven Gods: Female Clowns and Power in Rotuma* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1995), 150.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Roger Abrahams, 'Complicity and Imitation in Story Telling: A Pragmatic Folklorist's Perspective,' *Cultural Anthropology* 1, No. 2 (1986): 229, accessed May 7, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/656268>.

⁶³ Babita, Question 12.

The mechanisms of performances as related by some folklorists overlap in many regards with Butler's theory of performativity. Sawin stresses that the emotions and personalities of performers emerge as powerful determinants in forming the overall image of folklore. Just as Butler maintains that 'the body becomes its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised and consolidated through time',⁶⁴ Sawin maintains that

Performance is a multi-layered phenomenon. We must constantly be aware both of the actual human beings who act and observe and of the relative subject positions posited by the culture and genre. Further, we must recognize that these discursive positions in a sense *create* the participants (as performers/spectators), while the participants (as performer/audience) reciprocally *create* these positions as effective social realities by embodying and reinstating them.⁶⁵

Recurring performances of certain styles, themes and rituals through folklore leads to their naturalization in societies. This naturalization leads these communities to claim ownership over these styles. To ensure its survival folklore has to be performed as a form of reiteration. Kapchan believes that the potential in folklore to sustain tradition making through repetitions is cause of the shift in methodology by ethnographers studying folklore. These researchers move from studying 'static texts' that had been 'severed from their ground of enunciation'⁶⁶ to studying performances of folklore as its scope lies beyond what inscribed materials capture. Schechner classifies performing 'as a public dreaming'⁶⁷ where revelations are made in two distinct manners. Firstly, the revealing of those things that may have been blocked for such a long time that they have turned into fantasies and have been kept from materializing by the same powers that had blocked it initially. Secondly, the expression of those views and opinions that would in normative circumstances 'have had a hard time getting expressed at all'.⁶⁸ Thus, analysing performances of folksongs is a means of peering into the societies they originate in. Bauman and

⁶⁴ Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,' in *Literary Theory: An Anthology*, Julie Rivkin and Micheal Ryan (Blackwell Publishing: Oxford, 2004), 904.

⁶⁵ Patricia Sawin, 'Performance at the Nexus of Gender; Power, and Desire: Reconsidering Bauman's Verbal Art from the Perspective of Gendered Subjectivity as Performance,' *Journal of American Folklore* 115, No. 455 (2002): 45, accessed May 5, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/5420781>.

⁶⁶ Kapchan, 'Performance,' 479.

⁶⁷ Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 265.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

Briggs assert that ‘performance puts the act of speaking on display; objectifies it, lifts it to a degree from its interactional setting and opens it to scrutiny by an audience’.⁶⁹ *Vivah Geet* are reflections of gender, religious, kinship and social norms of Indo-Fijian discourses exhibited through women and their performances permit literary criticisms to be drawn on them as living art.

Reverend Thiselton-Dyer’s publication of *The Folklore of Women* in 1906 is considered to be the one of the first to call attention to the presence of women in folklore. Now folklorists study folklore produced and performed by women and the unique reflections women oriented folklore present. Jordan and de Caro note that women’s folklore ‘has revealed a fresh vantage point from which to look at the world’.⁷⁰ They credit this positional change for the more comprehensive insight into the mechanisms of women’s world. Understanding women’s version events also allows a re-evaluation of men’s world and how it functions and creates structured societies, mainly in restrictive patriarchal contexts. The interrelationship and inter-dependence between these two worlds is also revealed together with the biases, oppressive principles and underlying gender stereotypes. These stereotypes do not only exist in men’s imagination but as realities and influencing factors in life. However, more intriguing is the complicity on the part of women who encourage, abide by and discursively enforce these forms. Indo-Fijian communities that uncompromisingly affirm a patriarchal structure and permit exclusively heterosexually bounded relationships are in principle antagonistic toward feminist ideologies. Women who align to such societal principles depict complicitness as the interviewees’ comments consistently indicate.⁷¹ Rajni states that

We get a lot of respect and honour at the weddings. Not all singers get that kind of respect because we have to present ourselves in a certain manner. Especially when you sing well, and you sing the acceptable lyrics and when you are singing for the right purpose then people will surely give you a lot of respect.⁷²

⁶⁹ Bauman and Briggs, ‘Poetics and Performance,’ 73.

⁷⁰ Rosan Jordan and Fa de Caro, ‘Women and the Study of Folklore,’ *Signs* 11, No. 3 (1986): 518, accessed May 8, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3174007>.

⁷¹ See (Kirin Narayan, ‘Singing From Separation: Women’s Voices in and About Kangra Folksongs,’ *Oral Traditions* 12, No. 1 (1997): 23-53, accessed December 21, 2013, <https://www.google.com/#q=Singing+From+Separation%3A+Women%E2%80%99s+Voices+in+and+About+Kangra+Folksongs.>)

⁷² Rajni, Question 9.

Complicit Women Performers

This complicity in women is hardly a matter of concern at the communal level since portrayals of pro-patriarchal concepts and normative heterosexual themes in folklore has been naturalized into the very structure on which folklore is produced and performed. Women folklore performers are given due respect and recognition in many ‘societies where sex role does not conflict with performer role’ leading women to ‘become important singers and storytellers, sometimes eclipsing the men’.⁷³ Indo-Fijian society, for instance, acknowledges the role of women in many folklore performances, mainly in women-dominated ceremonies like weddings. Older women singers develop a rapport with the wider community and are often seen acting on the margins of societal regulations. Due to age and social maturity they also liberally display behaviour disallowed to women. Smoking in public and using invectives and expletives are not perceived as offensive by anyone who is aware of these older women’s position in the cultural hierarchy. In these circumstances their gender is positioned second to their role as matriarchs and custodians of tradition. However, some matriarchs also aim to further sustain the stereotyped image of womanhood as Gauri (59) clarifies that ‘at my age I also have to portray good values and examples as a woman’.⁷⁴ It is apparent from this comment that these performers operate in a space that is achieved through compromise with patriarchy. Her comments validate that there is an unwritten gender script that is in play and that individuals like her by their very act of abiding by this script give it authenticity. It is this very act that also validates patriarchy which frames these scripts.

With the establishment of feminine perspectives and themes in folklore, it is only fair to perform deeper research to establish the workings of folklore and how these appear under a feminist gaze. Sawin suggests a ‘gender-sensitive theory of performance’⁷⁵ to evaluate folklore performances to reveal undisclosed gendered ideologies. She reveals several reasons behind male hesitation to grant women uncontrolled access to public performances. Firstly, they fear that women performers could persuasively portray non-normative and socially unapproved images of females in performances. Furthermore, women could snatch positions of prestige in

⁷³ Mart Weigle, ‘Women as Verbal Artists: Reclaiming the Sisters of Enheduanna,’ *Frontiers* 3, No. 3 (1978): 6, accessed May 8, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3346320>.

⁷⁴ Gauri, Question 32.

⁷⁵ Sawin, ‘Performance at the Nexus of Gender,’ 41.

conventionally male dominated performance space. In the Indo-Fijian setting women perform within the social boundaries monitored and enforced by patriarchal powers. With situations such as this, according to Nichole Kousaleos, 'feminist folklorists have looked to women's experience and their expressions in all its various forms to examine the reality of women's lives in various cultures and contexts'.⁷⁶ An interesting discussion can also be done on Indo-Fijian female folksingers and their songs as they are a performance within a performance whereby the singers perform the songs while performing their gender. This conflation of these performances merits further elaboration.

⁷⁶ Nichole Kousaleos, 'Feminist Theory and Folklore,' *Folklore Forum* 30, No. 1 (1999), 19.

Patriarchy

Many societies still exist that are heavily administered through patriarchal notions founded on the suppression of women by denying their legal and economic rights as well as regulation of their sexuality. The lack of theoretical insights within these societies, coupled with those aspects of modern societies that are still patriarchally structured (such as religion) and devoid of feminist reworking, mean that patriarchy's mechanisms continue to escape comprehensive analysis. This is due to the plasticity of patriarchy; that is, while its androcentric principles are consistent, the way in which it plays in societies varies. Religion, economic factors and basic biological differences are some justifications used to enforce patriarchal ideologies on women. Patriarchy as a concept has been used 'to refer to a system of government in which men ruled societies through their position as heads of households'.¹ The patriarchal system is so finely intertwined in societal structures that its detection is sometimes difficult. How individuals and groups function in patriarchal societies is dictated by its patriarchal principles which are seldom questioned by those under its power. Savita, an experienced folksinger, claims that 'some people do not even know why they do certain things. They just say that we are doing it because people have been doing it in the past'.² Interestingly she is not saying this to problematize culture but to justify that cultural practices should continue even when these are submerged in patriarchal and obsolete ideologies when seen through a feminist perspective. Mostly the mask of culture or tradition patriarchy's its true image, allowing its largely undisturbed continuation. The application of Butler's theory of performativity helps unveil the deliquescent agenda of patriarchy. Butler, whose work involves 'analysing the performative production of sexed identity'³, focuses on the influencing cultural factors that help shape an individual's gender in such a manner that 'sex and gender come to be conceived as natural extensions of a biological body'.⁴ Denying any ontological role to biological attributes, she identifies the physicality of the agent as the stage for the performance of gender traits that are socially regularized. Assuming gender as a cultural

¹ Sylvia Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 19.

² Savita, Question 42.

³ Jagger, *Judith Butler: Sexual Politics*, 53.

⁴ Ibid.

construct makes patriarchy a vital phenomenon for this study as it plays a fundamental role in forming the cultural mould within which gender forms.

Steven Goldberg concludes from his study of past, present, primitive, preindustrial and modern societies that ‘all of the 1500-5000 societies on which we have any evidence have associated hierarchical dominance with men’.⁵ This fact is used by pro-patriarchy advocates to justify its existence and continuation, maintaining that since it has existed for so long its power has become ‘ubiquitous’.⁶ The Indo-Fijian community has always been patriarchal. Shireen Lateef emphasizes that ‘the Indian family in Fiji is ideally patrilocal, patrilineal and patriarchal. The essential characteristics of which are absolute male dominance and female subordination, males as the economic providers with females and children as the economic dependents’.⁷ As we have noted, the influence of the Indian homeland and the girit era have had immense impact on Indo-Fijian value systems. Feminists like Lateef aim to identify the oppressive aspects of this system, demanding the transformation of methods that have been used to keep patriarchy intact.

Mechanisms of Patriarchy

Sawin explains that:

A patriarchal system survives by keeping women under control, requiring them to subordinate their will and their desires to goals set by and for the advantage of men. Ideally this is achieved hegemonically, by persuading women that they are inferior and do require male guidance and by requiring women to internalize their own surveillance.⁸

Sawin’s views imply that certain strategic actions are taken by the custodians of patriarchy (men and complicit women) to maintain the status quo. These actions take many forms, ranging from instituting misleading ideologies and religious doctrines to creating economic disparities. Firstly, the appropriation of asymmetrical ideologies promotes gender stereotyping. One such conception

⁵ Steven Goldberg, ‘Why Patriarchy?’ *Group* 32, No. 1 (2008): 16, accessed May 22 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41719174>.

⁶ Magie Humm, ‘Kate Millet,’ in *Feminisms: A Reader*, ed. Maggie Humm (Hertfordshire: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 61.

⁷ Shireen Lateef, *Purdah in the Pacific: The Subordination of Indian Women in Suva, Fiji* (Victoria: Department of Anthropology and Sociology, 1988), 358.

⁸ Sawin, *Performance at the Nexus*, 47.

is the treatment of Hindu widows, divorcees and women who are barren. The participation in many women oriented Hindu functions is restricted. In Hindu weddings, for instance, married women play a very significant role in performing ritualistic activities and widows are disallowed in these circles as customs render their participation ceremonially unpropitious. The husband's death makes a widow a bad omen. This notion is derived from the Hindu religious principles that emphasize the paramount position of the husband. According to Srivastava, in 'Hindu society a woman's life is so much tied up with her husband that she has hardly any place in society without him'.⁹ A historical analysis of Fiji's indentured labourers proves that quite a few female labourers saw salvation in travelling to a foreign country since they were widows with uncertain futures. Remarriages were extremely rare within Hindu households as the rituals observed in their weddings were on the assumption of a virgin bride and there were also difficulties finding a husband for a widow.

Generally, the significance placed on husbands by religious teachings compels women to engage in numerous rituals for finding and keeping good men. Unmarried girls, for instance, enter into covenant fasts where they deny their bodies certain indulgences such as food for certain number of days or a certain day of a week for several weeks consecutively. This sacrificial act is to ensure spiritual guidance in the provision of a well to do and healthy husband. A financially well-off husband would ensure a comfortable life and status and pride for her family. A healthy husband would ensure a longer marriage and the preservation of the cultural privileges that come with being married. Gauri explains that 'it is part of our religious beliefs that when women return from offering prayers at temples they should also pray to their husbands. These should be done as it helps maintain familial peace although a lot of women don't do it nowadays'.¹⁰ The stigma surrounding widowhood also makes it imperative for women to continue these prayers and fasts after marriage for their husband's longevity. 'Widowhood is regarded as a curse in Hindu society'¹¹ and these sorts of beliefs make the position of men significant. The fact that young unmarried girls are also not given a chance to contribute in many wedding rituals emphasize their need to find husbands if they want to be part of these exclusive circles. Lateef picks this up when she writes that 'familial ideology is further

⁹ I. Shrivastava, 'Woman as Portrayed in Women's Folk songs of North India,' *Asian Folklore Studies* 50, No. 2 (1991): 273, accessed May 5, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1178387>.

¹⁰ Gauri, Question 40.

¹¹ K. Upadhyaya, 'On the Position of Women in Indian Folk Culture,' *Asian Folklore Studies* 27, No. 1 (1968): 87, accessed May 8, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1177801>.

reinforced by the higher status of married women over unmarried women'.¹² Another noticeable gender asymmetry exists in the freedom men have to easily get married when their wives die if they are still young and can support a wife.

Another mechanism used in regulating females is in the hedging of 'virginity and defloration in elaborate rites and interdictions'¹³ as existent among Indo-Fijians. Their cultural and religious beliefs emphasize the importance of women safeguarding their virginity. Firstly, it serves as a matter of pride for a husband who has his wife's virginity presented to him as her most precious sacrifice after wedlock. Secondly, marrying off a daughter who is still a virgin is a sign of a family's honour. The Hindu wedding ceremony has a segment known as *kanyadaan*, which in literal translation means *gift of the virgin*, where the insinuation is that the bride has had no 'previous sexual relations'.¹⁴ The parents of the bride through a formal ritual gift *their virgin daughter* to the groom. While this practice is portrayed as a noble parental duty it could also be seen as a license for controlling female sexuality.

As noted in the introduction, Indo-Fijian folksongs play a pivotal role in representing socially recognized genders and expectations or their enactment; behaviourally, linguistically, emotionally, and physically. The folksongs that are sung in Fiji have been extracted from the songs that existed in India and have been hybridised through the use of Bollywood tunes and local vocabulary.¹⁵ Many similarities exist in the themes, styles, contexts, performances and even the musical instruments that are used for the singing of these songs. In India women's folksongs 'chiefly describe the household environment and the domestic rituals connected with the rites of passage, festivals and ceremonies'.¹⁶ While Indo-Fijian folksongs borrow heavily from India due to the shared religious and ethnic settings, there are certain features that distinguish them. One such difference exists in the singing of *sohar* which are ceremonial songs principally for rituals associated with child birth. Both Shrivastava and Upadhyaya note that the North Indian culture has special songs that are sung at the birth of a male child, 'but no such songs are sung by women of the house on the occasion of a daughter's birth'.¹⁷ These ceremonial songs could be sung through special requisition at the birth of a female child, provided the mother is proven to

¹² Shireen Lateef, 'Rule by the *Danda*: Domestic Violence Among Indo-Fijians,' *Pacific Studies* 13, No. 3 (1990): 47.

¹³ Kate Millet, *Sexual Politics* (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1969), 48.

¹⁴ Lateef, *Purdah in the Pacific*, 331.

¹⁵ See (Miller, 'A Community of Sentiment,' 2008, 1-7.).

¹⁶ Shrivastava, 'Woman as Portrayed in Women's Folk songs of North India,' 270.

¹⁷ Upadhyaya, 'On the Position of Women in Indian Folk Culture,' 83.

have had conceived and delivered the child after many difficulties. However, ‘since there are no exclusive *sohar* for girls, the same songs that are sung at the birth of a boy are sung for girls’.¹⁸ In the Hindu Indo-Fijian context, most families regardless of the sex of the child have *sohar* sung at their homes for all of the sanctioned rituals of child birth. The negative perception surrounding female-child birth is fortunately not as evident in Fiji as it is in India. Nonetheless, gender stereotyping continues to plague Indo-Fijian discourse such as in *Vivah ke Geet*. As has been noted, the Indo-Fijian female stereotype dictates that:

Ideally, women should be quiet, demure, unobtrusive, and obedient. They should dress modestly and generally attempt to be physically and socially inconspicuous. Interaction with unrelated males should be avoided and spatial movements outside the home should be minimized. Women must not talk too much or too loudly or be argumentative, especially in the presence of males or older females. A disobedient, argumentative, talkative female who mixes freely with males and is seen alone in public too often has the potential to dishonour the family. Women are perceived as sexually vulnerable and sexually impulsive and thus in need of protection and control since they are the repositories of family honour.¹⁹

Such gender expectations may not be thoroughly prevalent in the educated, urban Indo-Fijian population but in most rural settings females exemplify patriarchal perceptions of femininity. For instance, a Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre 2013 publication reports a prevalence of violence amongst rural and minimally educated women, imputing this to their lack of awareness of their rights when compared to educated and economically independent women.²⁰ The transformation in the mind-set of the former group could be attributed to what Margaret Mishra outlines as the arrival of Western feminist ideas to Fiji in the 1960s and the work pursued by several gynocentric movements to develop awareness amongst locals of a progressive female consciousness.²¹ This was done through the distribution of literature and community outreaches,

¹⁸ Shrivastava, ‘Woman as Portrayed in Women’s Folk songs of North India,’ 275.

¹⁹ Lateef, ‘Rule by the *Danda*,’ 45.

²⁰ See (Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre, *Somebody’s Life, Everybody’s Business: National Research on Women’s Health and Life Experiences in Fiji (2010/2011): A Survey Exploring the Prevalence, Incidence and Attitudes to Intimate Partner Violence in Fiji* (Suva: Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre, 2013)

²¹ Mishra, ‘The Emergence of Feminism in Fiji,’ 49.

building the ground work to create gender equality. As expected, however, generational ideologies and gendered thought patterns have acted as major obstructions. This is because ‘gender is never merely individual, but involves interactions between small groups of people. Gender involves institutionalized rules’.²² For instance, motherhood is a societal expectation placed on women, with praise and honour awaiting those who comply. Embarrassment and shame define those who do not. A woman who is unable to provide her husband’s family with a child is known as *banjh*²³ or barren. This is a derogatory term meant to create shame since motherhood is deemed second only to being a wife in terms of social and religious importance. Butler’s idea of performativity could be used to understand this situation. Butler states ‘that the utterance creates the situation it names because of the authority of the speaker’.²⁴ The authority exercised by patriarchy in such societies empowers its custodians to utter such labels against individuals who fail to materialise their gender script. Through these utterances they erect the platform for their *othering*. Butler, meanwhile, would treat these failures as fortunate. These very lapses are what substantiate her claims that gender should not be unquestionably derived from biological traits in individuals. Just because a body carries breasts should not dictate that it should assume motherhood. The fact that no demeaning nominal tags exists to describe men without children, shows patriarchal power play to maintain female submissiveness. Such childless women are also unwelcomed from ritualistic participation. This vividly illustrates the societal ideology pressuring women to indulge in heterosexual marriages to fulfil the role of wives and mothers. Marriage is perhaps the most powerful weapon in the arsenal of Indo-Fijian patriarchy, which makes *Vivah Geet* essential to patriarchal systems. From the actual ritualistic ceremony to the resultant life of a married woman, subordination becomes the order of life. Lateef asserts that the creation of these mind-sets, the separation of the sexes and the regulation of women’s sexuality place men and women in distinct spheres; men in the public and women in the private. Thus, ‘the role of women is largely confined to marriage, the performance of household chores, bearing and rearing children, and caring for men folk’.²⁵ This explains the noticeable absence of Indo-Fijian women from the political arena in the past. Ireen Jai Narayan became a member of parliament but she was born and raised in India, and only came to Fiji

²² Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 244.

²³ Upadhyaya, ‘On the Position of Women in Indian Folk Culture,’ 86.

²⁴ Culler, ‘Philosophy and Literature,’ 514.

²⁵ Lateef, ‘Rule by the *Danda*,’ 45.

through marriage. Mishra, however, highlights the contribution of Shaista Shameem, Shamima Ali and Imrana Jalal, women advocates for the current generation, who have made notable contributions of the female population's empowerment. The deficiency of Indo-Fijian women in higher political order is difficult to fathom, as predominantly Hindu India has already had a woman Prime Minister and is currently overseen by a woman President. Biman Prasad and Nalini Lata attribute this scenario of poor female representation in both municipal and national politics to a number of factors 'including attitudes and cultural values' within which 'women's primary role has been as a housewife, looking after children and safeguarding culture'.²⁶ Rajeshwari Rajan attributes female political progression in India to the portrayal of powerful and aggressive images of Hindu Goddesses to the Indian public, leading to the acceptance of a counter-image of women to the meek, subordinate and obedient one. She claims that 'the use of these figures in popular culture like folk theatre, mythology, song and dance performances, oral storytelling and cinema has assisted the rise and dominance of women political leaders'.²⁷ It is evident in an analysis of Rajan's comments that performance based art forms were used to introduce pro-female ideologies into existent social discourses with positive results. Such re-acculturation seems to be relatively slow in the Indo-Fijian contexts even though it has access to the same forms of cinematic experience at least.

Compulsory Hegemonic Masculinity

The adoption of normative masculinity among men is highly stressed in social circles. Males from an early age are expected to participate in *manly* activities where physical strength and endurance are evaluated and built. Playing soccer with peers, doing labour intensive farm work with elder men as well as indulging in smoking, drinking *kava* and alcohol consumption are highly gendered activities meant for men. Constant reprimands are heaped on boys who associate with women or are seen getting involved in *women's work* like cooking, washing and hurdling together in women's group. Talking excessively and public expression of emotions, especially crying, was associated with women and girls, so boys and men were expected to be indifferent.

²⁶ Biman Prasad and Nalini Lata, 'Institutions and Gender Empowerment in the Fiji Islands,' in *Institutions and Gender Empowerment in the Global Economy*, ed. Kartik Roy, Hans Blomqvist and Cal Clark (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2008), 224.

²⁷ Rajeshwari Rajan, 'Is the Hindu Goddess a Feminist?' *Economic and Political Weekly* 33, No. 44 (1998): 35, accessed May 26, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4407322>.

Implementing such gender related statutes was vital in maintaining the dichotomous gender relation in society. This is because ‘gender is a system of power in that it privileges some groups of people’ over others and in the case of the Indo-Fijian society men have traditionally been the privileged party.²⁸ In modernizing Indo-Fijian communities today these activities are not perceived with the same gendered gaze. Husbands of working women do help out with cooking, washing and raising children constantly, without the criticisms that were labelled against such men not so long ago.

In cane farming settlements where households had large families for the sake of labour provision, patriarchs existed in almost all families whose very presence demanded ultimate reverence. Wives of these patriarchs in some instances expressed pride over the fact that their husbands controlled their families heavy-handedly. In most cases the authority these men wielded was treated as ‘natural facts’;²⁹ therefore, such patriarchs also served as community leaders in religious groups or even the *panchayat*, the village justice system made up of five respected elderly men. Those men who constantly stayed home and did not attend village events or male gatherings, as well as those men who allowed their wives to contribute to decision making, were said to be under *petticoat gummunt* (petticoat government). This was a form of social coercion applied on men to make them internalize a socially and culturally constructed gender role. ‘Work/walk like a man,’ or ‘don’t act like a girl’ were/are common insults used to realign the boys’ behaviour to the expectations of their gender. The underlying rationale in all these gendering processes was the desperate effort to keep alive normative hegemonic masculinity. Raewyn Connell and James Messerschmidt claim that:

Hegemonic masculinities were distinguished from other masculinities, especially subordinated masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity was not assumed to be normal in the statistical sense; only a minority of men might enact it. But it was certainly normative. It embodied the currently most honoured way of being a man, it required all other men to

²⁸ Judith Lorber, *Breaking the Bowls: Degendering and Feminist Change* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 15.

²⁹ Raewyn Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1987), 245.

position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men.³⁰

As a result of such practices Muhammad Haj-Yahia, who did an extensive study on relations in highly gendered societies, concluded that ‘boys begin developing hostility toward girls and women, and they learn to compulsively hold on to their masculinity’.³¹ When the hegemonic discourse on manliness incorporates and justifies male violence against women it is likely that men within such discourses act out violently against females to live up to those expectations of manhood. This could be one of the factors influencing the high incidence of domestic emotional, physical and sexual violence against Indo-Fijian women. According to a Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre report, fifty six percent of Indo-Fijian women interviewed had been victims of some form of domestic violence.³² Lateef explains that ‘the threat and use of physical violence against females is a powerful and effective mechanism for ensuring the maintenance and reproduction of traditional gender relations among Indo-Fijians’.³³ Patriarchy hangs a metaphorical veil separating women from experiencing those aspects of life that are typically categorized as masculine and at the same time the outside forces that could threaten male supremacy are curtailed out of women’s reach.

Nonetheless, Mishra notes that the hold of patriarchy on Indo-Fijian communities has not been without objections and deviance. In ‘The Emergence of Feminism in Fiji’, she quotes the example of an indentured labourer called *Sukhrania* who had opted for prostitution instead of continuing plantation work. Her ‘decision contradicted the patriarchal assumptions that women should be chaste (among a host of other virtues)’,³⁴ and she paid for this offence with her life. *Lachminarain*, a male indentured labourer wanted to exclusively own her, and mandated that she comply with ‘stereotypical feminine virtues’.³⁵ When she failed to do so, *Lachminarain* brutally murdered her, thus reinstating self-contained patriarchal dominance. Two clear points that come out from this incident are firstly, the attitude of men that they have the right to regulate women’s

³⁰ Raewyn Connell and James Messerschmidt, ‘Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,’ *Gender and Society* 19, No. 6 (2005): 832, accessed September 29, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27640853>.

³¹ Muhammad Haj-Yahia, ‘On the Characteristics of Patriarchal Societies, Gender Inequality, and Wife Abuse: The Case Study of Palestinian Society,’ *Adalah’s Newsletter* 20, (2005): 3.

³² FWCC, *Somebody’s Life, Everybody’s Business*, 42.

³³ Lateef, ‘Rule by the *Danda*,’ 43.

³⁴ Mishra, *The Emergence of Feminism in Fiji*, 42.

³⁵ *Ibid*.

sexuality. Secondly, the male perception that assumes that defining morality and social norms is their prerogative. Even in this modern era Fiji continues to grapple with such negative male mind-sets. It is often agonizing to learn of such incidents where both victims and perpetrators are modern and educated persons. Such crimes cast a dark shadow across the work of feminists and human rights activists here. To a large extent the undue favouritism shown towards males at the domestic level in conjunction with the immense freedom they enjoy on a daily basis are the reasons why Indo-Fijian males develop an inflated ego and authoritarian attitude.

Economic Disparities

Economic constraints also act as retention tools of women's submission. During the indenture system Indo-Fijian women had a sense of economic freedom as they were contracted individually. Since they received separate pay the need to be dependent on husbands, fathers or brothers as commonly seen in typical Indian family setups, was negligible. The highly asymmetrical ratio between men and women further affected the relationship patterns, leading to breakup of institutions like family and marriage. This was significant because the familial systems are the foundational spaces where man/women roles and expectations (even economic related) become materialized. Lateef notes that:

Without denying, or in any way negating, the degradation women endured during indenture, one must surely acknowledge that the breakdown of the traditional patriarchal family gave women some control over their own destiny, at least in the arena of personal relations with men.³⁶

After the cessation of indenture in Fiji a new trend emerged with the ensuing of small scale farms. These individual farms were developed on land leased from The Colonial Sugar Refinery, the Australian company managing Fiji's sugar industry. The remaining indentured labourers invested in these farms and Indo-Fijian settlements arose around those areas where there were acres of cane farms lying alongside one another. Marriages led to households, which led to the

³⁶ Shireen Lateef, 'Indo-Fijian Women-Past and Present,' *Manushi: A Journal About Women and Society* 39, 1987: 5.

development of communities. Lateef notes how the nature of cane farming, which favoured ‘two adult males generally a father and a son’,³⁷ led to the withdrawal of women from farms and into domestic duties. The labour intensive work and physical challenges involved in cane farming coupled with security concerns regarding men drove women to seek protection and support through marriage. The decision to settle down also arose out of the women’s loss of an independent income at the end of their contracts. Lateef clarifies that:

With the reestablishment of the family after indenture greater controls were imposed on women by men, particularly over female sexuality. The memory of life in the coolie line was still fresh and men made certain any control exercised by women previously was re-appropriated by men.³⁸

Most of what is written about Indians during indenture reflects a morally deficient image of women. While Lateef considers these reports to be biased due to their mainly male authorship, these commentaries are all that is available as official records of history for this particular context. The shortage of women led to many discrepancies in behavioural patterns associated with them. Brij Lal reports the sharing of women among men in the *coolie lines* when husbands, ‘out of pity or greed, agreed to their wives providing sexual services to a small number of men’.³⁹ While these systems of sharing served an intended purpose, things also got violent, due to jealousy arising among men who felt the need for personal ownership of women. Quarrels, conflicts and fatal clashes occurred, which led to further deterioration of living conditions during indenture. Lal notes that ‘women everywhere were blamed for murders and suicides on the plantations and sometimes even for the high infant mortality rates. To the overseers and planters, the women were immoral and socially unredeemable’.⁴⁰ Lateef argues that women were being ‘used as scapegoats for explaining the violence of plantation life’.⁴¹ Her comments rightly imply that men were to be blamed to a large extent as they were being governed more by their patriarchal attitude rather than adapting to their current circumstances. At the same time, based

³⁷ Ibid, 6.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Brij Lal, ‘Girmit, History, Memory,’ in *Bittersweet: The Indo-Fijian Experience*, ed. Brij Lal (Canberra: Pandanus Books, 2004), 14.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Lateef, ‘Indo-Fijian Women-Past and Present,’ 4.

on the same reports Lateef discusses instances of women playing ‘men off against each other in pursuit of more money and jewels, with the highest bidder being the winner’.⁴² Such incidents showed women assuming responsibility for their economic prosperity by taking complete advantage of their sexuality and conveniently performing outside of normative gendered sexual scripts. Thus, women once again were held liable for the corrosion of the sanctity of the institution of marriage. Not surprisingly then, as soon as the Indo-Fijian community acquired some semblance of order and normality after the conclusion of indenture, the control and regulation of women resumed. This time, however, the restrictions had to be ardently applied and preserved with the not so distant memory of women-related complexities during life in the *coolie lines*. Marriage ceremonies, hence, became paramount occasions for reiterating expected gender beliefs, gender orientations and gender identity through the instrumentalising of wedding songs containing messages for women. Some of these roles included being obedient wives, and mothers and these duties revolved around the domestic sphere. Even in cases where women join the paid work force Mensah Adinkrah notes that these are ‘concentrated in stereotypically female occupations such as nursing, teaching and low-level clerical work’.⁴³ He adds that such ‘economic marginalisation of women’ forces them to ‘rely on husbands, common-law partners, boyfriends or male relatives for material support’, thus perpetuating female subordination.⁴⁴ Lalita, a teacher by profession makes the prevalence of such notions clear when she states ‘the lessons in the three days of wedding songs have to be soaked in by the girls. They need it because the husband is the *provider* but it is the woman who has to ensure that the family is managed well [emphasis added]’.⁴⁵ Why would an economically independent woman still consider the husband to be the provider and relegate herself to the domestic sphere?

Walby claims that ‘women are not passive victims of patriarchy’,⁴⁶ generating two main arguments from this comment. Firstly, that women also actively contribute to their oppression. Secondly, that women are not necessarily just bearing the oppression and that they are reacting to improve their situations. In the Indo-Fijian context the latter proves applicable as well because marked improvements have been noted in female contributions to the Fijian economy. Women

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Mensah Adinkrah, ‘Patriarchal Familial Ideology and Female Homicide Victimisation in Fiji,’ *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 32, No. 2 (2001): 286, accessed October 10, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41603748>.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 287.

⁴⁵ Lalita, Question 39.

⁴⁶ Walby, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, 125.

have been actively joining both private and public sectors of employment as viable labour force. Their economic liberation permits them to reconstruct their social context, rather than continuing with the inherited ones. The increasing educational status of women churns out formally qualified individuals who are able to join the work environment outside the domestic sphere. For example, the official census records of 1986 showed 74 percent of Indo-Fijian females had acquired formal education at least to the Form 4 level. This rate increased to 85.8 percent in 1996 with prediction of further growth with the establishment of government policies making education accessible and affordable. In addition, the 2007 census report revealed that out of all Indo-Fijian women who were active and within the working age group, only 13 percent were unemployed. This statistic, meanwhile, did not account for the number of women involved in subsistence forms of employment like baby-sitting, that still assure women of some independent income. One of the many forms of liberations formal sector employment has provided women is the freedom of choice in terms of whom and when they want to marry. Lateef attributes this to the fact that women are now working outside of the domestic sphere where they come into contact with men and choose life partners during their socialization. Moreover, changes are noticed even in circumstances where girls agree to arranged marriages. Where formerly females in general (including even their mothers) had no part to play in deciding who the groom would be, today in cases of educated and working brides, the process of groom selection is transparent.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, two problem areas still plague the entire concept of marriage in the Indo-Fijian community. Firstly, as Lateef states, ‘the question of whether one desires marriage is not an issue contemplated by Indian women in Fiji [...] marriage is taken as granted’.⁴⁸ As part of her gender status, a Hindu Indo-Fijian girl is expected to marry and progress into fulfilling other roles associated with her gender. Secondly, the marriage has to be heterosexual in nature to be recognized by her society and religion. From a feminist viewpoint both these choices reflect the attempt by patriarchy to manipulate women’s life by manipulating her sexuality and her self-image despite her economic freedom.

⁴⁷ See Adinkrah, ‘Patriarchal Familial Ideology,’ 288-289.

⁴⁸ Shireen Lateef, ‘Marriage: Choice or Destiny? The Case of Indian Women in Suva, Fiji’ (paper presented at the Pacific History Association Conference, Suva, Fiji, June 27-July 2, 1985), 2.

Religious Ideologies

The Indo-Fijian way of life runs parallel to and in very close conjunction with religious beliefs. Much of their life is dominated by religious functions as per the calendar of ritualistic times and seasons. Religious doctrines even govern rituals for almost all significant events in the life of Hindus. A way of life structured thus was vividly pronounced when Indo-Fijian communities were intact in rural settlements after indenture. In rural communities these still exist and even urban Hindus to a great extent endeavour to maintain religious assemblies and honour religious rites. According to Donald Brennis and Ram Padarath ‘the most important organizations in the village are religious societies’⁴⁹ and these societies and their codes largely impact Hindus’ lives. Thus it becomes imperative that men control positions of power in all vital and authoritative religious establishments to ensure the extension of male dominance over women in society in general.⁵⁰ Nowhere is this better illustrated than the pre-dominantly male administrators in Hindu religious organizations. From village and community based *mandali* (group) to temple priests and national executives of the *Sanatan Dharam Prathinidhi Sabha of Fiji*, men assume most positions of significance.⁵¹ Women’s groups also exist but at a subordinate level, taking their cue from the national or communal governing authority. According to Susan Wadley, ‘women are active practitioners but have little religious authority in orthodox, textually sanctioned Hinduism’,⁵² as witnessed in Fiji. As a result religious practices portray a gendered approach towards the treatment of men and women. Upadhyaya exclaims that ‘it is a curious custom among the Hindus that a male member can marry times without number but the same right is denied to the female members of the family’.⁵³ While it seems that such an allowance is made in an unjustified manner, fortunately due to the closely knit Indo-Fijian community this privilege is not prevalently utilized. This is due to fact that once word gets around of a certain individual’s shenanigans, they are treated with suspicion which affects their chances of marriage. Another practice Upadhyaya elaborates on is the custom of *sati* (self-

⁴⁹ Brennis and Padarath, ‘You and Who Else,’ 58.

⁵⁰ See (Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 36-53.)

⁵¹ For more information on Indo-Fijian religious structures see; Kyung-Hak Kim, ‘Twice Migrant Indo-Fijian Community in Sydney with Particular Reference to Socio-Religious Organisation,’ *Indian Anthropologist* 34, No. 2 (2004): 1-27, accessed December 2, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41919963>.

⁵² Susan Wadley, ‘Women and the Hindu Tradition,’ *Signs* 3, No. 1, (1977): 120, accessed May 26, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/3173084>.

⁵³ Upadhyaya, ‘On the Position of Women in Indian Folk Culture,’ 87.

immolation) that Hindu women in India had to endure at the death of their husband. While there is no historical evidence of this practice in Fiji, this does not imply that Hindu wives have not had to suffer certain injustices.

Wadley emphasizes that men are privy to the dual character housed in Hindu women. One version incites submission and the other entails power to rebel. For the sake of patriarchy's survival men have epitomized submissive role models for women to mirror as idealistic representations of wives, womanhood and motherhood. These images are 'laid down in Hindu law books, collectively known as the *dharma-sāstra* (the Rules of Right Conduct), written and oral mythology, in Sanskrit and in Vernaculars, provides many examples of female behaviour and its consequences'.⁵⁴ The pronouncement and enforcement of these models through folklore, for instance, during Hindu functions and ceremonies such as weddings, helps establish these role models explicitly. With the application of the theory of performativity, it can be inferred that the repetitions of these expected behaviour have led to its legitimization. Thus, from birth females begin to construct their gender within codes set by their immediate and wider social environment embodied in religious and morally endorsed role models. One of the most widely used figures in *Vivah ke Geet* is the image of *Sita*, the wife of the Hindu God incarnate, *Rama*. Brides are constantly compared with *Sita* who represents all that is good in a Hindu woman. She sacrificed the comforts of her life of royalty to accompany her husband in his banishment in the forests for fourteen years. She is kidnapped by an evil demon king for her beauty but she resists his charms and is later rescued. However, her virtue is questioned and she has to prove her chastity to her husband and her accusers. This image was most critically emphasized during indenture when men witnessed (in their opinion at least) the decline in women's morality. The suffering of *Sita* hence, became generally applicable to all Hindu women in Fiji based on Indo-Fijian history. Lalita points out that when performers sing '*Vivah Geet* we always refer to the groom as *Rama* and the bride as *Sita*. These are the two individuals from the *Ramayana* that they need to emulate'.⁵⁵ In fact Meena clarifies that the tradition of singing at weddings was sourced from *Rama's* wedding. She states that 'when Lord *Rama* and *Sita* were getting married there was

⁵⁴ Wadley, 'Women and the Hindu Tradition,' 117.

⁵⁵ Lalita, Question 11.

singing at their wedding so people follow that concept and we try to have singing at our weddings as well'.⁵⁶ Hence Sita and her femininity imprinted in suffering is constantly reiterated.

Danijela Majstorovic and Inger Lassen claim that 'the myth that abused women are masochists is supported by a cultural understanding of suffering as part of femininity'.⁵⁷ It has been traditionally established that to suffer is a feminine virtue and a pre-requisite to being a *real woman*.⁵⁸ In Fiji, for example, a Hindu wife is expected to remain loyal and submissive even to an abusive husband. Her own natal family would expect her to bear her allotment of oppression with the justification that she is one of many women who go through the same. Other nonsensical ideologies depict a true woman to be one who could go hungry if required to allow her family to be fed, a dutiful wife is one who denies her own desires to satisfy her husband's emotional and sexual needs and a real mother is one who would forego her own dreams to fulfil those of her children. Women are expected and usually required to make sacrifices and these denials of self are established as part of their very nature. The gradual empowerment of women is fortunately fading the effectiveness of such regressive notions away. However, this will require a rewriting and reimagining of gendered traditional and cultural practices, most of which still live through folklore performances. Betty Friedman maintains that 'the core of the problem for women is not sexual but a problem of identity'.⁵⁹ The continuous subordination of women in the Indo-Fijian community is the result of their acceptance of gendered identities developed within patriarchy and accentuated through their cultural practices.

Complicity of Women

An important idea to consider at this juncture is the complicit nature of women's involvement in the entire gendering and enforcement process. Lateef claims that 'economic determinism is not sufficient to explain the subordination of Indo-Fijian women'.⁶⁰ Based on her observation it could be implied that despite the levelling of economic statuses of men and women, other factors still operationally affect formation of gender identities. Since gender is

⁵⁶ Meena, Question 8.

⁵⁷ Danijela Majstorovic and Inger Lassen, *Living With Patriarchy: Discourse Approaches to Politics, Society and Culture* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011), 41.

⁵⁸ See (FWCC, *Somebody's Life Everybody's Business*, 74-80).

⁵⁹ Betty Friedman, *The Feminine Mystique* (New York: Dell Publishing Company Inc., 1974), 69.

⁶⁰ Lateef, 'Marriage: Choice or Destiny?', 1.

performative and the body as its performance stage has no bearing on the gender eventualities, the possibility of subversion does exist. Hindu Indo-Fijian women embody subversive capabilities but in more cases than not, patriarchal regulations from an early age curtail subversion and maintain submission. Dube states that ‘the structuring of women as gendered subjects through Hindu rituals is fundamentally implicated in the constitution and reproduction of a social system characterized by gender asymmetry and the overall subordination of women’.⁶¹

In the Indo-Fijian context, for instance, women who have a proven track record as a faithful wife, a culturally knowledgeable individual and a successful mother, receives the highly respected position of a matriarch. In this position she wields substantial authority and can also perform certain acts publically (like smoking) that are forbidden for other women. From the male perspective female subordination allows for collusion between the two genders in maintaining male superiority. Lerner asserts that ‘women have for millennia participated in the process of their own subordination because they have been psychologically shaped so as to internalize the idea of their own inferiority’.⁶² This idea is confirmed within the Indo-Fijian context where women have formed their own lives and have accepted the dominance of patriarchy, mainly paternalistic dominance. While all aspects of women’s lives reflect the workings of patriarchal influences, the focus here is the manner in which folklore (mainly wedding folk songs) is used to reinforce normative performances of gender.

The use of folksongs during wedding ceremonies to promote a gender agenda is an example of the subtlety with which patriarchal mechanisms function. Songs are powerful in transporting undercurrents of gendered views within them. The Hindu wedding context idealistically presents the convergence of gender performance and the performance of folksongs that describe, define and announce the expected gender identities. Analysis of *Vivah ke Geet* verifies the stereotypical roles and identities of men and women in them. The ability in songs to create specific emotional responses is exploited during performances in the public sphere as the past experiences are connected with the present circumstances and the foundations for future expectations are laid down. What women sing as part of their songs are realities of life. At the

⁶¹ Leela Dube, ‘On the Construction of Gender: Hindu Girls in Patrilineal India,’ *Economic and Political Weekly* 23, No. 18 (1988): 15, accessed May 25, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4378429>.

⁶² Lerner, Gerda. *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 218.

same time these songs which narrate rituals should not be dismissed as mere tradition. They reflect societal knowledge and every society is structured upon its knowledge which permeates all aspects of culture, religion and living. The voices of the women singers assume corporeal creative power through the construction of what is being uttered. The authority they enjoy is emanated by the patriarchally dictated and gendered cultural space within which they are operating as puppets. The compositions of their songs are highly influenced by the cultural practices and norms as well as societal expectations of the two genders recognized and endorsed by the Indo-Fijian patriarchy. When observed through feminist lenses, the role of these women can be diagnosed as complicit in nature. This is because they, being women, are in fact fortifying patriarchy's hold on females through their conveyance of gendered values and images of women. While their position is unique in this context, they are also at one level similar to the other subordinate females at the wedding. The singers bridge the gendered spaces occupied by males and females through the song performances. However, these women singers are actually staging a double performance. They are performing their gender as subordinate females while concurrently performing the songs. There are, nonetheless, moments of subversion and deviance within the song lyrics and dance movements, but these are functional, in the sense that the invectives and tabooed motions have intended purposes within a patriarchal structure. However, the interesting point to consider here is whether these somewhat subversive behaviours are truly a challenge to patriarchal rule. How threatening are these actions and words really to the dominance of males in this gendered setting? An analysis of the performances and the wider societal setup prove that these acts do no more than reinforce the power of patriarchy.

The essential thing about performative utterances is that they do not *describe* but *perform*, successfully or unsuccessfully, the action that they refer to. In the case of the wedding singers what they sing do seem to be challenges to male supremacy. These utterances are, however, not materialized outside of this context. No follow up actions are taken to indeed ensure that the song lyrics become reality. For instance, towards the conclusion of the Hindu wedding, song performances are synchronized with the paternal relatives of the groom as they eat. Singer(s) narrate the feeding of these men by relatives of the bride's family. While these men are important members of the groom's family, they are not fed a proper meal. In some cases large aubergines or *baigun* is fried without being diced and placed on the plate of these men. The singers than through their songs challenge these men to eat what is placed before them since it

has been served lovingly. The main aim is to judge the reaction of these men for the sake of humour. It is assumed that both the servers and the served understand that these are customary acts and not matters to be taken seriously. Social conventions dictate that bride's family has to satisfy even the most minor of the groom and his family's wishes, but at junctures like the one mentioned above, denial of their wishes is acceptable. It must be clarified at the same time, that outside this context, brides' families assume the subordinate position as implied by Hindu customs. It is concluded that the singers or those serving at the wedding have no intentions of insulting the male members of the groom's family. It is fundamentally a ritualistic performance that is part of their culture. Furthermore, the fact that the men are tolerant enough to bear such treatment without complaining re-establishes their supremacy. They are shown as emotionally in control and mature enough to overlook minor blemishes in behavioural patterns. It was evident in the interview of the singers that they were quick in rendering subversive songs as 'just for fun' as it had a negative bearing on their overall portrayal of sanctioned femininity which entailed displaying public respect for senior male members of the groom's family. In relation to subversive songs Durgama strongly utters that 'I don't think people should sing such things and they should just stick to the way songs were sung for Rama's wedding. Such songs exist but my opinion is that it should not be sung. These were composed by foolish people'.⁶³ It is unclear whether her strong comments are meant to cease the temporary insults men have to endure or her effort to safeguard Indo-Fijian femininity. In either case, however, men and androcentric ideologies find exaltation.

To cushion the effect of such songs certain mechanisms are pre-instated which can be deployed to sustain the social status quo. For example, *Neg*, a tradition of gifting money, is applied at such moments, whereby the men being picked on offer a few dollars to the women to appease them. The women calm down and cease their invectives, indicating that they have been pacified by the gifts. From a feminist perspective the economic supremacy of men is indicated here as well as their higher gender status. Strategies like *neg* have also been criticised in recent times as they have been utilised beyond their intended purpose. Babita identifies how some women demand more money for their ritual duties and in the process exert unsanctioned authority and greed. She asserts that

⁶³ Durgama, Question 25.

They (women) should accept a few dollars and not ask for more and more money as we see nowadays. These customs were followed in the past and people would accept a little money and let the rituals continue but today some women become greedy and ask for a lot of money instead of accepting what they are given.⁶⁴

Lateef believes that ‘Indian women do not simply inherit or internalize the culture and regurgitate it in a habitual fashion but rather interact with it to construct and recreate it through their everyday social interactions’.⁶⁵ Her observations show that gender is performative for females in the Indo-Fijian context as it is universally for everyone as per Butler’s theory. Thus (from a purely theoretical perspective) these females could, if they wanted, act out a different form of gender and not comply with the one demarcated to them by the patriarchal society they are in. The root of this submission lies in familial contexts. Millet suggests that ‘patriarchy’s chief institution is the family. It is both a mirror and a connection with the larger society; a patriarchy within a patriarchy’.⁶⁶ From early childhood girls begin to notice and internalize patriarchal mechanisms in the family. The assignment of becoming an acceptable girl and eventually a marriageable woman ensues with requirements being filled in as the process continues. All the activities they participate in have to eventually relate to the end goals of becoming the gender their biological makeup predicts them to be within the patriarchal and sex-gender system. Movement for example is greatly restricted for girls by instilling fear of punishment and danger from elements outside the family structure. One of the justifications provided for confining girls within a patriarchally monitored space is that girls, who are frequently seen around the community unaccompanied by a reputable or trusted woman, will find difficulty in securing a good husband. For an Indo-Fijian family one of the worst forms of dishonour is the calling off of a daughter’s wedding and these do occur in some cases when stories of a bride’s unorthodox behaviour is revealed. To prevent such regrettable moments, most fathers, in conjunction with complicit mothers, institute strict and unbending rules to govern their daughters, while sons are left on a substantially longer leash. Rajni points out that

⁶⁴ Babita, Question 30.

⁶⁵ Lateef, *Purdah in the Pacific*, 103.

⁶⁶ Millet, *Sexual Politics*, 33.

Because a father has more love for the daughter he is more worried about her welfare mainly when she gets older. He has to ensure that nothing untoward happens that stains her image in society [...] we do have less control on boys because we know that he is ours and that he will remain with us always but girls have to marry and move to another family so we have to ensure that they carry the right reputation with them.⁶⁷

The above comment shows how the curtailing of female freedom within families by male figures is justified as love and concern and not as patriarchal control. Mothers, who are fundamentally the children's caretakers, teach, model and enforce the gender identities to their children. *Vivah ke Geet* portray fathers and mothers in acknowledgement of the good qualities they instil in the daughter. The mother's complicity is rewarded when she receives praise in public spheres for nurturing her daughter according to cultural norms, enabling her child to become worthy of a man. Kandiyoti sums it well by stating that 'the cyclical nature of women's power in the household and their anticipation of inheriting the authority of senior women encourages a thorough internalization of this form of patriarchy by the women themselves'.⁶⁸ Geetanjali Gangoli states that 'women within patriarchies who accept contextually relevant patriarchal norms of female behaviour; sexual behaviour, dress, appearance, marital status, motherhood, are rewarded as long as they conform to these norms'.⁶⁹ Thus, many matriarchs are often folksong performers and this privilege is the result of their years of submission and enforcement of patriarchal ideologies. Their accomplishments as wives and mothers also position them in an authoritative space to be able to share their knowledge with others through their songs. Many singers are not mere puppets voicing male views; they are frequently reflecting on their own experiences in life accompanied with what they have witnessed in other women. Mostly women have no use for any societal freedom as they are psychologically unprepared to use it. Only major transformations at the grass root levels would ensure that women grow up aware of their equality, rights and independent status. Contemporary progress made in the formal education of girls, the awareness created by women's movement and most importantly their economic

⁶⁷ Rajni, Question 42.

⁶⁸ Deniz Kandiyoti, 'Bargaining with Patriarchy,' *Gender and Society* 2, No. 3 (1988): 276, accessed May 22, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/190357>.

⁶⁹ Geetanjali Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms: Law, Patriarchies and Violence in India* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishers Limited, 2007), 50.

prosperity and independence has, to some extent, softened the stance of the Indo-Fijian patriarchy. While in urban areas this has quickly become evident, rural areas in Fiji still need to progress further. However, *Vivah ke Geet* continue to reverberate the same stereotypical tunes due to its close ties with history. It would be interesting to note how feminist views begin to encroach into these songs as feminist opinions become more widely accepted.

Phasing Out Patriarchy

It is not that patriarchal ideologies have never been questioned or subverted seriously. It is just that the frequency and assertiveness of these subversions have been so nominal that patriarchies have outlived them. Harris Mirkin suggests that ‘the end of patriarchy would require the destruction of the taboos against those things which threaten patriarchal, monogamous marriage’.⁷⁰ The forbiddance of homosexuality, illegitimate or live-in arrangements, pre- and extra- marital sexual relationships, has always been stressed to maintain the pro-patriarchal hierarchy. Despite these restrictions there have been instances such as those mentioned in Mishra’s work that still occur in many communities around Fiji. On many occasions strict patriarchal controls have resulted in the very consequences they had been trying to prevent. For example, there are numerous cases of elopement by girls whose parents fail to consider their views when choosing a husband. Divorces and remarriages continue to take place even though previously a marriage was ‘ideally insoluble and permanent’⁷¹ from religious and cultural perspectives. In addition, few Indo-Fijian women are choosing to marry later in life or not at all, thereby moving away from traditional views that girls had to marry in their late teens or early twenties. Another considerable transformation has been the dismantling of the heterosexual binary that guided sexual relationships. The emergence of homosexual and bi-sexual men and women increasingly points to this fact. Louise Lamphere asserts that the focus on a ‘conjugal couple as the centre piece of marriage’ is a biased notion and so is the assumption ‘that the Patriarchal Man (heterosexual and in control) seems necessary for any marriage and kinship

⁷⁰ Harris Mirkin, ‘The Passive Female the Theory of Patriarchy,’ *American Studies* 25, No. 2 (1984): 44, accessed May 22, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40641862>.

⁷¹ Lateef, ‘Rule by the *Danda*,’ 47.

system to function'.⁷² Even though gay marriages are still not permitted either religiously or legally in Fiji, men and women involved in such relationships or sexual orientations are accepted in society. For instance, overtly effeminate boys and men are witnessed living in Indo-Fijian homes, in many cases economically supporting their families. This example is particularly chosen to indicate the softening of the notion of compulsory masculinity among men, especially those administering families. While there are instances of homophobic criticisms in wider society, most of these men and women have developed the confidence to be true to themselves. Lateef explains 'that individuals are neither mechanistic puppets nor carefully scripted actors in the societal drama',⁷³ implying that autonomy of choice is vested in all individuals to the point of denying well established gender identities.

Millet states that 'it is often assumed that patriarchy is endemic in human social life, explicable or even inevitable on the grounds of human physiology. Such a theory grants patriarchy logical as well as historical origin'.⁷⁴ An analysis of *Vivah ke Geet* can also reveal the manner in which these assumptions are intertwined in the lyrics of these songs. The analysis is important since patriarchal systems are frequently confused as being normative and they 'fit with social norms,' making 'male privilege often appear invisible'.⁷⁵ Lateef relates that 'Indo-Fijians are pre-occupied with their attempts to keep males and females apart and go to great lengths to achieve this end'⁷⁶ even to the point of using folklore to carrying out this process of manipulation.

From a feminist point of view, therefore, the Indo-Fijian society stands as patriarchal. This means that the notions, ideologies and structures produced in this system reflect male centred biasness. Thus, the mission to eliminate patriarchy will only be accomplished when what Lerner says is no longer true:

Men and women live on a stage, on which they act out their assigned roles, equal in importance. The play cannot go on without both kinds of performers. Neither of them contributes more or less to the whole; neither is marginal or dispensable. But the stage set

⁷² Louise Lamphere, 'Replacing Heteronormative Views of Kinship and Marriage,' *American Ethnologist* 32, No. 1 (2005): 34, accessed May 22, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3805145>.

⁷³ Lateef, *Purdah in the Pacific*, 103.

⁷⁴ Millet, *Sexual Politics*, 27.

⁷⁵ Renato Rosaldo, 'Notes Toward a Critique of Patriarchy from a male Position,' *Anthropological Quarterly* 66, No. 2 (1993): 81, accessed May 22, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3317107>.

⁷⁶ Lateef, 'Indo-Fijian Women-Past and Present,' 7.

is conceived, painted, defined by men. Men have written the play, have directed the show, interpreted the meanings of the action. They have assigned themselves the most interesting, most heroic parts, giving women the supporting roles.⁷⁷

⁷⁷ Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, 12.

Whenever women get the chance, they cheat the system by harbouring resentment, expressing discontent, and engaging in acts of insubordination, even when it results in violence. Their willingness to break the rules is evidence that their ideological subordination is neither thorough nor complete.¹

Indo-Fijian Gender Situation

Gender stereotyping is a common phenomenon within most communities constructed on Hindu religious beliefs and Indo-Fijian cultural and traditional principles. Two common features in these communities have been the patriarchal hierarchical structure and the sex-gender system, where biological sex is generally responsible for the eventuating gender adoption in order to sustain heterosexually affiliated relationships. Susan Ville and Elliot T. Armor recognize this view that ‘masculinity and femininity are bodily performance based on the demands of our heterosexual and phallogocentric economy, not expressions of the body’s inner nature’.² Butler’s theory of gender performativity can be applied to explain the increasing incidences of gender subversions among Indo-Fijians. The term *subversion* is used by Butler since she preferred the term subversion over resistance, as ‘it communicates something of the mire from which political agency emerges’.³ The implication here is that the agent or subject can subvert from within the discursive net the very discourse that is responsible for its intelligibility. To resist would require the agent to exist outside of this discourse in order to present an unblemished opposing stance. While there have been instances of subversions in real life situations of Indo-Fijian patriarchy, this thesis also wants to focus on its portrayal in folksongs. Gender is discursively enforced and folksongs represent an important part of this discourse. Subversive actions and language present in songs are indicative of real life subversive potential.

¹ Shireen Lateef, ‘Wife Abuse Among Indo-Fijians,’ in *To Have and To Hit: Cultural Perspectives in Wife Beating*, 2nd Edition, ed. Dorothy Courts, Judith Brown & Jacquelyn Campbell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 227.

² Susan Ville and Ellen Armor, ‘The Trouble with Gender (and Beyond),’ in *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, ed. Susan Ville and Ellen Armor (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), vii.

³ Judith Butler, Afterword for *Bodily Citations: Religion and Judith Butler*, ed. Susan Ville & Ellen Armor, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 285.

Gender is painted on the social canvas that constitutes of all social activities, principles and history. Susan Ehrlich emphasizes that ‘the routine enactment of gender is often, perhaps always, subject to institutional coerciveness of social institutions’.⁴ The social context is a significant aspect of the gendering process, thus its influence should be acknowledged rather than overlooked. The cultural and social norms form the checklist against which gender performances are assessed and approbated. Hence, it is these very factors that ‘render other performances of gender inappropriate and unintelligible and at times subject to social and physical penalties and sanctions’.⁵ While in the Fiji context extreme homophobic reactions rarely occur, passing invectives and badgering of cross dressers and feminine males in particular is very common. The *fixing* of ambiguous genitalia is surgically conducted as well but such delicate operations are left to visiting foreign surgeons. Nevertheless, these failures still prove the vulnerability of well-established gender identities and have also led to unofficial re-inscriptions of the traditionally applied gender scripts.

In the Indo-Fijian context the disentangling of the patriarchal web (due to the influx of formal education, the success of feminist oriented awareness programs and female economic independence) has led to the emergence of multiplicities of gender identities and to some extent the transfer of the control of female sexuality from men to women themselves. Catharine Mackinnon states that ‘male dominance is sexual’,⁶ implying that sexual superiority founded on physical attributes has been employed as a justification for male dominance. Thus, one of the most influential causes of female empowerment has been the dismantling of the controls that regulated female (and even male) sexuality. Indo-Fijian female sexuality has traditionally taken shape within the demands of male desire.⁷ Therefore, as male sexuality itself deviates from the masculine stereotypical past, patriarchal authority of sexuality regulation is lost. Male sexual preference has evolved and this has led to the problematization of the masculine image against which the other gender has historically been formed. The realization of the fluidity of gender on the part of agents has led to the acquisition of gender types that do not necessarily conform with societal expectations. Indo-Fijian society has increasingly witnessed the materialization of

⁴ Susan Ehrlich, ‘Trial Discourse and Judicial Decision-Making: Constraining the Boundaries of gendered Identities,’ in *Speaking Out: The Female Voice in Public Contexts*, ed. Judith Baxter (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 140.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mackinnon, ‘Sexuality,’ 158.

⁷ Viven Burr, *Gender and Social Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1998), 46.

genders outside the accustomed binary of masculine man and feminine woman. As male sexed bodies fail to embody those attributes that were discursively sanctioned to them, such as masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality, the entire sex-gender system falls into jeopardy. The myth that a particular sex had to result in a particular gender is gradually becoming undone, and would have been completely alleviated if not for the existence of religious practices and social norms that continue to support the dichotomous gender pattern.

In Indo-Fijian communities, practices and belief systems still exist that are governed by gendered mechanisms and continue to corroborate disputable gender stereotypes. Priya Chatter points out how the discourses surrounding Indo-Fijian women's 'femininity and sexuality have their roots in ancient and modern India. The idea of Indian womanhood is espoused in the feminine as self-sacrificing and subordinate and through heterosexual identity in various roles'.⁸ Comprehending the act of stereotyping is vital as much of what is perceived as correct gender in most societies is based on accepted stereotypes. Ingrid Robeyns suggests that

Stereotypes are cognitive devices that operate at the non-conscious level, and help us to make sense of the staggering amount of information that our brain constantly has to process. They are hypotheses about sex difference, which affect our expectations of their work, qualities and abilities.⁹

Androcentric social structures depend upon misinformed ideologies such as stereotypes to maintain the status quo. Butler is of the view that gender is 'a construction that regularly conceals its genesis'¹⁰ and this concealment is necessary to veil the ambiguous strategies employed to create a notion of gender that has to be generically justifiable. Indo-Fijian patriarchy has been culpable of such practices historically as some social facets still resonate. Religious observances, the institution of marriage and folklore are still closely aligned with principles formerly generated within patriarchal systems and absorbed into Indo-Fijian lifestyle under the guise of traditional culture. As Jon Archer and Barbara Lloyd state 'the way men and women

⁸ Chatter, 'Sita's Virtue'.

⁹ Ingrid Robeyns, 'When Will Society Be Gender Just?' in *The Future of Gender*, ed. Jude Browne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 58.

¹⁰ Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,' 900.

behave is the end result of a long historical process and a much longer evolutionary one'.¹¹ These means of Indo-Fijian life display the 'regimes of power'¹² that dictate the formation of identity in individuals. Butler insists that 'identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes'¹³ which are used to illustrate normative identity expectations but these could also be inverted to become 'the rallying points for a liberatory contestation'¹⁴ against oppressive social structures. For instance, when individuals increasingly fail to conform to those expectations, over time, these norms will lose their validity.

While being at the centre of humanity, gender is not constant. Therefore, through the subversion of normative genders social and political systems like patriarchy, which rely on gender hierarchy for survival, can be challenged and defeated. Mimi Marinucci suggests that the notion of performative gender allows us to gain 'recognition of the active role that everyone plays in maintaining the hegemonic binary' and at the same time their potential 'to disrupt the hegemonic binary whenever it proves to be too constricting'.¹⁵

Patriarchal Stand Against Gender Proliferation

Aware of the subversive potential in individuals, patriarchy mandates the performance of accepted gender through stringent punitive ramifications. Institutions like kinship, religion and culture are activated as support systems to pursue patriarchal objectives. For example, the persistent use of kinship ideologies in *Vivah Geet* validates the role kinship plays in overall gender stratification. Rajni identifies that 'in our songs we explain to the bride that when she moves over to her in-laws she has to be able to recognise and adopt the new relationships that await her'.¹⁶ Butler notes that:

To guarantee the reproduction of a given culture, various requirements, well established in the anthropological literature of kinships, have instated sexual reproduction within the

¹¹ John Archer and Barbara, *Sex and Gender*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 31.

¹² Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 125.

¹³ Judith Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Insubordination,' in *The Second Wave: A Reader in Feminist Theory*, ed. Linda Nicholson (London: Routledge, 1997), 301.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Mimi Marinucci, *Feminism is Queer : The Intimate Connection Between Queer and Feminist Theory* (London: Zed Books, 2010).

¹⁶ Rajni, Question 40.

confines of a heterosexually-based system of marriage which requires the reproduction of human beings in certain gendered modes which, in effect, guarantee the eventual reproduction of that kinship system.¹⁷

Patriarchy's strategic manoeuvres to sustain gender ideologies by mandating reproductions and reiterations have proven to be its ultimate nemesis. The continuous failures in the retention of delimited gender forms have crippled the binary confinement, thus allowing for gender proliferation. This has occurred rather gradually in Fiji due to the traditional social systems and the physical distance from the West. However, the diversification of gender forms here has attained some momentum proving that individuals have become aware of the plasticity of gender and are exploiting it. West and Zimmerman claim that 'gender is a socially scripted dramatization of the culture's idealization of feminine and masculine natures, played for an audience that is well schooled in the presentational idiom'.¹⁸ With the degeneration of patriarchy, cultural practices that were bred in gendered social wombs become equivocal, hence, in need of re-inscription. This signifies that the idealization of masculine and feminine traits, or vitally the appropriation of these traits to specific genders can be rectified or eliminated altogether. As far as the audience is concerned, it will have to *re-school* itself and reconfigure its perceptions of gender identity and its performance by individuals on their own terms.

From a purely feminist perspective, however, cultural and traditional practices have not amended as rapidly to keep up to date with evolving gender conceptions. This is because 'scheduled performances' of normative genders continue 'in special locations' as reflections of patriarchal expectations.¹⁹ The Indo-Fijian wedding functions are such locations where religious, cultural, patriarchal and even modern convictions converge, but where historically inspired conventions dominate rituals and this is revealed through folksong performances that narrate these events. This is despite the fact that the social space outside of this specified wedding context continues to display subversive attitudes towards hegemonic gender statuses.

¹⁷ Butler, 'Performative Acts and Performative Gender Constitution,' 524.

¹⁸ Candace West and Don H. Zimmerman, 'Doing Gender,' *Gender and Society* 1, No. 2 (1987), 130, accessed April 24, 2013, <http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=08912432%28198706%291%3A2%3C125%3ADG%3E2.0.CO%3B2-W>.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The performances of non-normative forms of gender reveal its performative nature and justify the subversions. Nonetheless, even subversive gender displays are still parodied upon socially approved designs for the opposite gender. For example, females are expected to adorn themselves with jewellery and use cosmetics to elevate their facial features. Transgendered men in their display of a varied gender mainly replicate female dressing and adorning styles. In some instances voices are deliberately controlled to a high pitched level to match with how women sound as Bindu identifies in the singing of *Vivah Geet* by men that some 'try to soften their voice to sound like a woman but the difference is clear'.²⁰ Their attempt to divert from normative behavioural patterns and expected gender performance is clearly exhibited in the way they present themselves in social settings but only up to the point that they match another existing gender. These are not like drag performances in some respects as these transgendered individuals do not limit their subversive performance to a particular audience, within a particular social context but their performance is a daily routine²¹ and this routine is internalised by them as their gender identity.

Licensed Gender Rebellion

The Indo-Fijian context proves fascinating in the manner in which subversive acts and performances have been legitimated within mainstream cultural practices. An historical analysis shows evidence of some forms of performances during significant Hindu Indo-Fijian ceremonies which is/was subversive of patriarchal canon. For example, it was common practice during weddings to have a man (sometimes two) adopt female attire and dance to songs and music for public viewership. The fact that men chose to take up this performance was indicative of the confidence they had in their own sexuality and gender, to be able to perform as the opposite gender would. These performers were renowned for their performances and the fact that they were husbands and fathers was reassuring of patriarchal dominance. Eve Shapiro asserts that 'as an intentional performance of gender, drag has been at the centre of debates about the nature of

²⁰ Bindu, Question 31.

²¹ See (Carmen White, 'Fijian Males at the Crossroads of Gender and Ethnicity in a Fiji Secondary School,' *Ethnology* 44, No. 4 (2005):313-336, accessed January 5, 2014. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3774093>).

sex and gender'.²² Butler uses drag to illustrate the performative nature of gender, the performance of women's dancing by men in the Indo-Fijian context, on the other hand, has not been analysed from such theoretical angles. Nonetheless, the fact that societally acknowledged men (heterosexual, masculine and patriarchal) display feminine actions publically as a form of folklore performance in a confined social space still reflects that gender performance can be deliberately subverted. This subversion is permissible because the performance had an intended purpose and the performers reverted to their normative gender statuses upon the dissolution of the performance stage. The intent of the performance was to perpetuate societal norms by depicting the peculiarity of cross dressing. Karma suggests that performativity needs to be 'textured with a theory of spatiality (spaces)'.²³ In the above scenario due to the *space* of the performance where such acts were sanctioned, the seemingly subversive performance is in actuality submissive to patriarchal conceptions of gender. Similar performances are still evident but the nature of performers has altered. Currently these performers are pre-dominantly transgendered men whose performances are not confined to the performance stage only. After the conclusion of the stage performance they carry on performing this non-normative gender in the metaphorical stage of life. This has stigmatized such performances, thus, it has been relinquished to become a realm for transgendered men, some of whom have turned it into a commercial activity.

Another pretext in which subversive acts are subsumed within mainstream patriarchal culture includes the performance of *Vivah Geet* by women. There are segments in the Hindu wedding where allowances are made in the form of folklore performance for acts that could be classified to be subversive of patriarchal principles and authority. These include inversion of gender and power structure, utterances of ordinarily tabooed language and themes as well as enacting erotic and impressionable bodily displays. Weddings are women centred; a rare occurrence in most functions of purely patriarchal sanctioning. Many theorists would consider weddings to be one of patriarchy's many social apparatuses that exhibit male superiority and female subordination. This is accounted for by the fact that weddings are essentially the exchange of women among two groups of men, namely the groom and the bride's father who head the groups respectively. The crudity of this trade is masked by ceremony, ritual and flair

²² Eve Shapiro, 'Drag Kinging and the Transformation of Gender Identities,' *Gender and Society* 21, No. 2 (2007): 251, accessed April 8, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27640961>.

²³ Karma, *Spatializing Gender Performativity*, 2.

and women are commissioned to discharge these activities. From a critical point of view, it could be concluded that women are veiled from comprehending the fundamental reality by the festivities that trail for weeks if not months and are saturated with fragments of work, enjoyment, material goods and rituals. *Sanatani* Hindu Indo-Fijian wedding is laden with minor and major rituals, displays of jewellery and clothing, food, folklore and superstition. Women, nonetheless, meaningfully use this opportunity to fulfil their cultural, social and religious expectations. However, at apt instances they also subvert the very authority that makes these moments possible. Their actions are considered subversive because they do not align with the patriarchally dictated ontological and hegemonic reality of gender. The women, as Butler writes, ‘need the social world to be a certain way in order to lay claim to what is one’s own, but it turns out that what is one’s own is not one’s own’.²⁴ What Butler is implying here is that the sense of power or ownership that females experience in patriarchal societies is the result of their submission. This also means that outside of that submissive state they would be dispossessed of what they may want to lay claim to. Butler sums this up as:

In this sense, we must be undone in order to do ourselves: we must be part of a larger social fabric of existence in order to create who we are. This is surely the paradox of autonomy, a paradox that is heightened when gender regulations work to paralyze gendered agency at various levels. Until those social conditions are radically changed, freedom will require unfreedom, and autonomy is implicated in subjection.²⁵

Without these alterations, a false sense of impunity and sovereignty is what women can expect.

The reason behind identifying the subversion in the Hindu wedding context is not to produce a pleasurable and subversive spectacle but to allegorize the substantial ways in which reality is both reproduced and challenged. It is the performance of gender that keeps it alive and visible, thus, it is only through its subversion that its mechanisms become apparent. Haste notes that ‘to enter the male space would be an agentic act which is contrary to the metaphor of the female role. It would occur only where women wished to assert power over men, or to disrupt

²⁴ Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, (London: Routledge, 2004), 101.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

the male world'.²⁶ While this is highly evident in Indo-Fijian lifestyle, their folk culture, meanwhile, continues to echo past and in many senses obsolete notions. The manner in which folk song performances are composed and performed, even those with subversive themes, is so fluidly engrained in ritual that it seems nothing more than sanctioned acts with no real consequence on social structures. However, if anything it reiterates patriarchy.²⁷

Lateef claims that 'weddings not only enable Indian women to become familiar with, experience and internalize *Brahminic* interpretations of maleness and femaleness but also provide the arena for the articulation and expression of discontent'.²⁸ She claims that along their performance of womanhood, femininity, 'marriedness and motherhood'²⁹ they juxtapose contestation and dislike of their subordinate position. Folksongs become the avenue to verbalize protestation since there are no religious or cultural forums available where such allegations can be made legitimately. In their analysis of challenge songs Donald Brennis and Ram Padarath establish how societal controls are temporarily lifted to allow the singers to perform their art unhindered. They surmise that:

Because songs are artistic performances controlled by a strict traditional etiquette, rather than everyday communication, singers can raise such important issues in highly insulting ways without outraging their opponents and their audiences. The vitality and interest of the songs rely heavily upon the audience identifying events and personalities in the real world of the village in the exaggerated and outrageous accusations only possible in such traditional performances.³⁰

Indo-Fijian culture regulates individuals' behaviour through an intricately designed scaffolding of taboos. One of the most tabooed themes has to do with the subject of sex and female sexuality. Lateef notes that when women danced in specific situations in weddings their dances 'frequently

²⁶ Haste, *Sexual Metaphor*, 78.

²⁷ See (Ann Gold, 'Outspoken Women: Representations of Female Voices in Rajasthani Folklore Community,' *Oral Tradition* 12, No. 1 (1997): 103-133, <https://www.google.com/#q=Outspoken+Women%3A+Representations+of+Female+Voices+in+Rajasthani+Folklore+Community.>).

²⁸ Lateef, *Purdah in the Pacific*, 340.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Brennis and Padarath, 'You and Who Else,' 57.

depict the sexual act'.³¹ She notes that 'women swing, sway and thrust their bodies in imitation of men performing the sex act'³² and in some instances they also place a hand before their crotch to model a penis. Durgama explains that 'men don't need to know what is happening in these performances because women sing insults and do cheeky things'.³³ Meena comments that in the past women 'women were not allowed to dance in front of the gathered crowd or public so they took up this space when the groom and all the men left with the procession'.³⁴ Her comment indicates the provision of a special space to allow women the opportunity to perform what is normatively suppressed in them and this acts as a pressure release valve. Men who are undoubtedly aware of these performances pretend to be oblivious as these are only meant to be entertainment forms. Rajni justifies male absence from such events by stating that 'if men see the things that transpire there then they would obviously make fun of the women'.³⁵ Schechner asserts that 'to perform acts that are otherwise forbidden, punished, taboo, unthought-of is a way of *making fun*. In human cultures these acts are often violent and sexual'.³⁶ Hence, the subversions by women are treated as nothing more than jokes and no serious considerations ensue. The women themselves do not pursue the matter further from this particular channel but that does not necessarily obliterate their subversive potential. Srivastava claims that 'women's folk songs are a safety valve meant to provide an outlet for women through which they can express their bottled-up resentment against the social order'.³⁷ Women are venting their frustration but their condemnations are diluted by ritualized performances, thus, their honesty is interpreted as liturgy. Lateef labels these pronouncements as 'licensed rebellion' that function 'to preserve and even strengthen the established order'³⁸ of patriarchy. Even though these performances attain little if any radical societal transformation, it brings to light two distinct precepts. Firstly, whether it is publically conceded or not, a sense of camaraderie exists among Indo-Fijian women. This exists in and through awareness of the asymmetries that exist in terms of gender relations and statuses in their immediate social contexts. This is revealed through the thematic similarity in songs sung by women in different geographical localities. Secondly, the

³¹ Lateef, *Purdah in the Pacific*, 342.

³² Ibid.

³³ Durgama, Question 26.

³⁴ Meena, Question 26.

³⁵ Rajni, Question 24.

³⁶ Schechner, *Performance Theory*, 235.

³⁷ Srivastava, I., 'Woman as Portrayed in Women's Folk Songs of North India,' 283.

³⁸ Lateef, *Purdah in the Pacific*, 344.

fact that women can fluently perform (even if temporarily) the gender roles associated with males reveals that they are not limited by any form of biological or physical factors. The forces that delimit and bridle gender configuration are cultural.

Edwards and Sienkewice note that:

The tensions which surround weddings are strong. The social pressure on the girls to get married and on families to find suitable partners is considerable. Weddings provide many opportunities for displaying wealth and forging new links which enable a family to consolidate or improve their position in the social hierarchy. However, opportunities like this also bring with them great anxiety and worry.³⁹

Thus, singing invectives in songs is used as a medium of discharging the emotional strain. It is common for women to sing songs meant to embarrass the *baraath*⁴⁰ for their assumption of the dominant position of 'bride takers'⁴¹ over the bride's family. The fact that singers are predominantly women also births the idea that the songs contain their personal sentiments as subordinate beings but this rebellion is sanctioned.

Subversive Acts Weaponized

Are subversive acts in both the generic social environment and in specified wedding contexts weapons against patriarchal and heterosexual dominance? Butler seems to think not as she insists that 'subversion is sometimes considered a kind of tactic that a subject deliberately instrumentalizes for an explicit purpose at hand'⁴² but that should not be considered to be its primary role. For example, when a female gets into a sexual relationship with another female with plans for a long term relationship, is it justifiable to categorize this as a deliberate act of

³⁹ Edwards and Sienkewice, *Oral Cultures*, 127.

⁴⁰ This refers to the groom's procession that arrives at the bride's home or any allocated venue for the main rituals to be fulfilled by a Hindu priest. The procession is led by the groom's father and most of his main male relatives. In the past due to transportation and distance issues such processions only consisted of men. This was because long distance travelling was required and in many cases processions had to sleep outside in sheds. This meant the women were restricted from travelling with such groups. In modern times, however, the groom's procession has many women as modern forms of transport like buses and cars make it easier for women to travel.

⁴¹ Lateef, *Purdah in the Pacific*, 341.

⁴² Butler, *Afterword*, 285.

subversion for the sole purpose of subverting? Do not other factors like emotional attachment or physical attraction have any role to play in their choice? Misconstruing subversion only as a tool would leave it as ‘nothing other than an instrumentality deployed by an autonomous will’⁴³ when it evidently exceeds that definitional perimeter. While Butler’s use of drag only illustrates subversion, the examples of performances in the wedding context mentioned earlier are actual subversions but of no effect due to the spatial and contextual conditions in which they emerge. However, it still sets precedence through its revelation of the palpable non-correspondence between material body and gender performance. Shimizu Akiko maintains that ‘the theory of parodic subversion both presumes and requires that the subversiveness of a certain identity should be visible and recognizable as parodic’.⁴⁴ In the performance by Indo-Fijian women, (both in song and dance) the contrast that pertains to their societal gender roles and their actions and words, materializes the failure of these females as agentic beings in conforming to the socially mandated gender scripts. The real intentions of these subverting females can only be discussed and not attributed any firm conclusions without any psychoanalytic study. However, from an ocular-centric scrutiny of specific wedding related performances, subversion of gender expectations is evident. More than ever before, contemporary Indo-Fijian society seems to be heading towards a more liberal version of gender determination systems. Two questions that arise out of these are; firstly, how and if these transformations will be reflected in folklore? Secondly, when will those aspects that have been historically considered subversive become engrained into normative and acceptable gender conventions?

The answers to both these questions rely on the survival or demise of the hold of compulsory heterosexuality on social norms. Butler emphasizes that ‘heterosexuality is always in the process of imitating and approximating its own phantasmatic idealization of itself-and failing’.⁴⁵ It is this failing that indicates the vitality of repetitive acts for the very continuation of the normative heterosexual culture and how failures problematize the essentialist approach to justifying heterosexuality. She notes the efforts it makes to establish ‘itself as the original’⁴⁶ and this is mechanized ‘as a compulsive and compulsory repetition that can only produce the effect

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Shimizu Akiko, *Lying Bodies: Survival and Subversions in the Field of Vision* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 137.

⁴⁵ Butler ‘Imitation and Gender Insubordination,’ 313.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

of its own originality'.⁴⁷ This need for repetitions weakens the maintenance of heterosexuality and reveals the 'fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignifications and recontextualization'⁴⁸ of the systems within which gender identities form.

Thus, the appeal for sustaining normative gender patterns based on the mechanisms of a sex-gender system has lost its lustre. To a large extent subversive gender acts in folksongs and in real life have exhibited the alternate viewpoints responsible for its collapse. The fascinating idea now is to consider how folklore performances that exemplify gendered values will react to and reflect transforming gender identities that are becoming increasingly apparent in society. However, this time the subversions embodied in these songs should not only represent social reality but affect societies transformatively for a better world for Indo-Fijian women.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 176.

It is because some texts bear messages which work on us in a way of which we are not necessarily aware that I feel it is important to analyse texts carefully in terms of the systematic language choices which have been made. Close analysis may help the reader to become aware of the way that language choices may serve the interests of some people to the detriment of others.¹

It is this quotation from Sara Mills that becomes the rationale for the following chapter in that folksongs are being treated as pieces of discourses. While folklore content may not appear systematic as Mills emphasises the fact that the songs represent the language and cultural structure of Indo-Fijians makes these songs carriers of subcurrents of social beliefs, ideologies and conventions. This chapter will present an analysis and a close reading of folksongs sung at *Sanatani* Hindu weddings in Fiji to identify those features of Indo-Fijian that perpetuate hegemonic gender discourses. The songs that are analysed here are those that reflect gender hierarchy, normative heterosexual relationships, gender stereotypes, kinship norms and gender subversions. I have directly translated the songs into English from *Fiji Baat* and their depictions and portrayals have been kept consistent with the original songs (which are provided in the appendix) to support the analysis. Indications are also made of the rituals and occasions that the particular songs narrate as contexts of performance influence the meanings in songs. The particular focus is on exposing within these *Vivah ke Geet* the repeated acts and images that validate gender expectations. The songs prove that while female singers/performers generally conform to such norms, there is a strong, if often untapped, potential for subversion of stipulated standards.

Subversive acts are favoured in Butler's theoretical construct as a means of freeing societies from biased gender notions. The Indo-Fijian society has by default always assumed a heterosexual existence. All vital social aspects have been designed on this very foundation including beliefs, values, family as well as economic and political enterprises. Butler problematizes heterosexuality and the identities formed through and within its ideological parameters. She suggests that heterosexual identities cannot be depicted as authentic as these are

¹ Sara Mills, *Feminist Stylistics* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1.

also constituted through repeated performances.² If heterosexuality was the natural type set human attribute then it would have no need to be enforced on individuals. To ensure its embodiment most if not all Indo-Fijian individuals growing up in conservative Hindu homes are surrounded with heterosexually aligned discourses. The most important feature of such discourse is its portrayal of specific gender identities mainly in a polemical binary divide which is followed by lists of social expectations on conduct and attitude. Butler insists that ‘to understand identity as a *practice*, and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life’.³ Pre-sexed agents are made to comply with these guidelines by structuring esteemed human institutions like history, culture, education and religion to reinforce the same ideologies through their practices and theoretical framework. Drenching social discourses with sanctioned notions is vital to maintaining compliance to heterosexuality as this would ensure that heterosexual oriented ideologies form constant points of reference for individuals.

Lia Litosseliti and Jane Sunderland claim that ‘discourse in a social practice sense is not only representational but also constitutive’.⁴ What they imply is that discourses do not merely display cultural and social knowledge and practices but they also embody the capacity to influence social construction. While being links to the past, discourses are devices that can impact future realities in all aspects of humanity, gender ideologies being one of them. Butler iterates for instance, that heterosexuality survives through constant repetitions and its survival is pivotal to the preservation of the patriarchally inclined gender hierarchy.⁵ Surya Munro notes that ‘patriarchal systems also underpin the institution of heterosexuality; which depends on the normalisation of opposite sex couples, and is reinforced by particular notions of the family, legitimacy and inheritance’.⁶ Therefore, it is through the interplay of various asymmetrical ideologies that the Indo-Fijian patriarchy has perpetuated a gendered society. Mills claims that ‘ideology is often characterised as false consciousness or an imagined representation of the real condition of existence’.⁷ From a feminist perspective the image and status of women depicted in

² Butler, ‘Imitation and Gender Subordination,’ 313.

³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 184.

⁴ Litosseliti and Sunderland, ‘Gender Identity and Discursive Analysis,’ 13.

⁵ Butler, ‘Imitation and Gender Subordination,’ 313.

⁶ Munro, *Gender Politics*, 16.

⁷ Sara Mills, *Discourse* (London: Routledge, 1997), 32.

these ideologies are biased. However, due to their prevalence in discursive practices they have been internalised as natural by both males and females. By problematizing heterosexuality a large part of Indo-Fijian belief system (including marriage) can also be problematized if not altered. The cause for this transformative resistance lies in the fact that conservative ideologies persist in social discourses through traditionally utilised means like folklore. While they successfully communicated sanctioned social norms in the past, they have now evolved into modern forms to continue fulfilling the same task in the contemporary society where they are being challenged by more progressive notions.

It must be noted that where subversion has created counter narratives on gender the existence of complicity and conformity especially in the case of females have reinforced orthodox values. A close reading of the following songs of Indo-Fijian wedding singers reveals their gendered discursive characteristics. Since gender is an act that is performed repetitively, the singing of these songs are gendered performances that occur in a social context, more specifically, Hindu *Sanatani* wedding functions where both singers and listeners converge within an intersection of cultural, religious and social practices. Katie Normington asserts that ‘any performance by women is merely the portrayal of a set of learned gestures; a fictitious act. In other words, women are never present upon the stage, instead the spectator views a representation of womanhood’.⁸ In the case of the folksong performers what the audiences view is the depiction of Indo-Fijian womanhood as determined by the Indo-Fijian patriarchal systems which regulate the signifying practices that eventuate into gendered identities. This portrayal is meant to act as points of reiteration for other individuals being gendered.

Collette Harris explains ritualised subversive practices as acts that solidify the place individuals hold in society. She states that:

The power regimes that form human subjects may also force them into displays of characteristics other than or, perhaps more accurately, beyond those that have been internalised, in order to be accepted within their own communities, that is to say, people do not necessarily internalise everything that is supposed to constitute their (gender) identity.⁹

⁸ Katie Normington, *Gender and Medieval Drama* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 35.

⁹ Harris, *Control and Subversion*, 22.

While Harris recognises how society coerces people into certain positions it can also be noted that it is within these restrictions that the performative nature of gender is highlighted through gender performances that are below or beyond the set parameters of individual gender assignment. When women subvert within the confines of cultural practices and rituals they sustain sanctioned femininity and men momentarily forego their regulation of women's conduct only to assume it with more consciousness of their privileged gender position.

The lengths of *Vivah ke Geet* are arbitrary because they are composed to be performed. This gives the singer the prerogative to repeat certain verses or omit them from their performances depending on the context and time. In the past weddings songs were sung mostly by a group of women who only had the *dholak* accompanying their performance. Babita reports that 'in olden days 20 or so women would just sit in a group and sing the songs at the weddings'.¹⁰ Most singers today prefer to do individual performances and have three to four different musical instruments in their groups. Singers also use sound systems including microphones and loud speakers which permit the singers to sing solo whereas in the past women had to sing in groups to be able to remain audible when many guests were present.

The continuous performances of these songs prove that they are not mere strings of words tied together poetically to a recreational end or they would have been abandoned at the advent of modern entertainment forms. It is evident that *Vivah ke Geet* transact a higher function that necessitates their survival as Lalita points out that 'today folk-singing has advanced so much that so many people's livelihood depends on it'.¹¹ However, as this thesis has aimed to depict the Indo-Fijian gender situation is also manipulated through this medium. Fundamentally, these songs embody power discourses; they represent social norms, gender stereotypes and specific images that signify people's beliefs, conditioned values and ideologies. These songs personify hegemonic discourses and allow them the corporeal position from which to impact society. Via the gender performance in their songs, the singers either reinforce the ideas of womanhood or reflect subversive tendencies. In either case it is patriarchy that is the actual beneficiary. Ruth Wodak notes that 'patriarchal inequality is produced and reproduced in every interaction' mainly in a social setup where even subversive behaviour is ingeniously instrumentalized to produce

¹⁰ Babita, Question 10.

¹¹ Lalita, Question 8.

approved genders.¹² The importance of these songs is emphasised in Meena's comments that 'these songs are not jokes, they have a significant place in the entire ceremony. People need to know that this is not about money and that when people want to come into this field they should realise and recognise the religious, cultural and traditional value it holds'.¹³

The language that is used in the wedding songs is gendered. Even though the songs are performed through women's voices, the language largely fails to embody the specific qualities to be potentially subversive of phallic ideologies as women perform what is expected of them rather than transcendent images. The seemingly subversive songs in reality reinforce the asymmetrical gender standards rather than causing an inversion of the androcentric status quo because the women mostly perform non-normative behaviour momentarily and such performances are categorised as norm or *just for fun*. To break out of such profiling women singers have 'to prove themselves possessors of intellectual and powerful voices, not just beautiful voices suitable for emotionally expressive speaking (or singing)'.¹⁴

Songs Portraying Males/Grooms are Ritually Superior

Songs 1 and 2 in the appendix are sung at the groom's home a day before the wedding and at the arrival of the groom at the wedding venue respectively. The first song is a jovial song and is reflexive of the mood of the groom's female relatives. While female family members, mainly cousins and friends, apply oil and turmeric paste to the publically exposable bodily parts of the groom (face, upper torso and legs), they make fun of each other and the groom. These are more of pleasant exchanges of witty taunts, not genuine insults. The apparent discomfort of the groom due to being surrounded by many females is exploited by the singers. Grooms become uncomfortable because the restrictive spaces between males and females are temporarily suspended for the performance of this ritual. Traditionally Indo-Fijian society strictly prohibits the mingling of opposite genders where touching and unnecessary conversations transpire. Thus, the scenario where females are allowed to physically touch a man in most parts of his body is only permissible as a socio-cultural practice.

¹² Ruth Wodak, introduction to *Gender and Discourse*, ed. Ruth Wodak (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 13.

¹³ Meena, Question 38.

¹⁴ Judith Bean, 'Gaining a Public Voice: A Historical Perspective on American Women's Public Speaking,' in *Speaking Out: The Female Voice in Public Contexts*, ed. Judith Baxter (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 27.

Folksongs continue to be sung that describe the groom and praise him mainly by comparing him to *Rama*. The singers also assume the point of view of various family members and narrate their emotions. In this case the mother's view has been taken. She is full of pride for her son for his marriage. Since she stands close to him, she also becomes the centre of attraction and adoration of the crowd. The song emphasizes the importance of the groom and how everyone finds significance by being related to him. It must be noted that the other titles of relatives that are substituted with *mother* have to be in relation to the groom, for instance, *fua* (his father's sister), *jija* (his sister's husband). In a patriarchal society mapping relations around male relatives especially fathers and patrilineal ancestors is mandated.

The third line of the song narrates how the groom's mother is standing behind her son and then the next line pronounces that 'now *everyone is adoring*' her. This demonstrates the idea that the mother is adored as the mother of a son rather than as an individual in her own right. She finds prominence in that social space by being associated with the groom. Her physical positioning is also symbolic as she stands '*behind*' the groom (man), thereby representing the subordinate position of most women in a patriarchal society. Gangoli notes that it is through the conformity of 'women within patriarchies' to 'relevant patriarchal norms of female behaviour' that women gain social acknowledgement and in the *adoration* given to the mother of the groom in the wedding ceremony we see a reward for conforming to motherhood.¹⁵ Lateef adds that at a 'later period of the life cycle a woman reaps the benefits of having endured the hardships of being a young wife and daughter-in-law in a strange and sometimes hostile environment'.¹⁶ Hence, weddings in effect are social events in Indo-Fijian Hindu life where women redeem the favours accumulated by aligning with patriarchy.

Song Two also depicts the significance given to the groom. The husband is always portrayed as more dominant of the couple and this notion is applied to the marriage rituals to confirm this hierarchy. Hindu custom implies the groom and his procession has to be treated with utmost reverence throughout the ceremony.¹⁷ The song narrates the event when close family members of the bride present *jeona* to the groom. The song instructs that the groom be served in vessels made with gold. He is to be given water from Ganges and Indus which are spiritually significant rivers for Hindus. Serving the groom in golden utensils and giving him water from the

¹⁵ Gangoli, *Indian Feminisms*, 50.

¹⁶ Lateef, 'Wife Abuse Among Indo-Fijians,' 227.

¹⁷ Mayer, *Peasants in the Pacific: A Study of Fiji Indian Rural Society*, 1961, 67.

holy rivers is indicative of his higher status in relation to in-laws. The treatment he receives is comparable to a king's and nothing less is acceptable. While reflecting good values this also indicates the high esteem in which the husbands are to be perceived by wives. This custom sets the precedence for the bride and her family to always continue with such conduct for the husband. To clarify the groom's standing, the song describes that his rest area is decked with flowers (line 7). This is significant because Hindus use flowers as items of worship presented to god during prayer and here the groom gets the same honour. Even during the ritual where the bride's father officially and through religious rites *gives away* his daughter in marriage, he has to view the groom as Vishnu, an important Hindu god. The father offers his daughter, who has to be decked in gold, as an understanding, devoted, pure and healthy virgin. Such rituals combined with years of submersion in androcentric discourses compel women to resign to their given roles. Irigaray states that women begin to perform these roles 'so perfectly as to forget she is acting out man's contra phobic projects, projections and productions'.¹⁸

Therefore, songs that use the choicest adjectives to praise the groom are not idle words since they reflect the hegemonic hierarchy of genders in Indo-Fijian society.

Songs Portraying Female Stereotype in the Specific Role of *Fua*

The ritual of popping rice involves frying raw rice in oil in the *mandap* or the altar constructed within the shed/hall at both the bride and groom's home. This ritual is observed on the night before the actual wedding. The bride and groom's *Fua*¹⁹ using some broom sticks as spoons fries the rice, and the popped rice is later used in the actual wedding ceremony. In cases where there may be more than one *Fua* priority is given to the eldest or the one who is seen to best fulfil social expectations. One of the privileges of being a female who conforms to social norms is the opportunity to participate in such rituals. In this case being the groom's or bride's *Fua* qualifies one to take up the central role in this ritual. However, the woman who is chosen to do this task must not be a widow or a divorcee or someone with poor reputation. While the role belongs to the paternal aunt any woman who wants to assume this traditional role in the ritual has to meet up with other specific conditions. Since there are punitive consequences of deliberate

¹⁸ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, translated by Gillian Gell, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 53.

¹⁹ Paternal aunt of the marrying individual.

and irrefutable subversion, women who fail to exemplify sanctioned femininity and womanhood are denied access to such forms of public honour. In such ways a woman with a questionable repute is often ostracised by society. Allowing such women's participation in significant religious and cultural rituals would warrant the expression of displeasure from the wider social circles. Moreover, the union between two families through marriage is only approved after careful scrutiny of family members on both sides. Thus, distancing from relatives who do not comply with social conventions has been more of a norm with Indo-Fijians.

The chosen woman dresses up in full cultural attire and is positioned inside the *mandap*, in full public view. The attire also includes accessories like vermilion that is placed in the hair parting to depict her marital status. She is constantly being commented on and praised by other women and relatives as she performs this task. As the groom's (or bride's) paternal aunt performs her rituals in the *mandap* the wedding singers direct songs like songs three and four describing her actions, appearance and also taunt her in good humour. For example, '*sitting in the mandap the sister looks extremely bright*' (Song 4 Line 1). If she is playful enough to respond to the singer's comments through her gestures or facial expression then this leads to the singing of more songs, some of which could assume a subversive and suggestive nature.

Song three is an example of the type of songs that are sung as a narration of the *Fua*'s actions and the emotions of others in relation to this ritual. In this song her brother-in-law's heart is shown to be beating heavily, '*Listen listen to the brother's heart beating against his chest as his sister pops the rice*' (Song 3 Line 1). The assumption is that the brother is overwhelmed by the amount of money he has to pay the sister as is the custom during this ceremony. Male relatives are required to place *neg* (monetary gift) for her effort. On the same note, it must be added that the woman who is at the centre of this ritual playfully demands money to be placed beside her as she pops the rice. This role has become stereotyped, and the seemingly subversive demands for money are culturally scripted. The money itself does not mark her independence but exhibits kinship ties of dependence between the families. This also becomes an example of redeeming accumulated favours for conformity to social obligations along kinship and gender expectations.

Through witnessing countless repetitions of such performances by other women, girls grow up internalising such roles as inherently mandatory. They in turn perform the very same acts when they arrive at those junctures further justifying this role's existence to the next

generation of females. The point to note here is the portrayal of a specific femininity that entails love for material goods and desire to look culturally fashionable. Such qualities are perceived as gender norms depicting women as seeking opportunities to buy new clothes and dress up for social functions. Butler emphasizes that gender is ‘a regulatory norm’²⁰ and are actualised through actions and these repetitive actions ‘congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being’.²¹ This implies that the sister’s choice (song 4) of copying the performances of sisters from other weddings causes this image to become part of Indo-Fijian culture’s image of femininity. In that sense, culture itself is both a portion of and the outcome of the process of gendering.

Song 4 narrates the sister’s role in the wedding which appears to revolve around the customary goodwill payments. She is depicted as unsatisfied by any other gifts except money. Lines 3, 5 and 7 of Song 4 repeat the lyrics *she wants more dollars*. The point of interest in this scenario is the refusal of the gifts by the sister. Even though the items being offered are typical materials associated with women, the sister appears to prefer money to them. In one sense this action reflects the power of choice that a woman has even in a traditional context. The fact that she understands that choosing money permits her more options in purchasing whatever she desires instead of settling for what she is given, depicts her comprehension of basic economic principles. This can be interpreted as an improvement of women’s status from the post-*girit* period when they were economically dependent on men as the prevalent notion was that women could not cope with ‘tiresome and physically demanding work on cane farms’.²² This coupled with security concerns due to the attitude of certain men against women as a result of the poor reputation women had been given during the indenture period, women opted for protection and economic support through marriage. The continuation of this practice in many ways resulted in the adoption of domestic work for women and all economic activities for men. The naturalisation of this ideology was also one of the main reasons for denying women education as it was perceived that they had no need for it when managing households. Lal also mentions that ‘Indian Indentured Women stood accused in the eyes of their own community as well as those of the

²⁰ Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 53.

²¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 43.

²² Lateef, *Indo-Fijian Women-Past and Present*, 6.

official world²³ which led to a regulation of their femininity and sexuality. Such negative reports and the lack of female political representation meant that little if any protests were made against such conventions by the women who were most affected by them. Thus the economic naivety and dependence of women became the official status quo.²⁴ This song however, portrays a woman who understands the value of money and publically demands it rather than succumbing to the lure of items.

Another stereotype depicted in the song is the sister's compliance with a certain outward appearance. As the song claims, she looks '*extremely bright*' in the central position she occupies. In one sense the woman in such a position experiences that empowerment and attention that one finds deficient in a patriarchal set up. This could also be interpreted as a clever patriarchal ploy to release the build-up of gender and power related tensions. The experience of being in a central position in a public sphere distracts women from the underlying asymmetries that affect their daily lives. Other women can also look forward to such occasions when they would once again assume significant positions publically, even if temporary. The mention of money and gifts is also pivotal because materiality has often been used as a method of ensuring conformity by women. Indo-Fijian women have historically been kept economically dependent upon men. This has been a deliberate attempt to ensure that men could use money and goods as leverage to sustain their submission. Lateef pronounces that one of the main characteristics of the Indo-Fijian community has been 'male dominance and female subordination, males as economic providers and females as the economic dependents, spatial and social confinement of women' as well as 'male inheritance of family property'.²⁵ It is conclusive that Lateef notes the close reciprocity between female subordination and their economic depravity as one leads to the other within a vicious cycle. She clarifies that by restricting women to the domestic realm they are 'denied access to the labour market; consequently they are rendered economically dependent on males'.²⁶ Even in cases of violent marriages women are forced to tolerate such treatment chiefly

²³ Brij Lal, 'Kunti's Cry: Indentured Women on Fiji Plantations,' in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1, (Delhi: Sage Publications, 1985), 58.

²⁴ See (Biman Prasad and Nalini Lata, Institutions and Gender Empowerment in the Fiji Islands,' in *Institutions and Gender Empowerment in the Global Economy*, Kartik Roy, Hans Blomqvist and Cal Clark (eds.), (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2008), 223-240).

²⁵ Lateef, 'Wife Abuse Among Indo-Fijians,' 218.

²⁶ Ibid.

because relying on social welfare benefits and aid from charitable organisations after divorce or separation remains an effective disincentive.²⁷

The women in this song are performing a certain gender script as discursively created by society. The repetitions of these acts have over time established these behaviour patterns as normative. Furthermore, the song promotes heterosexual relationships by emphasizing relationship titles within binary oppositions along gender lines, for example, father/mother, brother/sister-in-law. Even though people have the potential and freedom to act, their actions are controlled by social norms and their acceptance of these regulations is what consequently validates these norms. Using gender performativity as a theoretical construct it can be concluded that any alteration any individual initiates could lead to wider social transformations. For example, the sister in the context of this song could decide to act out of the socially expected mode of behaviour by not requesting *neg* or dressing differently thus discontinuing ‘the repeated stylization’.²⁸ This could potentially lead to the normalizing of the alternate behaviour into culture. The issue, nonetheless, is that most women in such contexts act complicitly as it offers them substantial privileges and attention.

Songs Portraying the Bride in Marriage

For songs 5 and 6 the singer adopts the voice of the bride to narrate her emotions towards her father while in Song 7 the singer assumes an instructive tone by advising the bride to comply with the expectations of her role as a daughter, sister and wife. Bindu notes how when they sing they ‘mostly sing about the father and daughter’s relationship. We sing about how he has brought up the daughter from her childhood and now is getting her married’.²⁹ Initially, in Song 5 the bride asks the father to provide the best quality materials to construct the area where the wedding will be officiated. The bride utters ‘*Bring the greenest bamboos my father, Nicely and*

²⁷ For more specific data on women’s social and economic in Fiji can be attained from the following sources: Wadan Narsey, *Gender Issues in Employment, Underemployment and Incomes in Fiji* (Suva: Vanuavou Publications, 2007.), United Nations Population Fund, *An Assessment of the State of Violence Against Women in Fiji 2008* (Suva: UNFPA Pacific Sub Regional Office, 2008)., Asian Development Bank, *Country Gender Assessment: Republic of the Fiji Island* (Manila: Pacific Regional Department and Regional and Sustainable Development Department, 2006)., Judith Shaw, *Fiji Country Report* (AusAid, 2008): 39-59, accessed November 19, 2013, http://www.ausaid.gov.au/Publications/Documents/fiji_study.pdf.

²⁸ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 43.

²⁹ Bindu, Question 11.

respectfully decorate the mandap' (Song 5 Line 1 & 2). She is acknowledging the father's traditional position of authority and responsibility for providing all the material requirements of the family, including the wedding. In Line 5 she compares herself to Sita and her husband to Rama by stating that '*Rama and Sita will sit in there*'. This is significant because Rama is the reincarnation of the Hindu God *Vishnu*, thus Rama is also worshipped as a god by Hindus. His wife Sita, as the story is related in the Hindu holy book *Ramayana*, accompanied Rama into fourteen years of exile away from his kingdom. She let go of the royal life and luxury to accompany her husband in exile in a forest. Sita's dedication and loyalty to her husband have often been used as a model for Hindu wives. The fact that this idea is also mentioned in the wedding songs indicates that Sita is the epitome of wifehood for Indo-Fijian women to emulate. This implies that if a wife has to sacrifice luxuries, or suffer some difficulties in life, it is part of her feminine attributes. In many cases women are expected to tolerate even physical domestic violence by husbands as a 2008 United Nations Report points out that 'the power traditionally accorded to males in Fiji results in an official sanctioning of sexual violence'.³⁰

The 7th line describes the emotional state of the bride's mother who is reluctant to let her daughter go by '*holding onto my feet*' but the bride knows that the father will finally give her away in performing his duty of *kanyadaan* (gift of virgin). In Hindu beliefs the giving away of the virgin daughter during the marriage ceremony is regarded as the highest duty of a father. While giving away a daughter in marriage is significant for Hindu fathers, there is also emphasis on the daughter being a virgin. This acts as an indication of the woman's purity and the father's ability in maintaining that purity. The hedging of 'virginity and defloration in elaborate rites and interdictions'³¹ becomes a means for Indo-Fijian fathers and brothers to justify the regulation of movement and choices of females as Alice Schlegel notes that 'virginity of daughters and sisters (like the chastity of wives) is a marker of the integrity of individual men'³². The fact that the bride actually wants her father to perform this rite indicates how she has been conditioned to believe from childhood that her true family is the one she acquires after marriage. She has to prepare for that transfer long before she even approaches marriage age. This exchange of women is a common feature of 'a social system characterised by gender asymmetry and the overall

³⁰ UNFPA, *An Assessment of the State of Violence*, 19.

³¹ Millet, *Sexual Politics*, 48.

³² Alice Schlegel, 'Status, Property and the Value on Virginity,' *American Ethnologist* 18, No. 4 (1991), 724, accessed June, 3, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/645449>.

subordination of women’, which Dube believes to be the consequence of ‘the structuring of women as gendered subjects through Hindu rituals and practices’.³³ Savita mentions how ‘according to our religion and culture we teach girls from a very young age how to even pray and maintain good relationships. When we see girls doing the wrong things during prayer ceremonies we realise the failure of parents in teaching them the rights ways’.³⁴

Gayle Rubin emphasises that ‘kinship is the idiom of social interaction organising economic, political, and ceremonial, as well as sexual activity’³⁵ in human societies. The consistent inclusion of relationship titles and kinship bonds in wedding songs indicates that Indo-Fijian society is also one where ‘one’s duties, responsibilities, and privileges vis-à-vis others are defined in terms of mutual kinship or lack thereof’.³⁶ Rubin is highly critical of kinship’s mechanisms, asserting that they contain ‘bewildering rules’ and that ‘their internal complexity is dazzling’.³⁷ Her disapproval of kinship ties is rooted in the claims of Lèvi-Strauss who noted that kinship systems were fundamentally structured on ‘an exchange of women between men’.³⁸ This means that if the bond between men was to be maintained it mandated heterosexuality to ensure that only women were exchanged and that this exchange found justification. Any system that commodifies women is male dominated and biased, thus inappropriate for achieving any semblance of equity. While a theoretical and critical observation of the notion of kinship uncovers its covert impairments, it remains a reality of Indo-Fijian lifestyle, and for those in the Hindu way of life, the decision to marry off daughters is a cultural and religious privilege and right. Thus, Dube summarises that ‘kinship is not merely a moral code but provides the organising principles which govern the recruitment to and placement of individuals in social groups’.³⁹

The song also reemphasises the wife’s duty to apply vermilion to her forehead as a conspicuous act to indicate the finality of her marriage potential. Finally, as is common in patriarchal societies the bride gives the credit for her birth and life to her father. She also expresses gratitude for the father who has ‘*nurtured*’ (Song 5, Line 11) her in a manner that she

³³ Dube, ‘Construction of Gender,’ 15.

³⁴ Savita, Question 42.

³⁵ Gayle Rubin, ‘The Traffic in Women: Notes on the “Political Economy” of Sex,’ in *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975), 169.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 170.

³⁷ *Ibid*.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 171.

³⁹ Dube, ‘Construction of Gender,’ 1.

is now acceptable to another man as his wife. Her transfer is validated through cultural and religious ceremony as well as legal means. Her praises for her father act as official recognition of the father's supremacy in the patriarchal family which gives him authority to sanction her *exchange* enforced by culture. This is why Rubin claims 'that the world historical defeat of women occurred with the origin of culture, and is a prerequisite of it'.⁴⁰ She states that:

Kinship systems do not merely exchange women. They exchange sexual access, genealogical statuses, lineage names and ancestors, rights and people-men, women, and children-in concrete systems of social relationships. These relationships always include certain rights for men, others for women. "Exchange of women" is a short-hand for expressing that the social relations of a kinship system specify that men have certain rights in their female kin and that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or to their male kin.⁴¹

The Indo-Fijian society in every way reflects these definitive principles as they operate within families and in the wider community.

Song 6 is the narration of a conversation between a father and a daughter. The daughter has come of age and wants to be married, and expresses frustration that her father can '*sleep soundly*' (Song 6, Line 1) instead of finding her a husband. The first idea to be noted in this song is that the girl admits that as part of her gender performance she has to marry by a certain age. Indo-Fijian society deems with suspicion girls who remain unmarried after a certain marriageable age. Sixteen is the legal marriage age and a few parents continue to get their daughters married at this age especially when they cannot afford or do not want to support their education. UNFPA states that 'many poor families prefer to invest in boys' education because it is still believed that boys will grow up and look after them'.⁴² With poverty level standing at twenty-five percent, this makes many females vulnerable to denial of their right to education and employment leading to early marriages. Durgama explains how she was denied access to formal education because the prevalent conception of parents was that 'girls would end up writing love

⁴⁰ Rubin, 'Traffic in Women,' 176.

⁴¹ Ibid, 177.

⁴² UNFPA, *An Assessment of the State of Violence*, 8.

letters to boys once they learn to write'.⁴³ Late 20s is usually considered the upper limit for women to get married to avoid two main problems; firstly, it becomes difficult to find a suitable husband after that age has passed. Secondly, depending on the social status and location of these women they may become victims of unsubstantiated insinuations which further hinder chances of marriage. Hence, in accordance with these social expectations parents begin searching for suitable husbands for their daughters when they feel the socially acceptable age has arrived. The song in fact portrays that the girl herself has become anxious due to the social expectations and questions her father's delays. When songs such as these are publically sung they impact the women in the audience who relate the themes of such songs with the social discourses that concur with the compulsion to marry.

The daughter in the song is also specific about the type of husband she is seeking and grooms also have to fit into these stereotypical images of man. Once again Rama is depicted as a suitable husband. According to legend Rama lifted up a bow as part of the requirements of a marriage contest and broke it into two. He portrays power through his action and that Sita was destined to become his wife. This was the image of men in a patriarchal society and the song suggests that women themselves are aware of this and are intrigued by men's *cleverness and maturity* according to the song. Most songs praising brides only relate to their beauty and not mental aptitudes.

Rubin claims that 'the exchange of women is a seductive and powerful concept. It is attractive in that it places the oppression of women within social systems rather than in biology'.⁴⁴ The exchange of women is at the centre of marriage but the festivities and celebrations suggested in Song 7 as part of Hindu weddings conceal this truth. The end of every verse repeats '*Such a joyous moment is this*'. Anyone listening to the song can be manipulated into believing that every occurrence is '*joyous*' and divert their attention from the exchanges, power play and gender stratification. All the different rituals that have to be observed, the many formalities that have to be met and the inclusion of material elements to the entire wedding performance, effectively occupies the senses of all individuals concerned. As the song suggests *henna* designs, bright clothing and jewellery are some of the materials that concern women during Hindu weddings. In fact in most cases these become the point of interest and most

⁴³ Durgama, Question 20.

⁴⁴ Rubin, 'Traffic in Women,' 175.

conversations revolve around these. This song is also sung with a quick beat with all instruments being played as it personifies the celebratory atmosphere that a Hindu wedding should be. Another expressive space is opened up for the women through the suspension of certain social limits which further diverts their attention. Bindu explains how ‘even women are able to force the men to dance for that moment because of the happy atmosphere. All their actions are justified by the joyous occasion. Mainly in strict families there are many restrictions on women’s actions, most of the limits do not apply in those circumstances’.⁴⁵ The singer’s repetition also helps emphasise that the decision to carry on the marriage tradition is a socially acceptable one. The 3rd line suggests that ‘*people have come from far and wide*’ which informs the individuals getting married of the social support for their conformity. This song actually does what Oring explains to be a function of folklore which is ‘maintaining conformity to accepted patterns of behaviour’.⁴⁶ The song also simultaneously instructs the bride to abide by the social expectations of a wife by moving into her in-law’s home and being obedient to those who reside there. She is patronised into submission by suggesting that her actions affect her ‘*brother’s reputation*’ (Line 10).

Songs Portraying the Groom in Marriage

As stated earlier, weddings tend to reflect patriarchal values at work, mainly in the legalized and sanctioned exchange of women. Songs 8 and 9 are focused on the attitude of typical grooms and their procession who enjoy a culturally elevated position when compared to the bride’s cohort. In the case of Song 8 the singer narrates the arrival of the *samdhi* (the groom’s father) with the wedding procession at the wedding venue. The point of view adopted here is that of the bride’s father because he calls the groom’s father *samdhi* and he is also the one in charge of welcoming the guests. Bindu clarifies that ‘even though I am the one who is singing, it is understood that these words are actually of the bride’s father and mother’.⁴⁷ The actual ritual that occurs during the welcome includes the bride’s father washing the groom’s feet and the prayer offerings by the priest. This song also takes a turn towards gender subversion as the female singer calls the groom’s father ‘*naughty*’ (Song 8 Line 5). In the Indo-Fijian culture guests are accorded highest respect and in conservative families women veil their faces as a sign of this

⁴⁵ Bindu, Question 25.

⁴⁶ Oring, ‘The Functions of Folklore,’ 294.

⁴⁷ Bindu, Question 25.

respect. While uttering such words cause subversion of the codes of hospitality it must also be noted that within sanctioned femininity an Indo-Fijian woman it is unorthodox cannot pass such comments at important guests. In the list of expected visitors to the residence of a family with daughters, moreover, their daughters' grooms and grooms' fathers would appear right on the top in terms of importance. The female singer oversteps her social limitations to publically insult the most important guest by calling him names and falsely suggesting that he is *winking* at other women. However, it would be totally inappropriate to suspect any malice on the part of the singers. This is because the singer is performing a role that is part of the general custom and ritual of weddings. The female singer also subverts her role by publically insulting the groom's maternal uncle or '*Samdhi's brother-in-law*' (Song 8 Line 8) and this time associating him with the bride's mother. She insinuates that the groom's uncle is eyeing the bride's mother. While the relationship that develops between these two particular individuals is one that permits a level of witty verbal exchanges, it would be going too far along social conventions to suggest intimacy between them. The female singer, who should be respectful and silent in public due to the expectations of her gender, assumes the authority to speak publically. However, she not only speaks (through her songs) she utters insults and invectives towards significant male personas within that social context. Jean Baudrillard's concept of simulation which 'is to feign to have what one doesn't have'⁴⁸ fundamentally explains the women's position in this situation. Culturally endorsed regulations are pre-instated to curtail or modulate the subversive acts so patriarchal authority is never threatened as Baudrillard asserts that 'pretending or dissimulating leaves the principle of reality intact'.⁴⁹ However, he goes on to clarify that within pretence hides a more subtle fact in that the mere act of faking problematizes reality. In this specific case when women can assume a subversive role depicts the potential for this pretence to develop into an actuality.

Song 9 is a conversation between Rama who represents the groom and his mother. It narrates the groom's departure to his bride's hometown for marriage to participate in the marriage contest to win Sita. In the 3rd line, Rama (the groom) is confidently asserting that '*I will break the bow, mother*' and win the contest. In other words the groom implies that he can achieve everything with his ability. In the following lines he goes on to state that he will destroy

⁴⁸ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

the pride of the other great warriors who will come to marry Sita as well. He concludes that he will definitely bring her back as his bride. At every level this song depicts male supremacy as it emphasizes Rama's prowess as a warrior and his confidence as a ruler and Sita becomes the objectified trophy that validates this. At no point in this song is Sita's choice reflected, however, it should be clarified that according to legend she also desired marriage to Rama.

The above song is from an album by Daya Wati, a popular wedding singer, whose songs are played in many weddings around Fiji. This particular song is from an album produced specifically with songs sung for the groom. Interestingly, nine out of the ten songs in this album parallel the groom with *Rama*, the Hindu God. As a reincarnation of the supreme Hindu God, he was the crown prince and an acclaimed warrior. From a purely narrative point of view he could be seen as a ruler and a powerful one at that. He in fact personified patriarchy, being the most central character in a male dominated tale in the *Ramayana*. Analysing Rama as a character in a literary text from a feminist perspective, he can hardly be classified as an ideal husband. This is because he succumbed to societal pressure and rumours and doubted his wife's chastity after she had been in captivity of an evil king (Ravana) for a certain period of time. Sita, his wife, had to endure a fiery trial to prove her purity as a faithful wife. This serves as a typical example of victim blaming which still persists. The UNFPA report states that 'ideas and attitudes on traditional gender roles are so engrained in Fiji that cases of sexual harassment and abuse are often not thought of as criminal offenses, particularly if the woman's character or modesty is considered questionable'.⁵⁰

The portrayal of women in the same epic is mostly negative, as it is Rama's step-mother who got him exiled and there is another female character Surpanakha who is the villain's sister. She was a widow and tried to entice Rama and his younger brother but failed. Her jealousy led her to Ravana where she heaped praises of Sita's beauty before him, leading him to kidnap Sita to force her to marry him. Eventually, this series of events leads to war and the absolute destruction of Ravana's kingdom. Much of Hindu life and art are dominated by the teachings of this holy book and undoubtedly the portrayal of women here does have an influence on how women are viewed generically in society. The tradition of singing *Vivah ke Geet* was adopted from the *Ramayana* and even songs today continue to be based on the themes and characters from it. Similarly, the images of women and men and the expectations of both these genders are

⁵⁰ UNFPA, *An Assessment of the State of Violence*, 19.

also influenced by the images portrayed in the Ramayana and are discursively enforced through the songs. Bascom iterates that folk art has traditionally been used in most societies as a social control mechanism whereby their exhibitions have been wielded to make individuals assimilate or reject certain attitudes.⁵¹ In a patriarchal society these songs would definitely carry male centred ideologies, thus providing constant justification of the male dominated social structures. Weddings songs can simultaneously patronise as well as discourage unacceptable attitudes. Brennis and Padarath who carried out a research focused on Indo-Fijian folk songs also emphasised that ‘the subject matter of the songs often illuminates moral and social issues which are important’.⁵² For instance, they emphasised that in the singing of challenge songs the singers brought out critical issues like religious and political differences and debated these openly through songs where these singing events were carefully controlled by strict conventions, therefore, preventing ill-feelings and social disparities.

Songs Narrating the Farewell of the Bride (Sentimental)

The farewell of the bride at the conclusion of the wedding is depicted as emotional in Songs 10, 11, 12 and 13. Babita clarifies that ‘I am adamant that at two instances it is mandatory to shed tears to flow and that is at a funeral and at the farewell of a bride ... if a bride departs without crying, in my view she is immature and that she is too modern’.⁵³ More often than not, the singer herself would shed tears and her voice would adopt a painful tone. Bindu adds that ‘I have seen brides breaking into tears after listening to my songs as they actually go around the fire or is being seen off’.⁵⁴ Even in commercialized audio albums, singers sing these particular songs sentimentally and this is sensed in their voices. This is because in the traditional sense, this moment marks the severing of all the rights the bride has in her natal family. Traditionally daughters lose all legal rights to their father’s property as well upon marriage. This was mostly because fathers would accumulate as much money, jewellery and other gifts of furniture and clothes as was right for a daughter and present it at the moment of *Kanyadaan*. In many circumstances daughters could not ask for any further financial help from her father’s family

⁵¹ Bascom, *Folklore and Anthropology*, 33

⁵² Brennis and Padarath, ‘You and Who Else,’ 57.

⁵³ Babita, Question 30.

⁵⁴ Bindu, Question 32.

after the performance of this ritual. Her husband's home becomes her new home and family and regardless of what she experiences it is part of her duty to adopt and adjust her life to that environment. Babita explains that at times singers assume the viewpoint of brides' mother to tell the bride that

What was pardoned at her natal household may not be pardoned at her in-laws so she has to adjust to their way of life. The mother must make it very clear that she has to consider her husband's parents as her parents and she should not run back to her mother for any form of advice or help. She no longer belongs here.⁵⁵

It is mostly unheard of that married daughters take care of their parents in case of the absence or unwillingness of other siblings. In such cases the son-in-law and his immediate family's consent was what influenced the eventual decision of whether the parents could live with her married daughter's family. It should be noted however, that parents would exhaust all options before they would even consider living in such an arrangement. This is simply because of the stigmatisation such situations could create in social circles.

Even though there are instances of Indo-Fijian couples settling with the bride's family, these arrangements are sometimes tenuous, especially if the bride has other siblings living in the same house. In rural settlements this was always highly unorthodox and was discouraged. Any woman returning to her natal household with or without her husband became the target of gossip. The situation of any man who accompanied his wife in such a situation would be worse. Gossip and insinuation may seem as feeble punishment for non-conformity to social norms. However, one only has to understand the workings of an average Indo-Fijian community to grasp how effectively gossip is used as a social control in regulating behaviour of individuals.⁵⁶ The post *girit* society was mainly acephalous both politically and socially, thus communal discourses were instrumental in forming and maintaining social conventions. Indo-Fijians have been

⁵⁵ Babita, Question 11.

⁵⁶ See; (Donald Brenneis, 'Grog and Gossip in Bhatgaon: Style and Substance in Fiji Indian Conversation,' *American Ethnologist* 11, No. 3 (1984): 487-506, accessed December 23, 2013,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/644628>.,

Andrew Arno, 'Fijian Gossip as Adjudication: A Communication Model of Informal Social Control,' *Journal of Anthropological Research* 36, No. 3 (1980): 343-360, accessed December 23, 2013,

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3629529>.)

extremely cautious of becoming the topic of discussion in social circles and this fear to a great extent impacts their decisions. Even though this mentality is gradually losing its hold, in most rural settings and to a substantial level in urban Indo-Fijian societies, it continues to influence people's perceptions. To prevent becoming the centre of any critical discourse people keep themselves in check and this is in itself evident of the social order that is discursively sustained.

The 2nd line of Song 10 emphasizes how the '*father's household*' will lose its happiness. The father's authority is acknowledged as the head of the family. The 5th and 6th lines when the singer adopts the brides' voices and asks '*what error did we commit that we received this punishment?*' is interesting. Firstly, what is the error the singer means? She cannot be referring to the marriage since it is socially sanctioned. The bride as well cannot have any qualms about getting married as she has been continuously prepared for this day both mentally and psychologically by her family as soon as she gains consciousness of her gender expectations. This is done by saturating her life with the gender script that she has to perform and introducing regulatory controls to mould her into the female stereotype. The fact that she witnesses many other women acting out the same gender expectations, assures her of the legitimacy of what she is entering into. In fact Babita mentions that 'I realise that brides know from long before that they will marry and separate from her natal family but she has to respectfully cry for her father and mother and appreciate what they have done for her before she departs'.⁵⁷ Thus, the error being made, as mentioned in the song, cannot be marriage. If the wedding singer was subversive enough to bring into question the act of marriage itself, she would in one sense be problematizing her own social function as a wedding singer. Therefore, the '*error*' refers to the fact that a female had been born in their family and that they had to bear the pain of raising and preparing her for another family which was more fortunate to have had a male. The emotional attachment because of the kinship ties is understandable but the song states that the family is being punished and this remains unclarified. It could also be interpreted as an unofficial acknowledgement of how hard it is for a bride's family who feel a double sense of guilt that they have to let their daughter go even if they may not want her to leave.

For the last four lines, the singer assumes the voice of the bride's parents and encourages the daughter to uphold her natal family's reputation by conforming to the social conventions of a married woman which are embedded in religious beliefs. The singer's attempts to incorporate

⁵⁷ Babita, Question 30.

such lessons in her song is explained by Brenneis who claims that ‘Fiji Indian Hinduism is characterised by a stress on moral behaviour and character rather than devotion; didacticism is a feature of most public events’.⁵⁸ The singer performs this social pedagogic role and also highlights the traditional practice of blaming natal parents of women for any forms of non-compliance with the demands of their new life. To avoid social condemnation the parental voice reinforces the societal principles that govern the conduct of a woman since it is only by abiding with these that she can maintain a respectable status.

Song 11 also portrays the departure of the bride to her husband’s home permanently at the conclusion of the marriage ceremony. It is sung at a slower pace and some singers do employ a voice that depicts pain. The words and tone of this song makes one feel that the bride feels compelled to let go of her past and embrace her future. Social expectations imply that she remove the memories of her life with her natal household as it may interfere with her new life. Rubin states that ‘more constraint is applied to females when they are pressed into the service of kinship than males’.⁵⁹ The singer in line 6 is using the narrative viewpoint of the bride who states that ‘*I have to set my heart*’. This implies that regardless of her personal stance social norms surrounding the act of marriage demand that she coerce herself into submitting her life to another man. The patriarchal nature of Indo-Fijian society dictates that a woman moves to her husband’s household after marriage and that all that she possesses or may attain in the future becomes her husband’s as well. Line 8 is also symbolic because the bride will be ‘*decorating*’ her husband’s home which in a sense portrays her as an object of attraction. Nonetheless, before she can contribute to her marital life she first has to instate ‘*the desire for my husband*’ in her heart. Marriage has created a false imposition to act out the role of a wife and submit to the husband and fulfil the subsequent roles. She also has to assume the husband’s surname and name her children after his family name. Rubin goes on to write that ‘a woman must become the sexual partner of some man to whom she is owed as return on a previous marriage’.⁶⁰ This she claims to be the means of maintaining ‘the flow of debts and promises’⁶¹ among men. The departure of the bride may seem as a minor occurrence to a bystander not privy of its real significance. But within

⁵⁸ Donald Brenneis, ‘Passion and Performance in Fiji Hindi Vernacular Song,’ *Ethnomusicology* 29, No. 3 (1985): 400, accessed December 22, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/851796>.

⁵⁹ Rubin, ‘Traffic in Women,’ 182.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

Hindu rituals this is a symbolic act that represents the subduing of a woman's natal ties and pre-marital life by the expectations of her married life.

Song 12 is sung at a slow pace for emotional effect. The fact that in this song the singer draws upon the relationship between the mother and the daughter is in one sense the recognition of a mother's contribution to the process of transforming a girl into a woman worthy of a man. Verse 1 briefly focuses on the father's role where he is shown as the provider who owns the '*compound*' in which she was nurtured. He is also shown as the strong man who is able to place his daughter on his '*shoulders*' (line 6). This act portrays the father's protection over his daughter whereby he keeps her away from situations where things that could harm her chastity exist. The mother, on the other hand, is portrayed as gentle and delicate throughout the song. She sings '*sweet lullabies*' an act that is repetitively mentioned in the song and she fulfils all the essential duties of a primary caregiver. The last verse shows that the mother '*taught me and made me literate, gave me education, made me worth marriage*' (Verse 5). It basically points to the fact that the rationale behind availing literacy and education to girls was to make them better wives and mothers rather than making them independent. The fact that the mother was at the centre of all this grooming and preparation also depicts how women play a significant role in getting other women to conform to gendered social expectations. The close connection between mother and daughter as depicted in this song validates the notion that Indo-Fijian girls also recognise the immense contribution of their mothers to their overall nurturing into sanctioned femininity.

At certain points the song becomes very personal and specifies the intimate details of a mother's nurturing. For example, the song relates in verse 4 that '*From wet beddings She lifted me out, with her delicate hands She bathed me*'. While in one sense the song rekindles the warm memories the bride has of her mother, in another sense the song exalts the role of motherhood. In the Hindu beliefs the concept of motherhood is second only to that of a wife. Thus, the song channels young women's minds towards motherhood by enshrining the vital position it occupies in a family and in the life of an individual. More interestingly, meanwhile, verse 2 line 6 states '*she would hide me in her veil*' which points to Lateef's idea of *purdah* as mentioned in her work *Purdah in the Pacific: The Subordination of Indian Women in Suva, Fiji*. The word *Purdah* in its direct translation into English means curtain but in the context in which it is used by Lateef it signifies veiling or enclosing. In this metaphorical sense the song is suggesting the responsibility

of a mother in protecting her child from dangers in the outside world. At the same time the *purdah* performs a dual role of filtering and controlling the learning experiences of the child to ensure that she only learns and practices what is socially approved and sanctioned. While Lateef believes in a recreation⁶² of gender roles Butler also asserts the absence of any essentialist or inherent gender. If their views hold true than there is every possibility that Indo-Fijian women can also perform gender roles and embody gender identities that differ from the stereotypes conventionally enforced. The fact that most do not, confirms the power and efficiency of patriarchal discourses that still achieve their aim of producing conforming females who in turn advocate the very same values that render them complicit when seen from a feminist perspective. Wedding singers and their songs form a vital link in the sustenance of these discourses.

Song 13 while belonging to the category of emotional farewell songs is different in one key sense. When in the other three songs the bride appeared to have passively negotiated with her situation, in this song she assumes an accusing tone. The singer narrates the bride's emotions where she questions her removal from her natal home. The choice of words is of interest as the vernacular word used by the singer is '*nikaal*' which in direct translation means '*being removed*' (Line 2). Instead of stating that she is being *sent* or married the singer opts to use *removed* which connotes coercion on the part of the bride's family. This is interesting as the bride is not expected to question such patriarchally motivated traditions where women are mandated to live at her husband's home. In fact most females witness over time many women going through the very same process. It is through such processes that women get to comprehend the social mechanisms that govern them and direct their lives as gendered social beings. Despite the prevalent discourse however, it seems that the bride presumed in this song finds a need to rationalise what is transpiring with her. What makes the song more emotive is her debating with her parents. She questions that if her parents were to let her go eventually then '*Why oh mother did you give me birth, Why oh father did you wait on me*' (Verse 1). In one sense she is subverting her gender expectation by questioning her separation via marriage by feeling betrayed. It is highly unlikely that she was unaware of this eventuality as the overpowering and ubiquitous gender discourses that mandate a woman to marry in order to fulfil all her stipulated roles is successfully in operation. This debate however, problematizes the notion that females are inherently and unconditionally aligned towards marriage and separation from their natal households.

⁶² Lateef, *Purdah in the Pacific*, 103.

In line 7 and 8 the bride questions ‘*What was my mistake oh father*’ that ‘*from my home I am being removed?*’ Was her error being born in a patriarchal society or being born with a body that was deemed inferior at birth for having certain biological traits that are less esteemed? Or was her ‘*mistake*’ her own complicity and compliance with social norms that endorsed asymmetrical manipulation of normatively gendered individuals? Adinkrah notes that:

The weight of patriarchy appears to exact a particularly heavy burden on Fiji Indian females, commencing at birth and continuing to the end of the lifecycle. From the day she is born, her presence is treated as a melancholic occasion, and she is openly resented for not being born male.⁶³

Accordingly the bride calls on her parents to ‘*open your mouth*’ (line 9) denoting that she wants them to explain their role in materialising this scenario. However, there is not much complicit parents can say as they are also burdened by social regulations. While they have to fulfil their own specific roles as parents they also have to ensure conformity in their daughter as society holds them responsible as custodians of culture and social values. The song nonetheless, is not void of meaning and the utterances made through it are definitely reflections that exist in some quarters of society. It is possible that such rigid traditions have come under scrutiny and need to be rationalised for those women who perceive themselves independent and well able to economically support themselves, their husbands and families. Women in such circumstances, see no cause for the compulsion to leave her natal home permanently for her in-law’s residence. The composition and performance of such a song reflects that folksingers who, though normally complicit to hegemonic patriarchal notions of gender and culture, are also aware of the changing social situations and rising female consciousness that births contention against out-dated practices. This song is an insight into the ever growing female awareness of their empowerment both economic and social. Minakshi proves this change when she concludes that ‘*nowadays even the brides do not cry as much as they used to before*’.⁶⁴ What she insinuates is that the tradition of leaving natal families permanently with minimal or no further connection is more of a suggestion now rather than a serious consequence of marriage as it was in the past.

⁶³ Adinkrah, ‘Patriarchal Familial Ideology,’ 288.

⁶⁴ Minakshi, Question 25.

Songs Narrating the Farewell of the Bride (Joyous)

Song 14 is about the bride departing for her husband's home after marriage but it is presented in a melodious and joyful manner. It does not contain the sentiments of the daughter's departure but is bent on identifying and praising what is socially envisioned as the positives of marriage. The 3rd and 4th lines of the song relate that the woman has found a husband after many prayers as is customary for Hindu Indo-Fijian girls belonging to religion-oriented families. The belief is that this sacrificial act in conjunction with prayers will enable them to secure a healthy, accomplished and caring husband. The song also hints at the notion of romanticized love between the pre-nuptial couple. Love marriages would typically support such a notion since the marrying couple is intimately aware each other's emotions. However, the same cannot definitely be claimed for arranged marriages which were very common among Indo-Fijians in the past and still exist to a certain extent, mostly in rural communities. Within this arrangement the individuals being married were seldom aware of or in contact with the person they were marrying. Durgama, for instance, confesses that 'I had not seen my husband before the wedding at all. I actually stole a glance at him when he was going to the river for a bath before the wedding'.⁶⁵ The prerogative for selecting a spouse was with the parents of whom the father was the dominant partner. How much decision making power a young girl with minimal or no education and almost no economic capacity would have in such situations barely requires elaboration mainly within patriarchal authority. As a result of their upbringing and psychological training the women obediently play along with what is socially demanded of them. The song depicts the bride *stealing glances* at the groom in the excitement of finding a husband, thus enabling her to step up to the next level of the gendered social hierarchy. In extreme arranged marriage scenarios many brides and grooms do not even see who they are marrying until after marriage. This practice was very common in the past, mainly when cameras were not the common commodity they are today. Thus, children relied solely on their parent's choice of a spouse for them in the absence of a photograph since asking to see the potential partner would be tantamount to questioning the parent's judgement. This could be the other reason why the bride '*covertly*' (line 10) glances at the groom as she is curious to find out what he actually looks like. The song concludes by re-emphasizing that marrying off daughters is part of parental duty and

⁶⁵ Durgama, Question 30.

responsibility. Performing *kanyadaan* is also shown as a blessed and privileged task. The bride is also oblivious to the exchange centred around her as she is submerged in the social event that the song describes as ‘*Auspicious events*’ (Line 14) that a traditional, fully fledged Indo-Fijian *Sanatani* wedding is.

Song 15 is sung with a fast beat as it is the social lubricant that assists in sustaining the joyful atmosphere of the wedding. Nonetheless, the song is not void of social values. One of the most notable ideologies the song promotes is the advantages of marriages for women. For example, through constant repetition the song creates the notion that it is after marriage to an influential, powerful or wealthy man that the bride will achieve the privilege to rule. The song reiterates ‘*That my princess will rule now as well*’ (lines 6, 10, 12). The emphasis on *now* suggests upon her marriage. The groom who is symbolically portrayed as a ‘*ruler of palaces*’ (line 1) has the ability to transform a woman into someone who can rule just through marriage. Lateef believes that by emphasising ‘the higher status of married women over unmarried women’⁶⁶ the Indo-Fijian society reinforces the importance of marriages and families. The fact that a female singer is iterating these views of marriage verifies that women themselves consent to these ideologies and are complicit in the reification of male centred social mechanisms. It is due to her subordination to mainstream patriarchal viewpoints that she is even permitted to fulfil the role of a wedding singer. Rajni explains that

When you sing well, and you sing the acceptable lyrics and when you are singing for the right purpose the people will surely give you a lot of respect. When you do present yourselves well people overlook minor errors in singing ... so sing in a manner that people respect you at the weddings and outside of the wedding as well.⁶⁷

If her gender performance outside of the performance stage contradicts with the socially approved expectations of her gender then she would be denied the right to publically proclaim these values. Thus, in the past most folksingers were matriarchs who were made ‘to internalize the idea of their own inferiority’.⁶⁸ The idolising of matriarchs by women causes them to follow

⁶⁶ Lateef, ‘Rule by the *Danda*,’ 47.

⁶⁷ Rajni, Question 9.

⁶⁸ Lerner, *Creation of Patriarchy*, 218.

a path of subservience, where they later become an arm of the same patriarchal system by enforcing the very notions that oppress women.

In the song the parents are repetitively instructed to '*Farewell her with joy*' as they have fulfilled their social responsibility of raising and marrying a girl. The first two lines of verse 2 serve as a reminder that parents of girls can never rest until they have sent off their daughters through marriage to their husbands' homes. This practice is mentioned in lines 6 and 7 '*an old custom of the world it has been, who has ever been able to retain their daughter?*' This line emphasises that marriages are mandatory as it is uncustomary to keep daughters unmarried or at home after they are married. From a patriarchal perspective it can be argued also that a man would face restrictions in exercising his own familial dominance and authority if he lived at his wife's natal home as it already has a dominant male in the form of his father-in-law. Secondly, such practices would cast doubts on a man's economic power which is needed to maintain social standards and gender hierarchy.

Song 16 is performed with a fast tempo as it is meant for entertainment and it often attracts dancers as the first line proclaims '*Loud music and joyful noises, Happiness canopies Janak⁶⁹ today*'. This is one of the songs that uses various kinship ties and promotes the familial ideology that is at the centre of Indo-Fijian life and rituals. This is also a song where women are at liberty to publically pull out men from the audience to dance with them. However, these men have to be close relatives, more often the relatives mentioned in the song itself as Meena clarifies that '*the privilege given to women is restricted within certain relationships*'⁷⁰ in the sense that it is pre-determined which family member one can approach based on his/her own kinship title. The only reason given for this allowance is that it is a cultural practice and that it is essential to sustain the social mood. Patriarchy manages to use even such instances to highlight its ideology of kinship.

A close reading of the song reveals again that marriage is a vital social function as it brings joy and strengthens family ties. The singer portrays the ritual of rice popping to be a family affair and then goes on to name almost all the immediate relations of the bride. The concept of *neg* is mentioned and it should be noted that only the male relatives are being sought after for money as verse 4 states that '*Excited are the mama and mausa, flaunting away their*

⁶⁹ *Janak* was the name of Sita's natal kingdom. In most Hindu wedding songs, this name is given to the home of the bride as is done in this song.

⁷⁰ Meena, Question 25.

money'. This is a clear residue of post-indenture conditions where economic power belonged to men. The songs have not evolved sufficiently to reflect actual social changes in this particular regard or these have been kept out deliberately due to the dominant patriarchal mind-set. This scenario reflects one of the biggest drawbacks of tradition and it is the unawareness of current practitioners as to the source or rationale behind a certain cultural practice. This also stands as one of the most influential reasons for societies remaining stagnant in terms of social progressiveness.

Songs Narrating the Circling of the Altar

Song 17 is a narration of the most important portion of a Hindu wedding when the bride and groom circle the altar as the priest recites special chants to make the marital bond holy and official. Seven rounds are made altogether and it is only at the end of the seventh round that the marriage is deemed complete. This ritual is of feminist interest as it embodies the depiction of gender hierarchy. This is because the groom leads the first four rounds of the circling and the bride leads the last three. The extra round given to the groom is indicative of the dominant role he has been granted by religion and society. He remains the head of the family and also supersedes any influence his wife has in society as an individual. Rohini Lata also interprets this asymmetry in getting the man to lead an additional round to the woman as re-emphasising 'the traditional/submissive role of the women who are subjected to their husbands'.⁷¹ Dube establishes that within the gendering process of a girl, emphasis is placed on her 'possible need to bow before the wishes of the husband and his family, and in general, on the submissiveness and obedience, as feminine ideals'.⁷²

It must be added at this point that this song closely follows the rituals being performed in the *mandap*. While it serves as a narration for the rituals by stating for example, 'I am making the first round' or 'second round' and so forth, the song adds a deeper meaning to the ritual by evoking the emotions of the bride, her relatives and the guests. It also brings into focus the power vested in the rituals in that performing certain minor acts can in fact embody a more significant value. For instance, circling of the fire may seem as a redundant act without the legal

⁷¹ Rohini Lata, 'Means of Connecting the Contemporary Indo-Fijian Women Towards the Imaginary Homeland' (Supervised Research Project, University of the South Pacific, 2009), 8.

⁷² Dube, 'Construction of Gender,' 3.

documentation of marriages, nonetheless, the bride can comprehend that each of the rounds actually separate her from her natal family. This alludes to the fact that this ritual is not a stage performance where acting and music coincide. *Vivah ke Geet* narrate real life occurrences in the sense that the marriage rituals are public acts that hold significance beyond the stage on which they are performed.

The song is symbolic as the singer narrates the distancing of the bride from her family as they complete each round of the altar. She calls out to each member of the family but receives no replies. This is because as the wedding ceremony progresses the distance between the daughter and her family widens. The 7th verse narrates the end of the seventh round when the bride resigns to her position and accepts '*I now belong to a strange home*'. It may also now become clear to her why she was not receiving any replies from her family members who were aware of what social conventions came into play after the marriage of daughters.

The song also emphasizes kinship relations along heterosexual lines as all the relations presented here are in binaries of father/mother, grandfather/grandmother. The Indo-Fijian patriarchal system relies on kinship and Rubin claims that 'kinship systems rest upon marriage'.⁷³ This makes heterosexual marriage vital to the survival of patriarchy as within this marriage form female sexuality remains male-regulated. Therefore, the cultural, traditional and religious conventions made available to the gendering process unitarily advocate the transformation of male and female into men and women. Rubin claims that each of these two polemic divisions of humanity is depicted as 'an incomplete half which can only find wholeness when united with each other'.⁷⁴ So anyone gendered within these constraints is made to develop a heterosexual mind-set through their submersion in gender discourses that present getting married and fulfilling the resultant roles as the ultimate purpose of their life.

The prevalence of the sex-gender system is also evidenced in this instance. In the Indo-Fijian society a child's biological attributes are used at birth to determine their sex. Thus, from childhood, girls know that they will eventually get married and assume the role of a wife, mother and subsequent other feminine roles; an evolution away from their past life at her natal household. The Indo-Fijian society obviously suffers from the wrongful conflation of sex, gender and sexuality. However, since this conflation serves patriarchy well there is no apparent effort on

⁷³ Rubin, "Traffic in Women," 179.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

their part to correct such misconceptions either. Shannon Sullivan asserts that an urgent need exists to ‘rethink dominant contemporary conceptions of gender and the notions of sex and sexuality’.⁷⁵ She justifies the need for such urgency to soften the rigidity with which these concepts are categorized into having binary binds where each pole of the binary opposition stands as a sharp contrast to the other. In a society like Fiji, such notions prove to be highly restrictive.

When Bindu, the composer of this song, performs Song 18 in her album, the pain in her voice is audible. She attempts to maintain the sombreness that is created upon the conclusion of circling the altar as the marriage nears finalisation. Aligning with the content, the song is performed at a slow tempo although all the traditional musical instruments can be played with the singing. The song is aimed at reinforcing the values of obedience and respect into the bride. These values are identified in the vows she takes in the circling ritual. The lines ‘*Forget it not dear bride*’ is repeated at the end of all the verses, thus, the aim of the song can hardly be misconstrued. In relation to the purpose of such songs Babita explains that ‘the main thing is that the bride has to ensure that she commits herself to the man she is marrying and fulfils her promises’.⁷⁶ Bindu adds that ‘the teachings are in the song. She has to be a good partner to her husband. The intelligent girls understand what we are trying to tell them through the songs’.⁷⁷ Fundamentally the song re-emphasises qualities of an Indo-Fijian female stereotype some of which Lateef identifies as being ‘quiet, demure, unobtrusive and obedient’ and to be physically and socially inconspicuous’.⁷⁸

If a female is controlled and manipulated prior to marriage then this control and manipulation only increases post-marriage. Gauri states that ‘after marriage the parents do not have any control over the daughters so this responsibility comes on the husband to help keep the order’.⁷⁹ The honour of her natal household and now her husbands are both bestowed on her as is socially programmed. This puts double pressure on her to be careful of her attitude, character, actions and appearance. Sawin argues that ‘a patriarchal system survives by keeping women under control, requiring them to subordinate their will and their desires to goals set by and for the

⁷⁵ Sullivan, ‘Reconfiguring Gender,’ 24-25.

⁷⁶ Babita, Question 40.

⁷⁷ Bindu, Question 40.

⁷⁸ Lateef, ‘Rule by the *Danda*,’ 45.

⁷⁹ Gauri, Question 42.

advantage of men'.⁸⁰ The social norms that expect women to be submissive force women to conform to the gender roles sanctioned by society. From a daughter and sister she becomes a wife, daughter-in-law, sister-in-law and later a mother. The performances of all these roles within cultural boundaries reduce the subversive potentials in women. This is due to the sense of responsibility a woman is made to feel by constantly reminding her that her actions and words affect the reputation of her father, brother or husband. Line 12 reiterates that '*The companionship of girlfriends is over*' which serves as a reminder that she is no longer a child but is a mature woman who can now take the burden of family and marital life. While asking her to '*fully commit*' (Line 9) to serving her in-laws it is also constantly emphasised to her that giving up or abandoning her duties is not an option since she has promised '*To live together forever*'. Her commitment is life-long as Indo-Fijian customs and Hindu religion particularly prohibit remarriage of women. This ensures that divorce and separation are not valid options available to married women within cultural circles. This has coerced women in many cases to bear ill-treatment, abuse and violence in order to avoid social disapproval on leaving their husbands.

Songs of Playful and Subversive Nature

Song 19 is highly subversive as it ventures into off-bound territories in Indo-Fijian culture, especially in public spaces. Such songs are sung at the conclusion of the wedding when important members of the groom's household are invited to sit at the altar where the wedding has taken place. They are served lunch separately from the rest of the invited guests. However, this event becomes one of taunts and teasing where the singers and relatives from the bride's side make fun of these guests. In this particular song the singer is accusing the '*sister*' (Line 1) of the groom's father of being promiscuous. The language in the song is loaded with puns and double meanings. In normal circumstances, any Indo-Fijian man would be seriously offended at the mention of one's female relatives in such a manner. The idea was that sisters, mothers and wives were under the protection of brothers, fathers and husbands whose duty to safeguard the dignity of these female relatives. This duty was taken so seriously that at times the women themselves were treated violently when their own actions threatened family dignity. In the case of this song's performance, however, there is usually no offense taken for the sake of fun and custom

⁸⁰ Sawin, 'Performance at the Nexus of Gender,' 47.

and for the fact that people realise that it is the roles of women that are targeted and not the women holding those roles in particular. Despite the prevalence of such rituals there are often cases of offended individuals at weddings who may not be able to ignore the barrage of repeated insults from the singers mainly when these insults exceed sanctioned limits. Savita clarifies that ‘we really cannot sing such insults publically. Sometimes we hear of the singer criticizing the groom’s sister or the *Samdhi*’s sister and these are disrespectful’.⁸¹

The first line states ‘*Samdhi your sister roams around openly*’ (Line 1), which portrays the idea of a woman roaming around aimlessly. This is unconventional for Indo-Fijian women and engaging in such activity was a disregard for social norms with punitive consequences. The terms ‘*Chaina kera*’ is used figuratively to mean penis and the fact that ‘*She runs into the cane farm all the time*’ (Line 4) suggests that she wants to have sex with a cane cutter. In village situations cane cutters had very low social standing as they were seen as mere labourers, and the idea of sleeping with such men was distasteful mainly for women coming from relatively affluent families. The cane cutters usually had a rough demeanour, with calloused palms and they frequently used abusive language as a result of working in difficult physical conditions and being in male company more often. Thus, the association of a respectable woman with such a person publically was nothing less than insulting. The 7th line contains the word ‘*ride*’ which is euphemistically used and contains connotations of sexual acts. The singer actually uses the English word *ride* in her song and the song suggests that the sister is not there to hire a taxi but to gain a *ride* from the drivers. This also ties in to the last line of the song where the sister is portrayed as desirable. The actual word used is ‘*maal*’ and it is not a word to reflect beauty but is an adjective that is used to describe a woman who is sexually desired. The 10th line also portrays the *samdhi* standing with an aubergine that represents a phallic symbol. Since the aubergine is being served as food why then is the ‘*samdhi standing*’ (Line 10) with it and not serving it on a plate? The power play between the two dominant males from the two most important families is being highlighted in this song. The bride’s father can be represented as publically challenging the groom’s father with a phallic symbol momentarily because within the cultural space of marriage the bride’s father has a subordinate position.

The female singer subverts her gender performance by taking up such a stance in a public forum; nonetheless, her culpability is nullified by the context of her stage performance that

⁸¹ Savita, Question 18.

makes allowance for such action. The same woman would be held guilty for making such claims beyond the physical performance stage in the wedding context. The justification for such outbursts is the need to balance off the apparent asymmetry that exists between the groom and bride's family. The entire feeding process also includes the gifting of money by the bride's family to persuade the men eat the food that is placed before them. The relevant songs narrate the entire session and aim at encouraging both parties to perform their customary roles with good humour.

Butler argues that 'gender is the mechanism by which notions of masculine and feminine are produced and naturalised, but gender might very well be the apparatus by which such terms are deconstructed and denaturalised'.⁸² The acts and utterances in the song are considered subversive because on the foundation of heterosexual kinships there are certain restrictions that maintain an acceptable social order. Breaking away from sex categories and heterosexual normativity will also consequently eradicate the social restrictions that are in many instances responsible for the submissive nature and non-articulation in Indo-Fijian women. From childhood they are psychologically conditioned to have weakened self-esteem since most decisions concerning them are made without their input, while males in their own families enjoy relatively more freedom and right to an opinion. This may also work negatively for men by developing an inflated sense of ego in them but females are the main victims of such unjustified restrictions.

Song 20 is meant for entertainment and dancing. It has a fast and melodious tone and the accompanying music is also rhythmical and fast. Such songs can be sung on the two nights prior to the actual wedding so that family members and relatives can have fun. When these songs are performed women relatives sometimes force male relatives to join in the dancing. Women also play around with the turmeric paste and make fingerprints on each other's and men's clothes. In many ways these are subversive acts as it is highly unorthodox for women to dance publically with men, some of whom are related to them and established cultural protocols govern their interactions. The words of the song are also subversive as they point out a particular female relative '*Fua*' as attracting unnecessary and disrespectful male attention. The song also implicates elderly old men who are generally held in high regard in society as being tempted by an attractive woman. They are shown to be '*going crazy*' (Line 4) after witnessing the

⁸² Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 42.

appearance of the *Fua*. The younger boys are also depicted as whistling at an older woman. The woman presented in the song is actually acting out of her gender script by employing extreme lustre and gaining male attention.

It must be noted that such playful songs are essential to Hindu weddings for various reasons. Firstly, they act as social lubricants that create and maintain an atmosphere of enjoyment. The gathering of family, friends and neighbours is kept vibrant through these songs. Secondly, the songs help in the release of many forms of pressures and tension that build up during wedding preparations. Hindu weddings are complex choreographies that require many participants and they are also composed by numerous series of minor and major rituals. There are, at the same time, many obstacles that could arise and disturb the preparations. One, for example, could be deaths of close relatives which would restrict major familial celebrations for certain periods of time. There are many examples of marriage cancellations through such causes in Fiji. The immensity of the preparations make these cancellations agonizingly inconvenient. Thus, when everything comes together well and the wedding festivities officially begin, songs of this sort become mandatory to finally discharge the anxieties. Furthermore, Indo-Fijians perceive these songs to be traditional practices that need to be performed regardless of current concerns and debates. Babita explains that ‘such songs are sung for the sole purpose of entertainment. When it was sung for Rama’s wedding the women did sing to make fun of Rama’s procession but they were not vulgar or disrespectful’.⁸³ It is clear that in an effort to preserve the notion of sanctioned femininity these singers accuse other subversive song performers of being out of sync with cultural expectations but the plasticity of gender is revealed in their observations of other female singers who perform beyond or below their gendered roles.

Song 21 is also sung for entertainment purposes in weddings but belong to functions outside of the actual marriage ceremony. The underlined words refer to female relatives of the groom and these terms are substituted with other female relatives in the course of singing. The song can be seen as depicting subversive notions as far as the gender performance of Indo-Fijian women is concerned. Firstly by comparing the mother and sister with the *Lal Muniya* the singer suggests that they are very agile and unstable. This does not comply with the image of a stereotypical notion of an Indo-Fijian woman according to patriarchal principles. Extreme rapidity is unfeminine according to these standards and this is the reason for associating these

⁸³ Babita, Question 25.

particular women with these actions. It is done for the sake of having fun during the functions. At the same time it serves as a reminder that such actions and conduct are tolerated as *fun* only in certain circumstances. The song also states that the groom's mother '*drinks alcohol*' (Line 4) which to conservative families is extremely subversive of sanctioned feminine gender expectations. Many marriage proposals are rejected and in some instances even weddings are called off when families learn of a potential's bride's indulgence in such subversive acts. Marriage proposals can also be rejected if it is discovered that the girl being suggested for marriage consumes alcohol while in the case of a man this is part of his gender performance. From a traditional stance the characteristics of an ideal marriageable Indo-Fijian woman in Shoiln's view is one who can 'cook, respect her elders, look after the family and the home and do housework'.⁸⁴ Many marriages are also called off, sometimes at the eleventh hour, when stories of the potential bride's former relationship with another man reach the groom's family. Men, on the other hand, may have such habits but these are ignored since they fit into the male stereotype in the Indo-Fijian community.

Song 22 is an important portrayal of how women qualify for certain privileges by abiding with patriarchal demands on them. These begin with the purchases of material goods such as clothing and jewellery for the wedding functions. Then women occupy the central roles in almost all the rituals that constitute a Hindu wedding. This happens to be the first indication in this song. It consists of praises for female relatives of the groom who are most likely involved in fulfilling their cultural and religious duties for the marriage. When one is portrayed as '*brightly shining*' (line 1) another is described as '*incredible, shining like the moon*' (lines 6 and 7). By performing these duties they are in fact showing their allegiance to social norms which are built upon heterosexual relationships and subsequent kinship ties. The second indication in this song has to do with the marital status of the participating women. The mention of red *bindiya* (Line 2) suggests that the women who are joining in the rituals are actually married. Therefore, married women are praised and exhibited throughout this song to ensure that other females are encouraged to follow suit into marriage to become eligible for certain social privileges.

Song 23 is a fast paced song, with a flowing rhythm. The phrase '*I know now*' is repeated several times deliberately by the singer to emphasize the sexual learning experience of the bride after marriage. The Hindu wedding is traditionally conducted under the assumption that the bride

⁸⁴ Meena, Question 41.

is a virgin, thus she is portrayed as excited about the whole concept of sex. The song contains obvious symbolisms within the Indo-Fijian language, where the parrot represents the image of a penis due to the shape of its beak and for the fact that this term is generically accepted to mean penis in Indo-Fijian colloquialism. Line 3 and 4 state '*My spouse's parrot does not know how to speak, My mynah⁸⁵ exclaims*'. The above song is subversive since it is full of insinuations, depicting the sexual encounter between the spouses. This song deliberately suggests the sexual relations between the married couple who are assumed to be having sexual intercourse for the first time. The repetition of '*I know now*' continues to suggest the sexual encounters and the lessons learnt. The song states that '*My mynah exclaims*' suggesting that what she symbolises is part of her body. While the sexual suggestion is clear, the part of her body she means remains distorted which tends to be more subversive as it is open to many interpretations. The singer could mean her mouth or her vagina and it could be a deliberate play on words by the singer to imply the naivety of the bride in sexual matters. Lines 7 and 8 of the song state '*My spouse's parrot wants to peck at chick peas, My mynah wants to peck at pearls*'. In this case chick peas are the woman's nipples and pearls refer to the man's testicles. These interpretations were clarified by the singer through a male relative due to the obvious social barrier in her opening up to a strange man (me as the interviewer). Sadly, gender hierarchy persists here as well since the man's penis is symbolised with a parrot which is a beautiful and rare bird. The woman's sexual contribution (physical body) is represented as a *mynah* which is a very common and normally annoying creature.

The Indo-Fijian culture is very particular in restricting sexual discourse within very tight social circles. For example, it is rare for parents to discuss sex related issues with children. In most cases such learning is left to formal education or peer groups. There are apparent dangers of this as young men acquire distorted ideas on sex and sexuality from individuals who may themselves be wrongly informed. Furthermore the influx and accessibility to pornography, women's image suffers further misrepresentation as Mary McGowan identifies its role in female discreditation even to the point of contributing 'to the political disempowerment of women'.⁸⁶ Regardless of such consequences sexual discourses are largely banned from both secure familial circles and the public sphere.

⁸⁵ A kind of noisy bird common to Fiji.

⁸⁶ Mary McGowan, 'On Pornography: Mackinnon, Speech Acts, and "False" Construction,' *Hypatia* 20, No. 3 (2005): 27-28, accessed January 5, 2013, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3811113>.

However, most of the adolescent or adult wedding guests would hardly miss this interpretation as it seems highly unlikely that the singer could mean anything else. Besides the occasions on which these songs are sung are those moments when singers in an orthodox fashion can employ invectives and can also venture into restricted themes and discourses. Sexual discourse due to its apparent absence from normative conversations attracts most reaction from audiences, thus it is highly present in these special songs. Sex related suggestions in language and action are heavily presented in wedding songs since sexuality is one of the most veiled discourses for Indo-Fijians. Sex and sexual relations are apparent and existent even though below the surface of public interactions. Since such aspects are closely tied to emotions and passion of people the probability of such discourses emerging unexpectedly into the communal domain is high. To minimise such outbursts, controlled and inhibited levels of exposure is permitted through secure mediums like folksongs. This turns the potentially negative consequences of disclosures into acceptable and symbolic reflections of veiled social realities which are also often humorous and entertaining.

An important point to be noted from a theoretical perspective is that the song is based on a heterosexual foundation, that is, the '*spouse*' is obviously male and the narrator female. This song contains a double play of complicity and subversiveness. Bringing sexual discourse to the public realm is highly subversive. However, this subversion is delimited to the form of sexuality that is intelligible in the Indo-Fijian society, that is, the patriarchally sanctioned heterosexuality. By complying with this social demand the narrator denies the radically subversive notion of female homosexuality. Homosexual performance in females is described as radical as it goes against major social expectations of femininity in Indo-Fijian women. These expectations implicate females to present themselves in a manner that they are desirable within male perception. This includes embodying and materialising those features that render them feminine and sexually appealing to men. Butler claims that femininity is 'a mask that dominates/resolves a masculine identification, for a masculine identification would, within the presumed heterosexual matrix of desire, produce a desire for a female object'.⁸⁷ A submissive female reciprocates this desire by assuming the feminine attributes of male desirability and repressing her potential of reinscribing those social norms that restrict and regulate her sexuality.

⁸⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 68.

Song 24's tune is based on a Bollywood movie song and contains fast beats. The criticisms in this song are mainly to do with the *samdhi*'s outer appearances. Traditional singers like Rajni assent to such songs where the insults and playfulness is limited to people's appearances and not their character. Rajni notes 'when you sing songs of insult you can make fun of people who are sitting in the *mandap*. You can make fun of their face, belly, moustache, ears, nose and hair'.⁸⁸ The first verse is largely focused on the *samdhi* and how he is dressed. The singer manages to playfully tease him in such manner but presents a positive outlook of him. When she does become critical, for example, '*To the Samdhi, He gives side looks*' (Line 6 and 7), this criticism is of a behaviour that is socially acceptable. Within social norms the groom's father can humour the bride's mother as kinship ties permit. Furthermore, when the groom's sister is mentioned in the last verse she is only portrayed as '*full of fashion*' and that she is attempting to dance in the *mandap*. This is an improvement when compared to the insults mentioned in earlier songs.

One of the most notable issues that women singers have against male singers and traditional singers have against modern singers is the issue of limitations when it comes to mocking through songs. Male singers are constantly blamed for being too crude in their comments on relations of the groom. Bindu explains that 'one of the biggest problems with male singers is that they usually sing beyond the limit that women singers maintain'.⁸⁹ Moreover, it sounds more offensive when a man publically criticises one's sister, even if that happens to be in a wedding song. Bindu illustrates that 'if a lady is making fun of the groom's sister it sounds all right but imagine a man insulting the groom's sister in public. It sounds very offensive and can lead to tempers flaring among the male relations'.⁹⁰ This in itself is one form of power play as female insults do not carry much significance due to their social status. When men from their dominant gendered positions utter similar insults, these are inevitably given a more serious demeanour. Thus, female singers feel that they are more apt for such songs rather than man. On the other hand, traditional female singers are critical of contemporary singers by stating that they also do not abide by the customary established perimeters for songs of playfulness. Song 23, for example, is from an original composition of Vidya Wati, whose use of subversive connotations

⁸⁸ Rajni, Question 25.

⁸⁹ Bindu, Question 31.

⁹⁰ Bindu, Question 31.

would not augur well with singers with a traditional mind-set. Thus, Song 24 easily qualifies as what traditional singers would deem traditionally appropriate.

Similarly, Song 25 is also one that is sung at a fast beat since it is meant to sustain the playful atmosphere in the *mandap* as the groom's procession eats. The singers playfully insult the *samdhi* and his sister. However, this song also remains within the specific social limits for this context. Firstly, the manner in which the *samdhi* eats his food is being criticised. He is told to 'slow down on the eating' (Line 2) and that he is eating 'hungrily' (Line 6). He is also accused of stealing the *pūḍī*⁹¹ (Line 13) and the reason given for the theft is his sister's inability to make *pūḍīs*. The mention of a man's sister in public especially in a negative sense, as in the song, can prove to be offensive. However, as the context of the song sets the ground work for such insults to be permissible, these are treated as jokes. It must be added nonetheless that accusing an Indo-Fijian woman of not being able to cook mainly a traditional item such as *pūḍī* tantamount to insult. Knowing how to cook and do housekeeping are two of the most fundamental features of the stereotyped Indo-Fijian female.

The use of such playful and subversive songs performs the social function of inverting normative social order momentarily in the *mandap* when the groom's relatives sit to eat. Even though they have a higher social standing during the wedding for being part of the groom's procession, women from the bride's side (mainly the wedding singers) are able to sing insults at them. At such moments tabooed themes can be included in the songs but it depends on the singer to decide the levels of invectives they can employ. It largely depends on the mood and attitude of the individuals being picked on as some tend to ignore the traditional significance of these songs and take offense.

This chapter has analysed some of the *Vivah ke Geet* commonly sung in Fiji, some of which are also available in music albums. The song lyrics are indicative of the gender situation in the Indo-Fijian Hindu society. They expose the gender scripts that individuals have to act out corporeally as part of their daily lifestyle, even though the songs concentrate specifically on the wedding context. The wedding singers depict the gender expectations of society through their songs. This makes them an important part of the discursive network which creates, sustains and regulates gender. While most of the songs depict stereotypical images of women and men, there

⁹¹ *pūḍī* is a common dish prepared for Hindu Indo-Fijian weddings. It is a form of chapatti since it is made of flour dough and is rolled out in a flat and circular shape. However, it is not baked on a hot plate but is fried in boiling cooking oil. These are also smaller in size in comparison to chapatti(s).

are also songs that are subversive of gender expectations and social norms regulating gendered individuals but are void of power to question society as it is.

Conclusion

The Indo-Fijian community has historically proven to be a relatively progressive one. Post-indenture and resettlement in Fiji, this society has outgrown numerous unconstructive ideologies while securing economic and political status. The caste system was one of the earliest detachments Indo-Fijians experienced and this came as a benefit of the mainly harsh indenture period. A large number of descendants of the indentured labourers have also moved out of the agrarian lifestyle and are now engaged as entrepreneurs or employees in the Fijian economy. Many have also successfully ventured into the political and public sectors as a result of significant levels of academic achievement which have been available in a rather egalitarian fashion. Thus, this thesis may be questioned on the grounds that the situation of females in Fiji has improved a lot in response to these advancements. However it does not mean that each and every woman has been a beneficiary of such progressive transformations. The 2006 ADB report on gender relations in Fiji points out the continuing ‘restrictions on Indo-Fijian women’s mobility’ while some ‘particularly rural communities consider it more socially acceptable or prestigious for women to work only in the home and family compound’.¹ The statistics from UNDP and FWCC incorporated in this thesis also indicate the suffering of many women even to date in what many would deem as a civilised society. The worrying point however is the fact that these reported statistics do not take into account the countless cases which are swept under the cultural, religious and social rug where gender hierarchy has historically found an ally.

Female *girmityas* were mostly used as labourers on the farm and as domestic workers. This period also saw the exploitation of some of these women as sex objects due to their helplessness and relative scarcity. The social and economic situation of these women after indenture and the close connection to the Indian way of life birthed certain gender expectations. These were underscored as ideal characteristics of womanhood by the patriarchal control system and were subsequently adopted by these women who were being dictated by their circumstances. What later became recognized as femininity and feminine qualities in Indo-Fijian women was the result of the repetitive reproductions of specified acts by individuals in accordance with social norms. Subversions on both personal and public levels did occur but were doused by regulatory controls that marked social boundaries. Stigmatization, ostracizing, and both physical and psychological violence have been deployed

¹ Asian Development Bank, *Country Gender Assessment: Republic of the Fiji Islands*, 23.

to sustain the gender hierarchy. Education, legal and political provisions and economic independence has assisted in elevating women's status over time. However, it would be a blatant disregard of reality if one were to assume that women have reached a position that is completely secure and free of discrimination. Violence against women to the extent of honour killing continues to stain the Indo-Fijian social fabric in some instances among the educated and the so called modern population. Adopting an oppressed position for women for this thesis was a deliberate political strategy to argue that a significant feminist battle still needs to be waged. Thus this thesis finds justification, as any feminist project that liberates even one woman, changes one negative mind-set or problematizes one androcentric ideology is well worth the effort.

This thesis proves that certain aspects of Indo-Fijian lifestyle like *Vivah Geet* still maintain those ideologies that promote an asymmetrical standing between men and women. However subversive songs that are sung parallel to songs of normative nature prove the rebellious potential housed in all females. The conditions and treatment of women 'is enabled by narratives, complexes and institutions which derive their strength not from outright, immutable, unbeatable force but rather from their power to structure our lives as imposing cultural scripts'.² One of these features is the Indo-Fijian wedding folksongs. If it is claimed that the songs are only being sung for fun then how can the amount of money being paid to singers be justified even when these can be paid for newer forms of entertainment. How can the comments of the singers be disproved who feel they are playing an extremely important function of educating younger generations, a feeling these singers have attained from the social accreditation they receive. Therefore, this thesis has analysed wedding songs that are still sung at Hindu weddings for their gendered content which actually represent a portion of the gender discourse that is eventually responsible for promoting and enforcing certain gender expectations. The main focus has been to discredit the sex-gender system, question patriarchal authority and problematize the gender stereotypes that are presented as essential gender forms. The discussion also revolved around exposing the linguistic asymmetry and why there is a need to reformulate language in order for it to provide women opportunity to affirm 'herself as a subject'.³

What a post-structuralist approach such as Butler's theory of gender performativity offers women is the opportunity to break out of the identity binarism so that they reposition

² Sharon Marcus, 'Fighting Bodies, Fighting Words: A Theory and Politics of Rape Prevention', in *Feminists Theorise the Political*, ed. Judith Butler and Joan Scott (London: Routledge, 1992), 388-389.

³ Alarcon, 'The Theoretical Subject(s),' 292.

themselves in the discursive forum to become visible and audible on their own terms. It must be noted also that female voices have been in active engagement socially and politically, privately and publically in discourses. These voices have been subversive in some instances, repressed in others but it must be noted that women have also appeared to be complicit. It would be presumptuous, meanwhile, to place the blame solely on their shoulders, as much of who women are and what they represent is the consequence of the discursive environment they occupy, the space that gives them intelligibility and the gendered subjectivity they assume. Women's psychological development from birth in a male-centred society, their inherited culture and beliefs as well as the social norms that control them, eventuate into who they finally become. If they sound complicit then it is only because they are not privy to the existence of a different voice, or know about it but are powerless to embody it. Whichever be the case, the two reasons mentioned above are sufficient to answer Irigaray's question as to 'why she (any woman) submits so readily to this make-believe, why she mimics so perfectly as to forget she is acting out man's contra-phobic projects, projections, and productions of her desire'.⁴ Attaining and mechanizing the female centred voice is essential to women's meaningful existence as Janet Quinn points out:

A woman who has found her full voice, who can express the symphony of her heart's passion, her soul's wisdom, her body's phenomenal strength and beauty, and her mind's knowing is a woman who is free to be fully who she was born to be.⁵

The hope is that this thesis creates the awareness on the fluidity of gender so that individuals who feel constricted by a dichotomous gender system can at least theoretically justify their opinion and decision to subvert. The task of analysing folklore in a feminist light to was taken to reveal its complicit nature and how it has served as an arm of patriarchy infecting social discourses with gendered and asymmetrical ideologies. The drive was that this uncovering will help create counter narratives that can be developed to neutralise its effects on female psychology.

Butler perceives 'new kinship and sexual arrangements to compel a rethinking of culture itself'⁶ and the rate with which the Indo-Fijian society is transforming, this cultural overhaul becomes more portentous. If the emerging multiplicities of gender become officially

⁴ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian Gell (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 53.

⁵ Janet Quinn, *I Am a Woman Finding My Voice* (Pymble: Harper Collins e-books, 1999), xxii.

⁶ Judith Butler, 'Is Kinship Always Heterosexual?' *Differences* 13, No. 1 (2002): 39.

accepted within the Indo-Fijian society in the future, it will lead to the loosening of the heterosexual bind on marriage as has happened recently in countries like France and New Zealand. It will be rather fascinating to observe then, how *Vivah ke Geet* will evolve to integrate gay and lesbian matrimony and kinship into its content and performance.

Foucault claims that:

We may suspect that there is in all societies, with great consistency, a kind of gradation among discourses: those which are said in the ordinary course of days and exchanges, and which vanish as soon as they have been pronounced; and those which give rise to a certain number of new speech acts which take them up, transform them or speak of them, in short, those discourses which, over and above their formulation, are said indefinitely, remain said, and are to be said again.⁷

Folksongs belong to the category of discourses that Foucault characterises ‘to be said again’ and they have played a significant role in maintaining gender situations historically. It is apparent that as texts representing art, *Vivah Geet* will continue to be performed. However, it is desirable that instead of depicting the past these songs should begin to represent women in the present as they continuously push social boundaries and create a new and liberal future for themselves. Rupali Chibber states that as ‘women are denied the right to create their own images of femaleness’ they have had to ‘to conform to patriarchal standards imposed on them’.⁸ Since *Vivah Geet* has been used as one of the tools in achieving this conformity then this should also be the medium of gaining female sovereignty.

⁷ Michel Foucault, ‘The Order of Discourse,’ in *Untying the Text: A Post Structuralist Reader*, ed. Robert Young (London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1981), 57.

⁸ Roopali Chibbar, ‘Patriarchy and the Indian Woman-Poet,’ *Indian Literature* 33, No. 5 (1990): 166, accessed on January 15, 2013, www.jstor.org/stable.23333041.

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APPENDIX

Song 1

(Chorus)

More beta ke lagi hai hardiya ,

Shenayi baje bajna.

(Verse)

Ab maiya khaḍi hai dulha ke piche,

Ab sab lagaye maiya ke najariya,

Shenayi baje bajna.

TRANSLATION

Song 1

Bhatwaan (Groom's Home)

(Chorus)

With tumeric my son will be anointed,

With the sounds of trumpets and musical instruments playing.

(Verse)

Now his mother* stands behind the groom,

Everyone adores the mother now,

The trumpets are playing.

**mother* can be replaced by other relational titles (for example, father, uncle, aunt) and the same lines can be repeatedly sung.

Song 2

(Chorus)

Sone ki thali me jeona paroso,

Jeona jeo lo kripa nidhaan.

(Verse 1)

*Ganga Jamuna se jal mangao,
Keḍuwa gundh lo kripanidhaan.*

(Verse 2)

*Longa ilaichi ke vera jodhwo,
Wirwa kunch lo kripanidhaan.*

(Verse 3)

*Phool newari ke sejh bichao,
Sejia soe lo kripanidhaan.*

TRANSLATION

Song 2

Praising The Groom

(Chorus)

Serve jeona* in a golden plate,
Accept the jeona oh merciful.

(Verse 1)

Get water from Ganges and Indus,
Accept this drink oh merciful.

(Verse 2)

With clove and cinnamon prepare the eateries,
Accept the eateries oh merciful.

(Verse 3)

Set the bed with flowers and foliage,
Sleep on the prepared bed oh merciful.

**jeona* is a collective term for all the eateries and sweet meat offered to the groom but this could also include other gifts like jewellery or clothing. This is to show him respect throughout the ceremony and especially when he arrives at the venue to keep the word of marrying the bride.

Song 3

(Chorus)

Ke sunn sunn bhaiya ke dhadke chatiya jab bhaini lawa bhujhe na.

Na mano toh bhabi se pucho,

Bhiya ji ke haal ho.

(Verse 1)

Haal me gadbad, chal me gadbad,

Kaisa hai yeh kamaal jab bhaini lawa bhujhe na.

Na mano toh Sali se pucho,

Jija ji ka haal ho.

(Verse 2)

Haal bhi patka, chal bhi patka,

Kaisa hai yeh kamaal jab bhaini lawa bhujhe na.

(Verse 3)

Sali ji se pucho unke jija ji ka haal,

Woh ghabdaye aur chaal ghabdaye,

Kaisa hai yeh kamaal jab bhaini lawa bhujhe na.

TRANSLATION

Song 3

Lawa Bhujhe (Both groom's and bride's home)

(Chorus)

Listen listen to the brother's heart beating against his chest as his sister pops the rice.

(Verse 1)

Ask sister-in-law if you don't believe me,
Her husband's condition.

(Verse 2)

Odd in feeling and in conduct,
Amazingly, as his sister is popping the rice.

(Verse 3)

Ask the *younger sister** about her brother-in-law's condition,
He feels shaken and his conduct is also shaken,
Amazingly, as his sister is popping the rice.

*The *younger sister* in this case is *Sali*. This term refers to the younger sister of the wife. In Indo-Fijian culture the younger sister of the wife can joke around with her new brother-in-law but respectfully and within social limits.

Song 4

(Chorus)

*Maḍo me bhaiti bhaini lage nais bola,
Lawa jo bhuje bhaini mange dola dola.*

(Verse 1)

*Maiya aur baba ab neg deo bhaini ke apan saḍi deo.
Saḍina mange, mange dola dola.*

(Verse 2)

*Bhiaya aur bhabi ab jaldi se aao,
Bhaini ke apan challa mangai do.
Challa na mange bhaini mange dola dola.*

(Verse 3)

Mama aur mami ab jaldi se aao,

Bhaini ke apan kajra mangai do.

Kajra na mange bhaini mange dola dola.

TRANSLATION

Song 4

Lawa Bhujhe (Both groom's and bride's home)

(Chorus)

Sitting in the *mandap* the sister looks extremely bright,

While popping rice sister wants more dollars.

(Verse 1)

Mother and father give some *neg* now, give your (referring to groom) sister a new *Sadi**.

But she does not want *sadi*, she wants more dollars.

(Verse 2)

Brother and sister-in-law quickly come and give your sister a ring.

But she does not want a ring, she wants more dollars.

(Verse 3)

Uncle and aunty quickly come and give the sister a bouquet of flowers,

But she does not want a bouquet, she wants more dollars.

**sadi* is traditional Indo-Fijian female attire. It is basically a length of brightly decorated cloth that is wrapped around the body. Depending on decorations and colour, these can be very expensive, thus, good gifts. In occasions like weddings women are stereotypically expected to be dressed in expensive *sadis* which should be accompanied with jewellery and make up. This behaviour is now taken as a social norm.

Song 5

(Chorus)

Hari hari baans mangao more baba,

Ki pawan se ab mandap sajabo.

(Verse 1)

Wahin maḍo mein sundar vedi rachi-rachi,

Na baba paat banao ki rachi-rachi.

(Verse 2)

Ram Siya chuka mein baithe hai ki,

Brahmma ji kush aashan baba ho.

(Verse 3)

Mai humari paaon pakadi hai,

Tum baba dena karin kanyadaan.

(Verse 4)

Bhai hamare lawa parchi hai,

Ke bhauji bhare maan sindura ki.

(Verse 5)

Janam diye mohi kiyo saiyani ki,

Aaj more vyah raachayo mor baba.

(Verse 6)

Jug jug jiyo more baba nagariya,

Humko banaya ahivaat more baba ki.

TRANSLATION

Song 5

Song of the bride (bride's home)

(Chorus)

Bring the greenest bamboos my father,
Nicely and respectfully decorate the *mandap*.

(Verse 1)

Right there in the *mandap* set up an altar,
Come on father and plan it out.

(Verse 2)

Rama and Sita will sit in there,
God himself will be there, father.

(Verse 3)

Mother is holding onto my feet,
But you father give me away as a gift.

(Verse 4)

My brother will be putting popped rice into the fire,
My sister-in-law will help put vermilion on my forehead.

(Verse 5)

Father you gave me life and nurtured me,
Today you are also getting me wedded.

(Verse 6)

Long live my father's household,
I have been made worthy by my father.

Song 6

(Verse 1)

Kaise bapaiya tum nindh bhar bhar soyo,

Ab mai huwi hun saiyani na.

(Verse 2)

War dhundoh, war dhundoh, war dhundoh,

War dhundoh chatur sayana na.

(Verse 3)

Purab dhundah beti pachim dhundah,

Nahi war chatur sayana na.

(Verse 4)

Charo lok me dhundah beti,

Nahi war chatur sayana na.

(Verse 5)

Awadh nagariya me jao,

Jahan base Raja Dashrat na.

(Verse 6)

Raja Dashrat ji ke char kuwar hai,

Charo hai bade kuwar baba.

(Verse 7)

Ram ji ke jaeke Tilak chadao,

Ram ji chatur saiyana hai.

TRANSLATION

Song 6

Bride's Song for Father

(Verse 1)

Daughter:

How can you sleep soundly father,

Now that I have reached maturity?

(Verse 2)

Find me a man, find me a man, find me a man,

Clever and mature he should be.

(Verse 3)

Father replies:

I searched in the East, I searched in the West daughter,

I couldn't find a man who was clever and mature.

(Verse 4)

I searched in all four directions daughter,

There was no man who was clever and mature.

(Verse 5)

Daughter:

Go to the settlement of Avadh*,

Where King Dashrat lives.

(Verse 6)

He has four princes,

All are of marriageable age father.

(Verse 7)

Choose Rama for me,

Clever and mature is he.

*Avadh was the name of the kingdom where Dashrat was the king and he had four sons of whom Rama was the eldest and the most likely King. Rama had a stepmother who wanted her own son to become king so she forces Dashrat to send Rama into exile, which he agrees to as an obedient son.

Song 7

(Chorus)

Mehendi lagi toreh haath beti,

Yeh toh kushi ki baat hai.

(Verse 1)

Dur dur se log sab aaye hai,

Chute na sabke saath re beti,

Yeh toh kushi ke baat hai.

(Verse 2)

Maiya baap ke pyari dulari,

Bachpan se kheli saat re beti,

Yeh toh kushi ki baat hai.

(Verse 3)

Bhaiya bhauji ke kehna nibhana,

Bhai ke rakhna laaj re beti,

Yeh toh kushi ke baat hai.

(Verse 4)

Beti toh hoti hai dhan hi paraya,

Dege dyaee maa baap re beti,

Yeh toh kushi ki baat hai.

TRANSLATION

Song 7

For Bride

(Chorus)

Henna designs have been drawn on your hands,

Such a joyous moment is this.

(Verse 1)

People have come from far and wide,

You have an in-severable connection with them oh daughter,

Such a joyous moment is this.

(Verse 2)

The darling of mum and dad,

From childhood with them she has played oh daughter,

Such a joyous moment is this.

(Verse 3)

Dutifully obey the requests of your brother and sister-in-law*

Save your brother's reputation oh daughter,

Such a joyous moment is this.

(Verse 4)

A daughter always is an external asset,

The blessings of your mother and father are yours oh daughter,

Such a joyous moment is this.

*The brother and sister-in-laws mentioned in this case are the groom's older brother and his wife. In Hindu culture the husband's older brother is given as much reverence as the father.

Song 8

(Chorus)

*Aye gaile aye gaile aye gaile,
Samdhi baraat liye dekho aye gaile re.*

(Verse 1)

*Jet me na aae ghasita na laye,
Samdhi baraat liye dekho aye gaile re.*

(Verse 2)

*Noti noti samdhi dekho hai ayaa,
Mare najariya, mare najariya,
Samdhi ke paseena bahaye gaile re.*

(Verse 3)

*Samdhi ke sala sajh dhaj ke aaye,
Samdhi ke dekho nihare laga re.*

TRANSLATION

Song 8

Song for the Arrival of Groom's Procession

(Chorus)

Arrived arrived arrived,
With the wedding procession *Samdhi** has arrived.

(Verse 1)

He did not come by jet he brought no *ghasita**,
With the wedding procession *Samdhi** has arrived.

(Verse 2)

Naughty**Samdhi* has arrived,

He's winking, he's winking,

While his sweat pours.

(Verse 3)

Fully dressed *Samdhi's* brother-in-law has also arrived,

He is already eyeing the *Samdhin*.

**Samdhi* is the title that defines the relationship between the fathers of the groom and bride. While the English vocabulary does not have an equivalent word, Fiji Hindi uses this term to represent this particular relationship. On the other hand, the mothers are given the title *samdhin*.

**Ghasita* is the name of a vehicle made out of wood that was used as a transport vehicle in cane farms and rural areas. It had no wheel and was simply dragged on the ground by a horse or bullock using ropes. This song is sung in urban areas as well despite the fact that *ghasitais* not used here and has not been used by most of the contemporary urban generation. This proves the fact that folksongs have retained themes and content from the past. Most of Fiji's Indo-Fijian population actually share the common history of indenture and cane farming.

*While the adjective *naughty* is actually what the singer means, her pronunciation is *noti*. She uses the English adjective in a song which is pre-dominantly sung in Fiji *Baat*.

Song 9

(Chorus)

Jaibe Janakpur,

Maiya hum beyahun ko.

(Verse 1)

Dhanushwa thoḍan dege more maiya,

Wahi re Janakpur,

Baḍebaḍe yodha hai,

Darshan unke hi karbe more maiya.

(Verse 2)

*Wahi re Janakpur maiya,
Garbh bhirwanwa hai,
Hum unhike garbh mitaheb.*

(Verse 3)

*Wahi re Janakpur maiya,
Sita kuhari hai,
Hum unhise vyha rachiye.*

TRANSLATION

Song 9

Song for *Dulha* (Groom)

(Chorus)

I will go to *Janakpur**,
To get married mother.

(Verse 1)

I will break the bow my mother,

There in *Janakpur*,

Great warriors will be present there in numbers,

I will meet them as well mother.

(Verse 2)

There in *Janakpur*,

There is a lot of pride,

I will wipe off their pride mother.

(Verse 3)

There in *Janakpur*,
Sita is still single/virgin,
She is the one I will marry.

**Janakpur* is the name of Sita's maternal kingdom. It is coined using the name of Sita's father *Janak*.

Song 10

(Chorus)

*Beti beyahe piya ghar chali,
Sunni lage pitaa ki gali,
Kitni lado se bitya hai palii,
Aaj sasuraal ko chali.*

(Verse 1)

*Kya galti humse huwi,
Jo sajha aaj humko milee,
Laike doli ab bhai chale,
Dono naeno se neer bahae.*

(Verse 2)

*Ye toh kaisa karishma hai,
Tuth jataa babul ki galee.*

(Verse 3)

*Jake sasuraal bitya,
Nahiaar ke laaj rakhna,
Yahi maiya babul ki armaan,
Laaj rakhna tu humar.*

TRANSLATION

Song 10

Bride's Farewell Song

(Chorus)

After marriage to her spouse's house my daughter is going,

Benumbed is her father's household,

With such tenderness she was raised,

For her *sasuraal** today she departs.

(Verse 1)

What error did we commit?

That we received this punishment?

The brothers carry her *doli**,

Tears flowing from their eyes.

(Verse 2)

What kind of wonder is this?

That her father's house breaks.

(Verse 3)

At your *sasuraal* daughter,

The reputation of your maternal home do keep up,

For this is the desire of your mother and father,

That you keep our name safe.

*The word *sasuraal* is the term for the in-law's home and this can be used by both bride and groom. For the Indo-Fijian bride, however, this term holds special meaning since after marriage the wives leave their parent's home permanently to live with the husband's parents and family. In the contemporary modern society couples may opt to live separately from the

groom's family altogether but the songs are still sung in this manner. This is because the Hindu tradition believes in the woman being with the husband and not dependent on her maternal household. In some cases the woman's family may even refuse to interfere with their daughter's marital problems even if she seeks their help. This is simply due to the ritual of *kanyadaan* where the woman is no longer their entity but that of the husband and his family. In instances when husbands die early, the young widows remain with the in-laws unless decided otherwise.

**dolia* small wooden house-like structure with four long handles. It is a form of litter or wheel less vehicle that is powered by four or more men. Traditionally the bride would sit inside it and her brothers would carry her a certain distance away from their home or the wedding venue. While this is rare in Fiji, it is/was common in India. The mention of this in the song proves the close ties Indo-Fijian folksongs have with the ones in India.

Song 11

(Chorus)

Chod babul ka ghar mujhe pi ke nagar aaj janaa pada.

(Verse 1)

Sang sakhiyo ke bachpan bitati thi mei,

Vyha guḍiyo ki has has rachati thi mai,

Sabse muh mod kar,

Kya bataun kidhar,

Dil lagana pada.

(Verse 2)

Yaad maeke ki dil se bhula kar chali,

Preet saajan ke man me sajaye chali,

Yaad karke yeh ghar roye ankh magar,

Mujhe janaa pada.

TRANSLATION

Song 11

Bride's farewell Song (Her Own Perspective)

(Chorus)

Leaving my maternal home I have to go to my spouse's street today.

(Verse 1)

My childhood was spent here with my friends,
We married dolls to each other once upon a time,
However turning my face away from all,

How can I tell you where,

I have to set my heart.

(Verse 2)

I am removing the memories of my maternal household,
Decorating my heart with the desire for my husband,
My eyes do shed tears by reminiscing this house,
But I have to go.

Song 12

(Chorus)

Janam liya hai maiya ke godhi,

Maiya meri palan jhulai hai,

Aur loriya gayi.

(Verse 1)

Choti thi mai nanhi bachi,

Pita ke angan kheli,

Kandhe chadkar pita ke kheli,

*Ungli bakad kar maiya,
Maiya humko chote se paali,
Ingli pakad ke chalaayi,
Maiya meri palan jhulai hai,
Aur loriya gayi.*

(Verse 2)

*Haatho se apne bhojan khilaya,
Godi me bidha ke,
Jab mai rotii amma meri,
Mujko toh hasati,
Godh me lekar maiya meri,
Achal me chuphai,
Maiya meri palan jhulai hai,
Aur loriya gayi.*

(Verse 3)

*Maiya mujhko gale lagati,
Kaheti hai re btita,
Tum ne humko jivan di hai,
Tum ne humko pala,
Girte girte dhokar khate,
Maiya humko bachai,
Maiya meri palan jhulai hai,
Aur loriya gayi.*

(Verse 4)

*Gilye gilye bistar se,
Maiya humko uthati,
Apne nazuk haatho se,*

*Humko toh nehlati,
Kaise bhulun apni maiya,
chote se woh paali,
Maiya meri palan jhulai hai,
Aur loriya gayi.*

(Verse 5)

*Mujhko padaya aur likhaya,
Sikhcha humko dini,
Shadhi ke mai yog ban are,
Dulhan mujhko banayi,
Kaise bhulun apni maiya,
Anchal me mai kheli,
Maiya meri palan jhulai hai,
Aur loriya gayi.*

TRANSLATION

Song 12

Song of Reminiscence (Bride)

(Chorus)

In my mother's lap began my life,
She cuddled me to sleep always,
And sang sweet lullabies.

(Verse 1)

A tiny innocent girl I was,
Playing in my father's compound,
Playing on his shoulders,

Taking me by my finger,
My mother nurtured me through childhood,
She cuddled me to sleep always,
And sang sweet lullabies.

(Verse 2)

With her hands she fed me,
Sitting at her bosom,
When I would cry my mother,
Would make me laugh,
Taking me in her lap,
She would hide me in her veil,
She cuddled me to sleep always,
And sang sweet lullabies.

(Verse 3)

Mother would hug me,
Saying 'oh dear child',
She gave me life,
She nurtured me,
When I fell or stumbled,
She protected me,
She cuddled me to sleep always,
And sang sweet lullabies.

(Verse 4)

From wet beddings,
She lifted me out,
With her delicate hands,
She bathed me,
How can I forget my dear mother,
Nurtured me from childhood,
She cuddled me to sleep always,
And sang sweet lullabies.

(Verse 5)

She taught me and made me literate,
Gave me education,
Made me worth marriage,
A bride she made me,
How can I forget my dear mother,
Within her veil I played,
She cuddled me to sleep always,
And sang sweet lullabies.

Song 13

(Chorus)

*Jehi ghar janam liyo more baba,
Yanhi se den nikaal ho baba.*

(Verse 1)

*Kyun maiya mohe janam diyo hai,
Baba kyun kiin dedaar ho Rama.*

(Verse 2)

*Kyun bhaiya humme sung khilayo,
Bhaoji kyun kiin dedaar ho Rama,
Kaon chukh aab bhaeo more baba,
Gharwa se det nikaal baba.*

(Verse 3)

*Baba kuch bolo maiya mueh kholo,
Bhaiya kyun khade chup chaph oh Rama,
Kahe bhauji tuh jhup jhup roye,
Sunlo kuch humor oh baba.*

(Verse 4)

*Madawa bhi jhuta garwa bhi jhuta,
Jhute sab sakhiya humar ho Rama,
Jehi bhaiya ke mae bhandh rakhiya,
Yehin se hot niyaar ho baba.*

TRANSLATION

Song 13

Farewell Song (Bride)

(Chorus)

In this home I was born,
From this very place I am being removed.

(Verse 1)

Why oh mother did you give me birth,
Why oh father did you wait on me.

(Verse 2)

Why oh brother did you include me in your childhood,

Why oh *bhabhi* (brother's wife) did you wait on me,

What was my mistake oh father,

That from my home I am being removed?

(Verse 3)

Father say something mother open your mouth*,

Why brother are you so quiet and reserved,

Why *bhabhi* do you secretly weep,

Hear me also oh father.

(Verse 4)

My past is left behind with this home,

Left behind are the company of my girlfriends,

This is the brother I had tied *rakhi** to,

He turns his face away oh father.

*(*muh kholo*) meaning open your mouth is an idiomatic phrase in Fiji *Baat* that means to speak out.

**rakhi* is a uniquely Hindu tradition where a sister ties a stringed bend on her brother's left hand during a specially marked time of the year. It was a symbol of the sister's appreciation and acknowledgement of her brother's presence. This practice is more commonly known as *Raksha Bandhan* (literally translated as bend of protection) because that is exactly what the brother had to do. He had to offer protection to his sister. From a feminist perspective this can be seen as female acknowledgement of their weakness and the power of protection bestowed on males in a patriarchal society. Unfortunately in this song the brother cannot offer any form of escape to his sister who is now in the process of assuming the most important role attributed to her gender, that of a Hindu wife.

Song 14

(Chorus)

Chod chaaḍ ke apni ma baap ki galee,

Mori bitya sasural chali.

(Verse 1)

Mannat se mila mujhko,

Ye pyara piyaa,

Meri dil ki dhadkan me,

Aaj woh hai samaya.

(Verse 2)

Ma baap ki dulari,

Aaj bani hai dulahaniya,

Aaj bani hai dulhaniya,

Jae ki piya ke angna.

(Verse 3)

Dulhan chup chup ke dekho,

Dulha raja ko takhe,

Kaise sakhiyan se woh taana mare.

(Verse 4)

Janak ji ke dware,

Hoth hai mangal char,

Dhanye hai maiya bapaa jo,

Dewe hai kanyadaan.

TRANSLATION

Song 14

Wedding Song (Parent's Perspective on daughter's marriage)

(Chorus)

Leaving behind her mother and father's street,

To her *sasuraal* my daughter goes.

(Verse 1)

Through prayers and covenants,

I found this dear spouse,

In my heart beats,

He has become absorbed.

(Verse 2)

The darling of mother and father,

Has today become a bride,

To her spouse's compound she goes.

(Verse 3)

Look at the bride as she covertly,

Peers at the king groom,

And her friends tease her.

(Verse 4)

At the parents dwelling,

Auspicious events transpire,

Blessed are the mother and father,

Who give the gift of the virgin.

Song 15

(Chorus)

*Mahelo ka raja mila,
Ki tumhari beti raaj karegi.*

(Verse 1)

*Galiya galiya dhoom majhe ki,
Doli me jiya dole ki,
Khain jaye na mera jiya,
Ki rani beti raaj karegi.*

(Verse 2)

*Duniya ka dastur puerana,
Beti ko kisne rakh paaya,
Yehi babul hi dege dua,
Ki rani beti raaj karegi,
Kushi kushi kar do bida,
Ki rani beti raaj karegi.*

(Verse 3)

*Jis ghar jaye swarag banaye,
Maeke ka kabhi yaad na aawe,
Yahi babul hi dege dua,
Ki rani beti raaj karegi,
Kushi kushi kardo bida,
Ki rani beti raaj karegi.*

TRANSLATION

Song 15

Song for Rejoicing

(Chorus)

The prince of palaces you have found for your daughter,

She will rule as well now.

(Verse 1)

There is excitement in every street and corner,

Heart bounce as well,

Hope my soul does not leave in all this excitement,

That my princess will rule now as well.

(Verse 2)

An old custom of the world it has been,

Who has ever been able to retain their daughter?

Just blessings parents can bestow,

That our princess will rule now as well,

Farewell her with joy,

That our princess will rule as well now.

(Verse 3)

She will turn into heaven whichever home she will enter,

Never miss your parent's home,

Just blessings parents can bestow,

That our princess will rule now as well,

Farewell her with joy,

That our princess will rule as well now.

Song 16

(Chorus)

*Dham dham dhol dhamaka,
Aaj janak me chayi kushiya,
Lawa bujhe dulahin ke femli.*

(Verse 1)

*Nach nach ke aaj lawa bujhe,
Maḍo me aayi fua,
Sung me dekho sakhiya,
Fute nahi hai lawa,
Jaldi neg laao na.*

(Verse 2)

*Jham jham karti fua ke payal,
Karti sabko ghayal,
Kahan gaye hai dulhain ke bapaa,
Kahe tu sharmaye,
Jaldi neg laao na,
Ho kaka neg laao na.*

(Verse 3)

*Chup chup karti bahen ishara,
Kahan hai bhaiya raja,
Maḍo me aab dhum machi hai,
Kahan hai dulhain ke aaja,
Jaldi neg laao na.*

(Verse 4)

Mama mausa harshit howe,

*Rupia khub lutawe,
Mausi mami kaki dekho nakhda khub banawe,
Jaldi neg laao na.*

TRANSLATION

Song 16

Song of Joyfulness

(Chorus)

Loud music and joyful noises,
Happiness canopies *Janak* today,
The bride's family* pop rice.

(Verse 1)

The popping of rice continues with dancing,
The aunt is in the *mandap*,
With her friends,
The rice refuses to pop,
Bring over the *neg* quickly.

(Verse 2)

Jingling are the anklets of the *fua*,
Causing sweet agony,
Where is the bride's father,
Why are you shy?
Quickly bring the *neg*,
Oh uncle bring the *neg* quickly.

(Verse 3)

Sisters giving secret signals,
Where is the king brother,
There is chaos in the *mandap*,
Where is bride's grandpapa,
Bring over the *neg* quickly.

(Verse 4)

Excited are the *mama* and *mausa**,
Flaunting away their money,
Mausi Mami Kaki are putting on up a show,
Bring over the *neg* quickly.

*The word used in the original song is family but is pronounced as *femli*.

Song 17

(Chorus)

Baba re baba bolao toh bap na bole ho.

(Verse 1)

Baba paheli bhawariyun jo ghumun,
Toh ab hi tumhari gheriya,
Maiya re maiya bolao toh maiya na bole ho.

(Verse 2)

Maiya dusra bhawariyun jo ghumun,
Toh ab hi tumhari gheriya,
Ajaa re ajaa bolao toh ajaa na bole ho.

(Verse 3)

Ajaa teesri bhawariyun jo ghumun,

*Toh ab hi tumhari potni,
Aji re ajii bolao toh ajia na bole ho.*

(Verse 4)

*Ajiichauthi bhawariyun jo ghumun,
Toh ab hi tumhari potni,
Nana re nana bolao toh nanana bole ho.*

(Verse 5)

*Nana panchwi bhawariyun jo ghumun,
Toh ab hi tumhari natni,
Nani re nani bolao toh nani na bole ho.*

(Verse 6)

*Nana chat'ai bhawariyun jo ghumun,
Toh ab hi tumhari natni.
Bhaiya re bhaiya bolao toh bhaiya na bole ho.*

(Verse 7)

*Bhaiya satwi bhawariyun jo ghumun,
Toh ab mei parai ghar ki.*

TRANSLATION

Song 17

While Circling the Altar (During Wedding)

(Chorus)

Father oh father I call but father doesn't respond.

(Verse 1)

Father I am making the first round,

So I am still your daughter.

Mother oh mother I call but mother doesn't respond.

(Verse 2)

Mother I am making the second round,

So I am still your daughter.

Grandfather (paternal) oh grandfather I call but grandfather doesn't respond.

(Verse 3)

Grandfather I am making the third round,

So I am still your granddaughter.

Grandmother (paternal) oh grandmother I call but grandmother doesn't respond.

(Verse 4)

Grandmother I am making the fourth round,

So I am still your granddaughter.

Grandfather (maternal) oh grandfather I call but grandfather doesn't respond.

(Verse 5)

Grandfather I am making the fifth round,

So I am still your granddaughter.

Grandmother (maternal) oh grandmother I call but grandmother doesn't respond.

(Verse 6)

Grandmother I am making the sixth round,

So I am still your granddaughter.

Brother oh brother I call but brother does not respond.

(Verse 7)

Making the seventh round oh my brother,

I now belong to a strange home.

Song 18

(Chorus)

*Saat pehro ke saato vachan,
Pyari dulhaniya bhul na jaana.*

(Verse 1)

*Tujhe lene ko aaye sajan,
Saj ke hoja tu chalne ko sung,
Saat rehne ke khayi kasam,
Pyari dulhaniya bhul na jaana.*

(verse 2)

*Jake sasuraal me tu rahegi,
Sewa apne bado ke karigi,
Unke sewa me rakhna lagan,
Pyari dulhaniya bhul na jaana.*

(Verse 3)

*Roye mata pita aur bahen,
Chuthe sakhiya saheli ka sung,
Saat raheni ki khayi kasam,
Pyari dulhaniya bhul na jaana.*

TRANSLATION

Song 18

Advice to Bride

(Chorus)

There are seven promises with the seven rounds of the fire,

Forget it not dear bride.

(Verse 1)

To take you away your spouse has come,
Get fully groomed and ready to go,
To live together forever you promised,
Forget it not dear bride.

(Verse 2)

At your in-law's will you reside,
Serve your elders there you must,
To their service you must fully commit,
Forget it not dear bride.

(Verse 3)

Crying are your mum, dad and sister,
The companionship of girlfriends is over,
To live together forever you promised,
Forget it not dear bride.

Song 19

(chorus)

Samdhi tohr bahini ghumhe bazaar.

(Verse 1)

Jab dekho tab ghumhe maket me,

Chaina se mange chaina kera.

(Verse 2)

Jab dekho tab daude ganaa ke khet me,

Khoje ganaa kat' aiya.

(Verse 3)

Jab dekho nache taxi stand peh,

Drivan se mange raide.

(Verse 4)

Aa re samdhi pyare,

Maḍhwe me aake khana kha re,

Tera samdhi baigun le khaḍa,

Sabko khilaenge rupiya lutaenge,

Shadi me hungama ho ho ho.

(Verse 5)

Khale samdhi pyare,

Maḍhwe me bhaita naen laḍawe,

Samdhi ke bhaini maal lage.

TRANSLATION

Song 19

Subversive but Playful Song

(Chorus)

Samdhi your sister roams around openly.

(Verse 1)

She roams around the market all the time,

She asks the Chinese for *Chaina kera**.

(Verse 2)

She runs into the cane farm all the time,

Searching for a cane cutter.

(Verse 3)

All the time she is dancing at the taxi stand,

Asking the drivers for a ride.

(Verse 4)

Come dear *samdhi*,

Sit at the altar and eat,

Your *samdhi* is standing there with aubergine,

We will feed everyone and get them to waste their money,

Festivities will be abundant at the wedding.

(Verse 5)

Eat dear *samdhi*,

Sitting here eyeing the ladies,

His sister too looks very desirable.

**Chaina* is the word Chinese in the Indo-Fijian language and pronunciation and *kera* means banana. The two words together represent a certain variety of banana that is commonly found in Fiji.

Song 20

(Chorus)

Gao ke badal gaai huliya ho,

Jab se aai chul buliya.

(Verse 1)

Gao ke budhwan ab paglawe,

Fua ke badal gaai huliya ho.

(Verse 2)

Fua ke saḍi cham cham chamke,

Gao ke laḍkan sitti mare ho.

TRANSLATION

Song 20

Playful Song

(Chorus)

The appearance of the village has transformed,

Since the bubbling beauty arrived.

(Verse 1)

The elderly village men are going crazy,

*Fua's** appearance has transformed.

(Verse 2)

Fua's saḍi is shimmering and shining,

The village boys are whistling loudly.

**fua* is the term for aunty, which in this case is the sister of the father. The term can be used by both girls and boys to refer to their father's sister. The Indo-Fijian language has different single word titles for example father's sister is *fua*, mother's sister is *mausi*, father's brother's wife is *kaaki* and mother's brother's wife is *maami* unlike English which has the term aunt for all these different roles.

Song 21

(Chorus)

Dulha ke maiya chidiya ho,

jaise lal Lal Muniya.

(Verse 1)

Dulha ke maiya motar chalawe,

Daru piye re bina paniya ke,

Jaise lal Lal Muniya.

(Verse 2)

*Dulha ke bhaini taxi chalawe,
Daru piye jaise lal lal Muniya.*

*the underlined word can be substituted with other titles of other female relatives.

TRANSLATION

Song 21

Playful Song

(Chorus)

A bird is the groom's mother,

Like a *Lal Muniya**.

(Verse 1)

The groom's mother drives a car,

She drinks alcohol without adding any water,

Like a *Lal Muniya*.

(Verse 2)

The groom's sister drives a taxi,

She drinks alcohol without adding water,

Like a *Lal Muniya*.

**LalMuniya* is a tiny bird usually seen around open or rural areas. They appear in groups and are very quick in their movements.

Song 22

(Chorus)

Dulha ke bhaini dekho chatak barite hai,

Dulha ke bhaini ke bindiya lal hai,

Lage jaise suraj ke tejh hai.

(Verse 1)

*Dulha ke fua ke jugnu ke baal hai,
Lage re yeh toh koi hay re bijuriya.*

(Verse 2)

*Dulha ke kaki dekho lage hai behaal,
Chamkat chamkat jaise koi chaand hai.*

TRANSLATION

Song 22

Playful Song

(Chorus)

Look at the groom's sister, who's brightly shining,
The groom's sister's *bindiya** is hot red,
Looking like the sun.

(Verse 1)

Look at the groom's aunty (paternal) her hair is coloured like a chameleon,
Looking like lightening.

(Verse 2)

Look at the groom's aunty (paternal uncle's wife) who looks incredible,
Shining like the moon.

**bindiyais* a decoration worn by Hindu women. It is a small brightly coloured round object or dot of vermillion that is stuck or pressed onto the centre of the forehead. For married Hindu women this is mainly red in colour as a sign of their marital status.

Song 23

(Chorus)

Saiya lagaye dono naina mae jaan gaai.

(Verse 1)

*Saiya ke tota bole na jaane,
Hae bole more maena mae jaan gaai.*

(Verse 2)

*Saiya ke tota mung chune hae,
Moti chuke more maena mae jaan gaai.*

(Verse 3)

*Saiya ke tota soye na jaane,
Kaliya soye more maena mae jaan gaai.*

TRANSLATION

Song 23

Subversive/Playful Song

(Chorus)

With both eyes my spouse is eyes me,

I know now.

(Verse 1)

My spouse's parrot does not know how to speak,

My mynah exclaims,

I know now.

(Verse 2)

My spouse's parrot wants to peck at chick peas,

My mynah wants to peck at pearls,

I know now.

(Verse 3)

My spouse's parrot does not know how to fall asleep,

My mynah sleeps early,

I know now.

Song 24

(Chorus)

*Samdhi hamare baḍe shaan wale,
Ban thaan ke aaye lage jaise dewane.*

(Verse 1)

*Samdhi jo aaye hai,
Cot' pe t'ai mare hai,
Aur rup rang se dekho,
Bada hensum lage hai,
Samdhi ko dekho,
Mare tirchi najariya.*

(Verse 2)

*Bada hauke patke hai,
Pet' toh khali lage hai,
Samdhiyan ke jab jab dekhe,
Toh ismail mare hai,
Kanikani dekho mathe par chamke.*

(Verse 3)

*Dulha joh aaye hai,
Saath me bhaini aayi hai,
Aur bhaini ji ke dekho badi feshan wali hai,
Rahi rahi ke madho me,
Kamariya hilawe.*

TRANSLATION

Song 24

Playful Songs

(Chorus)

My samdhi is big on appearances,

He's all suited up and appears almost crazy (or passionate)

(Verse 1)

Since *Samdhi* has come,

With a tie on his coat*,

And from his appearance,

He seems quite handsome*,

To the *Samdhi*,

He gives side looks.

(Verse 2)

Fanning himself and throwing tantrums,

His tummy looks starved,

Every time he looks at the *samdhi*,

He gives a smile*,

The *kanikani** is shining on his forehead.

(Verse 3)

Now that the groom is here,

With him is his sister,

The sister is full of fashion*,

From time to time,

She swings her hips in the *mandap*.

*There are many instances when modern singers who sing mainly to entertain use English vocabulary in their songs. The words tie, coat, handsome, smile and fashion are actually present in the original songs. Older and more traditional singers avoided such practices keeping to their original dialects. However, the pronunciations are hardly what a proper Indo-Fijian speaker of English would use. The spelling in the appendix has been kept as close as possible to the original singer's pronunciation. The use of English words also indicates the quickly transforming society whereby the dressing of people have changed in that wrap around *dhotis* have been replaced by three piece suits even for traditional occasions like weddings.

**Kanikani* is a skin condition that develops due to excessive consumption of yagona (a traditional Fijian drink where roots of a certain plant known as Yagona is pounded and mixed with water). To hide this people apply skin lotions or coconut oil to their exposed skins as showing signs of *kanikani*, although a common sight among many Indo-Fijian men, is usually a cause for embarrassment as it proves that one consumes this drink excessively and could also portray laziness. Despite the best efforts of the *samdhi* to look dashing his weakness has been exposed (verse 2 line 5).

Song 25

(Chorus)

*Puḍi lelo samdhi mere bhole bhale,
Khichḍi khao samdhi todah hole hole.*

(Verse 1)

*Kaun desh se aaya samdhi,
Chaar din ke bhuka lage.*

(Verse 2)

*Ladke milke patri parose,
Tukur tukur samdhi takeh lake.*

(Verse 3)

Ladke milke puḍi parose,

*Jatak jatak lage samdhi tudhe,
Kuch tudhe kuch bhuyia giraye,
Kuch toh jebwa me dare lage,
Na samdhi aab tu sarmao,
Pet'h bharkekhichdi khao.*

(Verse 4)

*Kahe samdhi tu puḍi churayo,
Bhaini ke kaaran puḍi churayo,
Inke bhaini badi chatkili,
Puḍi banawe nahi jaane.
Chaar din ke bhuka samdhi,
Habar habar puḍi khae lage.*

(Verse 5)

*Kahe samdhi tu puḍi churayo,
Bhaini ke karan puḍi churayo,
Inki bhaini badi feshan wali,
Puḍi bele nahi jane,
Nahi samdhi ab nahi ghabrao,
Peat bharke puḍi khao.*

TRANSLATION

Song 25

Playful songs

(Chorus)

Take the pūḍī* my innocent samdhi,
Slow down on the eating of khichḍi my samdhi.

(Verse 1)

Where from has the samdhi come,

He seems starved for four days.

(Verse 2)

The boys are serving out the food,

Samdhi is gazing at them hungrily.

(Verse 3)

Now the boys are giving out the pūḍī,

Roughly Samdhi breaks them into pieces,

Some he breaks some land on the soil,

Some he stuffs in his pocket,

Be not shy dear samdhi,

Eat to your fill.

(Verse 4)

Why oh samdhi did you steal the pūḍī,

Was it because of your sister?

It is because the sister looks trendy,

But does not how to make pūḍī.

Being famished for four days,

He hungrily eats the pūḍī.

(Verse 5)

Why oh samdhi did you steal the pūḍī,

Was it because of your sister?

His sister does a lot of fashion,

But does not know how to roll out pūḍī,

No samdhi do not fear,

Eat to your fill now.

*pūḍī is a Indo-Fijian unleavened bread that is deep fried in oil. It is similar to chapattis in its ingredients and shape (round) however, it is smaller than chapattis and it is also cooked differently. Pūḍī is the most common item in any Hindu wedding menu. It is also widely used as a form of offering in Hindu prayers.