

(RE)VIEWING THE *OTHER*: GENDER SUBVERSIONS IN INDOFIJIAN  
PERFORMANCES

BY

VICKY VISHAL SHANDIL

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## ABSTRACT

Cultural performances are more than forms of entertainment and vehicles for conveying social and religious traditions. These acts are political acts that can exceed their role of promulgating hegemonic formations and instead be used to subvert and deconstruct existing social realities. This doctoral research focuses on performances that subvert IndoFijian heteronormative gender(s), namely: performances by female singers of *qawwali*, a genre of competitive singing historically exclusive to males; and *lahanga naach*, dances by cross-dressed males in Fiji and in the IndoFijian diaspora in New Zealand. Situated within the interdisciplinary field of Pacific Studies, this research draws upon cultural and gender studies as well as materials and knowledge from and about Pacific and Indian cultures to examine these cultural performances. Concepts such as Butler's theory of performativity and Hall's theory of articulation are employed to argue that cultural performances are *performative* in the sense that they not only depict what already exists, but initiate and materialise what can be. This argument is discussed and illustrated through both ethnographic and historical engagement and research methods, interweaving transcriptions of performances with relevant academic literature and oral history interviews of performers as well as cultural experts represented by community leaders, academics and gender activists.

This dissertation begins by discussing the idea of a liminal other in relation to ethnic and gender identities and establishes the liminal other's position in the overarching argument of this research. This is followed by detailed descriptions and analysis of *qawwali* and *lahanga naach*, respectively, in accordance with an additional research objective of documenting and creating archival records for these two performance genres. The latter part of the dissertation returns to themes of gender subversion, hegemony and performativity, discussing examples of the real-life implications of embodying liminal identities.

The dissertation concludes by emphasising the need for more research on performance cultures in the Pacific and draws attention to how individual agency can promote social change and impact meaning-making mechanisms of social groups through the means of cultural performance. Importantly, this research presents an alternative outlook on the



gendered understandings of IndoFijians by including the voices of the disadvantaged who occupy liminal spaces in society.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

Subversive behaviour exhibits the capacity to point both towards and away from received convention, at once legitimatising the cultural order as naturally given and destabilising it as artificially contrived. (Brightman, 1999, p. 273)

Within IndoFijian society, there is a pressing preoccupation with portraying an image of connectedness and stability. This concern is driven by the pressures of being a settler population acutely aware of their differences from both a distant India, and the indigenous *iTaukei*<sup>1</sup> population of their Fijian home. This concern manifests in attempts to control all aspects of daily life in order to present a sentiment of coherence. The effort to maintain the status quo is significantly vigorous in propagating and policing adherence to gender ideals. In an earlier research undertaking, I studied the role folk performances have in producing culturally gendered beings from biologically sexed ones. That project clarified that IndoFijian folksongs performed for wedding ceremonies are meant to create, reiterate and reinforce conventional femininity and gender hierarchy (Shandil, 2016). Considerable emphasis through discourses of religion, culture, and tradition is placed on gendered ideologies in discursive forms like cultural performances. Gender norms are not only expected but emphasised by policing and disciplining, sometimes even violently, otherness. The following excerpt from the dissertation of a pioneering IndoFijian feminist, Shireen Lateef, outlines IndoFijian patriarchy's notion of normative femininity:

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

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<sup>1</sup> In this dissertation non-English terms are italicised only at the first instance of their use.

vulnerable and sexually impulsive and thus in need of protection and control since they are the repositories of family honour (Lateef, 1990, p. 43).

IndoFijian females have been pressured to embody such attributes to enable the maintenance of consistent identity by their society. On further analysis, it also appears that males have faced similar pressure to personify the ideals decided for them. Hall (1977b, p. 236), drawing on the work of Mary Douglas (1966), states that 'stable cultures require things to stay in their appointed place. Symbolic boundaries keep the categories "pure", giving cultures their unique meaning and identity. What unsettles culture is "matter out of place" the breaking of our unwritten rules and codes'. Society sanctions and manages individual behaviour through ideologies, value systems, and stereotypes, for stability's sake. Religion, history, ethics and customs are portrayed as both sources and justifications for normative behaviour. This multifaceted task is completed, or at least attempted discursively, via the inclusion of endorsed mindsets within epistemic practices. Inevitably then, a plethora of discourses come into being that convey the hegemony.

Analogously, discourses identifying behaviours that fall beyond social acceptance also become existent. While society survives through the constant reiteration of binaries within, binaries also exist that correspond to things without or outside of social acceptance. For instance, the conventional gender binary that encapsulates man and woman as normative gender categories represents one end of a wider gender binary, with the other end encompassing unsanctioned gender embodiments. This *other* is what is of interest as it is presented as what should not be but may be and is frequently used as the means of reifying what should be. Hall (1977b, p. 229) defines the *other* as 'people who are in any way significantly different from the majority' and are 'frequently exposed to this binary form of representation. They seem to be represented through sharply opposed, polarised, binary extremes...'. He claims that 'difference signifies. It speaks'. My dissertation aims to amplify this voice of difference expressed in IndoFijian gender liminal performances. This is achieved by incorporating voices of *nachaniya*<sup>2</sup>, namely Aishwariya, Ashley, Afsana, Pinky, Kushwa,

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<sup>2</sup> The English translation for *nachaniya* is dancer, but in IndoFijian contexts it is often used in reference to performers of *lahanga naach*. Discussed thoroughly in Chapters 5 and 6.

Bijuriya, Rani, Laila, Bhan, Pooja, Monto, Sheetal, Shelly, Nilu, Rafiq, and Johnny, and also of female qawwali<sup>3</sup> performers Sushil, Manju and Shalini.

DeLuca (1999, p. 336) alleges that 'antagonisms make possible the investigation, disarticulation, and re-articulation of a hegemonic discourse'. The liminal *other* provides an interesting conjecture to apply critical analysis to the IndoFijian gender dichotomy. As will be explained later, applying articulation theory reveals how gender differences are constructed and naturalized into Indo-Fijian consciousness.

Historically, IndoFijians have been rigid on possible gender identities of individuals, but current social realities depict a liberalised approach to gender since a noticeable presence of liminal performances in daily life is undeniable. While the presence of the *other* still creates social discomfort, reactions towards gender liminal individuals have largely improved and this research project tracks this social transformation via analysis of cultural performances. The reason for this is historical evidence of the inclusion of gender liminal performers in mainstream rituals which raises the possibility that certain public performances have been the avenue through which liminality journeys from personal to public sphere(s), consequently pushing the envelope of gender identities by compelling a redefinition of femininity and masculinity (Namaste, 2005, p. 6).

This doctoral research focuses on those performances that subvert, disrupt, and challenge IndoFijian heteronormative gender(s). Bauman (2005, p. 149) comments 'performance forms of a community tend to be among the most memorable, repeatable, reflexively accessible forms of discourse in its communicative repertoire'. The reflexive accessibility Bauman identifies is instrumentalised to gain insight into the representation of gendered identity in certain performances. Identity of any form is 'not simply the mask of the moment but a temporal emergent, interdiscursively accomplished in the process of socialisation' (p. 147). Thus, analysis of discourses can contribute eminently to understanding identities. Nixon (1977, p. 301) iterates 'emphasizing the invented character of identities...does direct us towards the processes through which identities are forged or fictioned. Such an enterprise leads us to the cultural or symbolic work involved in this process'. This justifies the analysis of social discourses, even those embodied by 'neglected materials drawn from popular culture'.

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<sup>3</sup> A musical cultural performance discussed more thoroughly in Chapters 3 and 4.

Hall (1980, p. 8) sees this as 'evidence of the new stresses and directions of contemporary culture'. For Hall (p. 8), this is what Cultural Studies is 'primarily concerned with'. In adopting a Cultural Studies approach this thesis gives due diligence to cultural performances by analysing selected performance materials for their history, features and social impact.

The core materials for this project are performances by female singers, and dances by cross-dressed males from IndoFijian communities in Fiji and New Zealand. In the former's case, prime focus is on *qawwali* where female performers engage in the performance of insults, and sometimes *gali* (vulgarity) when competing against males. These acts, compounded with their central public presence, potentially subvert normative IndoFijian femininity as Miller (2015, p. 233) finds that 'concerns over female performance in the public realm centre on the impropriety of a woman subjecting herself to the male gaze, particularly if she is married and particularly in a mixed-sex performance context'.

The second genre is *lahanga naach* (LN) that features dances by cross-dressed males. Traditionally, LN was exclusively for weddings but more recently LN is performed for other social events like birthday parties and stage shows. Another significant change sees feminine men with blurred sexualities perform such dances, when formerly males in these performances were generally acknowledged to be heterosexual. Miller (2008, p. 279) in his dissertation calls them *nachaniya* (dancer(s)) or 'transsexual specialists' whom he witnessed performing in cultural and social events. Performances of *qawwali* and LN constitute discourses and enactments that appear subversive and transgressive. Therefore, it is the expression of liminality in the language of female performers, and dance movements, mannerisms and appearance of male performers, that need analysis to comprehend why such occurrences are permitted in an otherwise rigidly gendered society, and whether these displays prompt a reconceptualization of gender.

Skjoldager-Nielsen and Edelman define liminality as 'an in-between of potent but dangerous formlessness. It denotes the social non-space in which transformation is experienced' (2014, p. 1). They add that 'liminal experience is often coupled with transgression of individual and social limits and as such retains the quality of unpleasantness and peril' (p. 4). Despite the danger and condemnation, the presence of sanctioned subversion currently witnessed in IndoFijian cultural rituals can be traced back to Fiji's colonial era (Brenneis, D. & Padarath, R., 1979). Society surely affects those who are liminal and contributes to the marking of persons

and practices as liminal; what needs to be clarified is how liminal individuals, as actively engaged social beings, affect society. Beech (2010, p. 286) notes that 'liminal practices occur at the intersection of structure and agency and so are particularly well fitted to expanding our understanding of self-identity/social identity'. Such research focus has been advanced in the Pacific region by Besnier and Alexeyeff and my project approaches 'gender liminality' and 'gender-liminal persons' as these two researchers have.<sup>4</sup> Besnier (1994b, p. 317) notes that 'gender-liminal persons may acquire certain forms of alternative prestige, the most obvious of which is recognition of their excellence in performance arts, the very contexts in which liminality can be most appropriately foregrounded'. Besnier's observation has been critical to the objectives of this project.

This study of performances is also inspired by Deborah Wong's concept of 'performative ethnography' (Wong, 2008). For Wong (p. 78) it is not possible to 'tell' about a specific performance 'without telling...about how and why' that performance is being talked about, and one cannot 'reflect on ethnography without doing it'. Through performative ethnography a researcher can reveal how performances are 'social change agents' as genres of representation and how they overlap 'cultural ideologies and political economies'. Wong (p. 78) argues that studying and writing about performances 'needs to do more than simply describe the thing in front of you' and so my project ties specific performances to the articulations and disarticulations of gendered identity. In other words, along with providing ethnographic descriptions of on-stage performances, their wider impact on social ideals is also discussed. This requires looking beyond the moment of a performance to the network constitutive of social, cultural and historical conjectures that inspire the performance and the resultant reifications or transformations of lived realities which are by nature 'socially constructed' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 10).

My dissertation argues that performances as discernible and delimited cultural sites potentially reveal the convergences and fissures between multiple practices that create individual and social identities. Hence, the central question is, how is gendered meaning formed, contested and disseminated in and through IndoFijian cultural performances, by social subjects who activate their agency within these power-charged settings? I scrutinize

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<sup>4</sup> See (Besnier, N. 1994a; Besnier, N. 1997; Besnier, N. 1994b; Besnier, N. & Alexeyeff, K. 2014)

the constrictive power of gender ideologies, mainly in scenarios where individuals violate gender norms or when gender performances on the bodily stage conflict with socially sanctioned gender scripts. Judith Butler's ideas of performativity, normativity and discourse as factors affecting gender formation are drawn upon to analyse selected materials. While enhancing an understanding of IndoFijian gender, my project also helps contextualise Butler's concept of performativity that she puts forward in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993). Entwistle (2004, p. 57) argues that 'despite their theoretical importance, Butler's arguments are largely abstract and fail to examine how gender is performed and reproduced at the mundane levels of everyday social and cultural practices'. My project addresses this criticism by using performativity as the theoretical lens to analyse LN and qawwali. Additionally, utilising articulation theory in this analytical process helps explain gendered identity as a 'socio-cultural ensemble' (Clifford, 2003, p. 45). This is vital to show all associations and disassociations, 'the hooking and unhooking of elements,' because the essentialised and natural image of gender is 'actually a set of historical connections and disconnections' (45) produced within a matrix of colonial history, religious influences, resettlement in a Pacific nation as well as ongoing socio-economic and political circumstances.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

IndoFijians constitute the largest concentration of people of South Asian descent in the Pacific. Their culture and traditions are undoubtedly founded on Hindu Indian principles but are practiced within and alongside other Pacific communities. Such a distinct position makes the circumstances in which they perform their identities worth investigation. The precariousness of being liminal in a society where otherness is handled punitively is another prominent rationale for this project. Otherness creates interest but attracts negative attention, which is why liminality needs to be made intelligible through research. It is the 'pervasiveness' (Lorber, 1994, p. 13) and omnirelevance of gender that makes it an inescapable fact of life. Even if individuals ignored gender norms meant for them, they would still be constantly judged, marked and labelled by others. This is because gender ideologies are built into patterns of behaviour and are taken for granted. Liminal gender performances result in ideological struggles as individuals attempt reconciling what is socially believed with what is reality. Lucal (1999, p. 782) attributes significance to 'gender rebellion' in the dismantling of oppressive and biased social structures. Liminality is not necessarily a place of

in-betweenness or incompleteness in a hegemonic dichotomy. Rather, liminality exhibits alternate possibilities, the recognition of which makes the world less challenging for some individuals. There is need for information on specific gender situations because improving awareness of individual agency is compelling social, cultural, and especially legal transformation. For instance, changes to laws and national policies to safeguard rights and welfare of minorities need to be made through informed processes. It is not enough to know that minorities exist; to normalise otherness, the spaces in which these othered individuals exist need to be revealed and explained. The mechanisms that shape these spaces need enquiry and theorizing as thoroughfare for individuals to negotiate and integrate difference. In addition, understandings of gender liminality have historically been overdetermined by Western academic discourse focused on western concepts. This monopoly can be countered by reporting on the Pacific's own unique renderings of non-binary gender identities (Alexeyeff, 2009). This project represents my contribution to the decolonising of Pacific academia by recognising local processes of meaning making particularly in cultural practices, and the exploration of local liminal identities amongst a Pacific settler population that, while not originally indigenous to Fiji, are a unique product of Fiji in terms of their local cultural placedness and particularity. By analysing and documenting these performances I explore competing forms of knowledge production (Wesley-Smith, 2016, p. 160) rooted in local practices where culture and identity is articulated not only through complicity and adherence, but subversion. The arguments advanced through this project contribute to the body of knowledge and literature accumulated on the subject of gender identities in the Pacific. This signifies my attempt as someone who is in some ways an insider providing academic discussions on matters of importance to my community and the Pacific. (Wesley-Smith, 1995, p. 124). Wesley-Smith (p. 124) calls this 'The Empowerment Rationale' that motivates 'the former objects of inquiry' to 'speak up' independent of and sometimes against the vested interests of outsiders' research goals. In the article *Rethinking Pacific Islands Studies* Wesley-Smith (p. 127) offers a few questions to assist in the decolonising process. Of those questions 'What is identity and how is it constructed? What is gender, and how are gender relations determined?' are a few taken up by my research.

This dissertation's research is situated within the interdisciplinary field of Pacific Studies. Teaiwa (2010, p. 112) observes the potential misconceptions that 'almost anything can qualify



as Pacific Studies so long as it is located in the Pacific or is about Pacific people' and prescribes how to counter such assumptions. One point relevant to my project is her note that 'Pacific Studies...has space for diversity in focus' (p. 124), a diversity instrumentalised in my interdisciplinary approach. Based on Teaiwa's prescription that 'Pacific Studies shall be interdisciplinary' (2010, p. 116) my thesis looks at anthropological and historical accounts of IndoFijians to reveal how certain features of their identity have been constructed via their social, cultural and political encounters. The discussion of IndoFijian gendered identity can benefit from such 'healthy cross pollinations...between the two disciplines' (p. 116) of history and anthropology. Furthermore, the employment of a feminist lens in analysing articulation(s) of gendered identity in ritualised performances of dance and music adds to the interdisciplinarity of this research. Such an approach serves this research well as it satisfies my desire as a researcher to follow my project 'wherever it may lead without the constrictions of a disciplinary framework' (Whimp, 2008, p. 406). Pacific Studies' objective of enhancing awareness of the existence and usefulness of local knowledge and meaning-making mechanisms also inspires this dissertation. Thaman (2003, p. 3) suggests that the process of decolonising Pacific Studies includes 'valuing alternative ways of thinking about our world'. My research re-inscribes the world from the perspective of those whose liminality pushes them to the margins of society. The addition of performativity, and articulation as theoretical frameworks for analysing musical and dance performances allows the project to intersect and pervade the boundaries between Gender Studies, Cultural Studies, Pacific Studies and Ethnomusicology. Permeating the boundaries of individual disciplines counteracts the limits of producing single discipline studies.

Teaiwa also emphasises engaging 'comparative analysis' (2010, p. 116) in Pacific Studies. Due to scope and length restrictions, my project does not juxtapose, for in-depth analysis, IndoFijian subversive practices with similar Pacific examples. Nonetheless, comparative analysis employed in plotting the historical evolution of two liminal practices of Indo-Fijians and juxtaposing several points on this continuum with each other provides some level of comparative analysis. Such comparisons reveal the connections and disconnections which represent IndoFijian identity, as Clifford (2001, p. 475) argues that 'traditions articulate, selectively remember and connect pasts and presents'.

While 'ethnic and/or national identity does not necessarily trump other components of identity' (Teaiwa & Henderson, 2009, p. 438) the interactions between these different components do affect the generic perception of a community. It is better therefore to analyse identities holistically. Fry (1997, p. 188), in his narration of the formation of the South Pacific Commission in the 1940s, recounts the debate surrounding the classification of Fiji Indians as Pacific Islanders—a classification that was unacceptable to Fijian leaders. Davies (2000) also notes IndoFijians being seen as '*vulagi*, mere visitors in the house of Fijians' in his post-2000 coup commentary. Despite a sixty-year gap between the the two authors' reports, there is little improvement noted in how native Fijians perceive IndoFijians. Regardless of this, for most if not all IndoFijians, it is impossible to imagine their communal identity without effects and influences of Pacific cultures around them on many aspects including language, diet, and dress. This integration is often ignored for political reasons, but cultural exchanges are surely evident in daily life in Fiji. Amongst its examples, this dissertation discusses the image of an *iTaukei*, or indigenous Fijian *nachaniya*<sup>5</sup> who represents a physical embodiment such of cultural integration.

Moreover, a Pacific Studies project advocates for minority groups. Wesley-Smith's Empowerment Rationale is explained by Teaiwa and Henderson (2009, p. 429) as committing 'to the betterment of Pacific people's lives'. My project does this by arguing against the discernment of liminality as a lack and liminal individuals as deviants. Research by locals can be expected to create more effective awareness among communities where biased mindsets persist due to an apprehension of liberal notions advanced by foreign entities. Tuhiwai Smith (2004, p. 5) notes 'research is a site of contestation not simply at the level of epistemology or methodology but in its broadest sense as an organised scholarly activity that is deeply connected to power'. My dissertation challenges patriarchy and prevalent misogynist notions. Teaiwa (2014, p. 267) underscores the necessity for such a study when she states that 'further work is needed to capture the complex layers of tolerance and intolerance that can coexist in Fiji and shape the everyday experience of those who identify as sexual minorities'.

Additionally, IndoFijian liminality is at risk of being conflated with similar identities. Research on gender liminality in several Pacific contexts is apparent and Indian *hijras*<sup>6</sup> are extensively

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<sup>5</sup> Discussed thoroughly in Chapter 4.

<sup>6</sup> See: (Ishikawa, T. 2011; Reddy, G. 2003; Lal, Vinay. 1999)

documented. IndoFijian liminality has not been given much academic attention, nor have the performance genres LN and qawwali. Lal argues for analysing IndoFijian cultural performances to gain insight into IndoFijian lives. He himself plots the emotional response to indenture by analysing 'Hindi folk songs' (Lal B. V., 2012, p. 102). Lal (2012, p. 112) notes that while 'statistical analysis provides valuable details about trends and tendencies...it does not give insights into the motives and perceptions'. He advises that 'it would be more fruitful to turn to new and little used sources' in academia such as cultural performances which can 'movingly illuminate the feelings' of those being studied. Lal analyses folksongs to comprehend emotions of labourers, thus, a similar approach with other materials can prove to be productive and socially revelatory research undertakings. This dissertation addresses Lal's lament that cultural performances have been neglected 'in the study of a community rich in folk traditions', and proves that these texts 'express and evoke attitudes and concerns that are generally representative of the human condition they portray' (2012, p. 112). IndoFijian cultural practices have received academic attention from Donald Brenneis and Kevin Miller who have written extensively on the social significance and role of performances of various forms. Building on the academic contributions of Brenneis and Miller, my project also creates its own space by procuring a feminist lens in carrying out the entire study.

This project illuminates the recurrence of non-normative gender traits in cultural practices that were meant to support the sanctioned gender dichotomy. Cultural performances 'organise and give meaning to experience, but there are always feelings and lived experience not fully encompassed by the dominant story' (Bruner, 1986, p. 143). IndoFijian gendered identity is heteronormatively structured but the presence of non-normative or liminal identities problematize this hegemony. Bruner (p. 143) adds that 'only after the new narrative becomes dominant is there a re-examination of the past, a rediscovery of old texts...The new story articulates what had been only dimly perceived, authenticates previous feelings, legitimates new actions, and aligns individual consciousness'. My project raises the volume of those muted channels that broadcast marginalised voices. Haraway (1988, p. 580) states 'we need the power of modern critical theories of how meanings and bodies get made, not in order to deny meanings and bodies, but in order to build meanings and bodies that have a chance for life'. The traditions of embodied liminality in cultural practices provide the opportunity to evaluate the convergence of agency, history and power. In the case of dance,

for instance, Ness (2004, p. 124) believes that it 'presents the analyst of human movement with a distinct opportunity for cultural study, given the content of its choreographic symbolism'.

Materialising gender equality is challenging in societies with essentialist ideologies. To 'understand and transform unjust gendered relations (and the interrelations of gender with other unjust power relations)', an ability to 'judge between different representations of reality' is necessary (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 105). The existence of gender liminality is a reality that upon investigation reveals gender's ideological constructedness, which then opens it up for disarticulation and un-reification and acknowledgment of multiple gender identities. Butler (1997, p. 301) insists 'identity categories tend to be instruments of regulatory regimes' which are used to illustrate normative identity expectations, but these could also be inverted to become 'the rallying points for a liberatory contestation' against oppressive social structures. Revelations of non-normative gender identities augurs the potential for misunderstandings and/or denial of personal rights to non-compliant individuals. There is a need to bridge the perceptive gap of differing opinions on gender because in a society like Fiji, gender is undeniably entwined with every aspect of life. Hence, Fiji has experienced vigilante forms of gender policing due to the ignorance or lack of awareness on gender fluidity. Patriarchy as an oppressive regime incites and inspires corrective measures against gender minorities, that also result in social, economic and political deprivation of such individuals. For instance, political progress for liminal men is doubtful given that women, despite having normative gender status, have developed political influence relatively slowly. While the election of four women in Fiji's cabinet in 2014 is applaudable, it should not be forgotten that these women did not win seats based on personal votes, but on the accumulative votes of their party's male leader.

In accordance with these aspirations, some sub-questions considered in this research are:

- What are the circumstances and for what specific purposes are the performances of subversive gender forms permitted in the public sphere? The perception of liminality as destructive to 'orderliness of schematized reality' compels such performances to be 'labelled anomalous or deviant' (Patel, 1997, p. 136), yet their performances continue. Of interest here is the 'power of ambivalence' (Ramazanoglu & Holland, 2002, p. 113) that at once confines and embraces liminal performances.

- What specific performance characteristics and performers' mannerisms contradict social norms, and are all liminal performances treated similarly or is there *otherness* within *otherness*?
- If subversive acts are socially sanctioned to accomplish specific ends, then what management strategies exist to prevent distortion of normative realities?
- Do liminal performances cause social transformation by creating consciousness of individual agency and self-identity?
- How do human rights and advocacy movements influence further liminal performances?

### **Background**

IndoFijian identity is relatively recent, developing only after the arrival of Indian labourers to Fiji on 14<sup>th</sup> May 1879, under the indenture system (*girmit*). Brij Lal (1985, p. 4) states that '45,000 of Fiji's indentured labourers were recruited from north India and 15,000 from the south when recruitment began there in 1903', many of whom settled in Fiji after completing their contracts. The dispersal of IndoFijians beyond cane farming areas and their economic diversification has led to them playing significant social, economic and political roles. To some extent, Fiji's political upheavals have also been blamed on them, and IndoFijians portrayed as political threats due to their increasing economic and educational successes, and a population that exceeded that of iTaukei before 1987.<sup>7</sup>

In discussing the effect of *girmit* on labourers, Lal (1985) identifies folklore as a means of coping with the drudgeries of their new setting. These music and dance performances, while based on material and styles from India, also incorporated content from their Fijian experience. These performances have over time become distinctly IndoFijian as post-indenture settlers around cane belts in Northern and Western Fiji further proliferated these performances by introducing localised styles and content. Today many distinctions are apparent between Indians and IndoFijians, but several cultural aspects of the latter reflect the Indian origin (Manuel, 2014), gender ideologies being one of them. An ADB Report (Asian Development Bank, 2006, p. 4) claims that IndoFijian gender relations are 'influenced by various traditional cultural values originating from South Asia', and two specific social features it outlines are the emphasis on 'formal male authority in decision making and...property' and the focus on the 'manageability' of females. Hinduism and its related cultural practices remain

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the history of Fiji Indians or Indo-Fijians see (Ali, A. 1979a; Ali, A. 1979b; Lal, B. 1992).

with IndoFijians in hybridised forms (Voigt-Graf, 2004, pp. 183, 199). However, Brenneis (1983, p. 64) concludes that IndoFijian performance texts differ from the Indian forms from which they originate. He clarifies that categorising them as 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'. A notable distinction of IndoFijian performances is the use of Fiji Hindi or *Fiji Baat* (Siegel, J. 1973) as the language of performance.

The performances considered in this project are, firstly, qawwali, which feature combinations of music with at least one lead singer, and secondly, lahanga naach, which constitutes dance, song and music. Younger generations largely perceive such practices as just entertainment forms, because there is relative lack of awareness of qawwali and LN's historical significance. IndoFijian expressive forms survived years of social change and challenges because they serve didactic and other functions. Miller (2008, p. 4) asserts that musical and ritual performances offer a 'distinct site of cultural production, constitutive and revelatory of multiple points of suture that informs an individual's sense of self in society'. Since expressive forms emerge out of life and living life in socially specified ways, on-stage performances are depictions of social realities. Littosseliti and Sunderland (2002, p. 22) believe that 'when we speak we are always telling listeners something about ourselves'. Therefore, performers reveal themselves when they speak through songs and dance. They tell their personal narratives, and every moment of telling transforms the contexts for the next moments of telling, for themselves and others. Kapferer (1986, p. 189) claims that 'individuals experience themselves—they experience their experience and reflect on it—both from their own standpoint and from the standpoint of others within their culture...I do not experience your experience. Paradoxically, your experience made mine'. Kapferer's comments relate to the performative potential in discourses and theorises the consequences of performances on ideological frameworks. Accordingly, my research integrates lived experiences of performers with an analysis of their performance genres.

## **Literature Review**

IndoFijian history and political identity has been documented by Ali, A. (1979) Ali, J. (2014), Mishra (1979), Somerville (1986), Subramani (1979), Trnka (2002), Jayawardena (1975), Kelly (2011) (1991) (1995), Ray (2000), Lal (1996) (1992)(1985), Mayer (1973) and Gillion (1920,

1962). Studies of musical traditions in Indian diaspora by Peter (2014), and Ramnarine (2002) also mention IndoFijian practices but without any substantial comparative engagement. This dissertation contributes to this specific gap in literature on IndoFijian gender liminal identities embodied by cultural performances.

In his dissertation *A Community of Sentiment: Indo-Fijian Music and Identity Discourse in Fiji and its Diaspora*, Miller writes on folk-based devotional music and song for their role(s) in the construction of IndoFijian identity both in Fiji and overseas. Miller's (2008) thesis 'focuses on the musical practices of Hindus' (p. 3) arguing that 'beyond its functional role' these 'inform a devotee's sense of self in society-variously defined as selfhood, ethnic identity, or community' (p. 4). Studying how IndoFijian identity is articulated through religious practices, Miller concludes that 'the performance and consumption of music enact connections that invaluablely inform Indo-Fijian selfhood and notions of community'. Miller's argument begins by asserting IndoFijian music as an ethnically distinct category and culminates in a musical ethnography that is also 'part history, part religious study, and part political analysis' of Indo-Fijians. Miller engages with qawwali at some length and briefly mentions performances by transgendered individuals (pp. 276-282).

Prior to Miller, Brenneis produced notable academic studies of IndoFijian culture. A series of publications by Brenneis outline at least three genres of performances, namely qawwali(*kavvālī*), *chautal* (*cautāl*), and challenge songs. Brenneis impressively locates the central pedagogic, social and political usefulness of these performances. In "The Emerging Soloist: 'Kavvālī' in Bhatgaon" Brenneis (1983, p. 63) writes about 'the contexts for and styles of' the performances of qawwali and how these were socially determined. The qawwali his paper considers were performed exclusively by male performers. In contrast, my paper studies performances by female qawwal<sup>8</sup> who were rare if not non-existent during Brenneis' research. Public performances by female performers hence indicates a significant change in communal stance. Brenneis further notes that Indo-Fijian 'kavvālī style is clearly not the same as the kavvālī style with which Pakistanis, Indians and Indianists are familiar' (1983, p. 64). His paper plots a brief history of religious organisation of Indians in Fiji, which Brenneis argues as having a major impact on the content and context of performances. In "Talk and

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<sup>8</sup> The central performer in a qawwali performance.

Transformation” Brenneis (1987, p. 502) outlines factors that make performances for and by Fiji Indians successful stating that ‘successful performance can serve immediate communicative goals for individuals and enhance their reputations and prestige’, which is an argument that can be tested in relation to performers of liminality. In “The Matter of Talk: Political Performances in Bhatgaon” Brenneis (1978, p. 161) focuses on *parbachan* (religious speeches) and challenge songs. He argues that despite differences in ‘texture, text and context’, both serve politically ‘pragmatic ends’. The paper notes women performing in ‘less public settings’ (161) implying the existence of gendered performance spaces. In comparison, my research focuses on a genre where men and women not only simultaneously appear on-stage but compete against each other. Brenneis discusses competitive singing of a different type in a paper titled “About those Scoundrels I’ll Let Everyone Know: Challenge Singing in Fiji Indian Community”. He records the performance of challenge songs by opposing groups consisting of individuals from different religious backgrounds. Brenneis notes that singers ‘attack, insult and slander, the religion, relatives, and persons of their opponents’ which are actions that in ‘other contexts provoke physical assault or other overt conflict’ (Brenneis & Padarath, 1975, p. 283). These performances are examples of sanctioned subversions where normatively disallowed speeches are expressed. By studying females performing genres they were previously restricted from and cross-dressed dancing by effeminate males, this dissertation makes licensed rebellion an area of interest as well.

Miller and Brenneis unpack IndoFijian identity from distinct perspectives. I have found their works to be useful foundations from which to direct my own research trajectory. The adoption of a feminist theoretical framework to analyse performances extends feminist criticisms of IndoFijians, previously implemented by Shireen Lateef and Margaret Mishra. Mishra’s paper “The Emergence of Feminism in Fiji” (2008) narrates the initiation and progress of IndoFijian feminism. Divided into three sections, the first describes cases of resistance against social norms by female indentured labourers, depicting these as initial feminist activisms. The second section narrates events of the women labourers’ movement in the 1920s as further reprisals against oppressive state structures. Section three summarises the post-indenture 1930s women’s movement that was characterised by female economic empowerment which Mishra credits with instigating future social change. Lateef personally represents educated IndoFijian feminists who fought back against patriarchy using the formal



medium of academia and her writings became foundational to Fiji-based feminist research. Lateef's article "Indo-Fijian Women Past and Present" (1987) relates their history by detailing women's development from indenture to the mid-1980s. It discusses significant issues relating to IndoFijian women in this period and more importantly accounts for women's roles in Fiji's history. The paper offers some case studies mainly of women who step outside of normative femininity by pursuing formal education and securing non-domestic paid employment. While seemingly minor forms of liminality, in the context of IndoFijian gender expectations, such moments marked significant movement away from social norms. Over time, employed and educated women have become the new norm but not all oppressive ideologies have disappeared. In "Rule by Danda: Domestic Violence Among Indo-Fijians" (1990) Lateef pinpoints gender hierarchy as a basis for domestic violence. The paper discusses the ideology of '*purdah*' (p. 46) responsible for curtailing female freedoms of movement and speech under the guise of women's protection from social evils. Her paper shows patriarchy functioning in communities and portrays domestic violence and gender ideologies as a 'dominant mechanism of control among Indo-Fijians' (p. 60). Ideology as control apparatus is again highlighted by Lateef in "Marriage: Choice or Destiny?" (1985) where she deals with the inevitability of marriage for IndoFijian women due to institutionalised traditions that depict marriage and motherhood as the epitome of femininity. Lateef's comments on the oppression generated by patriarchy and gender ideology is relevant as these forces impact the lives of both sexes. If females are controlled to appear and act in certain ways, then men are also compelled to maintain the binary opposite features. While penalties for subversion have been heavier on women, men are undeniably also victims of society's gender management practices.

Documentation of IndoFijian male liminality is lacking, but publications on indigenous Fijian liminality, and male liminality in other Pacific contexts, represent a substantial amount of relevant literature. Before discussing such work, it should be acknowledged that Dening (1980, p. 158), building on writings on liminality by Van Gennep and Victor Turner, contextualised this concept to the Pacific using the symbolism of beaches as spaces that mark 'beginnings and endings'. His ideas on 'boundaries', 'commitment', 'taboo' and 'ambivalent places' are engaged in discussions on liminality in this research, along with his arguments in *Beach Crossings* (Dening, 2004) on characters who choose to occupy liminal spaces. Besnier's extensive research on gender liminality in the Pacific, mainly Samoa and Tonga, proved more

specifically relevant to my project. Besnier's work helps define how liminality as a concept is applied to my research as he states 'there is some evidence that gender liminalities across the various cultures of the region share many features' while noting that gender liminality is 'subject to much intracultural diversity across individuals and contexts' (1994b, p. 287). Besnier's treatment of Polynesian liminality offers models that assist in designing appropriate research methods. In the chapter "Polynesian Gender Liminality Through Time and Space" (1994a) Besnier firstly dwells on the discourses around male liminality in Samoa, Tonga and Fiji by specifying terminologies used by people to describe and discuss liminal individuals. Also of interest in his chapter is the focus on context which greatly impacts where 'gender-liminal identity 'blossoms' (1994, p. 311) and where it is suppressed. In "Sluts and Superwomen: The Politics of Gender Liminality in Urban Tonga" (1997) Besnier points out 'much remains to be done in understanding how members of sexual and gender-based minorities conceptualise themselves as social entities, how they are constructed by society, and how they give meaning to sex and gender as sociocultural constructs' (p. 7). Attaining parallel academic documentation of IndoFijian liminality is one way to cater for the shortfall Besnier identifies. In this chapter, Besnier argues that gender parodies are key in exposing 'the fictional nature of gender and its alleged grounding in sex' (7) while noting that 'challenging received norms of gender and sex' (22) can be perilous for offending individuals.

*Gender on the Edge: Transgender, Gay, and other Pacific Islanders* (2014), edited by Besnier and Alexeyeff, contains chapters by various authors who deal with research on liminality. The Introduction by Besnier and Alexeyeff (2014) discusses diverse forms of gender 'inbetweenness' and classifies these collectively as non-heteronormative. They argue that liminality, by being 'on the edge', becomes 'both a position of power and one of marginality' and that such positioning(s) has made gender an issue of intellectual debate. This places gender at 'the centre of the important social, political and cultural questions...such as kinship, the division of labour, political institutions, religion, law, and the economy' (p. 1). The authors identify that gender is constantly overlooked as an issue of significance. This validates the need 'to remind us of the fundamental role gender plays in global and historical contexts'. More specifically in relation to non-heteronormative gender, one cannot deny its vitality in the definition of what is normative. Liminal individuals are 'at once part and parcel of their societies and subversive of social order' and 'their very existence embodies the contradictions of the contemporary society' (p. 2). The chapter brings to light the question of identity and

the consequences of adopting or rejecting pre-determined identity categories. Besnier and Alexeyeff contextualise this debate to the Pacific by discussing gender categories, such as Samoan *fa'afafine*, Tongan *fakaleitī*, Tahitian *māhū*, and *akava'ine* in Cook Islands. While none of the IndoFijian terms are discussed, *qauri* is mentioned by other contributors in specific reference to iTaukei liminality. Besnier and Alexeyeff assert that 'terms are not just descriptive but performative and with the performative comes the political' (p. 6); thus, denying IndoFijian liminality even a mention essentially impedes its political recognition. The authors discourage the conflation of Pacific non-heteronormative gender identities with similar western concepts. They argue that the two have more substantial contrasts than the differences in nomenclature. For instance, they note that 'family relations (including fictive families), friendships, and other forms of relatedness' are important factors in 'understanding non-heteronormative identifications in Pacific Island societies' as opposed to highly personalised identities of the West. Identities are context-specific and can only be comprehended through a contextualised study of the concerned group.

In chapter 8 of *Gender on the Edge* (pp. 162-183), Presterudstuen discusses 'processes of gendered self-identification among non-heteronormative ethnic Fijian men in contemporary Fiji'. Despite the diversity in performance of masculinity by these men, 'they all display ambiguous relationship to Fijian traditional notions of gender, thus, highlighting the often complex relationship between how individuals experience gendered identities and what is present as culturally specific, dominant notions of identity' (Presterudstuen, 2014, p. 162). While the chapter title specifies Fiji as context, the author explains that the research respondents were all iTaukei. Presterudstuen then identifies three groups of non-heteronormative gender among Fijians which range from those clearly visible to those that act straight publicly but privately identify as homosexuals. He notes that instead of being considered a distinct third gender category, the *qauri* are considered 'as something akin to male transgender or biological males performing hyper-femininity' (p. 164). He argues that the social acceptance of *qauri* identity inevitably becomes oppressive against 'many other forms of possible and existent' non-normative identities. The chapter also highlights how Fijian society is now increasingly driving non-heteronormative identities towards the hegemonised liminal identity identified generally as *qauri*. My research fills in a specific literary gap by identifying and discussing at least one transgender identity, that of the

nachaniya, that is witnessed in Fiji. I am careful, however, not to homogenise this identity and get into detailed descriptions of the diverse embodiments of the nachaniya identity.

Nicole George (2014) identifies another way in which liminality is managed. She recognizes that “‘tolerance of homosexuality’ was achieved only when it was articulated as “trivia” or “spectacle” such as transgender beauty pageants’ (p. 315). People associate these presentations as means of entertainment. This has relevance to my research as IndoFijian liminal performers are commonly perceived as sources of entertainment. It is arguable that if people were to recognise any serious social consequences of such displays, the amicable treatment they currently receive could be withdrawn. Additionally, George claims Fiji as ‘one of the few sites in the Pacific Islands where the political status of homosexuals is openly debated against a backdrop of religious conservatism and ethno-nationalism’ (p. 293). However, she notes that promoting rights of liminal individuals faces impediments as ‘homophobia remains a powerful feature of political and religious rhetoric in Fiji’. George focuses on issues of sexuality whereas my project analyses gender displays, however, her paper still helps understand the political and social context.

### **Theoretical Guide**

By analysing gender liminal performances in Indo-Fijian cultural practices, this dissertation discusses the mechanics of gender identity construction. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002, p. 113) suggest ‘since the diversity of political spaces for negotiating ‘otherness’ cannot be asserted in general, researchers need to examine what is similar and different in any given research situation’. Similar research, such as on Rotuman clowns (Hereniko, 1995), Samoan fa’afafine (Schmidt, Stewart, & Strathern, 2012) and Indian hijra (Morcom, 2013), inform my research’s arguments and methods. My research intentions are also influenced by Hau’ofa’s (1994, pp. 156-157) suggestion that ‘only when we focus on what ordinary people are actually doing, rather than what they should be doing can we see the broader picture of reality’. In following Subramani (1995) (2001), Thaman (1987) (2000) (2003), and Teaiwa (2001), my project attempts an interdisciplinary approach to research by combining feminist and cultural studies analyses of performed texts. This research identifies and documents how performers of liminality continue their liminal performances beyond the performance stage and how this impacts their social intelligibility as (Dolan, 2005, p. 1) argues ‘the consideration of power inherent in performance to transform social structures opens the way to a range of additional

considerations concerning the role of the performer in societies where they are both admired and feared’.

The following theories and methodology are used:

### Performativity

Butler’s performativity theory problematizes the sex categories of male and female by depicting both gender and sex as cultural constructs, rather than the widely accepted view of sex as the biological base and gender the superstructure (Butler, 1990, p. 7). She puts into contention feminist debates that place subjects into delimited identities and advocates for accepting multiple gender possibilities by dismissing binaries altogether. Thus, sexual identity is performative as ‘there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results’ (Butler, 1990, p. 25). Cameron (1998, p. 17) notes ‘traditional assumption in sociolinguistics was that women and men used language in characteristically different ways because they were gendered. I am a woman therefore I speak like one. The performance approach suggests instead that women and men use language as they do *in order to be, and be perceived as, gendered*’ (italics in original). Gender is produced and reproduced through managed social controls and these productions over time become set standards. However, these reproductions create the space for alternative articulations of gender driven by individual autonomy and agency. Butler’s illustration using drag opens 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 norm those actions were performed in. In that sense the body as the biological component of any subject has a vital function in the absorption and display of identity. 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. Butler sees the body as ‘an active process of embodying certain cultural and historical possibilities’ (Butler, 1988, p. 521)—a process of appropriation that itself compels careful evaluation. Gender is thus the bodily acts themselves and these bodily acts are gendered.

A theoretical analysis using Performativity shows how subversive performances deconstruct heteronormative ideologies by triggering their re-imagination. What is a body if not the culmination of all it has been historically made to experience and embody through social

processes of enculturation, thus, to analyse the performance by a body is to analyse the history the body has had to endure? Ness (2004, p. 124) claims 'body movement in dance may be understood as the embodiment of history, of existential givens, of social value systems, of symbolism, and/or of thought per se'. Embodied performances articulate more than what the sensory agents encounter initially. In other words, there is more to a performance than what is heard, seen, and touched. In reading the performance of liminality, the theoretical framework of performativity helps identify the multiple performances staged on the same body. Bammer (1992, p. 5) notes, the body is a 'primary site where oppression becomes palpable' while being 'an equally primary site of resistance to oppression'. Hence, the liminal performer disarticulates gender norms through the portrayal of the *other*.

### Articulation Theory

At the core of this research is the concept of gender being a cultural and social construct—an articulation— rather than a biological given. Unfortunately, pre-determining gender based on bodily characteristics is the norm for most communities and it is an ideology that compels the othering of those considered out of sync from sanctioned expectations. While current improvements in human rights and some level of awareness about individual agency have enabled a slight liberation of society from oppressive views, many continue to misunderstand the rationale behind the recognition of gender forms that fall outside the established binary. Demanding acceptance from people, or what Morcom (2013, p. 199) calls fighting 'fire with fire' may not produce healthy social relations, as advocacy has the potential to heighten the feeling and notion of difference and make it more obvious. This necessitates that social awareness of gender fluidity be done through more agreeable means.

An analysis of performance is strategic in identifying the mechanisms that articulate gender identities. Articulation theory shifts focus from the existing cultural forms to the moments of conjunctures and connections. These connections help gain a holistic understanding of social and cultural occurrences. Teaiwa (2005, p. 204) points out 'articulations generate the practice of providing layers upon layers of contextualisation, of bringing backgrounds into foregrounds, and of more accurately representing cultural and political complexity'. Her comment accentuates the vitality of revealing the connections and conjunctures that assemble in presenting IndoFijian notions of gender. Perhaps bringing to the surface and discussing these underlying reasons could serve as the impetus for social reformations of how

gender is perceived, and gendering processes managed. At this point the presence and operation of discourse in the social arena may offer some meaningful options. Trimbur (1993, p. 38) suggests 'that the meaning of the world is not discovered, but constructed, through rhetorical practices' or discourses. It must be noted, however, that individual subjects are not 'simply interpellated by one discourse' but through the convergence and relations of diverse discourses (p. 38). This allows subjects to exist as performances within a discourse rather than as 'content' (p. 39) which leaves potential for rearticulations of identities. The rationale for employing a discursive approach is also drawn from Hall (1977a, p. 6) who claims it to be 'more concerned with the effects and consequences of representation...it examines not only how language and representation produce meaning, but how the knowledge which a particular discourse produces connects with power, regulates conduct, makes up or constructs identities and subjectivities, and defines the way certain things are represented, thought about, practised and studied'. As established earlier, these identities are results of the juxtapositions and convergences of various discursive moments setting up the platform for the establishment of new meanings. Katerina Teaiwa (2004, p. 230) points out, 'meaning is created in the spaces between frames' which also implies that to understand the resultant meaning one has to understand the space between the frames.

Henderson's (2011, p. 272) article *Fleeting Substantiality: The Samoan Giant in US Popular Discourse* is a good example of similar analysis. Her paper examines 'the production and sedimentation of popular mythologies' of Samoans in the US. People's perception of Samoans are fuelled by assumptions of difference, and the meanings they invest into these differences (p. 277). This becomes a serious issue when conflated images of a group of people become stereotypes that then transform the generic view of an entire community. Using articulation theory Henderson is able to identify the social effects of such stereotypes. My project similarly reveals social perceptions of liminal individuals who are the main concern of this thesis. Henderson (p. 283) states 'physical size is what makes the giant meaningful, but it also defines the limits of his meaning; he is allowed no other role' and in similar fashion I argue that liminal individuals should not cease to exist outside their gender and that they need to be articulated as complete individuals and not just on the basis of their gender traits.

Slack (1996, p. 121) highlights that cultural studies becomes the means 'to talk about the power of the discursive and its role in culture, communication, politics, economics, gender, race, class, ethnicity and technology in ways that provided progressive-minded people

sophisticated understanding as well as mechanisms for strategic intervention'. The enabling of intervention into issues of gender biases and attaining progressive reformation can be a needed contribution of cultural studies and articulation theory to the IndoFijian mindset. To make any positive arbitrations into correcting prejudiced ideologies and disproving misinformed gender hegemony in this community, one has to first understand the various frames that converge in articulating these cultural meanings. If 'articulation is the political connecting and disconnecting, the hooking and unhooking of elements—the sense that any socio-cultural ensemble that presents itself to us as a whole is actually a set of historical connections and disconnections' (Slack J. D., 1996, p. 45), then what is presented as gender in IndoFijian society is an assemblage of quite an interesting set of factors. IndoFijian identity has been and is continuously influenced by the intersection of the indenture experience, political issues on leadership and indigeneity and their close proximity to Pacific Islanders far from the practices of Indians on the Indian subcontinent. Central to gender expectations of IndoFijians has been an underlying patriarchal narrative formed due to girit, that also saw the erosion and hybridisation of cultural forms brought into Fiji by the first generation labourers. The social setup of indenture marked by high men to women ratios, initiated many social ills which resulted in tightening of gender expectations. Such historical, local and global socio-political trends and transformations need to be analysed for the ways these have affected the construction of IndoFijian ideals of femininity and masculinity.

### **Methodology**

The survival of cultural practices is ensured through their reiterative performances. Kapchan explains that ethnographers who study cultures have adopted alternative methodologies at the recognition of ritualised performances' potential in perpetuating traditions through repetition. These researchers moved from studying 'static texts', which are 'severed from their ground of enunciation', to performed cultures as these scope beyond what inscribed materials capture (Kapchan, 1995, p. 479). With that understanding, the methodology for this project is that of a performance ethnography. Denzin (2003, p. 189) states that 'performances are embedded in language. That is, certain words do accomplish things, and what they do, performatively, refers back to meanings embedded in language and culture'. Schechner (2013, p. 29) says that 'performances mark identities, bend time, reshape and adorn the body, and tell stories. Performances or art and rituals, are "restored behaviours", "twice-behaved behaviours", performed actions that people train for and rehearse'. When combined, the



descriptions of performances offered by Denzin and Schechner qualify all forms of performances as texts to be studied. Even everyday life can be performance text(s), as individual's need 'years of training and practice, of learning appropriate culturally specific bits of behaviour, of adjusting and performing one's roles in relation to social and personal circumstances' (Schechner, 2013, p. 29). For studying performances of liminality, a performance ethnography is apt in locating the intersection of performance and performativity 'in a speaking subject with a gendered and racialized body' (Denzin, 2003, p. 190) which is relevant to the IndoFijian context, where ethnic identity plays as substantial a role as gender.

For Schechner (1988, p. 265) performance is 'a public dreaming' where revelations are made in two distinct ways. Firstly, performances reveal blocked desires which have turned into fantasies due to prolonged suppression. Secondly, they express views that would normatively 'have had a hard time getting expressed at all' (p. 265). Thus, analysing subversive performances is a means of peering into the hidden layers of the intersection of individual desire and social expectations. Bauman and Briggs (1990, p. 73) 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'. Using Performativity as a critical lens, my project unpacks performances to disclose disarticulation and rearticulation of gender identity. Liminal performances problematise the notion of inherent identity through the portrayal of embodied subversion, which reveal to individuals their potential for alternative embodiment. The storehouse of performances is 'lived' experiences and Denzin (2003, p. 191) concludes that experience can be studied in no other way but 'through and in its performative representations'. Performances are site(s) where 'memory, emotion, fantasy and desire' exist interdependently, manufactured through individual interaction with multiple discourses.

Based on the assumption that 'cultural practices are discursive' (Miller K. C., 2008, p. 27) my research analyses live and recorded (audio-visual) song and dance performances in Fiji and among the IndoFijian diaspora in New Zealand, for social and cultural transgression. While the live performances have been central sources of information, recordings of performances that were made available as softcopies on discs and USB by performers were also used as texts for analysis. Qawwali texts analysed feature performance competitions between male and female qawwal, and specific moments that contain gender-related arguments are highlighted. In terms of LN, an effort was made to present performances from different

contexts because performances differ based on settings and purpose for performing. LN is a particularly versatile genre as it has religious, cultural, and entertainment related functions. These texts are from different time periods and from different geographical settings, within Fiji and New Zealand. The loss of recordings of past performances and former performers who have since passed away, was a point of concern and disappointment. I also noted that current performers were not entirely concerned about recording and maintaining copies of their performances. This was an indication that the performers have begun to see their on-stage image as normal while audiences view it as spectacular.

### Oral History<sup>9</sup>

Anderson and Jack provide useful insights and guidelines on conducting successful interviews asserting 'Oral Histories provide an invaluable means of generating new insights' (Anderson & Jack, 1991, p. 11). An important proposition by them is perceiving interviewees as 'narrators' rather than the researched or sources of sought-after knowledge. This creates an appropriate perspective with which a researcher should walk into an interview scenario where he/she is not going to extract information but listen to the narration of events that someone has had the privilege of living. This implies that while it is advisable for a researcher to have goals for what needs to be gathered through an interview, these goals should not dictate the development of the interview in a manner that the process becomes too rigidly structured. Anderson and Jack (1991, 11) believe that 'spontaneous exchange within an interview offers possibilities of freedom and flexibility' and can make the interview situation both comfortable and productive for the narrator and the researcher. The authors (p. 23) view oral history interviews as 'a shift in methodology from information gathering, where the focus is on the right questions, to interaction, where the focus is on process, on the dynamic unfolding of the subject's viewpoints'. In aligning my interview approach to Anderson and Jack's proposal, I discovered that interview sessions flowed naturally as performers and other interviewees comfortably discussed their lives and experiences. This dissertation incorporates the voices of sixteen LN and two female qawwal.

Performers, whom I treated as experts on their performance genres, narrated their life stories from how they began performing and their experiences with the performer identity. Kisliuk (2008, p. 183) argues that mainly in the study of musical performances and performers, we

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<sup>9</sup> The interviews were completed after receiving ethics approval from VUW Human Ethics Committee on 8<sup>th</sup> December 2016. Approval Number 2367.

'present or re-present the experiential since performance is experience' and the performers are at the forefront of this phenomenon. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 8) also clarify that qualitative research methodologies need to consider lived experiences as 'this is where individual belief and action intersect with culture' and seeing how culture is central to the representations of identities, any insight into it is an opportunity of significance. There are several reasons for including performers' views in the analysis of the performances. Firstly, the performers are the best people to provide insight into their performances. Why they say certain things and not other things, why they dress or act or portray certain characteristics and avoid others, should be ascertained from them. Since they are performing specific liminalities, their experiences cannot be generalised with those of other performers nor of the society at large. Also, comprehending how these performers perceive themselves as cultural and liminal performers has also provided interesting discussion points. Performers of liminality have endured some level of social othering, which is made clear in conversations with them. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002, p. 105) point out 'social researchers have the power to represent the lives and ideas of the researched as similar or different across any divisions between them' and this means 'making knowledge claims' that interpret the 'social existence of others' and these knowledges 'have effects on people's lives, and can identify, or ignore, hidden power relations'. Considering the consequences of research as stipulated by Ramazanoglu and Holland, this project includes the viewpoints of performers, thus providing them a channel of expressing their reaction to oppressive and non-empathic social demands that have been placed on them with little sign of empathy. The most significant information to be acquired from these interviews has been performers' knowledge on their own social significance, mainly how their role has been established through history. Through a collection of these oral histories I have charted the development of liminal performances among IndoFijians. Additionally, academics, religious and community leaders, NGO activists, and enthusiasts of the two genres contributed to developing knowledge of the histories, significances and transformations these cultural performances and their performers, have undergone. These respondents, whom I call cultural experts, are people at the core of various aspects of IndoFijian life and have provided relevant contextualised information reflected consistently throughout the thesis. Most importantly, data from these individuals was vital in gauging the wider social perception of liminal performers.

## **Chapter Outline**

### Chapter 2      The Liminal Other

This chapter defines and sets up the platform for the rest of the dissertation, particularly in introducing and discussing the terms liminality and *other*. This is done through an extensive literature review of the genealogy of the concepts, mainly the theoretical input of Van Gennep, Turner and Denning. Butler is engaged in applying performativity to the analytical aspect of this research. This chapter attends to IndoFijian identity itself as othered, elaborating how it is defined in contrast to indigenous Fijian identity. The chapter then proceeds to describe IndoFijian hegemonic gender binary that becomes the foundation for explaining how and why the individuals studied for this dissertation are considered liminal.

### Chapter 3      Displayed Difference: A Historical Analysis of Qawwali

This chapter discusses the history of qawwali mainly in the context of Fiji and describes with illustrations the various aspects included in this performance genre. This chapter interweaves published material on qawwali with opinions of performers and qawwali enthusiasts, describes its current form, and outlines changes it has experienced. Throughout the chapter, special attention is given to the perspectives of female qawwal.

### Chapter 4      Analysis of Qawwali Performances

This chapter provides some sample performances with analysis to contextualise the overall arguments of my project.

### Chapter 5      The Dancing Other: Roots and Rituals of Lahanga Naach

This chapter traces and documents the history of LN in Fiji. The various aspects of the genre; including the various performance contexts, are outlined and explained. This chapter is integral to a dissertation aim of studying unresearched cultural practices by connecting relevant academic commentary with input from performers and cultural experts.

### Chapter 6      Analysis of Lahanga Naach Performances

This chapter provides some performances with analysis becoming the first academic documentation of this genre.

### Chapter 7      Managing Subversive Identities: Pathways to and Issues of Subversive Embodiments

This chapter discusses issues of embodying liminal identities, which are outlined in the specific experiences of nachaniya and female qawwal. Again, the contribution of field consultants is interwoven with the discussions to contextualise the experiences and identify those factors that enhance discriminatory practices. The chapter also pays attention to the efforts and challenges of rights activists in their aspirations to accomplish gender equality.

## Chapter 8      Conclusion

The conclusion comments on the fulfilment of research goals and objectives. It also identifies areas that can be further explored through analysis of the vast amounts of available materials that have thus far attracted little research interest.

## Chapter 2

### The Liminal Other

As a fictional directive I believe that the historical experience has taken root in the minds of the Indians in Fiji (as a result no doubt of that experience) as something broadly akin to a failed millennial quest. It was a failed quest because, upon arriving in Fiji, the Indians were confronted with a world which was anything but a fulfilment of their dreams of the promised land – “promised” in the sense that the recruiters in India impressed upon all prospective indentured labourers the possibilities of escape from the degrading realities of Indian life. The responses these labourers began to make to questions about self and identity, about “purpose”, about their psychological and social commitment to the “new” land, indicate not only a corrosive *angst* but also a corresponding fragmentation of *psyche*.

(Mishra V. C., 1979, p. 171)

#### Introduction

This chapter defines and contextualises the theoretical concepts at the core of this dissertation’s argument(s). It begins by arguing that IndoFijian identity is one that originates from a liminal state. Next the chapter moves onto contextualising the concept of liminality to IndoFijian communal and gender identities. Gender identity and parody are also explored with consideration of Butler’s theory of performativity, which leads to a discussion of subversive practices and social responses to them. The chapter concludes by identifying the liminal other(s) who are the focus of this research.

#### Being IndoFijian

The identity of the IndoFijian is rooted in liminality. As Mishra identifies above, the arrival of indentured labourers into Fiji began a transition that would not only reconfigure the identity of this group of people but that of a nation and a region. The Fiji that Indians arrived to was an infant British colony, experiencing its share of teething problems in negotiating with existing Fijian political structures and hierarchies, into which these labourers became an additional and significant influencing factor. In the years after Fiji’s independence, Becker

(1995, p. 15) notes 'the enhanced awareness of Fijian ethnicity and of both Indian and Western infringement on indigenous lifeways occasioned a popular movement, supported by the chiefly leaders to return to indigenous customs'. The coups of 1987 and 2000 were explicitly blamed on the increasing success of IndoFijian political involvement and its threat to indigenous rights. Rabuka (2012, p. 9) claims 'the tension in the relationship between indigenous Fijians and our Indian population had been building up in the 1970's and 1980's...and was fanned by the racial nature of party political confrontation in parliament'. While such racially-charged tenuous political conditions became apparent post-independence, Fiji's cession to Britain in 1874 was also completed amidst immense political volatility and power struggle involving violent suppressions of certain provinces and alliances by Cakobau and chiefs loyal to him. The declaration of Cakobau as Fiji's King was further evidence of 'a regional system' comprising 'Fiji's eastern islands together with eastern and southern Viti Levu' that existed even 'before the Europeans arrived' (Norton, 2012, p. 20). Historical accounts by Norton (2012) and Howard (1991) attribute significant blame for Fiji's recurring political issues, even in the independent and modern nation, on unequal power sharing that always tipped in favour of powerful individuals from eastern Fiji, which deprived other regions of much power or control. This resulted in the emergence of short-lived yet strong insurgencies such as cult movements like *Wai Ni Tuka* (The Water of Immortal Youth) and anti-government figures like Apolosi Nawai. These received harsh treatments in the form of arrests, imprisonment and banishment. Since admitting to this pre-existing intra-racial power struggle was undesirable for Fijian leaders, IndoFijians proved to be a readily available, easily justifiable and conveniently-placed scapegoat. Lal (2009, p. 72) observes that even in the 2006 coup, where all major players were indigenous, the blame eventually landed with IndoFijians as soon as deposed IndoFijian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry, joined the post-coup interim administration.

The indenture period, in a critical sense, had been an initiation ritual: one filled with pain, anguish and toil that would later see the birth of new identities. Even for those indentured labourers who would later return to India, their experiences in this Pacific British colony would remain a powerful memory. The narrations of girit by various writers of that era clarify that from the onset of their journeys, the Indians had to deal with the presence of *others* on ships they boarded. While the labourers were sourced from India, they were from different villages,

regions and states as well as from diverse social backgrounds, most prominently determined by the caste system. The unavoidable interactions within space-restricted ships over several months had the effect of severing old ties and creating new ones. Gillion (1973 (1963), p. 122) explains, 'In India social status, marriage, eating arrangements, and occupations were determined by caste, but these distinctions were all but obliterated in the depots, ships, and plantations. A new pattern of association, work, and marriage was imposed by the indenture system...'. Depots, ships and plantations symbolise points where 'connecting and disconnecting, the hooking and unhooking of elements' (Slack D. J., 1996, p. 45) occurred, thereby articulating a new and contextually-specific identity, the IndoFijian. If a few months of exchanges can erode the historically instituted ideology of caste, then surely one can expect more substantial shedding and adoption of identity characteristics through years of communication with other dominant ethnicities on these Fijian islands. My central argument for this chapter is derived from this assimilation of values and ideologies.

The IndoFijians this research studies are considered liminal due to their subversive practices and performances that ultimately cause their othering. I argue that through their performance, they create a public presence and a social image that compels their entry into discourses. Following Sharma's (2006, p. 30) rationale for understanding cultural performances as 'sites of community dialogue' which are useful 'for fostering social change', I present female qawwal, and nachaniya, as liminal others, at the forefront of gender negotiations. As Sharma (2006, pp. 72-73) notes in some Indian performance forms, qawwali and LN establish opportunities to 'modify or sabotage the dominant oppressive rhetoric' in society because these performances are 'less rigid compared to a literal text' and the improvised nature of these genres provide 'more space for its participants to derive multiple expressions and interpretations'. This discursive involvement has two potential social effects. Firstly, they challenge the historical practice of ignorance, whereby religious and cultural authorities neither publicly acknowledge nor explicitly condemn them. Secondly, they create circumstances for their social claims to be discussed, debated and negotiated. Their constant existence in various social spaces requires clarification or justification. Their bodies carry meaning, their presence asks questions, their corporeality destabilises hegemony and their performance redefines reality. These generate the conditions for a reassessment of tradition, culture and social expectations. Nonetheless, Clery (2014, p. 212) warns 'performances can



provide “safe” spaces for reflection and dialogue; however, *speaking out* is always a complex, risky, and political act, despite the cloaks of metaphor and playfulness that may help to enable expression’ (emphasis added). As this chapter discusses, the performers as social beings have struggled to justify their existence to a society always contemplating and enacting measures of discouraging subversive acts and demeaning subverts. In my interactions with performers, mainly of LN, I noted them feeling a sense of separation and difference. As much and as often as they try to integrate with society, they constantly encounter situations that remind them of their difference.

### **Liminality**

Liminality is defined as ‘a ritual space or phase of transition in which a person is no longer what they were but is not yet what they will be. The liminal is the in-between, the neither one thing nor the other’ (Buchanan, 2010). In the context of this research, the notion of liminality is used to discuss identity transitions. Its first application is to IndoFijian communal and ethnic identity. The second application is to gender identity. The argument in both cases is outlining recognised threshold identities and analysing the processes of embodying these identities that inadvertently render some individuals perpetually askance of expectations. There is however, a point of divergence to be noted in the application of liminality to this discussion. While liminality does suggest a transition or pre/post movement status, in the cases I present in this study, the individuals are not in fact transitioning but are in spaces where their specific gender embodiment(s) preclude their successful integration into any existing socially recognised and sanctioned categories. The aim here is not only to explain the presence of liminality but also to discuss its social impacts mainly on those deemed gender liminal. Gender liminality is a precarious status in structured societies where power relations are negotiated in close relation with gender. Prince (1981, pp. 4-5) identifies existence of cultures ‘where the male is superior to the female (so they think), it is a lessening, a reduction, a loss of position, regard esteem, etc., for a male to be put into a feminine circumstance’. With gender being an inescapable fact of life, those whom hegemonic discourses define and compel into a subservient gender category, are forced to bear harsher, more burdensome consequences of this reality. While the conflation of sex and gender remain a social reality, the compulsion to enter gendering processes and live with their consequences will continue to plague human life. West and Zimmerman (1987, p. 146) explain ‘insofar as sex category is

used as a fundamental criterion for differentiation, doing gender is unavoidable. It is inescapable because of the social consequences of sex-category membership: the allocation of power and resources not only in the domestic, economic, and political domains but also in the broad arena of interpersonal relations'. Evidently gender is instrumental in allocation of power and resources and based on West and Zimmerman's assertion, one has only to be born belonging to an *othered* sex category to be systematically denied equal access to economic opportunities and political agency.

While being risk-prone, liminal positions are also key to deconstructing the basis of rigid, heteronormative ideologies. As a theoretical concept, liminality provides the critical lens and language to re-view and debate origins and sustained articulations of existing social structures. In its corporeal capacity it creates tangible antagonism against what is unquestioningly accepted as true by instigating circumstances that call for a re-evaluation of norms. The non-conformist and borderless attributes of liminality make it the perfect analytical tool for probing and collapsing binary oppositions and hierarchical distinctions. Broadhurst (1999, p. 38) claims that a liminal performance can accomplish this 'with its abundant array of such aesthetic features as eclecticism, pastiche, parody, reflexivity, montage and collage, and a repetitiveness which foregrounds not sameness but difference'. By foregrounding difference, ideological foundations can be established that lead to the cessation of perceiving difference as lack and needing correction.

### **Contextualising Liminality**

There is no "IndoFijian" culture that precedes the colonial girit experience. While indentured labourers brought with them language, beliefs, practices and materials from India, IndoFijian history begins with interference, movement, change and adaptation. It is useful to contemplate the arrival of Indians to Fiji, and their eventual sea to land transfer, through the concept of 'beaches' developed by Pacific historian Greg Denning. Denning describes beaches as 'ambivalent space, as marginal time, as metaphor for cross-cultural encounters' (Denning, Readings/Writings, 1998, p. 85). Jolly (2011, p. 56) extrapolates the beach as 'a limen where everyday understandings are displaced, where crossings occur, cross-cultural even transcultural encounters, where the exchange of bodies and meanings subverts taken-for-granted understandings and creates the potential for profound and mutual transformation'. The beach applies both literally and figuratively to Indians' transformation into, what is today,

IndoFijian identity. Their literal beach crossing brought them into contact with a new environment in the form of a cluster of Pacific islands called Fiji, already inhabited by two dominant communities, namely indigenous Fijians, and Europeans in the form of colonial settlers and administrators, farm owners and church representatives. Norton (2012, p. 37) explains 'Europeans had favoured Indian immigration so long as they regarded the Indians as merely a subordinate adjunct to their own economic and political leadership'. However, when Indians/IndoFijians inevitably engaged in political uprising, Norton notes that colonial administrators' response to this was defending 'Fijians and endorsing government policies to cull IndoFijian progress'. Later, similar divisive strategies were implemented by a prominent Fijian leader with close colonial association. Ratu Lala Sukuna, who:

...had a strongly racist view of society and felt that each ethnic community should live in isolation from the other. He saw inter-ethnic solidarity as representing perhaps the greatest threat and the promotion of inter-ethnic suspicion and separation became the cornerstone of his design to maintain a social order that served the interests of he and his fellow chiefs (Howard, 1991, p. 45).

Humanity, however, overcame these artificial barriers as, over the years, cultural exchanges, social overlaps and political connections and disconnections have reformed and refined Fiji's communities. Some of these intersections have left lasting impressions that distinguish the IndoFijian even when he leaves Fiji and resides overseas. These migrant IndoFijians cross beaches *again* to leave the setting that has given their ancestors and them the claim to IndoFijian identity. It is especially in these diasporic locations that their *islandness* becomes more apparent. Naidu (2017, p. 11) provides this quotation from a personal conversation with Satish Chand, an IndoFijian intellectual:

The one impression I have living in Canberra the past quarter century amongst Indians is that Indo-Fijians are culturally and socially distinct from those from the mainland. We are more laid-back, trusting, and have adopted and adapted to island culture without realizing this. Do you know that LA and Sydney have kava bars like those in Suva market serving Indo-Fijians only? The melding of Indo-Fijians into Pacific Islanders I think has been necessary given the forces at play, successful on many counts, and gives us all a distinct identity.

Chand's reflection helps present a counter-narrative to the 'popular myth of colonialism in Fiji...that of a benign colonial state in which British and chiefly rulers faced little opposition except from "greedy" Indian migrants who had little respect for Fiji's sacred traditions' (Howard, 1991, p. 15). If IndoFijians have been resisting the cultural framework around them, then what is the explanation for the significant levels of cultural adoption and absorption that today represents the IndoFijian identity? While this connection is strong for IndoFijians living in Fiji, their *Fijianness* becomes more apparent in overseas settings when in a conglomeration of cultures, they are drawn towards their Pacific heritage ever more strongly than they are to their *Indianness*. Unfortunately, IndoFijian departures from Fiji are also attributable to the sense of liminality they can at times feel when Fiji's political climate turns hostile, and discourses are generated that alienate them from their country of birth. This limen status and feeling of otherness has plagued IndoFijians since giriti and has placed them in a perpetual position of 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1969, p. 69). A hopeful sign that tackles such emotions was presented on 5<sup>th</sup> May 2017, when the chiefs of Fiji's Rewa Province officially adopted descendants of *giritiya* and gave them an iTaukei clan identity of *Luvendra na Ratu* (Children of High Chief) (FBC News, 2017). The impact of this gesture on all parties will become apparent in due course, yet it stands as a signal of a positive step towards genuine reconciliation that in many ways parallels the rendering of all Fiji citizens by the 2013 constitution as "Fijians" regardless of ethnicity.

Like Denning, I derive the notion of liminality from Turner who discussed this subject from the point of 'threshold crossing' after adapting the idea from Arnold Van Gennep's 1909 publication *The Rites of Passage*. Van Gennep represents liminality as the point of transition when rites and rituals were observed to bring spiritual harmony to forces that were offset by significant life alterations like birth, puberty, marriage and death. His argument was that as individuals transited between positions, they were in in-between states, where they were vulnerable and required supernatural protection (Gennep, 1909). Turner summarises the three phases: in Phase One, 'separation' is marked by a detachment from an 'earlier fixed point in social structure'; then, in Phase Two, a 'liminal period', few or no characteristics of the preceding or following identity are displayed; and finally, the entry into Phase Three, namely 'reaggregation', when a new stable state is assumed (1969, pp. 94-95). Liminal individuals, therefore, are 'necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons

elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space' (95). This slippage and traversing of boundaries can often leave individuals involved in the process in a powerless and precarious state mainly when the transformation they attempt is unsanctioned or worse, unwanted. Even in sanctioned initiation protocols where individuals suspend prior and procure new identities, recommended ceremonies and rites often place immense challenges and demands on initiands' mental, physical and emotional capacities. The reaction to gender liminality, which is usually unendorsed within communities with well-established dichotomous gender systems, is also often negative. However, as easy as it is to see the volatility of liminality in general, one must also keep in mind its fecundity. As a space that is beyond social regulation and preestablished expectations, it provides opportunities for pursuance of multiple identities, especially unprecedented ones. Dentice and Dietert (2015, p. 77) assert:

The concept of liminality represents possibilities from which social change emerges, especially in the case of the transgender movement. As the social constructions of gender and sex continue to evolve, so do cultural expectations. Individuals who challenge gender norms may bring about social change by changing how we perceive and define gender, which is structured through binary arrangements.

Liminality, therefore, is key to this dissertation's identification and discussion of non-heteronormative gender displays and the social changes they motivate.

Nachaniya and female qawwal exist outside of hegemonic, sanctioned social and cultural identities, hence in liminal states. Their identity becomes problematic due to their inability, not necessarily by choice, to correspond with the symbols that subjects are expressed through. Within Turner's three state transitional process, these performers theoretically occupy the second stage. They have detached from their pre-determined states but due to prevailing social expectations, they become trapped between thresholds. The cause of this perpetual in-betweenness lies in the fact that their new identity is itself created performatively by their performances in this unrecognised ritualistic process. For their new identity to be officialised, social frameworks need to be reconfigured to give meaning to their nuanced selves. In other words, performances by nachaniya and female qawwal deconstruct IndoFijian gender structure through the public embodiment of characteristics that, from a hegemonic perspective, they are not permitted to display. Individuals embodying ambiguous

gender, highlight the fictitiousness of gender identities. Thus, society can no longer portray gender as 'a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed' as the disruptions to the 'stylized repetition of acts' reveal the 'illusion of an abiding gendered self' (Butler, 1988, p. 519). Butler (1988, p. 520) suggests:

If the ground of gender identity is the stylized repetition of acts through time, and not a seemingly seamless identity, then the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style.

The case of nachaniya and female qawwal are materialisations of the transformative possibilities that Butler mentions above. The understanding of gender identity as the product of a process of reification which need not be delimited by any polarised or binary configuration potentially eliminates its oppressive implementation. This relieves society of its compulsive policing duties to enable it to focus on more important social functions and liberate individuals from burdensome and unnecessary socio-cultural mandates.

My argument diverts from Turner's where he claims 'The neophyte in liminality must be a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group, in those respects that pertain to the new status' (emphasis in original) (Turner, 1969, p. 103). The nachaniya and female qawwal are not in a state where they are without form or foundation. They are both on the same gender continuum and are principally moving in opposite directions to gain an identity status that satisfies them. They are not engaged in this process at the community's behest, neither are they certain of what form their identity will finally take. Each individual embodies different blends of feminine and masculine attributes which in turn makes everyone the first and only version of themselves even though their gender is produced upon the same 'sedimentation of gender norms' (Butler, 1988, p. 524). Beech (2010, p. 286) explains 'social identity is a "site" in which people draw upon and are imposed upon by external discourses, and the self-identity is the internalised view of the self in which people seek to keep a particular narrative [of the self] going'. My own exchanges with, observation and analysis of nachaniya, for example, shows that while society perceives them as having a common, unsanctioned, identity, they all have different ways of performing their gender identity that actively impacts their social identities. Some criticised other nachaniya for being excessive and for eroticising their image. However, it must be noted that

these nachaniya only made an issue out of certain acts, like promiscuity, which they felt distorted all nachaniya's image. They recognised that exaggerated displays of femininity and sexuality only reinforced stereotypes people had of them. Johnny, a traditional nachaniya, claims that some performers 'do a lot of *nakhra* (coquette), *nakal* (copy) or "pretend"<sup>10</sup>, that "I am the main girl"' (Johnny-Rafiq, 2017). Johnny's argument, that these individuals are pretending or are copying femininity, is interesting as it highlights performers' active agency in parodying femininity. It must be clarified that Johnny's comment results from his annoyance regarding what he perceives as exaggerated levels of femininity embodied by nachaniya. To Johnny, such actions were attempts to horde attention or to out-perform others. At the core of his frustration is his view that other individual(s) have incorrectly embodied femininity, implying that there is an appropriate level of femininity one needs to materialize to be considered a woman. This brings into focus Beauvoir's (1974, p. 38) claim 'one is not born a woman but becomes one'. While Beauvoir affirms that 'one is born with a sex, as a sex, sexed, and that being sexed and being human are coextensive and simultaneous', sex has no influence on the gender that one acquires. She acknowledges sex as a fact and gender a cultural construct materialised through conformity to the historical idea of a woman. Butler explains this as an inducing of the 'body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project' (1988, p. 522). While on one level Johnny subverts social expectations to embody a feminine identity despite being male, on another level he falls into the social trap of advancing the idea of fictional normative femininity. In another key sense, Johnny also fails to recognise his own part in the proliferation of gender identity categories: as was made clear in various interviews, many nachaniya have drawn inspiration to embody gender differently from preceding nachaniya.

### **Gender Parody**

The example of Laila, a young and contemporary nachaniya, illustrates how nachaniya are influenced by earlier performers. Laila (27) states 'in Suva you must have heard of Johnny and Rafiq...and when I was young I saw them performing near my home and then my interest developed from there' (Bijuriya-Laila-Pinky, 2017). One interpretation of Laila's statement is

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<sup>10</sup> The double quotation marks indicate that Johnny spoke these phrases or sentence in English while most of interview language was Fiji Baat.

that his reference to ‘interest’ refers to his desire to perform LN, without necessarily embodying femininity beyond the stage. However, two facts in Laila’s case point towards an alternative interpretation. Firstly, Laila is a university graduate with permanent employment and, unlike other nachaniya, does not rely on performance income for subsistence, thus, attachment to performance is what motivates him. Secondly, Laila can perform femininity for the stage only, but chooses to also embody a feminine identity beyond it. Apparently, Johnny and Rafiq’s nachaniya image not only inspired Laila to become a performer, but also to do gender differently. Since ‘[a]ll bodies are gendered from the beginning of their social existence (and there is no existence that is not social)’ (Salih, 2002, p. 62), Laila’s social circumstances became oppressive when he began this transition. Regardless, he persisted in materialising his current embodiment. For Laila to have mentioned Johnny during the interview is evidence that the presence of nachaniya introduces people to alternate possibilities that raises consciousness and awareness towards gender’s reified naturalisation, which then attracts, inspires and performatively creates space for more divergences in gender embodiment. Butler illustrates this potential in subversive acts like drag, stating:

The performance of drag plays upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed. But we are actually in the presence of three contingent dimensions of significant corporeality: anatomical sex, gender identity, and gender performance. If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of those are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance. As much as drag creates a unified picture of “woman” (what its critics often oppose), it also reveals the distinctness of those aspects of gendered experience which are falsely naturalized as a unity through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence. *In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency* (emphasis in original) (Butler, 1999 (1990), p. 175).

Drag and a nachaniya performance are similar in how they present parodies of feminine gender. However, as Butler herself cautions ‘[p]arody by itself is not subversive, and there must be a way to understand what makes certain kinds of parodic repetitions effectively



disruptive, truly troubling, and which repetitions become domesticated and recirculated as instruments of cultural hegemony' (1999 (1990), pp. 176-7).

Shugart (2001) outlines three features of parodic performances that, when present, house subversive potential. The first feature she identifies is 'conspicuous performance' when there is 'no room for doubt that a performance is about to commence' (p. 101). LN and qawwali are public performances. Qawwali, whether organised for social or fundraising purposes, are always well announced. While the reason for marketing a ticketed performance is obvious, performances for weddings are thoroughly publicised because the organising family often uses these occasions as proclamation of their financial status in being able to afford such events. For LN, families that hire nachaniya pay substantial charges, thus it would make sense to ensure these performances are well attended, to get value for money.

Furthermore, a form of femininity often suppressed or veiled from wider public gaze becomes conspicuous through LN. Some nachaniya have eroticised LN performances by selecting songs and embodying movements that are both explicitly and implicitly sexual. Unlike India and many other nations, Fiji does not have dance bars or legalised brothels where such feminine images find context. The closest public viewing of this form is attributed to Bollywood movies, but even this context can be easily disowned as foreign. IndoFijian community, therefore, has negligible context in which sexualised female images can appear. This becomes the rationale for the existence of a nachaniya who can embody and publicly present what biological females cannot. By presenting this eroticised feminine display the nachaniya coerces a public juxtapositioning of sex, gender and sexuality. Hence, the conspicuous presence of the nachaniya, and female qawwal compels discursive engagements on these non-normative, yet recurring displays.

This liminal image, thus, not only affects specific individuals but communities who are placed under tension to make sense of these bodily presentations. The presence of this *other* draws attention to the possibility of many *others* that can be but are not. Inadvertently, this also brings into focus those boundaries, restrictions and processes that are meant to quell the *other's* manifestation. Bakhtin (1981, pp. xxi-xix) recognises the multiplicities of voices in discourses through his use of terms *heteroglossia* and *polyphony*, which he uses to discuss the many voices that exist in varied registers that do not necessarily blend into a unified consciousness. This he attributes to 'non-official viewpoints, those of the marginalized, the

oppressed and the peripheralized' (Baxter, 2003, p. 38) that continue operating regardless of the denial of their presence. The subversion of gender ideals in performances prompts a re-viewing of ordinary bodies, actions, movements, and sounds. What this discloses is that performances make the ordinary conspicuous by suggesting that the norm only remains as such by silencing or distorting its other, a phenomenon discussed more thoroughly later in this chapter.

The second feature of parodic performances Shugart (2001, p. 103) identifies is 'incongruence'. While this may at times overlap with the conspicuousness of performance, here the focus is not necessarily on contexts but content of performances. For a female qawwal, her physical presence on-stage surrounded by male musicians and singers, speaks volumes, not only about this stage's historicity but of the unfamiliarity of the female presence on it. Chapter Three of this thesis focuses on three female qawwal, Sushil, Shalini and Manju. For each, her presence as the sole female in every performance is not a coincidence but evidence of the historic patriarchal endeavour to discursively narrate women off this specific stage. Shalini highlights the oddity of on-stage female presence by making efforts to present some semblance of being demure and veiled. These attempts by Shalini appear highly incongruent because the *purdah* (Lateef, S. 1988) ideology can hardly be justified when one is performing qawwali, a genre that has increasingly become synonymous with vulgarity and indecency in Fiji. Shalini's exertion to preserve some aspects of her feminine expectations eventuates in the revelation of its subversion. She claims that as a sign of humility she veils her head for the entire performance and minimises movement and eye contact with audience between performances, but this still does not make her any less visible on-stage. Shalini attributes this to her religious beliefs and culture stating 'Sita Mata<sup>11</sup> always had the *achra*<sup>12</sup> over her head and was always simple' (Chand S. R., 2017). She at once both endorses and subverts hegemonic femininity by citing the patriarchally-enforced female image of Sita while instating herself as a qawwal. The incongruity between the on-stage performing Shalini and off-stage non-performing Shalini reveals that normative IndoFijian femininity exists and invades all spaces to enforce compliance. Conclusively, the more she tries to embody

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<sup>11</sup> Mother

<sup>12</sup> Another term for veil but the *achra* specifically refers to the end of a sari which a female can place over her head respectfully. In some other IndoFijian traditional attire a veil is provided as a separate but matching piece.

normative femininity, the more it highlights her subversiveness. Additionally, she can be classed as a deliberate offender who chooses to ignore cultural and social expectations.

Nachaniya also present many undeniable incongruities. Young and petite performers like Aishwariya and Ashley pull off more successful feminine embodiments with the support of their neutral physical appearance. The few masculine physical features they have such as stubble and flat chests are offset using makeup and padded brassieres, respectively. However, with performers like Bijuriya and Kushwa, their protruding belly, an acknowledged feature of IndoFijian males, contradicts the eroticised feminine outlook they aspire to depict. Surprisingly, these two nachaniya mostly leave the belly exposed by wearing short blouses and hanging their lahanga as low as possible, often at a level that metaphorically symbolises the thin line between decency and indecency. It is unclear whether such dressing is a remnant of their dressing styles from their younger days or if there are select audiences who are unperturbed by these obvious displays of male physicality during a performance of femininity. Much older performers like Rafiq and Johnny wore and still wear full covering attire that only leaves their forearms, feet and face visible. For Johnny and Rafiq, their conservative clothing reflected hegemonic femininity from the era they commenced performing. In older version performances, it was not so much the appearance of the nachaniya that created the incongruity but the generic knowledge that performers were crossed-dressed for performances and would revert to normative attire afterwards. This act of changing attire still highlighted the temporary transition and subversion of gender norms.

Shugart's (2001, p. 105) final feature of subversive parodies is excess, which is the use of items and practices that heighten 'the perception of incongruence showcasing the performative dimensions of gender and exposing the arbitrariness of gender constructs by caricaturing them'. With nachaniya, an emphasis on the incongruity between embodiment and biology, sex and gender display, is achieved with visible detachable items or external signifiers of femininity. First, while jewellery is an essential to IndoFijian feminine display, a nachaniya wears certain articles not often worn by women. For example, almost all nachaniya I observed wore some form of head jewellery or hair pieces. These ranged from simple to elaborate multilinked silver chains. All nachaniya I interviewed, except Ashley<sup>13</sup>, had shoulder length

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<sup>13</sup> He had taken a haircut specifically for a job interview after it was implied to him that his long hair would create a negative image of him to the interviewers.

hair which played a vital role in their outlook. Hair was tied into ponytails or plaited for performances with other articles of jewellery attached to these. Some used wigs and hair extensions to attain a more feminine appearance. Veils were always pinned to the hair as well. Most nachaniya narrated having spent almost an hour just getting their hair done suitably for a single performance and taking from two to four hours to get fully ready. The final look the nachaniya attains justifies such extravagant timeframes. One nachaniya claimed that they regularly dressed as well as IndoFijian brides, who get to do it only once. Nilu, a nachaniya from Suva, recounted witnessing arguments between couples when husbands compared nachanias' appearance to their wife's (Nilu, 2017). This also supports Shugart's (2001, p. 106) claim that 'excess is relative, and its apprehension depends ultimately on a more moderate norm against which it is defined'. The husbands from Nilu's stories make such comments when they juxtapose a female's attire and embodiment of femininity to that of a nachaniya, who is almost always spectacularly attired. Nachaniya achieve this by wearing what females wear but going further to adorn themselves with things most females consider unnecessary to attaining a presentable feminine look. In other words, biological females' threshold for attaining satisfactory feminine appearance is lower because females see femininity attached to their biological body. This grants them a sense of ownership on feminine values, an ownership that does not require much public assertion. The nachaniya, however, needs to make a stronger claim to his desired identity, as the matrix of ideologies compel a different gendering outcome for him. Of significance is the idea that a nachaniya not only embodies femininity but does it to an extent where his female embodiment not only gets acknowledged but becomes a spectacle that makes noticing the gender disparity more probable.

Similarly, a female qawwal's performance of femininity on qawwali's stage also appears excessive against its backdrop of masculinised performance context. The relative norm of Shalini's femininity attains an excessive nature when portrayed amongst a collection of male bodies that adhere to their sanctioned gender. Shalini's presence is an inversion of spatial codes of gender. The notion of 'grotesque realism' purported by Bakhtin relates to the examples of nachaniya and qawwal (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 19). He claims that the image of the grotesque can essentially lower 'all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract' (p. 19) and the '[e]xaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness' (p. 303) depicted on and through the bodies of

performers, like those in LN and qawwali, challenges the values placed on hegemonic ideals of masculinity and femininity. Bakhtin also goes on to attach liminal status to the 'grotesque body' elaborating that it 'is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built' (p. 317).

The three features of conspicuousness, incongruity and excess often overlap in their presence in performances. It would largely depend on the lens through which one observes performances to notice one or all these factors in operation. The centrality of the body in performances of parody nonetheless, guarantees some level of subversive potential in all non-conforming displays. The body cannot be so easily dismissed especially when it appears recurrently with a spectacular presence.

Historically, among IndoFijians, sanctioned displays of subversive practices have been used to stabilise hegemony (Shandil, 2017). These licensed gender rebellions were incorporated into folk traditions that have always been an integral part of IndoFijian cultural identity. One of the genres that include subversive practices is *Vivah Geet* (wedding songs), which I discuss thoroughly elsewhere (Shandil, V. 2016). Generally, there are two instances in *vivah geet* performances when performances are transgressive. First, after conclusion of wedding rituals, male members of groom's immediate family are seated and fed in an area near the main stage. This opportunity is taken by a performer to sing *gari*<sup>14</sup> at these male relations of the groom. The songs' lyrics are more in the vein of insults than extreme vulgarity. Nonetheless, the idea of an IndoFijian woman insulting a male(s) or his female relations publicly, is not normative. It is because of the typical order of IndoFijian gender hierarchy that such potentially subversive performances were called upon. The patriarchal social structure places a groom and his procession in a higher position. However, an inversion of power occurs when a singer, as a representative of the bride's side, sings insults against the groom's family by assuming the persona of a relative of the bride. This resonates closely with the idea of clowning present in many communities, including Pacific societies like Rotuma. Mitchell (1992, p. 19) writes 'by breaking or challenging frames of sensible conduct and thought, the clown deconstructs order. With her tricks of inversion, contradiction and exaggeration, she

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<sup>14</sup> The word *gari* is the name given to such songs. Even performers and those familiar with these songs refer to these performances as *gari gawe* (vulgarity singing). In reality the singers are not using extreme levels of vulgar language but rather insult the weight, eating style and posture of these male relatives, especially the groom's father.

creates mayhem by dismantling cognitive coherence and continuity'. Subversion in vivah geet is presented as humour but there are often cases when people are offended by gari, proving that even within such delimited temporal contexts, the tenacity of gender relations rise to the surface.

Another example of musical performances that incorporate licensed rebellion are again found within wedding contexts but involve female participants exclusively. Such gatherings do not represent any official rituals of the wedding ceremony. The Hindu IndoFijian wedding is an accumulation of three days of fragmented rituals. The subversive performance in question here can occur on any of the two nights before the actual wedding. It is usually an informal, unplanned gathering away from the gaze of males. The gathered women are always close relations or friends because some enactments in this scenario would be inappropriate in any other setting. Similar performances also transpire at the groom's residence after the departure of the wedding procession to the wedding venue. The groom's mother, who conventionally does not attend the wedding ceremony, gathers her female friends and neighbours and they play music and sing lewd songs. The enactments during this time are mostly imitations of 'sex acts' (Lateef, 1988, p. 358), bawdy songs, and cross-dressing. Women use male absence to suspend social conventions and materialise what is often forbidden. Female cross-dressing occurred only in such covert events and did not have public manifestations. This is attributable to the purdah ideology which operates quite vigorously amongst IndoFijians. While male cross dressing was practised in some family functions and informal social gatherings, LN represented its public version. Making allowances for subversive performances has two aims. Firstly, specifically for women, these are moments of release from tensions that accrue in living subordinate lives in a suppressive gender system. Secondly, permitting these performances for entertainment to categories of shallow art, thus, strips them of any substantial transformative potential. In regards to nachaniya, when their gender ambiguous image is cast as absurdity, their emulation is discouraged. LN, for instance, was not performed in all regions of India, which meant that this performance was not recognised, organised or appreciated by all IndoFijians. There are still people who do not agree with this practice, and their dislike has been further hardened by the entry of transgender males in LN. Conclusively, acts that appear transgressive of gender norms on the surface may serve patriarchy's purpose of reinforcing a dichotomous gender situation.

## Subversion and Society

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler (1993, p. 231) explains that parodies of gender like drag serve a 'subversive function to the extent that it reflects the mundane impersonations by which heterosexually ideal genders are performed and naturalised and undermines their power by virtue of effecting that exposure'. She adds 'there is no guarantee that exposing the naturalized status of heterosexuality will lead to its subversion. Heterosexuality can augment its hegemony *through* its denaturalization, as when we see denaturalizing parodies that re-idealize heterosexual norms *without* calling them into question (emphasis in original)' (1993, p. 231). Historically, IndoFijian patriarchy eroded any power implicit in such revelations through a manipulation of discourses relating to subversive displays. Categorising subversion as humour illustrates this strategy in practice. Furthermore, delimiting ambiguous gender to the performance stage and its severance from daily life represented other strategies of curtailing gender proliferation. Sexual practices outside of the heterosexual paradigm were kept concealed from widespread public discourse by labelling such acts as immoral and threatening punitive consequences on those engaging in them. Foucault offers insight on such social trends in *The History of Sexuality*:

On the subject of sex, silence became the rule. The legitimate and procreative couple laid down the law. The couple imposed itself as model, enforced the norm, safeguarded the truth, and reserved the right to speak while retaining the principles of secrecy. A single locus of sexuality was acknowledged in social space as well as at the heart of every household...the rest had only to remain vague; proper demeanour avoided contact with other bodies, and verbal decency sanitized one's speech. And sterile behavior carried, the taint of abnormality; if it insisted on making itself too visible, it would be designated accordingly and would have to pay the penalty (1978, pp. 3-4).

What Foucault notes above reigns true for numerous world societies, including IndoFijians, where non-heteronormative gender displays are subjected to ridicule or used as entertainment to promote the higher status of normative ones. The integration of secrecy as a tool for manipulation and control, however, has its problems. The most significant of these problems would be the possibility for individuals, enabled by their specific social circumstances, to privately engage in subversive practices while publicly reiterating and

vouching for norms. Additionally, as Foucault emphasises, the power assigned to '[t]he legitimate and procreative couple' to prescribe acceptable behaviour would also generate complicity. Among IndoFijians, for example, females are generally the subservient gender, but women can become family heads and lead some social groups. However, to attain such a position of power one must display a sustained adherence to gender and cultural expectations. To accomplish this, women need to ensure a personal commitment to heteronormative behaviour and emphasise such behaviour on others under their charge. Nonetheless, this still does not cancel out the possibility for individuals from either gender category to engage in veiled acts of subversion. A conversation with an elderly pundit revealed the active shrouding of subversion by implementing the purdah ideology. Prasad claims:

In those days<sup>15</sup> a lot of what was done was founded on religious perspective but today that is missing from much of our practices. Many things have started to happen. These things that are happening has generated many different types of ideas and thoughts. These<sup>16</sup> things used to happen in those days as well but there was a lot of purdah<sup>17</sup>. In today's world the purdah has disappeared altogether (Prasad P. A., 2017).

The dissolution of purdah is depicted as problematic here because it hazes the fictitious boundaries that prevented the visibility of non-heteronormative gender practices. This can perhaps explain the significant growth in the number of individuals embodying androgynous gender. The conversation with an experienced nachaniya below sheds some light on this trend:

**Bijuriya:** A good thing is that this generation's public does not really discriminate like before...it seems that there is a nachaniya in every house. Before when people asked where is Bijuriya's house then people would say ask someone else. They would ask at about four or six houses before they eventually reached my house. But now there is a Bijuriya in all houses so go to any one of them.

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<sup>15</sup> Amrit was 81 at the time of fieldwork. The period mentioned here is early 1950s to 1980s, which in his view was an era when conservative traditions were intact.

<sup>16</sup> The topic of discussion just before this statement was on *hijras*. The deliberate pause and hesitation with which this statement was spoken indicated that Amrit was speaking about homosexual practices. The conflation of gender ambiguity with homosexuality is readily accepted in everyday conversations.

<sup>17</sup> Amrit uses the word *parda* (veil).



**Vicky:** Really?

**Bijuriya:** Yes, in this area almost all homes<sup>18</sup> have a nachaniya.

**Vicky:** Interesting. Why is that?

**Bijuriya:** I think it is some 'virus'<sup>19</sup>(*with laughter*). Some have started just through watching or as copy cats. We noticed a few 'normal' boys...'normal' (*emphatically*) who used to hang around with us...who in a few years... they also started...

**Vicky:** Cross dressing and dancing?

**Bijuriya:** Not just dancing but wearing it all the time, their talking style also changed.

**Vicky:** You said copycats so who are they copying?

**Bijuriya:** Maybe us or someone else.

(Bijuriya-Laila-Pinky, 2017)

Two points from the excerpt are interesting. Firstly, Bijuriya's suspicion that it was him that the 'normal boys' had emulated to embody feminine gestures. This relates to Butler's assertion that gender parodies function to de-naturalise hegemonic gender. Secondly, Bijuriya also identifies that the 'boys' are 'wearing it all the time' indicating that he also realises the distinction of cross-dressing for a performance on a stage and in everyday life. The fact that he points this out proves the crossing of some boundary and the forming of some new meaning or at least the materialisation of a new norm. It is apparent from Bijuriya's observation that the 'narratives inscribed by the body' (Broadhurst, 1999, p. 46), particularly his body, has found not only spectators but followers too.

Similarly, female qawwal have impacted the qawwali genre and society. Shalini, for example, narrated that she had been motivated by Sushil, the first female qawwal from Fiji, who performed twenty years before her. Shalini even borrowed performance material from available recordings of Sushil. Furthermore, Shalini claimed to have inspired other female performers to play the harmonium like her. Harmonium players have traditionally been males. Shalini is the first well-known female performer to play harmonium on-stage. Several female performers of folksongs have now taken up this practice as well and if nothing else, this has eroded the male monopoly as harmonium players. This is not a trivial transformation

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<sup>18</sup> Bijuriya refers to a rural IndoFijian settlement in Tavua where he lives.

<sup>19</sup> Words in quotation marks were English words used by interviewees.

given the significance of harmoniums to traditional musical performances. Female singers bringing in male harmonium players for performances caused a sharing of significance since singers had to give some credit for good performances to harmonium players. Their identity as credible performers would also remain incomplete without this specific musical talent. Shalini and other female harmonium players have essentially redefined what it means to be a performer, specifically a female performer of IndoFijian folk genres. Both Bijuriya's observation and Shalini's claim, show that LN and qawwali as 'cultural production and artistic practice' are 'generative forces rather than passive mirrors of other aspects of social life' (Alexeyeff, 2009, p. 12). In both cases new realities were materialised when limitations instituted by traditions were traversed by some individuals which availed previously unavailable traits to be cited by others. If truly subversive practices are those that bring about some form of social reformation, then the two instances outlined above are acceptable illustrations of these.

Butler states '[s]urely, there are nuanced and individual ways of *doing* one's gender, but *that* one does it, and that one does it in *accord with* certain sanctions and proscriptions, is clearly not a fully individual matter (emphasis in original) (1988, p. 525). Since society provides the script and regulates the doing of gender, economic, social and political changes impact what remains or gets added to the gender script. Butler (p. 526) explains '[t]he act that one does, the act that one performs, is, in a sense, an act that has been going on before one arrived on the scene. Hence, gender is an act which has been rehearsed, much as a script survives the particular actors who make use of it...'. Normative gender has survived because there have always been individuals whose gender display closely resonated with already naturalised scripts. The 'script may be enacted in various ways' but as Butler iterates 'the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives' (p. 526). Nuanced gender performances then, can gain acceptability if the 'restricted corporeal space' and 'confines of already existing directives' are reformed. These reformations can be materialised through sustained subversive gender performances alongside changes to external factors that have a bearing on gender expectations. Gender is functional in organising society, mainly as a central factor in division of labour and distribution of resources. Due to economic development as an effect of globalisation, Altman (2001, p. 38) stresses 'sexual mores and values have constantly changed

as societies have come in contact with outside influences and new technologies'. Within IndoFijian social contexts, gender expectations have taken a progressive turn, resulting from thinning cultural boundaries that allow integration with other Pacific communities. Western ideologies imparted through mass media and formal education, also enhance transformations.

Mageo (1996, p. 607) credits the emergence of what she terms transvestism in Pacific societies to a reduction in gender role differentials, and this holds true among IndoFijians. The post girmity era marked a period when IndoFijians entered cane farming as individuals or as couples with children. Farmers resorted to having large families to fulfil labour requirements on farms for a booming sugar industry. Inadvertently role differentials were needed to organise the lifestyle such economic engagements demanded. Individual families combined to form villages that further endorsed gender expectations. Normative femininity and masculinity found continuous sponsorship in such traditional setups. However, Fiji's industrial growth diversified employment opportunities, and these coincided with large scale expiry of land leases in the 1990s. Urban migration ensued, which eroded traditional structures, thus the changing nature of families had an impact on the overall effectiveness of conventional gendering processes.

A divergence from gender expectations is more obvious now as IndoFijians continue to transform because of political, and global changes. It is not only the increasing embodiment of non-binary gender traits that deserves discussion but also the improvements in the reception of non-conforming displays. The diverse vocational positions available today, eliminates the need to maintain specific gender qualities. On the global scale, transform(ing)ed family conditions<sup>20</sup> are noted as prime factors that have not only eased but also provided the impetus for gender crossing. In traditional families, male authority was acknowledged because men were primary income earners. IndoFijian society, for example, has been articulated through an active male participation in the public and cultural domain and they have traditionally been the links between the domestic and communal spheres. In most cases they performed the role of purveyors and protectors of cultural values in families and wider communities. The advent of human rights and women-oriented affirmative action

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<sup>20</sup> See (Levy, 1977, *The Community Functions of Tahitian Male Transvestism: A Hypothesis*, pp. 12-21), and (Nanda, 1994, *Hijras*. pp. 373-417)

have opened educational and employment prospects for females. This eventuates in families having working mothers who share and, in some cases, handle more than just domestic burdens of a family. Such a scenario often culls male authority as female economic participation also contributes to a power sharing style of family management. This also sees an increasing engagement of men in child care roles that alleviates the traditional masculine image that reinforced a patriarchal ideology. All such social arrangements provide unconventional forms of femininities and masculinities for infants and children to reflect on, as they partake in the cultural construction of their gender identity. The adaptation to gender proliferation, nonetheless, is not eventuating at the same pace in all places, which often results in the operation of default mindsets, where gender configuration is still based on biological sex. Regardless of pressures instituted by hegemonic ideals, the complex nature of society still ends up creating spaces for embodiments of gender identities that, from traditional perspectives, appear liminal.

These liminal identities are but extreme versions of liminal gender traits that all individuals embody. In an application of Freud, Salamon (2002, p. 11) states 'pure masculinity or femininity is not to be found either in psychological or a biological sense. Every individual on the contrary displays a mixture of the character traits belonging to his own and the opposite sex'. Everyone, then, is failing to embody the socially idealised gender traits for their specific body. This leaves all individuals with a liminal gender identity. Yet, some individuals pay a higher price and are made to withstand greater levels of challenges to live their blend of androgynous gender identity. Homophobic reactions are generated among people and groups that hold dearly to heterosexist ideals, who see these threatened by potentialities of liminal gender forms. In a countering of such reactions Salamon (2002, p. 51) suggests:

To affirm a materiality—or, to be less abstract—to insist on the liveability of one's own embodiment, particularly when that embodiment is culturally abject or sexually despised, is to undertake a constant and always incomplete labour to reconfigure more than just the materiality of our bodies. It is to strive to create and transform the lived meanings of those materialities.

It can be argued that the presence of non-normative gender displays has the potential to impact on gendering outcomes. With this realisation those at risk of being deemed subversive have little choice but to engage with meaning making processes with the purpose of

reforming and recreating norms of perception and behaviour. At times they argue, and at other times they perform, sometimes they present and other times they represent. But always they continue to negotiate their liveability within and against existing social realities. Most renderings of liminal gender are tolerated because they present mixtures of gender traits where the subversive characteristics can be suppressed or made to seem inconsequential. For example, during field work I learnt of some nachaniya who had a feminine demeanour and were largely interested in performing what can be termed as domestic work like cooking and washing. In addition, they wore female attire and performed publicly. These all displayed traits of liminal gender. However, once they married and had children, their gender identity was no longer questioned because they reified the patriarchal ideology of men heading a family by being economically able to support one. Similarly, female qawwal evidently transgressed their expected gender traits of being reserved, quiet, respectful and submissive by being loud, rude, argumentative and present in a principally male domain. But since they were married, continued to fulfil their domestic expectations of motherhood or carers and performed in shadows of male authority, they strengthened gender ideals rather than dismantled them. Extreme liminality is represented by those displays of gender traits that transgress social expectations noticeably, and that leave little or no room for formations of counter narratives that can cancel the potential in such embodiments to problematise hegemonic gender structure. This is evident in those nachaniya that dress in feminine attire outside the performance context and fail to adhere to conventions of marriage and traditional family setup. Hence, these forms of liminality are considered transgressive and are prejudicially perceived and handled.

### **Identifying the Other**

All performers interviewed for this research reported being victims of abuse and in some cases, physical violence. For nachaniya, this usually came in the form of unwanted sexual advances, name calling, or unequal treatment. Female qawwal faced gossip and being labelled *besaram* (shameless) or *baḍa muh*<sup>21</sup> (big mouth) for entering male dominated spaces, hence, failing to be 'demure' and 'quiet' (Lateef, 1990, p. 43). These incidents show active protections of the gender dichotomy, a process that relies heavily on identifying and dealing

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<sup>21</sup> A phrase commonly used to describe an individual's behavior that fails to meet social expectations. The words mean big mouth and can be used to criticize someone's non-conforming actions as well. This phrase is most often used against women because it is they who are often sanctioned.

with subverting individuals. Bergvall, Bing and Freed in their studies of gender in various contexts note:

Individuals who fail to fit the strict female-male dichotomy are either ignored or subject to boundary policing. Groups that inhabit or stretch the boundaries of restrictive gender roles either become taboo (unmentioned and unmentionable) or are labelled aberrant. Thus, assertive women may be nudged back into their approved roles by being labelled aggressive bitches, and nurturing men may be reminded of their deviance by being labelled wimp, sissy, fag or pussy-whipped. Like the dichotomies day and night and Black and White, the categories female and male are used and reinforced daily... (Bergvall, Bing, & Freed, 1996, pp. 6-7).

Historically this power to correct was contained in patriarchal institutions and their symbolic representations like male family heads, husbands, fathers and village elders. Interestingly, this power has transcended such positions and institutions to be wielded by individuals and groups who act as self-proclaimed custodians of culture. Individuals who take it upon themselves to correct gender deviance in others can assume power by justifying their actions as needful to realigning practices with conventions. Their assumption of dominance is misconceived yet highly defensible in the absence of counter-narratives of disapproval. Staszak explains:

Otherness is the result of a discursive process by which a dominant in-group ("Us," the Self) constructs one or many dominated out-groups ("them," Other) by stigmatizing a difference—real or imagined—presented as a negation of identity and thus a motive for potential discrimination. To state it naively, difference belongs to the realm of fact and otherness to the realm of discourse. Thus, biological sex is difference, whereas gender is otherness (Staszak, 2008, p. 2).

Historical precedence is often used to reify the dominance of gender-abiding individuals over those who are deemed different. 'The asymmetry in power relations is central to the construction of otherness. Only the dominant group is in position to impose the value of its particularity (its identity) and to devalue the particularity of others (their otherness) while imposing corresponding discriminatory measures' (Staszak, 2008, p. 2). The liminal status of individuals prevents them from exercising similar claims to power and most are conditioned into accepting such treatment as norm. Occasionally they may retaliate against such

behaviour, but mostly traditional systems offer no defence for their otherness. This position of powerlessness is one of the areas performers invert when they enter the performance stage. By appearing and moving as they please, specifically when their audiences come from a society that offers little resource for understanding these performers, they potentially challenge their spectators' value systems. Put in other words, performances of subversion in such contexts numb senses to what is considered abnormal and become the initial steps towards the inclusion of these appearances as legitimate identities. The argument here is that the on-stage inversion of power positions can and do have implications on power relations off-stage. The images presented by *nachaniya* and female *qawwal* are 'moment(s) of alterity' that 'opens up a space in conventional, sanctioned ways of thinking for alternative, competing conceptualisation' (Shugart, 2001, p. 111). Any eventual progressive change that has been or will be made in terms of gender relations among IndoFijians, can be attributed to an accumulation of such moments of subversion that with each instance of display makes gender less concrete by revealing more of its fictitiousness. In this research, the other is represented by those who subvert gender expectations in the specific contexts of cultural performance which 'reflects people...produces them...and creates and constructs an experience' (Firth, 1996, p. 109) with the potential to challenge and alter social realities. Hall (1977a, p. 3) asserts 'meaning is constantly being produced and exchanged in every personal and social interaction in which we take part' and cultural performances symbolise such moments of interaction where ideologies are both validated and defied.

Essentially, the gendering process is also an othering process. Gender identity develops through comparisons and contrasts made with existing expectations on the binary gender structure. A binary form of perception is also 'inherent in the term "other"' (Rowe, 2012, p. 131) and as a literary concept (Hegel, G. 1807) (Kain, P. 2005) this has been used in discussions of race and gender relations. Butler asserts the 'notion of this Other *in* self, as it were, implies that the self/Other distinction is *not* primarily external...[that] the self is from the start radically implicated in the Other' (Butler, 2002, p. 1497). Conventionally, we construct our identity by implicating the image of the other and embodying those qualities that enhance our sense of difference from them. While the other is aberrant, it is also essential. The more anomalous it appears, the more stable I appear. Sometimes individuals undertake actions to highlight their conformity to expectations by underscoring the deviance in others. In a key

sense, they problematize the naturalized state of their own identity by engaging in acts that are depicted as measures to protect those very identities from distortion. Why do established notions of gender require protection? How can temporary moments of subversion leave historically sanctioned ideologies and statuses in a state of vulnerability? If the presence of an Other can destabilise the hegemony to the extent that individuals are required to intervene and oppress other individuals into submission, then perhaps the credibility bestowed on these norms requires re-evaluation. Several nachaniya felt that their human status was at times denied when people chose to verbally, sexually or physically abuse them. Upholding the human status of marginalised individuals like the gender liminal is vital as 'denying this humanity is the precondition and consequence of violence' (Frosh, 2002). Laila, Monto, Afsana, Ashley, and Sheetal were nachaniya who clarified that they did not deserve discrimination, neither did they require special recognition, but would be satisfied if they were just acknowledged as human. Such blatant disregard for the most obvious quality in liminal persons is explained in Hall's claim in *The Spectacle of the 'Other'* that 'when dealing with difference, it engages feelings, attitudes and emotions and it mobilises fears and anxieties in the viewer, at deeper levels' (1977, p. 226). The 'fears and anxieties' felt at the susceptibility of their identity to distortion drives people into acts of suppression against others.

Puja, a transgender performer, explains 'some people see nachaniya through *dusra najar* (second perspective). When they get to an occasion where a nachaniya is performing they start chatting and talking nonsense about us to other people' (Puja, 2017). The term 'dusra najar' used by Puja is semantically interesting. It is a common Fiji Baat phrase used to indicate a derogatory perception of something or someone. The term alludes to a hierarchy of social or moral standing and anyone transgressing social conventions is viewed suspiciously. Thus, because of his androgynous gender display, a nachaniya is also considered susceptible to other incriminating things like stealing, cheating and engaging in inappropriate sexual activity. A nachaniya from Suva discussed how he had to endure a court battle after being charged for sexually abusing a minor. The accusation was made by a neighbour, who the nachaniya claims was jealous of this nachaniya's thriving business. Although he was acquitted, what became clear was that people would readily believe any accusations labelled against nachaniya because of their liminal status. The perception was that since they could not abide by one set of important norms, they could easily break other norms because they were impulsive and



mentally weak. Bijuriya also related that for many years he witnessed gender liminal individuals like him being primary suspects in any cases of stealing in their villages or in weddings<sup>22</sup> that a nachaniya was performing at. Both examples illustrate how liminality caused these individuals to be suspected of lower moral standards. Their difference was damning to their social standing because whatever difference that existed had been articulated beyond its material base into ideological lenses to view these individuals through. 'Rebellion is hard on individual lives—it can eat up a person's emotions, and freedom', Lorber (1994, p. 10) explains, adding '[u]nless rebellion is a major group effort, supported by a substantial number of women and men, it is not likely to make a dent in an existing major institution like gender'. In retrospect, hegemonic ideologies do have massive impact on the lives of those deemed subversive as reflected in stories of nachaniya and qawwal.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has dwelled on defining liminality both from an ethnic and gender perspective. With an interweaving of stories and incidents from the lives of performers, the discussion here has been aimed at showing the constructedness of gender through the articulation of social, political, economic and cultural ideologies. The chapter has also highlighted characteristics of subversive performances and how these have the potential to cause social change by revealing the fictitious nature of ideologies. By the end of the chapter the concepts of liminality and other have been combined to attain the definition of the liminal other. A few examples are also presented to illustrate how difference can have real and lasting consequences. Fundamentally, the chapter has been an elaboration of the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

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<sup>22</sup> Theft was common in village weddings because ceremonies were home-based so personal dwellings were opened to numerous guests.

## Chapter 3

### Displayed Difference: A Historical Analysis of Qawwali

#### Introduction

The chapter begins with a description of IndoFijian qawwali and its connections with South Asia by weaving existing literature on qawwali with insights from qawwal and IndoFijian qawwali experts. In accordance with an important aim of my research, this chapter compiles the first documentation of IndoFijian female participation in qawwali. The different aspects that combine to form a complete performance event, including audience responses and other performance paraphernalia, are outlined and explained. More specifically, this chapter describes qawwali from the standpoint of three female qawwal, namely Shalini, Sushil and Manju, whose contribution to, and participation in this genre is threaded in the discussions throughout the chapter. The late Sushil Krishna, who is credited as the first IndoFijian qawwal, competed against male qawwal in the 1980s. Manju and Shalini began performing wedding folksongs in the 2000s and later segued into performing qawwali. Shalini remains active on the qawwali stage while Manju decided to delimit her performances to wedding songs after her qawwali mentor passed away in 2011. Pictures and excerpts of their performances are included where they help enhance discussions. Finally, this chapter includes analysis of some qawwali performances which identify specific lyrics, actions and reactions within performances that are subversive of gender norms.

#### What is Qawwali?

Inayatullah and Boxwell (2003, p. 220) define qawwali as ‘a fusion of the emotional power of Indian music with the emotional content of Sufi mystical poetry’. It is a musical performance genre that has roots in South Asia, specifically India and Pakistan and was brought to Fiji during indenture. Traditionally, in Fiji, qawwali was considered *deni mazhab* (spirituality in religion). This meant that qawwali performance was considered service to religion, which mandated guidelines, restrictions, expectations and aims. ‘The word qawwali itself is derived from the Arabic word *qaulah*, meaning to speak or give opinion’ (Inayatullah & Boxwell, 2003, p. 221), but for IndoFijians the term has attained a nuanced meaning. While referring to a musical genre, the performance event itself is also called qawwali. Therefore, it is correct to

say '*Ham kawali sunta hai* (I am listening to qawwali)' and '*Ham kawali jata hai* (I am going to a qawwali)'. Khan<sup>23</sup>, a qawwali promoter and enthusiast, explains that his paternal grandfather was instrumental in initiating qawwali in Fiji by using his knowledge and experiences with qawwali from India (Khan M. T., Interview with M. T. Khan Qawwali Expert, 2017). Brenneis (1983, p. 63) notes that while the qawwali in Fiji is 'not markedly different from those found in India and indeed often seen to have originated there, the performances of the texts have been radically transformed along lines both consonant with and contributing to the more general transformation of Indian life in Fiji'. In a way then, tracking developments in qawwali can reveal the articulation of IndoFijian identity as well. Khan explains that his grandfather brought religious texts from Bihar, India and these were used in generating content for qawwali. He also recalled that other qawwal, namely Munaf Qawwal in Nadi, Tahir Hussein Qawwal in Labasa and Kassim Qawwal in Bua, emerged later, after learning this art from their fathers, who had also been indentured labourers. Khan explains that 'these were qawwal who performed according to and on the knowledge of religion. They did not have sound amplification equipment. All they had was the harmonium, dhol and tambourine. They would also use beer bottles and use six-inch nails to beat music out of the bottles' (Khan M. T., Interview with M. T. Khan Qawwali Expert, 2017). Despite the improvised nature of the musical ensemble, the performers kept a connection with traditions alive, by singing religious content.

Amir Khusrau is credited with the inception of qawwali as a musical genre. As a court poet, he devised a creative strategy of combining music with religious content for its dissemination to new subjects that were added to the Khalji dynasty in India. This practice called *zikr* (remembrance) became a way of bringing god into discourses and discussions 'to help people to understand Allah, the Prophet, *pirs* (saints) and their greatness' (Bhattacharjee & Alam, 2012, p. 212). Specific subgenres of qawwali existed to accomplish this purpose, for example, *hamd* were songs about Allah, *nath* about the Prophet Mohammad, and *qatat* for pirs. The first two on this list are still performed in Fiji, albeit in modernised versions. Performers and fans use the same or very similar names for the various segments of the performance. Qureshi clarifies 'sufi poetry, the source of qawwali texts, constitutes a principal vehicle for expressing and communicating mystical thought and experience' (1986, p. 83). Qawwali, therefore, was

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<sup>23</sup> Khan, an Auckland resident, grew up in Ba, Fiji where his family were well-known for promoting qawwali performances. In any discussions of qawwali in Fiji at least one member of this family will often be mentioned.

usually performed in *mehfil-e-sama* (assembly to listen) where a pre-dominantly male audience gathered to listen to musical performances based on sufi traditions, where male qawwal were tasked with articulating Allah's worship through the combination of poetry with music. In India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, these performances were held in *dargah* (shrines) that were graves of saints. The dargah were also sites associated with saints when they were alive. The practice was typically marked on specific days of the week when a lead qawwal would gather a few other singers to comprise a chorus and perform renditions of 'philosophical verses in several languages...embellished with clapping and some musical instruments' (Bhattacharjee & Alam, 2012, p. 211). It was the commitment of the performers towards providing the best spiritual experience to their audiences that inadvertently became the origins of the competitive genre of qawwali. Bhattacharjee and Alam (2012, p. 219) note that sometimes several qawwal happened to gather at one shrine to mark an important day and in their effort to create the best spiritual atmosphere, all qawwal performed at their optimal levels that often led to some degree of competitiveness. Over time this idea has developed into a genre of its own, and in contemporary Fiji, IndoFijians identify with a form of qawwali that is founded on personal battles where a qawwal's success depends on one's ability to insult, brag and boast, and to do all this through creatively rhymed or cleverly composed verses. A discussion of the history and performance structure of qawwali in this chapter reveals the evolution of this genre to its current state.

Almost all religions have, in their devotional repertoire, some form of musical component. What is most fascinating about qawwali has been its ability to survive in various forms that clearly resonate with the original genre, especially within communities geographically removed from South Asia (Newell, 2007, p. xvii). In Fiji and New Zealand, for instance, qawwali maintains a presence within the conglomeration of multiple Pacific cultures. As Newell (2007, p. xvii) and other researchers have identified, qawwali is a blending of 'musical sounds' with 'song texts' that has traditionally been 'constructed and performed with the explicit intention of guiding the listener into subjective states of religious experience' or in other words, to enhance worship of god as a medium of connecting the natural world of listeners with a spiritual dimension. To attain this 'spiritual nourishment', men—and, rarely, women' (Qureshi, 1986, p. 1)—attended these performances. In Fiji, performance events, even today, can have exclusively male attendance, especially when the event features Islamic qawwali, and even when these are part of social occasions like weddings. The separation of genders in

such spaces means that women are unable to witness these performances that are always situated in the male space. While this spatial matter stands as a similarity between Asian and IndoFijian contexts, Brenneis (1983, p. 71) points out a divergence between them. Qawwali performed at shrines led listeners into a trance or spiritual intoxication and it was believed that they transcended into the spiritual realm. Such practices were not evident in Fiji, mainly because of the mixed religious background of audiences. In addition, IndoFijian qawwali performance was not aimed at creating moments of spiritual experience. Its purpose, as with most other folk and cultural practices, was didactic in nature. Brenneis (1983, p. 71) explains 'whether religious or secular...mental improvement and clarity, not intoxication' was the acknowledged purpose of cultural performances as it was seen as a way of 'bringing change' and 'causing social transformation' (p. 70). Considering the complex assemblage of historical circumstances, social conditions, political reality and geographical context, IndoFijians clearly needed a moral and ethical foundation to reconstruct their identity during and after the gruelling indenture experience. Values of unification with god and people were promoted through qawwali's content derived from Sufism's 'basic philosophy of propagation of universal brotherhood through love (poetry) and music' (Bhattacharjee & Alam, 2012, p. 209). Qawwali's multifarious applicability is evidenced in its use for religion, ritual, popular culture and creative art (Sakata, 1994, p. 91). Those of my field respondents who were aware that qawwali was traditionally used to advocate religious and moral values were genuinely unhappy about a genre of qawwali currently enjoyed by many IndoFijians that permitted the use of vulgarity, insults and lewd remarks and actions. My respondents see the inclusion of vulgarity as the most undesired of all the changes that the qawwali genre has experienced.

### **Contextualised History and Change**

My field consultants explained that Muslim indentured labourers brought *ilam* (knowledge) of their religious practices, which they established in Fiji. The survival and practice of Muslim festivals is 'astonishing' as 'the recruits were overwhelmingly Hindus' (Mishra S. , Transnational south asians : The making of a neo-diaspora, 2008, p. 75). Therefore, Hindu qawwal and musicians were instrumental in the sustenance of not only qawwali, but also the practice of *tazia*, another Shia'a festival. Most historical accounts fail to relay any in-depth discussion of cultural practices and rituals of indenture recruits, but an aesthetic aspect of

girmitya's life existed and drew inspiration from the new Pacific setting and the former homeland. Mishra explains:

It is rare, indeed, to come across an account that treats the recruits not as coolies (alienated labour power), but as bearers of culture, progenitors of artefacts, and carriers of civilisation. One explanation may be that ephemeral festivals, as a rule, rarely take on centre-stage in serious historical studies of girmity. It is this neglect that repeats the original colonial gesture of consigning the worker's life-worlds exclusively to the domain of work. But it is precisely to their fetes and festivals, and to the tazias in particular, that one must turn in order to free indentured workers from the instrumental interpellations of standard historiography. A cursory glance at the photographs of the festival kept in the archives of the Fiji Museum shows us something startlingly novel—a community *not at work* (Mishra S. , 2008, p. 75).

It is in these moments of respite that cultural performances central to IndoFijian identity took shape. Interviewed cultural experts indicated being aware of the practice of weekly gatherings, where musical performances were core to social interactions.

### Religion and Society

The attachment to music inspired the absorption of performances into all important social and cultural events such as weddings, festivals, and even funeral rites. In the specific case of qawwali, it represented an important source of meaningful entertainment as performers and audiences spent several hours on end engaged in performances. Dhiren narrates:

Qawwali was meant to promote the Islamic faith but Hindus were also present in the audience so singers decided to sing some Hindu songs too. There was an old qawwal called Habib from India. He would sing and narrate how the song relates to a historical Islamic story. The audience in these performances were spiritual people, and they would sit and discuss spiritual things. When people sit through the form of performances we have today, you cannot expect them to be discussing spiritual things. Those were what we could call 'high standard' but today the 'high-standards' refer to how well someone can insult the other person. Now even the dholakia(s) (dhol (drum) player) compete, trying to outplay the opposing team's dholakiya (Prasad D. , 2017).

Since a significant number of qawwal were Hindu, it was only a matter of time before the Islamic genre was adopted into a Hindu subgenre called bhajan<sup>24</sup> qawwali. Similar to what Rashid (2017, p. 273) found in other communities, 'qawwali performance became a space for the manifestation of multiple cultural contacts, Indic and Islamicate' in Fiji and helped define a new cultural identity. Even today, despite the transformations to the genre 'qawwali performance remains a shared cultural space, which continues to adapt and grow. It is not meant to efface religious difference, but to recognise that contestations of identification occur on multiple levels' (Rashid, 2017, p. 273). While following a similar structure to the Islamic version, bhajan qawwali derives content from Hindu religious texts like the Ramayana. Interestingly, of the three female qawwal considered in this research, only Manju had performed both Islamic and bhajan qawwali. Shalini did perform bhajans as a separate genre and competed in bhajan competitions but these were not performed in qawwali format. Respondents also shared that while current competitions mostly feature two qawwal, there were many instances historically where several qawwal gathered at one setting and performed competitively following the same *muqabala* (competition) strategies.

### Media

Miller (2008, p. 298) notes that the qawwali that developed in Fiji had no direct connection with the mystical Sufi (Muslim) tradition associated with the thirteenth-century poet-musician Amir Khusrau, as there were very few members of this order among the *girmitiyas*'. He goes on to point out that Hindi films (Manuel, P. 2000) were perhaps a greater influence on styles that were used in Fiji. However, as Khan (2017) explains, it was the generation prior to his own, that had carried the idea from India and initiated the performances in Fiji. Khan's father was himself an authority on traditional qawwali style used mostly in Western Fiji, and his ensuing generations actively promote qawwali and support qawwal. Furthermore, while Bollywood movies were available in Fiji, they were not accessible to all regions, as cinemas were mostly located in urban areas and televisions became available in Fiji considerably later. One of the main factors that has influenced change in the Indian version of qawwali has been the use of qawwali in the Indian film Industry. With the overwhelming nature of Bollywood's impact on Indian ways of life, the adoption of traditional performance forms into

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<sup>24</sup> On its own, Bhajan is religious song. Bhajan qawwali is the performance of religious songs in the qawwali format, that is, with poem recital and making arguments through songs.

commercialised activities is not always a question of *if* but *when*. Bhattacharjee and Alam (2012, p. 220) point out how in 'India, in keeping with popular music and culture, Qawwali found its way into Hindi films in 1960 with 'Yeh Ishq Ishq Hai' from the movie *Barsaat Ki Raat*<sup>25</sup> (A Rainy Night), thus creating a subgenre of entertainment music called *filmi qawwali*'. This trend has continued over the years with numerous films featuring qawwali that are based on love and romance. Such qawwali are classed as *ashiqana* in Fiji. International qawwal, like Rahat Fateh Ali Khan, have merged spiritual qawwali with filmy versions and have inspired similar trends in other contexts of the Indian Diaspora. For instance, on August 12, 2017 Rahat performed at a sold-out stage show at the Victoria Convention Centre in Auckland; this was attended by many IndoFijians who are familiar with him through Bollywood cinema. There is criticism of filmy qawwali which is accused of being 'a packaged cultural commodity' that has 'little or no spiritual quotient' and that those who consume such materials substantiate a lack of religious and spiritual affinity (Bhattacharjee & Alam, 2012, p. 222). Bhattacharjee and Alam note that this criticism was aggravated when qawwal began performing in 'pubs, discotheques and lounges to entertain the people' (p. 222), which was unacceptable to conservatives because such venues were associated with 'ungodly activities'. The 2015 film *Bajrangi Bhaijaan*<sup>26</sup> (Brother Bajrangi) featured an immensely appreciated qawwali number titled *Bhar de Jholi meri Ya Mohammad!* (Fill my bag, Oh Prophet Mohammad) that was a rendition of an older qawwali of the same title by Sabri Brothers. This qawwali secured a great following among IndoFijians with many Hindu bhajaniyas adopting the song's tune to perform Hindu religious songs as well. This song's popularity was enhanced by many other achievements that were not perhaps as apparent as its musical aspect. Firstly, for instance, even though it is a movie qawwali, it has a religious and spiritual foundation and is performed in the traditional style. It helps reconnect filmy qawwali to its original roots in spirituality and religiosity. This qawwali was performed by Adnan Sami, a Hindu singer, performing qawwali for the first time in his career. He was also part of the on-screen visualisation of the song,

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<sup>25</sup> The movie was directed by P. L. Santoshi. Featuring the most admired Bollywood actress of all-time, the movie was itself a trend setter that while featuring a love story as many Indian films of that era did, moved the central conflict of the movie from between parents and children to between unmarried characters negotiating romantic relationships and sensuality. Interestingly, the film also became the first to depict and glorify the life of a 'singing girl' in India.

<sup>26</sup> The movie was Directed by Kabir Khan who Co-Produced it with Salman Khan and Rockaline Venkatesh. The story features a Hindu man returning a mute six-year-old Pakistani girl to her home in Pakistan when she boards an incorrect train and arrives alone India.



which was shot in Aishmuqam Darga. Apart from being one of the most revered shrines in Kashmir, this was also the first time that permission was granted for filming on these premises. The theme of the qawwali and its spiritual aspect was instrumental in making such a milestone decision. In a key sense this song proved that the essence of qawwali could still be revived with appropriate support and action. In Fiji too, those who have previously been critical of the new qawwali have softened their condemnation, citing the crucial role these nuanced performances have played in preventing qawwali from dying out. A sort of role reversal can also be noted between religion, culture and music. Historically, people had an attachment to religion and culture, so music became the mediums through which people engaged with matters of spirit and identity. Today, music has a global appeal and a heavy following, and there is an effort to harness music's popularity for disseminating religious and cultural values.

Among IndoFijians this was substantiated by efforts of some qawwal to revive traditional Islamic qawwali by tapping into enthusiasts of modern qawwali. Khan (2017) narrates a time when the emergence of certain qawwal led to a revival of traditional qawwali:

The old system was totally gone but then Baswa Qawwal and Ahmad Qawwal came around in late 70s, they brought back the *dhang*<sup>27</sup> (decent) system again. This just happened suddenly. These qawwal did a few performances and people who were around that appreciated the older version, showed their support for such qawwal. People enjoyed the fact that the older style was resurrected. Since this had been suppressed for a few years, there was renewed enthusiasm for these performances.

Miller (2008, p. 299) points out that such revivals were a result of 'exposure to recordings of "traditional" Sufi qawwali from Pakistan, and the gradual distinction and specialization of bhajan and qawali performers in Fiji's local cassette industry' that caused a 'Muslimization' of qawwali. Nonetheless, an evolution of qawwali genres persisted even as older styles were being revived.

### Responses to Changes

Shalini's heavy borrowing from movies, and performance of modern or film qawwali, is a typical representation of the changes affecting this genre. She is one qawwal who has embraced modern themes quite overtly. By doing so she has altered the nature of the genre

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<sup>27</sup> While the word means 'manner', here the meaning is implied in context to mean 'decent'.

by positioning herself, a woman, as a dominant player in that field. Furthermore, she has also brought changes to qawwali's focus and content by singing on modern topics. These qualify as performative acts on Shalini's part, as through her performances, she has re-inscribed the expectations of qawwali. Other qawwal are also associated with their preferred performance style as Dhiren (Prasad D. , 2017) explains:

So, it (qawwali advertisements) would say Dhiren Qawwal versus Aten Qawwal...now Aten was the best qawwal in Fiji. He is now in Canada. He had very good sense of music unlike the qawwal of today. So, the people will know that since we are performing, there will be *ghaḍu gana*<sup>28</sup> (heavy songs). That is what they call it here, *ghaḍu gana* and the content of our songs will be vulgarity free. Sometimes I can be paired against Rishi<sup>29</sup> Qawwal who sings vulgarity and the audience would realise instantly that we are two different types of qawwal. This also gets people to the performance because they come to find out how we battle it out on the stage with our different styles.

Dhiren can compete effectively with Rishi, despite stylistic differences and without having to employ vulgarity. He attributes this to his years of experience, which enable him to manoeuvre the arguments to his level rather than adapting to Rishi's style. When asked as to why Dhiren would perform on the same stage as someone who was challenging the traditional image of qawwali, he explains 'but I am happy that people choose to be entertained through this method rather than something...what can I say...non-traditional<sup>30</sup>. To quite an extent we are part of something traditional as the dholak is playing, the harmonium is playing and other instruments.' (Prasad D. , 2017). The advantage of cultural preservation, however, seems insufficient justification for some patrons of traditional qawwali to overlook the consequences of the changes to the genre. Khan (2017) identifies:

One of the things with which I am totally unhappy, is what they call *Three Corner qawwali*. This includes three qawwal competing against each other. This is basically more of merry making and vulgar songs being sung. By the time this form of qawwali developed in Fiji, I had moved to New Zealand. What happens in this form of

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<sup>28</sup> Heavy Songs: the implication is that these songs are loaded with values and philosophical knowledge that could be based on religious teachings or life in general.

<sup>29</sup> The analysis of Rishi's performance against Shalini provided in Chapter 4, shows Rishi employing vulgarity in his performances.

<sup>30</sup> Here Dhiren implies that even though an apparent subgenre, vulgarity ridden qawwali can still be associated with cultural performance rather than modern music like bands.

competition is that sometimes two of the singers will get on one side and start to suppress the third singer. It includes a lot of vulgarity. The young generation appreciates that and sometimes we have 300 to 400 audience members. The vulgarities go on and there is smoking and consumption of kava.

Clearly, Khan has noted further deterioration of qawwali that can no longer be ignored, yet there is very little that can be done with the large support base these subgenres have accumulated. Vulgarity and insults seem to be the key issues for many former enthusiasts and even other performers like Dhiren (Prasad D. , 2017) who explains such audience preferences as this:

That (vulgarity) was never supposed to be in qawwali. But the recent qawwal do sing vulgarity and they have used foul language against me during performances as well. I tried to explain this to them, but they choose not to change. The young generation does not comprehend Urdu; it is a profound language, so the recent form of performances suits them better as it is easier for them to grasp. In their opinion they feel that qawwali is about opposing and insulting each other. They use very light or foul language when performing. That is all they understand, so for two hours, sing some vulgarities and then off you go. But because of this, formal qawwali has dwindled now.

Qawwali's appeal now reaches across a wider social section but distortion of original qawwali has been the price paid in materialising this change. On a positive note, however, the loosening of restrictions, and formation of new sub-genres have also allowed for the emergence of female qawwal.

The changes to qawwali are not completely surprising as its genesis was already one that echoed subversion of existing reality rather than conformity. Qureshi expounds that the 'sufi ideology is a response to orthodox Islam' (1986, p. 79) which is founded on philosophies of monotheism and an unquestionable distinction between god as Creator and humankind as Created. However, sufi doctrines emphasise an intricate and intimate bond between the Creator and Created, symbolised through love. This 'mystical love is at the centre of sufi ideologies' (p. 79) and is reflected in qawwali performances. The segment in qawwali, called *ashiqana* (erotic) exclusively features the theme of love, intimacy and romance. Fiji's modern qawwali form, as will be elaborated later in this chapter, predominantly reflects a concept of

love that is not spiritual but is located in heterosexual intimacy. The sufi rendition of kinship between god and men had already set a trajectory of subversion by depicting intimacy in god-men relations which then sets the platform for further evolution of non-conformist practices. Changes have not necessarily been detrimental to qawwali's image and purpose. For instance, among IndoFijians, qawwali performances are no longer associated with one community or religious group. Miller notes how '...in response to my query regarding the "best" singers of Islamic qawwali, most of my field consultants offered the names of Hindu singers...' (p. 313), and this remains true. In line with Miller's findings, in my research Hindu qawwal like Dhiren and Shalini regularly reconcile 'their own faith with the Islamic texts and contexts of qawwali performance through a discourse of religious universalism that posits a unity of practice for Hinduism and Islam' (Miller K. , A community of sentiment: Indo -Fijian music and identity discourse in Fiji and its diaspora, 2008, p. 326). It is claimable then, as Rashid (2017, p. 271) observes in the context of qawwali in America, that 'the performance of qawwali is a multi-religious site, where boundaries are contested and refashioned. In diaspora contexts, the function of these performances remains similar: to challenge boundaries'.

My research focuses on depicting how the boundaries that are challenged are not only cultural and religious, but also gender related. This discussion follows the subversive practices of a few individuals, who through their subversiveness have changed the image of an important cultural performance, if not an entire community's identity. This resonates with social intercessions introduced by Sufis, who as 'mystics opposed the vulgar display of wealth and power in public life by the *ulema* or their willingness to serve "ungodly" rulers' (Bhattacharjee & Alam, 2012, p. 211). Bhattacharjee and Alam note '[m]any began to lead a retired ascetic life, having nothing to do with the state...emphasizing upon free thought and liberal ideas, turned to meditation, to achieve religious satisfaction. They interpreted religion as "love for god" and service to humanity' (p. 211). To resist what they considered flaws in society's organisation, Sufis also chose musical performances as the medium to circulate counter-hegemonic thought to motivate and inspire change. Such potential in musical performance is highlighted by Dolan (2005, p. 91) who argues that 'people do performance, in both performative and material ways; publicly practicing performance makes it a tool of both expression and intervention, of communication and fantasy, of reality and hope'.

Musical performances like qawwali are ideal mediums for generating change through resistance because they are 'participatory, easily transmitted', accessible, and in the particular case of qawwali 'has a strong symbolic language that is easy to adapt to different situations' (Rashid, 2017, p. 280). Rashid's assertion is substantiated by the versatility witnessed in qawwali performances and the changes to the genre itself. For example, in breaking from norm, females have now also emerged as qawwal. This has subversive implications on multiple levels, as these women not only challenge the one gender monopoly of qawwali, but the hegemony of social spaces too.

Additionally, qawwali is innovatively used to serve more purposes than just religious pedagogy. Today it is used as an attraction for fundraising events. Clearly then, if the Sufis had intended qawwali to be a social change agent, it has surely been key in changing lives, redrawing gender lines and stimulating creativity. These developments validate Fisher-Lichte's (2005, p. 23) affirmation that performances not only reflect history but intricately characterise the future.

It is this transformative capacity in musical forms that sometimes problematises their identity and acceptance amongst certain groups. Newell (2007, p. xliii) notes 'many of the practices of South Asian Sufis, and of Sufis throughout the Islamic world, are criticized by conservative reformers as non-Islamic. Sufis, on the other hand, defend their practices with quotations from the Qur'an and Hadith, affirming that their practices are firmly grounded in Islamic tradition'. I encountered this tension during my fieldwork at a wedding in Natadola (Western Fiji), where Shalini had been hired to perform, but not in a *muqabala* (competition) format. The performance was organised at a Muslim bride's residence. When I arrived to record the performance, Shalini had already taken a two- and half-hour drive from her home in Ba to the venue. She was, however, still seated in the minivan in which she had travelled accompanied by four other musicians, the driver, Shalini's husband (Rohit), and musical and acoustic equipment. Rohit always preferred to use his own sound amplification system because he believed that the equipment provided at weddings was incompatible with the open spaces where such functions are often organised. While I waited with Shalini's team just a few metres away from the shed, Rohit explained why they were not setting up the stage for Shalini's performance even though it was already after 8pm. As Shalini's manager, Rohit handled the tasks of researching new materials for her songs and keeping up-to-date with social

requirements to which performances had to adhere. This was the reason for his knowledge of various processes and beliefs of different groups, including Islam. He stated that Muslim religious leaders, namely *maulana* and *maulvi*, were still present after finalising the wedding rituals. No musical performance was permitted in their presence, thus, unlike most IndoFijian celebrations, music in all its forms was missing from this celebratory occasion. It was only after they and other conservative followers left, that the performance commenced. This time of waiting, nonetheless, provided a good opportunity to speak with Rohit, who related to me that generally, Muslim religious leaders did not sanction the use of music citing its potential to divert followers' attention from spiritual matters in line with global Islamic conservative ideology (Otterbeck, 2004).



Figure 1 The first picture shows a veil separating male audiences from females. The veil is removed about an hour after the performance began, thus joining the gendered spaces. (Source: Author)

Those who support more traditional/conservative conceptions of qawwali, however, believe that music does play an important role in establishing and sustaining the god-human connection. The emergence of and large following for vulgarity-ridden qawwali has only strengthened the debate against music, as such performances are evidence of the divergence from religious philosophy many conservatives, warned about. Groot (2010, p. 244) identifies music as an important feature of qawwali 'with its supposed power to lead the participants "out of their minds" into ecstasy...However, music is also seen as a possible hindrance, as it may attract attention to itself if it is not tutored by spiritual experts'. Rohit also cited this ambivalence in music as a reason why many Islamic religious leaders did not support musical performances, clarifying that these spiritual elders were aware of people's inability to maintain strict control of what and how much involvement they could maintain with these.

Nevertheless, many Muslims continue to enjoy these performances as evidenced also by the Natadola example where most of the audiences remained to attend the performance, and many contributed to it with comments, requests for songs, and cheers. It was also clear that religious elders were aware of these practices, as they quickly departed after the serving of food. As a matter of courtesy, these unapproving leaders and followers are informed in advance of qawwali events. While the organisers may be frowned upon, not much overt resistance is witnessed to curb the performances. I witnessed at least one male member of the household that had hired Shalini's team complaining that when people could not support these performances, they needed to leave earlier so others could be given the opportunity to indulge themselves. It must be clarified, however, that this was the opinion of one person and not necessarily a reflection of a majority of Muslim IndoFijians. The people that remained to witness Shalini perform showed their support, for qawwali, and in retrospect, for the female qawwal. There were a few subversive aspects to the entire performance event. The religious leader's choice to ignore their congregation's promotion of musical performance can be deemed as licensed rebellion, to prevent creating strife amongst members who had clearly been introduced to music and had developed a penchant for it. It is also a difficult, if not impossible, task to segregate people from any or all instances of musical performances because music in its various forms has historically been and is still integrated in all cultural practices of IndoFijians.

### Qawwal: Mentoring and Training

While in the above scenario, religious leaders appeared as hurdles to the acceptance of musical performances in cultural events, traditional qawwali performances were performed under supervision of spiritual leaders. Qureshi (1986, p. 1) relates ‘under the guidance of a spiritual leader or *sheikh*, groups of trained musicians present in song a vast treasure of poems which articulate and evoke the gamut of mystical experience for the spiritual benefit of their audience. Through the act of listening—*sama*—the Sufi seeks to activate his link with his living spiritual guide, with saints departed, and ultimately with God’. Two important points of discussion here are: firstly, spiritual leaders ensured that the performances remained focused on the provision of spiritual experience. Secondly, they also ensured that the musicians and performers received training to successfully carry out this responsibility.

In Fiji, while folk musicians do not receive formal training in music, this has not stopped the production of talented musicians, well-known nationally for their musical skills. However, in terms of becoming a qawwal, one has had to receive some form of training or guidance from religious scholars for content, and other qawwal for performance style. In some cases, experienced qawwal provide training in both aspects. Often qawwal in training spent several years learning from their *guru* (mentor). For example, Khan (2017) narrated the story of a Hindu performer from Ba, who lived with Munaf Qawwal, a Muslim, for three years to learn qawwali performance style and knowledge of Islamic texts. This was the usual process followed by new performers of religious qawwali. The mentor’s task was also to provide his protégé opportunities to perform on-stage. This was done in instances when the mentor himself was performing and he would announce to the audience that his student was going to perform one or two songs. This was done to initiate the new qawwal into the field, and depending on the reputation of the mentoring qawwal, new performers could find instant appreciation from audiences based on the teacher’s credibility.

This training process was taxing, as one had to build knowledge as well as musical skills and all this had to be done at the mentor’s convenience. This is where female performers were at a disadvantage, because it was not socially acceptable for them to spend such considerable amounts of time away from their family with unrelated men. Clearly, then, those women who



still ventured into this training were already breaking social boundaries to get training to be qawwal. In the case of Sushil Krishna, Khan was not certain who her qawwali mentor was, but she acquired musical knowledge from her husband who was also a performer. Manju performed qawwali while her mentor, Santah *Bhajaniya*<sup>31</sup>, was alive, and he helped her during performances. She stopped performing after the passing of her mentor. Manju performed Bhajan qawwali but she competed with male opponents, and her songs were derived from Hindu texts. While Manju had the necessary knowledge of texts since she is a practising Hindu and a performer of other Hindu *lokgeet* (folksongs), she needed specific training on qawwali style of singing where poems, speaking and singing had to be alternated effectively. Shalini's case was also similar to Manju, as she also had a background in performing lokgeet. However, Shalini performs a combination of religious and Bollywood-inspired qawwali. In that sense her themes range from deep spiritual philosophies initially, but then she delves into romantic themes or even more modern ideas such as social media, and other national and international topics. Shalini had to receive training and assistance with both building knowledge capacity and performance skills. Whether male or female, new qawwal for both religious or secularised qawwali had to attain some training for the sake of competence.

Unlike Indian contexts, however, their performances were not overseen by spiritual leaders; in most cases senior qawwal and senior audience members provided the necessary guidance. Communal leadership was used to encourage social engagement from individuals and groups for performances because qawwali's IndoFijian foundations are set in family and community-based events.

### **Structures in Qawwali**

While field consultants attributed the development of musical traditions to informal family and village gatherings that featured amateur singers and improvised musical instruments, over the years a structure was established and qawwal began following certain standards while performing. Khan (2017) narrates:

We also often had sittings at home organised by my father. He wanted to hear some qawwali, a sort of personal sitting. By that time however the playing of bottles had

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<sup>31</sup> Bhajaniya translates as one who sings bhajan. For performers, the genre they perform becomes part of their identity and the name they are called.

become obsolete and we had things like *kartaal*. The idea for these instruments had come from India. The people got metal from the Colonial Sugar Refinery Company (CSR) and these were used to create the instruments. But for that performance we used nails and bottles. They also used a *moto* (metal spear) as the dhantal. Basically, farm equipment was used as musical instruments. Originally, we did not have many instruments, just the dhol and the harmonium. Also, since we did not have sound systems the singers had very loud and strong voices that was enough for the audiences.

In Fiji, traditionally a qawwali program began with introductory music called *saazeena* (melody or beauty). This acted as a signal to the main performance's commencement. Depending on context some qawwal would then sing maksad (purpose) songs interspersed with congratulatory songs. Usual occasions that included qawwali programs in the past were *chekni* (engagement), *mehndi night*<sup>32</sup> (henna night) or *shadi* (weddings). The maksad section was optional for fundraising events where qawwal would transition from saazeena to the next section which is called hambd (praise) or *ham-di-sanaa*. The songs in this section were praises sung to acknowledge the Almighty. Dhiren, a Hindu qawwal, drew parallels between these songs and the practice of *sumirni* (remembering god) performed in Hindu performances. The section following this is known formally as *naat-e- Paak* or Naat or as it is commonly called in Fiji, *natiya*. These were Urdu poems and songs offered specifically in the praise of Mohammad, also called *Rasool* (Prophet). These include songs about his birth and his reasons for being sent to the world. Due to Mohammad's importance to the Islamic faith, people often request for more natiya songs. Dhiren (Prasad D. , 2017) clarifies that these songs were based on Mohammad's *dastan* (stories), of how he helped disseminate Islamic teachings to people after receiving the Quran from Allah. Ashiqana (love) songs comprise the next section where intimacy-related songs are performed. Love was significant as 'sufism also assumes an inner kinship between God and man and strives to bridge the gulf between them through the dynamic force of love (*muhabbat*)' (Qureshi, 1986, p. 79).

While it was commonly accepted that songs in this section were to elaborate spiritual intimacy between God and humankind, some qawwal have extended this to heteronormative

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<sup>32</sup> The night before the wedding, where family and friends gather for a celebration of the union. This is a Muslim tradition.

romantic encounters. However, they had to veil these emotions in carefully composed verses that could at once be interpreted as attachment between two lovers and divine connections. Tact and deep knowledge of Urdu was particularly essential to accomplish this. However, some qawwal and qawwali lovers perceived this section as a recess or respite from the deep knowledge and history imparted in earlier sections, and the similar content that would be imparted in sections subsequent to ashqana. Due to this perception, some qawwal took the liberty of including some Bollywood style tunes and romantic theme for ashqana. This is what initially led to the use of the term *latest* which meant the performing of light topical songs to take a break.

The modern three-hour qawwali programs begin with *hambd* and transition to ashqana songs. Thus, love and film songs feature predominantly in such programs which are often advertised as *qawwali muqabala and ashqana songs* to attract those who may not appreciate the religious content but would attend the show to hear romantic numbers. Conventionally, the ashqana section is followed by *jung* (war) or *jung nama*. These are poems about heroic deeds of Hazrat Ali, Mohammad's son-in-law and one of the first Islamic converts. After conversion, Ali delved into preaching and protecting the religion. This led him into many wars in the regions of Baghdad. The songs in this section depict his heroic services to religion. In the context of a whole night program that begins at ten, *jung* is usually performed around two in the morning. Ali had two sons named Hassan and Hussein. They also suffered for religion, including martyrdom where Hassan was poisoned, and Hussein killed in battle. Singing about their lives is the next section called *Shahadat Nama* or *Shahidi*. This begins around four and lasts until six. The final section called *Afsaana* (fantasy) begins straight afterwards, where qawwal perform songs that conclude the program through messages of farewell, appreciation and seeking forgiveness for any offence caused through their performance. These concluding songs are also derived from incidents of Mohammad's departure from the world, but qawwal articulate a more human perspective of them. In some cases, however, the audience may request additional songs about other saints, mostly the descendants of Hussein and Hassan who preached Islam throughout the world.

The graves of such saints became shrines, one of which is in Navua, Fiji, but this is not widely known due to the absence of any significant rituals, traditions and practices associated with the site. People visit this site called Saiyad Baba Shrine, to offer prayers.



Figure 2 The Darga in Navua. (Source: Author)

### Performance Routine

Even in the context of Fiji, where qawwali is an imported performance genre, many features of qawwali's 'complex' (Groot, 2010, p. 247) nature are still evident. The inclusion of female qawwal has added to this complexity by bringing into the fold new ideological frameworks performers can draw from while performing. One of these has been debates on gender and inclusion of language from the domestic realm of life, which has found its way to the stage with women. For example, male qawwal have a preponderance to cite domestic duties like cooking, washing and post-marital responsibilities when competing with females. They habitually instruct women to return to the life historically associated with and expected of their gender. While the inclusion of gender-based arguments illustrates changes to qawwali, a performance style that has been sustained even in modern qawwali subgenres has been the organisation of performers' individual performance pieces.

A performance piece, whether putting forth an argument or offering rebuttal, can be subdivided into a few sections. A qawwal usually begins each performance turn with a musical introduction accompanied by his musical ensemble, playing their individual instruments spiritedly. Afterwards, the qawwal holds a key as he speaks to the audience. No other musical instrument is played here, even though the dholakiya may choose to sound a few beats like a drum roll, when the qawwal offers some interesting and exciting arguments or rebuttals. This introduction, which Miller (2008, p. 310) equates to 'an *alap* (a brief, stepwise ascension of

a major third)' is usually the qawwal's way of identifying a specific point in his opponent's song content that he has chosen to invalidate or develop. At times a qawwal may choose to recite a poem or *shayari* immediately after the short musical number before discussing the context of his performance. Dhiren says about these shayari:

There are different forms of shayari like we have the *Katha* which is a four lined shayari. There are also shayari where you can create humour by relating jokes to the audience. If you have the right vocabulary and words, then you can create good shayari...You always need to say a shayari before you sing your song. Sometimes you can include these in between song verses.

Dhiren illustrates how one can provide rebuttals without necessarily having to use insults. He quotes an example from his performance where his opponent recited this poem:

<i>Khudha mila toh apni tarha garib mila,</i>	Indeed, I found God but He turned out to be
	as impoverished as me,
<i>Bahut khoja,</i>	I searched immensely,
<i>bahut dhunda.</i>	I sought immensely.
<i>Magar khuda mila toh apni tarha garib mila.</i>	But when I did find God, He turned out to be
	as impoverished as me.

To that Dhiren responded:

<i>Woh mangta nahi kissi se bhi,</i>	He never asks anyone for anything.
<i>Woh palta hai sabko, woh kabhi garib nahi.</i>	Yet He sustains one and all, He is never
	destitute.

Through this poem, Dhiren criticises his opponent's inability to envision all aspects of the Almighty. Dhiren (Prasad D. , 2017) states:

I do not have to refer to someone's gender. You need to focus on the qawwal and his art. You need a lot of intelligence because you do not know where the opponent's song will end because that is where you must pick up the singing from. You may prepare and have a list of fifty songs and say I will sing this list, but you will surely have to divert based on what your opponent has sung. You also need to have rebuttals and make impromptu shayari and for that you need to know rhyming and a variety of Urdu words.

Dhiren's explanations above reveal that qawwali places considerable demands on its performers. These demands are not just physical but intellectual and psychological too. In a similar fashion to rap battles, qawwal have to devise spontaneous responses which should not only sufficiently counteract the arguments of the opponent but should also be presented poetically. All this needs to be done while maintaining a sense of calm despite the length of performances, and the constant barrage of comments and criticism. Qawwal combine the different aspects namely: shayari, song, interludes and explanations when and however they feel it produces the most impact on their performance and audiences.

Experiencing a qawwali performance is like standing in a sea and being submerged by water with every musical wave. Qawwali performances are structured in such a manner that audiences encounter unceasing supply of music and song. In the IndoFijian muqabala format, the audience gets to experience high levels of performance engagement because performers can rest when opponents perform, but audiences do not. With the right combination of music, song and speaking, a performance can have a powerful impact on the spectators whose response would be reflected in several verbal and non-verbal reactions. Music production is key to the entire event and in a qawwali-related change some audiences give prominence to music over song and poetry.

### **Qawwal**

Qawwal is the title given to the chief and central performer in a qawwali performance, who recites, sings, and argues, and in most cases plays the harmonium. In IndoFijian qawwali, the qawwal is undoubtedly the most important feature of a performance. One of the key goals of this dissertation is to bring the participants of performances, specifically the performers, to analytical foregrounds. As important as the art is for its aesthetic values, it is the artist that breathes life into it. Qureshi highlights 'in analyses dealing with musical sound he [the performer] is often conspicuously absent' and she adds 'a Qawwali performance, however, is so manifestly shaped by the participants, even at the level of its religious function, that the real question is not whether participants should become the focus of the analysis, but which one should' (Qureshi, 1986). In this research, performers are analysed for their creative influence, not only in performances, but also on society at large.

The different styles and rhetorical devices that comprise qawwali as a genre rely tremendously on competence levels of qawwal. Groot states '*Qawwal* are the professional,

hereditary musicians involved in the genre [emphasis in original]' (Groot, 2010, p. 243). While in Fiji's case, qawwal do take a semi-professional role, there have not been many notable examples of hereditary qawwal. In most cases, qawwal have entered the trade based on talent and proximity to existing qawwal who guided and trained them. When the traditional form of qawwali was popular, qawwal endured several years of grooming to gain their status. My field consultants explained that due to decline in religious qawwali, new performers do not necessarily gain religious knowledge as the lack of such performances means that the time spent in training cannot be sufficiently compensated by earning opportunities. Hence, they mostly rely on previously composed material from other qawwal for initial segments and perform their original pieces for latter parts within love songs or vulgarity and insults. These qawwal still require musical and singing ability but they gain popularity through their competitive skills and ability to dispense clever insults. Performers tend to gain considerable fame among IndoFijians and this allows them to sustain some level of following, and social status.

The status of South Asian qawwal both on and off-stage shows some distinctions from IndoFijian qawwal. Qureshi (1986) notes that among Sufis, performing qawwali was considered subservient to its listening, hence, performers were seen to occupy 'totally insignificant social positions' (Groot, 2010, p. 253) despite their essential role during gatherings. The qawwal were mere mediums who facilitated a spiritual connection. While their skills were key to the success of the process, giving them any official status would place them on par with spiritual leaders, thus qawwal were largely considered as only 'service professionals' (Qureshi, 1986, p. 95). In Fiji, qawwal were mainly farmers who combined their religious knowledge with their musical talent becoming performers. Later, as IndoFijians diversified into other vocations, qawwal emerged who had other full-time jobs, including teachers, a profession traditionally afforded a high level of respect. IndoFijian qawwal, principally of the older genre, have enjoyed tremendous levels of respect from people. The title *qawwal* is frequently added to names of established performers, since qawwali is central to their identity. Names such as Dhiren Qawwal, Kallu Qawwal, Aten Qawwal, Shiu Balak Qawwal became household names. During the 1980s and 1990s when qawwali performances were widely appreciated, some qawwal also obtained professional status as the financial benefits were enough for them to sustain families. Dhiren, for example, claims charging \$700

for a single performance, not including financial gifts that were presented by audiences. The financial gains for performers enabled better quality performances, allowing qawwal more time for training. However, commercial imperatives prompted changes in qawwali when audiences for the traditional style began to decline, which directly impacted performers' incomes. This led them to strategically turn towards commercialised version of the genre, which meant embracing vulgarity and insult ridden songs. Khan (2017) explains this as such:

What happened in the past was that qawwal had other sources of income. They would be farmers or drivers and would perform qawwali over weekends. They placed more emphasis on the songs, and the religious knowledge they passed onto the audience. Since their focus was not money, they did not care much whether people were entertained. For them, following traditions of qawwali held more prominence. These people had a passion for the art and would perform just because they wanted to sing for the sake of the performance not for money.

With such inclinations, qawwal maintained respectability outside the performance stage as well, and had good social standing with peers and the community. The status of qawwal also assisted in preserving their high social standing as among IndoFijians, economic success is in most cases equivalent to a high social position. Groot (2010, p. 253) notes, however, that this was not the case for South Asian qawwal, who as 'technicians of ecstasy' and 'professionals' had 'economic interest' in religious rituals that incorporated qawwali. This was attributed to the fact that it was rather difficult if not impossible to correctly place the motivation of performers into either financial gain or spirituality. Accordingly, they performed under such restrictions:

Qawwal should not attract undue attention to their person or behavior. They are expected to restrain themselves in making expressive gestures to underline words, to dress simply, and to limit their musical sophistication. Performance should not be so artful or theatrical that it becomes conspicuous as the focus of the ritual; if it does, the spiritual nature of the ritual will be distorted (Groot, 2010, p. 253).

In the IndoFijian context, traditional performers were obliged to embody the same values they expounded in songs. Any contradictory behaviour would cost them the moral high ground to impart such knowledge as IndoFijian audiences seldom separate the individual from the on-stage performer. The performance styles and features of most current



generation performers would push them out of both the Indian and traditional IndoFijian categories of qawwal, who embody characteristics Groot outlines above. Shalini and Sushil would also not meet these bench marks because of their performance styles that draw attention to themselves more than their content. Most conspicuous is their gender attributes, that surely divert attention from performance content to their on-stage mannerisms and behaviour. This is demonstrated by their male muqabala opponents, who make gender the predominant focus of their arguments.

### **Other Features of Qawwali**

The discussion below highlights features of qawwali that help identify it as a distinct cultural performance:

#### Purpose/Context

The purpose and context of performance has a significant bearing on performers' selection of content and style. Sakata (1994, p. 90) clarifies 'when a qawwali performance is secularized, certain spiritually motivated performance rules are no longer retained, while other artistically motivated performance practices are adopted'. From performances 'in auspicious buildings connected to...shrines or in the former dwellings of saints' (Groot, 2010, p. 243), contemporary qawwali features in numerous contexts and settings. The absence of holy places like shrines in Fiji, meant that from initial stages qawwali performances were based in alternative settings. The most common context was wedding ceremonies. Because of transport issues and distances between residences of brides and grooms, groom's processions often stayed over at the bride's residence after the marriage ceremony. This meant that there was always a lot of time left over that needed to be used. This became an ideal occasion for performances of folklore like lokgeet, LN, *nautanki* and qawwali. Performers and qawwali enthusiasts I interviewed portrayed qawwali as an apt genre for such occasions for three reasons. Firstly, qawwali themes were based on religious content and it suitably reflected the social conventions and moral psyche of IndoFijians. This meant that the audience were not only inspired to be part of the performance, but also felt an obligation towards it. Secondly, the source material for songs was endless, considering the numerous stories in several religious texts. Accordingly, the qawwal could manage to maintain meaningful performance through an application of their musical and singing ability to the variety of available material. This also meant that the songs that were performed had a sense

of freshness as they carried the individuality of the qawwal who interpreted stories from their own perspective. Finally, the competitive nature and the vibrant musical aspect of performances sustained the interest of audiences for lengthy periods. Thus, qawwali became a predominant feature of weddings but this meant that from early on, qawwali was already removed from the performance context of its Asian version.

Over years the distance from India created space for further proliferation of style. Researchers like Miller (2008, p. 326), for instance, note that three versions of qawwali were being performed in Fiji around 2006 to 2008. These were namely, as Miller also notes, 'bhajan qawali' (a form of qawwali performed by Hindus based on their religious texts), '*Fiji Qawali*' (where the songs were performed on local news or interesting incidents), and '*Islamic Qawali*' (where the songs were based on Islamic religious texts and themes). The names clearly categorise and reflect that qawwali has both religious and secular uses in Fiji. The selection of segments that structure qawwali performances is context-specific. As stated above, currently qawwali performances are either for weddings, wedding-related rituals, or fundraising events. Depending on a family's ability to arrange and financially support one, a muqabala can be organised. This would mean arranging two qawwal and catering for two sets of musicians.

Since IndoFijian traditional qawwali prioritised religious teaching over all its other benefits, competition in Islamic qawwali was based on creativity of the qawwal in adapting scriptures into poems and songs. More importantly, the qawwal were expected to follow chronology of events based on Islamic history and sing of the different stories and characters, in the order these transpire and appear in texts respectively. Dhiren (Prasad D. , 2017) explains:

When we used to compete, we would point out if someone failed to follow the chronology of events that we were singing about. So, we would tell them to go back and recheck their facts. That was how we competed. We would tell them to go back to the teacher and take more lessons. This generated some fun and humour, but then our debates remained within those boundaries. Then the opponent would come back and say that I am the one who is wrong because I misunderstood his relation of events and so forth. But there were no exchanges of foul language. This verbal jostling helps in making the event enjoyable because it is meant to be entertaining. It is supposed

to be fun but without the vulgarity. Nowadays, however, the performers are insulting each other's mothers, sisters. That is unacceptable.

Khan (2017) explains that some older, more confident qawwal pointed out their opponents' mistakes in a different way, that is, when a qawwal realised that his opponent had left out a portion of a story, then he would just start singing on the correct theme forcing the opponent to stop. Khan claims that the audience of such performances were also knowledgeable and would shout out their disagreement if a particular qawwal made mistakes with content. In that case it was better for the erring qawwal in the wrong to accept their error. This excerpt from Dhiren and Daven's 2016 Auckland based performance illustrates how qawwal point out incorrect song theme(s):

**Daven:** (Response to Dhiren)

<i>Abhi aap logo ne Rasool ke paidaish ke mutalak qawwali sunni,</i>	Just now you heard a qawwali related to the birth of The Prophet,
<i>Qawwal sahib thora fast fowod kar rahe hai,</i>	Seems Mr. Qawwal has fast forwarded somewhat,
<i>Mujhse farmaish ki gai thi ki mei mubarakbadi pe kuch geet pesh karu, toh wo mei pesh karunga.</i>	I have been requested to perform some congratulatory songs which I will do shortly,
<i>Fir mei kayanat ke mutalak kuch geet gaunga,</i>	Following that I will sing a few songs about the universe.
<i>Uske baad phir aenge Muhamad ke paidaish pe.</i>	<b>After that,</b> we will come to the birth of Mohammad.

(Source: Dhiren's Collection)

When saying 'fast forwarded', Daven smiles and pauses for audiences to react to his pointing out of an error in Dhiren's performance. Then he explains how he was going to correct the error by suggesting that one should sing about creation of the universe before the birth of The Prophet in that universe.

While this was one example of how qawwal competed based on themes, some could also build an entire argument on an inappropriately used word or phrase. The excerpt below is from a muqabala between Saaka and Channa Qawwal<sup>33</sup>, with Saaka being more experienced.

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<sup>33</sup> Both are stage names which are shortened versions of their real names.

Before the qawwal arrive at the outlined excerpt, they argue through their performances whether either is singing the apt content. Channa argues that his song marks the entry into the section of *jung* (wars) while Saka argues that Channa has failed to follow the chronology of events. When Channa gets his turn to sing, he clarifies exactly how his song is appropriate for the moment as it concludes one section and indicates the arrival of the next one. Channa also points out that loud shouting and pointless arguments by his opponent may depict him as an expressive qawwal, but that the audience was erudite and would be impressed only with appropriate content, not style. He states '*Yahan aise baat kare se khali nahi tum mahefil ke lai lega, yeh log samjhe hai. Islam kom me paida bhae. Tum mangta tadhki badhki baat karke mahefil le, phir socho* (you will not be able to secure the audience's approval just by speaking loudly, these people are knowledgeable. They have been born in the Islamic culture. You think that loud and animated speaking will draw them to you, think again)'<sup>34</sup>.

When Saaka gets his turn, he raises an interesting point of discussion. Saaka quotes and explains this shayari from Channa's performance:

Saaka: Brief Introduction

<i>Neem na kadhwan tyage, murakh na</i>	<i>Neem</i> <sup>35</sup> does not forego its bitterness nor a
<i>abhimaan,</i>	fool his pride,
<i>Kheer pudhi dhal doh bistha chakhe suhaan.</i>	Lay a pile of <i>Kheer</i> <sup>36</sup> and <i>Puri</i> <sup>37</sup> a dog will still
	taste the excrement.

**Saaka continues:**

<i>Dosto yeh joh geet inhone gaya who apni</i>	Friends, the song that he performed was
<i>jagha dheek tha,</i>	appropriate to the context,
<i>Lekin joh shayari yeh lagu kiya hai iska</i>	However, the shayari he used, I will break
<i>matlab mai apko fodh kar samjhai.</i>	down and explain to you.
<i>Neem se kadhwa kuch haie nahi hai.</i>	Nothing is bitter than neem.
<i>Aur kheer pudi ganj do, chahe kitna bhi</i>	And if you place a heap of kheer puri before
<i>gangh doh. Suhaan kutta ke bole hai. Bistha</i>	a dog. <i>Suhaan</i> is dog and <i>bistha</i> refers to

<sup>34</sup> Performance recording of Saaka versus Channa from 12 March 1989.

<sup>35</sup> A large tree found commonly in Fiji. The tree leaves are used in prayer ceremonies and people performing observances or fasts. The barks and roots are used for medicinal purposes. The products made from the tree are extremely bitter and *neem* is often the best comparison when describing bitterness levels.

<sup>36</sup> Sweet dish made from rice, milk, sultana and sugar.

<sup>37</sup> Small, flat, circular bread made from flour dough, fried in boiling oil.

*toelat ke bole hai. matlab tum kutta ke agge* excrement. The dog will leave the food and  
*kitna kheer pudi rak doh, uh tatas me muh* go for the dirt because that is in its nature.  
*lagai. Ulla shayaru uh bolis hai tab phir naat* Now this is the type of shayari Chaana stated  
*gay eke Husur ke taoheen karis hai.* before he sang the *naat* and this I feel is an  
insult to the prophet.

(Khan's Collection)

Quite interestingly, Saaka has taken offence at the mention of the words 'dog' and 'excrement' in section of songs about The Prophet. Clearly, Chaana was referring to Saaka when he recited that shayari. Nonetheless, Saaka has created an issue around those words being used in a qawwali. The audience also remains solemn as Saaka deliberates, indicating their comprehension of the transgressiveness of those words within that framework. Both, Saaka's decision to point this out and the audience's affirmative reaction portray the traditional image of qawwali. In contrast to the vulgarity in some modern qawwali, the above words would rank extremely low in terms of subversive potential, as shown in the excerpt below from a muqabala between Reshi and Babba Qawwal:

#### **Babba (Shayari)**

*Na mango tum dil isharo se* Do not ask for my heart  
*raho apne appe me,* through your signals just  
remain within your status,

*Tumhare hi liye rakha hai* I will keep it for you take it Points to his crotch when he  
*l Elena buḍape me.* when you are old. says, 'take it'.

Gives another challenging  
shout looking in Reshi's  
direction.

The audience laughs.

*Tumhare hi liye rakha hai* I will keep it for you take it Babba stops playing the  
*l Elena buḍape me.* when you are old. harmonium and repeats this  
line more emphatically and  
this time makes a more  
ostensible gesture towards

his crotch when he says 'take it'.

An audience member shouts out the question 'Konchi? Kera<sup>38</sup>? (What? Banana?)'

**Babba: Introducing next song.**

*Hum janta raha hamar* I knew he will lick my brain. I Large shout from crowd  
*dimaak chaati*<sup>39</sup>. *Hum janta* knew it...I knew it. when he utters these words.  
*raha...hum janta raha.*

*Chaat chaat ke humar muḍ* By licking and licking they Babba takes advantage of a  
*munda kar dis ilong.* have created a bald spot on bald spot on his head to  
*Chasmaa lagae ke rokek* my head. I must protect my emphasise the claim that he  
*paḍe.* head with this sunglass. has been overly frustrated.

Slides his sunglasses to his eyes. All this while the glasses were stuck on his head. (He is wearing sunglasses even though the performance is at night for the sake of stage presence and image).

*Chasma lagae ke rokek paḍe* I must protect my head with Babba has wound up the  
*nahi toh chaat lai ilong.* this sunglass otherwise they previous poem but he is now  
will lick it all out. building up a new set of

insults that are not necessarily poetic, but he ends each sentence with rhyming words.

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<sup>38</sup> Banana is clearly a reference to penis. Firstly, IndoFijians males tend to make this comparison often. However, if there is any doubt then Babba's gesture makes the inference apparent.

<sup>39</sup> *Dimaak chaati* (brain licking) is an IndoFijian phrase meaning 'to frustrate'. However, this form of frustration is caused by someone's silly behaviour that in this case Babba accuses Reshi of.

<i>Tabeh bole 'chinni chataiya chata chor'.</i>	That is why he sang 'sugar licked by a thief' <sup>40</sup>	A lot of articulate hand gestures and glances at
<i>Chinni chaate chitti katora chaate chor...blaery lathkhor.</i>	Ant licks the sugar and the thief licks the container...bloody lathkhor <sup>41</sup>	Reshi. Pauses at the end of every line and smiles while audience is given a few moments to contemplate
<i>Aaj tumar lagae dega puraa jor.</i>	I will penetrate you with full force.	what has been said and anticipate what comes next.
<i>Kaise rahi jab tumar la me hal jaai mor?</i>	How will it be when a peacock will enter yours?	
<i>Tohor me hal jaai mor, Mareg uthaek god.</i>	Peacock will enter yours, I will lift your legs and penetrate.	Loud cheers and laughter. Longer pause allowed for response to subside. Babba also enjoying with laughter and upper body swaying in excitement.
<i>You blaery chitora...blaery kokroch. Babba.</i>	You bloody lick...you bloody cockroach. Babba.	More laughter from Babba and audience. Shouts his own name at the end as intimidation technique.

### **Babba Song:**

<i>E chaatis thora jaeda ab chaate mange aur, Aur khali hoege bhala toh bhar dai thora aur.</i>	He has licked so many times but wants to lick some more, If there is more space in yours, let me fill it up some more.	In a typical qawwali fashion these two lines are sung repetively several times with fast paced music.
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<sup>40</sup> A song Reshi had sung before which was based on a Bollywood song of the same title quoted above.

<sup>41</sup> The term does not perhaps have a corresponding English term, but the implication is that a lathkhor is someone who likes getting beaten up, especially kicked.

### Reshi Response:

*Bahut deri se bole 'saaid',* For a long time, he has been Begins by returning Babba's  
*bole 'saaid'. Koi baat bole,* saying 'side'. Saying 'side'. challenging shout with his  
*bole 'saaid'.* He says a few things and own.

then shouts 'side'. He picks on Babba's habit of shouting the word 'side' in between his poems and songs. It is a performance habit.

An audience member shouts '*jhor<sup>42</sup> do saaid se.* (Take him from the side)'.

*Abhi thora deri me boli* In a short while he will again Uses a few English words in  
*saaid,* say 'side', lyrics for rhyming.

*Jab lo hoi iske taaid,* When low will get his tide.

*E baithi baut ke uccha pe,* He will sit up on a boat,

*Iske thel ke launde uppar kari* The boys will push him all  
*iske baais bahut chauḍaa* the way to the dry sand  
*hai.* because his base is very wide.

*Raeta peh dhel ke slaaid.* On the dry sand he will slide.

### Babba's response:

*Bole bot hum khich ke* He says he will push me and Babba has this time resorted  
*laijaega slaaid, e humme* make me slide, he wants to to some English words too in  
*kari slaaid,* slide me, order to give an appropriate

*Abbe lund.* You dick (penis). rebuttal to Reshi.

*Konchi karega slaaid,* What will you slide, The audience is thoroughly  
*Bahut tum karega slaaid tab* If you slide too much, then enjoying the exchange  
*aage to bandha rahi rassi hoi* the rope tied to the boat will judging from the loud  
*jai taait.* get tight. laughter and supportive

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<sup>42</sup> The word can also mean 'intercourse' or 'fuck' and that is probably what the speaker means anyway.



*Pagla, pahile baut ke rassi* Mad, first you should words directed towards the  
*khola mango, raait...ab e hoi* unfasten the boat's ropes, performers.  
*saaid.* right.... now he will go side.

*Tub u rassi hoi taait tab uske* When the ropes get tight The reference to an erection  
*upar ghati me tum maarna* then there will be a knot on and oral sex is evident and  
*lab bait.* top which is where you give this generates tremendous  
a love bite. number of shouts and  
laughter from the listeners.

(Source: Khan's Collection)

The poems, songs and gestures are rife with sexual innuendos and at times they are not even veiled with any puns or ambiguities but mentioned outright. For example, Babba calls Reshi lund (penis), which is a colloquial reference and is mostly used in jokes between friends or small groups, not publicly. Interestingly, many English words are used by both qawwal like 'bloody, slide, tide, tight' because they rhyme and suit qawwal's intent. This also importantly proves changes in language use. The focus of the performance is gaining maximum positive crowd reaction, and this can only be achieved through clever articulations of invectives and insults while maintaining musical harmony and hype. In comparison to the earlier excerpt from Saaka and Chaana where the word 'excrement' was offensive, this performance breaks many boundaries of acceptable public behaviour and speech. Enthusiasts of traditional qawwali disapprove of such performances, but overwhelming audience support tips scales in favour of these contemporary forms, hence such forms feature heavily in fundraising events.

Fundraising qawwali is usually a three-to-four-hour muqabala between two qawwal. The performers' focus in these events is to provide entertainment, which drives patrons to the event. The drive for entertainment supersedes other historical and cultural connections of the genre. Such performances have been performative as they have been key in re-inscribing expectations of qawwali as a cultural practice. Qureshi explains 'an understanding of the structure of the qawwali occasion also presupposes an awareness of the background dimensions which, for all qawwali participants, underlies the qawwali tradition' (1986, p. 77).

The eminence of understanding context of performance can be illustrated in a narration of Shalini's birth as a qawwal. She was hired to perform *vivah geet* (wedding songs) at a Muslim wedding, alongside another female folksinger. This was not intended to be a competition but

a display of the hiring family's wealth, in that they could afford two performers simultaneously. Shalini explains that since it was a Muslim wedding, she learnt and included some Islamic devotional songs in her performance. Being a female Hindu singer, this was neither asked nor expected of her. Nonetheless, her performance approach immensely impressed the Muslim audience. Shalini explains 'they were very pleased that a non-Muslim woman would sing Muslim songs' (Chand S. R., 2017). Shalini permeated a few boundaries in singing qawwali style songs with wedding songs and performing Islamic songs despite being a Hindu and female. However, public reaction was positive as reflected through both monetary gifts and compliments. The family then supported Shalini's qawwali training, which was enhanced further when they sponsored her to perform overseas amongst IndoFijian qawwali enthusiasts. Like Shalini, performers need to mindfully select materials for specific performances. In celebratory events, qawwal take more maksad (purpose) oriented songs that deal with the celebration's theme. Performance goals are also influencing factors on how performers engage with the event. For example, qawwal would utilise more fast-paced tempo songs for joyous occasions and more emotionally appealing songs with slower tempo for events of spiritual nature. Shalini uses every qawwali performance seriously, which leads her to bring a high level of energy.

### Variability

While there is an expected structure for qawwali performances, performers can and do at times ignore it, to perform to what stimulates and excites audiences. Repetition is common in qawwali and at times a poem that can be recited in two minutes could be performed for hours by highlighting and repeating words and lines as long as the audience continues to react favourably to these (Bhattacharjee & Alam, 2012, p. 215).

The muqabala format in Fiji usually places the performers in time restrictions, so they adhere to the structure. The audience also provides feedback in various ways which inform the performers of audiences' preferences and this helps singers alternate between different styles or further explore a style that appeals to the listeners. Mainly in the entertainment-oriented performances, the audience appeal is given significance and a qawwal often alters his or her performance based on responses. A proficient qawwal is one who is 'able to repeat, amplify, rearrange or even omit any part of the song text in immediate response to the changing requirements of his listeners' (Qureshi, 1986, p. 63). While Qureshi makes this

argument in relation to performers of devotional qawwali, those who perform contemporary forms, utilise more theatrics based on their need to maintain audience gratification. This conversation with Shalini depicts how audiences influence her performance(s):

**Vicky:** Now the thing about your style, you mentioned earlier, it is quite vibrant.

**Shalini:** Yes, because it is important for me to keep the audience awake even if that is managed through a few whistles and hoots. I am there for the sake of the audience. Yes, my opponent is present, and he accompanies my performance, but my focus is the crowd as they are the ones who have paid to be there, and I have to please them.

**Rohit:** Did you see the response of the crowd in Sigatoka? They were so quiet<sup>43</sup>.

**Shalini:** And the people also like 'latest' songs because it is entertaining. Like that night when I performed the song '*j'horī kardi jump*' (girl jumped up), then someone jumped and banged the shed's roofing iron. This is because the people were enjoying.

**Vicky:** And it also showed that they were listening to your words and not just sitting there irresponsible.

**Shalini:** It is important to sing some latest songs, but that does not necessitate singing vulgarity.

**Vicky:** Okay.

**Shalini:** Sing good things. Vulgarity should not even be part of the whole performance. It is just the people here (Fiji) who have made it a tradition?

(Chand S. R., 2017)

Shalini is known for her energised performances. While such effervescence is not always applicable to her folk performances like devotional hymns and wedding songs, qawwali provides the space for more vivacious performances. Her choice to whistle and hoot attracts more audience exhilaration because as a female she is not expected to do so. Her violation of gender expectation adds to the performance effect, and that is precisely Shalini's justification for engaging in such acts.

While she does generally respond positively to audience reactions, Shalini still resists including vulgarity, insults and invectives, despite their popularity. She presumes that such

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<sup>43</sup> Rohit implies that the audience were quiet because they were attentive to the performance.

acts would come at the cost of her and her family's *izzat* (honour), which is too much of a price to pay. Shalini adds 'qawwali is supposed to be sufi devotional songs. For that reason, I cannot sing any vulgarities with it. I do not even have any such things to sing. And if I ever have to sing vulgarities, then I will stop performing. That will not be religious, because to perform I must remember the One above and perform in reverence to Him' (Chand S. R., 2017). In her live performance I also noted audiences calling out the word *latest* suggesting, as Shalini explained, for her to sing some vulgarities. Her response was to continue performing more Bollywood tunes, because for her 'latest is singing movie songs' (Chand S. R., 2017).

Miller's fieldwork showed the term 'latest' (2008, p. 305) to mean Bollywood-inspired songs, but as Rohit, Dhiren and Khan all clarified, currently this term signals inclusion of vulgarity. Hence, while steering clear of vulgarity, Shalini changes the theme she sings about and adopts new styles, based on her audience's age and reaction. The change in style is not always based on a qawwal's crowd evaluation, as sometimes direct requests called *farmaish*, both verbal and written, are also made for performers to change direction or quicken tempo. Sometimes qawwal take a few minutes to explain why a particular song has been requested. A qawwal's articulation of a request's rationale has direct implications on the audience's reception to the performance. For instance, if a request is made in remembrance of a deceased relative, then the audience keenly heed the effectiveness of the qawwal's embodiment of relevant emotions into the song. Performers may diverge from the expected performance structure to accommodate requests, but these diversions are thoroughly explained. I noted this in a muqabala between Dhiren and Daven Qawwal, in Auckland. Daven explains his diversion as such:

*Azzizo Dosto, mae aapse kuch kahena* Dearest Friends, I would like to say  
*chahata hun.* something to you.

*Bhaijaan Shahid ne mujhe kuch qawwali* Brother Shahid has made an appeal for a  
*gaane ke liye shifarish ki hai. Unki ek* song. He has made a request.  
*farmaish hai.*

*Mae jaanta hun ki mai raste se thora hat* I realise that I am diverting from the path a  
*raha hun but mae unke adhin me ayah hun.* little, but I am submitting to the request that  
has been made.

<i>Unka joh ichcha hai use mae pura karta hun toh mujhe maaf karna.</i>	I will fulfil his desire, so please accept my apologies.
<i>Unki ye farmaish thi ki unke yahan jo mehendi night huwi thi...shayad aplog nahi jante honge...inki jab shadhi hui 1985 me. Ussi raat ko mera ustad, marhum Abdul Sataar qawwal ne unki mehndi ki raat ko pesh kiya tha. Aaj wahi mae pesh karta hun. Mere bhi dil ki ek ildija thi ki mae apne bete Sadid ke liye bhi ek chota sa remix karunga.</i>	His request is that once when there was a mehndi night at his residence...maybe you are not aware...he was married in 1985. That night my mentor, Late Abdul Sataar Qawwal performed a song at that celebration which is the same song I perform for you tonight. I have also had the desire to perform a remix song for the benefit of my son Sadid which I do now as well.
<i>Toh mulaeja farmaiega, uske baad me hum mubaraqbadi gaunga mehndi ki talukaat aur fir hum apna raste pe ajaega.</i>	I request your attention for this, afterwards I will perform a congratulatory song related to mehndi rituals and then I will return to the correct path immediately.

(Source: Dhiren Qawwal's Collection)

Two interesting points that emanate from this, are: firstly, the requests of audiences are important and can compel performers to alter their performance despite the guilt of disrupting the structure and possibility of being tormented by the opponent. Secondly, this indicates that traditional qawwal take the structure seriously and avoid its disruption. In this case, Dhiren also chooses to perform a romantic song following on Daven's divergence.

However, qawwal may not respond positively to all comments. For instance, in the same performance event, Dhiren responds harshly to a patron's suggestion that he perform songs with a higher tempo. Dhiren speaks these lines within his song after he overheard the listener's comment. He continues to play the harmonium as he delivers this statement. This is important as these words are deemed part of the performance rather than a word of caution post- or pre- performance.

<i>Aur ek baat mae bata deta hun, Abhi kissi ne bahar yahan kaha...naam nahi lunga...'ki raftar rakhna masta...'</i>	And let me tell you one thing, Just now someone out there said...I will not call out your name...'Master maintain the speed...'
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*Yeh apku shobha nahi deta hai. Aap jo bhi* This does not suit you. I know who you are.  
*hai mae janta hun. Ye apko shobha nahi deta* This really does not suit you.  
*hai.*

*Apne darje me raho. Tabhi apka darja jo hai* Please remain within your repute. Only then  
*wo apko mubarak dega.* you will be respected based on your  
standard.

*Aur mujhe mat sikhana ki qawwali kya hai* And do not teach me what qawwali is and  
*aur kaese gana chahiye.* how it should be performed.

*Tees ssal se maine mahefil ko dekha hai aur* For thirty years I have seen such gatherings  
*aise baḍe baḍe qawwal ka samna bhi kiya* and have battled such renowned qawwal.  
*hai.*

*To mae yahi chahata hun ki aap mujhe* So, what I want is that you do not try to  
*sikhane ki koshish na kare.* teach me how this is done.

(Source: Dhiren Qawwal's Collection)

At the end of this rhetoric, Dhiren's musicians yell out a large taunting and jeering shout as retaliation against the criticism. This illustrates how performer-audience interactions can also take undesirable turns. Dhiren's anger proved that he felt insulted by the comment. Anger is a common on-stage reaction of performers, but this is often reserved for opponents.

### Clarity of Text

As important as music is to the overall performance, it needs to allow for singer's words to be audible. This feature is a remnant of traditional performances, where a qawwal's words had to be discernible to successfully fulfil the pedagogical function. Qureshi (1986, p. 66) identifies two parts to a qawwali song, namely, 'a text unit – a poem – and a musical unit'. I, however, identified a third part that often precedes the poem and the singing. In this portion singers *bole* (speak) lines. Sometimes, qawwal use this style to describe the context of their songs such as referencing a religious story or identifying mistakes or oversights in their opponent's performance that they want to address in their poem or song. Secondly, qawwal *sunnai* (recite) a shayari relating to an identified incident, or a poem that provides ample rebuttal to an opponent's shayari. The main distinction between *bole* and *sunnai* is the rhyme of the poetry recitation. The third manner of text delivery is through singing with music. While in the first two aspects the musicians remain ready, they only play a more active role during

the singing portion. Some musicians may also act as choir, but this almost never includes the dholakiya. At times singers may make hand gestures to musicians to raise or drop the volume of the music if he or she finds it hindering the audience's ability to hear the words.

Seeing the centrality of the words or text, it must also be noted that having a deep or loud voice is a pre-requisite to be a good qawwal. Qureshi (1986, p. 61) notes 'all singing is carried out at a high dynamic level and with strong, even exaggerated enunciation of consonants' mandating qawwal to have certain vocal qualities. For qawwali, a melodious voice is not as significant as having *majbuti* (forcefulness) and being *bhari* (loud). In addition, qawwal also need linguistic proficiency, especially in Urdu, which is generally a second or rarely encountered language among IndoFijians. Therefore, qawwal have had to develop the skills of enunciating Urdu clearly, as Urdu is regarded as a rather formal language, associated with higher class or status. A qawwal that muddles pronunciations in his or her songs is unlikely to build reputation as an adept performer. The notable decline in the use of Urdu in modern qawwali forms correlate with the emergence of several qawwal, who do not have much knowledge of religious text(s) or Urdu but proclaim themselves as qawwal based on vocal qualities, debating ability and aptitude for crafting instant rebuttals. They are absolved of pressures to learn Urdu or religious texts because these are not utilised. The few introductory Urdu songs can be memorised. Therefore, historically not everyone could become a qawwal even *if* they had vocal abilities (because they may have lacked the Urdu and religious knowledge) but now anyone with the vocal abilities can lay claim to being a qawwal.

The support singers play an important role in sustaining an uninterrupted verbal communication by repeating the lead qawwal's lines. In Shalini's case, however, she maintained an uninterrupted performance by singing continuously and only pausing for musical interludes. Her performances did not use support singers. This was because Shalini's musicians were all males and their voices would not have aligned with her feminine one. Furthermore, Shalini is still developing her skills as a qawwal and needs more training to negotiate alterations of singing between herself and support singers. Similarly, any support singers that she may bring for future performances will need awareness of cues that indicate what lines were to be repeated and where the qawwal is to sing alone. The use of support singers and repetitions does help in presenting a more complete style of qawwali and in the absence of these, the qawwal is left to work harder on stage, as Shalini often does.

### Audience Interaction

Many performance genres have some level of interaction between performances and spectators, but qawwali takes this engagement to another level. In South Asian contexts, Qureshi (1986) identifies that response of listeners is related to emotional and spiritual arousal which is indicated through various gestures. In her analysis of responses to spiritual qawwali, Qureshi outlines three identifiable categories within which the audiences' reactions can be placed. The initial state which Qureshi names *zero* is where listeners' movement is minimal as they commit vision and hearing to the performers and the music. This stage is where they begin their transition and enter a liminal state that prepares them for deeper mental and emotional engagements. The next stage sees a manifestation of internal arousal into gestures, commonly restricted to hands, face, head and small, gentle steps. A little swaying can also be noted in some instances. In these two stages 'the listener is held to have self-control' (Groot, 2010, p. 252) and manage his actions possibly to prevent any disruption to the transitory process of others. The third and final stage symbolises the state where listeners attain spiritual intoxication and enter a trance. In this stage the bodily movements are uncontrolled and can take several forms including dancing, jumping, extreme swaying of body and at times rapid shaking of the body. The movements witnessed in such performances are like spiritual manifestations witnessed in worship segments of protestant and evangelical church services. In the Christian context, the worshippers can and are expected to join in singing, whereas qawwali listeners can and do shout praise and encouragement even while in a state of trance, but do not join the singing due to difficulties in predicting what lead singers sing next. Qureshi notes that spiritual leaders monitoring traditional performances sometimes had certain audience members removed when their movements become exaggerated and distractive. Qawwali I observed in Fiji, whether religious or secular, did not have any such spiritual leaders, but event organisers do appoint individuals to monitor performers' content, when restrictions are pre-instated. These appointed individuals can also get unruly audience members removed from the performance venue. It is clear, however, that they do not symbolise the same spiritual authority as the overseers in South Asian qawwali.

In Fiji, the common settings for qawwali performances today have moved from homes to halls for hire. These halls could be temporary stages set up in stadiums if there is a good sponsor



who can afford a larger space. In most cases, organisers use classrooms in schools to hold these performances as these are cheaper to secure and widely available. Such places can have an impact on the quality of the performance as the buildings in which the performances take place are hardly appropriate for musical production. Khan confesses that the number of qawwali events has rapidly declined. He reminisces that in comparison to the last decade, many families opted out of including qawwali in their wedding celebrations. Khan (2017) states:

When I went to Fiji last Easter, I searched for qawwali performances that I could attend. Over the period of about five days that Easter Weekend, there was just one qawwali performance in Ba. I searched from Rakiraki all the way to Sigatoka. Whenever I travel to Fiji, I even book my flights on specific dates so that I arrive in Fiji before Saturday and leave after Saturday. The weekends were often the prime days for organising qawwali, especially long weekends. In my experience of Easter weekend in the past years there were always at least two or three performances, but that time there was only one. I found out through my brother, that there were several weddings but hardly any had qawwali.

He blames this withdrawal of support on financial issues and mostly, on lack of respect for new versions of qawwali. Therefore, this genre is increasingly associated with fundraising events. Dhiren, an experienced and formally educated qawwal, laments ‘that is one of the few remaining advantages of qawwali as it is often used to assist people in need and to do some social work through collecting funds for people’s medical treatment or rebuild houses lost in a fire’ (Prasad D. , 2017). While being critical of modern qawwali—particularly the erosion of its pedagogical function—Dhiren identified that some good was coming from these performances despite the rapid detachment from the religious foundation. Since the purpose (and venues) of events have changed, so have the audiences and their reactions.

Previously with home-based performances for weddings, the crowd could be a mixture of genders and ages at least up to a certain time in whole-night performance. By the time the performances reached two or three in the morning<sup>44</sup>, only male enthusiasts would remain. Performers and audiences would delimit lyrics and comments to respectful levels because of the mixed audience and, even when the crowd was composed of all males, the same reactions

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<sup>44</sup> For all night performances.

were maintained. These mostly included clapping and shouting words like *sach hai* (that is true) or commonly *shabas* (bravo or well done). This was because, regardless of the change in audience composition, the religious foundation and trajectory of songs were consciously preserved. In contrast, halls are removed from domestic settings, thus performers can express themselves more liberally. They do not need to be overly conscious of audience composition because for paid events only those with genuine interest attend. In some cases, restrictions can be applied by organising committees, where audience(s) are expected to be composed of a wider populace. In the case of the former, the entertainment factor is key to the fundraising event, so qawwal are encouraged to embody those factors that persuade people to attend and remain for the entire performance as money is not only made in entry tickets but food, snacks and kava sales as well. In such events, which now represent the most visible form of qawwali, the audience is also at greater liberty in speech and actions. The responses include: alternatively rising and sitting when the music and singing become particularly captivating, cheering and loudly repeating punchlines in rebuttals, clapping, shouting, calling out encouragements and criticisms, walking up to the stage to place money on a singer's harmonium, dancing, loud laughter and sniggering as well as gestural signs to signal messages like raising musical tempo, or suggesting repetition of lines. The responses identified above are but some commonly witnessed ones. Sometimes audiences can also display acts of anger and violence. When these do occur, they are mainly in muqabala style events where audiences have a favourite singer. The vulgarity on stage is often supplemented by vulgarity amongst audiences, which occasionally leads to heated arguments. There is an apparent contrast in audience responses to performances of the Indian traditional form of qawwali, Fiji religious qawwali and Fiji competitive qawwali. All three versions, nonetheless, depict people's active participation in musical genres for spiritual and emotional indulgence.

### Sitting Arrangements

The location and sitting arrangement of musical troupes in relation to audience varies according to physical settings and contexts of performances. Bhattacharjee and Alam (2012, p. 219) explain that with South Asian qawwali, performance setups relied on centralising the shrines. In IndoFijian non-muqabala performances, the lone qawwal's musical ensemble is staged in a central location within the venue to enhance their visibility. This could be a special stage constructed beside the space used by officiating religious leaders. For muqabala events

organised at people's private residences, the trend is to allocate a space in the centre of the shed while audiences sit around the performers. Since fundraising events are mostly organised in halls, the qawwal are situated on raised main stages that face the sitting area. Even though qawwal compete, they are mostly made to sit beside rather than opposite each other. This allows qawwal to glance at their opponents while remaining face to face with audiences. Qawwal in Fiji sit cross-legged on the floor, with a harmonium placed before them. Some qawwal also place the harmonium beside them and play with outstretched arms and a semi-turned body. Others tend to remain on their knees while playing and singing, but much of this depends on physical fitness of qawwal. Qawwal often change body positioning due to time lengths spent in certain postures. The introduction of acoustic equipment has placed limitations on-stage movements of qawwal, as they often have to position and reposition themselves in relation to microphones. Several microphones are commonly deployed in the performance space to capture the sound of singers, harmonium and dhol.

The qawwal is always seated in a centered position in relation to his musical ensemble. The dholakia is usually seated right beside the qawwal because they often communicate during the performance. The other musicians rely on the dhol to lead the performances' musical aspect. These musicians sit behind the qawwal and function as support singers.



*Figure 3 The photo shows Dhiren during a religious qawwali performance in Auckland. Note the musical ensemble including the instruments, musicians, and support singers. Dhiren's group is mostly wearing black. (Source: Dhiren Qawwal)*



Figure 4 Dhiren's opponent at the same qawwali muqabala (fig. 3). Note that his group is wearing white. The difference in colour emphasises the competitive atmosphere. (Source: Dhiren Qawwal)

In Shalini's case, Rohit is usually an extra member in her group, as he likes to turn pages and give on-stage performance tips to Shalini. Manju also had an arrangement with her mentor, who always accompanied her on-stage. The sitting arrangement was also different in Sushil's case because she did not play the harmonium which added another musician to her group. She sat beside the harmonium player while other positionings remained the same. Other musical instruments usually included *dhantal*<sup>45</sup>, *jhikaa*, *majira* (also called *manjira*). The music produced, when these instruments are played in combination, is easily identifiable as IndoFijian. Groot notes that in qawwali 'the singing is accompanied instrumentally by harmonium, drums, and hand-clapping' (2010, p. 244). In Fiji qawwali style, clapping is not as prominently performed as it may be done for the South Asian styles. In the latter, performers and their ensemble can sometimes rise to their knees and throw their hands outwards when clapping so that clapping is not only heard but seen. The clapping is performed in time to the

<sup>45</sup> **Dhantal:** A musical instrument created with two pieces of steel rod. The longer piece can be around two metres long. Thirty centimetres of one of its ends is bent to form a shape similar to a candy cane. The other shorter piece is bent into a 'U' shape. Music is produced through a beating of the longer rod with the U-shaped rod while clutching and releasing the middle portion of the longer rod in relation to the beats of the dhol. The musician needs to be seated on the ground with the rod held vertically erect on the ground.

**Jhikaa:** A tambourine. With IndoFijians a semi-circular tambourine with two lines of small cymbals is popular. There can sometimes be up to three tambourines being played within one ensemble.

**Majira:** A pair of small metal hand cymbals which produce high-pitched percussive sounds. They have strings attached to their backs which allows the musicians to hold one in each hand. The cymbals are slid and clashed against each other.

basic meter and performers' movements add to the spectacularity of the performance. Nonetheless, qawwali in these two geographical settings share some features such as the 'powerful playing on the *dholak* or *tabla* (a pair of drums) and the emphatic rendering of texts are a trademark of qawwali' (Groot, 2010, p. 244). The musical emphasis on membranophones is similar in both regions, but for most IndoFijian modern qawwali performances, the musical component is sometimes exaggerated which has the negative impact of drowning out qawwal's words despite their use of microphones.

### **Female qawwal**

Sushil symbolised a notable exception among IndoFijian cultural performances by becoming the first female qawwal in the mid-1980s. In permeating gender boundaries of cultural performances, she founded the IndoFijian female qawwal identity that Shalini and Manju embodied around twenty years later. When asked as to why more female qawwal did not emerge despite there being several women folksingers, a Khan (2017) stated:

Yes, surely the culture affects this. The culture is a major problem, it places many restrictions. In Islam, with our religion women performers will not be able to perform because other men will start to criticise this decision. Additionally, people's perception of that lady will be changed even though she is not involved in anything wrong. They would question that if she is performing then when does she have time for cooking and child rearing.

As this comment conveys, women performers risk blighting their reputations owing to difficulties in escaping 'men's voyeuristic gaze'. Regardless of their level and nature of participation 'they are sexualised because men look at them as desired or despised objects' (Lorber, 1994, p. 93). Another factor that affects development of female qawwal, is that performance venues often separate men and women and qawwali is always performed on the male side. The female performer sits amongst an all-male audience, and if there is a muqabala, she would inevitably be pressured owing to the unfamiliarity with that space. In these cases, support is essential as Khan explains:

When I am present for these competitions and I notice that one of the qawwal is getting suppressed too much then because of the knowledge that I have, I sometimes go and whisper into the others ear what they could sing about. I have helped Shalini

like this. When the lady is surrounded by all males then you can understand the pressure she may face being looked at that way.

Apart from spatial and image-related issues, females must take a longer, more burdensome route to becoming qawwal. Males have an advantage in terms of exposure to qawwali because they can attend programs from an early age. This enables them to experience the qawwali atmosphere, learn audience preferences, and familiarise themselves with various performance techniques and segments of the genre. Men can also turn apprentice to other qawwal easily. A young and single woman would not be permitted into the companionship of an unrelated man, for fear of losing her honour. After marriage, a woman would be expected to handle domestic work and motherhood, which would leave her time constrained for training.

To date, all IndoFijian female qawwal started performing much later in their lives and were only able to do so because of support from husbands and husbands' families. Such support is needed for several reasons. Firstly, a lot of time must be dedicated in preparing for qawwali programs especially when one is a new qawwal. For example, for a whole night program, twenty-five to thirty songs need to be prepared. For a short four-hour program, they would need at least twelve. These, together with shayari, must be composed and practiced. A qawwal would also need to have enough knowledge of texts and scriptures, so that she can create impromptu songs and shayari to rebuttal. For Hindu performers this would require studying Islamic texts and seeking assistance from scholars to comprehend them. Therefore, many new qawwal opt to become understudies to experienced qawwal. This would again prove difficult for a female as she would have to negotiate numerous social codes to become an apprentice of a male qawwal. Her husband would need to be extremely supportive as they would be expected to accompany her to both training sessions and performances. Additionally, he would also have to deal with criticisms about his willingness to expose his wife to the male gaze and having to deal with the notion of being less renowned than his wife. Even after scaling through these hurdles, the female qawwal then must endure sexist and misogynist views of male opponents on-stage. The analysis of contemporary qawwali's content reveals an overwhelming reliance on sexual content and male qawwal do not hesitate to use these against female opponents. This becomes tricky for female qawwal like Shalini, who then must decide whether to respond reciprocally or abstain from such discourses to



retain a positive reputation. Nonetheless, whether she chooses to use vulgarity or not, her presence on the qawwali stage already places her in a subversive position. The presence of her female body in an otherwise male space begins a new narrative with the potential to recreate realities and inspires a renegotiation of identities for all involved in such interactions (Goundar, 2015, p. 1). In that sense, qawwali as a musical discourse proves that ‘a range of semantic possibilities (are) inherent in a musical structure’ and that performances can have impacts beyond the physical and imagined performance space (Qureshi, 1986, p. 233).



*Figure 5 Sushil Krishna in a 1994 qawwali muqabala. Note that there is a male harmonium player on her side who plays for her. (Source: Khan's Collection)*

## **Conclusion**

This chapter discussed qawwali as a performance genre. The chapter explained what qawwali represents through a detailed discussion of its history, performance contexts, purpose, forms, structures, changes it has experienced, and most importantly the role of its performers and audiences. Where applicable, arguments are illustrated using lyrics and descriptions of performances. Moreover, discussions of this chapter are entwined with voices of qawwali performers, and those who appreciate the genre and are conscious of its significance.

## Chapter 4

### Analysis of Qawwali Performances

#### Introduction

The three analysed samples of performances below provide more specific examples of how qawwali creates space for subversive presentations that challenge heteronormative gender ideologies. Each performance is preceded and followed by discussions of how certain words and actions can make their performers gender-liminal.

#### **Qawwali Muqabala: Sushil Versus Vijendra (Suva)—Sometime in the late 1980s**

The analysis below is based on one of the only recorded qawwali performances by Sushil, first IndoFijian female qawwal, who performed from 1970s to 1990s. Khan (2017), an IndoFijian qawwali expert, relates:

There was a well-known singer, Sushil Krishna who performed in those days. Khalid Hussein Qawwal was her mentor. Unfortunately, there are not many recordings of her performances because during her time we had tapes for recording. This was an expensive affair as you needed tapes, batteries and a radio with recording feature. I know that she sang competition songs with several qawwal.

Khan mentioned having heard Sushil perform in qawwali competitions, but earlier on in her performance life when she did not use vulgarities. Khan's interview also explained the lack of recordings from that time. Sushil became infamous later in her life for performing subversive content. Rajendra<sup>46</sup> narrates Sushil's life briefly:

I have heard recordings of Sushil's performances although I never personally attended her performance. I know she challenged Nura Qawwal and Yasin Qawwal. I do remember overhearing my female relations criticising the fact that Sushil sang vulgarities in the presence of men. This is because people do perform vulgarity in qawwali. The unfortunate thing was that more women were unappreciative of her performances than men. This was simply because they had ideas about what a perfect woman was supposed to be and going outside that role was unacceptable. So, they

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<sup>46</sup> Rajendra Prasad is an academic at the University of the South Pacific who has spent several years promoting and researching IndoFijian language and culture.



doubted the femininity of a woman in such a position. Perhaps that is why many females do not perform qawwali. Historically women only performed vivah lokgeet.

While Rajendra's comments narrate the general opinion women had of Sushil, it is understood that women used second-hand information from men to form these viewpoints as females traditionally did not attend muqabala events. This is evidence of female complicity in oppressive gender structures, and the unquestioned influence of ideological frameworks.

As only an audio-recorded version of this qawwali was available, this analysis focuses on lyrics. Nonetheless, lyrics provide evidence of Sushil's transgression of codes of femininity. Using invectives contravenes conventional qawwali style, but both qawwal maintain consistency in the structure of their performances. Each takes ten to fifteen minutes for rebuttals and arguments. Every segment of performance is comprised of shayari, a short narration (which could precede songs or be included mid-song) and song. The qawwal lays a stirring foundation with a shayari, preparing audiences for the rest of the segment. For example, the excerpt below marks Sushil's response to Vijendra's opening performance. Initially she acknowledges her absence from the stage for a few years which had caused her songbook to be metaphorically covered in dust, '*dhool se lipti kitab* (dust covered book)'. She confesses that competing with a renowned opponent is an immense task, yet challenges Vijendra, stating that she will put his reputation to the test.

*Aem veri veri hepi todae ae hait iu.*

I am very happy today, I hate you.

*Sori nahi bolo sori sori will not help iu,*

I will not say sorry because sorry will not help you,

*Iu ar veri veri noti toh ae hait iu.*

You are very naughty, so I hate you.

Use of English in songs is apparent from the outset. Both qawwal do this but Sushil, more so. This event already features a female qawwal, therefore, English lyrics mark yet another shift from convention. Some interpret this change as a necessary innovation to appeal to younger audiences, while others see it as distortion of tradition. The introduction between shayari and song outlines the argument's focus to audiences. For example, Sushil claims that Vijendra asked her to apologise to him without stating any reason for apologising. After identifying this, Sushil sings a song repeatedly disagreeing to offer apology. This essentially depicts public female rebellion against patriarchal authority and mandatory female submission. She then

accuses him of being '*noti* (naughty)' which later build up into more insults. She also gives her first justification for singing in this style, stating '*abh toh lakta hai ki mai iski latest ka jawab latest se de rahi hun aur qawwali me sher bol bol ke deti hun* (it is evident now that I am responding to his latest with my own latest and with shayari)'. In the next shayari she calls Vijendra a dog, saying '*Arre kutr ke tarif ko badlna hi padega* (...alter this dog's reputation)'. The performance scenario does not negate this comment's potential emotional effect on Vijendra, a male in a patriarchal society, the beneficiary of social codes put in place restricting females from exactly this sort of behaviour. Sushil continues her insults, targeting and undermining Vijendra's performance capabilities. She intensifies her rebuttals with constant references to her strength, and his destruction resulting from her commitment to defeat him. In the following lines she narrates awareness her stylistic variations:

<i>Lekin aaj mei kissi aur tarike se gaati hun.</i>	Today, however, I am singing in a different style.
<i>Shayad aap log ko aaj ke mugable ki zada mazza aaye kiyunki mei uske latest ka latest se latest me jawab deti hun.</i>	I feel that you will find more enjoyment in today's performance because I respond to his latest with my own latest.
<i>Shaitan ki raha me jab yeh chalat hai toh mujhe bhi chalna hi padega...</i>	Since you have started this walk on the devil's path, I will surely follow you...

Sushil is principally targeting Vijendra, not his singing style or songs' content. This magnifies Sushil's subversiveness, as unlike Shalini, who uses a non-confrontational strategy, Sushil emulates those qawwal, who in breaking from tradition, personalise rebuttals rather than argue on content. From the standpoint of a hegemonic IndoFijian masculinity, Vijendra should find Sushil's attitude unacceptable and ideally, mount counter-arguments. Sushil's personal attacks have left both his performance skills and male supremacy vulnerable, as she even suggests physical violence against him '*Laat ghusa khana hai jabdha yun fadhwana hai toh* (if you want to be punched and kicked and your jaw dislocated)'.

Sushil uses the logic of *a taste of your own medicine* by constantly clarifying that she is following a style initiated by qawwal like Vijendra. She claims of following the 'devil's path' only to pursue him and declares that Vijendra is only a calf in comparison to her, indicating that he is naïve as a qawwal.

*Humne dekhe hai tumhare jaise bahut bacheḍhe.* I have seen many calves like you.

In response to Sushil, Vijendra's arguments seem relatively weak. His performance comprises of several repeated statements. He mainly argues that Sushil is '*machiwa nahi* (immature)' and '*besaram* (shameless)'. He cautions that further insults will compel him to react in ways that would make Sushil flee. Sushil has done enough to aggravate Vijendra and cause him to reciprocate her insults. His repeated cautioning and lacklustre response indicates one of two things. Either, he chooses taking the higher road instead of singing vulgar songs. Or realising that he cannot match Sushil's subversion, he creates the illusion that while he can insult her, he decides not to. His lines, for instance, identify Sushil as immature and shameless, implying that he is mature enough to choose appropriate content.

<i>Dosto yeh bilkul machiwa nahi,</i>	Friends she is not mature at all,
<i>Yeh jitna purana hoti hai utna hi besaram hoti hai.</i>	The older she gets the more shameless she becomes.

Sushil's subversion is heightened by her aggressive approach. She already transgresses gender expectations by being present on this male stage; in addition, she verbalises expletives and makes public references to forbidden themes. In the extract below, Sushil sings about sexual intercourse, however, not from a passive feminine perspective but one where she penetrates. The words '*bhoku* (poke or penetrate)' and '*lagḍhu* (rub)' place her in the position of *doer* rather than *receiver*, as heteronormativity requires.

<i>Jisko me kas ke bhoku woh ghabḍha ke mujhse bole,</i>	Whoever I poke with force, calls out to me in horror,
<i>Dhire Sushil Dhire Dhire Sushil Dhire.</i>	Slowly Sushil, slowly Sushil, slowly.
<i>Jada na humkho kahe dena,</i>	Do not say a lot against me,
<i>Warna aaj raat ke tum bolio Sushil piraе Sushil piraе.</i>	Otherwise tonight you will shout out, it hurts Sushil, it hurts.
<i>Jisko mai kaske lagḍhu chilla ke ghabḍha ke bole,</i>	Whoever I rub with force shouts out and says,
<i>Dhire Sushil Dhire Dhire Sushil Dhire.</i>	Slowly Sushil, slowly Sushil, slowly.

Sushil states '*Teer choḍhne se pahile mai nishana laga leti hun* (I target precisely before I let the arrow go),' as clarification that her vulgarity is targeted to frustrate Vijendra. She reaches further subversive extremities in referring to Vijendra's wife in rebuttals. Refraining from comments on opponents' female relations is an unwritten, yet implicitly emphasised, qawwali code. When needed, this rule is included in qawwal's contracts, and in some programs comperes explicitly instruct performers against insulting female relatives. In mentioning Vijendra's wife, Sushil firstly breaches this code. Secondly, she breaks from the expectation of showing empathy for a fellow female. Sushil disregards this expectation and tells Vijendra, '*Jao apne ghar me jao apne biwi ke sath me chuḍhiya todho aur kalaiya moḍho* (go to your home and then break your wife's bangles and twist her wrists)' in response to his attacks. This is a reference to sexual intercourse which Vijendra insinuated he would do to Sushil. Her choice here parallels her with many male qawwal, who to display a masculine rebellious nature, often deliberately broke performance codes. Sushil does not shun from embodying rebellion even when it requires picking on other females whom she is expected to empathise with. Sushil concludes her sexualised offensive by again threatening physical violence '*Inko jaḍhoo se marungi inko laot bhi marungi* (I will beat him with a broom and kick him around)'. Choosing broom as her weapon is symbolic, as brooms are commonly associated with female domesticised role(s).

Vijendra's next round follows a similar trajectory in labelling Sushil naïve '*Tum toh ek nadaan chokri kiyun humse takrati*' (You are just a naïve girl why would you pick a fight with me) which, in his opinion, is sufficient cause for Sushil to cease performing '*Khaer tumhari isse me hai ki lelo ghar ke raaste*' (It would be better for you to start following the path homewards). Sushil's rebuttal proves interesting in its demonstration of activism against gender biases. IndoFijian cultural performances always have been gendered and the few genres dominated by women performers were often relegated 'to the domestic realm and men's performance activities to the public realm' (Goundar, *Beyond Exile: The Ramayana as a Living Naarative Among Indo-Fijians in Fiji and New Zealand*, 2015, p. 233). Goundar's (p. 233) research on *Ramayana* recitals identifies some issues of gender within IndoFijian cultural performances where even within regularly organised cultural events, devotees voice 'concerns over female performance in the public realm, centred on the impropriety of a woman subjecting herself to the male gaze particularly if she is married and particularly in a mixed-sex performance

context'. With this already registering as problematic in religious genres, Sushil's qawwal identity is potentially more transgressive due to qawwali's focus on both religion and entertainment, with increasingly more emphasis on the latter. Vijendra labelling Sushil a '*nadaan chokri* (naïve girl)' hints at this gendered segregation which he qualifies by repeatedly telling her to resume domestic responsibilities. Khan (2017) says of such arguments:

Comments mostly ask women to return to the kitchen and make *roti*. I have noticed, that when a man and woman compete, the man always reminds the woman that she does not belong to that stage. This is most common with our IndoFijian community, because we believe a woman's place is the house, doing kitchen work or washing clothes. The man qawwal will always pick on such things and keep reminding the lady that she should not be on-stage, and her performances should cease. When it is man versus man, they handle each others insults differently.

Upon realising Vijendra's hint, Sushil recites a lengthy shayari, focusing on women's strengths and their social, cultural, emotional contribution to human life. Sushil substantiates her claim '*Agar gustaki hui toh talwaar bhi hai nari* (if offended a woman can also be a sword)' later, by directly swearing at Vijendra.

Masculine expectations compel Vijendra to raise insult levels in asserting his dominance. The audience's shouts indicate appreciation for Sushil's effort, and serve as additional impetus for an experienced qawwal to fight for his reputation. Bem (1993, p. 151) claims that in patriarchal societies, 'the risk of feeling emasculated—or neutered—is especially intense when a man has to acknowledge a woman who is more powerful or privileged (or even competent) than himself'. However, Vijendra does not introduce any new strategies or argument trajectory, but continues to boast on his qawwali prowess, however, with little evidence. Ultimately, Vijendra's performance is entertaining as far as song and music syncing is concerned, but fails in content for being a series of unqualified claims, as shown below:

*Sare badan me ekar charbi<sup>47</sup> chadhi* Her entire body is filled with fat,  
*hai,*  
*Taan ki jamna mere samne khadhi hai,* She is standing wide chested before me,  
*Yeh kya dauḍe gi latest ke rais me.* How will she run in this race for latest songs?

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<sup>47</sup> Fat is used metaphoricallly here. He is not saying that she is fat but is using an IndoFijian idiom commonly used for someone being a deliberate nuisance.

*Muh ke fulaye mere agge khadhi hai,*      She stands here with an angry face,  
*Koi na raonak hai ekar agli fais me.*      There is no glamour in her ugly face.

Sushil, however, introduces more interesting rebuttal techniques. Firstly, she performs on the tune of Vijendra's previous song and identifies this in the song's introduction. It is clearly meant to disprove Vijendra's earlier assertion '*Ki tum mere saat chal nahi sakti* (you cannot move at the same pace as me)'. Secondly, in following male qawwal who often suggested females return to domestic duties, Sushil states '*Koi jadoo aaj nahi chali Vijenwa laut ke jao apan ganna ke khet me* (None of your tricks will work today Vijendra, just return to your cane farm)', hence, telling Vijendra to return to his primary occupation. Field consultants explained that qawwal are mostly part-time performers. Presently, some qawwal sustain themselves financially, as full-time performers by charging substantial hiring fees, and performing several folk genres for constant income supply. Sushil's act of turning tables here substantiates her confidence and thorough knowledge of rebuttal tools.

Vijendra's final response remains as ineffective as his earlier rebuttals and attacks. He orders Sushil '*Jaldi koshish karo abh mahefil se bhaag jane ki* (Try and run out of this gathering as quickly as you can)', claiming that she is irrational and just '*chilati hai gawaro ki tarha*' (shouts mindlessly). The same assertions would be more relevant if they came from Sushil, as she has surely outperformed Vijendra. Another weak argument from Vijendra is his claim '*Tameej nahi hai tumko kuch bhi geet ganne ki* (you do not comprehend protocols of performing these songs)'. It is hypocritical since Vijendra, on many instances during that event, resorted to shouting rudely to intimidate Sushil, although he knows such acts are outside qawwali's etiquette. As a male qawwal, he probably feels immune to repercussions of committing such violations, based on his sense of entitlement to that stage, a space Sushil must fight for. Vijendra delves into some sexual reference depicting himself as a rooster and Sushil a hen, when using the idiom '*apna churkhi na fudhwale* (until her comb is ruptured)', a colloquial phrase for sexual intercourse.

Sushil's concluding remarks suggest her realisation of being the better qawwal in that muqabala. Such information is mostly gathered by a qawwal's team, who move into and dialogue with audiences. More often one's success is assessed by accounting for claps, shouts, cheers and monetary gifts received in response to songs' tunes, rhyme and ingenuity of

shayari(s); performer's singing ability, musical skills, audience interaction and ability to frustrate opponents. Sushil outdoes Vijendra in all aspects except music and singing skills, where they were equally effective. Sushil begins with a rude remark reflecting Vijendra's defeat.

*Kitne qawwalo se tu bach gaya hai Vijenwa* You had escaped from so many qawwal but  
*lekin aaj Krishna nikali acha se tumar leedh*<sup>48</sup>. today Krishna has really taken out your  
excrement.

The female performer appears more liberated and upfront with insults than her male opponent. Vijendra continuously tells Sushil to concede defeat on account of his experience but fails to match up with her level of engagement, which incorporates insults and invectives. This reminded me of Manju's comments in relation to her participation in a qawwali muqabala against a male named Bobby. That performance was stopped when Bobby used vulgarities despite the organising committee forbidding their inclusion as the crowd composition included women and children. Bobby resorted to insults because it was the style his fan base preferred. Moreover, male qawwal recognise this as an easy strategy for frustrating female opponents given that they were hesitant to follow suit. In their respective interviews both Shalini and Manju revealed making requests with organising committees to institute limits to vulgarity in programs they participated in and they were both involved in performances that ended abruptly when limits were crossed and these qawwal or their supporters intervened and ended the program. Manju related to me her comment to Bobby after such an incident. She narrates 'it's okay that you are singing vulgarities but let me caution you, if a woman opens her mouth and starts to sing vulgarity, then women definitely know more vulgarity than men' (Manju, 2017). She continues 'I explained this to him, nicely. If I begin to sing vulgarity then you will not be able to take it because you can not match the criticisms a woman can pile on you' (Manju, 2017).

Manju's comment is clearly validated in Sushil's performance. Sushil's use of vulgarity, insinuations and crudity are significantly subversive. She confesses that these are deliberate acts when she sings that she will 'beat and sweep' Vijendra and asks '*Kaise marega yeh humko?* (How will he hit me?)', since '*Mahefil dega tanna isko* (The audience will criticise him

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<sup>48</sup> Horse excrement.

for that)'. This happens towards the end when Sushil realises that Vijendra has not engaged much vulgarity, which could be due to his fear that the audience will be critical of him if he publicly insults a woman. Sushil's interpretation may be accurate as Vijendra was restrictive in his comments and he labelled Sushil *besaram* (shameless) for her comments. He is apparently referencing social codes of speech and behaviour that prevent public use of certain vocabulary, particularly in mixed-gender situations. This can also be attributed to his unpreparedness for this level of contest from Sushil.

This recording is from the part of Sushil's life when she had gained the confidence to use vulgarities against opponents just as several male qawwal were doing. This is reflected in her explanation that she would be singing '*kissi aur tarike se* (in a different way)' and then qualifies this comment, saying '*mei uske latest ka latest se latest me jawab deti hun* (I will respond to his *latest* with my very own *latest*)'. As defined earlier, 'latest' in qawwali contexts now typically refers to vulgar songs or those with double meanings of sexual nature. Sushil's comment announces her decision to perform such songs, motivated by performances of her male contemporaries. Finally, she states:

<i>Aur inhone kya kiya, kuch galti baat kahi hai veshi wagera.</i>	And this one has committed a great mistake by calling me a whore.
<i>Toh mai itna kahena chahati hun. Ki joh aurat ko gali deta hai woh Maa bahen ka izzat kab rakta hoga.</i>	So, I want to say just this. Whoever swears at any woman, he certainly does not safeguard the honour of his own mother and sister.
<i>Dusri taraf yeh dekhi jati hai ki inki tarha, joh lavz yeh bol diya toh inki taraha...</i>	Also, I want to bring your attention to his words, so, in the same manner...
<i>Aaplog gussana nahi kiyunki jawab deti hun...</i>	You (audience) please do not be annoyed by this because I am just responding to what he has said...
<i>Inhone kaha veshi toh mai kaheti hun...</i>	He called me a whore then I say...
<i>Agar mai woh hun toh tum ek bahdhwa ho.</i>	If I am that, then you are a pimp.

There are a few subversive moments here. Firstly, Sushil claims that Vijendra is unable to safeguard his own mother and sister's honour. Her appeal to the concept of *izzat* (honour)



and claims of Vijendra's failure to fulfil his protective obligation, essentially question his manhood. Hegemonic male gender identity compels authoritative displays including protective behaviour towards female relations. Secondly, Sushil publicly swears at a male which infringes on socially expected femininity. A traditional IndoFijian concept of femininity forbids even loud public speaking, let alone use of expletives. Despite the context, Sushil realises that social conventions are not easily overlooked, mainly when one lives in the same society off-stage. Chatterjee explains that despite femininity being 'a patriarchal fiction which women are socialised to embrace as their own social reality, as their own gender identity regardless of what their lived experiences reveal', it still 'compels a particular kind of appearance and adopting a particular set of behaviour traits that is considered desirable' (Chatterjee, 2008, p. 73). This explains Sushil's offer of justification even before using the expletive. She maintains that her action is a reaction to Vijendra's pronouncements and clarifies that as a performer she is obligated to respond.

Nonetheless, what becomes apparent in this scenario is the undercurrent of social codes and the omnipresence of social values. Sushil's justification shows that even performances are social events that, despite their need to create a spectacular event continue to rely on social structures and ideologies to construct meaning. Connell (1987, p. 94) claims 'human practice always presupposes social structure, in the sense that practice necessarily calls into play social rules or resources. Structure is always emergent from practice and is constituted by it. Neither is conceivable without the other'. In the moment Sushil verbalises certain words and performs certain movements, all these are analysed in real time against a backdrop of set norms and codes. It is essentially this backdrop that qualifies performances' success or failure. It is in the application of social conventions that performers form their performance material, and audiences use these very conventions to analyse what they witness. To exist, to have an identity is to be relatable to these concepts and conventions as it is based on these that identities are articulated. Sushil, therefore, explains her actions because her use of certain words in certain contexts can potentially force her outside the matrix of accepted norms. Without such justifications, she risks being found liminal because while she claims to be a woman, she speaks as a man, on a stage where men have traditionally been the sole occupants. Ultimately, despite explanations, some audience members would still categorise her as a failed embodiment of IndoFijian femininity. This point is illustrated by Vijendra's

comment on Sushil's shamelessness. If one were to conceive the stage of performance as something constructed outside society's network of beliefs, ideologies, values and principles where a performer is at liberty to say and do whatever they deem necessary to producing a successful performance, then Vijendra's accusation of shamelessness against Sushil is neither appropriate nor relevant; Vijendra would not be able to call her shameless because there would be no moral or social standard to assess her actions against.

However, as analysis of the songs suggest, the stage does not offer any such relief from society. Prasad (2017) says about Sushil's off-stage image 'those people who have a real appreciation for traditional music understand the effort of these women. Other people would still raise their eyebrows against such a lady and ask '*kaisan besaram aurat hai?* (what sort of shameless woman is this?)'. Thus, a male qawwal's use of vulgarity is interpreted as norm, whereas a female qawwal assumes that she has an obligation to justify any divergences.

Regardless of what eventual symbolism is attached to her presence and performance on the qawwali stage, Sushil certainly redefines perceptions of gender through her embodiment of traits that problematise ideals of femininity. Not surprisingly then two other female performers entered the field of qawwali some years later.

### **Qawwali Muqabala: Shalini Versus Rishi (Rakiraki) —November 2013**

The setting for this muqabala is a hired school hall in rural Fiji, for a fundraising event featuring Shalini and Rishi. A raised stage is set up with basic fabric decorations and a banner attached as backdrop provided details of the performance's venue, time and performers' names. Both performers present short musical pieces to set the performances' mood, following which a compere welcomes audiences and introduces performers.

Shalini is the only female on-stage surrounded by male musicians, and her husband beside her. She is wearing a green salwar kameez and a purple veil flows over her shoulders and is drawn over her head. The veil depicts Shalini's adherence to dressing conventions for women, mainly in the presence of unknown men. Ideally, she should not even be attracting unknown male gaze, but that expectation is transgressed by her on-stage presence. Shalini is introduced as '*Fiji ki ek matr lokgeet kuin, ek matr kirtan kuin, ek matr qawwali kuin, Shrimati Shalini Rohit Chand* (Fiji's most eminent folksong queen, an eminent hymn queen and qawwali queen, Mrs. Shalini Rohit Chand)'. Her gender is mentioned for the second time a few minutes later as the compere calls for her garlanding. He states '*sabse pahile, matrya shakti joh hoti*

*hai, nari shakti ka hum swagat karte hai* (first we will welcome the matriarchal power, the feminine power)’ to identify Shalini.



Figure 6 Shalini and Rishi on-stage. (Source: Khan's Collection)

The rules for this performance particularly forbid use of vulgarity due to the presence of young students. The consequence for disobeying was stated as forceful removal by security officers. This extreme caution was necessary since qawwali programs were by this time increasingly becoming uncouth and violent. Qawwali enthusiasts identified this as a regrettable change, when compared with traditional qawwali that enhanced religious knowledge and morality. In contrast, new generation performers and patrons have developed an affinity for insults. In unregulated programs, performers rely significantly on vulgarity as entertainment factor. Thus, certain ground rules were instated for this program to avoid offending the diverse group that would attend this village-based event.

Shalini performs first and acknowledges the Muslim family that supported her transition as a qawwal. She also specifically welcomes female audiences, saying '*...jitne bhi matay hai apke charno me pranaam. Kushi ho raha hai ki aaj qawwali prograam me itni jaeda mataey aur bhane baithi hai* (to all the mothers I bring greetings to your feet. It is elating to see so many mothers and sisters sitting in this qawwali program)'. She does this because female audiences rarely attend qawwali programs. Shalini's first few songs are hamd, one of very few remnants of traditional qawwali. From the start Shalini brings energy to her performance and utilises copious amounts of hand gestures and head jerks and upper body swaying. Shalini relies heavily on 'concurrent movement' (Zile, 1988, p. 127) in her performances and this animated display adds to her subversiveness. Both performers sing in Urdu, another feature of

traditional styles. However, it needs to be highlighted that Urdu is not the mother tongue of either performer which implies that they learnt Urdu or memorised Urdu lyrics. The audience also needs at least conversational level understanding of this language to follow the material. While the followers of the Islamic faith attain this by attending religious functions, non-Islamic audience members mostly learn Urdu through Bollywood movies. During indenture, as studies by several academics show, culture-specific separation did not exist among IndoFijians. For instance, Chandra and Naidu (1979, p. 36) point out:

The caste system amongst the immigrants broke down. Religious differences broke down also. Inter-marriage between people of different religions was common. There was a considerable exchange of beliefs and rituals. Muslims participated in Hindu religious festivals and the latter's participation in Muslim rites was manifested in the *Tazia*<sup>49</sup> Festival.

In Fiji, most qawwal come from Hindu backgrounds. While this is true of present-day multi-ethnic Fiji, such heavy involvement of Hindus in Muslim festivities is also noted by Mishra in his study of *Tazia*. He (Mishra S. , 2008, pp. 74-75) notes 'the tazia's popularity is somewhat astonishing when one considers that the recruited were overwhelmingly Hindus and that only an insignificant minority of Muslims belong to the Shi'a sect—the tazia being specifically a Shi'a festival lamenting the martyrdom of Imam Husain on the plains of Karbala'. While Mishra's research covers the indenture and immediate post-girmit years, religious overlapping for cultural performances still occurs. Even in the performance analysed here, both performers are Hindus, but have acquired knowledge from Islamic texts to perform qawwali more proficiently, especially at a competitive level where opponents test your knowledge and audiences judge competency. This represents another feature of IndoFijians, where religious and cultural differences have thinned out to such a level that communities of people following different religious systems can share a single identity. There do remain some language and class-based variances, but all IndoFijians 'are seen by other Fijians as a people who share a way of life to the extent that justifies a common label' (Chandra & Naidu, 1979, pp. 32-33). While such a level of communal integration is admirable, it must be noted that the

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<sup>49</sup> Tazia as Mishra (2008) explains is a Shia'a festival where structures were constructed using bamboo, wood and clothes to represent mausoleums of Hasan and Hussein who were grandsons of Mohammad. They endured martyrdom for their faith and were thus recognized in such festivals. A segment of old-style qawwali performance also contained songs based on these two characters. Sunnis celebrated tazia but did not build structures.

Pacific context as a regional home to multiple cultural groups is a driving factor in the softening of boundaries that allow for easier crossing over.

Nonetheless, a Hindu qawwal's task remains a challenge in gaining ample knowledge to perform proficiently. Becoming a female Hindu qawwal presents some specific trials. Shalini narrates 'I have heard people say that I should not be singing qawwali, but I have never performed any vulgarity when I have performed. Also, God is one and all I am doing is taking His name'. Against the backdrop of such criticisms, Shalini's current position as a renowned qawwal is noteworthy. The qawwali stage is one such space where some level of subversiveness is part of the cost of entry. While sustaining and developing her skills as a lokgeet and Hindu kirtan performer, Shalini learnt religious teachings, processes and history of another religion. All this had to be negotiated in a socio-cultural context that continued to present restrictions pertaining to gendered space, codes of behaviour and biased ideologies. She continues to depict a liminal identity by performing on a male-dominated stage, in a male-oriented performance artform while attempting to embody as many ideals of IndoFijian femininity as manageable. The veil that covers her head is not an empty gesture. It is evidence of normative gender expectations making a claim on Shalini's body, even as she breaks some gender boundaries to be present in a space historically reserved for men.

Shalini's songs do not make outright claims regarding gender rights nor point out her role in redefining gendered spaces. She does, however, allude to the religious and cultural integration that qawwali has been founded on. She sings '*Rahim aur Ram ek hai, har ek ghar ek hai. Badan ka raang jaisa ho, lahu ka raang ek hai* (Rahim<sup>50</sup> and Ram are the same, there are different houses, yet they are the same. Whatever the colour of the skin, the colour of blood is the same)'. These lines are part of Shalini's song while offering *tareef* (praises) to Allah. Within this two-hours-long performance, both qawwal present relevant and thoughtful qawwali. Shalini then announces and performs the first Ashiqana song. Both Shalini and Rishi perform on romanticised love rather than a god/human-focused relationship. They delve into what Dhiren (Prasad D. , 2017) termed '*normal*' love or human intimacy. While introducing her performance, Shalini clarifies two points. Firstly, the songs were to be in '*alag hi andaaz me*' (in a different style). Secondly, she looks at Rishi and advises him that he was not the

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<sup>50</sup> Allah's alternate name means 'merciful'.

target of those songs. Shalini refers to Rishi as 'Bhaiyaji' (brother). Rishi, on the other hand, refers to her as 'Madam Qawwal'. Below is an excerpt of Shalini's song:

*You my love, you my dove, you my bubbly* You are my love, my dove, my pudding pie,  
*pudding pie,*  
*Tere kadmo me dil rakh doon until I gonna* I lay my heart at your feet until the day I die.  
*die.*  
*Bye-bye, bye-bye, bye-bye,*  
*Oh precious, please don't cry.*

What Shalini refers to as 'new style' is her use of English. This represents a major transformation in terms of language use. A few audience members walk to the stage and place money on her harmonium, signifying their enjoyment of Shalini's performance. There are also audible cheers from audiences which further emphasises Dhiren's point on the preferences of new generations. With the commencement of love songs, the potential for trading insults also opens.

In ignoring Shalini's earlier disclaimer, Rishi makes direct references to her as he sings:

<i>Husn wale chale gaye, yeh akeli rahe gai.</i>	All the beauties have gone, leaving this one behind.
<i>Aur saare jahan ke liye, yeh chameli rahe gai.</i>	She has been left behind as the only jasmine for the whole world.
<i>Arre mar gai hai Laila, lekin Laila ki yeh chela rahe gai.</i>	Now Juliet has died but here Juliet's disciple has been left behind.

**Rishi pauses and calls Shalini to look at him.**

<i>Pyar mujhse karogi toh tum nibha na sakogi,</i>	You will not be able to fulfil all it takes to love me,
<i>Aur ek baar joh tum ne nibha liya toh tum mujhe bhula naa sakogi.</i>	If you were able to fulfil everything, then you will not be able to forget me.
<i>Bhulanaa sakegi mujhe bhool kar tu, mai aksar tumhe yaad ata rahunga.</i>	You will not be able to forget me even if you wanted to, because I will continue to come in your thoughts.
<i>Satae ki jab jab tumhe bekarari tumhe yaad aaegi mohammabat hamari.</i>	Every time you will be uneasy you will remember my love for you.

<i>Sunne ki tu jab kabhi mohabbat ki baate</i>	Every time you hear talk about love you will
<i>tumhe yaad aeegi who din aur who raate.</i>	remember the days and nights we spent together.
<i>Yeh kon din aur kon rate hai?</i>	What days and nights are these?
<i>Khuzare joh tune bhaho me mere mai sab</i>	The times you spend in my arms, I will
<i>yaad tujhko dilata rahunga.</i>	always remind you of those.

Rishi targets what he deems Shalini's weakest factor, her gender. Being aware of gender norms, he recognises that mentioning intimacy with Shalini publicly will embarrass her. Rishi continues in this direction as such '*Guzare joh tune bhaho me mere, mai sab yaad tujhko dilata rahunga* (The times you spend in my arms, I will always remind of those)', his musicians smile and looking at each being aware of Rishi's intentions. Some audiences also give out a cheer delighted by these insinuations.

When Shalini starts her next performance, her first words are '*toh Rishi ji hum apko bhaiya bol chuke hai aur hum yahan aae hai qawwali gaane sab ke liye. Ishk karne nahi aae. Toh hum apko samjha de ki Salini se panga lene ka nahi* (Let me remind you Rishi that I have already called you brother and that I have come here to perform qawwali not to fall in love. Let me warn you not to mess with me)'. There is a louder cheer from the crowd, who are now enjoying this engagement between the performers in anticipation of more interesting counter points. Shalini's remark that she had already called Rishi brother is an effective come back. Since Rishi's attack was founded on norms of feminine decency, Shalini responds by attacking Rishi using norms of relationships. Brothers have a socio-cultural obligation to protect their sister's virtue. Technically, Shalini has accused Rishi of poorly representing masculinity for his inability to protect a female's virtue. She continues:

*aur hum apko yeh bhi bata de ki humko ishk already ho gaya hai twenty-five years pahile. Hamare pati hamare saat me baithe hai. Humko baar baar ishk nahi hota sirf*

*ek baar hota hai. Aur Bhaiyaji humare sar par yeh odhani<sup>51</sup> hai aur mathe par sindoor<sup>52</sup> hai. Iska matlab toh aap samajhte honge.* (I also want to let you know that I have already fallen in love once, twenty-five years ago. My husband is sitting right beside me. I do not fall in love again and again. You can also see the veil over my head and the vermilion on my forehead. I am sure you know what that means)‘.

Mentioning her husband may be a weak argument, as Shalini is relying on another male figure to complete her argument, but her questioning of Rishi’s understanding of cultural symbolism is strategically good. My conversation with Shalini indicates that she does not think the performance context absolves one from social, cultural and religious expectations. This is not surprising because, historically, social conventions have been propagated through such performances.

Rishi follows up with his response:

<p><i>ki meri itni zara si baat pe aap itna bigadhi gae. Humpe aise bigadne wale kitne gugzar gae. Maine toh pyar ki baat kiya tha par aap log batao, bole humme bhaiya bol dis hai. Right, hum bhaiya hai tumhar. Tum koi aur niyat se nahi humme dekhta?</i></p>	<p>You have been angered by such an insignificant comment from me. Many who showed anger towards me this way have passed away. I was genuinely speaking about love, but you (audience), explain me now how this talk of me being her brother came up. Okay, I am your brother. Or were you looking at me with some other intentions?</p>
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The audience appreciates this argument judging from their loud audible reactions. In traditional competitions the qawwal would not argue in this manner but changes in styles have made considerably-personalised comments the new norm. Rishi continues:

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<sup>51</sup> The term means ‘a wrap’ and is typically worn by women as a multipurpose garment. It is a one and a half to two-meter piece of (sometimes) colourful and matching garment a female would keep on herself. One end of this garment is tucked into the end of the lahanga that is tied at the waist. The *odhani* is then drawn from behind her to the shoulders and can be used to cover the waist area that becomes exposed when a blouse and a lahanga is worn. The same cloth can be drawn over the head to cover the face from unknown men or as a mark of respect for elders. The *odhani* is, therefore, also a veil or *purdah*.

<sup>52</sup> Vermilion placed on a Hindu woman’s forehead or front end of hair parting represents her married marital status.



<i>Watch out, odhni hai tumhar paas, tikka</i>	Be careful. You have a veil on your head, and
<i>laga hai, pacchis saal hoige tumhar sadhi ke.</i>	vermillion on your forehead, it has been
<i>Hum tumhe bhaini ke najar se dekhta, ka</i>	twenty-five years since you got married. I
<i>bhaini bhaiya ke beech me pyar nahi hoe?</i>	see you as a sister as well, can't a brother
<i>Hum uh pyar ke baat karta. Yahan toh bappa</i>	love his sister? I am speaking of that sort of
<i>log ladki log se pyar kare. Kaisan pyar? Jab</i>	love. Even fathers love their daughters.
<i>ladki paida hoe kaise dulaar kare. Hum</i>	What kind of love? Where they cuddle their
<i>tumme uh pyar karta, kaa bhae? Tum shadhi</i>	daughters. So, I love you that way, what is
<i>shudha hai. Tumhar admi baitha hai tumhar</i>	wrong with that? I know you are married.
<i>bagal me. Aur tum yahan aya hai ee tumhar</i>	Your husband is sitting next to you. You have
<i>ek dhanda hai</i>	come here to perform, and this is another
	one of your <i>dhanda</i> (trade))

Rishi has carefully overturned the argument by implying another meaning to the concept of love even though it was apparent from his performance earlier that he was referring to romantic love and not a familial one. As it is a live performance Shalini may not be able to specifically point this out, especially after a certain amount of time has passed. Another way Rishi tries to get to Shalini is by using the term *dhanda* to refer to her role as performer. The term is commonly used for women involved in prostitution and Rishi's next song substantiates, that this was the meaning he was implying. He sings:

<i>Ek aur dhanda karne wali hai...tumhar upar</i>	There is another woman who does <i>dhanda</i>
<i>nahi hai bahini. Sweety hai ek ladki, ee uske</i>	(trade)...this is not about you, sister. Sweety
<i>upar hai. Aur Sweety ke jon dhanda hai ab</i>	is the name of the girl I am talking about.
<i>aap log pata lagana ki konchi hai uske</i>	And you people try to work out what trade
<i>dhanda</i>	it is that Sweety is involved in.

Rishi's song leaves little to imagination and this is obviously meant to embarrass and insult Shalini.

<i>Bharte hai chadhte hai jiski marzi,</i>	Pay and mount as you please.
<i>Aur sunti hai dekho yeh sabki arzi,</i>	She fulfils all requests,
<i>Karti hai yeh toh regular duty,</i>	She performs regular duties,

<i>Dhante pe lag jawe Sweety uthawe tab</i>	To get to work Sweety must lift her beautiful
<i>taang apani beauty.</i>	legs.
<i>Kaam tumhara ban jae toh,</i>	When your job is done,
<i>Haath me inke paise dedho,</i>	Place some money in her hand,
<i>Jane kitno ko lejae,</i>	Countless many have gone with her,
<i>Kaam sabhi kaa ban hi jae.</i>	Everyone's desires are fulfilled.
<i>Rukte nahi koi sawar kar ke,</i>	No one stays back once they have mounted,
<i>Dhante pe lag jawe Sweety uthawe tab</i>	To get to work Sweety must lift her beautiful
<i>taang apani beauty.</i>	legs.

The theme suddenly turns sexual although a few songs before this Rishi was singing religious themes. When performances take this turn, the use of Urdu also declines drastically. Once Rishi begins using sexual banter in his songs, the crowd becomes immensely active and interactive, passing out comments mainly supporting Rishi. The comments such as '*aur batao* (tell me more)' encourage him to carry on similarly. When Shalini gets her opportunity to perform, she completely ignores all the comments made at her and performs a song on love based on a Bollywood tune. This does not deter Rishi who has now found the right sort of motivation as he recognises that Shalini appears visibly uneasy, plus the audience's preference is clear. His next song becomes more graphic in its descriptions.

<i>Dulaar dunga pyar dunga,</i>	I will cuddle you and love you,
<i>Aur dil ko tere mai karar dunga bahena.</i>	I will bring satisfaction to your heart,
<i>Pyas tere dil ki bhuj jaegi tujko mai aesa</i>	I will quench the thirst of your heart by giving
<i>uphaar dunga.</i>	you an awesome gift.
<i>Aur yeh joh uphaar hai bahena...</i>	And this gift you can...

While singing the portion below, Rishi performs the following series of concurrent movements: *Places his right hand out with palm open upwards. Makes a fist and pulls it towards his mouth. Then with a finger he makes circular movements around the microphone's top, then points at Shalini.*

<i>Haat me lelegi,</i>	Take in your hand,
<i>Muh me bharlegi,</i>	Put in your mouth,

*Phir jeeb se khelegi.*

And then use your tongue to play around with it.

*Yeh bahena ras pilegi tuh sab*

This sister will suck all the juice out.

As Rishi continues, Rohit departs the stage to complain to the organising committee about these insinuations.

*Yeh bahena ke hoht hai pyasi,*

This sister's lips are thirsty,

*Aur bahute jada hai amalani,*

And she really has the desire for it,

*Latka latka gaal hai iske,*

Her cheeks are sagged,

*Launde bole maal hai iske... (Uth ke chala ke Rohit Bhaiya)*

The boys still think she is desirable... (Brother Rohit has walked away)

*Ufh yeh kamar...*

Now that hip...

The performance stops mid-verse when Rohit shouts.

As happens in many such qawwali programs, there is a commotion as one of Shalini's relatives approaches the stage to manhandle Rishi. A security officer intervenes and stops the relative's progress. Some voices in the crowd, and Rishi, reiterate 'this was just a song'. However, Shalini, Rohit and her supporters' reaction indicate that the songs were not being viewed as distinct and detached from social conventions of public behaviour between two individuals of opposite genders. Upon questioning by a member of the organising committee, Rishi argues that the 'gift' in his song is a lollipop and he was not being vulgar. He resumes singing the same verse once calm returns.

Interestingly, Rishi also continues to make these apparently vulgar remarks while continuously calling Shalini sister, which is normally transgressive. Historically, IndoFijians have treated brother and sister relationships very respectfully even when these were *gao la nata*<sup>53</sup> (village-based relationship). Rishi's choice to constantly reiterate this term *bahini* while ignoring the moral codes attached to it, serves as a performative act of shredding the term of its value. It is not surprising then, that the IndoFijian community increasingly laments a

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<sup>53</sup> This was established between neighbours mainly IndoFijian settlements. People developed such relationships even when they were not even distantly related. However, people treated such relationships with great obligation. This resonates with the concept of *jahajibhai* (boat brothers) where people had developed immense affinity towards each other on the basis that they had travelled on the same boats to Fiji for indenture.

generation devoid of the same level of cultural, religious and social proprieties that were once deemed central to their identity.

Turning again to the qawwali context, Shalini and her supporters need to attend such events with better mental preparedness as such lewd remarks and sexual comments are common in modern qawwali performances. Alternatively, she could respond to Rishi at his level. If she has made the decision to enter that field and make a niche for herself, she needs to follow either of the above suggestions. Nonetheless, the treatment that Shalini received from Rishi has become the new norm in qawwali and this means that other female performers who want to break through the glass ceiling of this performance genre will need to embody a greater level of subversiveness than Shalini.

### **Shalini Versus Dhiren (Auckland) —July 2012**

The program is part of a fundraising event organised in a hall. Shalini is dressed in a yellow salwar kameez and a blue oḡhani covers her head. She is introduced as *Fiji Ba ke Qawwali Queen* (Qawwali Queen of Fiji Ba). Shalini joins her palms in salutation to the cheering crowd. Such audience response leads the compere to comment '*peheli baar sunna hai ki aurat log ke chia itna mile* (for the first time I have heard a woman being cheered for in such a manner)'. This comment sets the scene for my arguments because there is an overt acknowledgement of the rarity of male-female muqabala. The compere continues '*itna acha lagta hai jab ki hamare hi desh Fiji ke ek istri, joh ki naa sirf bhajan, kirtan aur lokgeet me duniya me apna naam kama, lekin ab qawwali me bhi apna naam kama rahi hai...* (it feels so good when we see that a lady from our country Fiji, not only earning a reputation for performing devotional songs, hymns and folksongs but now also making a name for herself in the world of qawwali...)'. The crowd's reaction also depicts their recognition that Shalini's qawwal identity, is unorthodox. Shalini reacts by simply joining her palms. It was the expected and appropriate response, as she constantly claims to be humble.

Shalini is seated on a raised stage. She has a microphone pointed at her face and a harmonium placed before her. The compere points this out stating '*dekhiye kain aise artist hai joh harmunia nahi bajate hae, Shalini Rohit Chand khud harmunia baja rahi hai* (see there are many artists who do not play the harmonium, but Shalini Rohit Chand is herself playing the harmonium)'. This is pointed out because while there are many female performers of folksongs, they rarely play the harmonium. Shalini has more flexibility and control over her

style of performance with this skill. It is rare to have female harmonium players for various reasons, so this is an achievement for Shalini, but the fact that this ability in her is perceived as spectacular by the audience, represents a bonus. Nonetheless, in the process of highlighting this ability in Shalini, the compere inevitably also highlights that which is not. It is not the skill itself that makes it significant, but rather that the skill is possessed by this specifically gendered individual. For each female musician of the IndoFijian traditional genre there are many others whose potential remain unrealised because of social conventions and norms. The lack or non-existence of female musicians is evidenced by the fact that Shalini is surrounded by a troupe of male musicians. The musicians are dressed in black which highlights Shalini's presence on the stage. Her husband sits beside her, on the side on which Shalini's opponent is stationed. There are females in the audience, but it is, as it normally is, a predominantly male crowd. Men sit around *kava* basins mainly towards the back half of the hall and the female audience members occupy seats in the first few rows. The adherence to codes of gendered spaces is apparent.



Figure 7 Shalini versus Dhiren. (Source: Khan's Collection)

The compere announces that Shalini will begin the performance, justifying it with 'ladies first'. Shalini begins:

*Sabke ankho pe purdah hai,  
Teri chahere pe purdah nahi hai.*

There is a veil on everyone's face,  
Your face is unveiled.

In this excerpt, the acknowledgement of veil is significant. In this case Shalini is implying that nothing is hidden from God nor is He hidden from anyone. In some Western feminist arguments, the 'purdah' or veil is seen as an oppressive symbol that ostracises females from public forums.

*Log chalte hai kaato se bachkar,*                      Folks avoid stepping on thorns when they walk,  
*Mai bachaati hun phoolon se daaman.*              I, however, exercise care with flowers.

Shalini uses the word '*bachaati*' here, which is the first time here that she uses a gendered verb for herself. In previous segments she sang in the second person. Shalini's movements gradually pick up later as her upper body movements become energised. It is her moving, dancing body that is key to her subversive gender display.

<i>Hosla dekho mere satadili ka yaaro,</i>	Note the bravery in my act of love friends,
<i>Ishq karti hun magar ishq ko samjha hi nahi.</i>	I love without comprehending what love
<i>Ae akal walo, mere myarazuno toh dekho,</i>	means.
<i>Aare uspe marti hun, jisse ankho se dekha</i>	Hey wise ones note my actions,
<i>hi nahi.</i>	I have fallen in love with someone I have
	not even laid eyes on.

As a female, Shalini is prohibited from discussing her intimate affections publicly which she does here. She makes eye contact with the audience as she speaks. Nonetheless, the notion of loving someone she has not yet seen, can also resonate with arranged marriages where a girl's parents selected her spouse.

Izzat bhi tere haat hai,	My honour is your responsibility,
Zillat bhi tere haat hai,	Not to be insulted is your responsibility,
Duniya me meri abruh rakhna mere allah.	Maintain my chastity in the world my Allah.
Yeh mohabbat nahi hai toh...	If this is not love, then...

It is interesting that Shalini would sing about honour, respect and chastity as such themes are not mentioned by male singers. They focus largely on listing strengths, whether their own or the Creator's.

<i>Joh sar na jhukale usse hum dar nahi kahete,</i>	Fear that fails to bow a head cannot be called fear,
<i>Aur har dar peh joh sar jhuk jaye use hum sar nahi kahete.</i>	And the head that bows to every fear cannot be called a head.

The term head is symbolic of self-pride or self-esteem. Shalini is now coming forth and establishing her position with confidence. Some audience members have already approached the stage to place money on her harmonium in appreciation.

The following statement appears in Dhiren's response:

*Toh aadmi aadmi ke kaam aata nahi.*      Men would support other men.

He uses the term 'aadmi' which is translated men. Even though it can refer to human kind in general, he could have used other words to make this reference. Using this term is deliberate, mainly against a female opponent for a subtle reminder of the world belonging to males. In a striking contrast to Shalini, Dhiren's appeals are made through word choices and there is very little use of gestures, facial expressions and intonations. He also uses fewer personal pronouns and sings mostly in the third person while Shalini uses more personal pronouns like 'mai' (I).

The content of the poem Shalini recites as her response, makes it clear that she is aware of her audience.

<i>Mandir meh raamji hai,</i>	The Ram of the temple is the Lord in the
<i>Joh mazjit me kudha hai.</i>	mosque.
<i>Yeh kisne khe diya,</i>	Who said that a Hindu is different to a
<i>Ki Hindu se musalmaan judda hai.</i>	Muslim?
<i>Na Hindu bura hai na musalmaan bura,</i>	Nor a Hindu is evil nor a Muslim,
<i>Joh ajae burai pet oh insaan bura hai.</i>	If it comes to being evil, it is humanity
	which is evil.
<i>Banao mandir yah mazjit,</i>	Build a temple or a mosque,
<i>iit wahi, chuna hai wahi.</i>	The same mortar and lime is used.
<i>Jisse log namaaz kahete hai,</i>	What some people call <i>namaaz</i> ,
<i>Pooja hai wahi.</i>	It is also the same as <i>pooja</i> .
<i>Hazaro huwe veer duniya me paeda,</i>	
<i>Magar sabki samman apni jagha hai.</i>	

Shalini is making an appeal to the mixed Hindu and Islamic audience through discussing religious harmony. She acknowledges the presence of *Sanatani* Hindus in the audience and sings a few songs for their benefit. The success of her strategy is evidenced in that all money

gifts have gone to Shalini, thus far. Her lyrics use namaaz and pooja, both words meaning prayer in Islam and Hinduism respectively. At the end of each verse she adds the lines '*Magar sabki samman apni jagha hai*', iterating that everyone has their own place and deserve equal respect and honour.

Dhiren:	<i>Mai joh chahu toh nazar koh moḍ du,</i>	If I want I can change any gaze,
	<i>Mai joh chahu toh nazar koh shishe se toḍ du.</i>	If I want I can break a look with a mirror.
	<i>Sagar ki lehar thaamlu,</i>	Calm the ocean's waves,
	<i>Tufa ko moḍ du.</i>	Turn a storm,
	<i>Aur jinko dawa hai apne purdah me chupa rahene ka,</i>	And those who pride in hiding behind the veil,
	<i>Aisa nah ho ki mai aaj ek nazar se woh purdah ke diwar toḍ du.</i>	Let it not be that with one look I break the walls of that veil.

This excerpt has a few important points. Firstly, Dhiren begins the process of praising himself, as common with modern qawwali. Secondly, he offers a challenge to Shalini. For instance, when he says, 'those who pride in hiding behind the veil', draws attention to Shalini's veil and implies that it serves no purpose when she has chosen to be on a stage to be gazed upon. Dhiren also cautions Shalini, with the implication that a veil is perhaps a weak protective barrier that can be easily overcome. This draws attention to the ideology of vulnerable feminine honour, as historically it took very little to dishonour an IndoFijian Hindu female. Since there were multiple levels and vast assortments of expected behaviour, the chances of transgression were high.

After Dhiren's turn the compere announces a break during which trophies are awarded to both performers. In fundraising events, trophies are given to both qawwal. Thus, no official winner was announced, but based on audience's reactions, everyone could decipher the better performer. The compere is obviously biased towards Shalini as out of the two performers he only praises her. While she is being praised, Shalini keeps her head bowed and veiled. When asked to come upstage to receive her trophy, she walks gracefully with a bowed head. This is in clear contrast to her energetic behaviour whilst she performs.

After the break the program featured ashqana songs.



Shalini: *Toh chalo ashikana Qawwali hum pesh karte hai.* So, let me present love songs in Qawwali style.

*Isme radha aur krishan ke pyar ki kahani hai.* This has the love story of Radha and Krishan.

*Lae hai hum bhi sunnane ache ache tarane,* I have brought some good numbers,  
*Sukr hai maefil ka joh hai mere naam ke deewane.* I appreciate the gathering that is crazy for my name.

*...Chura ke leja, bhaga ke leja, utha ke leja.* ...Steal me away, elope me away, kidnap me away.

Radha and Krishan are two characters from the Hindu holy text *Gita*. Krishna is the reincarnation of God Vishnu and Radha is his love interest. Many Bollywood songs are also based on their epic love. This love story is interesting because it depicts Radha and Krishna being playful with each other. In fact, Krishna has hundreds of wives, but Radha was his soul mate. Radha herself was married but could not deny her devotion to Krishna. So even though the two never marry and live together their love is considered epic.

The first two verses describe Radha and Krishna's love encounters. While the last verse here may seem worrying with words like 'steal', 'elope' and 'kidnap', it needs to be understood in the context. Firstly, a woman is asking her lover to take her away and this clarifies any issues with the term 'kidnap'.

Shalini brags about being able to move the audience with her songs. She informs Dhiren of commencing her attacks with '*Yeh hai Shalini ka waar* (This is Shalini's strike)'. Shalini becomes bolder with her comments calling Dhiren a mouse who has raided the performance, '*Ek chuhe ne dala daka yahan Qawwali raat mein* (A mouse has attacked this night qawwali competition)'.

Shalini: *Yeh rang mehndi ka pukare ajaa,* These henna designs are calling you  
*Yeh chuḍi kangna tujhko pukare ajaa,* come,  
*Tere kin kaṭe nahi din,* These bangles and bracelets are calling  
*ghoḍi to chaḍ ke doli leke ajaa.* you come,  
Without you the days are not passing,

Get on a horse and take me away in a  
palanquin.

Shalini mentions henna designs, bangles and bracelets, all of which are markers of femininity. The singer refers to these items in stating that the woman is calling her lover. In the absence of female qawwal such lines would not be part of qawwali performances. The last line is largely an Indian rather than IndoFijian tradition because IndoFijian brides generally do not use palanquins, but this crucially points to the borrowing from Bollywood. Shalini is using her femininity to enhance her performance, however, at one point she responds to an audience member's exclamation with a shout of her own. This act contradicts characteristics of IndoFijian femininity, but the audience finds this enjoyable since it happens unexpectedly.

Shalini:	<i>Qustakiyo me apna mazza hai</i>	Being subversive has its own rewards, try it
	<i>chakle,</i>	out.
	<i>Tu sathia tujhe dil diya hai apne.</i>	You are my mate, I have given you my heart.
	<i>Hindustak haseena,</i>	This Indian beauty,
	<i>Karke ankh ladina.</i>	In the meeting of gazes,

While performing the above, Shalini laughs loudly, thus adding to her public subversion. She suggests that being subversive can be rewarding and that one should try it. She perhaps implies crossing limits in love, but on a wider level the implication that subversion pushes the envelope, helps cross over walls and bring new experiences, is undeniable. She is herself a beneficiary of subversive performativity.

Dhiren:	<i>Aapne suna hoga, Ramayan me Sita</i>	You must have heard that in the story of
	<i>ko Rawan chura kar legaya tha.</i>	the Ramayana, Sita was abducted by
	<i>Lekin yeh kalyug ki Sita hai.</i>	Ravana.
		But this is a Sita of the modern times.
	<i>Mere kahene ka matlab hai ki kissi</i>	What I mean is that no woman should say
	<i>istri koh aisa nahi kehana chahiye ki</i>	steal me away, elope me away.
	<i>mujhko chura ke leja, bhaga ke leja.</i>	I think I should take this modern Sita on,
	<i>Toh modern Sita ko mai modern</i>	in a modern way.
	<i>tahara se lejaunga.</i>	

Dhiren's reference to Shalini as Sita is strategic, as he is setting up for a major attack on her. He narrates the story of Sita's abduction, illustrating an important feature of qawwali, where qawwal lay out lengthy narrations in setting up arguments and rebuttals.

He calls Shalini a *modern Sita*, implying her failure to embody heteronormative femininity. This would be greatly insulting to Shalini since she takes her cultural image seriously. Dhiren validates his claim by outlining 'no woman should say steal me away, elope me away'. Here, Dhiren is prescribing gender expectations to Shalini as, in his opinion, she is transgressing patriarchal norms that stipulate that women should not publicly desire romantic agency.

Dhiren: *Mai mahefil se sawal karta hun. ki* I want to ask a question to the  
*ashiqana nagama kisko kehete hai,* audience. What do you call love  
*'chura ke leja' yah isko kehete hai?* songs? 'Steal me away...' or this...?

Dhiren tries another approach in discrediting Shalini's qawwali, by classifying her songs as inappropriate to the genre. He uses his leverage as an experienced qawwal to make such a claim, however, as far as the entertainment factor is concerned, Shalini's performance outweighs his. With that yardstick, Shalini is the better qawwal in this program because its purpose was to entertain the audience.

Dhiren: *Dekho Shalini ne kaha hai ki who bahut* Shalini says she is very beautiful.  
*khoobsurat hai.* Every woman here feels that they are  
*Har aurat yahan apne aap ko* beautiful.  
*khoobsurat samajti hai.*

From Shalini, Dhiren moves his attention to all women, accusing them of narcissistic tendencies.

Shalini rebuts these claims by emphasising those significant roles of women that Dhiren conveniently ignores.

Shalini: *Is qawwal ko hum bata de ki humne* I want to clarify to this qawwal that I was  
*Radha aur Krishna ki Kahani sunnai thi.* narrating the story of Radha and  
*Radha ji pukar kar Krishna ko Keh rahi* Krishna.  
*thi ki mijhe utha ke leja.* Radha is calling out to Krishna to take  
*(Ramlu iske sound system jor karo,* her away.  
*Iske sune me fher hoe hai.)*

(Ramlu can you up the volume on his sound system as he is not able to hear well.)

Shalini quickly absolves herself from Dhiren's criticism by clarifying that she was narrating the song from Radha's perspective and not her own desires. This is an excellent counterpoint as audiences would not object to the intimacy between Radha and Krishna. The cheers from spectators prove that Shalini's quick thinking is appreciated.

Shalini: <i>Kiyun ulti sidhi bhak rahe ho aurat ke naam par?</i>	Why are you stating nonsense narratives about women?
<i>Yaad rakhna aurat se hai devi, aurat se hai durga, aurat se hai Radha aur Sita. Aur modern Sita bolta hai. Ramayan ke apman karta hai aap. Soch samj ke bolna.</i>	Remember that from a woman comes devi (feminine God form), from a woman comes durga (goddess of war), from a woman you have Radha and Sita. And you said modern Sita. You have insulted the Ramayana.
<i>Modern Sita kahae Bola?</i>	Think about what you are saying.
<i>Aurat se hai Mariam, aur Fatima. Aurat se hai bahen aur Ma, Aur beti.</i>	Why did you say modern Sita? From a woman you have Mary, from a woman Fatima.
<i>Agar aurat na hoti toh aap kahan se aate?</i>	From a woman comes sister and mother, and daughter.
<i>Aur aaj mahefil me Shalini nahi aati toh kakaji aap kaise aate?</i>	If there was no woman, then where would you have come from? And if Shalini was not here tonight then why would you have come?

Shalini's argument above is impressive as she points out various forms of Hindu, Islamic and Christian femininity. This shows that women can be represented in both peace and power. She also reprimands Dhiren for saying '*modern Sita*', arguing that it is not an insult on her, but on the holy book, Ramayana. Her question 'Why did you say modern Sita?' is an aggressive shout, which is unquestioningly a challenge. However, in this display of public anger against a male, she strategically and performatively invokes and discards normative femininity. In an

added level of rebuttal for Dhiren's earlier portrayal of himself as Shalini's lover, she refers to him as '*kakaji*' (uncle) referencing his older age. Immediately after this, Shalini begins singing the excerpt below where she sings to an assumed lover as she has already rejected Dhiren as a possible suitor due to his age.

<i>Tunne joh mera haath pakda zamane</i>	When you held my hand,
<i>wale dang hog aye.</i>	The people in society went berserk.
<i>Aisa jadoo kiya, jita mera jiya,</i>	You created such magic, you won my
<i>Pyar me tere pagal kiya,</i>	heart,
<i>Zamane wale dang hog aye.</i>	I fell in love with you,
	The people in society were berserk.

In direct retaliation to Dhiren's comments, Shalini performs this segment with a quick tempo and with her musical ensemble, produces a lengthy moment of fast paced lively music which is a thorough audience pleaser. As qawwali experts in Fiji point out, the modern crowd does appreciate music over the tact and clever rebuttals, so Shalini does well to please the crowd than engage in personal banter with Dhiren.

However, Dhiren continues to criticise Shalini, moving onto new aspects like the inaccuracy of the verbs in her lyrics.

Dhiren: <i>Abhi joh gana inhone gaya,</i>	The song that she just sang was
<i>Koi qawwal Fiji me gaya tha aur eh</i>	performed by a qawwal in Fiji, but she
<i>uske striling aur puling nahi samaj pai.</i>	was not able to understand the
<i>Jab stri geet gati hai use striling me</i>	gendered verbs in the song.
<i>gana chahiye.</i>	When a woman sings she should use the
	feminine verbs which she did not.

Even though Dhiren correctly identifies Shalini's incorrect gendered verb, this situation again indicates Dhiren's failure to see beyond Shalini's gender. In some ways this feels like a desperate attempt to gain an upper hand against the positive responses Shalini receives throughout. Unfortunately, for him, his gender argument fails because he has already used this strategy and his argument to discredit Shalini's style also fails because of the audience's focus on entertainment rather than content. Unperturbed, he continues:

<p>Dhiren: <i>Nazre mila kar sahara lelo,</i>  <i>Arre kissi ke rassoi ka jimma lelo.</i></p>	<p>Through eye connection secure my  assistance,  I advise you to take responsibility for  someone's kitchen.</p>
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He continues:

<p><i>Jao kisse ke ghar me Khanna banane ka</i>  <i>kaam karo, Rassoi ka jimma lelo.</i>  <i>Aur dil pat jaye toh chodho qawwali aur</i>  <i>jao uske ghar me rotia belo.</i></p>	<p>Go into someone's house and cook for  them, take responsibility for the  kitchen.  And if your hearts connect then leave  qawwali and make <i>roti</i> for that  household.</p>
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As Shalini, Rohit (Chand S. R., 2017) and Khan (Khan M. T., Interview with Khan Fiji Qawwali Expert, 2017) identified, Dhiren repeats the argument of advising female qawwal to return to domestic life. Towards the end, Dhiren no longer disguises his stereotypes, pointing at Shalini as he utters these lines. He does pick one of the most oppressive of IndoFijian female tasks, that of making *roti*. The question 'can and does she make *roti*?' has been a key factor in the identity of IndoFijian womanhood. Young girls are compelled to learn this skill, as knowing this increases her chances of marriage and remaining married. Women have even been beaten for failing to fulfil this role and it is used in this context to oppress Shalini on a qawwali stage. Dhiren also asks her to take responsibility 'for someone else's kitchen' as he does not give her enough credit to own a place. Such comments prove that oral performances are not detached from society, normative ideologies and stereotypes. In these texts we find 'memories and voices of living people...who share common bodies of knowledge, value systems, and ideologies' and the performance in one context brings to light the interconnectedness between diverse contexts (Jassal, 2012, p. 7).

<p>Dhiren: <i>Phulo ko kya odhna,</i>  <i>Dhup pade murjhae.</i>  <i>Churni ko kya rangna,</i>  <i>Bund pade rangjae.</i>  <i>Aurat ko kya maarna,</i>  <i>Chidhak diya mar jaye.</i></p>	<p>Why veil yourself with flowers,  A little sunshine and it withers.  Why even hit a woman?  Cast her aside and she dies.</p>
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Femininity is depicted as weakness with an inference that a female cannot survive without male support and that just casting her aside destroys her. Dhiren sings a few verses with both feminine and masculine gendered verbs pointing out that this is the knowledge Shalini needs to acquire. Dhiren also resorts to lyrics with sexual undertones to embarrass Shalini into submission.

Dhiren: <i>Charo taraf jaal pahile bichaib,</i>	First, I will lay traps on all sides,
<i>Phir dhire dhire tujhe hum phasaib,</i>	Then very slowly I will trap you,
<i>Thora deri,</i>	For a little while,
<i>Hera pheri,</i>	Monkey business,
<i>Channe ke khet me.</i>	In the chick pea farm.

Dhiren uses a Bollywood song narrating a sexual encounter in a chick pea farm. In one of the verses he changes chick pea farm to 'grape farm' as the setting of the qawwali is Auckland. This illustrates that performances are flexible and absorbent enough to reflect different settings. Dhiren continues '*Jora jori Shalini tere saat me* (Fooling around with you Shalini)' with the awareness that propositioning a married woman in public is nothing short of questioning her morality and virtue. Dhiren still says this knowing that social conventions concerning women place Shalini on the losing side for putting herself in a situation where she could become victim to such comments. Chattier (2008, p. 115) explains that an IndoFijian 'woman's character and chastity may be associated with compliance to purdah norms, so that women who observe the norms are assumed to be chaste and good and those who transgress them to be questionable moral character'. The ideology of victim-blaming thrives in this community and Dhiren uses this knowledge to his advantage.

Shalini: <i>Acha shaota ee jon striling ki</i>	Dear audience this speech he is making about
<i>aur pulling ke baat kare,</i>	gendered verbs,
<i>Iske chahi bus chalaye la chodh</i>	Maybe he should leave being a bus driver and
<i>ke master ban jao.</i>	become a teacher.
<i>Dosto hamar itna handsome</i>	Friends, when I have a handsome and fresh
<i>aur fresh shohar yahan baitha</i>	husband sitting right here why would I run after
<i>hai toh ekar piche kon padhi.</i>	this one.
<i>Ka hamar dimak paglaan hai ki</i>	Have I lost my mind that I run after him?
<i>hum iske piche bhagi.</i>	

Shalini mentions Dhiren's day job to imply that being a bus driver was not sufficient qualification to teach what gendered verbs are. This is also clearly a rebuttal to Dhiren's calls for Shalini to return to a kitchen. However, her arguments lose some edge when she refers to her husband to support her claim that she would not even show fake interest in Dhiren. Her defence of using one man against another potentially undermines her argument, when Dhiren has repeatedly portrayed females as weak.

Dhiren insinuates that Shalini is promiscuous comparing her to '*Machalti lahero* (unstable waves) in which '*kitne snan kar gaye*' (so many have bathed)'. He also makes a claim about his manliness stating '*Abhi dekha nahi hai mard khiladhi tunne* (Clearly you have not encountered a real player man yet)'. In making that reference, Dhiren highlights the ideology that men with several partners are macho and that such behaviour is part of their nature, whereas a female in a similar position would be deemed *loose*. There is no notion of a *loose man* amongst IndoFijians.

As if following a book of common strategies for competing with female qawwal, Dhiren inevitably resorts to another common tactic used by male qawwal, that of objectifying the female. The following verses show Dhiren making specific references to Shalini's physical body, a form of objectification that can only work against a female.

<i>Tu mere pyar ka tamatar hai, chus lunga toh</i>	You are my love tomato and if I suck you
<i>faeda hoga.</i>	out that would be awesome.
<i>Tere gore gore gaal hai na,</i>	Your fair cheeks are round tomatoes
<i>Gole gole tamatar hai,</i>	and if I suck them that would be
<i>Chus lunga toh faeda hoga.</i>	awesome.

Dhiren's backup singers do not chorus with him for the above portion probably finding it too crude even though they consistently sang with him before. In her performances just after this one by Dhiren, Shalini completely ignores Dhiren and shifts all focus to the audience. She states:

<i>Dosto satityo waise toh mai qawwali</i>	Friends, I do not really have a background
<i>gayak nahi hun.</i>	in qawwali performance.
<i>Mai lokgeet, kirtan gayak hun.</i>	I have always been a lokgeet and kirtan
	singer, but I have been encouraged by MT



*Lekin bahut protshahan mujhe MT Khan* Khan and family to get into this field, so I  
*and Family is mila toh mai ish shetr mai* have.  
*utri hun.* But I would just like to tell you that at the

moment I am leading the field in the  
*Lekin hum aap se ek baat kahe dai ki* number of latest songs.

*latest ke maidaan me abhi tak hum sabse* So, let me sing some latest songs to you.  
*dhani hai.*

*Toh chalo mai apko kuch latest sunati*  
*hun.*

Shalini provides a short narration of her genesis as a qawwal and claims '*latest ke maidaan me abhi tak hum sabse dhani hai* (I am the richest in the field of latest)'. She then resumes singing and outperforms Dhiren in terms of entertainment as her music is lively and she sustains an energetic delivery. Shalini clearly knows her strength and uses it. Her use of English lyrics is also quite apparent in the latter part of the program, such as:

*Wold faimus hai glema mera,* My glamour is world famous,  
*Aur kaibal konekshan hai tagdha mera.* My cable connection is strong as well.

Since her performance is fast paced and dynamic, an audience member responds with a loud shrill whistle which Shalini reciprocates by whistling loudly herself. She is surely not 'demure, quiet and reserved' which Lateef (1988) lists as characteristics of normative femininity.

Dhiren, however, makes no changes in the direction of his arguments pointing out '*Zamin se tu khad kitna bhi uthaegi, Mai aasma hu tu mujhe na chu payegi* (Regardless of how high you try to elevate yourself, I am the sky you will never be able to touch me)'. He claims that Shalini is not good enough to compete against him and suggests '*Ki do char qawwali sik ke qawwal nahi bano. Toh kaghaz ka livaaaz sharir se nikaal do* (I mean do not become a qawwal by learning a few songs. Remove this attire made of paper from your body)'. His latter comment is an indication to Shalini's use of song books, which Dhiren claims is a reflection of her inexperience.

In his final set of insults Dhiren discusses why Shalini should not have attempted performing qawwali at all. He hints '*Jab achal sabab ka sar se sarak jai, Toh baal ki safedi dur se hi diklae. Achal me chupha raheti hai toh nazar nahi ati* (When the veil drops from the head, Then the

white hair becomes visible. When things are hidden under the veil then these are not seen)'. Dhiren claims that being on stage makes one vulnerable and draws attention to their shortfalls. He advises Shalini to return behind the veil where things remain hidden. But Dhiren more directly tells her:

*Toh pahile jao qawwali sikh lo, ee sab* So, go and learn real qawwali first as there is no  
*filmi aur angrezi ganaa gae ke koi faeda* benefit in singing Bollywood and English songs  
*nahi.* here.

Dhiren's main argument here is that Shalini is not even singing qawwali, but a combination of filmy songs. Ironically, he himself performs songs based on Bollywood tunes repeatedly but somehow does not think Shalini can do the same. This may be Dhiren's attempt to discredit Shalini's much appreciated performance of 'latest' music which he is unable to emulate.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has delved into an in-depth analysis of selected performances using a gendered lens and engaged with cultural dimensions of performances. The analysis presented here have illustrated the subversive potential in performances.

## Chapter 5

### The Dancing Other: Roots and Rituals of Lahanga Naach

Throughout time and space, women and men have expressed themselves through their moving bodies by dancing on stage, which, in turn, has moved other bodies, those of their audiences. Further, the bodies which have been moved have not kept still themselves; they have, in turn, affected other bodies and altered the way they have been perceived. Those bodies are, in and of themselves, political bodies. They are part of engrained symbolic webs that mould them and enable them to become what they are. Hence, dance and politics are always already intertwined. Dancing bodies affect bodies in the audience; all of those bodies are political entities (Mills, 2017, p. 2).

#### Introduction

This chapter offers a detailed description of Lahanga Naach (LN). This is accomplished by citing research on similar performances in other cultural contexts, and by integrating insights from nachaniya and IndoFijian cultural experts into the discussion. Performers referenced in the chapter include Bijuriya, Bhan, Sheetal, Shelly, Ashley, Johnny, Rafiq, Laila, Pinky, Nilu, Rani, Pooja, Kushwa, and Iowane. The purpose, context, and other relevant aspects of performances are also outlined and explained with the assistance of photographs where applicable. This chapter fulfils an important aim of this dissertation, that of producing the first and extensive documentation of LN.

#### What is lahanga naach<sup>54</sup>?

Lahanga naach (skirt dance) is a public dance performance by a biological male, dressed in attire normatively associated with females. The origin of this genre has links to India, the country from which labourers came under the indenture system to work for the Colonial Sugar Refinery Company in Fiji. Among IndoFijians of North Indian descent, lahanga naach (LN) is the only performance form that has a dominant dance aspect. While other genres may include dancing, these result from impromptu responses to performance atmosphere, rather

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<sup>54</sup> Though in the Indian context this genre does not share the same name, the connection with the IndoFijian naach is apparent.

than the presentation by a designated dancer, who comes prepared with costumes and musical ensemble. A similar performance genre is *tirikuttu*, a cultural practice associated with IndoFijians of South Indian descent, which includes dancers delivering dialogues in short skits. Today, LN is largely seen as an entertainment source. However, historical accounts from performers and cultural experts show this genre having other significances, some more acknowledged than others. The contemporary nature of LN and society's perception of *nachaniya* (dancer/dancers) are two factors why this genre is not always considered important within discussions of IndoFijian cultural and religious performances. Nonetheless, LN continues to have a presence in numerous social events. In its capacity as live and recurring performance, this genre has 'affected other bodies and altered the way they have been perceived' (Mills, 2017), therefore, LN is arguably a political act, at the forefront of social transformation.

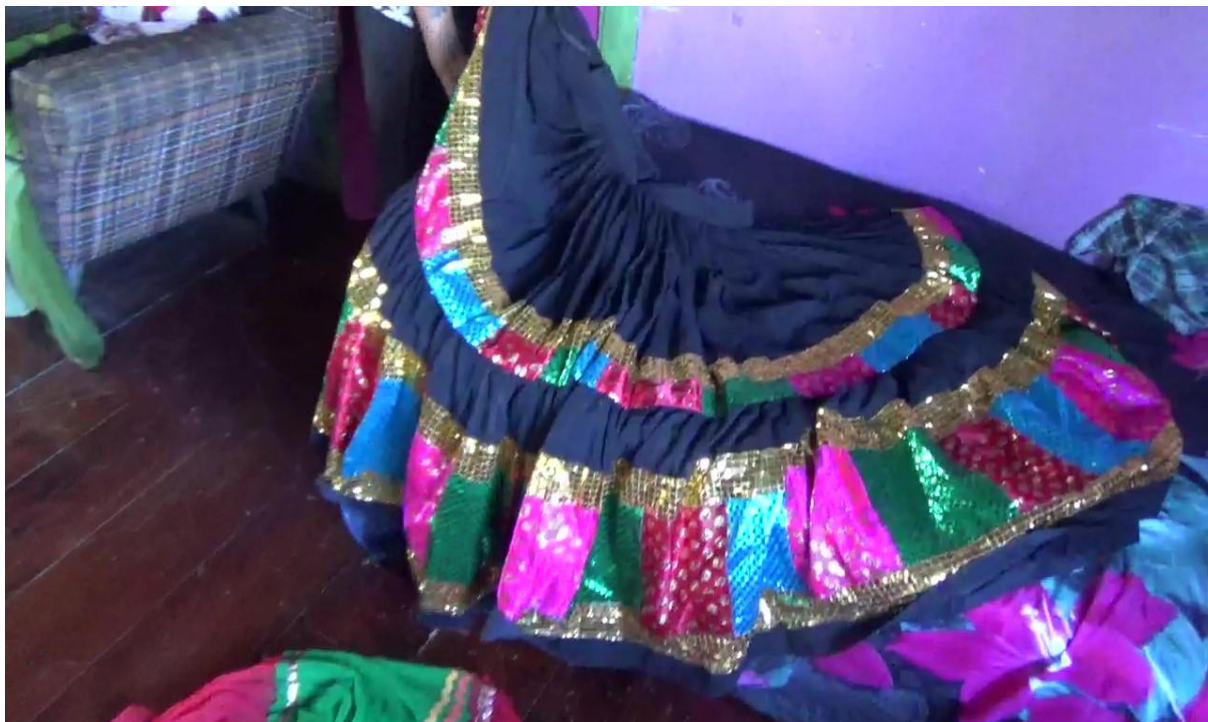


Figure 8 Picture of a *lahanga* sewn and designed by Johnny. It is sewn with about twelve metres of material. (Source: Author)

Conversations with field consultants produced varying theories on LN's existence in Fiji. Some saw it as an Indian import while others believed LN was created as a fun activity that developed into tradition. At least two performers also claimed LN to be a spin-off from another performance genre, namely, *nautanki*<sup>55</sup>. The younger generation performers were

<sup>55</sup> Informal theatre. There is no evidence of this still being practiced in Fiji. *Nautanki* used characters based on royalty, that is, king, queen, and princes like Shakespearean plays.

able to connect LN with India, a connection they established through online research while searching for materials to incorporate into their own performances. Monto (Monika, 2017) connects LN with Indian genres in two specific ways: firstly, the nature of performances, and secondly, linguistic similarities. The style of Fiji Hindi or Fiji Baat used in most rural settings resonates closely with Bhojpuri dialects spoken in the Northern States of India. Bijuriya, the only performer who can be classed as a hereditary performer since he followed his paternal grandfather into LN, stated confidently 'it is a performance form from India', a fact he learnt from his ancestors and that he also later learnt through research which he credits to being 'a bit literate'. Studies of Indian history show cross-dressed males as being a prominent feature of folk culture and informal entertainment, particularly in areas Fiji's indentured labourers were sourced from. Morcom (2013: 66-72) notes that in India, *nat* performers, who are cross-dressed males performing erotic dance forms as females, is not just a common feature today but is a historical practice. In Fiji, there has been a tradition in some areas of including performances by cross-dressed males into religious festivals and celebrations like weddings.

Interviews with cultural experts and performers indicated that performances by cross-dressed males were evident in *Ramlila* festivals in Fiji and in nautanki which were mostly performed in weddings. The idea for the inclusion of cross-dressed males was apparently the result of similar performances the girmitya remembered from India. There is no historical evidence indicating or acknowledging the presence of transgender or transvestite labourers on ships from India; nonetheless, once in Fiji some men, whether playfully or out of their desire to perform, decided on cross-dressing and dancing. This was the third rendition of how LN originated in Fiji, but Amrit, the field consultant who offered this idea, clarified that he saw the dance form develop because of existent social and cultural situations rather than an introduction of formerly practiced traditions, reconstituted in new settings. Amrit, a son of first-generation indentured labourers, a Hindu priest and community leader, described LN's beginning to me as this:

Lahanga naach began like this. Men would dance in gatherings<sup>56</sup> like this, what we are calling *jhangiya wala naach*<sup>57</sup> (pant dancing) while wearing bells on their ankles. In those days there were very few women<sup>58</sup>. In some homes there were four men and they would have one woman living there and they managed to live their lives. Men asked women to join them and show what talents they had. The women wore lahanga(skirt) in those days, which they wore in the dances. It was the women who performed lahanga naach. But when these women's children started growing older then they became shy and did not want to perform before anyone. The men then took over from them by wearing their lahanga and they put on some things on their faces to change their appearance and they began performing as women. They looked like women, but those who were witnessing the performance knew that these were men (Prasad P. A., 2017).

Lahanga was the traditional or typical clothes worn by IndoFijian women, so what they performed was not necessarily what we today describe as LN. It was just *naach* (dance) until men wore the lahanga for their performance. Lahanga on the dancing male was the distinct feature that separated this dancing from other forms of performances. Initially, only articles of female clothing were used to indicate this temporary transformation. Gradually, people's interest in watching these performances grew, leading performers to invest time and creativity into their performances. Performance groups were formed and musical instruments, costumes, ankle bells, jewellery and make-up materials were sought. Interviews reveal that former LN performers were understood to be men in the conventional sense: heterosexist, married and family heads. In Labasa I learnt of a man named Ram Chandar, who in the 1970s headed a LN performance group for hire. Ram, as the main dancer, cross-dressed in all accompanying adornments to perform. In addition, Ram owned a cane farm, was married with eight children and also headed his village *panchayat*<sup>59</sup>. Ram was highly respected despite his engagement in LN. Ram's story offers two ideas. Firstly, LN was an important cultural practice, thus its performance, and performers, were treated respectfully.

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<sup>56</sup> The gatherings Amrit mentions here were weekly grouping together of labourers from the same farm or nearby farms to share stories and enjoy some performances that people within the group would perform. Such gatherings are mentioned in several writings on indenture by various authors.

<sup>57</sup> *Jhangiya* is the term used for shorts. Amrit explains that people did not have actual ankle bells, so they attached cow bells to their shorts while performing to add to the entertainment factor of their performances.

<sup>58</sup> Amrit's observation is supported by official records that show a disparity in the ratio of males and females.

<sup>59</sup> A group, made of five elderly men, who had authority in resolving family, and communal disputes.

LN's continuing presence indicates that as a performance genre it has a cultural niche. Secondly, as a family and community leader, Ram reinforced patriarchal values by fully embodying social expectations society had of males. His temporary liminal displays demonstrate how to detach the stage performance from daily life. They also reified hegemony by presenting the absurdity of mixed gender appearance and simultaneously equating such images with humour and entertainment, hence, inconsequentiality. Hence, LN's performance and containment within social expectations was heavily dependent on the behaviour of the nachaniya.

### **Nachaniya**

The term nachaniya means dancer, but it has over time come to embody some implicit and derogatory meanings. When referring to performers, nachaniya implies an occupation. However, the semantic baggage the term has collected denotes promiscuity or inability to restrict movement within sanctioned spaces. For example, a female can be disparagingly called nachaniya to suggest that she is unable to remain socially inconspicuous or demure. It became clear during my field work that most people understood nachaniya as the name for both cross dressed and transgender performers. Bijuriya (1988) clarifies that LN's declining reputation has led people to attach other demeaning names to it. Bijuriya, an experienced and respected nachaniya, did not place blame for this poor image on critics alone, attributing some of it to nachaniya for 'not maintaining any standard'. He identified some off-stage behaviour of nachaniya, like excessive alcohol consumption, homosexual practices and erotic dressing, as factors that maligned their image and subsequently the genre's. *Paturiya* and *chinaar naach*, both synonymous with whore, bitch or licentious, were other names used instead of LN. Interestingly, these terms are feminine and by using these to describe performances by nachaniya the critics acknowledge the performers' femininity. This is ironic, since most critics are unsupportive of LN because they disapprove of male cross dressing, yet they were acknowledging the femininity central to the issue. Nonetheless, application of synonymous nomenclature was not evident when it came to disparaging sexual activities of passive homosexuals. IndoFijians use the term *bajaḍu* for female prostitutes but this is not used when referencing male prostitutes. They are called *gandhu* or *ganḍoo*, a generalised term used for male homosexuals, transgender and transvestite. In that sense, male transvestite and transgender prostitutes are not equated with women prostitutes.

The nachaniya represents the most socially recognisable and acknowledged form of gender subversion among IndoFijians. Their presence both on and off-stage can arguably create the circumstances that inspire gender mediation. The evolving image of nachaniya further opens possibilities for diverse gender identities and distortion of gender polarities. Traditionally in LN, the tenuous display of masculine and feminine traits on the same individual was interpreted as entertainment, similar to what Mageo (1996, p. 619) notes in other cultural contexts. However, the insinuations and narratives that these alternative presentations of gender generate cannot be restricted to the performance context. Social transformations are then instigated by these performances and performers. While the non-normative gender displays in males began with cross-dressing for performances, presently there are nachaniya who have stretched social expectations of gender, so that previously unrecognised gender embodiments now have a consensual identity. Even though objections still exist, current levels of acceptance have been hard won by inciting social change through establishing presence over many years. Monto (Monika, 2017) credits LN for the recognition of his identity stating:

I think when we perform LN especially when we are gay or transgender, it makes it easier to identify our gender identity. For example, if I only did Bollywood dancing then I would not be getting as much respect as I am getting now because I also do LN. This is because LN has religious, cultural and traditional roots, so we get respect from people. People know that we are nachaniya. Like when you, went looking for a nachaniya to interview, then people must have mentioned me. Because when you do Bollywood dance you can just play any song and dance. You can wear the shortest skirts and perform. But it is different with LN as you need to dance with your feet, your ankle bells, your hips, there is eye movement and head movements as well.

Monto implies that people perceive performers' gender identity and nachaniya role synonymously. He does indicate that a higher level of respect is given to those who perform LN because of its cultural foundations. For him and many other nachaniya, this performance genre is more than just dancing for entertainment. Performers like Bijuriya and Monto depict more fluidity in their overall image, as they sing the folksongs they dance to, and when contexts arise, they also perform to film music for the benefit of younger audiences. This gives them potential to be present in wider social contexts, which in turn assists their goal of



naturalising their identity by associating it with every facet of society. For example, previously religious events and weddings were the only venues for LN, but today nachaniya perform stage shows, beauty contests, parties, child birth rituals, and for other family functions. Moreover, nachaniya are no longer just performers, but simultaneously hold formal positions like teachers and academics despite embodying a liminal identity that they carry beyond the stage-performance. Such changes have provided the impetus for a reviewing of the nachaniya identity.

The evidence of this evolution is in the various categories of nachaniya, who embody various features that represent the social circumstances in which their identity developed. I was able to distinguish three different types of nachaniya. While they exist at the same time in history, they represent different periods of the same genre. The first category is that of older fashioned nachaniya, who, like the aforementioned Ram Chandar, cross dressed for performances and reverted to living their lives as heteronormative males afterwards. Field consultants related witnessing performances by crossed-dressed males in the 1970s and 1980s until the nachaniya image changed. Dhiren (2017), a cultural expert, narrates witnessing such performers as ‘men who dressed up for the moment. Now...when I say man, I mean man. I don’t mean any other type like...mixed gender<sup>60</sup>. What has happened now? The mixed gendered dancers have taken over these performances. Before, even if they were effeminate or had other choices people would not know but now they have made it obvious’. Dhiren alludes to the practice of veiling subversive identity, and older nachaniya began performing amidst expectations that they had to submit to this social demand. I encountered at least two performers during the time of the field work who could be placed in this category. One was a ninety-two-year old man, whose age had put an end to his performances. The second was a performer who was actively performing under the stage name Typhoon Rani. Both were married, with children, and while they were nachaniya they were also farmers. Monto, a young performer, identified Rani as the first nachaniya he saw and aspired to emulate. Monto added, however, that nachaniya like Rani who fulfilled hegemonic male roles, but were also feminine, occupied an ambiguous position for younger performers struggling to negotiate their preferred identity. Monto (Monika, 2017) states:

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<sup>60</sup> He used the words ‘mixed gender’.

It was difficult for us on another level when we witnessed some of these nachaniya who were performing these dances and they were married and with children. This really confused me because I was wondering how that was possible. I felt different in myself and could not understand how they were managing it.

Monto's statement depicts Rani's ambivalent identity in that while he reified heteronormativity as a husband, father, and patriarchal household head, he continued to inspire the potential for other identities beyond the heteronormative expectation.

Those who perform LN but do not fulfil all heteronormative expectations form the second category of performers. These nachaniya were also the primary income earners in their families, but their family units comprised of their parents or younger siblings rather than a wife and/or children. In all cases the nachanias in the second category were unmarried. In combination, these factors mean that these nachaniya are not assuming the heteronormative patriarchal roles of husband and father. They had taken up performing in late teenage years or early twenties and established their fluid identity through many years of performing. The key factor that has helped them deviate from social norms and sustain a liveable identity has been their ability to maintain economic independence. The fact that they financially support themselves and delimit their potentially subversive practices to certain discursive contexts, enables them to maintain social respectability and influence of quite a significant degree. In my observation, the performers of this category wore typically male or gender-neutral attire outside of performance contexts. Through one performer, I learnt that his choice to wear gender neutral clothes was a reaction to his social context that did not permit him to wear what he desired. The conversation went as follows:

Vicky: But is it necessary that if you are feminine that you need to go into cross-dressed dancing?

Bhan<sup>61</sup>: No. Well it is just like...when you cross dress (*hesitates contemplatively*) ...well it is cross dressing for a straight person but for a 'gay person'...like someone who thinks that I am a 'women' (sic) from inside like for us it is not cross dressing. For me it is like...now I am going into clothes that are meant for me.

Vicky: So, to society it seems odd but to you...?

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<sup>61</sup> Bhan was interviewed on 27<sup>th</sup> April 2017 at the University of the South Pacific where he works as a Teaching Assistant.

Bhan: That's one of the reasons like personally you will never see me in proper formal male dress. I do not have any. I do not like wearing shirts and trousers...I just like to wear these round necks as you must have seen me all these times. Maybe track pants...so these are things that I like to wear. But if you ask me to wear a *salwar kameez* or a *sari* then I will be much more comfortable.

(Bhan, 2017)

Bhan indicated that while he desires to wear female attire constantly, he is compelled not to by his occupational requirements. These comments cannot represent the perception of all performers in this category, but none of the performers who I would place within this second band wore female clothes off-stage. Most of my respondents belonged to this list. They are performers, confident enough to publicly declare a fluid identity, but were unwilling or unable to wear clothing that would mark them generally as women. Bijuriya, a nachaniya in this second category, comes closest to being a hereditary performer. He faced far less objections, when he began to perform, because his paternal grandfather had been a nachaniya. Bijuriya (1988) explains 'when I started, people just said that he is following in the footsteps of his grandfather'. Despite his hereditary status Bijuriya is placed in the second category because he does not intend to marry or raise a family, thus deliberately failing to meet heteronormative expectations.

The third category of performers were those who performed in, and wore, female attire daily. I interviewed two performers who could be placed under this category. Neither was married or had plans to marry. Both were financially independent, one lived with his mother, and the other lived alone and was engaged in several businesses that had branched out of LN performances, such as doing bridal designs and making sweets and cakes for weddings. Both performers clarified that they wore markedly female attire daily and added that because of their financial independence, they maintained a high level of confidence about their identity. In their opinion, displaying certainty about their own selves created the right space for others to accept who they were. Sporadic criticisms and teasing still existed, but both believed that these were too few to be considered significant.

## **Performance and its Paraphernalia**

LN as a dance form is a particularly strategic instrument in rebelling against pre-existing oppressive mindsets as it simultaneously engages multiple senses and stimulates diverse emotions. Alexeyeff (2009, p. 13) argues:

Dance, because of its visual and affective immediacy, is a particularly productive arena for the performance and contestation of important personal and social identities. Dance is compelling because it communicates at affective and embodied levels as well as cognitive ones.

These effects are not coincidental. While many perceive LN as an improvised performance genre, discussions with field consultants reveal a significant amount of emotional, financial, and human investment in just preparing for these events, let alone actual performances. Attire, dance moves, make-up, hair, and observances were some items nachaniya outlined, to which prior attention must be paid. These also happen to be features that reflect or 'present notions of normative femininity and masculinity' (Alexeyeff, 2009, p. 13).

### Song, Music, Dance

Music is an integral component of these performances. All nachaniya began their performance life by dancing to lokgeet (folksongs). Not all of them sang or still sing, but to gain credibility as LN performers, all had danced to live IndoFijian music performed on harmonium, dhol, jhika, and dhantal. Monto, Bijuriya, Kushwa, Rani, Johnny, Rafiq and Nilu had at some point in their performance life contributed vocally to their performances and five of them still do so. Bijuriya and Rani also get hired to perform songs only, and they wear female attire for such events as well. Others in the group stopped singing when they started to perform on film music. It was while discussing this point that I realised that some performers felt the name LN could only be used for those dances performed to lokgeet. However, people like Kushwa, Bijuriya and Monto, who perform both styles, did not see or emphasise any difference. The performers who predominantly perform to film songs also consider themselves lahanga nachaniya. Looking at current LN trends, crossed-dressed dancing to film music will probably dominate LN performances. Nonetheless, there are benefits of singing for your own dances, as the performer can customise his dance and song to context and audience. This lifts the aesthetic value of performances as audiences witness the performer embodying his own words rather than him reacting to words uttered by an

impersonal recorded source, namely a CD player. Below is an example of how Monto engages an audience member into his performance:

<i>Arreh abh mei bahut dhanya aur bhaḍai ke</i>	Now, with a lot of exaltation and praise I
<i>saat dhanyavaad deti hun,</i>	would like to thank,
<i>Vinod ji ko yahan par,</i>	Mr. Vinod over here,
<i>Bichara hamar Lahanga dekh ke,</i>	This poor fellow, who after seeing my skirt,
<i>Naach dekh ke,</i>	Seeing my dance,
<i>Kamar dekh ke,</i>	Seeing my hips
<i>Hamare paas pahuchahe dus dollar.</i>	Has brought ten dollars to me.

(Source: Monto's Performance)

Spectators do often gift money to nachaniya during the performance, and as this song illustrates, the performer is able to offer instant and personalised gratitude. For this song, Monto pauses after stating 'skirt', 'dance', 'hips' and indicates these specific features allowing audiences to react and add to the performance's effect. Only in a live song performance can the nachaniya wield such control over proceedings, which explains why some performers prefer this style. Those who still perform to lokgeet are usually expected to bring along their own musical ensemble. Thus, a few performers have troupes of musicians they often take along with them when hirers ask nachaniya to bring their own music. In such cases, higher rates are charged to accommodate for musicians. The difficulty in finding musicians is one of the reasons nachaniya have resorted to recorded music, particularly in urban areas where there has been a decline in musicians playing traditional instruments, especially harmonium and dhol. Interestingly, Monto finds musicians for performances in Auckland with relative ease, when compared to sourcing them in Fiji. One of my field consultants attributed this fact to a resurgence in people's connection to traditional music after they move to live in another country, which is leading some parents to even pay for their children to learn how to play dhol or harmonium.

Use of recorded film music eases logistical issues somewhat for nachaniya, but it also requires them to develop additional skills. *Abhinay* (acting), is one such skill that I noted many nachaniya use, even though they do not have a technical name for it. The word *abhinay* means acting, but in the case of nachaniya this involves lip syncing lyrics of songs they are performing to. This depicts some level of subversion as almost all recorded songs selected for these

performances are sung by females. In projecting these words themselves, these male performers often lay claim to feminine concepts and qualities that society does not associate with them. For example, calling on your lover to take you away or making references to one's beauty are conventionally associated with female actresses in song picturizations. Additionally, IndoFijian males are expected to be the dominant ones in intimate relationships and they cannot be concerned about or make references to self-beauty. In this sense a nachaniya's choice to *sange gao* (sing along) qualifies as subversiveness.

There are however other issues related to using recorded music in that it takes away some power from performers. LN has always been an interactive performance where nachaniya often approach some audience members and engage in some form of action that generate laughter. For example, older performers would get close to someone in the audience and sit at their feet or dance just beside them until they responded by giving the nachaniya money or accompanying them with a few dance moves. Performers like Johnny and Rafiq also included conversations in their performances where they spoke with each other and audience members, while performing. These exchanges were portrayed as recollections and narrations of previous incidents which help them paint the context or identify theme of their songs. They were the only nachaniya who used such a style of performance, because they are former actors of informal theatre. When they transitioned into LN, they imported some features of theatre performance. They emphasised, however, that even though they conversed with audiences, they did not establish any physical contact with them. More recently, however, nachaniya have started sitting on people's laps or throwing their lahanga on a seated spectators' head. In a particular performance by Monto, he sat on the lap, of a man who was in his late sixties.

Since Monto was performing to a musical ensemble and was himself singing, he remained in that position until the man took out his wallet and placed a few notes in Monto's hand. Since the musical performance was live, Monto had more control. If a similar act was attempted on recorded music, things would get awkward if the music ended and Monto was still on the man's lap. In this case the power vested in clothing is also made clear, as Monto's act of sitting on a man's lap is not perceived as transgressive since his female attire cancels out his biological reality. Fundamentally, however, an adult male is publicly sitting on another adult male's lap, and this illustrates licensed rebellion in a performance context.



*Figure 9 In this image Monto can be seen seated on the lap of an elderly gentlemen with Monto's veil over the man's head. Monto's musical ensemble is in right hand corner. (Source: Monto's Collection)*

Nonetheless, nachaniya reported of incidents where people were offended by such approaches, which is why they carefully select the people they interact with. At times, the hiring family identifies whom nachaniya should target, and in other instances performers go for people least likely to create issues about any touching or physical closeness. Often, selected people respond favourably to nachaniya approach, as it makes them feel important due to the awareness that in such public performances nachaniya usually focus their attention on important guests or powerful figures in the audience, similar to how it was in Indian royal courts. Kushwa often threw his skirt over a spectator's head even when performing to recorded film songs, however, he was expectedly quick when he engaged in such acts to maintain pace with the song. In performances I have analysed<sup>62</sup> where nachaniya were performing to recorded music, I noted that all were performed to songs by female singers and had erotic themes. These were songs popular during the time of the performance, so the audience was keen to see how well the nachaniya could perform to them. Hours of practice had to be put in, to be prepared for these performances. In terms of dance moves, these were

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<sup>62</sup> The performances were chosen randomly and on rechecking I noted that such songs were deliberately chosen for their fast beats and dance moves which were often copied by nachaniya.

mostly inspired by films, but certain movements seemed exclusive to IndoFijian style of naach. A common dance move I noted with some experienced nachaniya was when he held sides of his skirt and walked forward, backward or sideways with short and quick movements of his feet.



Figure 10 Monto performing this trademark LN movement of moving forward and backwards with skirt held high on both sides. (Source: Monto's Collection)

Twirling in circles, allowing the lahanga to flare outwards, was another common move. Some performers held burning camphor on their palms and some held a brass platter with lit camphor in it, all while dancing. In both these cases the dancers display balance and skill as well as some level of suffering to attain spiritual connection. Kushwa was the only nachaniya who associated his dancing with a well-known Indian dance form called *mujra*, a dance form mostly associated with courtesans and female dancers in brothels<sup>63</sup>. Morcom notes that *mujra* dancers derive many dance moves 'from the "folk", "classical", or "light classical" traditions' (2013, p. 15). Kushwa's dance moves were reflective of *mujra* mostly in his grace, and emphasis on eye and facial expressions in maintaining congruence with bodily movement.

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<sup>63</sup> There are several Bollywood movies that portray lead actresses as courtesans (*Devdas*: 2002), who perform *mujra* in brothels. Some movies also depict female protagonists as hired performers for royal courts (*Mughal-e-Azam*: 1960)





*Figure 11 The image shows Gorilla in Pundit Amrit's grandson's wedding, dancing with arti in his hand. Note that a Hindu priest is seated on the far-right, wearing a yellow coloured attire with red imprints which are his official attire. (Source: Amrit Prasad's Collection)*

### Attire, Make-Up, Hair, Jewellery

Most nachaniya consider their appearance to be as important as music and dance. Thus, many devote equal amounts of time to enhancing their looks and practicing for performances. The lahanga choli (skirt and blouse) was the most popular choice of attire for dances. While these could be bought in shops, nachaniya get their skirts especially sewn so that it has several layers and is sometimes longer than necessary. This was because nachaniya often used the skirt as a prop when performing, and it was lifted, swung and even placed on people's heads. Johnny is a tailor, so he designed and tailored attire for his group. Other nachaniya paid tailors to do the sewing. Kushwa was not a tailor but he often self-embroidered his skirts. Monto explained that the clothes they wore for performances can not necessarily be called everyday clothes. The reason given by several performers was that the lahanga used for performances were longer than usual ones, so it would be a struggle to wear one to work or any other function. More importantly, however, as Monto (Monika, 2017) explains, 'I think for us it is not an everyday costume, when it comes to the lahanga, because we have to pray to *Natraj*, the god of dance before we wear those clothes'. He adds that most nachaniya began their

performances with '*Ganesh*', a *sumirni*<sup>64</sup> (opening prayer). Monto explained that he followed this process because 'we need to follow our ancestors in the way they used to perform LN. This is because from our culture's point of view LN is very important... since when we are there, we are trying to give blessings to the family that has invited us to perform'.



*Figure 12 An example of a handmade tiara designed by Johnny. He has several, which he and Rafiq wear for performances. (Source: Author)*

The comments of *nachaniya* also allude to conventions related to clothing mainly in its capacity to mark gender. *Bijuriya*, for instance, explained that neither he nor his companions wear female clothes all the time, because they met 'various types of people in the public' and not everyone would perceive their cross-dressed image positively. He then pointed out that *Laila*, a school teacher, did not wear female attire outside the stage, because if he did, then 'he would lose the respect people have for him'. What can be gleaned from *Bijuriya*'s comment is that their community was willing to accept a crossed-dressed male on stage and would even respect him outside the stage, provided he abided by hegemonic dress codes. Clearly, articles of clothing embodied power to influence human status within a rigid gender binary.

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<sup>64</sup> In the case of LN, this involved a devotional song offered to a female deity like *Durga* and most *nachaniya* danced to these songs.



Figure 13 An example of a kurta or blouse. (Source: Author)

Furthermore, Bijuriya also noted that limiting cross-dressing to the performance stage preserves its significance in the community's perception, who also represent their audience. Bijuriya's comments implied his fear that if people were to see them in female attire daily, it would result in the loss of the advantage of producing the theatrical spectacularity their attire, jewellery and make-up, helped create on-stage. When asked if he would consider being dressed in female attire all the time if all restrictions were removed, Bijuriya said that he would maintain the status quo. He pointed out that one's dressing was key to the interpretation of one's performance. He illustrated this with examples of his lokgeet performances where he was often hired to perform *gari* (vulgarity) at weddings. As discussed in chapter 3, after a Hindu marriage ceremony concludes, there is a tradition where a singer hired by the bride's household performs a few playful songs targeting mainly the groom's father. These songs, performed mostly by females, express insults where singers can embarrass an individuals by insulting his physical features, maligning his character and even accusing his female relations of being *loose*. Bijuriya clarifies that if a man were to publicly voice such songs against another man, matters would escalate into arguments and violence. However, since he wears a sari to such performances, there had never been any adverse



reactions resulting from the fact that he was male. Interestingly, the female clothing is again instrumental in subverting norms.

Despite their best efforts, however, performances of some nachaniya still manifest some level of masculinity which make-up, jewellery and female attire is not able to sufficiently veil. Morcom notes Indian dancers she studied who were 'dancing in a way that was at once feminine but, in its vigour and muscularity, had a kind of "masculinity"' (2013, p. 95). I also found similar features in performances by Bijuriya, Shelly and Nilu. However, there were other performers, like Ashley and Aishwariya, whose androgynous physicality eased their ability to convincingly appear and perform as a woman.



*Figure 14 A photo of the type of ankle bells that were worn by some nachaniya. (Source: Author)*

There was another incident that drew particular attention to the use of clothing as a marker of identity. This was in relation to a nachaniya named Gorilla, who committed suicide during the period in which I was doing my field work. There were two interesting points to note in his case. Firstly, in conversations with field consultants, I learnt that Gorilla belonged to the first category of nachaniya, in that he was married and had a child. He only cross-dressed for performances and was respected in his community. However, when his death was reported in a national daily, the article (Ralago, J. 2017, p. 18) featured a picture of Gorilla in complete female attire. Whether this was done to sensationalise the news that was also a case of arson

and suicide, is unclear, but there was little point in publishing such a photograph when Gorilla spent most of his time in male clothing. Secondly, Kushwa pointed out to me that Gorilla's body in the coffin had been clothed in shirt and pants but a red *chunri* (veil) had been placed on one side of his head, as an indication of his other identity.



*Figure 15 This belt was tied to the waist to enhance the image of rotating hips. Johnny claims that the dangling items add to the performance's impact. (Source: Author)*

In addition to clothes, nachaniya invested heavily in make-up, jewellery and hair extensions. A few nachaniya took pride in the fact that they owned and used make-up materials that even many women did not possess. Nachaniya wore bangles, as these added to their feminine outlook and enhanced their hand gestures while dancing. Rafiq and Johnny wore tiaras for their performances, a remnant of their roles as queens in plays. All nachaniya, meanwhile, wore ghungroo (ankle bells) while performing and these were used to audibly sync their feet movements to musical beats. Ghungroo represent an item that has survived LN's evolutionary process. These anklets of bells weighed as much as three kilograms each and some nachaniya strapped four of them to their feet when dancing.

### Abstinence and Observances

Nachaniya were often welcomed by their hiring families with an *arti* ceremony. This is usually reserved for special guests and performed to idols and photographs of Hindu deities. Field consultants attributed this level of respect to their image as female deities incarnate, when

they arrived at a performance venue adorned in complete performance attire. The nachaniya understand the gravity of these beliefs, thus, they observed *nem*, the practice of fulfilling some cleansing rituals and abstinence from meat and alcohol consumption, days prior to performances. This was done to maintain purity for embodiments they were perceived to represent, namely goddesses or spirit mediums. Monto narrated declining performance invitations after his initial arrival in New Zealand as he lived with a family that regularly consumed meat preventing his fulfillment of cleansing rites. While he could perform under false pretences, Monto clarified abundantly that they can deceive people, but not spirits connected to performances. Hence, he and other nachaniya prepare for LN with '*vidhi vidhaan* (rites and protocols)' because any failure in observing all requirements can result in injury during performance, such as a performer who had experienced being rendered mute just as he was to begin singing. Clearly, an awareness of the spiritual aspects of LN would counter the perception that LN is just a playful performance form.

### Naming

Morcom (2013, p. 88) identifies the South Asian *kothis* who 'see themselves as females in drama and dance and a significant proportion see themselves as females in terms of gender and sexuality'. Morcom continues:

...kothis occupy a liminal and opaque place in South Asia, with a public identity that is not differentiated from boys/men. As an "invisible" sexual minority, unlike the *hijras*, people generally do not know about them and those that do would not talk openly about them in mainstream society (2013, p. 88).

In comparing nachaniya with South Asian gender liminal identities, kothis seem to have more similarities with them than hijras, even though among IndoFijians there is a tendency to equate nachaniya to hijras. Irrespective of how they perceive themselves or how they present themselves, their general social conception is as boys or males. As Morcom also points out, even when people were aware of kothis' divergent sexual practices there is a general *don't ask, don't tell* policy that guides such matters. The hijra is a recognised third gender who participate in Hindu cultural rituals. A nachaniya is not a recognised third gender even though his existence is acknowledged. Furthermore, some nachaniya do not perform certain religious and cultural rituals as they find the abstinence requirements too taxing. Most only perform dances for social events and in such events, they tend to be perceived erotically. Furthermore,

among hijras, sex work is a major occupation where they engage in ‘some kind of “female”, “passive” sex role (Morcom, 2013, p. 90), but this is not ritually or socially required. Otherwise, they are ‘generally thought’ to be asexual. Even though I did not directly or indirectly ask nachaniya respondents about their sexual preferences or practices, some of them voluntarily shared information around this aspect of their lives while telling their stories. Among my field consultants, only one nachaniya claimed to be asexual, while others either professed being bisexual or passive homosexuals and one of them mentioned being a sex worker. Thus, based on Morcom’s (2013, p. 91) description of kothis, who are feminine, engage in passive sexual activity with men, participate in performing arts in female roles and undertake feminine work such as housework and as beauticians, the nachaniya resembles kothis (Hall, K. 2005). However, an area where hijras and nachaniya converge is involvement of both groups in the system of *guru/chela* (Teacher/Protégé). In Labasa, Kushwa, as the most experienced nachaniya, had at one time or another mentored all the main nachaniya in that area. For example, Sheetal and Aishwariya had both been led into the field of LN by Kushwa. Sheetal had started mentoring Shelly when my field work was conducted. In Suva, Johnny and Rafiq were emblematic of this system. However, its clearest illustration was evident in Tavua where Bijuriya not only mentored three other nachaniya but provided them with housing and performance opportunities.

In Fiji, neither I nor any nachaniya have heard the term *kothi* used for them. They have been called *hijra*, as this was a term the public adopted from films and applied to the closest image they saw in Fiji, that is, nachaniya. When asked if the nachaniya themselves identified with the *hijra* category, most were reluctant and unsure if it applied to them. Apart from *hijra*, there were many derogatory terms that were used in reference to nachaniya. Some of these are *gandu*, *ganḍu*, *pufṭa*, *qauri*, *point five*. All these are references to being liminal, homosexual or androgynous and all nachaniya felt that these were insulting, uncalled for and were reflections of people’s insensitivity and disregard for the performers’ human status. While some of my respondents did not feel there was a need for any separate terminology to refer to them, others suggested a preference towards being called *jijji* or *akka*. Both terms mean sister and a few nachaniya were already using either of these terms when referring to other nachaniya. While there are in existence a range of acceptable terms for gender liminal people in several Pacific communities, nachaniya and others have not yet embraced any

common name. It is important for nachaniya to be identified as a valid identity within Fiji and the Pacific region, in a similar vein as the Samoan *fa'afafine* (Mageo, 1996), Cook Islands *laelae* (Alexeyeff, 2009), and Tongan *fakaleitī* (Besnier, 1994). A factor that brings the nachaniya closer to be recognised as a Pacific non-heteronormative category is the fact that at least two indigenous Fijians have also been identified as nachaniya. Johnny narrated the story of a man named Mala, who performed as a nachaniya in Johnny and Rafiq's team in 1980s and 1990s until he passed away. Mala not only danced but sang wedding songs and played a few musical instruments with Johnny's team. I also met a seventeen-year-old iTaukei nachaniya named lowane at Manju's residence during field interviews. Manju and her daughter were training lowane to improve his dancing skills and learn songs he was performing to, so that he could effectively lip sync the lyrics. lowane did not speak Fiji Hindi, but he dressed up as an IndoFijian nachaniya and performed in several weddings where Manju was the hired singer. This was an example of a creative overlapping of ethnic, as well as gender, boundaries. When asked where he saw himself in the future, lowane stated 'my future plan is that I want to be a 'big' dancer here in Fiji like Charfar<sup>65</sup>. I am trying my best, I am doing my best to beat all the nachaniya here in Fiji'. lowane and Mala's stories illustrate how Fiji's society has changed both IndoFijians and iTaukei over the years they've coinhabited Fiji. More specifically, this scenario shows how non-normatively gendered individuals can find an identity in the culture of another group. As gender liminal individuals, nachaniya play an important role in problematising rigid and polarised notions of gender 'fundamental to social role distinctions' (Mageo, 1996, p. 610). Mageo adds that in a salient state, 'transvestitism' and transgenderism are often 'means by which artists and others deconstruct gender role polarities' (p. 610).

An aspect of naming that can also be discussed here is that nachaniya usually choose a stage name for performing and advertising themselves as nachaniya. In most cases, however, it was noted that these individuals were more widely identified by their stage names rather than formal names. The oldest performer with a stage name is Typhoon Rani, but his name was given by his audience when they paralleled his dancing speed to a Typhoon that Fiji experienced in 1980s. The story behind Gorilla's name is also interesting. Amrit narrated that

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<sup>65</sup> Charfar is another well known nachaniya from Fiji. He was however, unavailable for interview for this project.



when Gorilla started performing, his makeup would transform his appearance to the extent that he looked like a European female, the IndoFijian term for which is *gori*. Over time *gori* evolved into *gorilla* and the *nachaniya* gradually accepted this stage name. The other *nachaniya* had chosen their names from female Bollywood actresses with pronounced sexualised images. Pre-1990s movies commonly portrayed such actresses in supporting roles as vamps or partners of villains. They often appeared in visualisations of erotic songs since female protagonists avoided such roles to maintain an image of purity. Names like Bijuriya and Laila are examples of such names. In other cases, *nachaniya* took up common IndoFijian and English female names, like Sheetal and Puja or Ashley and Shelly.

### Contexts of Performances

While *nachaniya* history is generally connected to performances for rituals and entertainment in weddings, *nachaniya* have successfully exported their art to other stages. Morcom (2013, p. 12) notes a side-lining of performances by liminal males from 'high status theatrical traditions' in India by identifying these genres as "'unmodern'". A similar phenomenon also exists(ed) in Fiji as LN is never seen in formal settings like school graduations. It is common for a few girls and boys to perform a dance copied from a recent Bollywood number and, in some cases, girls also perform Indian classical dances. LN is rarely, if ever, performed in such settings even though, as a performance genre, it is more closely connected to IndoFijians than Bollywood or Indian classical dance forms. Bhan (2017) recounted about his cross-dressed dance performance at his secondary school during a celebration event. He was surprised by the positive response he received for his performance even though he had been the only one to have tried such a thing. He was, however, reprimanded later by a school administrator for wearing what the Principal considered a 'revealing' costume. This was noteworthy because, as a male, Bhan was not expected to *cover up* as a woman is expected to yet norms of femininity were evidently attached to the female clothes. Nonetheless, school-based performances later led Bhan to more prominent stages such as weddings, Ramlila and a national talent contest.

### Weddings:

Wedding are traditionally the primary stage for a LN. A *nachaniya* could be hired to perform on the nights prior to wedding ceremonies and even in intervals during actual weddings. Some *nachaniya* dance in front of grooms' processions as they enter wedding venues. These

performances are mainly singing and dancing or just dancing. In Johnny and Rafiq's case, they had also performed in plays dressed as women, in wedding events.

#### Stage Shows:

At the time of my fieldwork not many nachaniya had ventured into this area, though a couple had gained fame through their participation in beauty contests, competing against other transgender individuals (not all of them were dancers) from multiple ethnicities. I included this as a context because, in terms of talent, nachaniya used such events to display their dancing skills. Even though the public generally treated these events as playful and humorous, this opportunity was used by participants to embody femininity as thoroughly as possible, and this also gave them space to display their talents.

#### Beauty and Talent Contests:

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Bhan was the only one of my field consultants who had entered a dance talent quest. Even though he did not win, he still managed to gain confidence and a reputation that served him well later, as the Ramlila coordinator in his community.

Another modern context in which LN is brought to the stage in its older state is the Fiji Festival organised annually in Auckland. Different nachaniya and musicians are brought from Fiji to perform. At least four of my nachaniya respondents had been to New Zealand for this specific purpose.

#### Ramlila and Nautanki:

Ramlila is a community-based theatrical production that follows the life of Rama. Originally, due to restrictions placed on women to perform in public events, all female roles in these plays were taken by cross-dressed men. Bhan and Ashley were heavily involved in organising and participating in Ramlila for several years. In Ashley's case, the Ramlila stage marked his entry into the field of LN, after his stage portrayal as Sita.

Even though nautanki is no longer practised in Fiji, I have included it in this list because two existing nachaniya were actors in these plays before they started performing LN. Johnny and Rafiq explained to me that they performed in plays by an Indian playwright named Puranmal. Johnny's theatre group performed scripts from India. The plays were based on power struggles between kingdoms and royal families. Some lines were spoken and some sung, so the troupe had a musical ensemble as well. Rafiq and Johnny always played female characters in plays lasting entire nights.



*Figure 16 Photograph of Johnny (in green sari) while performing in a Nautanki during his early days as a performer. (Source: Johnny's Personal Collection)*



Figure 17 The picture shows Ashley playing Sita in a 2014 Ramlila in Navua. Source: Santi Dut of 22nd December 2014 in The National Archives of Fiji.

#### *Pachra:*

*Pachra* are a special genre of Hindu devotional songs, performed by only some nachaniya who possess the special knowledge needed to perform them. Furthermore, the dancer needs to maintain absolute purity in preparing to perform these devotional songs. Field consultants informed me that this performance could not be recorded, but the frequent transactions in these performances were narrated to me. The description below is composed using narrations of these events by Manju, Kushwa, Bijuriya, Monto and Johnny. Manju has information on this practice because she sometimes performs *pachra* for nachaniya who cannot sing themselves or require assistance for any performance. She was the only one my respondents who was actively engaged in both genres covered by this research. Singers could be different from nachaniya provided they knew relevant songs and the protocols for performing. It could not be clearly ascertained why, historically and presently, only gender liminal males are expected to dance to the *pachra*.





Figure 18 Manju plays the harmonium as her daughter (navy blue t-shirt) performs a pachra. She had performed this song for an actual dance with Manju where Kushwa had danced. (Source: Author)

Firstly, pachra is devotional in nature and is directed to a specific female deity, mostly *Durga Mata* (Durga Mother). The lyrics are aimed at praising the goddess and more importantly they are invitations for spirits to physically manifest through an act of possessing any of the ritual's participants. Below is a transcription of a pachra Manju's daughter performed for the interview since recording actual performance is prohibited owing to the event's sacredness:

<i>Aao aao Durga maiya</i>	Come come oh	The women seen in the photograph above
<i>o hamare baed ma,</i>	Mother Durga to	are members of Manju's performance team
<i>(repeated four times)</i>	our altar,	and they accompany her to her
<i>O hamare baedya o</i>	To our altar to our	performances. They chorus for this song.
<i>hamare thaana ma,</i>	shrine,	The aim of the song is to offer constant
<i>Aao aao Durga maiya</i>	Come come oh	invitations to the deity thus, the support
<i>o hamare baed ma.</i>	Mother Durga to	singers help maintain the momentum.
	our altar.	

### Musical Interlude.

O tumhare liye hum	For you I have	The first verse where the song emphasises
yeh baediya sajaiye,	decorated this altar,	a specific preparation done for the benefit
O tumhare sung ma,	Just for you,	

Aao aao Durga maiya o hamare baed ma.	Come come oh Mother Durga to our altar.	of the deity. This altar is explained in detail later.
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Aao aao Kali maiya o hamare baedya.		The singer suddenly changes the name from Durga to Kali, another Hindu deity. Since the deities are incarnations of the same spiritual entity the name changes are inconsequential. However, both these deities possess powerful, even violent images with their idols and photos usually presenting them as armed and holding severed heads.
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**Harmonium Interlude.**

Tumhare liye hum yah fulwa chaḍae, O tumhare baediya.	For you we have offered flowers, On your altar.	The next verse identifies another item that has been offered.
Aao aao Kali maiya o hamare baedya.	Come come oh Mother Kali to our altar.	The song continues this way with the singer identifying several other items offered to invite the deities. Towards the song's end the tempo is raised significantly, mainly through dhol beats which other instruments correspond to. For an actual performance this is done to create the intensity, which ends with the possession of an individual by a spirit.

In terms of context, this ritual was explained to me as being associated with IndoFijians belonging to a specific caste, namely *telli* or *chamar* (cobbler). I was informed that these were lower castes and this ritual was referred to as *kul* pooja (prayers particular to a bloodline, descendants). Surprisingly, even though caste is considered as non-existent among IndoFijians, this was evidence that on some level caste still maintains a cultural presence at least in terms of specific bodies of knowledge or performance passed within groups or

families. When asked for clarification, one field consultant explained that even if people chose to ignore their caste, it would not cease to be a reality. This reality can also be problematic when there are spiritual connections with caste that need to be observed and executed. Failure to do so could result in disastrous consequences. Pachra's performance becomes necessary when a son from a family of the above-mentioned castes is to be married. Several days before the ceremony, a nachaniya is invited to the groom's house to perform this ritual. An area is selected within the compound of his residence where a small space is cleared and designated as a sacred spot called *harsaa* (altar). The performance can be near this spot, provided the proceedings are hidden from neighbours or passers-by. When this can not be guaranteed, the ritual is moved indoors or to a temple.

For this ritual, the nachaniya needs to be dressed in *solah shingaar* (sixteen adornments), a sixteen-step process that Indian brides usually follow to attain ultimate beautification from head to toes. The significance of this form of dressing is for the nachaniya to emulate the appearance of the goddess on whom the songs are focused. For the actual performance, a complete musical ensemble is not necessary. The nachaniya dances to dhol beats, so a performance could be completed with just one instrument. Due to the solemnity of this ritual, a lot of instruments are not used. Traditionally, a *mirdhang*<sup>66</sup> was used for this performance, but they are rarely seen nowadays. The nachaniya usually holds an arti with a lit camphor in it while dancing, as this is a prayer dance. The other important participant of this ritual is a matriarch from the groom's family, usually his mother. She sits near the altar and lays out an end of her sari on the ground before her. Sometimes the laid-out portion, called *achra*, is pinned to the ground to keep it from folding when the nachaniya is dancing on it. The garments that the groom and bride would wear for the wedding ceremony, are placed on the altar as the ritual is performed for transfer of blessings onto them. Due to spatial restrictions, the nachaniya takes small steps as he dances. Much of the performance is focused on hands, hips and facial expressions and some nachaniya sing as well. The groom's mother remains focused in prayer as the dance progresses. The dancing and singing comes to an end when either the nachaniya or groom's mother is possessed. This becomes evident, as the consultants explained, when either of them *aao bhao bhakke lage* (begin uttering

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<sup>66</sup> A double-barreled drum like a dhol but mirdhang has a distinctive sound. It was also played differently with open palms on both sides whereas on a dhol one side is beaten with open palm and the other with a curved palm so that your finger tips and base of the thumb touched the playing area simultaneously.

incomprehensible words), start shaking uncontrollably, speak in a deepened voice or enter into a trance. In most cases it is the mother who gets possessed, so the nachaniya's role concludes at that moment. Since the nachaniya is the medium through which the spirit was summoned, his role is central to the entire ritual. Thus, before leaving the achra, he can demand *sidhaa* (payment) for his role. The groom and his father are responsible for paying the stated amount. Performers usually ask for reasonable amounts even though the family is obligated to pay whatever is demanded. After the spirits have conversed with family members through the possessed individual, a priest, who is also needed at the ritual, calms the spirit through incantations. The bride's garments are then sent to her for the wedding. A few days after the wedding, a pig is sacrificed, and its blood poured on the sacred spot as a conclusion to the ritual.

The involvement of nachaniya in this ritual is both interesting and mysterious. Not all nachaniya engage in this because of the risk of adverse consequences that would result from any oversight in fulfilling all rites. For example, if the nachaniya is ineffective in summoning the spirits during the ritual then the bride would become possessed the moment she enters the groom's compound. Field consultants also reported of cases where grooms were paralysed on the wedding day, which was attributed to the ritual's failure. Such consequences bring into focus the deities that these songs are offered to. As was outlined in the song's description, these deities embody *shakti* (power) and need to be kept appeased as their very image depicts violence. Hence, experienced nachaniya were sought to perform this ritual. There are a few points worth noting here. Firstly, while the nachaniya is seen as gender liminal, in the context of this ritual he also stands between and betwixt the natural and supernatural world. Secondly, as nachaniya clarified, the performer could not just be a cross-dressed man, but had to be someone who was effeminate or considered feminine. When asked how this performance was completed in times when feminine nachaniya were not widely known, I was informed that families made requests to men who were generally deemed effeminate to help them by cross-dressing and appearing on the achra, and the singing could be performed by a separate individual. Kushwa called such individuals '*reserved la akka*' meaning sisters with publicly undisclosed liminality. Furthermore, performers like Kushwa and Bijuriya, who came from higher castes, could only cross caste divide and perform for a lower caste family because of their gender liminality. Kushwa notes:



Since I am from a higher caste I cannot perform for a lower caste. If one does, they will fall very sick. That is because we do the *rot*<sup>67</sup> *puja*. But god has given us this gift that we can go and dance there and come back without any repercussions. The only thing is that I must be in the full shingaar and since I have a temple at home, I need to do my sumirni before I go for that performance.

Kushwa refers to his liminality as a God-given gift that grants *special powers* to cross caste lines. All pachra-performing nachaniya claimed that if people knew their cultural significance in prayers such as these and powers they embodied, they would not only be given more respect but be revered as well. Since this ritual has aspects of caste, these performances are not made public. However, nachaniya have been known to participate in other performances that engage the supernatural, which are not hidden. On the contrary, these performances are meant to be spectacular and theatrical.

#### Performing Spectacles:

Some performances render the separation of a performer from the performance impossible. For example, in nachaniya's case, it is rather difficult to separate the corporeality and materiality of the performer from the aesthetics and spectacles of his performances. In certain performances, appreciation for the art can only be attained by focusing on generic inabilities of bodies and then observing these very bodies breaking through those boundaries. Fisher-Lichte (2008, p. 14) observes of 'fairground spectacles' that 'tricks that would "normally" lead to serious injuries miraculously seem not to harm the artists themselves, such as fire eating, sword swallowing, or piercing the tongue with a needle, to name a few.'

During my field research, I learnt that some nachaniya had taken advantage of the belief that effeminate and androgynous males have special powers to bless and curse. Some nachaniyas used this knowledge and became *ojha* (traditional healers). Thus, people with illnesses and special needs such as dealing with enemies and lack of success, visited these nachaniya who performed certain rites that could resolve their issues. Ojha were not popular with all sectors of society and many doubted their powers. Certain nachaniya ojha were able to attract more credibility by performing acts that defied abilities of a human body. Consequently, these performances appeared as demonstrations of a nachaniya's ability to wield supernatural

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<sup>67</sup> This is a special type of puja Sanatani Hindus engage in. Those who perform this puja must abide by certain lifelong restrictions.

powers. Sujata is a renowned nachaniya ojha living in Suva, whom I was unable to interview due to some legal and health issues he was involved in at the time of field work. However, in archival searches I found an article in Shanti Dut<sup>68</sup>, which contained a photograph (Sharma, T. 1992) of Sujata engaged in a performance where he pours boiling water on himself. Rani, being an experienced nachaniya, was central to the growth in performances that involved walking on nails and sharpened knives. He also introduced Bijuriya and Monto into such performances and Bijuriya and Rani collectively performed knife walking in Auckland for a Fiji Festival. Rani, however, was not an ojha.

### **Motivation for Performing**

The dance begins, and—presto—all sorts of things start to happen before your eyes...whether you realise it or not, you will also be assessing and broadening your own life experiences, and how they relate to what you have just seen. Why? Because viewing live dance is always a very personal experience...as humans we automatically engage our emotions, thought, and even bodies when our human compatriots are doing actions of any kind in close proximity to us (Nadel & Strauss 2003: xviii-xix).

Nadel and Strauss's assertion that dance is 'a very personal experience' has implications for understanding what nachaniya perform and how audiences perceive these performances. The appearance of the nachaniya and all aspects of his dance embodiment contravenes hegemony. In sharing their personal space with the body of the dancing nachaniya, every participant is conjoined in this subversive practice. Whether they approve or disapprove of the performance, they have acknowledged the existence of these liminal embodiments. In many cases, this acknowledgement is what the performer seeks, as it substantiates his existence and begins the process of his identification. Most performers emphasised that the dances they performed on-stage were important to their presence in society. It was clear that they used dancing as a way of announcing their existence to society. Monto explains:

I wanted to perform LN because I felt that I was a person who wants to do LN...you know how from an early age you can identify yourself if you want to be a boy or a girl or you want to be a gay<sup>69</sup>. I thought I am a gay. It is not that you have to do LN if you are gay but from my perspective I wanted to do LN.

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<sup>68</sup> The only newspaper in Fiji printed in Hindi and published weekly.

<sup>69</sup> Monto used the English word 'gay' during the interview.

Although Monto clarifies that one does not have to become a nachaniya if one was gay, the earlier portion of the quotation suggests that he saw a connection between his gay identity and his desire to perform LN. Nilu, another performer, stated that the idea of performing 'came from my heart' and despite restrictions placed by his father and issues created by relatives, he pursued becoming a nachaniya. The other nachaniya attributed their move into performances to their nachaniya friends who invited them to join in. Bijuriya mentioned a rare motivation in being inspired by his grandfather. His choice to remain unmarried distinguished him from his previous generation. Shelly provided another rare motivation, identifying performances as ideal venues 'for searching out boys'. Working at a place hardly frequented by men, LN provided the social flexibility to meet them. Some nachaniya had implied this, but Shelly said it outright. He claimed being frequently approached post-performance by men for sexual interactions. Generally, the possibility of appearing publicly as women drove most nachaniya onto the stage, and love for dancing as well as financial benefits of performing keeps them there. A few of the field consultants noted at some point in their lives LN being their main source of income. Some used this to support their siblings through school, construct proper houses for their family and start off businesses. Those who could have left after becoming financially well-established, continued performing, citing their love for dance and the cultural significance of LN as their motivation. Regardless of their reasons to begin or continue performing, these individuals have compelled society to rethink some widely accepted misconceptions about liminal identities.

Ness (1992: 230) claims 'each facet of social life, from mythology to subsistence practices, provides some possibility of insights into cultural phenomena. Virtually no moment of social existence is completely without some ongoing process of representation or utterly beyond some subsequent process of culturally relevant interpretation'. Dance in IndoFijian psyche represent moments when the inner self gets reflected on the corporeal body in a publicly visible manner. LN, where a nachaniya takes the stage to present dance moves, dressed in the attire typically for the opposite gender, is an illustration of what Dankworth (2014: 110) describes as a site 'where an interrelationship between cultural practices and freedom of expression merges'. Hence, as the nachaniya entertains the audience, he simultaneously speaks to the cultural systems that place individuals in polarised categories of male/female and man/woman.

The dance platform, which Mills (2017, p. 24) argues to be a political stage, is being actively used by my field consultants to create and present their own narratives. They live in more than one world, the one that is already present and the one that they create through their performances. Through dance the nachaniya publicly presents a feminine appearance and image, which feels natural to the audience in that context. The stage is perhaps the only place the nachaniya freely and unrelentingly expresses his femininity, where it is appreciated in terms of how well it is embodied rather than being questioned on why such an embodiment was attempted.

Nachaniya performances can be interpreted using Mikhail Bakhtin's (1984, pp. 4-5) notion of *carnivals*. He portrays popular performances as sites of contention where authority vested in socio-political authorities, like patriarchy, is debated using the medium of humour. While nachaniya are not necessarily participating in a 'feast of fools' (p. 5), the audience is always prone to respond to LN as performances put up for fun. For example, in weddings, nachaniya perform jovially and some deliberately engage in acts that produce laughter. Even though the nachaniya is dressed as a female and embodies feminine mannerisms, the audience accepts the performance without the conventional condemnation generally meted out to such displays off-stage. Bakhtin argues for the ability in performances to create the space for people to see the oppressiveness of some social practices and 'helps people resist these practices by making a connection with other members of their community and feel united through a realisation of their common conditions' (Sharma, 2006, p. 54). This reconceptualisation transpires because even as these subversive performances are temporary, the connections materialised in the 'necessarily collective' (Skjoldager-Nielsen & Edelman 2014: 3) sharing of the performance experience between nachaniya and audience, were enduring. Kapferer (1986: 189) says of this phenomenon

...individuals experience themselves—they experience their experience and reflect on it—both from their standpoint and from the standpoint of others within their culture...Further, I do not experience your experience; I experience my experience of you. The expressions revealed on your face, in the gestural organisation of your body, through the meeting of our glances, are experienced through my body and my situation

These moments are pivotal to the nachaniya's overall identity materialisation, as he gets to appear in a space he shares with the community. Since social sanctions delimit spaces for their social visibility, the performance stage marks the one setting where he can be himself. He transforms the stage into a 'performative space' (Fisher-Lichte 2008: 107) through the embodiment, by his male body, of historical possibilities reserved for female bodies. In presenting this subversive embodiment, he draws attention to his human body, and even if his current embodiment gets rejected, his existence as a living, moving and socially engaged individual is established. Even when the performance concludes, the nachaniya's image remains etched in viewers' minds. This marks the veil's dissolution and the emergence of the nachaniya as counter narrative to the existent suppressive gender order.

In addition to connecting with wider community, nachaniya also establish links with a smaller, more personal community of other nachaniya. In failing to embody socially sanctioned gender, a nachaniya disqualifies himself from assuming existing identities, which compels entry into a liminal space he shares with others like him. He remains in this socially isolated space until he decides to cove in to social demands or cause a re-inscription of the hegemony. Turner acknowledges that while such liminal spaces are removed from society, those within such secluded groups produce a 'hugely potent commonality amongst' themselves, which he calls '*communitas*' (Turner, 1969, p. 95). The performance stage symbolises the point of convergence, the area of 'shared meanings' (Hall, 1977a, p. 1) among the performers. Field consultants emphasised the important role their nachaniya community played in confidence building and in initial transformative processes leading to their new identity. Based on Appadurai's (1996, p. 5) claim that 'imagination has broken out of the special expressive space of art, myth, and ritual and has now become a part of the quotidian mental work of ordinary people in many societies', I argue that nachaniya as ordinary people 'deploy their imaginations in the practice of their everyday lives' and in living their lives as they imagine it, they affect changes to social perceptions. They undertake these imagination-fuelled journeys, not as individuals but in conjunction with others. I apply this collective sense of imagination that Appadurai (1996, p. 6) calls 'a "community of sentiment", a group that begins to imagine and feel things together', to experiences nachaniya share with each other as IndoFijians. While there is palpable camaraderie between nachaniya, who live in same regions, what I find intriguing is how they have connections with others in different parts of Fiji and even those

who live overseas. There was intimate awareness of each other's preferences and dislikes, performing schedules, personal background and current happenings. The only exceptions were younger performers who were mostly close to only one or two experienced nachaniya and were gradually familiarising themselves with others in the national and international nachaniya community. Since these individuals have historically been marginalised, by their families and society, the role of the nachaniya community becomes foundational to their self-concept and identity. Hall (1996, p. 2) states that 'identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common origin or shared characteristics with another person or group or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation'. Nachaniya share among themselves the responsibility of being essential cultural players, while enduring through a history of oppression which solidifies their commitment to their group identity. Some stories narrated to me by interviewees help illustrate benefits of such a community. Pinky and Laila, for instance, both found support in Bijuriya after their families' objections to their performances became unbearable. Pinky, who was eighteen at the time of the field work, lived with Bijuriya. This had some effect on calming Pinky's father's anger resulting from his performances. Since Bijuriya was accorded some level of respect in society, Pinky's father felt assured that Pinky's transformation would not lead him into further subversions if he stayed with a responsible person like Bijuriya. The fears Pinky's father had, were inspired by stereotypes portraying transgendered individuals as homosexual, promiscuous and drunkards, whose only aim in becoming performers was to live unrestrictively. Kushwa (Nand, 2017), as an experienced and older nachaniya, displayed a certain level of control and authority over other nachaniya in Labasa. He related to me how he had used the funeral of a nachaniya who had committed suicide<sup>70</sup> to explain to younger performers the importance of discipline and gaining economic independence. Kushwa narrated:

...since I have a car, I took other new ones with me and told them, "look, this is the life of akka<sup>71</sup> (sisters). Not even a dog will come to your assistance if you do not care for your own selves. Be careful. If you want to come out, then come out and build things for yourselves rather than carelessly floundering everything (Nand, 2017).

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<sup>70</sup> This had happened a few days before the Interview with Kushwa.

<sup>71</sup> He uses the term here to refer to nachaniya or transgender. It is the South Indian word for elder sister.

Kushwa's actions reflected the sense of community he shared with other nachaniya. Since some of them had been disowned by their families, Kushwa encouraged them to make economic independence a priority, just as he had done. Kushwa also used his fame and respect to promote new nachaniya, indicating that he often recommended performers to people who wanted LN. He also brought in new performers with him to his own performances as apprentices and usually offered them dressing and dance tips. More importantly, however, Kushwa protected members of his nachaniya community from exploitation and self-harm. Field consultants in other regions recounted similar stories about their own groups.

### **Audience Response**

In many performance forms, such as qawwali, audience response can cause changes to the intensity and direction of performances. Alexeyeff (2009, p. 15) also argues that 'dancing from the heart is not just embodied in the virtuosity of the dancers but also created through interactions with the audience members. Most dance performances that take place in local contexts aim at eliciting a response from the audience'. LN, as has been argued above, is a genre that in its live performance brings performers and audiences into a unity of experience. It was noted that different performers interacted at different levels, and this reflected their experience as nachaniya. Even though, nachaniya at times face discrimination and abuse off-stage, their on-stage experiences concerning audience response are mostly positive.

My analysis of performances reveals a few overlapping and recurring audience responses to LN. It is rare for audiences to join nachaniya on-stage, especially when the dance was being performed to film songs. Nachaniya at times pulled people out from the audience to join them in dancing, but some hesitation is always noted even with those who eventually do join in. The most common responses included laughter and clapping, passing encouragements for more intense dancing, and whistling. For performances by nachaniya known to throw their skirts over spectators or for sitting on people's laps, audiences constantly look out for who will be selected by performers. When targeted by nachaniya, there is a tendency to quickly push away the lahanga, which is usually done with shy laughter from the individual, but bursts of laughter from others.

It would be incorrect however, to suggest that nachaniya never come across any on-stage problems. In the Indian context, pre-existing gender biases not only limit performance spaces for liminal performers 'but also reinforce gender norms that enable the use of sexual

exploitation and violence' (Khan A. W., 2014). With nachaniya, audience members attempting unwanted physical contact was one of the issues respondents reported. Ashley narrated an incident where he publicly slapped a man who entered the stage uninvited and grabbed Ashley as he danced. Some nachaniya also faced incidents of arguments with angry wives when they had approached or touched their husbands while dancing. Some nachaniya found this fascinating, as the anger fundamentally resulted when women felt threatened by nachaniyas' feminine display. However, a worrying trend has been continuous sexual advances directed at nachaniya, mainly after their performances. At least five of my respondents narrated various incidents where men forced themselves on them, after nachaniya denied sexual requests. Clearly, such actions were motivated by nachaniyas' feminine appearance which was often interpreted as weakness. Over time, performers have developed strategies of avoiding and dealing with such incidents.

### **The Off-Stage Scene**

The case of nachaniya has proven that gender subversion is a reality within IndoFijian communities. While nachaniya have endured through time to establish themselves economically and socially, this was not achieved without defeating many misconceptions, stereotypes and biases. As biological males, nachaniya break the mould that produces heteronormative men, to give meaning to their own identities. Such actions bring social repercussions because of underlying concepts that influence IndoFijian mentality. One such notion that Brenneis identifies in Bhatgaon, and is largely true of all IndoFijian communities, is *jalan* (Brenneis, 1979, p. 46). He states:

The other face of this avowedly egalitarian social ideology is a widespread concern for one's individual standing vis-à-vis others and considerable sensitivity to perceived slights and affronts. Villagers suggest that *jalan*, which implies both "envy" and "jealousy", are common human characteristics and that it lies at the root of many conflicts in Bhatgaon. One "jealously" guards one's reputation and social equality relative to other men. A neighbour's new house or his child's success in the school examinations might damage one's *amour propre* and lead to resentment. As one villager explained, "Some people don't like to see others go up in the world. Many try to help others, but some like to put them down. They suffer from "envy" and think only of themselves.



This perception continues to dominate mindsets. While growing up, I have had several encounters with such ideologies, witnessing jalan-inspired incidents as I moved from rural Labasa to urban Labasa and then to urban Suva. I even heard similar thoughts from IndoFijians living in New Zealand. It has become clear to me that the notion of jalan is a significant factor in the articulation of IndoFijian identity. Brenneis observed the operation of jealousy as an outsider, and I can argue more confidently of this concept's prevalence amongst IndoFijians with a specific focus on its role in the assemblage of IndoFijian ethics and gender identity. The concept of jalan inevitably draws attention to the *other's* existence in racial, economic, communal and gender relations.

Constant comparisons and contrasts with others requires substantial levels of effort to manage the paraphernalia that gives meaning to self. One's educational and economic achievement, for example, are qualities always under review. Furthermore, family honour is also foundational to sustaining one's self worth. Women, as deposits of family honour, are vigorously controlled to avoid tainting of family name. It is historically and widely believed that any form of dishonour brought to a family through a female relative is the worst form of dishonour. Therefore, men as protectors of family reputation needed to embody characteristics that enabled them to maintain patriarchal authority. While males were preordained as keepers of power, they needed to prove their ability to wield this power by engaging in social activities that emphasised masculinity.

IndoFijian society does not have official initiation rituals marking male transition from *naujawan*<sup>72</sup> (younger male) or *baccha*<sup>73</sup> (calf) to *admi* (married, family head, economically independent). Marriage was previously considered to be a form of initiation, but over time unofficial initiation rituals have taken many forms. These include finding employment, or assisting fathers in any significant farm work, being allowed to drive unsupervised or being permitted to travel alone. Senior male figures in families handled the task of managing these processes and assisting in engendering masculinity into younger males. This task involved not only providing opportunities, but also administering punitive action for failures in embodying expected levels of masculinity. The blame for unsuccessful transitions, therefore, was not only

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<sup>72</sup> The term is borrowed from Brenneis (1979, p. 46) who noted this demarcation between adult and younger males in Bhatgaon.

<sup>73</sup> An informal and sometimes insulting term that is used to undermine someone's ability to contribute to a certain discussion or be part of a group due to the individual's age.

attributed to young males but also on those overseeing the process. These were often fathers, but in some family setups this role was handled by grandfathers and uncles. The entire gender binary rested on the success of this process, as females would essentially be striving towards embodying whatever classified as the binary opposite of masculinity. The masculine attributes reflected in sons were always seen as reasonable cause for fathers to be proud members of a community's patriarchal regime. This provides some elaboration for the strict and hurtful ways some of my respondents were treated, mainly by their fathers, when they failed to conform to gender expectations. For instance, Johnny narrates:

My father was strictly against the idea of someone being a man, wearing a lahanga or dancing in female outfit. My mother used to be very pleased with it and she also used to support me with this. She would help me escape my father's gaze and go for performances. I have been beaten several times for dancing. When my father found out I had been dancing somewhere, he always severely beat me (Johnny-Rafiq, 2017).

Like Johnny, many nachaniya recounted heavy-handed treatment from male relatives when they displayed signs of diverging from expectations. In most cases, performers identified the support of mothers towards their choice of performing, although this meant subverting not only sanctioned gender norms, but also patriarchal authority of family heads. Rafiq, who came from an Islamic background, left his family for a nachaniya's life. While Johnny and Rafiq both turned performers in a similar period around 1960s and '70s, my research shows that circumstances for other nachaniya, who became performers much later, was not altogether unchallenging. For example, Shelly<sup>74</sup>, a nachaniya from Labasa, began performing in 2013. Realising that his father would not agree with him cross-dressing, Shelly moved to Labasa town, away from his family home, before appearing on public stage. Four years later, while everyone in his village and his immediate family have learnt that Shelly is a nachaniya, he has still never performed in his father's presence. Initially, when Shelly began this transformation, a few of his relatives brought up issues about his changing physical appearance. He narrated 'My father's brothers were asking why I was behaving this way and why I had grown my hair. My mother heard these things and then told me about it and all I said to my mother was that they were not the ones financially supporting me or them, so what they said, did not really

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<sup>74</sup> Shelly is a 24-year-old nachaniya from Labasa who was interviewed at a restaurant in Labasa Town. Since he lived with his employer, his own residence was not available for the interview.

matter. I told her to ignore them' (Shelly, 2017). Shelly's distance from his family gave him freedom to amend his looks and appear feminine by growing his hair and wearing gender neutral and women's clothing. His economic independence provided the leverage to confidently present his identity. Thus, his subversive gender display was overshadowed by his active economic status. This resonates with the IndoFijian mindset that attributes a higher position to financial independence than other aspects of life. It is common in conversations where one's children are mentioned that IndoFijian parents will usually outline their career or educational status before any other matters. It is possible that at some level comparisons are always being made with the children of other friends and family. As Brenneis outlines 'a widespread concern for one's individual standing vis-à-vis others' does play an integral role in one's self-worth. For those with children, their progeny become added factors that influence their social position. Hence, life choices of sons and daughters are carefully regimented by parents and immense attention always paid to how well social expectations are fulfilled.

The reaction of Johnny's father, who beat him to make him submit to social expectations, and Shelly's decision to not perform in his father's presence, both reflect something important. Fathers, as patriarchal representatives in individual families, bear the most responsibility for the gendering process and are considered responsible for scenarios where it fails. This is especially illustrated in Shelly's decision to not perform in events where his father was present. This was not because Shelly had personal qualms about dancing before his father, but he acknowledges that such situations would make things awkward for his father, who would have to deal with looks from individuals at the event. These *looks* would range from people trying to assess the father's reaction to Shelly's cross-dressed appearance, to more serious looks of disapproval and disappointment for being unable to nurture his son to embody masculinity as socially expected. Based on the web of gender ideologies and traditions of behaviour, even if someone praised Shelly's performance to his father, it could be considered an insult because the better he performs as a female the more subversive Shelly becomes. Generally, IndoFijian audiences do not treat the performer as distinct from the persona presented in the performance, least of all in Shelly's case, whose liminal identity is already well known off-stage. Since *jalan* continues to be an important ideology in operation among IndoFijians, people would surely highlight such failures in gendering processes of

others in order to feel better about one's own life through comparison with the shortfalls of the others.

### **Changes to LN**

LN has played a central role in reshaping IndoFijian concepts of gendered identity. Besnier & Alexeyeff (2004, p. 2) argue that 'non-heteronormative Pacific Islanders are at once part and parcel of their societies and subversive of the social order' by being 'heralds of the new, the experimental, and the exogenous' while simultaneously remaining 'deeply enmeshed with what many think of as "tradition"'. This liminal position can be both problematic and productive. LN has experienced changes over time and as a performance that was tied to traditions and cultural practices, these changes materialised through a gradual evolutionary process rather than a chaotic one. Nachaniya from different times and geographical locations can blend their performance styles and perform together. This seamlessness can be accredited to the transitory process where the nachaniya keep the foundations of LN intact as they weave new styles, ideas and themes into it. Sharma states 'I believe that the changes in any form are demands placed on it by the changing times, and it is not possible to freeze a certain historical rendering of it' (2006, p. 80). Nachaniya have established that over-emphasising history and traditions can have the undesirable effect of losing out on younger audiences. As a result, many have strategically introduced new styles, music and attire to performances. Monto is an ideal illustration of this, being the most versatile nachaniya I met. He still performs sacred devotional dances, sings and dances in traditional LN style, and performs cross-dressed dancing to film music and participates in stage shows. He embodies all key junctures in LN's history and has managed to do this by adapting to demands of different contexts. Monto explains:

I am the only nachaniya in New Zealand. At first, people were not very appreciative of these performances here, so I had to modify myself. I brought new costumes, glamour and beauty. Because if you look at LN back in the old days even in 1980s, everything had to be covered, their way of dressing was very decent. But that was the dressing in that time and I had to change the form of dressing so that we could make the performance more attractive to the new ones who were born and bred in New Zealand as we wanted them to also know about our identity. So, we have changed LN a little bit to attract people to it. We have changed LN into a modern form. You see it

is very hard to educate people born here, about culture. Like they might see my performance as just a gay person who is dancing, but behind that is the performance of our traditions. To explain these cultural things to them we need to have their cooperation which means, understanding what they like. Now if I wear a costume that covers my body completely and I dance in a very traditional way then the young ones will get bored and will want to go back home. That is why I perform differently.

However, Monto also acknowledges global changes that ease the acceptance and implementation of his decisions, stating:

If you look again and compare the people of those days with the people of today, then you will realise that culture was so strong in those days that people could not bring in new ideas and behaviours by themselves. Culture and people's way of life was so strong that it dominated every part of life. There were gay people then as well, but due to lack of education and cultural pressure they had to get married and settle down with families...People in Fiji too would not appreciate that their son had turned out to be gay, that they would not be able to find a woman for marriage. People did not have a voice, education or technology which prevented exposure to western culture. People did not know about their rights.

Essentially, Monto's argument is that education and modernisation are factors that help nachaniya to express more of themselves on and off-stage. This has not only opened more opportunities for nachaniya but has simultaneously prolonged the life of LN as a performance genre.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has been a discussion of the performance genre lahanga naach. The genre has been explained in terms of its performance, performers, performance contexts, audience response and changes. A focus of the chapter was showing how LN performances subvert gender expectations. Looking at femininity from the perspective of transgender nachaniya offers an illuminating perspective to analyse gender relations. This has been the rationale for making this connection between musical performances and gender identity.

## Chapter 6

### Analysis of Lahanga Naach Performances

#### Introduction

The following analysed performances offer specific illustrations of gender subversion in some lahanga naach performances. These are carefully selected to reflect the different contexts that mostly incorporate LN.

#### Rani Performs *Sumirni* (Auckland)

Context:

This performance is part of the 2010 Fiji Festival organized by Radio Tarana in Auckland. Sumirni is a prayer song/dance that nachaniya perform as offerings to deities to commence performances. The spiritual aspect of their identity is a matter of utmost importance to nachaniya. Nilu (2017) explains 'once I say my prayers and I go anywhere, the entire *mahefil* (audience) becomes mine from the moment I arrive. This is because I am being and doing what god intended me to be and do'. While they pray before leaving for the performance, nachaniya also perform sumirni (prayer dance) to begin their performance. Here dance is used as prayer as Crump (2003, p. 160) recognises dance's multifaceted value in stating 'dance is a complete aesthetic that conveys physical, emotional, intellectual and social meanings through movement imagery'. Through sumirni, a spiritual connection is being sought and Rani, himself, represents a female deity.

Sumirni is performed with music and is like other dances performed by the nachaniya. The distinction in sumirni is not in form or content but in intention. Firstly, sumirni is offered to god and is technically not for the audience's benefit even though the audience may observe the performance reverently with an awareness of context. Accordingly, the lyrics are predominantly names of deities and are pleas for success. The nachaniya is emblematic of an entity that links the spiritual and physical realms. This transforms the stage into a space ideal for the performer to maximise his expressive potential. Secondly, the movements used in sumirni are rather subdued in comparison with other performances. Movement of feet, hand gestures and body are limited to just a few routines that are not exaggerated or animated. However, Rani's other performances do not have many exaggerated movements anyway. The

movements reflect the solemnity of the context and there are a few movements used in this song, which are not used for other performances. For instance, the performer touches the harmonium with the fingers of one hand or both hands and then touches his forehead repeatedly three or four times and performs the same action with the dhol since these two instruments are core to the musical ensemble. As Rani states ‘when I perform the *thumka*<sup>75</sup> it goes with the beats of the dhol. My foot movement, *ghoongur* playing and the entire actions needs to sync with dhol. I do have some good dhol players and they also rehearse with me. These musicians accompany me when I travel to other parts of the country to perform<sup>76</sup>’. The performance has better cohesion when musicians are either experienced or have rehearsed with the performer. This is one reason why renowned performers are accompanied by their own musicians. Reputable performers can charge substantial amounts, and this enables them to secure long term commitment from good musicians. Hence, the performer in the initial stages shows respect to the musical instruments as these are fundamental to successful performances.



Figure 19 Rani performing Sumirni at the Auckland Fiji Festival. (Source: Bijuriya's Collection)

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<sup>75</sup> Thumka is an informal term used to refer to dance but is more specifically a reference to jerking hips, or pelvic thrusts as dance movements.

Performer:

Rani wears a blood red coloured sari, a common colour worn for prayers. The sari has golden borders and this shimmers in the bright sunlight that covers the front of the stage. Since Rani is bald, he is wearing a wig that extends black hair down to his shoulders. The hair is left untied and covers both of Rani's ears and cheeks. A head ornament is mounted just above the centre forehead. There are bangles on both hands and these go from the wrists to mid-arms. Rani has rings on three of the fingers on both hands and is fully attired as a nachaniya, a task that can take almost two hours to complete when done to their liking. The sumirni is performed by Rani who has deliberately raised the pitch of his voice to sound feminine as his normal voice is ostensibly masculine.

Names of Hindu gods like Brahma, Vishnu, Durga and Hanuman appear in the song, since it is a prayer. The song is, however, focused on a female deity because *maa* (mother) is continuously stated referring to the higher power being implored. Rani is inviting a deity to manifest herself and integrate with the performer and the instruments.

Performance:

*Rani<sup>77</sup> walks up to the front edge of the stage. One hand clutches the microphone to the lips while the other at hip level holds onto the end of the sari or the achra<sup>78</sup>. Rani is clad as any conservative, traditional IndoFijian woman would be, for a community event. After singing the first verse Rani walks back to musicians seated at the left back end of stage. The walk is graceful and Rani sings to his convenience, meaning the singing is paused and resumed based on whether he is where he wants to be while singing.*

*He faces the musicians momentarily before resuming singing and slowly turns to face the audience. Rani is standing next to the musicians. Both hands are brought together as a Hindu does for prayer but microphone in right hand prevents hands from joining.*

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<sup>77</sup> Lyrics in English: Appendix 1.

<sup>78</sup> The part of sari left over after it has been wrapped around the waist. This long piece of the sari material is sometimes brought across the front and pinned to the top over a shoulder. Sometimes, as Rani does in this case, it is passed around the back, over the arm and then held in front. This resembles the way one would wear a shawl.



*When uttering 'large gathering' Rani moves the left hand in a sweeping action to indicate the audience. When singing 'hamar' (mine) Rani wobbles head gently, eyes closed for emphasis.*

*Turns to musicians, voice raised higher indicating imminent commencement of music. A dhol plays and tambourine shakes, sounds in the background. Turns to audience, hands brought close together. Some words' enunciation is stretched, with lips tensed in emphasis. Steps back to the musicians.*

*Faces the musicians and indicates for music to commence, which happens as soon as Rani turns towards the crowd and begins singing. Left hand stretched out at an angle with arm kept close to his body and forearm stretched out as if seeking alms. Rani turns a few times to the musicians while performing. Feet movement is minimal, he only turns. There is more head and torso movement. One hand holds microphone to lips, while the other continually pulls on achra.*

*Rani moves closer to harmonium and repeats a gesture of touching the harmonium and then his forehead several times. The same action is repeated with the dhol.*

*Turns around gracefully facing the musicians. Music begins to accompany singing. Points at the harmonium, indicating that his words are directed at it. Then turns to face the audience. Walks to front stage. Left hand pushed out few times and then returned to touch the chest area every time the song mentions 'hamari' (mine). The movement has picked up momentum with a series of hand gestures, turns and head movements facing different directions.*

*Rani begins to hop gently, alternating feet. At one point, he bends down and touches the harmonium again. Then turns to face the audience and pauses singing while stretching both hands outwards on either side just below the shoulder level. Bends knees and keeps the back straight. The musicians are familiar with this routine as*

*they immediately halt playing, then resume with quick disjointed beats to which Rani slides his head to one side than the other and then to the front a few times. These are quick head jerks with a steady neck. The music cues these movements and adds to the overall expressive effect. Rani twirls around twice and then stops, facing the audience, bends knees, and with right hand raised above the right side and left hand held at chest level in front, slides head to the left and right holding the neck steady.*

*Walks to musicians and while stretching left hand outwards half rotates towards audience and then back to musicians.*

*Rani's movements become energised now. There is a considerable level of hopping on either foot, hand gestures have multiplied, accompanied by a few twirls. Smile is evident. The musical interlude ends with Rani standing facing the musicians while jumping on spot, no hand gestures.*

*Turns and walks to front stage. Left hand is stretched out with palm open and facing upwards. For a moment the hand moves to the upper chest signalling the heart, then returns to the stretched-out position. Rani stops at centre stage, bows forward and sings while facing audience directly in front of him. Returns to musicians and indicates something which becomes clear shortly when music again halts temporarily and Rani repeats the choreographed routine of bent knees, stretched arms and head sliding in various directions. This time this regime continues longer than its earlier performance. The musicians are looking at Rani and are smiling conspicuously. These are Rani's trademark moves and the syncing with the quick bouts of halt and resumption of musical beats impresses many. He then repeats twirls and rotations of whole body with outstretched arms. Short jumps on spot maintained throughout.*

*Walks to front stage and sings with left arm outstretched. Jumping is missing this time. Returns to musicians and bends over the musical instruments while singing. Back turned to audience.*

*Walks around the stage a few times and then stands facing the audience at an angle. Feet are obviously placed together even though they are hidden behind the sari. Raises both hands outwards bent at the elbows which are placed close to the sides of the body. Palm of left hand open while microphone is held in the right hand. Slides head side to side a few times but this time the music continues to play with quick halts and resumptions. Moves a few steps forward and places left hand on area just below the front left side hip. Rani's eyes seem to be fixed on someone in the audience, perhaps deliberately.*

*Takes a walk back to the musicians and continues to sing.*

*The last few lines are sung while bending over the musicians and the musical instruments. This represents the conclusion in which Rani's movements reiterate the significance of the music as he continues to bow towards the musicians while uttering prayers.*

In this performance, much of the deliberate dance movements are concentrated in musical interludes between verses, but the singing of some verses does have significant levels of concurrent movements where lyrics require physical acts for emphasis. Reserving most movements to the interludes allows Rani to concentrate on singing, and then be more expressive while dancing. Holding the microphone to lips is a drawback to the fluency in dance movements. Rani has his own way of adding excitement to the performance without necessarily employing exaggerated movements. These are noticed in the use of head sliding in various directions, while standing steadily with both arms outstretched and neck kept steady. The quick halts and resumptions in music, synchronised with these sets of movements, adds to the expressive effect. These are the only out of the ordinary movements in the context of this performance as the rest of the movements are predominantly stepping, turning, walking, eye contact, bowing and face tensing.

Rani's movements are reminiscent of dance movements of earlier generation nachaniya(s) as established from analysis of various sources<sup>79</sup>. Older generation performers mostly took steps around the dance area and employed hand gestures that were graceful and sustained rather than rapid and exaggerated. Facial expressions and head movements were also relied on significantly, similar to other older performers like Johnny and Rafiq. Another common movement they use is lifting of lahanga by holding two points of the lower edge on both sides and then walking forwards and backwards with quick successive short steps. This makes the ghungru ring with a flourish. The dhol beats are quickened to match the steps. Rani does not perform this move because he is wearing a sari, but also because the intention of this performance is prayer. Nonetheless, nachaniya(s) from category one rely predominantly on their singing abilities and their musicians' skills to entertain the audience. The ability to sync bodily movements and singing to music was given prominence over agility or speed. Developing a connection with the audience through eye contact is also evident in Rani, Rafiq, Johnny and Kushwa's performances, while dancers like Ashwariya, Ashley and Shelly (all category three) remain within the dance space and rarely engage with spectators. Kushwa, who had transitioned into dancing on Bollywood songs, initially sang and performed traditional styles, which explains why he remained considerably more interactive with audience members when compared to other new generation dancers. Kushwa (Nand, 2017) explains 'for LN you can do the entire dance by just lifting the lahanga this high and moving around. You must go slowly and just give some looks and gestures. There is a lot of grace involved and sometimes you have to do the *kathak* beats and then we also have to do the *chakri* (full body twirls)'.

### **Johnny and Rafiq's Performance**

Context:

The setting is an IndoFijian wedding reception in Nasinu Town, outside Suva. The main program has concluded, and guests are being served with food as Rafiq and Johnny take the stage to perform. The stage is a small tiled area, separated from the space where the main proceedings transpired. The main reason for this separation is likely Rafiq and Johnny's musicians' need to set up their musical instruments while the reception was ongoing. This

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<sup>79</sup> Various sources include descriptions given by some old individuals whom I spoke with but who were not engaged in a formal interview session. This also includes my own personal experiences witnessing such performances coming from a family that had nachaniya.

preparation progresses well if the musicians were the only stage occupants. In any case the main stage is occupied by guests walking up to meet the bride and groom throughout the event. As with most home-based weddings and receptions, time is not of the essence. Most often the official programs begin after the preset or scheduled times and can continue until early hours of the morning. There was no way of saying when the festivities officially ended even though, based on rituals, one could identify when all cultural and religious ceremonies were completed.

Today people in urban areas cull the conventionally exaggerated nature of social activities to adhere to timetables given by venue managers. This has largely been the cause of many such functions turning into choreographed events where even performances by nachaniya or other traditional musical groups are subjected to time restrictions. Even when functions are based in homes, people need to be mindful of noise restrictions which require functions to conclude by specific times. Rural-based events may also adhere to time limits simply because of the convenience of guests wanting to leave after the main programs are concluded. Lifestyle changes are the main reasons behind these shifts as people are no longer predominantly farmers or farm workers but wage earners who must be at work the following day. Pundit Prasad shares other factors for some of these changes:

There have been a lot of changes. Some of these changes have come about because of the pressures faced by our people. For example, we cannot continue with the performance of bhajans and kirtans all night, like we used to do in the past. Before we used to have weddings during the night but increasingly people are choosing day weddings because of the fear of house break-ins during these times. A lot of robberies are now evident in the country and the fear of these is preventing people from carrying out practices like before. In desperation we have had to change because of all these fears. Now we also cannot play the instruments after 10 or 11 pm so we have had to change our practices for the safety of our people. Day marriages are better because people are less fearful of leaving their homes unattended (Prasad P. A., 2017).

LN performances were performed differently in terms of time when Johnny first became a nachaniya. Wedding ceremonies were night events, with celebrations lasting entire nights and into the following day. Johnny narrates:

After the wedding ceremony was concluded and the bride goes inside the house that was when the play performance commences. Sometimes the play begins at around 11 or 12 at night. The play finishes at about 6. Everybody then goes to take a rest, freshen up and eat. Maybe sleep for an hour. Then at 9 am another nachaniya gets ready; gets dressed up again, that is, wear the lahanga and blouse, apply make-up, then singing and music restarts. We danced and accompanied married couple on the return trip, arriving sometimes at 12 or in the afternoon and that is when you finished the performance. I would not be home for two days. I would pack my bags and go and only return on the third day (Johnny-Rafiq, 2017).

Johnny and Rafiq incorporated some aspects of theatre performance into their naach, after nautanki performances diminished. As reflected in the performance being analysed here, they are conversing and narrating short stories based on audience members or groom and bride's relatives.

Performers:



*Figure 20 Johnny awaits in the background standing with musicians as Rafiq moves upstage to perform. (Source: Johnny's Collection)*

Rafiq and Johnny are dressed in *ghagra choli*. Both performers are wearing an old style of attire with long sleeved blouses and lahanga that cover even their ankles in obedience to traditions of IndoFijian female dressing codes. Johnny is wearing a multi-coloured lahanga and a mainly black blouse with shades of red and blue in it. Both performers have applied conspicuous amounts of make-up.

The material Johnny has used for the blouse is shiny and glitters in the stage decoration lights. Johnny has shades of red on both cheeks. A wig is set on his head on which there is a crown, one of many that Johnny himself makes. The costumes they wear are designed and sewn by Johnny. Several strings of fake pearls hang from his neck. A two-inch-wide golden chain is wrapped around Johnny's waist and ghungru on both ankles. Johnny is wearing large silver earrings and a hibiscus flower is inserted over left ear.



Figure 21 Rafiq on center stage, performing. (Source: Johnny's Collection)

Rafiq's attire includes a pink lahanga and a long-sleeved pink blouse. The portion of hand uncovered by sleeves are lined with bangles. Rafiq wears a large nose ring, a wig and head ornament that is designed as three chains. The middle chain is placed in the centre of the

head which leaves the other two chains to dangle on either side. He has a hibiscus flower inserted over right ear. Rafiq has henna designs on both palms which IndoFijian women mainly do for celebratory occasions. Rafiq's blouse is made from plain pink material and he has a series of multi-coloured ten-inch-long woven strings attached to a belt wrapped around his waist. Johnny showed me a few of these during the interview and added 'this is the belt for the hip. In this dance you need anything that dangles. Because it swings, it creates more movement' (Johnny-Rafiq, 2017).

Both performers have veils attached to their wigs. Since traditionally IndoFijian women were expected to have long hair that was mainly plaited, Johnny and Rafiq are wearing wigs that resemble this feature. A middle point on an edge of the veil is pinned to the plait, allowing veil to suspend behind them. This look is an emulation of rustic female character looks from 1980s Bollywood movies, the period in they became LN performers. Clearly, film culture continues to influence their fashion choice.

Performance<sup>80</sup>:

**Rafiq:**

*Dhulwa ke ek* A friend of the Palm of left hand covers the ear and the right  
*friend humse bole* groom's, the poor hand is placed across the tummy.

*bichara,* fellow said to me,

*Tum nahi worry* You do not worry He is moving in a circular pathway within the  
*karo tumme hum* about anything, I will performance space which extends from  
*ghare lai jaega.* take you home. where the musicians are seated all the way to

the first line of benches where guests are being served food. While moving around Rafiq also moves backwards until he stands beside Johnny who also takes a few steps away from the musicians so that they are both standing around the centre of the stage. Johnny places both hands on his hips and

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<sup>80</sup> A parallel transcription of performance is provided here because of the interactive nature of the performance. Johnny and Rafiq sing, converse (with each other and the audience) and dance unlike other nachaniya who mostly just sing and dance.



stands facing the audiences. Rafiq has since moved his left hand to form a fist that is used to rest his chin while the right hand remains in its former position. They both face the crowd that is seated on their right.

<i>Hum bola pahile</i>	I first asked him ‘Are	When Rafiq starts speaking again his left
<i>‘Tum singal hai?’</i>	you single?’	hand moves back to the ear.
<i>Toh bole ‘hum</i>	Then he said, ‘I am	
<i>khali sora saal ke</i>	only sixteen years	
<i>hai.’</i>	old.’	

Rafiq’s gesture of placing his hand over the ear is a sign of shyness, indicating bashfulness in discussing his encounter with a man. This movement is itself feminine and, like everything else Rafiq performs on the stage, reflects stereotypical female behaviour, especially the Bollywood version of it. Their ability in embodying such femininity draws attention to LN ‘as a privileged space for performing gender-a place in which gender is constituted in a way that is particularly visceral, emotional, passionate and, potentially, strongly felt and “real”’ (Morcom, 2013, p. 100). Rafiq’s performance appeals to audiences and his words generate humour because, despite the attire and feminised movements, the body and gender contradiction is obvious. The success of Rafiq’s performance relies on the audience being able to relate to an interaction between two individuals from opposite sexes on heterosexist foundations. He tries to narrate an incident between himself as a female and a young man who is allegedly interested in him. Rafiq’s question about the young man’s relationship or marital status ‘*tum singal hai?* (are you single?)’, is aimed at giving the conversation a romantic appeal as this question marks the beginning of a proposal. The appeal of this incident is twofold. Firstly, the audience would find a public exchange of conversation that has romantic undertones, entertaining. This is simply because such themes are rarely discussed openly, least of all in public domains. The second, more fascinating factor, is the potentially subversive attributes it embodies. If Rafiq’s embodiment of femininity is successful than the audience are presumably witnessing a woman and a man involved in a romantic discourse. An added level of pleasure is gained from the supposed age difference between the characters, which for IndoFijian contexts is highly intriguing. On the other hand, if the

audience notes the body/gender contradiction and they perceive Rafiq as transgender, then a different form of romantic encounter is being publicly displayed. This form, however, is neither socially sanctioned nor officially accepted. Hence, it is subversive but still permissible on the stage where it becomes interpreted as *just humour*. This scenario would, nonetheless, have wider social ramifications if audiences were to meet Rafiq outside the performance space. In daily life encounters, Rafiq is constantly identified as gender liminal, even when dressed in hegemonic male attire, owing to his feminine appearance and mannerisms, and for this he is at times subjected to verbal abuse. Johnny shares that they have both been exposed to teasing and derogatory comments in public settings like the market or in a bus, even when they were not in their nachaniya attire. The actual conversation we had on the topic was as follows:

Johnny: They have sworn at us so many times. We have been sworn at while walking on the street.

Vicky: Have you ever been attacked? Did anyone ever try to physically attack you?

Johnny: No.

Rafiq: People have said a lot of things but nothing like that.

Johnny: When we go to town, when we get onto the bus the iTaukei shout, the IndoFijians say, 'there goes the gandui'. They call us 'gandui'...jeering at us you see. Even until yesterday someone jeered at Rafiq in town, a woman. And Rafiq really gave her a telling off. Imagine, **even until yesterday**.

Rafiq: Yes, you cannot keep tolerating it especially when people start to get extremely irritating. You have to say at least something. Well, do not swear back at them, explain it nicely. That lady called me yesterday, so I went to her. She said I want to get a performance from you guys on Saturday'. I told her 'if you want a dance then you need to come home'. Then she lost it saying, 'you guys are finished you cannot dance anymore'. Now anyone in that situation will feel angry. I told her 'do not judge me like this'. I said 'place me beside yourself and compare, what is the difference between us? Just as you are so am I'. I was so angry but then I made sure I told her 'you can sell yourself if you want but do not try that on me'.

Vicky: You cannot tolerate this all the time?

Rafiq: Yeah, sometimes it just gets too much and then we have to say at least something. Now when we walk about in town people say so many things, some laugh and make fun, but I do not mind. I just keep walking but yes when someone goes too far then you will have to do something.

(Johnny-Rafiq, 2017)

What stood out to me were Johnny's words, 'Imagine, even until yesterday'. While indicating that encountering abuse was an ongoing experience, he still seemed surprised by it. Johnny and Rafiq are renowned nachaniya, and those who know them are aware of their liminal gender identity. It is rather disappointing to note that despite this being public knowledge, some people would still bother to create issues about it. More astounding is the fact that it happens in those social contexts in which Johnny and Rafiq have always been and will continue to be constantly visible. Disregard for their age and elderly status by those teasing them, indicates that there are people who deem failure to embody sanctioned gender sufficient justification to suspend moral codes on treatment of elders.

Performance – continued:

<i>Hamar friend</i>	My friend Sales	He then makes a complete turn by moving
<i>Salesh ostrelia</i>	Australia...	around in a circle and lifts his right hand up.
<i>wala...</i>		The right hand and left hand both move to the
		left side of the blouse as Rafiq completes the
		turn...

<i>Saleshwa paisa</i>	Salesh gave me some	As Rafiq says these lines, his left hand is pulling
<i>daike bole</i>	money and told me to	onto the blouse to create a gap between the
<i>wespec benk me</i>	place it in Westpac	blouse and the body. The right hand then
<i>rakh lo.</i>	Bank.	places a note (money) into this gap.

**Johnny:**

<i>Benkwa toh</i>	But the bank has	Looks at Rafiq and states this but Rafiq
<i>band hoige re.</i>	closed.	continues to face the crowd.

**Rafiq:**

<i>Tab hum bola</i>	Then I asked him ‘what	Two fingers of the right hand are still visibly
<i>wespac koi tud</i>	if someone breaks into	holding the note inside the blouse and the left
<i>dai tab?</i>	the bank?’	hand moves to the ear again as Rafiq speaks.
<i>Toh bole nahi</i>	Then he said do not	The right hand remains in the same position by
<i>worī karo hum</i>	worry because I will	the time these lines are completed and then
<i>hai sikuriti gaad.</i>	stand as the security	Rafiq brings left hand away from the ear and
	guard.	places it flat on his tummy. Rafiq continuously
		smiles shyly and shakes head gracefully while
		speaking these lines. He faces the crowd most
		of the time.

**Johnny:**

<i>Arreh Bhagwan.</i>	Oh God.	Johnny faces the musicians preparing to begin
		singing the next song.

Rafiq placing money in his blouse is a duplication of this behaviour from older, rural females. Placing money in a knot of a handkerchief and inserting it in the blouse was common practice. Rafiq could have left the money with the musicians but he chooses this act deliberately. This receives some laughter from the audience because of individuals locating humour in Rafiq’s parody of female behaviour in such detail. They may also be laughing at a practice, uncommon in urban settings.

Additionally, the verbal exchange between Rafiq and Johnny is based on some colloquial phrases. For instance, Rafiq’s reference to his blouse as ‘*wespac* (Westpac)’ is not coincidental. It is selected from everyday conversations when people commonly referred to that spot as Westpac Bank in jest. Further humour is generated by hinting to a bank break-in, which here entails getting into the blouse. The reference to physical contact of a sexual nature is certainly implied, therefore, the use of subversion as entertainment becomes evident. An extrapolation to gender roles is made when the other character in the story, Rafiq, is narrating says ‘do not worry because I will stand as the security guard’. The male has automatically taken responsibility for protecting the female, which contextually is Rafiq. Evidently, the *nachaniya* makes a claim on femininity in several ways and these performative acts and discourses ultimately represent counter narratives to the gender hegemony. It must be noted,

however, that there is a possibility of appropriating these subversive performances as fun, hence, cancelling their performative potential. This can be done by arguing that such behaviour only belongs to socially negligible categories. Marking transgressive performances as frivolity is a usual justification for emphasising adherence to sanctioned behaviour. Harris (2004, p. 22) states:

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.

In theory, Rafiq and Johnny challenge notions of internalised gender by performing a gender identity that does not conform to that which is deemed normative for their bodies. They inadvertently problematise gender binaries by performing beyond expectations and revealing the fictitious construct that is gender. Their overt displays of subversion create spaces for a reconceptualization of what has always been accepted as natural.

**Rafiq:**

<i>Humlog ke lalli</i> <i>humlog ke</i> <i>ekdam bhool</i> <i>ge ostrelia jae</i> <i>ke.</i> <i>Hum idhar se</i> <i>bola lalli 'Ram</i> <i>Ram,'</i> <i>Toh udhar se</i> <i>bole 'halo'.</i>	My dear friend has completely forgotten me since she moved to Australia. I said from this side ‘Ram Ram’. She said from that side ‘hello’. 	Stands with hands folded when this part begins but then as Rafiq speaks about talking to someone on the phone in Australia, he takes the left hand and places the palms near the left ear with the thumb and small finger stretched outwards in opposite directions to symbolise a phone call. When Rafiq says the words ‘hello’ it is spoken like someone with an English accent. The humour is in the fact that an IndoFijian woman is putting on an accent because she lives in Australia.
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**Johnny:**

<i>Abh Janae</i> <i>Hindustani</i>	Seems like she does not speak	Johnny stands facing the crowd with both palms holding each other at mid body height. It is a respectful posture.
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*baat nahi kare Hindustani any*  
*Janae. more.*

**Rafiq:**

*Dhanyawad* I appreciate the Rafiq holds the note at arm's length, looks at it,  
*hai ki aap dono* gift of ten dollars shows it to the crowd and places it inside the left  
*ne milkar bheja* you two have sent side of the blouse.  
*dus dollar* to us.  
*hamar paas.*

This portion of performance appeals to another feature of IndoFijian reality. It relates to diasporic IndoFijians in Australia and New Zealand. Most families can now claim to have relations overseas. In important functions, like weddings and funerals, this information is often highlighted as a mark of prestige and status. Rafiq impersonates someone who is an overseas guest who gifts him ten dollars in appreciation for his performance. Many performers who sing and dance habitually mention names of gift-givers in gratitude.

**Overall Comments:**

Nowadays, performances last for around an hour and a half and feature similar role-playing conversations about family members and guests. The conversations serve as interludes to song performances that cover themes of celebration, happiness, marriage and life. Currently, Rafiq leads the dancing, after Johnny started concentrating on singing after turning 76. Johnny still organises all the performances, sews costumes, makes jewellery and most importantly sings for the dancer, in complete *nachaniya* attire. The guru-chela (teacher-student) relationship between them has evolved to the point that they not only share performance stages but live together also. After interviewing them and then witnessing their performance, I noted that the *lahanga* and stage have a transformative effect on these individuals. Rafiq, for instance, who is normally reserved and quiet, gains effervescence when he dons the *lahanga* and enters a stage. Johnny appeared confident and in-charge both on-stage and for the interview. He confessed that age had reduced certain physical abilities but claimed that his enthusiasm for performing was still the same, if not more.

## **Kushwa's Rural Labasa Performance**

### **Overview:**

Kushwa is undoubtedly the most expressive of all performers I interviewed or recorded. It was his experience and confidence that led him into embodying a significant number of improvisations while performing. Kushwa's performance is energetic and he also has many moments of direct contact or interaction with audiences. He maintains a unity with the performance space which is made evident in the fluidity with which he moves to the edges and then beyond this space. In dance Kushwa appears most feminine. The grace, skill and passion he displays seem to naturally flow out of him, as Morcom notes with similar dances, 'a core femininity and female subjectivity and a sense of the true inner feminine self' (2013, p. 100). By moving his body in this hyperfeminine, emotionally invested and even seductive manner, he materialises femininity that is staged on and connected to his body, and 'hence appears to be as natural as if the body itself were female'.

### **Context:**

The setting is a shed erected in a compound of an IndoFijian bride's home in a cane farming settlement. However, being close to a town centre has enabled this village's inhabitants to work in occupations unrelated to farming. This is significant because diversification from farming means interactions with other influences, unavailable to earlier settlers in this area, whose lives revolved around their farms, religion and cultural events. The area has several community-owned schools and temples, which indicate a strong functioning society. Kushwa's emergence and success as a nachaniya from this village, with its deep cultural roots, is not only interesting but also admirable as it suggests something of Kushwa's commitment to his liminal identity.

The audience composition is typical of any rural or semi-rural wedding. The operation of gendered spaces is apparent as men and women sit separately, despite the absence of a physical divide. Women are predominantly dressed in sari, salwar kameez or lahanga choli. In the male section, there is further subdivision between those seated on the ground around kava basins and those on benches, presumably non-kava consumers. The nachaniya is expected to perform in a small grass patch that falls between the male-female space.



Figure 22 Kushwa interacts with an audience member mid-performance. (Source: Kushwa's Collection)

#### Performer:

Kushwa is wearing an orange ghagra choli<sup>81</sup>. While the lahanga's length reaches his ankles and even touches the ground, the blouse ends immediately after the padded chest area. This leaves a portion of the torso exposed and Kushwa's belly protrudes ostensibly. His hair is tied into a bun and is held together by an ornament that resembles a thick necklace. There are bangles on both wrists and large earrings and a noticeable nose ring. Kushwa wears matching orange long pants under the lahanga, which shows every time he twirls quickly, raising the lahanga.

#### Performance:

Kushwa chooses an item<sup>82</sup> song here that features in a 1999 movie *Shool* (Thorn). The on-screen visualisation was filmed using Shilpa Shetty, a Bollywood actress widely acknowledged for her on-screen sex appeal. The film song's setting is a villain's wedding where an item girl dances, surrounded by a horde of male admirers who accompany her by reacting lewdly to

<sup>81</sup> A combination of blouse and lahanga.

<sup>82</sup> An appealing, upbeat, and often sexually provocative music and dance sequence picturised on female(s) performers, called item girls, in Bollywood movies.



this female's moves. They seem aroused and bawdy by the allure of the dancer and her proximity to them. Their eyes are seen gazing at her exposed torso or her face. Kushwa's performance borrows heavily from this visualisation, but without male support dancers. There are also noticeable parallels between Shilpa's and Kushwa's appearances such as the nose ring<sup>83</sup>, even though Kushwa wears a larger one.



Figure 23 Kushwa performing at a Labasa wedding. He constantly moved into the crowd of males seated to his left. (Source: Kushwa's Collection)

Kushwa performs to *Main Aayi Hun* (I Have Come...):

*Kushwa's left hand is held across the chest and the right hand is held across the hip. He is facing a camera and making expressions at it which includes lip syncing song's lyrics. With musical beats Kushwa moves the hand across the chest left and right a few times. The neck moves in the opposite direction to the hand. A change in beat and Kushwa makes a quick half turn, right leg moves forward and left leg back. The body is positioned in an angle while the left hand is lifted above the head from near the left ear and a finger touches the head.*

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<sup>83</sup> This is important because a nose ring is only rarely worn by IndoFijian females. Many women do not even get their noses pierced. Kushwa's decision to wear it is his attempt to emulate the appearance of the movie performer.

*The right hand is placed on the hip and followed by kamar matkae<sup>84</sup> or kamar hila<sup>85</sup> or thumka. Then Kushwa takes long graceful step away from the camera. Once he reaches a certain spot, Kushwa turns around quickly and with the right foot firmly on the ground, he elevates the left foot slightly. Kushwa lifts one hand to the hip level and the other to the head level and wiggles them to the left side twice. Then he walks towards the audience again with hands raised and flying. There are a few quick full body twirls making the lahanga flare up while both hands are thrown outwards at the head level and the wrists are jerked every time the hands extend fully. Kushwa continues this full body twirling several times before turning onto an audience member seated near the performance space and extends his hands to him invitingly.*

*Kushwa walks while simulating thumka to another audience member and throws an edge of his lahanga over his head. This invites a loud cheer which momentarily drowns out the music. Kushwa's eyes widen as if in excitement and he pulls the lahanga and walks away from that man. In that time, the man Kushwa had earlier picked on runs away from where he was sitting as the area falls around the edge of the audience; a zone Kushwa often chooses people from. Kushwa turns towards the man as he is running away and tries to touch him with his lahanga by pushing it towards him. Kushwa then walks a few steps and stands with one hand placed on the hip. He raises the left hand and points to himself as the song iterates 'my age now is seventeen'. He is looking at someone directly while saying this and appears to be implying that his age actually is, seventeen. Kushwa then moves a few steps back while throwing hands outward in front. He raises both palms upwards towards the ceiling as the song utters the word 'jhabḍa' (ceiling).*

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<sup>84</sup> Hip rotation.

<sup>85</sup> Hip shaking.

*Kushwa then lifts the right hand straight up from the shoulder and brings the other hand to touch the mid-section of his torso. He wiggles the torso a few times and then suddenly seeing someone else that could be the next target, he moves to another side while looking directly at that person. Finding a pole in the way he places a hand on it and slides close to it while keeping his eyes on that person. He nudges and nods his head a few times in that person's direction and flicks the left hand several times motioning a flying kiss. He then quickly withdraws from the pole and returns to the opposite end of dance space. Once at the edge he sits halfway down and performs few thumka before turning around and doing the same action several times in another direction. This time he picks someone seated deeper in the audience and while maintaining eye contact with that person directs a few thumka towards him. The movement is concluded with a suggestive nod that implies an invitation. A smile is consistent on Kushwa's face throughout.*

*He moves to the front edge of dance space and as the words for the next verse begin he steps backwards rapidly swinging arms in front of himself.*

*Reaching the end of the dance space, Kushwa halts and brings the right arm out from the right side while wiggling it followed by the right limb. Similar movement is repeated on the other side. Kushwa then wiggles the chest and torso area while both hands are extended fully and placed on thighs. The eyes are fixed ahead. Kushwa then takes a few steps forward and brings the left pointer finger out while raising the left hand to the mouth and rotates the finger in a horizontal circular movement which is often a hand sign for 'all' as the song narrates. The hip is swung forward and backward gently as this hand movement is made and Kushwa's eyes focus on someone in the audience.*

*Kushwa then performs a few quick twirls making the lahanga rise and rapidly extends hands outwards as the wrists are jerked every time the hands extend fully. Kushwa continues this twirling of the entire body several times and then in preparation for the next verse he concludes this movement with the right hand placed on the right side of the head and the left hand placed on the hip and shakes the hip in quick succession. Kushwa concurrently bites on his lower lip and strains his eyes indicating pleasure. As the crowd cheers, he smiles and dashes to front of dance space with both hands raised to head level like karate chops.*

*Kushwa again withdraws from the front and for the first-time he picks on a female audience member sitting on a bench closeby. Kushwa approaches the woman gently, and with both hands softly touches the sides of her face. Loud cheers are heard from the crowd. Kushwa again enters the dance space and continues to twirl and wiggle performing thumka. Eyes continue to shine and search the crowd for the next target. A few shrugs of the shoulders are added in sync with musical beats. Kushwa constantly reverts to the movement of directing thumka at specific individuals and this movement is repeated several times in different directions. In between these movements he steps forward and backward to get into position and the steps are accompanied by circular hand gestures with fully extended hands. A new movement is introduced when Kushwa holds a pole with one hand while stands at arm's length and wiggles the buttocks. This short series of movements resemble those of a pole dancer and Kushwa performs this twice during the entire performance. He then for the second-time performs while staring directly at a camera.*

*At the beginning of next verse Kushwa again places and hastily removes his lahanga from the head of a man seated nearby. The crowd suddenly livens up after going slightly quiet when Kushwa's*

*moves had become repetitive. As the crowd cheers, Kushwa walks away to the centre of dance space and turns quickly again and starts to dance down the same path to the front. This time he stops near another man whose head is at the level of Kushwa's thigh. Kushwa lifts his lahanga to the knee level, bends the knees slightly to bring his hips closer to the man and then commences to shake the hips rapidly close to the man's head. He withdraws quickly as the crowd cheers and begins another set of movements.*

*The last verse of the song sees many of the movements repeated dominated by full body twirling with extended hands and quick wrist jerks.*

*Kushwa concludes the performance by repeatedly performing thumkas facing various directions. This is done quite rapidly as the tempo of the music rises to achieve a flourishing end.*

There are several points of interest in this performance. Firstly, Kushwa seems to engage significantly more with his audience than other nachaniya I interviewed. It was also interesting to note that audiences reacted with laughter when Kushwa interacted with individuals. Several female audience members only looked directly at Kushwa when he was performing some distance away from them, but when Kushwa drew near to them, they would smile and look away until Kushwa withdrew. This is to avert any direct attention from Kushwa who commonly picks on individuals. Some male audiences also watch the performance by keeping their heads pointed in a different angle to the performance and just turning their eyes to see Kushwa dance. This is an effort to avoid being made fun of in the circle of friends who could interpret such provision of attention as a liking for such characters or even sexual attraction since it was common for nachaniya to be approached for sex after performances.

Hanna (1988, p. 59) claims, generally 'the persona of the beautiful and seductive male dancer...is not only an overt symbol of alluring female sexuality, but also a veiled symbol of transvestism and secret homosexuality'. Kushwa's act of touching an unknown woman randomly is also a noteworthy occurrence. It is extremely unorthodox for women to be touched publicly by unknown males. The fact that Kushwa's act of establishing physical contact with an unrelated female receives cheers rather than angry rebuke, proves a

significant point. Kushwa is not perceived as a man and this liminal state allows Kushwa to transcend certain social boundaries without repercussions. Since this is true, then the audience's reaction of non-anger indicates the erosion of the gender binary, since Kushwa's current identity attains recognition or acknowledgement in a fully-fledged gendered social scene. It can be argued that it is only the performance scenario that makes this possible. However, there are other IndoFijian performances, like dancing to lokgeet, which are informal in nature but even in these, individuals are extremely alert about who they can approach and engage with, even playfully. Gender and familial links are closely followed especially in social gatherings like weddings.

Kushwa's movements can be classed as feminine and at times seductive, as such moves are performed by female film actresses. While in the interview Kushwa claims to choreograph his own dances, it is clear from the analysis of some of his performances that these are renditions of foundational Bollywood movements like torso wiggling, steps, hand gestures and, most particularly in Kushwa's case, eye and facial movement. Kushwa's movements are graceful and not forceful like masculine performances. He also avoids movements like pelvic thrusts and substitutes thrusts with wiggles. His hairless chest, torso and feet (which are exposed in other performances) give evidence of personal grooming of a nature that is predominantly done by females. However, Kushwa's confidence in giving direct eye contact and non-hesitant performance create the awareness that he is portraying that identity without fear or shame; such confidence was conspicuously missing in the performances by younger performers like Ashley and Ashwariya. Kushwa is clearly a nachaniya from the second category as he performs common moves from older nachaniya but with a hyperfeminine embodiment.

### **Bijuriya Diwali<sup>86</sup> Naach**

Context:

The performance's setting is an openly accessible tent at Tavua Market. After Bijuriya performs lokgeet, he also performs a dance to recorded music. The audience comprises mostly of IndoFijian females.

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<sup>86</sup> Diwali is the most important religious festival for Hindus in Fiji. While the inclusion of Bijuriya's performances is understandable because LN is now performed in more contexts than just weddings, what is surprising is the choice of song for the performance for a Diwali function.

Bijuriya performs to *Kaddu Katega toh Sabme Batega*<sup>87</sup> (Once Sliced the Pumpkin will be Shared with All) from 2013 movie *R...Rajkumar* (Prince). The visualisation features two main female dancers, whose sexual attractiveness is emphasised with seductive dressing and eroticised dance movement. They are supported by female backup dancers emulating the same movements. This song's visualisation begins with a group of transgender individuals running onto the dance set. They reappear in the frame a few times during the song. Representation of transgender people in mainstream movies are rare, but this surely influences Bijuriya's choice of the song. Nachaniya select such songs for their beats and rhythm that support an energised performance and that also contain sexual undertones. This song's lyrics feature an element of double meaning. For example, the implied meaning of *Kaddu Katega...* is that after defloration one will be available for sex to all. While on semantic value the song clearly does not belong to a religious festival, its musical features make it valuable in adding energy to a celebration.

Performer:



Figure 24 Bijuriya Performing for event marking Diwali at Tavua Market. (Source: Bijuriya's Collection)

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<sup>87</sup> Lyrics in English: Appendix 2.

Bijuriya is wearing a yellow blouse that covers the upper body from the shoulder to the lower sternum. The blouse is padded to give the semblance of breasts. The lahanga is also worn below the navel and is wrapped around the pelvis. This leaves a large portion of abdominal area exposed and Bijuriya constantly engages this during his performance. Bijuriya is also wearing a colourful flared lahanga which is yellow with spots of red, green and orange. A belt with bells is tied to his waist. These chime because Bijuriya moves his hips quite often.

Performance:

*Stage is vacant while recorded music plays. Bijuriya enters, as words commence, with a medium sized pumpkin held in left-hand and supported by left hip. He enters doing thumka and the right arm flaying gracefully. Turns towards audience and raises pumpkin above head. Bijuriya twirls few times with the pumpkin held up by both hands. With musical interlude, Bijuriya lays the pumpkin on-stage. He then removes a veil that was wrapped around his neck and tucked into lahanga. The veil is also flung to the stage and Bijuriya picks up momentum.*

*Bijuriya's movements rely considerably on turning around on his feet with hands rising and moving flexibly to and music. Another routine includes joining both hands in front of the hip and combining this with pelvic thrusts. With every thrust the hands move a few inches higher.*

*Bijuriya also constantly does thumka with one hand on hip.*

*Much of the movement is repetitive but some new ones are noted. Sometimes Bijuriya uses his palms to form an arrow pointing down right beneath the area where the blouse ends. This hand movement is accompanied by raising and falling of chest simulating deep sensual breathing. Bijuriya begins lip syncing. Similar movements from earlier on continues, thumka, turning around on feet. There is a constant smile on his face. Bijuriya looks at audience but does not interact with anyone. Later in the performance, Bijuriya moves around stepping to all the ends of the performance space. This is done using many long steps which accompanied by a hand raised above the head and another spread outward, a few inches from the thigh. Movement is maintained on the*



*hips and abdomen with many jerks and rotations. There are quick turns in almost all directions but Bijuriya mostly faces the audience.*

*Bijuriya begins lip syncing. Similar movements from earlier on continues, but with the addition of a few new movements. One movement includes Bijuriya holding edges of the lahanga and flaring it or rubbing his lower limbs seductively. Another movement includes rotating the head while keeping neck steady and smiling ostensibly. Hands are brought to the chest level with fingers forming hooks, are locked and unlocked alternating one hand on top and then the other. With all these movements, hip jerks and abdominal wiggling is constant.*

Unlike Kushwa, Bijuriya remains within the performing area and does not enter anyone's personal space. While the song lyrics are seductive, Bijuriya's movements are rather restrained or not heavily eroticised. His constant pelvic jerks and emphasis on abdominal wiggling resonate with film item songs. However, Bijuriya does not concentrate a lot of action on his buttocks or chest area. He mostly faces the crowd, which prevents the audience from paying attention to his back which is completely exposed except for a strap that holds the blouse together. There are several reasons why Bijuriya dances less seductively even though the lyrics allow for more subversive embodiments. Bijuriya is mindful of the context. Hanna (1988, p. 18) identifies that in most settings 'dancing often generates electricity and *reflection* about the performance that *lingers long afterwards*' (emphasis added). Firstly, the performance is in Bijuriya's home town and most of the audience and passers-by know him. Bijuriya revealed during the interview that he maintains a level of respectful behaviour within his village and neighbourhood. Secondly, the context of Diwali celebration places some restrictions that curtail seductive movements as other community members would be part of the audience. What they witness in the performance can have a bearing on their perception of IndoFijian identity itself.

### **Aishwariya's Wedding Dance**

Context:

The context is the same as Kushwa's performance above since Aishwariya performed with Kushwa as his protégé. Aishwariya belongs to the third category of nachaniya who are aged

below thirty years and have only a few years of performing experience. They only perform to Bollywood music.



*Figure 25 Aishwariya performing in Vunika Wedding. Also note women are seated to the left and men on the right of nachaniya. (Source: Kushwa's Collection)*

#### Performer:

Aishwariya is physically very flexible as indicated by his movements. His youth and petite built are key to this. Aishwariya has chosen to wear a ghagra choli. The blouse is bright orange and is made from material that catches the light and shines. The lahanga is light blueish and has red lower end border. The lahanga's length reaches Aishwariya's ankles. Unlike Kushwa, Aishwariya does not wear matching long trousers underneath. His movements are energetic and usually incorporate the entire body in swift coordinated routines, but the lahanga hardly rises higher than his knees as the lahanga is long and heavy. He is wearing bangles, a necklace, earrings, and a head ornament. All items Aishwariya wears are typical female adornments, most of which female guests at the wedding are wearing. One of the most important items in Aishwariya's attire is the veil, clipped to his hair. The veil hangs from the point where it is hinged and allowed to sway and complement Aishwariya's dance movements. The veil, traditionally a mark of IndoFijian femininity and subservience, is seen here on the biological

body which women have always been compared against. Based on preexisting, socially constructed ideals, cross gender comparisons have always rendered women in a subservient position to be controlled and dominated. The purdah is the outward sign of this oppressive practice as women would be expected to cover up and veil themselves from unknown gazes. This was also used as a sign of compulsory respect females had to bestow on their husbands and in-laws. Traditionally this practice of covering up has been unquestionably abided by and enforced as women's dressing has always been controlled under the guise that it was a sign of decency and chastity. While growing up I personally witnessed hasty retreats or quick dashes by females to retrieve their veils when elders or unknown men came into proximity. Such acts, while principally regarded as indications of cultural values, were also oppressive because these were unrelentingly prescribed, and transgression was not treated lightly by patriarchal authorities. Thus, when the veil is adorned on a male body, it diminishes the authority that underwrites these conventions. Fisher-Lichte (2005, p. 174) points out 'when oppositions dissolve into one another our attention focuses on the transition from one state to the next. The space between opposites opens up; the in-between thus becomes a preferred category. Again and again we have seen that the aesthetic experience enabled by the performances can primarily be described as liminal experience, capable of transforming the experiencing subject. Evidently, this type of aesthetic experience is of pivotal importance to the aesthetics of the performative...'. Aishwariya's appearance is as performative as his actions, as it helps rewrite gender ideologies or at least problematise hegemonic identities. All nachaniya as 'experiencing subjects' not only embody femininity on-stage but through the stage develop the confidence to live an alternate identity beyond the performance context. Aishwariya dances to *Aagre ka Ghagra*<sup>88</sup> (Skirt from Agra) a 2009 movie song. The actress's seductive performance in this song's visualisation makes this an item song, and these are nachaniyas' popular choices. The song lyrics do not rely on sexual references or double meanings, but they bring into focus feminine beauty in an intimate context. Making the ghagra (skirt) as the point of reference, the song draws attention to the person in the ghagra as one whose beauty is worth admiration. Hence Aishwariya's song choice is interesting because while listening to the song one will note the female attire on a non-female body. One will have to suppress their perception of gendered dressing codes to accept this performance

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<sup>88</sup> Lyrics in English: Appendix 3.

in a traditional social event like a wedding. On the other hand, some may use this contrast as a point of enjoyment. An injection of fantasy, with temporary engagement with that which is taboo or forbidden, is often pleasurable.

#### Performance:

Aishwariya's performance is as feminine as his appearance. The sets of movement, all twirls, turns and steps are easily relatable to IndoFijian feminine mannerisms. His performance lacks those movements that may have been construed as masculine. One obvious absence from Aishwariya's movements is the use of pelvic thrusts that were common in Bijuriya and Monto's performances. Aishwariya's dance consists principally of foot movements and thumka. He frolics on different spots for much of the performance, seldom placing both feet firmly on the ground.

*The performance begins with Aishwariya tapping the ground with his left foot continuously while the left side hip is protruded as both hands rise to the face level with open palms forming circular movements. Moves the right hand to the right ear and covers it while the left hand moves to the protruded hip and forms sweeping signs over it as the hip rotates with music. Sometimes Aishwariya also moves both hands up and down the front of the body while wiggling the entire body from neck down to the chest and then to the hips and the feet in one swift uninterrupted move. This was done every time the song's lyrics announced the word jawani (youth) which also refers to sexual attractiveness or maturity. Aishwariya also often held one end of the odhani (veil) and swung it in front of himself. This was done everytime the song announced the words Reshmi rummal (silky handkerchief) with silk often seen as an erotic clothing material. The odhani was also held tight by two of its edges and moved right and left gracefully but to the beats of the song. Aishwariya also turned around several times while doing thumka and moving arms in circular movements. Sometimes Aishwariya also chose to move up or down the performance*

*space. This was always done while tapping a foot on the ground and rotating hips. Towards the end of the performance Aishwariya makes a series of twirls using both feet which made the lahanga flare outwards. Hands were kept at full extension, with graceful movements of wrists and fingers.*

Overall, Aishwariya's dance was lively and it was clear that he relied quite significantly on swift movement, speed and maintaining rhythm and sync with music. There was no improvisation in the form of approaching individuals or even giving direct eye contact to anyone. Aishwariya danced as if alone in the shed and it was his agility and energy that kept audiences attentive. The repetitive movement could have caused some reduction in interest, if the performance had not been a short one. As a new performer, Aishwariya is still working on confidence-building and is surely not in a place to engage with audiences as Kushwa does in his performances. The contrast between the two performers' styles is obvious.

### **Monto's Stage Show in Hamilton**

Context:

The performance is part of a stage show by singers and musicians formerly of Fiji. The audience comprises predominantly IndoFijians. Monto is introduced by Rani, his transgender friend. Rani enters the hall, walking through the centre aisle. He is dressed in a pink ghagra choli and is speaking through a microphone while walking. His lahanga gets caught under a chair or someone's feet, so he turns to a man seated right next to him and says:

*Tum hamar sange sab taem kahe lahanga* Why do you always play this game of  
*bhaja la kaam karta?* entangling my lahanga?

*Abhi hum chuye ga toh nahi bolna.* If I touch you now, then do not complain.

The second line, spoken as a caution, is understood as part of Rani's performance, as the audience roars out with laughter. If a man had pulled on an unknown female's lahanga in a such a manner, it would be highly transgressive. The fact that Rani delivers the lines in a slightly solicitous manner, adds to its overall effect of fascinating the audience. He continues his walk, saying:

I have an announcement to make.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Spoken in English.

It's very important so let me sit down.

He walks to the second row of chairs and turns swiftly. His walk is confident and forceful. The audience's audible giggles and gleeful shouts show that they are enjoying this. He puts a chair down before the stage. With his back to the audience, he bends down to release the lahanga stuck under the chair's foot.

*Fir bhaj ge.*

It's entangled again.

*Bahut bhajhe hai.*

It gets entangled often.

Thusfar, the lahanga has received significant attention. This is interesting, because the lahanga demarcates Rani from the rest of the audience. He is not the only one wearing a lahanga, but he surely is one who is conventionally not expected to wear it. His constant remarks about the lahanga draw attention to the fact that he is wearing one. It is a fact that is not being hidden but made obvious. He is also hinting at the non-normative status of his lahanga-clad presence, pointing out '*bahut bhajhe hai* (it gets entangled a lot)', which suggests that he is not in the habit of wearing a lahanga. A female voice from the audience questions '*Kitna lehanga pahina?* (How often do you wear skirts?)'. The question is meant to clarify how much experience Rani has of wearing lahanga. The tone of the questioning voice and accompanying giggles suggest that the question is not meant to condemn Rani but contribute to the humorous notion being implied. Nonetheless, the question and Rani's own remarks draw attention to the non-hegemonic display.

Rani sits on a chair and faces the audience. Legs are crossed under the lahanga. He asks the audience:

Are you ready for another performance?

Is that what you want?

(He dangles the microphone towards the audience expecting a response. He is not entirely happy with the intensity of the response, so he asks:)

*Kon khana nahi khais?*

Who has not eaten yet?

(Insinuating from the lack of energy in the response)

The next performer is my very close friend...my sister...my everything.

You must have seen her being very naughty on Police Ten Seven<sup>90</sup>.

Who has seen her on Police Ten Seven?

Okay, she needs to be punished.

(Brings in a little of the western concept of *kinky* sexual references) enroute

She is coming out now.

Please give it up for Monto Monika...

There is a loud cheering and clapping. As Rani pronounces the final words of the introduction, a song widely popular throughout the Pacific Islands, *Pate Pate* by New Zealand based group Te Vaka, begins. The auditorium goes dark as the song is softened out. A Bollywood song plays, that is picturized on the main female protagonist and titular character of the movie title *Bhaji Rao Mastani*. The song's title is *Deewani Mastani* (Crazy Madly). Only the first few lines of the song are played as Monto walks into the hall, through the centre aisle with two young females escorting him. As Monto moves closer to the stage, walking gracefully, he looks at the audience. The walk is both confident and seductive. This song is chosen as it narrates (in Marathi<sup>91</sup>) this walk, which represents Monto's entry into this space.

<i>Nabhatoon aali apsara</i> <sup>92</sup>	The fairy has come
<i>Ashi sundara</i>	Such beauty
<i>Saaz saazpuna</i>	With all the ornaments
<i>Aali aali aali aali..</i>	She's come, she's come..
<i>Kesa maathi maalala gajra</i>	With festoon in her hair
<i>Lokanchya najara</i>	With the eyes of the world
<i>Theel tichyauvar</i>	On her

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<sup>90</sup> Television series featuring NZ Police operations once showed Monto being pulled over for speeding enroute to a performance.

<sup>91</sup> The song was composed by Siddharth-Garima and much of the song is performed by Shreya Ghosal, a female. Music was provided by Sanjay Leela Bhansali who is also the movie's director. The initial part of the song is performed in Marathi (which is due to the setting of the story). The portion to which Monto walks to the stage is performed by Ganesh Chandanshive, a male singer, who in this case announces the arrival of an *apsara*.

<sup>92</sup> Derived from Sanskrit, the term refers to the female spirit of clouds and water.

<i>Aali aali..</i>	She's come..
<i>Duniya chi pyaari tu</i>	You're beloved to the world
<i>Aaga naari harnigey</i>	O deer-like woman
<i>Aaga raani sundaraa ha ha..</i>	O beautiful woman..
<i>Aali ho aali.</i>	You have come..

As the song fades a pre-recorded introduction for Monto announces: *Ladies and Gentlemen. The Sensational. The Dancing Queen. The Drag Queen. Ladies and Gentlemen...Monto Monika*. This brings into focus the potential of dance in the identity formation process of Monto. Hanna (1988, p. 28) elaborates on similar incidents: 'performers may surrender themselves to spectators' gaze or assert themselves before the gazes and thus manipulate the gazers who partake of fantasy worlds often denied them in real life'. In this instance Monto lays claim to the *woman* identity by publicly declaring himself as one.

#### The Performer:

Monto is wearing a skirt that shimmers and a colourful blouse that covers the area to the end of his ribcage, exposing a large abdominal area. This is noteworthy because if females wear this style of clothes they would be conventionally expected to cover up by wearing the skirt at a higher point or wearing a blouse that was longer. Even today people find it inappropriate and even offensive when a woman wears a kurta (blouse) that leaves a large portion of the abdomen and back, bare. If a female were to wear the clothes exactly as Monto did, even if for a performance, then they would be categorised as shameless or accused of being indecently attractive. It can be argued that Monto's role is necessitated due to social conventions that prevent IndoFijian women from publicly embodying such displays. However, if these representations are considered indecent or beneath social standards then why should they be allowed at all? How is permitting such embodiments on certain individuals and then marginalising them, better than proscribing these performances altogether? Undoubtedly, these performances are pressure release valves that allow for relief, even if temporarily, from the burden of constantly having to align to rigid matrices of expected behaviour. Simultaneously, Monto's actions are performative as they reveal the alternative possibilities of embodiment. The positive reactions from the audience also serve as performative acts that accredit Monto's appearance that falls beyond the binary embodiment. Thus, intentionally or unintentionally, a change has taken place, in that the ritual of performance has allowed for



the acknowledgment of the *other* as a recognisable identity. This is because while Monto may have been in a performance at that very moment, the fact that the same Monto appeared on a reality television show that the audience members witnessed gives Monto a presence beyond the stage. Rani, in the process of introducing Monto, also finds recognition since his own identity is acknowledged when people pay attention to Rani's presence and voice.

#### Performance:

Though the song is from a Bollywood film, much of the lyrics are in English. While it is arguable that this may represent a certain deterioration of Indian culture, Monto's choice in selecting this song illustrates the drive by some performers to modernise their performances for the benefit of younger audiences, who are unable to relate and engage enthusiastically with older dances to lokgeet. Dankworth (2014, p. 111) notes 'contemporary images' of performances can foster the creation of a 'collective sense of identity' and in due course sustain the possibility of having more performances in the future.



Figure 26 Monto performing a stage show in Hamilton. (Source: Monto's Collection)

*Monto faces the crowd and lip syncs the songs even though the singer's voice is feminine. Monto faces the crowd yet most movement is*

*focused on the buttocks. Monto prefers this movement, using it in many performances. There is a slight pause in dancing even though the music continues, as he fiddles with the string that holds up the lahanga. After managing to loosen the knot, Monto drops the skirt to the floor revealing a shorter skirt underneath, equally shiny.*

*Following a large cheer from the crowd that momentarily drowns out the music, Monto turns to one side, lifts a leg slightly from the floor and then violently shakes the hips and leg. For a moment, the movements are out of sync with the beats of the music. Both hands are raised on the side and move gracefully simultaneously, like hula dancers. Monto injects a high level of energy into the performance and excites the crowd. The cheering proves this.*

*Suddenly Monto jumps off the stage and runs down the aisle. It is apparent that this is still part of the performance.*

*While moving down the aisle Monto leans over a male audience member seated in first row and then swiftly runs to the back of the room. That area is well lit and is not covered by the colourful lights of the stage. For a moment Monto seems to have exited the atmosphere of the performance because these lights do not work effectively with his dressing.*

*Monto stands on a chair and does few thumka, then jumps off the chair and runs into a group of men standing at the back of the hall and performs a few moves near them. These are a few quick heaves of the chest, which is padded to resemble breasts.*

*It seems that the lighting in that area makes Monto's actions slightly ineffective, so he quickly runs towards the stage again but slows down in the aisle with slight flourishes of the hands to indicate that the performance is ongoing.*

*Monto reaches the second row of audience members where he stops, turns and in sync with the beats raises a leg slightly above the floor and shakes it repeatedly. This seems to be Monto's signature move for this*

*song. Monto also selects individuals in the front row and acts out the lyrics. Monto climbs on a vacant chair and flings away his hat. Someone from the audience flings it back to Monto, but he is unable to catch it.*

It is clear that this performance is not choreographed. Monto is not really following a rehearsed sequence but is improvising movements which mostly include interacting with the audience by approaching them. He attracts audience's excitement, everytime he performs movements that females would ordinarily not perform or acts that draw attention to eroticised body parts like chest and buttocks. For instance, cheering was more audible when he climbed on a chair and threw his hat or when he lay on the floor and wriggled his body. Hip and buttock rotations and heaving of chest was also met with cheering.

*Monto runs down the aisle again and this time Monto jumps up and sits crossed-legged on a table and runs his fingers through his hair. Then jumps off and dances his way into a group of men where he brushes his body against them. On his way back to the stage, Monto lays on the floor and wriggles around momentarily before throwing up his foot. Cheers are heard from the crowd and Monto rises and returns to the edge of the stage.*

*After performing a few of his usual thumka and leg movements, Monto returns to the audience and this time he sits on a man's lap for a few moments, attracting cheers. Returning to the stage his flow feels disturbed as he tries to unbutton his blouse. After several attempts the blouse comes off. Underneath is a colourful and shiny bra. The blouse is flung away. The skirt and bra are made of matching material. He spends the rest of the song moving up and down the aisle with raised flexing arms. With the song coming to an end, Monto moves to the edge of the stage where with the final beats Monto raises both his hands and forms a pose that draws attention to the curves of his hips. As the crowd cheers, Monto runs down the aisle, picks up an article of his attire from the floor and exits the hall.*

The choice of song is interesting as it is picturised on Neha Dhupia, widely regarded as one of the sexiest actresses in Bollywood. In the movie's context, she is playing the role of a prostitute and in this song, she is seen picking people's pockets, using her dance as a distraction. Thus, her performance in a sexy avatar is justified in her portrayal as a woman

who is already transgressive of social conventions. Most nachaniya select such songs to enhance the eroticised image they intend on representing. This was very clear in Monto's overall image and movements.

Another significant point in this performance is Monto's use of space. While the performance begins on the stage, it does not remain there. Monto jumps off the stage within the first minute of the song and enters the audience space and explores the length of the hall. In this process he enters others' personal spaces. Clearly, the performers have used the stage as a point of entry into the real world as well. Monto came into the hall to occupy the stage space. However, by the end of the performance some audience members experience Monto's presence within their own personal spaces, which was most likely unexpected, and yet a reality that they must deal with and make sense of. This interaction is key to the normalisation of the nachaniya's presence.

### **Rani Performs for Religious Celebration**

Context:

This performance is for *Shri Krishna Janamashtami* (Birth celebration of Krishna). As with most traditional, rural or semi-rural locations, the celebrations are held in a corrugated iron shed. These do not have walls and are not always the best settings to produce high quality music. Nonetheless, for years, these have been the symbol of all major IndoFijian celebrations. The interior of the shed is decorated with multicoloured cloth material and palm leaves. Rani performs just beside the area demarcated as *thaan* (altar), mostly occupied by musicians and religious leaders who recite holy texts. The use of this central space by a cross dressed performer proves that LN has cultural and religious acceptance.

While in mainstream society transgenderism may not be fully accepted or officially acknowledged, in such contexts nachaniya assume prominent positions. These performances are acknowledged and accepted, while in other instances LN can be devalued to only a means of entertainment. This disparaged image is perhaps validated by the inclusion of LN in events primarily for merry making. However, when LN is performed in religious functions that are observed annually and in adherence to many forms of abstinence and cleansing, one is compelled to reconsider the marginalised view of LN.

Morcom (2013, pp. 7-8) identifies three categories of performers in Indian history mainly in the regions from which the first-generation indentured labourers to Fiji were brought from.

These were firstly, 'Classical courtesans...from hereditary families of low caste'. Secondly, 'Devadasis' who performed ritual religious roles in temples, and finally, 'transgender males or female impersonators'. While the two former categories were embodied by biological females, the third category portrayed male cross-dressed performers in social events and these were divided into several categories with some assuming ritualistic roles and others providing entertainment. Classical courtesans and devadasis were excluded from mainstream social conventions because they did not fully or appropriately embody the Indian notion of femininity. Since they performed 'in front of men', the tendency was for them to 'be seen erotically, and as sexually available, whether her performance was erotic or not' (Morcom, 2013, p. 7). This generally disqualified their acknowledgment as socially acceptable women which in turn led to their exclusion. Transgender performers faced similar exclusion for their failure to embody hegemonic masculinity that was vital for the sustenance of the gender binary on which much of society's systems were based. Since IndoFijian society is founded on Hindu cultural principles, similar forms of discriminatory perceptions are also witnessed in this community.

However, Rani in this context enjoys social acceptance by observing codes of decency in his costume and by fulfilling the cultural role which he is required to fulfil. Caulker (2003, p. 22) in analysing similar performance cultures explains 'doctrine and communal belief systems are transferred into visual movement and mechanism' like 'dance, music, costumes' which act as 'mnemonic devices that serve to preserve and transmit cultural values'. Rani displays codes of femininity and decency in his image and performance. Female characters feature predominantly in all celebrations relating to Krishna. Rani bases his appearance on the female dancers in such stories. To comprehend why a transgender performer is in action here instead of a female, one must understand the context of IndoFijian history. For the remaining Indians in the post-indenture period, the aspect of their Indian identity that was revived, foremost, was their musical performances. As the tradition of dancing was already inbuilt in the cultural fabric of these people, dance performances inadvertently developed and flourished. With the absence of the categories of courtesans and devadasis, males cross-dressed to perform. This was the foundation of the tradition in Fiji and Rani represents one of the last performers of that category who cross-dress to perform and then revert to living heteronormative lives. New

generation nachaniya do not have this in common with Rani, but they manage their identities through their own means.

Performer:

For this performance, Rani wears a peach coloured ghagra choli with wide golden borders on the bottom edge of the lahanga. Unlike Kushwa, Ash, Bijuriya and Nilu, Rani's attire does not leave a large portion of the abdomen exposed. Even the blouse's sleeves reach beyond the elbow and halfway down the forearm. The remainder of his arms are covered with bangles. There is an exposed area between the blouse and lahanga which is covered by gold jewellery woven into the blouse. For this performance Rani's hair is fastened and held together with a net that has attachments of tiny jewels. A portion of the back is exposed but this is negligible enough to be considered appropriate. Women from conservative backgrounds would typically be dressed this way. Connell (1987, p. 73) explains that society

...culturally elaborates the distinction between the sexes. Clothing is a familiar example. There are modest differences in average physique between men and women. Society exaggerates them, for instance with garments and women's breasts or men's penises and makes them categorical, for instance, by putting women in skirts and men in trousers. Different societies elaborate the distinction of sex in different ways.

Connell's claim that clothing is used as an instrument of gender categorisation is evident in the IndoFijian context. Additionally, clothing is often used as yardstick for assessing people's economic and moral standing. Rani, being aware of the event's significance, abides by the codes of decent dressing for females, as his male body is at that moment embodying feminine ideals for a religious celebration. Rani's adherence to codes of dressing generates interesting points of discussion. This is because being dressed appropriately in terms of style and decency for a female does not negate the fact that based on Rani's biology and expected gender, he should not be wearing those clothes at all. Rani's appreciation and acceptance in that scenario can therefore be explained in two ways. Firstly, it is an unofficial acknowledgement within cultural and social scenes of a third gender category that has its cultural and religious importance. Performers like Bijuriya, Kushwa and Nilu are other examples of those whose identity is solidified by their contributions to religious and cultural performances, but who also continue to live in non-traditional social setups beyond the stage, where their gender

embodiment falls short of any sanctioned identity, but they are still able to assume some social roles. The second reason for this acceptance indicates society's ability to perceive the performers in their diverse identities: the identity on stage and the identity off stage. This entails a recognition of the performer as an individual who assumes a female identity to perform for rituals but then returns to his socially recognised identity.

Performance:



Figure 27 Rani's performance invaded by a nachaniya imposter. (Source: Bjuriya's Collection)

*Rani dances while a male musician simultaneously sings and plays the harmonium. Rani concentrates on the dance performance. He holds the edges of the Lahanga on both sides and lifts it slightly. This reveals a black pair of long pants worn underneath. As usual Rani relies on graceful movements of feet and turns his body in different directions. Rani also moves around in the performance space. There are constant twirls, thumka and smiles. Such movement routines are repeatedly performed until another dancer*

*interrupts the performance. A cheer from the crowd draws Rani's attention towards one corner of the shed from where the second dancer approaches. Rani stands still with hands still clutching the lahanga and looks at the dancer as he enters. Rani is frowning at the dancer as if unhappy or disapproving. However, the reactions that follow make it apparent that the second dancer has come for the sake of entertaining crowds by parodying Rani's appearance and movement. Rani decides to play along.*

The second dancer is not fully attired like Rani and only wears a lahanga. Another long piece of cloth, obviously a veil from a ghagra choli, is wrapped around his neck. Otherwise the dancer wears a collared T-Shirt, a pair of formal pants and does not wear any make-up. He joins the dance towards the end of Rani's performance to add some humour to the event's conclusion<sup>93</sup>. While laughter is permissible, both dancers are mindful of context-related limitations. Erotic dancing or suggestive body movements are unacceptable, and the dancer(s) could be ordered to stop if such lines are traversed. It is not the demographic composition of the audience that sets the boundaries, but the purpose of the gathering. Kushwa and Bijuriya, for example, both dance seductively at weddings and other non-religious public gathering but they refrain from such moves when appearing for religious occasions. While the demographic composition of all community events is similar, people attend these with differing mindsets, aware of ground rules exclusive to each.

The second dancer enters while performing a few quick full body twirls, with one arm raised up straight above the head and the other clutching the lahanga. While twirling he touches the veil hanging from his neck and then returns to the lahanga. His movements indicate some level of unfamiliarity with the attire. Once he reaches Rani, he stops twirling and performs a few thumka while facing Rani but does not change hand positions. Rani resumes dancing. He turns slightly to have his side to the second dancer. Rani performs some graceful thumka as someone would in a dance off. The second dancer changes his movements by holding an end of the veil so that it stretches out before him and then places the other hand on his hip. He turns left and right in this position attempting to tap his feet with the dhol beats. Rani pauses

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<sup>93</sup> Since many forms of abstinence were strictly observed for several days, the ends of these events were celebrated.



to observe the dancer for a few seconds before clutching and lifting his own lahanga on both sides. This is followed by swift frolicking of the feet in sync with dhol beats and lifting and dropping of hands. The flares on the lahanga add to the expressive effect as it exaggerates Rani's simple movements. There is an smile on Rani's face which remains as he attempts to dance in a circle around the second dancer. Rani twirls while stepping within the stage. The second dancer while maintaining the same routine, picks up speed and begins to attract more cheers and comments. Rani pauses again to observe the dancer for a short while. Then Rani hops and alternates feet but keeps hands on his thighs. The second dancer swings the lahanga deliberately and touches the male singer and harmonium player. This gets a burst of laughter from the audience. Rani has reduced his movements to small thumka and a negligible level of feet movement. He then beckons for the microphone to be handed to him. Rani sings:

<i>Eek aa udhum machya tumne,</i>	What chaos you have created,
<i>Yeh nachaniya bhari oh mere babul ho,</i>	You dancer of great magnitude,
<i>Yeh nachaniya bhari...</i>	You dancer of such magnitude...

The second dancer, although apparently not one who performs regularly like Rani, is called a great nachaniya in jest. When he is called a 'nachaniya of great magnitude' the crowd reacts with laughter as the parody is clear. The second dancer by this time is copying Rani's earlier move of holding the lahanga and making full body twirls. A larger burst of laughter is produced when Rani continues:

<i>Lahanga hamar tum faḍ nahi dena,</i>	Do not tear my (borrowed) lahanga,
<i>Thora bachai ke nacho...</i>	Dance with a little care...

Rani points out that the lahanga belongs to him and this excites the crowd. This is also symbolic as the second dancer has obviously entered a space that is rightfully Rani's. However, to enter that space and receive apt audience reaction, the lahanga's role must be recognised. It is no longer just an article of clothing but a key to a very specific social space. The audience respectfully appreciate Rani's LN because that is the purpose of Rani's presence in that context. They react with laughter to the second dancer's performance because while he enters the performance space clad in a lahanga, he does not embody the social significance that Rani is accorded in that same space. If Rani's performance is a parody of hegemonic femininity then the second dancer's performance is a parody of a parody. However, if Rani's parody has now an established and distinct social identity then this nullifies its parodic status.

The laughter of the audience essentially substantiates this claim and proves that the nachaniya identity is one that many now recognise and acknowledge.

### **Monto Performs for Chatti (Auckland)**

Context:



*Figure 28 Bijuriya is seen here performing for a chatti function with the baby in his hand. (Source: Bijuriya's Collection)*

The occasion: a celebration to mark the sixth day after a baby's birth. The focus is the child and his *fua* (father's sister), who performs the rituals for this event. A musical ensemble is often invited to narrate the ritual's proceedings and add to the celebratory atmosphere. In India the tradition sees a group of hijras singing and dancing as part of the event, for which they need to be paid, and there are also cases where they attend these functions even without invitation. Even in such instances, they are paid because it is considered bad omen to deny them payment for a social role they have been associated with historically. Bijuriya, Monto and Nilu informed me that they were also invited by IndoFijian families in Fiji and New Zealand to perform for chatti (sixth day). While chatti is a well-established IndoFijian tradition, the nachaniya's role in it has been optional, thus, nachaniya only attend on invitation. When

they were invited, however, they were always treated with respect and the baby is handed to a nachaniya to be blessed.

Performer:



Figure 29 Monto performing a song for Chatti. (Source: Monto's Collection)

Monto is wearing a pink sari with golden borders. There are red and silver bangles on both wrists. Monto has applied make-up. The long hair is left unfastened. He is wearing head ornaments which are a conspicuous feature of his outlook. Monto sits on the floor beside the musicians while performing. A few times during musical interludes, Monto rises to dance a few steps and then sits down to continue singing.

The chorus of one of Monto's songs is<sup>94</sup>:

*Ke moreh lalna ke palngwa<sup>95</sup> jhulawe?*

Who will swing my darling's bed?

*Ke moreh lalna ke palngwa jhulawe?*

Who will swing my darling's bed?

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<sup>94</sup> English translation of lyrics in Appendix 4.

<sup>95</sup> Hindi word for bed but here it refers to a bed built into swing for baby to sleep in.

This performance was recorded in Auckland and Monto clarified that he was often invited to such functions. This performance sees the nachaniya appear outside the context of LN, which supports the argument that they have over time diversified from their traditional role of just being dancers. This provides evidence of the ritualistic significance nachaniya are accorded within traditions and cultural practices. Nachaniya do not elaborately discuss their sexualities to maintain a positive image and remain eligible for events such as this, where they are regarded as mediums that can transfer blessings. Concerning this, Kushwa says:

I am respected. But for that you should progress in life. If I just hide here asking myself “what will that one say to me or what will they do to me”, then you cannot achieve much out of fear. In my village when they have the mandali,<sup>96</sup> I attend that. I wear a sari or a kameez and I go. I give donation for prayers. Don’t just go out with boyfriends. There is no point in applying vermilion and saying, “this is my husband or that is my husband”.

Bijuriya adds’ ‘If I pull boys into the cane field, then who will call me home? No one. That is the thing, you have to maintain respect (to get respect)’. Kushwa identifies that active social participation, even in their liminal identity, brings respect and Bijuriya specifies control on sexual interactions, to sustain such positive outcomes. Even though Monto performs eroticised dances, by preserving an overall clean reputation, he can participate in events like chatti.

## **Conclusion**

Performance makes the ordinary conspicuous. When males embody femininity, it demonstrates how femininity is constructed and perceived by society at large. Inevitably, the focus also goes to their failure in embodying masculinity as well. To illustrate this argument this chapter has analysed examples of performances with specific focus on displays that are subversive of gender norms.

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<sup>96</sup> Weekly recital of Ramayana.

## Chapter 7

# Managing Subversive Identities: Pathways to and Issues for Liminal Embodiments

### Introduction

This chapter discusses political implications of the subversive identities *nachaniya* and female *qawwal* present in their respective cultural performances and beyond the stage. The arguments here interweave the voices of performers and Fijian human rights activists with academic commentary on the subject. The chapter expounds how certain performances provide a platform for non-normative gender displays, resulting in wider social implications. Some personal narratives are included to illustrate specific forms of discrimination that individuals with liminal identities face. This chapter will also discuss motivations of these performers, and support they receive in materialising their mostly unacknowledged identity.

### Performativity and Performance

As soon as performativity comes to rest on a performance, questions of embodiment, of social relations, of ideological interpellations of emotional and political effect, all become discussable...when performativity materialises as performance in that risky and dangerous negotiation between a doing (a reiteration of norms) and a thing done (discursive conventions that frame our interpellations), between someone's body and the conventions of embodiment, we have access to cultural meanings and critique (Dolan, 2005, p. 6).

Lahanga naach, and qawwali performances by females, are examples of what Dolan describes as sites where 'performativity comes to rest on a performance'. Their specific embodiments of gender materialise previously non-existent identities by moving beyond boundaries that have historically suppressed such corporeal potentialities. This dissertation has focused primarily on the impact of such subversive performances on social perceptions and ideologies that have been foundational to social and cultural existence. It has become apparent that the performing bodies of *nachaniya* and *qawwal* cannot be regarded as ordinary bodies that only absorb and reflect social conventions. They can no longer be resigned to passivity where they are 'written upon by networks by which [ their individual bodies] has been disciplined' (Mills,

2017, p. 19). These bodies are performative as they 'do not express a pre-existing identity but engender identity' through the very acts they perform (Fisher-Lichte, 2005, p. 27) and are causing a questioning of the hegemony by problematising it. Judith Butler, in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*, argues for the ability of performative acts to disprove and collapse dichotomies. The IndoFijian conception of gender that traditionally comprised of a choice between two rigid categories, each with rigidly enforced expectations, is just such a dichotomy that nachaniya and female qawwal challenge. Fisher-Lichte (2005, p. 79) argues 'embodiment...presupposes disembodiment', implying that performers resist a pre-existing identity to assume a new one. Even though these embodiments can be deemed as temporary, their effects are not, as Fisher-Lichte explains (p. 79): 'while the actors' gestures, movements, and sounds are transitory, the meanings they bring forth continue to exist beyond these fleeting signs'. Blacking (1983, p. 95) adds, 'culture is not a template that controls people's thoughts and patterns of action; it is rather available knowledge that is invoked and constantly reinvented in the course of social interaction'. For nachaniya and female qawwal, this process of invocation and invention is characterised by as many impediments as it offers opportunities. This chapter aims to discuss these issues and realised potentials based on specific lived experiences of some field consultants—experiences they share with other gender liminal performers.

In a reading of Butler's claim in *Gender Trouble* that 'the parodic repetition of gender' (1999 (1990), p. 187) can disprove its intractable conception, Walker (2010, p. 72) suggests that 'we as individual subjects can authoritatively choose when and how we hyperbolize' exhibitions of gender characteristics. This claim, however, needs to be analysed in conjunction with Butler's claim in the same text where she argues against a 'pre-existing subject' (p. 182) by attributing the constitution of individuals to discursive convergences which forecloses the notion of pre-discursive agency. In simple terms, Walker (p. 72) explains that Butler's 'theory of identity formation does not posit a subject who stands in front of their closet each morning contemplating which of their outfits will best subvert heterosexism that day'. Those who hyperbolize their gender appearance, like the nachaniya, or who present their gendered selves in a space their particular gender is typically restricted from, like the female qawwal, may not be doing so with the specific intention of being subversive of heteronormative ideologies. Yet, by their very act of dressing and being, both groups of performers

problematize the hegemonic and naturalised image of gender as either this or that in a binaried model.

As conversations with nachaniya and female qawwal made apparent, none of them had ever ventured into the practice of LN or Qawwali to demand social change or debate social reality. They had taken a path that, despite its challenges resulting from their individual cultural and social embeddedness, offered them the fulfilment of desire or realisation of some talents. A common phrase among several interviewees was '*bhitar se* (from inside)', implying that the motivation to embark on their current life trajectory came from within themselves rather than social circumstances. The female qawwal, for instance, can see no cause to consider herself inapt for the qawwali stage as she feels that she belongs there as much as any other performer. The nachaniya claims that he is 'god gifted' to perform that role and to exhibit that image both on and off the stage. In both cases, there is embodiment that neither group was expected to naturally inherit or be drawn to. Interestingly, socio-cultural circumstances both instated barriers to their progress, and also unwittingly provided avenues to deal with these hurdles. The choices that these individuals considered natural to them have problematised existing IndoFijian social definitions of gender, sex and sexuality, even if these outcomes were unintended. The conversation below with Johnny illustrates the above argument:

**Johnny:** For me personally, I am not a show off dancer. And 'I am not a show off gay'. See I feel happy when I perform publicly. The dance satisfies me. Whether anyone likes my dance or not, I feel happy that I am wearing the lahanga and kurta with all the makeup and all the jewels and the hair do and all the bells on my feet and every time I put down my foot there is a loud *chahm*<sup>97</sup> sound. That I am an artist, I can do something to make people happy. I do not worry about what they think of me. I never feel proud and say that 'look I am somebody'. Dancing satisfies me.

**Vicky:** So, for you the fact that you practice your art, is enough?

**Johnny:** I can leave everything else in this life, but I cannot leave dancing. I have this made up in my heart that no matter how old I get, even when I walk about

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<sup>97</sup> A loud jingle created by the ankle bells on his feet.

with a walking stick, I will still wear the Lahanga and Kurta and *chamar*<sup>98</sup> *chamar chalega* (walk with jingle sounds or with a swaying hip).

**Vicky:** If anyone ever asks you 'who is Johnny?' and when you describe yourself the word dance needs to be there, isn't it?

**Johnny:** Yes. Because now everyone knows me as Johnny nachaniya.

**Vicky:** That's your identity?

**Johnny:** Yes, that's my *pehchan* (identity). That I am a 'dancer'. 'But people who understand, they will surely guess that he must be a gay...he must be a gay'.

**Vicky:** So, whether people like that or not is beside the point, but that's who you are and...

**Johnny:** But otherwise...if... 'even if I am not a dancer'<sup>99</sup> if you say that 'I am a gay' whether I am a nachaniya or not one...well I am a gay and that's my identity that's what I am. I am a gay and 'I was never ashamed that I was a gay. Never never never never, in all my life' even until now, whatever I prefer that is what I wear but then I do not wear a woman's attire when I am not going to perform. Only wear the female attire when you need to present your art. When you go to perform...not that you remain in that attire twenty-four hours.

(Source: (Johnny-Rafiq, 2017))

There were a few contradictions in Johnny's statements that need explaining. Firstly, he states that his performances were for pleasing the audiences while claiming that he did not really care about what people thought. Clearly as a performer he made every effort to entertain the audiences, however, he chose to ignore criticisms that related to his gender which was a constant discussion point for many people he and other nachaniya encountered. Secondly, while Johnny emphasises dance as the art or talent he possesses, he does not detach the dance from the lahanga and Kurta. In that sense, it is not only the dance that he deems important to his identity, it is the clothing and jewellery as well. Thirdly, Johnny was also one of the nachaniya who made his sexuality very clear during the interviews even though no

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<sup>98</sup> Another term for the jingle sound. Here Johnny uses the word to describe his steps as musical sounds.

<sup>99</sup> The words in inverted commas are not translations from Fiji Hindi but actual words spoken by Johnny. He was quite proficient in speaking English.



questions were asked in that regard. It was apparent from his comments that for him the nachaniya identity conflates with being gay. This was interesting because society at large also subscribed to such a conflation. The fact that Johnny used the Western concept *gay* to identify his gender liminality also presents an important discussion point. Conversing with Johnny revealed that he regularly paid attention to national and international news, which contributed to his knowledge on such matters and provided him with the language to describe himself. This was uncharacteristic of older nachaniya as only younger, more educated performers had referenced concepts like human rights and international gender issues in their discussions. Most field consultants had limited their reflections to more immediate social and cultural contexts. Their elaborations signified that it was their appearance and the failure to fulfil gender roles and obligations that caused their othering. Scholars have observed that, unlike Western societies, indigenous Pacific societies do not give 'ontological priority' (Alexeyeff, *Dancing from the Heart: Movement, Gender and Cook Islands Globalisation*, 2009, p. 112) to sexual orientations in considering gender liminality. In the case of IndoFijians, however, failure to embody sanctioned gender ideals is always attributed to non-heterosexual tendencies. For nachaniya, the perception is that the divergent attire and appearance and the feminised embodiment is a ruse to attract men for sex. Hence, it is the notion of homosexuality that motivates people to discriminate against and verbally abuse nachaniya. In the case of Johnny and Rafiq, they chose to accept the nachaniya identity regardless of the many misconceptions associated with it. The performance stage also provided them an appropriate platform on which this identity could be lived and fully expressed.

### **Stereotypes**

The incident which particularly drew my attention to the stereotypes associated with the nachaniya was Ashley's story of a job interview:

**Ashley:** The lady who arranged the interview asked me to shorten my hair. I had not even been given the job and she got me to that. First, she said if you get the job then you get a haircut and then she called and said that it would be better to get a haircut before the interview. She said 'dress up professionally, do not apply nail polish, keep your nails short, do not wear makeup or earrings' and I followed all those requirements. An aunty of mine told me once that people might be thinking

many different things about me because I dress differently. She warned me that I could be asked those types of questions at job interviews.

The lady at the interview told me that they would consider if I was suitable for the position. I did share with them that I did bridals and I danced at weddings, because I do those things part time or after office hours and weekends. This job was supposed to be an eight to five commitment. I told them that I was very professional about my work and that I kept my professional life and personal life separate and that I never cross-dress to work.

**Vicky:** But would you dress up like that if it was allowed?

**Ashley:** 'Actually no'. This is because I do not like to wear makeup during the day. I do not like dressing up<sup>100</sup> during the day either.

**Vicky:** And what about a top and skirt without makeup?

**Ashley:** No, I still would not. That is because if I did dress up then I would not like my beard to be shown. It really embarrasses me, so I avoid that. I am more comfortable with that at night. Also, it will be difficult to manage such clothes in the heat.

So, during the interview they asked, 'if we give you the job what sort of dressing will you do when coming to work?' That was the question.

I answered that I will wear normal shirt and pants, so they asked, 'don't you wear top and skirt to work?'

They asked if I would dress up like that.

I said, 'no, why would I do that?'

They responded, 'we thought that you might do such things', adding 'if you are thinking about dressing that way and coming to work then please do not'. I had not been given the job yet and they had already put all these conditions. They said, 'if you dress that way then the boys will be attracted to you and they will keep coming after you and will you be comfortable with that?'

I explained to them that firstly, if I get the job, then I would not cross-dress, and when at work I would maintain professionalism and would not entertain such

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<sup>100</sup> In the context 'dressing up' was understood to be Ashley adorning the female attire.

behaviour from the boys. I told them that my purpose there was not to entertain anyone but to do the job I was hired for. She said okay and yet did not hire me.

(Source: (Ashley, 2017))

The hegemonic gendering system emphasises that individuals' appearance corresponds with their specific gender identity. Lucal (1999, p. 784) identifies that in other similar gendering processes:

...a person who fails to establish a gendered appearance that corresponds to the person's gender, faces challenges to her or his identity and status. First, the gender nonconformists must find a way in which to consult an identity in a society that denies her or him any legitimacy. A person is likely to want to define herself or himself as "normal" in the face of cultural evidence to the contrary. Second, the individual also must deal with other people's challenges to identity and status—deciding how to respond, what such reactions to their appearance mean, and so forth.

Lucal's observation is evidenced in Ashley's case in various forms. Firstly, the interview panel's specific conditions on Ashley's appearance shows the oppressiveness of the binary gender system. Doan (2010, p. 635) calls this 'the tyranny of gender' and explains that it is a result of individuals challenging hegemonic expectations that are founded on the patriarchal dichotomization of gender. Doan (p. 635) highlights that such situations have 'profound and painful consequences', citing that 'for the gender variant, the tyranny of gender intrudes on every aspect of the spaces in which we live and constrains the behaviours that we display'. Even though Ashley was careful about separating his nachaniya identity from his formal profession, preconceived conflated ideologies still negatively impacted his aspirations for formal employment. The advice by Ashley's aunty also proved the existence of such ideologies in wider society, hence her proactive approach in preparing Ashley for these sorts of incidences as Ashley was one of the youngest nachaniya in Fiji at the time of the fieldwork. Another discussion point that arises is the perception of people that a nachaniya would inevitably engage sexually with men they interact with. This was a common misconception and many of my field consultants reported repeatedly encountering this mindset from critics. The interview panellist's perception that the male co-workers would inevitably be 'attracted' to Ashley confirms the existence of such opinions. This indicates both the failure of the employer in encouraging equal and non-discriminatory working conditions as well as the

biased idea that a gender liminal individual would not be able to self-establish any social boundaries. Even if Ashley's failure to secure the job was not ultimately due to with his gender identity (even though he strongly felt that it was), the fact that he was asked such questions proves that at some level there is failure to see beyond the corporeal body and instead assess the abilities of the individual.

### Hegemony: A Double Bind

An additional argument drawn from Ashley's story relates to his embarrassment regarding his beard, which draws attention to the fact that he strives to present a specific form of feminine appearance that aligns with the socially expected one. The discussion on this point is further enriched by an interesting opinion presented by Bhan (2017), an academic and nachaniya:

...when I realised 'I am not a man I am not a women (sic), I am neither of them'<sup>101</sup>. So, before when I wanted to be like women, you know 'like feminis...like...femininity'...we have a lot of problem with our beards, so I used to go for waxing and it was quite painful and expensive back then when I was still a high school kid...Yeah twenty-five dollars per session. And it was like twice a month or once a month...I just collected from my savings because luckily, I am an only child, so I used to get good pocket money. I would also always apply nail polish and henna designs on my palms and feet. However, after realising that I am not 'a women' (sic), I started shaving, that it is okay to be what I am. That I do not have to look exactly like a woman. I do not have to have a soft skin to fake that 'I am a women'. 'I am not a fake women'.

What Bhan is narrating here can be explained as an act of freeing oneself from the bonds of binary thinking. Bhan decides to create his own identity rather than submit to a pre-existing form. For instance, in Bhan's attempt to embody the socially sanctioned image of femininity, he found himself in a doubly oppressed situation. He was already subverting the gender expectations particular to his biological sex, that is, embodying an androgynous gender display despite being male and this act itself was presenting him with several social challenges. He experienced an added level of oppression when compelled by social expectations concerning those who are gender liminal to adhere to a specific form of femininity. This is an interesting discussion point because it depicts that liminality could be made acceptable by meeting certain conditions that are sometimes interpreted as the norm

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<sup>101</sup> The words in inverted commas are Bhan's own words.

for the embodiment of gender liminality. An application of any form of preconditions on liminal gender displays is essentially reinscribing an oppressive system, the very mechanism that produces circumstances that encourage discrimination based on gender. Bhan's decision to allow the shadow of his beard to show helps him save money, avoid physical pain and creates an identity where one can embody feminine characteristics without mandatorily having to meet every detail commonly associated with what is considered beauty for an IndoFijian woman.

By contrast, Ashley chose to submit to expectations of normative femininity and this was more likely the impact of his own social situation. The impact of social circumstances on gender embodiment can also be argued using the example of Sheetal. Sheetal wears traditional IndoFijian female attire to all his LN performances and most other social events he attends. He realised that the same attire could not be worn to his day job as a hair stylist. He did, however, add that 'the other thing is that when I dress up like this<sup>102</sup> people are already saying all these things to me. Now just imagine if I started coming to work in *girlish*<sup>103</sup> clothes everyday...' (Sheetal, 2017). Sheetal lives in Labasa, a town in a rather conservative part of Northern Fiji. Thus, he faces a more rigid social environment in which to embody his identity. Sheetal adds 'even my customers sometimes tell me that in Suva and the Western side they [known nachaniya] are in full attire and full make up and they ask me why I do not also do the same. I just tell them that I do not like it'. These customers, who are obviously aware of Sheetal's nachaniya identity, expect him to also adhere to an expectation that they have developed of individuals who are gender liminal. In their statements these customers recognise the fluidity of gender enough to recognise Sheetal's identity but fail to comprehend that as a result of this fluidity, Sheetal's identity can be embodied in various forms. This explains their expectation that Sheetal perhaps desires to cross-dress at work but has reasons that prevent him from doing so. Sheetal, on the other hand, does realise that dressing can create oppression but in his specific case he chooses to be practical rather than subvert dressing codes just for the sake of it. Sheetal has no qualms or hesitation in wearing a sari, blouse or skirt for his performances or when he attends certain social functions like weddings and parties even where he is not performing.

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<sup>102</sup> Sheetal means wearing gender neutral clothing to work.

<sup>103</sup> The actual English term he used to describe female clothing.

Collectively, Bhan, Sheetal and Ashley are all subverting norms of femininity and masculinity, but they are doing it in their own styles and using the social, political, cultural and physical resources available to them. Zimman (2009, p. 60) argues that individuals coming out with a transgender identity assert 'a self-experienced gender identity that is different from the gender he or she is perceived to be by others'. He goes on to parallel this process as an embodiment of 'an invisible gender identity' to the 'way that gays and lesbians come out by claiming a sexual orientation that is often not visible to others'. As Bhan's experiences particularly depict, certain identities unfold gradually as individuals engage in self-discovering journeys, where through a process of shedding and embracing, connecting and disconnecting, their unique sense of self develops. There is more conviction and attachment to such an identity because it is self-created rather than imposed by external forces as moulds to grow into. This substantiates Abrahams (1986, p. 50) claim that 'our individual experiences are so central to the ways in which we put together a sense of identity, that to underscore the typicality, is to confront one of our dearest held beliefs: that having been made individuals, we should do everything we can to hold on to our sense of uniqueness'. The narratives of several performers depict a sense of resilience in establishing their non-conformist identities despite resistance from social and cultural structures both on and off-stage.

### Resilience

As a female qawwal, Shalini has had to display a resilient attitude in entering and persisting with this particular identity. This has been necessitated by past and on-going discourses that do not recognise female presence on the qawwali stage. In many instances, male qawwal articulate these opinions in their lyrics knowing that many in society at large believed similarly. Shalini counters these ideologies by laying a firm claim to the qawwal identity, citing her strengths as a performer as merits to be on-stage. She boasts her uniqueness in being the first female harmonium player. She also prides over the fact that she has managed to permeate several boundaries to establish fan bases among social groups that other female folksingers have not been able to engage with. For instance, by performing qawwali she has performed before Muslim audiences and through this one act she has crossed religious, gender and genre boundaries. Most female folksingers only perform lokgeet and bhajans for predominantly Hindu audiences and Shalini, using the same platform explored and connected with new genres. In doing so, she has established herself as a competent and flexible

performer. These achievements have led her to release professional audio and video recordings which have boosted her national and international image as a renowned performer, discrediting viewpoints that restricted female performers to small communal events.

Similarly, nachaniya boast about the fact that despite social perception of being weak and failures, they have managed to build their lives, sustain families and make cultural and social contributions. Society at times hyperbolises and misrepresents the non-submissive acts of nachaniya as deviance and inability, to undermine their achievements and their identities. Nonetheless, conversations with nachaniya reveal that they applied a different interpretation to their own lives. For instance, when asked if they had any regrets that came out of living as a nachaniya, Bijuriya responded 'I do not think so. It is not that if I did not procreate a child, then my life is useless. It cannot be that important as there are also people who are not able to have children even after marriage. So, what is the difference between me and him. Thus, I have to say no. I have never felt disadvantaged, you and me, we are both humans. I earn my own living and I am happy'. In this statement Bijuriya dismantles the IndoFijian patriarchal precondition that males need to marry, produce children and head families as a sign of social success. It is non-compliance of such fundamental social conventions that destabilises the tenets of a gender binary.

### **Gender Fluidity and Rights**

Bhan's earlier quotation where he confesses to defying the embodiment of both normative femininity and masculinity alludes to the fluidity of gender. His use of the phrase 'fake women' also indicates the rigid conditions of the gendering process, such that even conceptualising gender or describing gender is almost impossible without having to infer to the binaried hegemony. However, as Gagne, Tewksbury and McGaughey (1997) help explain, Bhan's actions simultaneously problematise the foundational status of the very social system they acknowledge:

To challenge the binary, individuals must overcome a number of interactional, organisational, and structural barriers. They must learn to live and find ways to cope with the discomfort and hostility that others express at not being able to categorize them within existing gender categories. They need to find ways to support themselves and interact with others in organisations that have social spaces for women and men

only. And, they must find ways to establish themselves as legal and social actors within institutions that recognize only two sexes and two congruent genders (p. 504).

It was clear in discussions with Bhan that he had, over time, attained more confidence about his sense of identity. The fact that he worked in a tertiary educational institution and was in regular contact with non-governmental organisations and groups that championed LGBTQTI+ rights, enabled him to view society and culture from a perspective unavailable to other nachaniya. Nonetheless, those who had any awareness of concepts such as human rights, LGBTQTI+ rights and protection under the constitution referred to these in their interviews. Sheetal, for instance, emphasised several times that he was aware of certain constitutional protections for trans people, but saw little effort from governments in ensuring that these were enforced. This failure was evidenced in Ashley's job interview scenario. Doan (2010, p. 640) explains 'in public spaces the tyranny of gender operates when certain individuals feel empowered to act as heteronormative constructed gender enforcers. These policings are sometimes exaggerated by the presence of other silent but supportive watchers'. In Ashley's case, the panellists assumed the role of enforcers, and my respondents narrated many incidents of random individuals finding the need to point out their divergence and imposing unjustified labels on them. In the case of female qawwal, they received criticism for performing qawwali because of the presumption that it was restricted to male performers and audiences. It was refreshing to note that the female performers argued that they also belonged on that stage based on their musical talent, skills and belief in gender equality. Vojdik claims 'to assure women equal protection, it is not enough to require traditionally male institutions merely to open their doors to women. Rather, the notion of gender must be reconceptualised as an institution, a social practice of subordination' (2002, p. 85). In the context of IndoFijians, their cultural performances play an integral role in this process of reinscribing notions of gender. Doan iterates 'gender variant performance in public spaces that is supported by a wider community can be a powerful statement against the dichotomy (2010, p. 640). Alexeyeff (2009, p. 13) further argues that performances 'reinforce and demarcate particular identities' but also clarifies that these identities are not 'predetermined' but are rather made 'emergent' through expressive forms.

In this sense, both nachaniya and qawwal have entered spaces where certain identities have historically emerged and within and through these spaces they have materialised their own



identities. The support a nachaniya and the female qawwal receives on-stage becomes the impetus for certain forms of subversive gender to emerge and enter everyday discourses where these are discussed, explained, debated, justified or dismissed. Through these discursive transactions, however, these images gain momentum and recognition that enables the creation of additional spaces for their display. 'Appearance is a central component in the establishment and maintenance of self and Identity. An alternative gender may be achieved only through interaction, in which the recognition of others has the potential to legitimate and reinforce the emergent alternative identity' (Gagne, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997, p. 486). As Gagne and others argue, some social and political progress is being made in issues relating to gender liminal individuals because their social visibility necessitates an elaboration on their existence.

#### Othering: Actions and Reactions

Expectedly, the discourse generated on and about liminal individuals also produces negative outcomes in the form of stereotypes and labels that can have a haunting impact on their lives as outlined below by Ashley:

**Ashley:** There is a feeling that since we are cross dressers so if they employ us this could lead to a decline in their reputation. This is what people think in Fiji. Yes, the company's name will be spoiled because they hired a poofta to work for them.

**Vicky:** See I understand what you are saying but I am a bit confused about the perspective of the company. Are they assuming that just because you are a cross dresser you will not be able to perform your duty?

**Ashley:** Yes. I do not think they are even considering how capable we are or how experienced. They are not concerned about those things. They are looking at what we are wearing, they are looking at what we look like. That is where their focus is. They are not looking at our education or experience.

**Vicky:** So, what that means is that you are left with some very limited types of jobs that you can work in.

**Ashley:** Yes. I shared this with Bhagirati, that this world is such that it discriminates us. The other thing they claim is that if we dress like this to work then the boys will not be able to work and they will not be able to concentrate on their work.

**Vicky:** But females are employed there as well. The boys could do the same with them, isn't it?

**Ashley:** But the thing is that they think that we are cheap. They feel that nachaniya are cheap. That we can just go with anyone. That is what they are thinking and that represents the general thought here. A similar problem like this also occurs when we go to perform in the villages. When you cross dress and go somewhere then this always comes up...mainly from women that 'you are dressed up like this so do not go near my husband, they might get attracted to you'.

**Vicky:** By why that insecurity? Why would their husbands do that?

**Ashley:** Maybe they do not trust their husbands...well, it is because the women feel that since we are nachaniya then the men get attracted to us easily.

**Vicky:** But how can they make such a claim?

**Ashley:** Well, I think what they feel is that we are easy to get. And people will not question. But the main expectation is that since we are dancing then we must be going out as well<sup>104</sup>. They try with us because they feel that we will not expose these things to anyone as we are probably doing this all the time.

(Source: (Ashley, 2017))

Browne (2004, p. 332) argues '[e]veryday spaces can be disabling environments for those who do not correspond to presumed gender norms' as in the case of Ashley, whose nachaniya identity causes him to be seen as incapable and deviant, and his very presence in a particular space has the potential to reduce the social significance of a space itself. The sense of powerlessness felt by several of the nachaniya was palpable when they narrated facing similar incidences. Since gender still retains social, political and economic centrality, 'to achieve accountability as a social actor, one must enact gender in ways that are socially recognizable and decodable' (Gagne, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997, p. 479). Failure to do so results in misconceptions and misappropriations such as those outlined by Ashley above that also extend into representing them as morally corrupt. The stereotype of being sexually promiscuous, sexually impulsive and an easy source of sexual exploitation was a key thread that connected the experiences of my respondents. Even though sexuality is private,

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<sup>104</sup> This was a common reference made by several nachaniya, who felt that males considered them to also be available for sexual favours whether paid or unpaid.

particularly in the case of the nachaniya, the conflation of trans identity with homosexuality by society, creates many issues for them. Semmalar (2014, p. 288) attributes this to gender being 'a public concept' and that 'trans people...are always already out and hence intensely vulnerable to attacks on their selfhood'. Their othered status also means that they have little, if any options to attain redress, just as my interviewees complained of being subjected to victim blaming by police when filing complaints of harassment.

The sexualised and eroticised identity of the nachaniya is a socially implied one because even as 'gender and sexuality are attributes of one's body that seem fundamental to one's sense of self' their 'meanings are determined by norms that come from outside oneself' (Burt, 2009, p. 150). Irrespective of the external origin of these aspects of their liminal identity, nachaniya are still socially othered and consequently blamed for this othering. Ashley recounted an incident where he was approached by a male audience member for sexual favours after a performance. When he declined, citing that he did not engage in such acts, the individual stated '*tum dusra rakam ke gaḍu hai* (you are a different type of gaḍu)'. The term used here is commonly used for liminal males, but with a specific reference to anal sex. The man's comment indicates the assumption that by being liminal, Ashley is also homosexual and since he is a nachaniya he must also be involved in sex work. Ashley suffers further othering within his already othered status by failing to fit into the pre-existing, even if misinformed, nachaniya identity. Conversations with nachaniya proved that this was by no means an unusual encounter. Nonetheless, as Nelson argues, 'subjects can be constituted through hegemonic constructions of gender, race and sexuality while remaining reflexive of, and (potentially) intervene in, that process' (1999, p. 341): nachaniya have over time helped change some ideologies relating to them as witnessed in the respect and empathy they receive from many in society now. In all fairness, Ashley may be more forthcoming about such discriminatory practices for the simple fact that he is a relatively new nachaniya and is still surprised by such incidents while others have come to a stage where they are able to overlook such social reactions as insignificant. Yet this does not reflect the ideal action by liminal persons nor does it justify the continuation of prejudice against them based on the presumption that they are the ones who need to adjust as they are the ones who are different.

I also noted people having similar misconceptions about the sexuality of female qawwal. The analysis in Chapter 4 show Rishi and Dhiren finding it permissible to attack Shalini publicly

using sexual content in their songs, even implying that she is promiscuous. Vijendra also insinuates several times through his songs that Sushil's public subversive behaviour results from her lack of morality. Since all these performers come from the same society, they are certainly aware that such assumptions and accusations on people's morality and character cannot be easily dismissed and that these can be damning to the female performers beyond the stage. They would not make such claims against other unrelated women due to the risk of social repercussions on themselves. In any case, male qawwal can compete against female qawwal without bringing up the topic of sexuality at all but such attacks are perceived as a means of easy victory. Such exchanges place the female qawwal in a precarious position where her reputation is left open to several and often negative reviews. If she is accused of being immoral or loose, society holds her responsible for choosing to enter spaces where her virtue would be vulnerable even though that space was a stage that she entered because of her musical talents. I witnessed an example of such subconscious stereotypes during my field work when I engaged in a conversation with an attendant and a customer at a music CD shop in Fiji. When I asked if I could contact any of Sushil's relatives or her husband, the customer responded with a smirk, 'Which husband? She had a few'.

### **The Question of Change**

Valentine (1999, p. 51) argues that '[o]ur bodies actively constitute space and project spatial relations and positions in accordance with our own intentions' but that these 'bodily performances are inhibited or constrained by moral representations about how we should or should not look, and how much space we should or should not take up'. As oral forms of communication, qawwali and LN, use movement, dance, song, music and presence as tools to contribute to social discourses that ultimately affect their own status as meaning-making mechanisms. Longhurst argues '[o]ur bodies carry out a vast array of tasks and pleasures. They can be surfaces for artwork, carry out practical tasks, establish and cement identities, make love, violate, excrete and pray' (2001, p. 11). The moving, singing, dancing and living bodies of performers in these artforms have hence turned into tools for activism for the naturalisation of their social presence, beginning from specific spaces and eventually extending into other areas. Naidu (2017), a prominent IndoFijian academic, claims that:

They (qawwal and nachaniya) are definitely not coming out and blowing their own trumpet but there are messages, subtle messages, all kinds of messages. This is their

time, when they are singing their qawwali or speaking during the challenges or they are doing their lahanga dance then they can say and do things which can be part of messages that they want the wider communities to know.

An analysis of performances by both groups of performers confirms that with time and changes in social contexts, performances have also transformed. In relation to qawwali, Shalini, as the only active female performer, has opted against emulating Sushil's confrontational performance style. She still competes against male qawwal, and sings to Bollywood tunes on modern themes, but refuses to compete using vulgarities and insults, even when her opponents make no exceptions for her. While there is evidence that Sushil was criticised for not adhering to social conventions related to females, relevant data cannot be attained to establish if this was the reason why more female qawwal did not emerge after or during her time. Regardless of Shalini's relatively conservative performance style, she has been key in challenging male dominance in qawwali and has kept the IndoFijian female qawwal identity alive. The most important message that can be gleaned from her presence on the qawwali stage is that the obstacles that keep women from this genre have purely been cultural constructions and that no natural characteristics exist that can negatively impact a woman's ability to be a qawwal.

In terms of nachaniya, the transformation is far more notable and interesting. While former performers were conservative and mindful of social and cultural conventions, the new generation of performers are bolder and exert more confidence in their performance on-stage and their identities off-stage. Even though the image of the nachaniya has been a part of IndoFijian cultural and social fabric, it is only now that those bodily engaged in these representations are overtly subverting social expectations to live their lives based on their own choices. Turner emphasises 'meaning arises when we try to put what culture and language have crystallized from the past together with what we feel, wish and think about our present point in life' (1986, p. 33). Every nachaniya has retained LN from the previous generation of performers and has injected into it his own skills, talents, experiences and knowledge. In so doing he has recreated the nachaniya identity to reflect his own self in it. A significant change many current nachaniya share has been the decision to remain unmarried which adds to their social subversiveness. Marriage was clearly portrayed by some respondents as an oppressive system which was historically used, particularly for men with

effeminate qualities and feminine tendencies, to submit to social expectations. Since marriage has also been used as a medium of emphasising the gender hierarchy which places men over women, non-compliance to this tradition further destabilises the dichotomous gender ideology.

### Media and Change

One of the factors that has been crucial to the achievements made by liminal individuals in terms of how they are perceived, has been the advent of greater access to information. Social and mass media have been instrumental to the process of creating awareness in communities not only on why certain individuals are different, but also on how to react to these differences. Global media has 'increased awareness of ideas of homosexuality and gayness' (Morcom, 2013, p. 196). The equal status of women in all facets of life is another example of consciousness creation in IndoFijian communities with the help of media. In both cases, results have been noted with varying levels of success. At times the decision to use media must be handled with care, especially when dealing with sensitive issues like gender and sexuality. For example, during the time of field work for this dissertation, Fiji Human Rights Commission authorised an advertisement that was broadcast on television and radio stations. It featured a few individuals claiming that they were transgender, bisexual, gay and lesbian and that they desired equal treatment. It was rather surprising when a few of my field consultants disapproved of the advertisement claiming that it was going to create further aggression towards them. What I concluded from discussions with these individuals on the subject was that, based on social realities, demanding for rights through the media left room for misconceptions and these could result in negative reactions towards them.

For nachaniya this was a tricky situation because while they had cultural significance amongst IndoFijians, which somewhat justified their existence, other cultural groups in Fiji would not place the same interpretations on them. Sheetal resented this advertisement, claiming that it was probably done in consultation with educated, well-established individuals from higher echelons of society who would be relatively protected from any backlash experienced in communities removed from urban centres. A few of the nachaniya had also highlighted being targeted by indigenous males, and they feared such incidents would increase if trans rights were enforced on people. I personally also had some issues with that advertisement, as it had used certain terminologies (gay, bisexual, transgender) with the presumption that people at

large were aware of what these meant or their social implications. It is grey areas such as these that birth adverse reactions because, despite the widespread existence of liminal individuals, there is very little understanding of them. The advertisement relied heavily on Western concepts of and terminologies for liminal identity, which could not be sufficiently and seamlessly applied to most Pacific contexts, including both IndoFijian and iTaukei. Gagne and others explain that 'identity is constructed within a range of potential social options. The dominant Western system of gender has made it difficult for those whose gender falls somewhere between or outside of the binary system to understand and accept themselves or to be recognised as socially legitimate' (Gagne, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997, p. 479). It is such forced and socially isolated approaches that can be replaced by context-specific communication mediums like cultural performances to convey sensitive and taboo subjects. Approaches that include the historical and cultural place of liminal individuals 'could potentially form powerful and extremely grounded arguments about the rights' of these individuals to belong and to be valued in societies and communities and to help construct positive and diverse liminal identities (Morcom, 2013, p. 202).

### NGOs and Change

There is activism by official organisations like Haus of Kameleon, Fiji Women's Rights Movement, Fiji Women's Crisis Centre and Fiji Human Rights Movement to ensure individuals with liminal gender identities are safe and free from discrimination. Activists from these institutions pointed out, however, that there is minimal IndoFijian participation in their activities and awareness programs, whether these were focused on women or trans people. While sifting through publications at the Fiji National Archives, I came across a 1992 article published in *Hindustan* titled *Indian Women and Rape*. The article quoted Shamima Ali, who was then, and remains, the Coordinator of Fiji Women's Crisis Centre (FWCC). The article discussed physical abuse of women and the factors that were key to the issue. I engaged in an interview with Ali<sup>105</sup> to see if any progress had been made in the twenty-five years since the publication of the article in terms of changes to the biased gender ideologies. The four key areas of discussion were: the overemphasis on the concept of shame, the notion of

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<sup>105</sup> Shamima Ali was interviewed on 21<sup>st</sup> June 2017 on the premises of Fiji Women's Crisis Centre. The interview was conducted in English.

'macho-man', the view of feminist and women's movements as radicalist, and the media's prejudicial opinion of the centre's work (1992, p. 5). In terms of overall changes Ali states:

Now, you would think that I gave this interview in 1992 and this is 2017 and it is almost twenty years later, and you would think that those attitudes are gone...what I find nowadays that young women...there is a trend that they do not care anymore. That they are professional women and that they are willing to come out and talk about molestation or sexual harassment or someone raped them...things like that. But again, that is a very small number...it is very, how shall I say it...incremental kind of a change. So, I would not say that there is an overall change...overall, I would still say that those attitudes still remain there. They still remain there. (Ali S. , 2017).

This claim by Ali resonates with what my performer field consultants also blamed as factors fuelling the suppression of their identity. As has been claimed earlier in this dissertation, ideologies of gender oppress men as much as women. The prevalence of notions such as shame, virtue and honour continue to encourage harsh treatment for subversive behaviour as has been experienced by both female qawwal and nachaniya. Furthermore, the idea of a macho-man also alludes to the existence of a dichotomous gender system that places social pressure on individuals to comply with expectations of sanctioned femininity and masculinity. The oppression caused by this notion was highlighted in a comment by Johnny (Johnny-Rafiq, 2017): '...other men would jeer at my father because of me, they said that your son wears a lahanga and dances. Among Hindustani...the top line men...those who consider themselves bigshots, macho-man...they will perceive you insultingly...'. Ali outlined the expected characteristics of a normative IndoFijian male, which she had come to understand in her decades of dealing with gender-related issues within this community, as such:

A macho man is the one who walks around and struts around and does everything manly. Does not help in the house, does not wash the dishes, does not hang around his wife too much. Does not say to his friends that it is five pm and I need to get home because then his friends will say 'you are under the petticoat government'. A macho-man would not say things like that. He is not gentle, he is not sensitive, who does not listen to women. He is the big boss-man. And the sense of male entitlement, that this is my right, and nobody dare say no to me. And being competitive and you do not have to listen to the wife's opinion because my opinion is all that matters. That is all that it



is about, and it is also about how people look, and how they walk and how they talk, and all these ideas combined, forms the idea of the macho-man. He is the ladies' man and he can have several relationships, but women cannot.

A glance at the expectations above quickly suggest that nachaniya do not embody a clear majority of these characteristics and for this they are constantly othered. An online survey I conducted with several IndoFijian academics showed that they also noted an emphasis on similar behavioural principles for men, such as being providers, family heads, protectors of family honour, which meant that women were compelled to embody complementary values of submission and passivity. Ali also explained that in fighting notions such as these, organisations such as hers have had to forego the use of terms such as feminism which was producing antagonistic reactions from the public at large. This was another example of the need to contextualise strategies to the cultural backgrounds they were working in. She did point out, however, that where mass media was concerned, a lot of improvements were still needed. In her opinion, media was still largely depicting and reinforcing certain female stereotypes and images that did little to change prejudiced mindsets.

Kris Prasad<sup>106</sup>, an activist with Fiji Women's Rights Movement (FWRM), was also interviewed to corroborate the information from FWCC as it was an organisation that also worked with women and had more recently also started advocating trans rights. Kris identified that they dealt with two categories of trans people: those who embodied a feminine identity and those who did not. He clarified that there was evidence of harassment and 'real violence' against people whose gender identity did not comply with the hegemony and that FWRM was actively dealing with many such reports by liaising with relevant authorities to take legal action against perpetrators (Prasad K. , 2017). Kris also pointed out the discrepancy in employment opportunities for liminal individuals, stating:

...the main reason is the institutionalised discrimination that such individuals have faced. Once they express a gender identity that was trans and did not conform to the expectations of society then what happened was that...from a young age even at school...a lot of our members and people we meet were abused in high school and even universities. This affects their mental state and prevents them from finishing school or they do not get good enough grades to get into universities. Now we do have

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<sup>106</sup> Kris was interviewed on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2017 in Suva. The interview was conducted in English.

a lot of people who are studying and doing law etcetera, but we have still not have had that generational shift yet, like those who are older are mostly present in industries like hospitality, hairdressing and sex-work. There are a couple of trans people, who are in government jobs or are professionals, but they are very careful about their visibility and gender expression because workplace discrimination is still happening.

Kris identifies both the prevalence of gender-based discrimination and the tendency for liminal individuals to be oppressed by control mechanisms empowered by heteronormative ideologies. Another significant issue that Kris identified in relation to advocacy work was the absence of IndoFijians from such forums. He elaborates:

That is one of thing that I also want to know, like why do we have members of the IndoFijian trans community who do not feel that they are part of this space in the general LGBTQ space. This could also boil down to racism as well. Like most of the iTaukei get into the LGBTQ movement through their connections in sports and other forms of organising and in case of Indo-Fijians they are not that involved in sports so...but yeah there are spaces like singers and dancers and salons as well. However, I feel that these things seem to be underground and there are no major connections with the main LGBTQ community. And that could be the reason why some people as you mentioned did not really like the advertisement<sup>107</sup>. A common thing that I also hear a lot as well is that Indo-Fijian LGBTQ feel disconnected from the mainstream movements.

Kris makes some appealing arguments here that verify and even explain certain statements made by my performer field consultants. It was made clear in conversations with them that they did not participate in NGO-sponsored activities even though their liminal identity was socially visible and apparent. This is attributable to the predominance of non-IndoFijians as administrators and participants in such organisations' campaigns. This lack of IndoFijians in activism leadership means that it is a challenge to engage more grassroots IndoFijians (minimally educated, rural based liminal persons like most nachaniya) to engage with NGO activities. Kris himself was involved in activism through connections he established as a university student whereas only two of the thirteen nachaniya I interviewed had university

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<sup>107</sup> The Fiji Human Rights advertisement on LGBTQTI+ rights explained earlier in this chapter.

qualifications. Since racism is a social reality in Fiji, it would be naïve to expect NGO operations to be free of racial biases. More importantly, however, nachaniya could likely lose some cultural credibility if they joined such institutions that operated on western ideologies, a side effect of the western financial backing most Fijian NGOs receive. Losing culturally instituted value would be a significant price to pay as, due to the absence of other methods of activism, cultural performance is the best and, in most cases, only avenue available to nachaniya to express and present their identity to society. Most of my respondents attributed a spiritual significance to their performance and their identity, in some cases claiming that they were worshipped as goddesses at certain cultural events. They attributed this to Ardhanarishwara, an androgynous image of god Shiva. This image would be slandered if the individual at the core of this identity was seen subscribing to western notions of trans identities, most of which were conflated with homosexuality in IndoFijian communities.

In addition, arguably nachaniya do not see the need to engage in NGO campaigns because on some level they are satisfied with the progress they make within spaces that they have already claimed for themselves. Rose (1999, p. 254) argues that spaces for negotiating liminal gender identities do exist and that 'the body in its fleshiness becomes a resource for that project' as an individual's bodily engagement helps 'articulate a space different from the arrangements of phallocentric discourse'. Bhan's statement below impressively illustrates such a space:

...women usually compliment me on my dressing. They say 'we like the way you are wearing the sari'. They ask 'how did you learn this? Where did you learn that from? Where did you get this sewn?' We get into that whole female conversation...you do...forget...you feel for a moment that you are not *alag* (different or other). You are like them.

While such spaces have been rare historically, the presence of the nachaniya inspires some level of progressive thinking as Bijuriya notes, 'the people were excited that they got a chance to play instruments for my performance...NOW it is a matter of happiness for many to be our musician, but there was a time when people hid their faces because they did not want others to know that they were playing for us'. Among IndoFijians, improving the perception of those with liminal gender is an ongoing process such that some basic levels of acknowledgement and recognition continue to require activism. However, as Monto constantly claimed, his experience in New Zealand has been notably favourable even amongst immigrant IndoFijians.

Since Monto is no longer struggling with foundational identity issues; he has been able to turn his attentions further ahead. He is now trying to secure intellectual rights to the materials used for LN performances such as songs and dance movements.

### **Conclusion**

The performance of gender in a space not only shifts with each performance, but in a very real way, as Doan argues, each performance also changes the space in which it is performed (Doan, 2010, p. 638). In exemplifying Doan's claim, this chapter has discussed the implications of liminal identities for those who embody them and for society at large. The chapter has outlined some real issues faced by these individuals but has also argued that by consistently embodying and presenting their unique identities, liminal individuals are helping recreate social expectations by problematising existing ones. The role, contributions and shortfalls of advocacy groups in this process of reforming social concepts of gender were also presented. All this was done by weaving together the voices of active stakeholders, who either embody or are otherwise engaged with liminal identities.

## Chapter 8

### Conclusion

I never actually met my grandfather. He died in 1946 and I was born in 1956. I met one of his shipmates when I was young. I still remember that meeting because I was a young boy and he was a very old man when we spoke. This man told me that in those days (girit years) people would meet once a week and the free people would meet at least twice a week for about two hours. They always had performances in these events. Later they would share their stories, discuss how life was going and there would be some encouragement shared...That was the strength that helped our culture and people survive (Lal B., 2017).

The above comment is taken from a conversation with Brij Lal<sup>108</sup>, an IndoFijian academic, community leader, former Education Permanent Secretary, and a FijiFirst party backbencher in the Fijian government from 2014 to 2018. Lal alludes to the central role musical performances played in rallying the migrant Indians, becoming the impetus for community building. He highlights that musical performances were used as reasons for gatherings that then turned into impromptu counselling sessions that helped people maintain strength and sanity while bearing the overwhelming atrocities of indenture. The sense of community developed in these forums played an essential part in founding and solidifying the IndoFijian identity. Music and other performances were fundamental to the activism and tenacity to live, to endure and persevere. The weekly musical performances became pressure release valves, but they did more than that. These performances helped lay the foundations for their future identity.

Decades later, IndoFijians continue to depict an unfailing attachment to musical performances and dance. As this dissertation argues in the context of certain performances, activism continues to be a feature in them. However, the narratives put forward are no longer about a communal identity only but more specifically challenges to gender hegemony. This dissertation proves the multifaceted functions of cultural performances by presenting and

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<sup>108</sup> Not to be confused with the prominent IndoFijian historian of the same name, currently living in exile in Australia. At the time of the interview in 2017, Lal had just published a book in which he had traced his family genealogy and history. His book depicted his family's history alongside Fiji's history.

illustrating their nuanced uses in contemporary Fiji and New Zealand-based IndoFijian communities.

In making these arguments, this dissertation has drawn upon both theoretical frameworks and the lived experiences of performers, namely qawwal and nachaniya. This has shown the instrumentalisation of the performers' active agency in not being mere absorbers of culture and normative discourses, but participants who both iterate, and also challenge and alter hegemony. By engaging in performative acts, these individuals expand and create spaces for the presence of new identities. Essentially, this process is one that involves a social and cultural transformation, where identities that were formerly compelled into precarious liminal categories are given recognition, acknowledgement and status. This interdisciplinary Pacific Studies project has collectively discussed gender issues present in a non-indigenous, yet established, Pacific community from the vantage of its musical and cultural performances. In the process some historical narratives have been documented for the first time, and the richness of dance and music have been further comprehended.

In its scope, particularly in relation to studying cultural performances, this project represents an insider's engagement with his own culture and history. The topic of IndoFijian folk culture and cultural performances is fecund ground that desperately needs more extensive research. This is because such cultural practices are absent from historical records, and the oral sources that can help fill these gaps are gradually and permanently diminishing, which was one of the limitations I encountered while undertaking research for this dissertation. Nonetheless, future researchers can produce fruitful and justifiable studies if they undertake this task innovatively. They can look forward to, as I have experienced, an enlightening journey hearing voices that have previously been drowned out by an obsession with IndoFijian economic and political engagements.

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## Appendix 1

### Translated text of the pachra song discussed on page 166.

Protect the purity of my virtue,  
You are Brahma and Vishnu (2x).  
You are the best and the purest of tone,  
The accumulation of all knowledge,  
In this large gathering,  
Do protect me from shame (2x).  
You the best Durga when it comes to giving,  
Hanumaan tops the list in bravery,  
The lords of the three universes,  
Always work for my good.  
The purest of tone to pay homage to you,  
I cling to your feet mother.  
Come and sit with me,  
Open my books for me mother.

#### Interlude

I have completed the sixteen stages of beautification,  
I cling to your feet mother.

#### Interlude

I cling to your feet mother,  
Come and sit in my heart,  
Remind me if I forget what to say.

#### Interlude

I cling to your feet mother,  
Come and sit beside me,  
You lead whatever happens mother.

#### Interlude

The purest of tone to pay homage to you,  
I cling to your feet mother.



All these instruments are yours mother,  
You govern all of them mother.

## Appendix 2

**English translation of song Bijuriya performs to in the analysis on page 209.**

Once sliced the pumpkin will be shared with all.  
With a gun hidden in the trunk of my heart,  
And a tinge of hunger for love in mixed in my intentions,  
In the secluded backside where there is a tense alley,  
To that tense alley call your lover,  
The dirty flesh will be washed,  
The stiches of virtue will open up,  
And the envelope of shame will be ripped.  
Once sliced the pumpkin will be shared with all.  
Whenever it is sliced it will be shared with all.  
Parched and dry is the land that is my flesh,  
You make it rain, raindrops of colourful juices on my lips,  
You carry out such a catastrophe that after the jug is emptied,  
That which had grown would automatically shrink.

Once sliced the pumpkin will be shared with all.

I am a local brew, consume me and I will make you forget foreign brands,  
Then we can come to the main point as we have discussed nonsense for long.  
As soon as job thirty-three is concluded things will go from dates to raisins,  
You will only repeat my name.

## Appendix 3

**English translation of the song Aishwariya performs to in the analysis on page 211.**

On the ghagra from Agra (2x).

On the ghagra from Agra place the net from Jaipur (2x).

Whoever looks at it, says

‘What a site this is?’

On the ghagra from Agra (3x)

Your eyelashes are intoxicating,

Your eyes are melodious tunes,

Your breathe is fragrant,

You smell delicious. (2x)

Face so beautiful, your youth torturous,

There is some cunningness in your attitude.

Your silky handkerchief,

Your silky handkerchief has pulled some mischief,

Your silky handkerchief,

Whoever looks at it says,

‘What a site this is?’ (2x)

Sweetness on your lips,

Your words are sweet as sugar cubes,

I miss-stepped when I saw your stride,

Your burn like soft fire,

Ghagra (3x).

## Appendix 4

English translation of Monto's song analysed on page 230.

Who will swing my darling's bed? (4X)

Just reward that person with a golden bangle.

That my darling is swinging in bed, a bed. (3X)

The darling's mother is swinging the bed. (2X)

That my darling is swinging in bed.

Just reward that person with a golden bangle.

That my darling is swinging in bed.

My darling's *fua* is swinging the bed. (2X)

She is giving thumka.

That my darling is swinging in bed...in bed.