FROM INDIAN TO INDO-CREOLE: TASSA DRUMMING, CREOLIZATION, AND INDO-CARIBBEAN NATIONALISM IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By

CHRISTOPHER L. BALLENGEE

A DISSERTATION PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2013

© 2013 Christopher L. Ballengee

In memory of Krishna Soogrim-Ram

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to numerous individuals for helping this project come to fruition. Thanks first to my committee for their unwavering support. Ken Broadway has been a faithful champion of the music of Trinidad and Tobago, and I am grateful for his encouragement. He is indeed one of the best teachers I have ever had. Silvio dos Santos' scholarship and professionalism has likewise been an inspiration for my own musical investigations. In times of struggle during research and analysis, I consistently returned to his advice: "What does the music tell you?" Vasudha Narayanan's insights into the Indian and Hindu experience in the Americas imparted in me an awareness of the subtleties of common practices and to see that despite claims of wholly recreated traditions, they are "always different." In my time at the University of Florida, Larry Crook has given me the freedom—perhaps too much at times—to follow my own path, to discover knowledge and meaning on my own terms. Yet, he has also been a mentor, friend, and colleague who I hold in the highest esteem. Special thanks also to Peter Schmidt for inspiring my interest in ethnographic film and whose words of encouragement, support, and congratulations propelled me in no small degree through the early and protracted stages of research. Gratitude also to Peter Manuel whose many email conversations nourished a great deal of my work.

In the field, there are far too many to thank. My work is our work through and through. First and foremost, Lenny Kumar took me on like a brother: hosting me in his home, conversing about music and philosophy, laughing and celebrating alongside me, and literally driving me all over the country. As is evident in my writing, I am truly indebted to Lenny more than I can ever repay. Likewise Nita, Lenora, and Lennita Kumar deserve equal thanks for allowing my wife and I to invade their home and steal

away their husband and father for weeks at a time. Thanks also to Trinidad and Tobago Sweet Tassa members Shiva Persad, Keron Ramkeessoon, Kevin Mohammed, George Baboolal, “Big” George, and Thomas Ramoutar. The Tampa branch of Trinidad and Tobago Sweet Tassa also became great friends over the years. Thanks to Amarnath Ramkissoon, Vishwanath Woods, Jonathan Sanowar, Vishal Deo, and especially Rohan Abraham for inviting me to join the band and putting up with my camera. Without their help, this project would not have been as successful and as fun as it has turned out to be. Krishna Soogrim-Ram passed away shortly after I spoke with him in August of last year. In the short time I knew him, his words and wisdom touched me in profound ways. I am grateful to Krishna and his son Sanjeet for providing a wealth of oral and photographic history that spans beyond the bounds of the present study. Federico Moratorio helped with cinematography and photography in Trinidad in spring of 2011. In the summer of 2012, Heather Hall also assisted with filming, photography, and interviews. I thank them both for technical help and good times. I thank Brinsley Samaroo and Kumar Mahabir for providing academic support and helping to arrange my first trip to Trinidad in 2007 and subsequent conversations about this or that detail. Profound thanks to the congregation of Aramalaya Presbyterian Church for making me feel at home during my stay in Tunapuna. I am especially grateful to Rev. Everson Sieunarine who became my closest friend and confidant that summer. I will never forget our journeys into town and into the bush and for all the conversation along the way.

My work was facilitated by a dedicated support network on campus including, among others, Laura Robertson and June Hall in the College of Fine Arts and in the School of Music, Trent Weller, Charles Pickeral, Amanda Mayberry-Hipp, and John

Duff. Also thanks to Robena Cornwell and Michelle Wilbanks whose stewardship and direction of the Music Library helped tremendously during my time at the University of Florida. Moreover, I have deeply depended upon my colleagues, especially Jack Forbes, Chris Witulski, Sunni Witmer, Elikem Nyamuame, Hicham Chami, and Brian Holder, for moral and intellectual support. I am honored by their friendship and scholarly advice. My research was sponsored in part by the A. Curtis Wilgus Fellowship from the University of Florida Center for Latin American Studies, the University of Florida Graduate School Dissertation Award, and numerous travel grants from the University of Florida Graduate Student Council and the University of Florida Office of Research and Graduate Programs. Thanks also to Owen and Elizabeth Reynolds and the technical theatre crew at Santa Fe College for helping to build tassa drums and giving me more leeway that I deserved to retreat from the theatre and finish my dissertation.

I am nothing without the love and support of my family. This journey has kept me away from them for far too long, and I have a long road yet to travel. Luckily, I have an excellent traveling partner. Ty jesteś moim skarbem.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

page

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 4

LIST OF TABLES 11

LIST OF FIGURES 12

LIST OF OBJECTS 16

ABSTRACT 17

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION 19

East Indians in the West Indies 23
Literature Review and Theoretical Framework 25
Research Objectives and Methodology 38
Chapter Overview 42

2 TASSA ORGANOLOGY, TECHNIQUE, AND ENSEMBLE HIERARCHY 44

Dhol Tasha in the Bhojpuri Diaspora 45
Instruments of the Trinidadian Tassa Ensemble 54
Tassa 55
Bass (Dhol) 70
Jhal (Jhanjh) 81
Hierarchy within the Tassa Ensemble 84
Playing Technique 86
Tassa 87
Bass 88
Jhal 89
Cognates with Creole Drumming Ensembles 91
Summary 98

3 REPERTOIRE 100

General Characteristics of Tassa Repertoire 101
Notes on Musical Analysis and Transcription 106
Folk and Classical Hands 110
Tikora 110
Chaubola 115
Nagara 120
Wedding Hand 123
Caribbean Hands 129

Dingolay 129
Calypso 136
Recently Composed Hands 139
Chutney 139
George of the Jungle 143
Collective Composition 144
Summary 145

4 "I GOIN' IN A MATIKOR TO SEE THEM LADIES FÊTE:" HINDU WEDDINGS AND TASSA PERFORMANCE 149

Introduction: Matikor, Lawa, and Agwaani 150
Matikor 155
Cooking Night 164
Lawa 167
Agwaani 172
Wedding Jassles 174
Summary 179

5 TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION IN COMPETITIVE TASSA PERFORMANCES 181

Contesting Tradition 182
Mastana Bahar 184
Tassa Taal and the National Tassa Competition 186
Rules, Regulations, and Performance Expectations 188
"We're All Under the Umbrella of T&T:" A Competitive Tassa Performance 192
Tradition Contested 196
Repertoire 196
Narrative 197
Spectacle 198
Competitive Format 199
The National Stage 202
Summary 205

6 CO-NATIONAL INSTRUMENTS? RACE, CREOLIZATION, AND MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AS EMBLEMS OF TRINIDADIAN IDENTITY 209

Patterns of Race-based Competition in Trinidad 213
Racial Tensions in the Colonial Era 214
Party Politics as Racial Politics 219
Music and Nation 224
Steel Pan and Trinidadian Nationalism 225
The National Instrument Debate 235
Summary: Multiculturalism, Fusion, and National Belonging 249

7 CONCLUSION: TASSA, COOLITUDE, AND INDO-TRINIDADIAN NATIONALISM 260

Double Consciousness 262
Négritude and Afro-Creolization as Indigenization 264
Why Tassa? 268
Indo-Trinidadian Musical Aesthetics 268
Intra-ethnic Appeal 270
Creolization and Indo-Trinidadian National Belonging 275
Coolitude: Toward a Theory of Indo-Creole 278

APPENDIX

A DISCOGRAPHY 284

Referenced Sound Recordings 284
Consulted Sound Recordings 286

B MUSICAL TRANSCRIPTIONS 287

Notation Key 287
Tassa Notation 287
Bass Notation 288
Jhal Notation 288
Transcriptions 289
Tikora 291
Chaubola 292
Nagara 295
Wedding Hand 297
Dingolay 301
Calypso Hand 303
Chutney 304
George of the Jungle 306

C TASSA COMPETITION RULES AND SCORE SHEETS 307

2003 National Tassa Monarch Competition Rules and Guidelines 307
2005 National Tassa Competition of T&T Preliminary Rules and Guidelines 308
2007 Dinsley Community Residents Association Tassabration Score Sheet 309
Tassa Taal 2007 Rules and Regulations 310
Tassa Taal 2013 Rules and Regulations 311

D AUDIO EXAMPLES 312

E MAPS 313

LIST OF REFERENCES 314

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH 322

LIST OF TABLES

Table page

3-1 Formal structure of wedding hand. 125

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		page
1-1	Wedding maro	19
1-2	Dancing to tassa at a wedding reception.	21
2-1	Detail of musicians in a Muharram procession	46
2-2	Dhol section of a dhol tasha procession during Ganesh Chaturthi	48
2-3	Tasha drummers performing during Ganesh Chaturthi	48
2-4	Surinamese tazza groep Milan Tazza	51
2-5	A four-part Trinidadian tassa ensemble circa 1960s	54
2-6	Mahadeo Goolcharan makes a clay tassa shell	56
2-7	Heating clay-and-goatskin tassas	57
2-8	A small freon canister (right) and one with the top cut away (left)	58
2-9	A completed nut-and-bolt tassa made by Lenny Kumar	58
2-10	Members of Trinidad & Tobago Sweet Tassa playing buoy drums	62
2-11	Advertisement for Radio 90.5	63
2-12	The underside of a paten tureen owned by Antony Gopee.	65
2-13	Antony Gopee (right) with Lenny Kumar.	66
2-14	Kumar Ragoo of ‘D’Evergreen Tassa Group accompanying a matikor	67
2-15	Tassa chopes (left) displayed for sale alongside steel pan sticks	69
2-16	Jhal and tassa displayed for sale alongside trap sets and cymbals	69
2-17	Martin’s 1838 sketches of musical instruments of eastern India	71
2-18	A bass made from slats of wood built by Quicksilver Tassa Group	73
2-19	Basses belonging to Malick Tassa Drummers	74
2-20	Amar Ramkissoon cleans goatskin for new bass drumheads	75
2-21	After cleaning, the skin is left to dry	76

2-22 Once dry, the hair is removed from the skin 77
2-23 Lenny Kumar applies masala to the bass drumhead 77
2-24 Shiva Persad uses a belt sander to finish the outside of a bass shell 78
2-25 Lenny Kumar begins the process of lacing the drumheads 79
2-26 Kissoon Bachan holding his jhal 83
2-27 The author playing jhal for a wedding 84
2-28 Music for the entrance of the *dulaha* (groom) and *dulahin* (bride) 85
3-1 Drummers accompany a tadjah procession during Hosay 104
3-2 Detail of tikara drum 111
3-3 Tikora theka 112
3-4 Tikora inside taa. 113
3-5 Tikora end taal 113
3-6 Bhatee, nadidin, and Hosay tikora basslines 115
3-7 Chaubola cutter modules 116
3-8 Emamalee Mohammed's rendition of chaubola taals 119
3-9 Nagara theka 121
3-10 Nagara inside taal with three-measure bass and jhal tag 122
3-11 Wedding hand thekas 126
3-12 Wedding Hand, Taal 1 127
3-13 Wedding Hand, end of Taal 2 127
3-14 Dingolay theka with simplified foulé 130
3-15 Dingolay foulé with bracketed ghost notes 131
3-16 Comparison of cutter pattern, dingolay, taal one 132
3-17 Comparison of cutter pattern, taal two, dingolay 134
3-18 T&T Sweet Tassa's second iteration of taal two in dingolay 135

3-19 Dingolay end taal 136
3-20 Comparison of “dudup rhythm” and calypso hand bass pattern 138
3-21 Comparison of steelband conga pattern and calypso hand theka 138
3-22 Comparison of chutney patterns with foulé for chutney hand 141
3-23 Lenny Kumar’s inside taal for chutney hand 142
3-24 Bass pattern for chutney-soca hand 142
3-25 George of the Jungle theka and taal 144
3-26 Partial transcription of hand improvised by T&T Sweet Tassa 145
4-1 The betrothed’s mother teekays the bass 159
4-2 Matikor puja 161
4-3 Ladies dance to tassa after matikor puja 163
4-4 Some typical wedding foods 165
4-5 Sunday morning procession going for lawa 166
4-6 Women going for lawa led by T&T Sweet Tassa 167
4-7 Dancing at lawa 171
4-8 Post-agwaani wedding jassle 174
4-9 Scenes from a wedding jassle 176
5-1 Harry Lutchman Tassa Group’s performance on Mastana Bahar 185
5-2 Posters advertising tassa competitions 188
5-3 T&T Sweet Tassa’s performance at the 2009 National Tassa Competition 194
6-1 “Waiting for the Races” 215
6-2 Oceanic and maritime imagery of Indian presence in Trinidad and Tobago 222
6-3 Tenor steel pan 228
6-4 Sagicor Exodus Steel Orchestra rehearsing in their panyard 228
6-5 “A Tribute to the Steelband Movement” 231

6-6 The cover of Emamalee's Mohammed's *Tassarama* 239

6-7 Banner promoting Trinidad and Tobago's fiftieth year of independence 252

6-8 Music and dance performances at the launch of Patriotism Week 2013 organized by the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration 253

6-9 Photo collage in Piarco International Airport 258

7-1 T&T Sweet Tassa All-Girls Band 273

7-2 D'Evergreen Tassa Group 273

7-3 Tassa class at Shiva Mandir 282

E-1 Regional maps 313

E-2 Map of Trinidadian locales mentioned in the text 313

LIST OF OBJECTS

Object		page
D-1	Tikora (wedding suite) (.mp3 1 MB)	312
D-2	Chaubola (wedding suite) (.mp3 3 MB)	312
D-3	Someri (wedding suite) (.mp3 1 MB)	312
D-4	Calypso (wedding suite) (.mp3 5 MB)	312
D-5	Wedding Hand (wedding suite) (.mp3 6 MB)	312
D-6	Nagara (wedding suite) (.mp3 3 MB)	312
D-7	George of the Jungle (wedding suite) (.mp3 1 MB)	312
D-8	Tikora (.mp3 1 MB)	312
D-9	Nagara (.mp3 5 MB)	312
D-10	Dingolay (.mp3 3 MB)	312
D-11	Calypso (.mp3 4 MB)	312
D-12	Chutney (.mp3 3 MB)	312

Abstract of Dissertation Presented to the Graduate School
of the University of Florida in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

FROM INDIAN TO INDO-CREOLE: TASSA DRUMMING, CREOLIZATION, AND INDO-CARIBBEAN NATIONALISM IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

By

Christopher L. Ballengee

August 2013

Chair: Larry Crook
Major: Music

Tassa is an Indo-Caribbean musical genre popular in Trinidad and Tobago characterized by a four-part ensemble comprising four instruments: two small kettledrums called “tassa,” a double-headed bass drum called *dhol* or simply “bass,” and *jhal*, a set of hand cymbals. In this study, I engage tassa on two interrelated levels. First, I provide a description of the ensemble and a musical analysis of common repertoire. Second, I use this musical analysis to discuss ways in which tassa is evoked as a symbol of Indo-Trinidadian identity. In the process, I situate tassa performance as one among a variety of diasporic practices that reverberate through layers of individual alignments—religious, gendered, economic, and otherwise—to construct an ostensibly unified Indo-Trinidadian identity that references India as a place of origin and the Caribbean as home. With divergent though ultimately complementary referents, Indo-Trinidadian identity is in this way rooted in a pronounced multilocality.

The Caribbean region has historically been regarded in terms of a prevalent Afro-European creolization. The presence of Indians and other marginalized groups, however, problematizes this assumption, both in terms of academic theories of creolization and state-sponsored, Afro-Creole-centric rhetoric valorizing Afro-Caribbean

culture to the exclusion of others. This study addresses this problem by providing musical analysis that reveals tassa exists within a coherent Indo-Trinidadian musical system at once indebted to North Indian aesthetics but deployed in an idiosyncratically Caribbean manner principally independent from Afro-Trinidadian input. Such an analysis in turn informs academic and state-sponsored rhetoric surrounding notions of creolization and multiculturalism. In a final analysis, I draw upon the social critiques offered by W.E.B. du Bois' "double consciousness," its theoretical protégé *négritude*, and an Indo-centric poetics of *coolitude* to consider what I call an Indo-Creole identity evident in tassa musical production that informs both the independence of an Indo-Trinidadian musical system and Indo-Trinidadians' symbolic use of tassa in demands for national representation.

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Figure 1-1. Wedding maro. Aranguez, Trinidad. August 2007.

During the initial days of my fieldwork in August 2007, I attended a wedding in Aranguez, Trinidad at the invitation of anthropologist Kumar Mahabir. Like most Hindu weddings in Trinidad, the event was held at the bride's parents' home. An impromptu, expansive corrugated-metal awning covered the fenced-in front yard, creating a space beneath, blocked from the sun and rain, that was elaborately decorated with garlands, lights, and *murtis*. In the haze of the morning, DJ speakers were already thumping a mix of chutney and Bollywood film songs before a sea of expectant plastic chairs facing an exquisite *maro*, a gazebo-like structure within which the wedding proper would take place in the afternoon. As we walked from the sweltering morning heat into the relative coolness of this shady space, oscillating fans blew the sweet scent of curry from the

buffet table. Stopping to look, smell, and listen, Kumar turned to me, stretching his arms outward as if to take it all in and at the same time direct my attention to a world unfolding around us, and said, “Look! It’s India right here in Trinidad!”

Very early in my research, I became fascinated by ways Indo-Trinidadians surround themselves in one way or another with symbols and practices that represent clear continuities with India. While these practices may in reality be quite divergent from contemporary subcontinental phenomena, they nonetheless resonate as “Indian,” however romantic or imagined this notion sometimes may be, in diaspora. By virtue of their reinvention and codification in Trinidad, these practices at the same time, and seemingly paradoxically so, express an everyday Caribbean orientation. I became especially interested in practices that reverberate through layers of individual alignments—religious, gendered, economic, and otherwise—to construct an ostensibly unified Indo-Trinidadian identity that references India as a place of origin and the Caribbean as home. With divergent though ultimately complementary referents, Indo-Trinidadian identity is in this way rooted in a pronounced multilocality.

Musical practices are a profoundly important means by which this multilocality is deployed as affirmation and acculturation within the Indo-Trinidadian community. Music, furthermore, is an essential means by which Indo-Trinidadian multilocality is put on display in public spaces where Trinidadian ethnic identities frequently meet one another. Expressions of Indo-Caribbean-ness within a predominantly Afro-Creole context raises intriguing questions. In a region conceptually framed by a prevalent Afro-European creolization, how are racial and cultural alterities resolved within a creole framework? By what means is Indo-Caribbean otherness expressed, accepted, repulsed, or otherwise

processed by cultural stakeholders? For Trinidad and Tobago in particular, music and musical metaphors are important means by which identities are expressed, critiqued, and challenged. Therefore, in a contemporary nation-state comprising two dominant ethnic minorities and no majority, how is Indo-Caribbean national identity deployed in musical discourse? This study seeks to illuminate possible resolutions to these questions by examining key aspects of Indo-Caribbean musical and nationalist discourse. I examine Trinidadian tassa drumming as a central case study through which these notions are explored.

Figure 1-2. Dancing to tassa at a wedding reception. The flag of Trinidad and Tobago flies in the background. Tunapuna, Trinidad. April 2011. Photo by Federico Moratorio.

Why tassa? What is it about tassa as an ensemble and as a genre of music that is appropriately emblematic of Indo-Trinidadian identity? Tassa is an Indo-Caribbean musical genre popular in Trinidad and Tobago (though played elsewhere) that is characterized by a four-part ensemble comprising four instruments: two small kettledrums called “tassa,” a large double-headed bass drum called *dhol* or simply “bass,” and *jhal*, a set of small hand cymbals. Collectively, this ensemble is referred to as a “tassa group” or “tassa band.” Most often, it is simply called “tassa,” this term referring both the individual kettledrums and the ensemble itself. Tassa is invariably present for Hindu weddings and the Shi’a Muslim Muharram observance (locally termed *Hosay*); it is played by Hindus, Muslims, and Christians; though few and far between, women have steadily been accepted as drummers in recent decades; tassa is a common feature of sacred and secular celebrations regardless of the socio-economic class of participants; and even in New York and Florida where West Indians form substantial diasporic communities, tassa is a vital component of Indo-Trinidadian—and perhaps more broadly Indo-Caribbean—cultural expression. In this way, tassa is routinely taken for granted as a quintessentially Indo-Trinidadian musical practice as well as an emblem of Indo-Trinidadians identity.

In this study, I engage tassa on two interrelated levels. First, I provide a description of the ensemble and a musical analysis of common repertoire. Second, I use this musical analysis to discuss ways in which tassa is evoked as an Indo-Trinidadian symbol in the most recent bid to make tassa a co-national instrument alongside the more famous steel pan, an instrument with decidedly Afro-Trinidadian associations. This study provides a systematic musical analysis that reveals tassa is

nurtured within a coherent Indo-Trinidadian musical system at once indebted to North Indian aesthetics but deployed in an idiosyncratically Caribbean manner principally independent from Afro-Trinidadian input. This independence reflects the historical socio-cultural rift between Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians and informs the current state of racial politics. Indo-Trinidadians' exile from India and subsequent geographic and social segregation from centers of Trinidadian colonial power allowed Afro-Creole culture to emerge as national culture in the era leading to independence in 1962. From this point on, Trinidadian national belonging has been largely framed in terms of creolization, defined chiefly in reference to "Afro-Creole." Valorization of Afro-Trinidadian symbols as national symbols is exemplified in the elevation of the steel pan as Trinidad and Tobago's national instrument in 1992, an act that some Indo-Trinidadians viewed as yet another state-sponsored affirmation of Indo-Trinidadian exclusion. I draw upon the social critiques offered by W.E.B. Du Bois' "double consciousness," its theoretical protégé *négritude*, and an Indo-centric poetics of *coolitude* to consider what I call an "Indo-Creole" identity, evident in tassa performance and in ideas about tassa, that informs both the independence of an Indo-Trinidadian musical system and Indo-Trinidadians' symbolic use of tassa in demands for national representation.

East Indians in the West Indies

Trinidad and Tobago is a twin-island nation-state at the southernmost tip of the Lesser Antilles with a total population of about 1.3 million. Between 1838 and 1917, hundreds of thousands of indentured Indian laborers were imported to the Caribbean through a global scheme of British indentureship that exported workers to British, French, and Dutch colonies in the Caribbean, south and east Africa, the Indian Ocean, southeast Asia, Australia, and Oceania. Descendants of indentured Indians form a

distinct and important part of the cultural fabric of the Caribbean. Throughout the region, people of Indian descent are certainly in the minority, though they form a majority in Guyana and constitute the largest ethnic minorities in Surinam and Trinidad and Tobago. Smaller and arguably more assimilated communities are also found in other islands and mainland regions, most prominently Jamaica and islands of the Lesser Antilles. Beginning in the latter half of the 20th century, significant Indo-Caribbean communities also coalesced in North America, especially New York, Toronto, and central and south Florida; and in Europe, especially the Netherlands.

For colonial authorities and plantocrats of the West Indies in particular, indentureship was a means of keeping plantation wages as low as possible upon the end of African slavery in the 1830s. In Trinidad, the majority of Indians worked in sugarcane cultivation while some were assigned to cocoa, coffee, coconut, and other agricultural estates. Though contract requirements were modified at different points throughout the life of the indenture system, laborers generally agreed to a contract of five years, upon expiration of which most stayed in Trinidad rather than return to India. By the turn of the century, Indians made up no less than one third of the total population of the colony.[1] The descendants of these indentured workers continued to comprise a slight minority throughout most of the twentieth century. Today, those identifying as Indo-Trinidadian or "East Indian" make up 40% of the population, a plurality over Afro-Trinidadians or "Creoles" (37.5%) and other minority groups.[2]

---

[1] Marianne Ramesar, *Survivors of Another Crossing: A History of East Indians in Trinidad, 1880-1946* (St. Augustine, Trinidad: School of Continuing Studies, University of the West Indies, 1994), 131.

[2] Central Intelligence Agency, "Trinidad and Tobago," World Factbook, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/td.html (accessed May 23, 2013), under "People and Society." In academic literature, the terms Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian are

Indo-Trinidadians have historically faced discrimination and cultural invisibility in matters of national representation. In the decade preceding independence from Britain in 1962, the educated black and "colored" (racial mixture of black and white) middle class inherited power from the departing white ruling class. As such, notions of the burgeoning nation privileged Afro-Trinidadian culture to the exclusion of Indo-Trinidadian identifiers. This resulted in a "creole culture," specifically defined in terms of an Afro-European stream of syncretism that was enshrined as the font of authentic national culture. Indo-Trinidadians experienced something of a cultural renaissance throughout the 1980s, coinciding with and indeed reinforced by a concomitant rise in Indo-Trinidadian political assertiveness in the same period. Though revised state rhetoric has turned toward the promotion of "multiculturalism" and "unity in diversity" in recent decades, Indo-Trinidadian demands for equal representation continue to be met with accusations of ethnocentrism, racism, and anti-patriotism.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

In the wake of the historical impact of European colonization and African slavery, the Caribbean region is most often regarded in terms of an Afro-European creole culture. Indians—like the Chinese, Syrians, Lebanese, Javanese, Amerindians, and other significant but marginalized groups in the region—have been relatively absent from Caribbean popular and academic discourse. A good example is Sidney Mintz's book *Sweetness and Power*, a widely popular socio-cultural history of sugar production and consumption that gives only passing mention of Indian indentured labor.[3] Since this

conventional ethnic identifiers. While Trinidadians generally understand these terms, they usually refer to each other as "Indian" or "East Indian" and "Creole" or occasionally "black" or "Negro."

[3] Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Penguin, 1986).

book is to a large degree intended for a general audience, such an omission seems all the more troublesome as it perpetuates the invisibility of indentured Indians in the Caribbean despite their place as the primary engine of the British sugar industry after emancipation.

While numerous studies have addressed specific elements of global 19th-century indentureship, Hugh Tinker, David Northrup, and Walton Look Lai's respective studies provide the most far-reaching insights in this regard. Tinker's classic history of the British indenture system provides vital statistics on the recruitment, transportation, and working conditions of indentured Indians.[4] Northrup, however, has criticized Tinker's characterization of the indenture system as little more than "a new system of slavery" for its apparent hyperbole. As Northrup writes:

> Tinker relates how he began his research with a moderate and detached point of view about indentured labor and was gradually led by his reading of the evidence to present a darker picture of it as a new system of slavery. It is ironic that in the course of my research on the subject my views shifted from near Tinker's final outlook back toward a median position, which sees indentured labor overall as having more in common with the experiences of "free" migrants of the same era than with the victims of the slave trade.[5]

Where Tinker frequently recounts the abuses and misery of the indenture system, Northrup by contrast presents a calculated, figure-laden account that situates Indian indenture within a truly global labor narrative. Look Lai's account of indentureship in the British West Indies covers much of the same ground as Tinker and Northrup, though he

[4] Hugh Tinker, *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830-1920* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).

[5] David Northrup, *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834-1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), x.

is the only scholar to date to give a deeply nuanced account of Chinese indentureship in the Caribbean.[6]

Morton Klass conducted the first substantial ethnography of Indo-Trinidadians in the 1950s, a historically momentous time when Trinidadians were preparing for independence in 1962.[7] Though he makes passing mention of Indo-Trinidadians' national sentiments, Klass' work is largely that of classic ethnography: cataloging kinships and social life within a single village. Scholars have since criticized Klass for focusing too narrowly on a supposedly closed rural setting and ignoring "the rise of new elites, the emergence of party politics and rapid urbanisation" in other parts of the country that greatly affected Indo-Trinidadians.[8] Colin Clarke's ethnography of urban Indo-Trinidadian life in San Fernando addresses some of these issues and spans a longer time frame, from 1930 until 1970. Clarke, however, largely confirms what Klass had concluded earlier, namely that Indo-Trinidadians were largely excluded from participation within the larger national community by a combination of voluntary insularism and institutionalized racism.[9]

Oxford-educated historian Eric Williams became the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago in 1962. His *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*, revised and republished in the same year, is an interesting historical artifact as it is often difficult

---

[6] Walton Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies, 1838-1918* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

[7] Morton Klass, *East Indians in Trinidad: A Study of Cultural Persistence* (Prospect Heights, Il: Waveland Press, 1961).

[8] John La Guerre, ed., *Calcutta to Caroni: The East Indians of Trinidad* (St. Augustine, Trinidad: University of the West Indies Extra Mural Studies Unit, 1985), xiii.

[9] Colin G. Clarke, *East Indians in a West Indian Town: San Fernando, Trinidad, 1930-70* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1986).

to separate Williams the scholar from Williams the politician, especially as he discusses himself in the third person.[10] In light of his party's equation of Afro-Trinidadian culture with national culture (discussed in chapter six), it is clear why Williams' relatively brief mention of Indo-Trinidadians, principally limited to one nineteen-page chapter titled "The Contribution of the Indians," is reticent on the kinds of racial rivalries that were brewing even in the colonial period. Historian Bridget Brereton—also a Trinidadian—has, however, written extensively on the racial politics of colonial and contemporary Trinidad and Tobago. Her book *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870-1900*, first published in 1979, is still today one of the most encompassing histories of race and class in the nineteenth-century Caribbean.[11] Most important at present, Brereton reveals Indians not merely as victims of an oppressive plantocratic system nor simple commodities to be discussed in terms of numbers only, but as dynamic members of society despite their relative lack of socio-economic power. This indeed is a milestone in the historiography of Indo-Caribbean people. Moreover, it laid the foundation for later work on contemporary race relations in which Brereton cites nineteenth-century racial divisions as the foundation of the development of distinct Afro- and Indo-centric narratives of the nation's past that come to bear in the racial politics of today, a sentiment echoed in many recent studies of race in Trinidad and Tobago.[12]

---

[10] Eric Williams, *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago* (Buffalo, NY: Eworld, Inc., 1962).

[11] Bridget Brereton, *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[12] Bridget Brereton, "'All Ah We Is Not One:' Historical and Ethnic Narratives in Pluralist Trinidad," *The Global South* 4, no. 2 (2010): 218–238; Bridget Brereton, "The Historical Background to the Culture of Violence in Trinidad and Tobago," *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* no. 4 (2010), http://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/february2010/index.asp.

In addition to Brereton's historical treatment of race and class, the work of Viranjini Munashinghe and Aisha Khan has been particularly influential in my understanding of Trinidadian politics and Indo-Trinidadian bids for national representation. Munasinghe's straightforward ethnography is grounded in a deep reading of colonial history and its impact on contemporary Indo-Trinidadian identity and national belonging. She insightfully distills Indo-Trinidadian nationalist narratives into a dichotomy of *callaloo* and tossed salad models of culture, the former suggesting a thorough and equal blending of ingredients and the latter suggesting a mix with retention of constituent parts.[13] Her analysis comes to bear on my discussion of creolization as part and parcel of nationality in chapter six.

Khan's discursive analysis of counterhegemonic strategies that resist the homogenizing rhetoric of creolization is equally useful in understanding the dynamics of Indo-Trinidadian nationalism.[14] In the process of interrogating Trinidadian politics of identity, Khan wrests creolization from its reified place as a static, *a priori* assumption in Caribbean academic discourse:

> Through its pervasiveness—as colonial ideology, as postindependence politics, as cultural discourse, as locally (and supralocally) observed sociocultural processes—mixing shapes the ways groups constitute and reconstitute themselves over time. As discourse, mixing is not expressed as a single, uniform concept deployed in certain contexts. Rather, mixing is expressed diffusely through numerous articulated metaphors through which people make abstract and static concepts concrete and dynamic as these metaphors are brought to

[13] Viranjini Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad? East Indians and the Cultural Politics of Identity in Trinidad* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001).

[14] Aisha Khan, "Creolization Moments," in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, ed. Charles Stewart (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007), 237–253; Aisha Khan, "Journey to the Center of the Earth: The Caribbean as Master Symbol," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 3 (2001): 271–302.

> bear on specific events or experiences and thereby explain them, memorialize them, or define them.[15]

Though a theme in both Munasinghe and Khan's work is the role of Indo-Trinidadian expressive culture in legitimizing demands for Indo-Trinidadian national belonging, each discusses music and the arts in abstract terms and frequently only as a means to an end. In this dissertation, I focus on how the musical means through which identities are articulated can clarify ways that concepts of "mixing" reflect and inform competing claims for national belonging.

Though few and far between, ethnomusicological studies of Indo-Caribbean music provide considerably more nuanced analysis of the varied orientations of Indo-Trinidadian musics, musicians, and audiences. Gregory Diethrich demonstrates how the increased political assertiveness of Indo-Trinidadians in the 1980s coincided with a corollary rise in Indo-Trinidadian expressive culture, music especially, in a manner such that "the political and the artistic… exerted a dialectical influence on one another, each mutually reinforcing the potency and legitimacy of the other" in much the same way as Afro-Trinidadian expressive arts did for Eric Williams in the mid-twentieth century.[16] Diethrich's study resides largely in the socio-political realm, however, and provides little in the way of detailed musical analysis given the theoretical ground he chooses to cover. Where Diethrich's work touches upon a wide range of sacred, popular, erudite, and folk genres, Helen Myers, Tina Ramnarine, and Peter Manuel focus on more specific musical topics.

---

[15] Aisha Khan, *Callaloo Nation: Metaphors of Race and Religious Identity Among South Asians in Trinidad* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 226–227.

[16] Gregory Michael Diethrich, "'Living in Both Sides of the World': Music, Diaspora, and Nation in Trinidad" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2004), 3.

Based upon fieldwork in the 1970s and 1980s, Myers' impressive volume *Music of Hindu Trinidad* is the most important resource on Trinidadian Bhojpuri songs and likely will remain as such given the steep decline in Bhojpuri speakers in the latter part of the twentieth century.[17] Myers devotes significant space to documenting the music itself, frequently including transcriptions of melodies, rhythmic schemes, and numerous full (and often literal) translations of Bhojpuri song texts. In this way, the music itself becomes a character in the ethnographic narrative, a hinge upon which Myers relates Trinidadian and Indian musical heritages in very direct and understandable terms. She makes explicit connections between songs collected in Trinidad with their corollaries in India where, for example, her search for popular tunes sung in the village of Felicity in central Trinidad was difficult thanks to divergent traditions:

> Almost without exception, the Indian women for whom I played the songs from Trinidad easily identified each example, explained its meaning, and in many cases sang the same song for me. Usually the text of the song was similar to that from the West Indies, but often the tune was different. They were insistent that the meaning of the song derives from the words, not the tune.[18]

What Myers concluded was that the Trinidadian melodies were frozen; they remained static while their apparent Indian forebears did not. This and similar anecdotes point to ways in which music (and Indian cultural generally) in Trinidad remained rooted in North Indian vernacular sensibilities, yet developed idiosyncrasies that make it unique to the Caribbean experience. Manuel's study of Indo-Caribbean local-classical (or *tān*) singing foregrounds similar survivals and retentions in the midst of a profoundly idiosyncratic

[17] Helen Myers, *Music of Hindu Trinidad: Songs from the India Diaspora* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[18] Ibid., 409.

musical system.[19] That these genres persist without significant Afro-Trinidadian syncretic influence lends credence to Khan and Munasinghe's problematization of the conventional characterization of Trinidad—and the Caribbean region writ large—in terms of an equally mixed callaloo.

In this light, the innovations apparent in Indian-derived traditions, music especially, point to an idiogenerative impulse, an internal creativity that at once confirms the kind of ingenuity that characterizes creolizing processes yet denies—for the most part—exogenous influence. The popular song genre chutney is particularly illustrative in this regard. While "modern chutney evolved primarily from a specific set of folk subgenres, all of which share the use of fast tempo, a simple refrain-verse… structure, and light, erotic Bhojpuri texts,"[20] as Manuel notes, chutney "constitutes a revival and repackaging of [these] folk genres… which have declined in their traditional contexts."[21] Indeed, Ramnarine suggests chutney is emblematic of a more generalized Indo-Trinidadian "multi-local" identity, one that is oriented toward India as a place of origin and Trinidad and Tobago as home.[22] In other words, as instruments and timbres point to Indian aesthetics, the rearticulation and invention of new modes of deploying them are distinctly Caribbean. It is my contention in this study that tassa follows such a pattern. The analysis in chapters two and three demonstrates that increasingly virtuosic repertoire catalyzed and was facilitated by technological innovation in the instruments of

[19] Peter Manuel, *Tān-singing, Chutney, and the Making of Indo-Caribbean Culture* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000).

[20] Ibid., 169.

[21] Ibid., 172.

[22] Tina K. Ramnarine, *Creating Their Own Space: The Development of an Indian-Caribbean Musical Tradition* (Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2001), 144–145.

the tassa ensemble. Moreover, chapter three's discussion illuminates a pattern by which new repertoire is created through rhythmic adaptations of existing song forms. Therefore, even when appropriating an Afro-Trinidadian genre like calypso, tassa repertoire maintains an internal coherency while simultaneously referencing its Caribbean locality.

At present, relatively little academic or documentary attention has been paid to tassa drumming. To my knowledge, Emory Cook first recorded tassa for commercial release in the mid-1950s, though his recordings are brief and woefully mislabeled.[23] In an effort to preserve the sounds of Trinidad and Tobago at the moment of independence, Alan Lomax made an ambitious compendium of recordings throughout the country in 1962 including numerous recordings of tassa drumming and a few interviews with drummers themselves.[24] The Cook and Lomax recordings provide an important historical point of comparison for the current study. Though many of the texts mentioned above make passing reference to tassa, Manuel has made the most important contributions to its study, including musical transcriptions and comparison with other Indian and Indo-Caribbean genres, in a forthcoming volume, *Tales, Tunes, and Tassa Drums*.[25] My analyses in chapter three proceed in dialog with Manuel's tassa-focused chapter in this manuscript.

---

[23] *East Indian Drums of Tunapuna Trinidad*, Cook 5018 (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Folkways, 1956).

[24] These recordings are accessible from the website of the Association for Cultural Equity: http://www.culturalequity.org.

[25] I am grateful to Manuel for sharing the manuscript of his chapter on tassa from this book. As his text is still in progress, references to it throughout this dissertation are made to the chapter in general rather than specific page numbers. Peter Manuel, "Tassa Drumming from India to the Caribbean and Beyond," in *Tales, Tunes, and Tassa Drums: Retention and Invention in Indo-Caribbean Music* (Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, forthcoming); see also Manuel's documentary film: Peter Manuel, *Tassa Thunder: Folk Music from India to the Caribbean* DVD, 2010.

Indian *tasha*—Trinidadian tassa's most likely antecedent—has received similarly scant ethnographic study apart from the valuable work of Richard Wolf.[26] A number of nineteenth century sources also provide a limited historical perspective on tasha drumming. Of these, perhaps the most important is journalist Abdul Halim Sharar's account of nineteenth-century Lucknow, which includes extended passages describing tasha in conjunction with Muharram and other contexts.[27] Sharar's description indeed indicates a robust tasha tradition in and around Lucknow during the era in which laborers would have been actively recruited from the region for travel to overseas plantations.

The scarcity of research on Indo-Trinidadian music is conspicuous given the comparatively vast volume of material concerning Afro-Trinidadian musical forms. Calypso and steelband have been an especially popular topic among local and international scholars since the 1950s. Cook's single recording of tassa, for example, seems quite insignificant in comparison to his numerous recordings of calypso and steelband.[28] Stephen Steumpfle and Shannon Dudley's respective steelband studies in particular have shaped my thoughts about the intersections of Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian musics and, more generally, the place of music in conceptions of Trinidadian nationalism.[29] Both authors relate a narrative of steel pan's origins within

[26] Richard K. Wolf, "Embodiment and Ambivalence: Emotion in South Asian Muharram Drumming," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 32 (2000): 81–116.

[27] Abdul Halim Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, trans. E. S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain (New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 2012).

[28] For a full Cook Records catalog see http://www.folkways.si.edu/search/collection/cook-records.

[29] Stephen Stuempfle, *The Steelband Movement: The Forging of a National Art in Trinidad and Tobago* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995); Shannon Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge: Steelband Spirit and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

impoverished Afro-Trinidadian neighborhoods on the outskirts of Port of Spain where pan was denigrated for its associations with the lower class. By the rise of party politics in the independence era, steel pan emerged as a national art form via political patronage by Eric Williams' People's National Movement, a party historically associated with Afro-Trinidadian interests. Through repeated public performances in association with political events and national holidays—especially Carnival—pan came to be regarded as "an indigenous instrument of festivity" and a "vital means by which the nation creates, contemplates, and celebrates itself."[30]

My work pivots from this notion of steel pan performance as emblematic of Trinidad and Tobago nationalism, to an assumption that tassa performance is equally as affirming of an Indo-Trinidadian national identity. I do this by situating Trinidadian identity within a continuum of post-colonial critiques beginning with W.E.B. du Bois' "double consciousness," continuing with *négritude*, and concluding with Khal Torabully's parallel notion of *coolitude*.

Du Bois first explicated the idea of double consciousness in his seminal text *The Souls of Black Folk*, in which he describes the conflicting duality of being both black and American:

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two

[30] Stuempfle, *The Steelband Movement*, 236.

> warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[31]

The "theory of political agency" catalyzed by Du Bois' assessment of race and class in the United States still resonates with numerous commentators.[32] In his critique of *The Souls of Black Folk*, for example, Paul Gilroy notes that, though "double consciousness was initially used to convey the special difficulties arising from black internalization of American identity," it eventually became a means "to illuminate the experience of post-slave populations in general."[33] Indeed, Gilroy's notion of the "Black Atlantic" is in essence a far-reaching application of the premise of double consciousness, used in this case to expound upon a post-colonial theory of black identity.

Double consciousness also formed a central pillar of the early twentieth-century négritude movement initiated by poets and political thinkers born in French overseas territories: Martiniquean Aimé Césaire, French Guianese Léon Damas, and the future first president of Senegal, Léopold Senghor. Each brought with them a keen eye for cultural observation that had been conditioned through metropolitan political and cultural hegemony in their respective homelands. Négritude writers acknowledged their Du Boisian two-ness and used it to their advantage by taking up the tools of their masters—e.g. formal education, literature, state politics—to celebrate, valorize, and ultimately legitimize black culture as equal to that of Europe. With such equality, the European master narrative of racial superiority is contested and proven false. It is therefore no

---

[31] W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Pocket Books, 1903), 7.

[32] Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 125.

[33] Ibid., 126.

accident that the rise of négritude coincided with increasing agitation against European colonialism throughout the second quarter of the 20th century. Most relevant to this study, Afro-Trinidadian leaders in the 1950s effectively nationalized Afro-Creole cultural identifiers—among them Carnival, calypso, and steel pan—to legitimate cultural and political autonomy from Britain. In doing so, however, Indo-Trinidadian expressive culture was categorically excluded from the Trinidadian nationalist project and Indo-Trinidadian claims for national representation were consistently labeled as "racist" and "unpatriotic."[34]

Indo-Mauritian poet and linguist Khal Torabully uses négritude as a fulcrum from which he generates a poetics of the Indian indenture diaspora. Just as négritude writers appropriated the derogatory term "negre" as an emblem of bondage to embody and overcome, so too does Torabully recuperate the insulting epithet "coolie" in his notion of coolitude. The Indian indenture diaspora—whether in the West Indies, Mauritius, Fiji, or elsewhere—is bound by a common history of exile from India, discriminatory policies stemming from a legacy of indenture, kinship with the land, and a psychological connection with an ever distant and largely imagined India. Individuals in these disparate diasporic sites, whose "rituals, values, and mythic stories" are "defined in terms of… locally relevant social categories,"[35] nonetheless form an "imagined community"[36] whose emblems of identity coalesce in coolitude. With its emphasis upon

[34] Yelvington, Kevin, "Introduction," in *Trinidad Ethnicity*, ed. Kevin Yelvington (London: MacMillan Caribbean, 1993), 12–13.

[35] Paul Younger, *New Homelands: Hindu Communities in Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad, South Africa, Fiji, and East Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 7–8.

[36] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (London: Verso, 1991).

a recuperation and rearticulation of Indo-centricity within new homelands in diaspora, I suggest in chapter seven that coolitude provides an apt frame toward interrogating the concept of Indo-Creole.

Research Objectives and Methodology

My research plan for this study emerged organically and in dialog with my informants' feedback and interests. In the beginning, I had two broad research objectives: to learn about and document tassa as a musical phenomenon and to understand the impact of tassa performance upon defining Indo-Trinidadian orientations toward belonging in Trinidad and Tobago and the Indian diaspora writ large. Three modes of data gathering and analysis constitute the basis for my research: historiographic and archival research, ethnographic fieldwork, and musical analysis.

As a vernacular music ostensibly confined to rural areas for much of its existence, there is very little in the way of concrete historical evidence of tassa prior to the 1950s. I searched text archives of the University of Florida's Latin American Collection and the West Indiana Collection at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. While these repositories yielded valuable information on Indo-Trinidadian music and culture in general, I found very little information pertaining specifically to the history of tassa drumming. I also extensively used the digital archive provided by Google Books to search for public domain documents. This search yielded numerous references to nineteenth-century Indian tasha drumming that augment Sharar's well-known accounts as mentioned above and to my knowledge are unmentioned in contemporary literature on Indo-Trinidadian music.[37] Google Books searches also

[37] Among others, the following were particularly helpful: Jaffur Shurreef, *Qanoon-e-Islam, or the Customs of the Moosulmans of India*, trans. G. A. Herklots (London: Parbury, Allen, and Co., 1832); Robert

allowed me to access British parliamentary records; travelogues, newspapers, and professional journals written by colonial West Indians; and other public domain materials otherwise unavailable or impractical to access. A search of the digital archives of the Victoria and Albert Museum also returned a wealth of iconographic evidence of North Indian musical traditions dating from as early as 1800 and spanning much of the nineteenth century. Lomax's collection of photographs, contained within the Cultural Equity Association's digital archives, provided similarly valuable iconographic evidence of Trinidadian Hindu weddings, including tassa performance.

The two most important geographic sites for my ethnographic fieldwork were Trinidad and central Florida. In both areas, I engaged musicians and community members in formal and informal interviews and collected qualitative data via participant-observation.

Between 2007 and 2012, I took three research trips to Trinidad where I worked in and around the market town of Tunapuna in north Trinidad and in the environs of San Fernando, Trinidad's second largest urban center, in south Trinidad. Two key informants during this time were Lenny Kumar, founder and director of the band Trinidad & Tobago Sweet Tassa based in Princes Town; and the late Krishna Soogrim-Ram, former director of Malick Tassa Drummers (a band founded by Soogrim-Ram's father, Soogrim Ramkeesoon) based in Barataria.

In 2009, I befriended a group of Kumar's students who had formed a branch of T&T Sweet Tassa in Tampa, Florida. From August of that year, I began periodic visits

---

Montgomery Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India, Vol. III* (London: Wm. H. Allen and Co., 1838).

with them to improve my skills as a tassa drummer. These lessons often coincided with Kumar's frequent visits to Florida. I eventually became an accepted member of the band and traveled with them to performances for weddings and cultural events in central Florida. I also helped organize special events for Kumar and the band including a three-day residency at the University of Florida in April 2010, an appearance at the Percussive Arts Society International Convention in November 2011, and most recently a workshop at the Society for Ethnomusicology Caribbean and Southeast Chapter meeting in March 2013.

In tandem with my dissertation research, I also began shooting footage for an ethnographic film called *Sweet Tassa: Music and Tradition of the Indo-Caribbean Diaspora*. I hoped that the process of filmmaking could be ethnographically rewarding at every step of the project, from preliminary research through to distribution and feedback. The film is a participatory project, one in which I am in control, but controlling as little as possible. In the field, making the film has given my research associates and me a goal toward which we can work together. Though I am typically the one holding the camera, it is truly a group effort as we decide together which directions and perspectives the film should take.

Moreover, filmmaking allows me to demonstrate and receive trust in ways perhaps more apparent than taking fieldnotes or making audio recordings of performances. While many informants have difficulty understanding what ethnographic research is, most have a good idea of the impact a film might have on their standing in the community. Fostering trust is immeasurably important in any kind of ethnographic work, especially in small culturally self-aware sites like Trinidad where there is always a

political motive for promoting one's particular form of artistic expression.[38] Moreover, tassa drummers are often guarded to the point of paranoia that someone will videotape their public performances to post on YouTube where anyone could study and steal some aspect of their particular drumming style.

Perhaps, most importantly in the production phase of the film, I have partnered closely with Lenny Kumar whose role as associate director acknowledges his vital participation in the project as one who not only advises about issues of musical style and repertoire, but also has the depth of knowledge to know the right questions to ask, the right people to ask them to, and then helps make sense of it all afterward. On more than one occasion, I've been in the middle of an interview and clearly barking up the wrong tree when Lenny, who has been waiting in the wings, takes over to steer me back in the right direction.

In addition to numerous informal conversations, collaborative experiences like filmmaking and the academic and performance presentations mentioned above were a particularly important component of my organic approach to fieldwork, leading to lasting friendships and assimilation of profound insight into tassa culture in a natural and unpretentious manner. By focusing on easily understood, goal-oriented activities more than simply listening or asking questions (though these are, of course, very much collaborative activities as well), the qualitative data I have collected in the form of memories, emotions, and camaraderie is difficult to quantify and moreover difficult to cite in a traditional scholarly monograph. Nonetheless, I cite my experiences throughout the dissertation as best I can where they might be illustrative of particular points.

[38] Ramnarine, *Creating Their Own Space*, 145.

The final component of my research methodology is musical analysis. As mentioned above, Cook and Lomax's respective mid-twentieth-century tassa recordings were particularly helpful as a point of historical comparison. I also drew upon a handful of commercially available recordings, which are cataloged in Appendix A. My own extensive field recordings, primarily centering on the music of T&T Sweet Tassa, also provided ample musical material. Apart from Manuel's transcriptions and a handful of rhythmic sketches found throughout the academic literature on Indo-Trinidadian music, tassa is an exclusively oral tradition. Therefore there are no conventions for tassa notation, nor is there any kind of repository of scores or musical manuscripts to readily use as a point of comparison. Though my analyses in chapter three proceed in limited dialog with Manuel's transcriptions, I was obliged to create a percussion notation (based upon standard Western staff notation) to approximate specific tassa techniques. See Appendix B for a notational key and full transcriptions of most of the repertoire discussed in chapter three.

Chapter Overview

I introduce tassa in chapter two by discussing its Indian forebears and contemporary corollaries both in India and the global Indian indenture diaspora. Next, I contextualize tassa practice by covering the organology and technique of each instrument in the ensemble and conclude with a discussion of ensemble hierarchy and parallels with Afro-Trinidadian drumming. Chapter three is concerned exclusively with tassa repertoire and consists principally of musical transcription, analysis, and comparison of common "hands." A central conceptual theme across chapters two and three is that technological and musical innovations within tassa tradition emphasize a

generative impulse from within the structures of an Indo-Trinidadian musical system rather than adoption of syncretic, creolized practices linked to Afro-Trinidadian heritage.

Chapter four places tassa within its most common performance context, Hindu weddings. The discussion of this chapter emphasizes tassa's musical, functional, and symbolic importance in such a context, setting up a discussion of performances for formally adjudicated tassa competitions in chapter five. Chapter six provides a historical overview of post-independence racial relations in Trinidad and Tobago, using this as a foundation to provide a socio-political analysis of the national instrument debate. A second theme of chapters four, five, and six concerns how and why tassa emerged through performance as a particularly important symbol of Indo-Trinidadian culture. Chapter seven concludes the study by relating the discursive dualities apparent in double consciousness, négritude, and coolitude to a socio-cultural analysis of tassa drumming as an embodiment of Indo-Creole identity.

CHAPTER 2
TASSA ORGANOLOGY, TECHNIQUE, AND ENSEMBLE HIERARCHY

The tassa drum is a single-headed membranophone with a bowl-shaped shell. Trinidadian tassa's most likely antecedent is the *tasha*, a semi-spherical drum played in a variety of Pakistani and Indian ensembles, though often linked with the double-headed barrel drum *dhol*.[1] This conglomeration of tasha and dhol, frequently also combined with hand cymbals called *jhanj*, was flourishing in the Bhojpuri region of India during the time indentured laborers were recruited for work in the colonies. Therefore, many of the areas around the globe where these laborers settled developed idiosyncratic forms of dhol tasha performance.

In this regard, Trinidadian tassa represents a unique manifestation of the Indian dhol tasha continuum. While maintaining obvious and measurable links with its Indian forebears, Trinidadian tassa nonetheless continues to respond with enthusiasm to innovation in instrument construction, technique, and (as discussed in chapter three) repertoire. My analysis in this chapter demonstrates ways in which the instruments have been modified as an idiosyncratic response to and facilitation of increasingly virtuosic expectations. These technological innovations suggest tassa is not a mere Indian cultural survival, but a dynamic art form grounded upon Indian aesthetic foundations yet thoroughly Caribbean in its diasporic creativity. The analysis of this chapter in concert with that of chapter three therefore suggests a coherent musical system within which

[1] Richard Wolf reports alternate North Indian pronunciations including *tāsā*, *tāshā*, and *trāsā*. Of these, he suggests *tāsā* is of Persian origin and the oldest form of the word in India. In this study, I use the English approximation *tasha* to refer to this type of drum. Wolf, "Embodiment and Ambivalence," 87n.

tassa develops according to Indo-Trinidadian idiogenerative guidelines with little fundamental influence from Afro-Trinidadian musical aesthetics.

Dhol Tasha in the Bhojpuri Diaspora

The word "tasha" most likely derives from a Persian root meaning "bowl" or "cup."[2] The drum itself also has Persian roots, evidenced by its appearance in the Tâq-i-Bustân reliefs dating to around 600 CE.[3] In North India, tasha accompanied Shi'a Muslim Muharram observances from at least the early 1800s, though its history probably dates to earlier times. For example, iconographic evidence depicts what appears to be a well-established tasha performance tradition in the Banaras region circa 1800 (figure 2-1). Contemporary nineteenth-century writer Abdul Halim Sharar describes a flourishing tasha tradition in Lucknow in the late 1800s and reports that tasha was played in an ensemble together with the double-headed membranophone *dhol* and hand cymbals *jhanjh*. According to Sharar, performance of this "dhol tasha" ensemble had by that time reached a high level of skill and public admiration:

> In Lucknow bands[,] there are usually three or four large dhols and at least one man, though occasionally two or three, beating tashas. There is also at least one man playing the *jhanjh*, cymbals. The jhanjh can be traced to Persia and neighbouring countries and the tasha is common in and around Egypt, but the dhol is purely Indian. This type of band was introduced into Lucknow from Delhi mainly by the military… Dhols are never played without tashas, and the men who play the tasha require the highest degree of skill.[4]

[2]A number of European words—the French, *tasse*, the Italian *tazza*, the Spanish *taza*, the Catalan *tassa*, the Portuguese *taça*—each meaning "cup" or "bowl" are traceable to a similar etymological root. See also, Manuel, "Tassa Drumming."

[3] Wolf, "Embodiment and Ambivalence"; Manuel, "Tassa Drumming."

[4] Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, 151.

Sharar infers the music of dhol tasha was martial in character, owing to its military associations. This martial association was an apt accompaniment for Muharram processions that sought to remember and indeed embody the historical martyrdom of Hussein at the hands of Yazid's forces at the Battle of Karbala in 680. The processional qualities of dhol tasha were appropriate for accompanying Muslim wedding processions as well.[5] Sharar does not mention tasha in Hindu contexts, though it is likely that Hindus were drummers themselves and also hired dhol tasha for weddings and other occasions. Around the time of Sharar's writing, dhol tasha had clearly attained an important place in Lucknow and the surrounding Bhojupri region, an area that includes the modern Indian states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

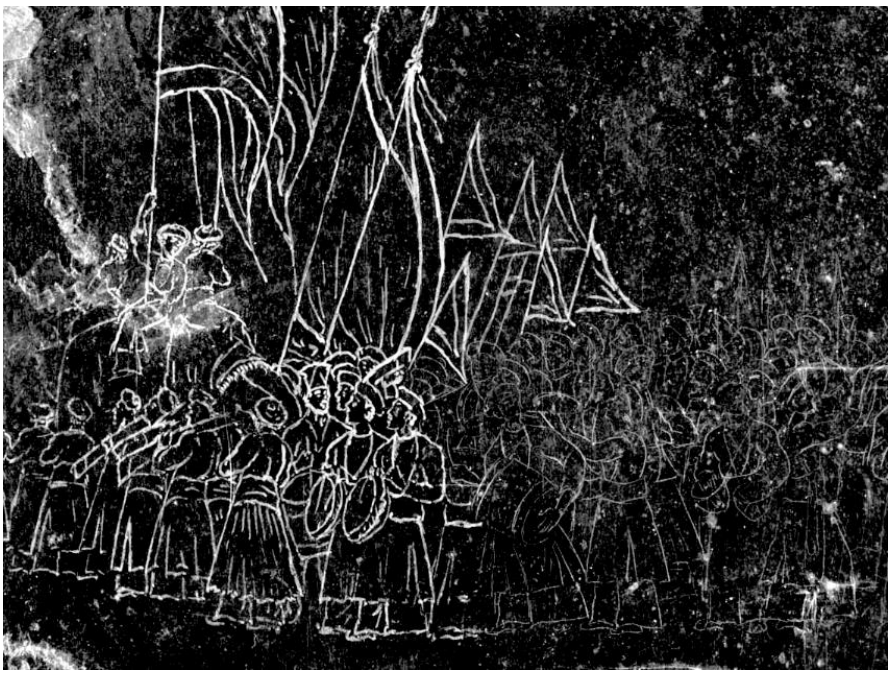


Figure 2-1. Detail of musicians in a Muharram procession. Murshidabad, India. Circa 1800. Among them are tasha and dhol players. Victoria and Albert Museum, IS. 35:23-1961.

[5] Ibid., 151–151; 207.

Dhol tasha today is particularly widespread in India and parts of Pakistan, with ensemble structure and specific repertoires varying from place to place. Wolf suggests that dhol tasha in India is largely the domain of "a great number of ensembles with limited repertoires and abilities," in which the tasha features "little [musical] variation, with a few [repeated] cadential phrases."[6] Some groups, however, include multiple tasha drummers who are skilled at interpreting the standard repertoire and take turns leading the group (similar to the passing of the cutter role in Trinidadian tassa bands).[7] The majority of bands are relatively small ensembles that perform for a variety of religious and social functions, especially Muharram. However, large ensembles are common in some areas. Dhol tasha in Pune, for example, is deployed most spectacularly during the annual Ganesh Chaturthi in which groups numbering more than one hundred players accompany the procession of a series of *murtis* of Ganesh through the city streets. Bands also participate in a massive dhol tasha competition as part of the festivities.

[6] Richard Wolf, E-mail to author, November 25, 2012.

[7] Ibid.

Figure 2-2. Dhol section of a dhol tasha procession during Ganesh Chaturthi. Pune, India. Photo courtesy Umesh Kale.

Figure 2-3. Tasha drummers performing during Ganesh Chaturthi. Note the thin, flexible sticks and nut-and-bolt style construction. Pune, India. Photo courtesy Umesh Kale.

Dhol tasha traditions also developed in places where labor was exported from India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In Sumatra, locals trace the importation of dhol tasha to the late 1700s, coinciding with the arrival of Indian *sepoys*

recruited by the British East India Company to man its fort in Bengkulu (Bencoolen).[8] The "*dol-tasa*" of this region today is primarily linked with the Muharram observance, locally termed *tabut*, and therefore expectedly martial in character. In rural areas, tabut drumming ensembles may comprise only one *tasa* player along with a few *dols*. Ensembles swell in urban areas, however. According to Margaret Kartomi, "the passionate atmosphere of a full-scale tabut festival in Pariaman is created largely by the military sound of teams of drummers playing up to a hundred large [dols] at once, led by one small [tasa] per team, and playing a repertory of up to about fifty rhythms."[9] This repertory is built upon a call response structure in which the tasa leads the dol players through a series of rhythms, each musically representing sections of the Muharram narrative.[10] Drummers obtain a "clear and bright" tone on tasa and dol by heating the drumheads by a flame before performance, much like Trinidadian drummers do with goatskin tassas.[11]

The majority of Indians exported as laborers during the indenture period of 1834-1921 were from the Bhojpuri region. Therefore, the indenture system largely accounts for the export of Bhojpuri culture, including dhol tasha, to many places across the world. In Mauritius, for example, tasha drumming is linked closely with Muharram, locally termed *Ghoon.* Ensembles may have a number of large double-headed drums that more closely resemble European marching bass drums than the Indian dhol. These are

[8] Margaret J. Kartomi, *Musical Journeys in Sumatra* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012), 78–81.

[9] Ibid., 79.

[10] Ibid., 91–93.

[11] Ibid., 82.

played with two padded mallets. Also included in these groups are a number of clay tashas covered with goatskin and commonly played with two splayed wooden or cane sticks. The repertoire is repetitive and martial in character, with a lead tasha beating out musical cues and more skilled drummers engaging in limited improvisation. Drummers and spectators also sing prayers and exclamations while drumming.

In the West Indies, the most pronounced dhol tasha traditions are expectedly prominent in those former colonies that received large numbers of indentured Indians, namely Surinam, Jamaica, Guyana, and Trinidad. Indo-Surinamese *tazza* features a blending of dhol tasha and European-style marching band instruments. Like Trinidadian tassa, a typical Surinamese band, or *groep*, usually features four parts, two tazzas, one bass, and one timekeeping instrument, either jhanj or a plastic, trap set-style tambourine. Surinamese tazza drums are commonly fashioned from repurposed metal canisters using a nut-and-bolt system to affix a synthetic drumhead, a construction perhaps borrowed from Trinidadian tassa. Unlike tassa, however, tazza drums are quite shallow, more closely resembling the tasha of north India in this respect. Moreover, tazza are generally hung from the waist and played with two thin and very flexible nylon rods without balled tips. The bass drums are taken directly from trap sets or marching band batteries and played with two padded mallets. Some groeps also add trumpet or other European marching band drums including deep toms and quads (figure 2-4). Repertoire is largely cadential and repetitive in character, though the lead tazza may introduce some improvised patterns.

Figure 2-4. Surinamese tazza groep Milan Tazza. Instrumentation includes (from left to right) marching quads, trumpet, snare drum, trap set bass drum, and tazza. Photo used by permission of Milan Tazza.

Jamaica received a small number of indentured workers relative to Surinam, Guyana, and Trinidad. Perhaps because of their slighter numbers, Indo-Jamaicans have largely assimilated into Jamaican society. Most willingly or forcibly converted to Christianity and were encouraged to put aside Indian cultural practices. Nonetheless, many Indo-Jamaican traditions persist, including dhol tasha. Like in Trinidad, the ensemble is referred to as “tassa,” and includes tassa, bass, and jhanjh. The tassa is made from clay covered with goatskin. The bass is doubled-headed, played with one hand and one stick, and fashioned from slats of wood held together with iron straps like a cooper’s barrel. Ensembles vary in size depending upon function. For Muharram, locally termed *Hosay* like in Trinidad, ensembles feature one tassa and many basses. Leroy Jagessar, an Indo-Jamaican drum builder, explains:

> In Trinidad, they play, like, five tassa to one bass drum. Here we do it vice versa: five bass drums to one tassa. The tassa is so powerful; it overpowers the bass drum, so we don't need five tassas playing."[12]

In this way, the *Hosay* tassa ensemble more closely resembles the large ensembles used for tabut in Sumatra, though on a much smaller scale. Given the relatively smaller size of the Indo-Jamaican community and its degree of assimilation, one finds Afro-Jamaicans participating in tassa more commonly than in any other Bhojpuri-settled locale.

Guyanese tassa has come to closely resemble Trinidadian tassa in terms of construction, technique, and ensemble hierarchy. However, a Guyanese style of tassa that apparently predates this move toward Trinidadian models is referred to as *tassa tadjah*, which is perhaps derived from Muharram drumming (the replica of Hussein's tomb is called *tadjah* in Guyana and Trinidad). The tassa tadjah ensemble includes one or two tassas, jhanj, and a large barrel-shaped bass drum that is played on one head with a small thin stick near the edge and a thick stick in the center. In performance, this drum is planted on the ground with the playing head facing upwards at about waist height in this way precluding ambulation as in virtually all other dhol tasha traditions.

The vitality of Trinidadian tassa has certainly impacted the development of regional dhol tasha variants. Peter Manuel suggests that a good deal of the repertoire of Surinamese tazza drummers—especially that commonly used to accompany dancing—is borrowed from Trinidadian tassa.[13] It seems Jamaican tassa has also been shaped at least partially by Trinidadian models. Jagessar, for example, admiringly refers to tassa

---

[12] "HOSAY in Jamaica_WI.mov," YouTube video, 14:44, posted by "Dean Sutherland," September 15, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QzxFJGR9yjk.

[13] Peter Manuel, E-mail to author, February 10, 2013.

as “Trinidad music.”[14] Though it is likely that regional dhol tasha variants indeed borrow from Trinidadian tassa to some degree, mimicry alone does not provide a full explanation for the range of differences among Caribbean dhol tasha traditions. A comparative project beyond the scope of the present study would be necessary to sort out the details. Clearly, however, the exchange of musical ideas within the region is now easier than in the past. With the advent of YouTube and other social media sites, access to Trinidadian tassa exemplars has mushroomed since I began studying tassa in 2007. At that time, there were very few tassa videos posted on YouTube, whereas today there are hundreds. Drummers who can learn by watching and listening have therefore benefited greatly from these resources. For example, I posted a video of the Trinidadian band D’Evergreen Tassa Group on YouTube in late 2007 and subsequently removed it about a year later. Soon after I had taken down the video, I received an urgent message from one YouTube user: “Hi can [you] please put back the… video!? My group and I were trying to learn that!”[15] Perhaps the most important meeting place for exchanging ideas about tassa, however, happens among individuals within the Indo-Caribbean diaspora in North America where Indo-Caribbeans from throughout the region (mostly Trinidadians and Guyanese) live side by side, teaching and learning from one another, and often carry this knowledge back to the Caribbean when they return home.

[14] “HOSAY in Jamaica_WI.mov”

[15] YouTube user Mattiecoura, YouTube personal message to author, February 17, 2009.

Figure 2-5. A four-part Trinidadian tassa ensemble circa 1960s. Left to right: Harry Lutchman holding a “rum barrel” bass played with a thin and slightly curved stick; unidentified tassa player and Soogrim Ramkissoon playing large clay-and-goatskin tassas; and a young Krishna Soogrim-Ram playing a large set of jhal. Photo courtesy Sanjeet Soogrim-Ram.

Instruments of the Trinidadian Tassa Ensemble

In Trinidad and Tobago, dhol tasha tradition developed an association with virtuosity more than in any other locale described above, though much of the processional and martial aspects of the music have remained. Trinidadian tassa drumming features a codified four-part ensemble consisting of two tassas, one dhol, and one player of jhanjh (or jhal). In the following pages, I discuss the organology of these instruments, describing their traditional morphology and further noting numerous technological innovations employed in their construction today.

Tassa

A typical Trinidadian tassa band will have at least two tassa drums covering two distinct musical parts, the “cutter” and the “foulé” as discussed in more detail later. The tassa shell may be constructed of metal, clay, or other improvised materials covered with animal or synthetic drumheads. The earliest tassas in Trinidad likely resembled the relatively flat, metal-shelled tashas of North India. Raiaz Ali, a St. James *Hosay* drummer, is known to possess a tassa of this type called a *taireen* or *tureen*.[16] By the 1950s or perhaps shortly before, Trinidadian tassa shifted toward deeper, more resonant shells fashioned from large clay pots covered with goatskin secured by sinew lacing. A tassa with this kind of clay pot for a shell is commonly referred to as a *dabbu*, from the Hindi for “spoon” or “ladle.”[17] The tassa drummers in figure 2-5 each hold a dabbu drum. The Goolcharan family of Chase Village in Carapichaima is the preferred manufacturer of this type of shell as well as all sorts of other pottery items, especially the ubiquitous *diyas* used for Hindu religious practice (figure 2-6). Clay drums, however, have all but disappeared from regular use today. Though they prefer the “sweeter” sound of clay-and-goatskin drums, drummers tell me that these are heavy, fragile, and generally inconvenient to maintain compared to contemporary designs. Moreover, the goatskin heads need to be heated about every twenty minutes to “stand up,” or raise the

[16] As will be discussed later, Cedros drummers still play a type of tassa called “paten tureen.” See also, Manuel, “Tassa Drumming.”

[17] Ibid.

A B

C

Figure 2-6. Mahadeo Goolcharan makes a clay tassa shell. A) Forming clay on a spinning wheel, B) shaping the shell, C) a finished shell ready for the kiln. Chase Village, Trinidad. April 2011.

pitch, of the drum during performance. Small fires must be kept burning for this purpose and therefore present certain hazards that many prefer not to deal with (figure 2-7).[18]

[18] For a succinct description of the process of making clay-and-goatskin tassa drums, see the following reprint of a 1997 article from the Toronto newspaper Indo-Caribbean World: Manshad Mohamed, "For Ray the Beat Goes On and On," in *Indo-Caribbean Music and Culture in Greater Toronto* (Toronto, 2010), 87–89.

Figure 2-7. Heating clay-and-goatskin tassas. This is done to “stand up” or raise the pitch of the drums. Early 1990s. Photo courtesy Sanjeet Soogrim-Ram.

Today, pressurized gas canisters, especially freon and propane tanks, are the most common raw materials for tassa shells (figure 2-8). The tops are cut away to leave a lightweight yet strong and durable metal shell that conveniently accepts a standard sized synthetic snare drum head, usually thirteen or fourteen inches in diameter. Lenny Kumar prefers Remo Pinstripe or Evans G2 drumheads, though many drummers

Figure 2-8. A small freon canister (right) and one with the top cut away (left).

Figure 2-9. A completed nut-and-bolt tassa made by Lenny Kumar. Princes Town, Trinidad. April 2012. Photo by Federico Moratorio.

tend to experiment with whatever they can get their hands on.[19] These heads are customarily affixed by a "nut-and-bolt" style tuning mechanism. Builders use various methods to construct this system, though the most common style consists of a counterhoop fashioned from a steel rod, bent and welded into a ring, with standard ¼" bolts evenly spaced around the hoop and welded perpendicularly. As the counterhoop is placed upon the flange of the drumhead, these bolts slide into receiving brackets welded to the shell and are then secured with nuts and washers. With good welds, this system allows for the application of a tremendous amount of pressure upon the drumhead, in turn providing for sustained tuning at higher pitches without the need to heat the head. These metal tassa drums are usually painted a solid color, though more intricate designs both on the inside and outside of the shell are not uncommon. Drumheads made from transparent material, like Remo's Pinstripe head (as seen in figure 2-9), for example, allow for the novelty of an airbrushed or otherwise stylish design peaking out from under the playing surface.

Though there are competing claims about the origin of the nut-and-bolt tassa, the late Krishna Soogrim-Ram of Malick Tassa Drummers claimed to have been the first to put a synthetic head onto a tassa shell, an innovation he arrived at over the course of numerous experiments. In the 1980s, Soogrim-Ram made a drum with an iron shell and a goatskin head affixed with a nut-and-bolt mechanism.[20] In the early 1990s he commissioned a teakwood dealer to carve a set of lightweight tassa shells. Though he

[19] I organized a trip for Trinidad & Tobago Sweet Tassa to attend the Percussive Arts Society International Convention in November of 2011. As we stepped into the booth set up by Evans, the sales representatives were amazed that a G2 head could withstand the pressure exerted by Lenny Kumar's tuning system. One said, "I have never seen a G2 stretched that much!"

[20] Sanjeet Soogrim-Ram, E-mail to author, February 6, 2013.

first covered these with goatskin, he eventually fitted them with synthetic drumheads secured with nut-and-bolt mechanisms. These first of Soogrim-Ram's "plastic" drums are still in use by Malick Tassa Drummers today. One of Soogrim-Ram's apparent motivations for finding an alternative to the clay-and-goatskin drum was to avoid the need to heat the drum over a flame. On one hand it was an inconvenience, especially when he traveled abroad, yet on another, Soogrim-Ram's rheumatoid arthritis was complicated by the radiant heat of the clay shell against his body. What was born out of necessity, however, soon became a vehicle for widespread change in tassa practice.

It is possible that several drum builders happened upon the nut-and-bolt idea simultaneously. This type of tensioning system, for example, was already in use by Indian tasha drummers by the 1980s. Moreover, bongo and conga drums as well as a variety of orchestral and trap set drums, all with mechanical tuning mechanisms, were accessible models upon which drum builders may have based their experiments with the nut-and-bolt tassa. Whatever its genesis, however, Malick Tassa Drummers were indeed important in popularizing this innovation through collaborations with Malick Folk Performers, a folk theatre group that has won Trinidad and Tobago's annual Best Village Competition nine times since 1983, and with The Lydian Singers, a semi-professional choir performing operatic and concert repertoire. These appearances resulted in ample publicity both for the band and the drum. However, Soogrim-Ram told me that the nut-and-bolt tassa was initially received with skepticism: "When I first invented this plastic skin [tassa]," he said, people didn't like it "because it was

strange."[21] When he showed up to play for Hosay, for example, he was pushed out of the formation and told it was not a real tassa.[22]

Given Soogrim-Ram's likable personality, musicianship, and humility (qualities often lacking in seasoned tassamen), Malick Tassa Drummers became a favorite of event promoters and government agencies who hired the band for a variety of high-profile jobs, many of which were reported in newspapers and broadcast on television. Krishna's son Sanjeet Soogrim-Ram recalls that the nut-and-bolt drum was first used publicly at a performance for Carifesta in 1992.[23] With the publicity provided by these kinds of events, Soogrim-Ram's nut-and-bolt drum was exposed to a national audience, further fueling its popularity. Bands across the country soon adopted the design. By the late 1990s, the nut-and-bolt drum fundamentally changed the look and sound of tassa both at home and in the diaspora, especially in New York and Toronto where cold weather wreaked havoc on goatskin drums.

The popularity of the nut-and-bolt drum has led some older drummers to lament the loss of the traditional goatskin tassa. Aesthetically, the sound of the synthetic drumhead is indeed harsher than goatskin; drummers often say that goatskin drums sound "sweeter" thanks to a timbre that naturally accentuates mid range frequencies while maintaining the kind of high-end attack that is characteristic of tassa performance. On a nut-and-bolt drum, much of the subtle sonic coloration typical of goatskin heads is

[21] Krishna Soogrim-Ram, Interview by author, April 29, 2012.

[22] Sanjeet Soogrim-Ram, E-mail to author, February 6, 2013.

[23] Ibid.

absent. Rather, aesthetic tastes among a new generation of drummers have swung toward increasingly higher-pitched tunings on synthetic heads.

Figure 2-10. Members of Trinidad & Tobago Sweet Tassa playing buoy drums. Central Florida. October 2009.

Figure 2-11. Advertisement for Radio 90.5. This is an Indian-oriented radio station based in Valsayn, Trinidad whose broadcast schedule consists primarily of Bollywood hits and Hindu and Islamic religious programs. Note the image of a clay-and-goatskin tassa. Penal, Trinidad. August 2012. Photo by Olga Ballengee.

In an effort to find a combination of materials that can achieve the sweetness of goatskin while maintaining the convenience of synthetic heads, a number of tassa builders have created hybrids of the old and new styles. Some drum builders, for example, began fashioning plastic shells from commercial fishing buoys, attaching a synthetic fourteen-inch drumhead with nut-and-bolt mechanisms. Lenny Kumar improved upon this design by replacing the nut-and-bolt system with nylon rope lacing, a tension mechanism he told me he learned from examining djembe drums (figure 2-10). In comparison to a nut-and-bolt system, nylon rope tension allows for a more even pressure all the way around the head, helping to control overtones and creating a more focused sound. Moreover, the nylon rope aesthetically approximates the look of a traditional clay-and-goatskin drum, an image that remains recognizable in iconographic depictions of tassa despite the virtual ubiquity of nut-and-bolt drums (figure 2-11).

Satya Maraj, a young drummer living in Queens, New York, has gone in the other direction by adding a nut-and-bolt mechanism to a clay shell. At only fifteen years of age, he designed and built a metal harness that fits on the underside of the clay shell and attaches to the counterhoop with the customary nut-and-bolt system. In this way, a synthetic head can be fitted on his clay drum. However, the most successful experiment with alternative materials—to my ears—is Soogrim-Ram's tassa shaped from teak shells with a nut-and-bolt tension system. Although these drums do not precisely approximate the timbre of a goatskin drum, they nonetheless produce a subjectively

sweeter sound with reduced overtones and absence of the metallically resonant character of the metal-shelled tassa.

No matter the materials or method of construction, in performance the tassa is suspended from the player's neck by a long piece of cloth, so the drum hangs about the groin. Only in Cedros is there an exception to this rule. The traditional tassas from this region are made from clay and shaped like a large shallow pot with a flat bottom (figure 2-12). They call this type of drum *paten tureen* (alternatively "patent" or "pattern"). "Tureen" indicates its shape like a broad serving dish, while colloquial explanations suggest that "paten" refers to its shape based upon a specific pattern. Unlike tassa elsewhere in Trinidad and Tobago, the paten tureen is hung from the waist by a strip of cloth connected to two braided leather handles extending from the top edge of the hoop (figure 2-13). The repertoire played on the paten tureen, however, is essentially the same as that played elsewhere in south Trinidad.

Figure 2-12. The underside of a paten tureen owned by Antony Gopee. Cedros, Trinidad. August 2012. Photo by Olga Ballengee.

Figure 2-13. Antony Gopee (right) with Lenny Kumar. Note the tassa strapped around Gopee's waist, typical of Cedros drumming style. Cedros, Trinidad. August 2012. Photo by Olga Ballengee.

In all cases, tassa is played with a pair of thin and very flexible sticks called *chopes* (singular *chope*[24]) that are traditionally made from supple cane or reed, but today are more commonly constructed from thin fiberglass rods, which are imported by suppliers in Port of Spain for building elaborate masquerade costumes. Where commercially produced fiberglass rods are unavailable or difficult to obtain, improvised materials are often used. Romeo Ragbir, a Trinidadian living in Plantation, Florida, for example, advises his young tassa students to make their own chopes by cutting and sanding the fiberglass shafts of driveway reflectors. Ragbir also told me he once

[24] This is sometimes pronounced and spelled as *chob* or *chobe*. In all cases the long *o* sound is used.

recycled an old fishing rod, splitting it down the middle and cutting it in half to make two pairs of chopes. Each chope has a ball-shaped tip that is generally built using nothing more than masking tape, though some drummers—including myself, as described below—will sometimes use other materials for added weight. Usually, a small amount of tape is wound around the tip of the chope to form a core upon which more tape is methodically applied until a dense ball is formed. The handle of the chope is thicker than the shaft to facilitate a better grip. More tape, felt, leather, or other material may be applied to the shaft to build up this thickness as well as for decoration and protection from splinters.

Figure 2-14. Kumar Ragoo of ‘D’Evergreen Tassa Group accompanying a matikor. Note the flex of the chope. Aranguez, Trinidad. July 2007.

Trinidadian chopes are more complex in construction than sticks used for Indian tasha, which are little more than thin cane or reed, usually with no tip at all.[25] The Trinidadian innovation in chope building is no doubt a product of and a reciprocal catalyst for the virtuosity in Trinidadian tassa technique. The speed and precision of Trinidadian repertoire is dependent upon a well-balanced pair of chopes. The added weight of the masking tape ball allows for an increased bounce and therefore more flex within the stick itself (figure 2-14). Experienced drummers are able to make chopes tailored to their specific tastes, while beginners usually buy them from an individual drum builder or from various stores that deal in musical instruments or Indian products (figure 2-16). Lenny Kumar and his wife Nita are both skilled chope builders who sometimes make chopes in bulk to sell to these retail outlets (Lenny sometimes sells other instruments in this way as well; see figure 2-15).

[25] A sketch by Robert Montgomery Martin in 1838 indicates that the *tasha* he observed was played with two sticks. These sticks are depicted as having balled ends, though it is unclear whether this indicates tips or handles. Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India, Vol. III*, 601.

Figure 2-15. Tassa chopes (left) displayed for sale alongside steel pan sticks. R&S Investments Ltd. Music Store. San Fernando, Trinidad. August 2012.

In my chope building, I have found that I prefer even more weight than is customary on the tip so that the increased bounce makes up for my developing technique. To this end, I include a ¼" nut as the core of the head and wind masking tape around it. Lenny, however, found he could not play with my chopes because they were too difficult for him to control. He also commented that they produced a darker and therefore less desirable sound on the tassa. Other developing drummers though were enthusiastic about my design since it made the articulation of rolls much easier for them to achieve. The downside, of course, is that the nut tends to break through the tape over time and will eventually fly off the tip of the chope in mid-performance if not properly secured with strong adhesive.

Figure 2-16. Jhal and tassa displayed for sale alongside trap sets and cymbals. R&S Investments Ltd. Music Store. San Fernando, Trinidad. August 2012.

Bass (Dhol)

The Trinidadian *dhol*, more commonly called "bass," is a double-headed cylindrical membranophone. In construction, drum builders use dense woods like mango or cedar that are preferred for their strength and resonance. Logs are roughly hollowed with a chainsaw and finished with hand tools so that the bass shell is approximately one or two inches thick. Basses are usually finished with varnish or painted a primary color, though some can feature elaborately painted designs. In some cases, bands make or commission an elaborate silk or cloth cover for the bass emblazoned with the band's name and decorated with Indian motifs. Some bass coverings are more functional than others, however. Photos taken in Charlo Village by Alan Lomax in 1962 depict a bass covered in what seems to be a fitted bed sheet (figure 4-9, A).[26]

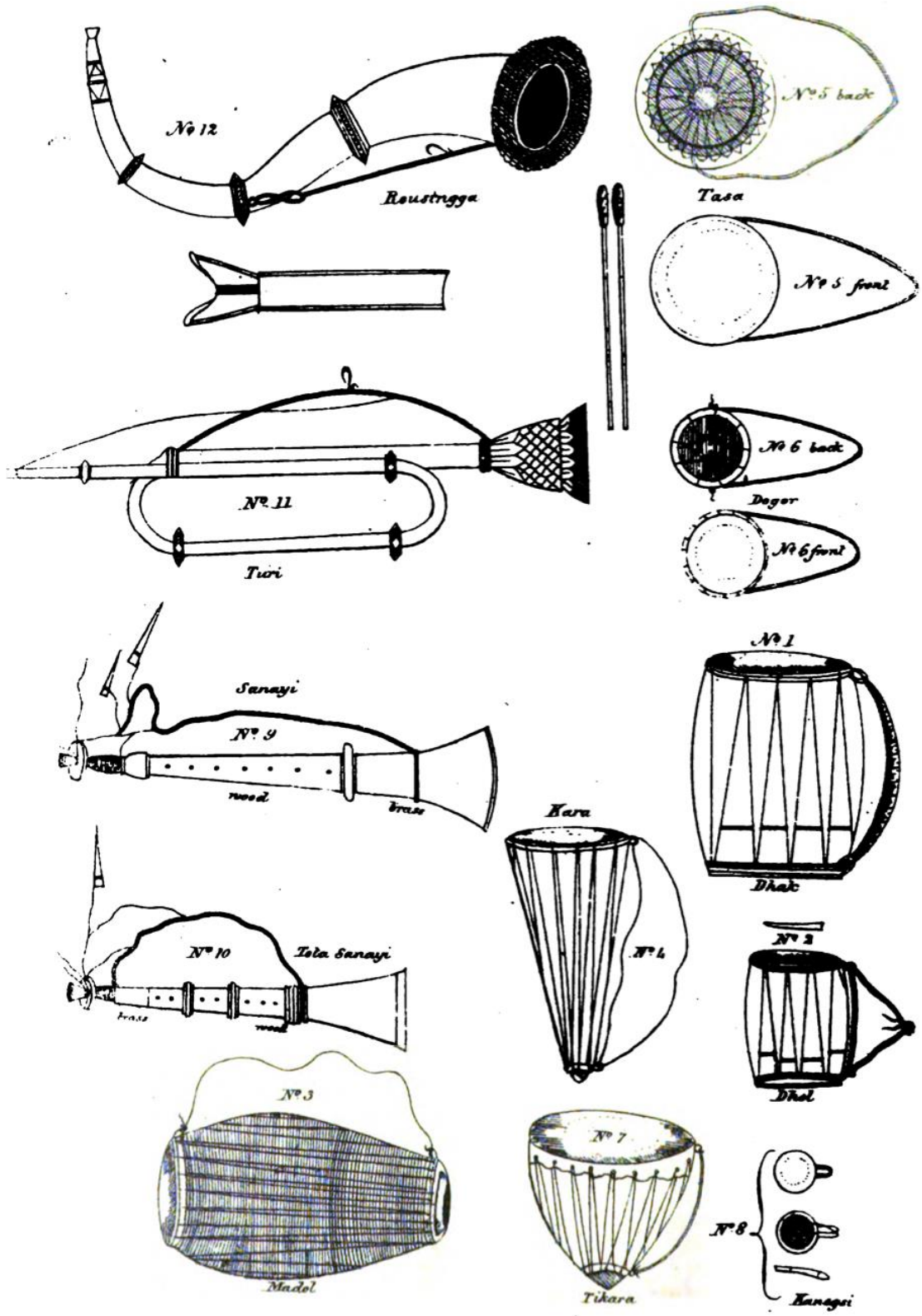
In performance, the bass is strung around the player's neck with a strip of cloth connected to the drum at either end. Drummers position the bass at a diagonal to their bodies so that the lower pitched "boom side," played with a stick called a *dankar*, drops lower than the higher pitched *tan* side, which is played with the other bare hand. The bass can vary greatly in diameter, though most are fifteen or sixteen inches with the diameter of both ends consistent throughout the length of the shell. Older basses, however, featured a certain curvature similar to those used by *bhangra* musicians today. Robert Montgomery Martin's sketches of Indian material culture from the early 1800s, for example, depict a rounded *dhol* (figure 2-17).[27] Referring to it as a "rum

[26] Alan Lomax, Association for Cultural Equity Photographs and Digital Images, Caribbean 1962 Collection, Ref. No. 01.04.0208: 12 May 1962.

[27] Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India, Vol. III*, 601.

barrel bass," Lenny Kumar possesses a bass that bears this shape that he believes to be about one hundred years old. It is made from slats of wood rather than a hollowed

Figure 2-17. Martin's 1838 sketches of musical instruments of eastern India. He gives back and front views of *tasa* (No. 5). A pair of sticks (presumably chopes, though he does not use this term) is drawn to the left of the front tassa view. He also depicts a dhol (No. 2) with a curved shell as well as a bass stick that is tapered from handle to tip. The jhanjh is not depicted here but is mentioned in the appendix of Martin's volume. The now obsolete *tikara* (No. 7) is pictured here as well. Image reproduced from Martin*, The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India*, *Vol. III* (London: 1838), 601.


№ 12
Roustrigga
№ 5 back
Tasa
№ 5 front
№ 11
Turi
№ 6 back
Dogor
№ 6 front
Sanayi
№ 9
wood
brass
№ 1
Dhak
Kara
№ 4
№ 2
Dhol
№ 10
Tola Sanayi
brass
wood
№ 3
Madol
№ 7
Tikara
№ 8
Kanagsi

log. A photo of a young Krishna Soogrim-Ram, his father Soogrim Ramkeesoon, legendary tassaman Harry Lutchman, and another unidentified drummer similarly depicts a curved-shell bass, indicating that this type of drum was still in use in the 1960s (figure 2-5). Virtually all basses today have straight sides, though Cedros yet again is an exception, with most basses there having a slight curvature, perhaps only by virtue of regional tradition.

A B

Figure 2-18. A bass made from slats of wood built by Quicksilver Tassa Group. A) The bass shell ready for re-heading, B) the inside of the drum. Note the wooden rings and two sets of steel crossbars on each end that serve to shape and reinforce the slatted shell. The dark, glutinous material visible on the inside of the head in the bottom photo is masala. El Dorado, Trinidad. July 2007.

Some contemporary bands have experimented with building cylindrical basses from slats of wood (figure 2-18), though the resonance of these has generally been unsatisfactory compared to those built from solid logs. Though this may be a clue as to why the curved bass has fallen out of fashion, it is perhaps due more to the waning of skills needed to build such a drum and the disappearance of readymade cooper's barrels that could be repurposed for drum building. In true Trini fashion, drummers have

used improvised materials over the years as well. Kumar Mahabir suggests that metal biscuit tins, the same kind used in early steelbands, were covered with goatskin to make basses in the early 20th century.[28] Similarly, many drum builders have experimented with using oil barrels and other industrial containers. In one of the most innovative experiments, Soogrim-Ram built a bass with a shell formed from fiberglass resin that has served Malick Tassa Drummers very well over the years (figure 2-19). Overall, these experiments have failed to gain widespread traction and so the hollowed-log archetype remains the most common model for Trinidadian basses.

Figure 2-19. Basses belonging to Malick Tassa Drummers. Krishna Soogrim-Ram's fiberglass bass is on the right. Note the w-style lacing and brass tuning rings. All the rings are relaxed on the drum at left, while two rings have been pulled tight on the drum at right. A length of rope leftover at the end of lacing the

[28] Kumar Mahabir, "The Influence of the Tassa on the Making of the Steelband: The East Indian Contribution to the Trinidad Carnival," Manuscript (Trinidad and Tobago, 1984).

drum is commonly braided through the lacings on the lower-pitched stick side as in the drum at left. Photo courtesy Sanjeet Soogrim-Ram.

Figure 2-20. Amar Ramkissoon cleans goatskin for new bass drumheads. Dunedin, Florida. March 2010.

No matter the material used to form the drum shell, the heads of the bass are always made from animal skin, usually goat but deer, calf, or other hide is acceptable where available, and affixed with a w-type lacing consisting of a single length of rope running back and forth from one head to the other (as in figure 2-19). To prepare a head for mounting, the skin is shaved, cleaned, stretched, and dried for a day or so (figures 2-20, 2-21, and 2-22). Once dry, the skin is moistened enough to be pliable. A hoop of bamboo, cane, non-oxidizing metal (like aluminum), or other stiff material is laid upon the damp skin. The hoop is slightly larger than the diameter of the shell and about an inch or so in width. The edges of the skin are then folded upon the hoop. At this point, a second hoop of smaller width but about the same diameter is laid over the folded edges and by increments is forced under the first hoop. Using this method, the skin becomes crimped between the two hoops and will not pull out when stretched on the drum. This

completes one drumhead. After both are finished, they are temporarily attached to the drum so that the moistened skins take the shape of the shell.

Figure 2-21. After cleaning, the skin is left to dry. Dunedin, Florida. March 2010.

Figure 2-22. Once dry, the hair is removed from the skin. Sprinkling fine sand onto the goatskin as an abrasive, Rohan Abraham then uses a blunt scraper—in this case the butt of an aerosol can—to remove the hair. Dunedin, Florida. March 2010.

Figure 2-23. Lenny Kumar applies masala to the bass drumhead. Princes Town, Trinidad. April 2011. Photo by Rohan Abraham.

After they are dry, the drumheads are removed and a glutinous mixture known as *masala* is applied in a tight circular layer to the center of the underside of each head (figure 2-23).[29] The added mass of this mixture helps control unwanted overtones and adequately lowers the pitch of the drumheads. The word “masala” may be more familiar as the generic term for a wide variety of Indian spice mixtures or pastes. This culinary metaphor rightly evokes a pasty mixture of various recipes. In Trinidad, tar is usually used as a base for masala to which is added softcandle (paraffin wax), castor oil, or

[29] *Masala* is not unique to Trinidadian basses. Similar *masala* mixtures are applied either on the inside or outside of drumheads on a wide variety of drums in South Asia.

other ingredients by preference of the builder, with specific recipes jealously guarded from public knowledge. If the masala is applied too thin, overtones muddy the fundamental, but if the masala is too thick, the instrument lacks resonance. When the masala is applied in proper amounts and the heads are tensioned appropriately, the drum emits pure, well-defined tones (though not necessarily of definite pitch).

Figure 2-24. Shiva Persad uses a belt sander to finish the outside of a bass shell. Princes Town, Trinidad. August 2012.

Once the masala is applied, the heads are then affixed to the shell using one of two prevailing methods. The first and most common method is to thread the tensioning rope directly through the skin via holes pierced on the inside of the hoop. This provides for an effective though potentially uneven tension if care is not taken to adequately distribute force across the hoop. The second and perhaps more efficient method employs a counterhoop made from a steel rod bent and welded into a ring the same diameter as the drumhead. Then, several small loops of rope are tied to the ring. This

counterhoop slides over the skin, resting against the drumhead's integrated hoop. The tensioning rope is then threaded through the loops instead of through the skin itself as in the previous method. As tension is applied, the steel ring more evenly distributes force across the head.[30] In both cases, fine tuning is done by way of adjusting small metal rings threaded onto the drum's rope lacing. Drummers pull these rings tight just before a performance, and relax them when the drum is stored (as in figure 2.19).

Figure 2-25. Lenny Kumar begins the process of lacing the drumheads. Princes Town, Trinidad. April 2011. Photo by Federico Moratorio.

The bass is played with a *dankar* on the low-pitched boom side and an open hand on the other higher-pitched *tan* side (or most often referred to simply as the hand

[30] This method is essentially the same as that Rainer Polak describes for the "iron *jenbe*." Rainer Polak, "A Musical Instrument Travels the World: Jenbe Playing in Bamako, West Africa, and Beyond," in *Ethnomusicology: A Contemporary Reader*, ed. Jennifer Post (New York: Routledge, 2006).

side). The dankar is a thick wooden stick about one inch in diameter and perhaps a foot in length. It is padded on the tip with masking, duct, or gaffer tape (or a combination of these), while the handle is covered in tape or cloth to prevent splintering. Lightweight branches of a variety of trees can be used to make the dankar, but old broom handles may also be recycled for this purpose. The dankar used by drummers today is straight. In days gone by, however, the dankar tapered from the handle to the tip, with a slight curve at the end. Lenny Kumar recalls learning to play bass with a stick like this, though it was by that time—the late 1960s and early 1970s—nearly obsolete. Careful inspection of photos of two bass drummers taken by Alan Lomax in 1962, for example, depicts one drummer using a curved stick on the upward facing head of his drum (figure 4-9) while the other uses a straight stick to strike his downward facing head (figure 4-5). With a curved stick striking the drum in such a way, the former drummer's technique more resembles that depicted in mica paintings of dhol tasha drumming in nineteenth-century North India[31] than Trinidadian bass players of today who all use straight sticks on the downward facing drumhead. Trinidadian drummers with whom I worked were not familiar with the etymology of the word dankar. However, it may be related to the word *dunkā*, a seemingly now obsolete term for "a bass kettle drum," though this is only speculation.[32]

[31]A good example is Add. Or. 408 a mica painting c. 1850 from Banaras held by the British Library. It is reprinted in Frank J. Korom, *Hosay Trinidad: Muharram Performances in an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 74.

[32] Shurreef, *Qanoon-e-Islam*, Appendix L.

Jhal (Jhanjh)

Richard Wolf reports that hand cymbals are somewhat uncommon among dhol tasha ensembles in India today.[33] Sometimes another metallic idiophone such as a metal gong or maraca-like metal shaker is used in this time-keeping role. When hand cymbals are used in dhol tasha, however, they are properly termed *jhanjh*, the same word Sharar uses in his nineteenth-century description of the ensemble. Though Trinidadian drummers invariably recognize the word jhanjh, virtually all drummers I have encountered refer to the cymbals as *jhal*, a term that implies a smaller set of cymbals like those used for *chowtal* singing.[34] (The cymbals are often referred to simply as "brass" with a player of jhal referred to as a "brassman.") An explanation for this shift in terminology perhaps lies in the ever-shrinking size of the cymbals themselves. Mid-twentieth-century photos of tassa bands often depict cymbals of about twelve to fourteen inches in diameter (as in figure 2-5 and 4-9); Lenny Kumar even remembers learning to play with a set of hi-hat cymbals when he was young. These indeed would have been big compared to the small size of jhal today which are rarely larger than about six inches in diameter, though some, like Southside Tassa based in Cedros, use an even smaller set of only about five inches. Likewise Romeo Ragbir uses a small lightweight set of *kartal* (*manjeera*) for his very young tassa students who have trouble holding a heavier set of jhal. The possibility that the name changed to follow the instruments, however, is largely speculative as many older drummers do not use the term jhanjh and quite a few younger players, including the knowledgeable Mukesh

[33] Richard Wolf, E-mail to author, November 24, 2012.

[34] Peter Manuel, E-mail to author, October 2, 2012.

Ragoo of D'Evergreen Tassa in Santa Cruz, use the word jhanjh to describe tassa cymbals of any size. That being said, Emory Cook, who made the first substantial audio recording of tassa, indicates the term "ghang" to describe the noisy cymbals he captured on tape in Tunapuna in the mid-1950s. In 1962, Lomax's informants similarly use the term jhanj. Whatever the differences in terminology, cymbals are certainly much smaller today than they were in the 1960s. Along the lines of the advent of the nut-and-bolt tassa and fiberglass chopes, smaller cymbal size seems yet another innovation aimed to facilitate increased virtuosity given that a smaller cymbal set makes it easier to play fast passages. Moreover, smaller cymbals also produce a more controlled sound in contrast to large cymbals whose sound spectra have greater potential to muddy the "sweetness" of the ensemble.

The cymbals of the jhal set are most often constructed from solid brass sheets, cut and hammered to shape around one centimeter in thickness. Unlike the conical

Figure 2-26. Kissoon Bachan holding his jhal. Chagaunas, Trinidad. August 2012.

cymbals used for trap set, jhal are flat with only a small crown in the middle through which a hole is drilled for the addition of handles. The handles are made from cylindrical pieces of wood or PVC pipe a few inches in length and no more than an inch in diameter. They are attached to the cymbals by cloth or sinew wrapped around the handle, passed through the hole, and tied in a knot on the other side.

Figure 2-27. The author playing jhal for a wedding. St. Madeline, Trinidad. August 2012. Photo by Heather Hall.

Hierarchy within the Tassa Ensemble

Tassa repertoire calls for four parts played on at least four instruments: one lead tassa called the “cutter,” one accompanying tassa called the “foulé,” one bass, and one jhal. In Hosay performances, there is always one cutter (though this role may be passed among a number of capable players), but there are usually many players on each of the other parts. For weddings, parties, competitions, and other contexts, the ensemble usually consists of only one player on each part. No matter the number of players or context of performance, the role of each part remains the same.

Figure 2-28. Music for the entrance of the *dulaha* (groom) and *dulahin* (bride). Weddings usually call for an ensemble of only four players. This, however, was a special occasion: the wedding of a bandmate of T&T Sweet Tassa. Carapachaima, Trinidad. April 2011. Photo by Rohan Abraham.

The jhal is essentially a timekeeping instrument. According to the drummers I talked to, there are no codified parts for the jhal to play; one must simply keep time in a musical way, ideally with emphasis on the upbeat using the sizzle technique. The bass also keeps time and, in conjunction with the jhal and foulé, grounds the ensemble in a distinct groove. Though bass lines can be quite similar from hand to hand, there is generally enough variation so that knowledgeable listeners can identify a hand from hearing the bass alone. Lenny Kumar also regards the bass as a melodic instrument given that it is capable of producing two distinct, though indefinitely-pitched tones. The quasi-melodic nature of the bass is perhaps most conspicuous in the rhythm called wedding hand and some aspects of Hosay repertoire.

The foulé plays non-improvisatory ostinato patterns that also serve a time-keeping purpose. Because the foulé parts are generally easy to remember and play well, less-skilled drummers are most often relegated to the foulé role during

performance. Moreover, if a part of the ensemble needs to be omitted for any reason (because someone is arriving late to a gig, for example), the foulé is excluded. This is not to say that the foulé is unimportant. Quite to the contrary, it is the rhythmic and temporal cohesion of the foulé, bass, and jhal that provides a firm foundation for the cutter to improvise.

The cutter is the musical leader of the ensemble. The cutter plays *taals*, specific patterns that signal the band to start, stop, or move between sections of music. Moreover, the cutter improvises a near-constant solo throughout any given performance, generating musical interest through innovative, varied, and unexpected "cuts." The reputation of an ensemble is often staked upon the skill and expertise of the cutter. Therefore, the most experienced player in the group usually occupies the cutter role. In some bands, the cutter and foulé parts are always relegated to the same players. Many accomplished bands, however, will have a designated leader who gives the taals but will also allow each tassa player a chance to cut. As the cutter role is passed on, the previous cutter takes up the foulé. Typically bands will have only two tassa players, though some may have more. In any case, only one may take the cutter role at a given time while the rest play foulé.

Playing Technique

In the following pages, I describe performance techniques for each instrument of the tassa ensemble. This section should familiarize the reader with the demands of tassa performance and prepare for more in depth discussion of repertoire in chapter three.

Tassa

Good tassa playing begins with proper stick technique. The most common grip involves placing the shaft of the chope between the third and fourth fingers, with the butt of the chope passing through the space between the thumb and index finger and the space between the middle and ring fingers. The arms are held with the elbows bent at about 90° with hands about level with the navel and a few inches apart. Knuckles of opposite hands should face toward each other. In this configuration, the tip of the chope should rest just above the center of the drum. The chope strikes the head with a twisting wrist motion. In Cedros, some drummers use this grip with the non-dominant hand only while using what resembles a traditional snare drum grip with the dominant hand. In this Cedros-specific grip, the chope also passes through the fingers in the same fashion, yet the palm faces upward with the chope striking the drum horizontally rather than vertically. In any case, the shaft of the chope should always touch the rim of the drum for each stroke. This allows the chope to flex so that the tip bounces off of the drumhead. With this basic technique, drummers can produce a variety of strokes.

The sound most closely associated with tassa is the multiple-bounce roll that has been an attractive feature of tasha performance since at least the mid-19th century when Sharar described this impressive kind of playing in Lucknow: “The method of playing the tasha is to beat it with such rapidity that one stroke cannot be distinguished from another.”[35] This technique is essentially an elaboration of the basic stroke I have described above with the tip of the chope allowed to bounce multiple times on the drumhead for each stroke. With controlled pressure applied with well-balanced chopes,

[35] Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, 151.

these multiple-bounce strokes played in succession produce a roll similar to a snare drum buzz roll. When only one chope plays a multiple-bounce stroke and the other plays a single stroke (as in the foulé for *nagara*), the result is similar to a snare drum drag rudiment. Most beginning drummers are far too eager to develop their rolling technique and often become frustrated at their slow progress. Despite the show-stopping character of a good roll, sub-par drummers tend to rest on their rolling ability while ignoring the essential development of rhythmic and tonal variation typical of the best cutters. The hallmark of good cutting is standing out from the crowd, while the hallmark of good foulé is staying in time and allowing the cutter to shine.

Drummers can achieve tonal variation on tassa by strategically placing their strokes closer to the edge of the drumhead for a thinner, slightly higher pitched tone (in my transcriptions in chapter three and Appendix B, these edge strokes are indicated by a triangular notehead) and close to the center for a fuller, slightly lower pitched tone (indicated by a standard notehead). Many foulé patterns are played on the edge so that the cutter can use the more powerful center tone for improvisation. Some foulé patterns, like that for nagara and dingolay for example, use both the edge and center to produce characteristically tonal accompaniments.

Bass

The dankar is usually held in the player's dominant hand and used to play the "boom" side of the bass. This leaves the other hand free to play upon the *tan* or "hand" side. The boom side, as the name implies, is relatively low pitched and the hand side is relatively high pitched. There are two basic strokes that can be played with either the dankar or hand: open and closed. For the stick side, the open stroke consists of a single strike to the center of the head with the edge of the tip of the dankar. The closed stroke

is achieved by lightly pressing the dankar into the head. For the hand side, the open stroke consists of a single strike with the palm on the edge of the head so that the fleshy base of the thumb takes the brunt of the force. It is important to emphasize that this stroke should land primarily on the palm; players often stretch their fingers outward and away from the head so that they do not muffle and therefore interfere with the stroke. The closed stroke on the hand side, however, is characterized by simply placing the palm on the head while allowing the fingers to touch, therefore muting the ringing of the drum.

On both the boom and hand sides, if closed strokes are used, they are virtually always played in quick succession after an open stroke. In other words, the closed strokes are used to rhythmically mute the ringing head to keep it from muddying the sound of the bass and the ensemble overall. The proper placement of closed strokes contributes to the precision and therefore sweetness of an ensemble. The exception that proves the rule of closed strokes immediately following open strokes is evident in what I call “touch strokes” in the bass pattern for chaubola. These are essentially closed strokes on the hand side that are meant to sound like a light thud rather than a resonant tone. Drummers will often use only a light tap of the fingers to execute this stroke while others may use the their full palm. I notate these strokes with an x-shaped notehead.

Jhal

Tassa repertoire demands a tremendous amount of stamina from all players, especially the bass and jhal. The weight of the bass is borne on the player’s neck and shoulders. However, proper jhal technique requires both support from and constant flexing of the biceps. Over the course of an extended performance session, the rather

weighty jhal therefore can tire even the most seasoned players. In my experience, jhal is therefore the most difficult instrument to play well for this very reason.

Jhal may be played either in a horizontal or vertical position. In the horizontal position, one cymbal remains in an upward-facing position while the other cymbal is used to strike downward upon it. While this technique is useful for beginning players, it limits development of more advanced technique. By contrast, the more common vertical position allows for greater freedom of movement for each cymbal, therefore facilitating more advanced technique including some variation and improvisation when appropriate. In either case, proper grip is key, as the handles tend to slip out of the player's hands with successive strokes. The cymbals should not be allowed to dangle from the straps. Rather, the straps should be wound tight around the handles with the player's grip keeping the straps from loosening. The handle of each cymbal is bifurcated by the strap; the fingers should grasp the handle at about this midpoint with the end of the handle butting against the fleshy part of the outside edge of the palm. This grip will prevent slippage of the handle and allow for the kind of secure yet loose grip needed for fast and accurate performance.

There are three fundamental jhal strokes, though players I have talked to generally do not have specialized names for them. Rather than break down rhythmic patterns into individual strokes, players regard rhythms as complete phrases or repetitive grooves. For analysis sake, however, I refer to the three fundamental jhal strokes as the crash, sizzle, and tap.

The crash consists of striking the cymbals together and immediately pulling them apart so each cymbal's vibrating energy dissipates in the air. The sizzle consists of

lightly pressing the two cymbals together so the vibration causes the cymbals to “sizzle” against one another. This sizzle is then resolved by sliding the cymbals closed with a pressed staccato. The vast majority of jhal patterns use a combination of the crash and sizzle. The tap is an advanced and rarely used technique but one worthy of mention here. This simply consists of tapping the edges of the cymbals together to create a pinging metallic sound. I have seen this technique used to create rhythmic and improvisational interest, primarily in the context of staged shows and competitions. In everyday performance contexts, this technique is rarely present.

Cognates with Creole Drumming Ensembles

One evening I sat with Lenny Kumar looking over photos and listening to tassa recordings Alan Lomax had made during a trip to Trinidad in 1962. I wanted to see if Lenny knew any of the people in the photos or could clarify some points about the music. Eventually, we came to an audio clip of Lomax interviewing a drummer named Isaac, now deceased yet in his day a well-known tassaman from north Trinidad:

Isaac: My age is about forty-two. I started to play drums since I was about ten years… now I am a big man! And I continue playing all the time…

Lomax: And what kind of drums do you call these?

Isaac: Well, we call this a tassa…

Lomax: And that’s the cutter that you play. What do you call that in “Indian?”

Isaac: … You mean the cutter? Well of course there is four of us playing. One is a bassman, a *bullerman*, and I am the cutter; including a jhanjh, a jhanjhman…

Lomax: And the other drum? What do you call that? The other kettle-drum? [Indicates the second tassa.]

Isaac: The same, tassa. It is the same tassa, but he is a *bullerman*. You see? I am the cutter.[36]

Lenny was quiet for a moment then let out a little chuckle. Lenny's daughter sat across from us in the living room. Lenny glanced at her, "Did you hear what he said?" The low-quality speakers on my laptop computer were at full volume, though the audio clip was barely audible so far away. "No," she said. I played it again. Then they both laughed together.

After I asked what was so funny, Lenny replied with his own question: "Do you know what a *bullerman* is?" I had no idea. "It's a gay man," Lenny said, almost whispering. As it turns out, buller is derogatory slang used throughout the Anglophone Caribbean to describe a male homosexual. Richard Allsopp cites the word's meaning as such since at least 1987,[37] though it has probably been in common use for much longer.[38] Lenny suggested that Isaac was trying to trick Lomax, obscuring the truth from this outsider who came out of nowhere and clearly displayed a certain naivety in talking about Trinidadian music and culture. I chalked it up as a mystery-to-be-solved and continued liming with my friends.[39]

---

[36] Alan Lomax, "Interview with Isaac about his biography and tassa drumming," Association for Cultural Equity Sound Recordings, Caribbean 1962 Collection, T1088.0, Track 14: Charlieville, Trinidad: 6 May 1962. My transcription with italics added for emphasis.

[37] Richard Allsopp, ed., "Bull; Buller," *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (Mona, Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 1996), 120.

[38] See, for example, Wesley E.A. Crichlow, "History, (Re)Memory, Testimony and Biomythography: Charting a Buller Man's Trinidadian Past," in *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*, ed. Rhoda Reddock (Mona, Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 2004).

[39] In Trinidad, the verb "lime" means "hang out." Many Trinis half-jokingly suggest that liming is a national pastime (and I tend to agree).

Only after I had returned home a few months later did it begin to make sense. I was re-reading Stephen Stumpfle's *The Steelband Movement*, an excellent musico-nationalist history of steel pan that I had not touched in years but which had initially propelled me into the study of Trinidadian music in graduate school. I had forgotten all but the main points of the book and decided to return to Sumpfle's inspired study in search of my own inspiration while writing up my research. As I read, I happened upon the following passage concerning the history of tamboo bamboo, the bamboo stamping-tube ensemble from which steel pan emerged in the 1930s:

> Trinidadians had developed tamboo bamboo bands with a distinctive format by the early twentieth century. [Donald] Hill describes three basic bamboo instruments—the *boom*, *foulé*, and *cutter*—and suggests that they had roles similar to those of the three different sizes of drums common in Afro-Trinidadian drum ensembles… The instruments in the tamboo bamboo band and their uses were by no means standardized. For example, Lennox Pierre, a solicitor who was an early advocate of the steelband movement, describes a three-foot boom; a *buller* and *fuller* (foulé), which consisted of pieces of the same length but with different numbers of joints; and a cutter that was tapped with a stick and, when a band was stationary, was also struck on the ground.[40]

Though I had spent time studying calypso, my narrow focus researching Indo-Caribbean music had clearly come at the cost of being rather ignorant of traditional Afro-Trinidadian musics. Upon reading this passage, however, I was immediately struck with the commonalities between tassa and tamboo bamboo. As I studied more closely, I began to realize that the parallels between tassa and Creole drumming ensembles are indeed compelling.

Similar to sorting out "musical influences," tracing etymological origins is often like searching for a needle in a haystack. The task is especially complicated in the

[40] Stuempfle, *The Steelband Movement*, 23–24.

Caribbean region where European, African, Asian, Amerindian, and subsequent Creole languages form a linguistic complexity that defies deconstruction. Nonetheless, there are some commonalities that cut across linguistic and political boundaries. One similitude relevant to the study at hand is drum nomenclature.

The term *kata* is a common Afro-Caribbean drum name. *Cata* in Cuban rumba refers to a timekeeping instrument and the pattern that it plays. *Kata* similarly refers to various aspects of percussive timekeeping in Haiti.[41] The related term *ka* is used for lead drums in St. Lucia as well as in Guadeloupean *gwo ka*.[42] These examples are but a few in which the *kata* role provides either a guiding musical timeline or serves as a lead drum, signaling musical cues and perhaps improvising solo sections to accompany dancing. Gage Averill notes that the term "*kata* derives apparently from the Ki-Kongo word meaning 'to cut'… In the English-speaking Antilles the similarity of [*kata*] (both in sound and meaning) to the English word *cutter* allows for the substitution of the latter."[43] One finds, for example, a lead *cutter* in Carriacouan Big Drum and a lead *cutter* drum in the ensemble used to play *kalenda* for stickfights in Trinidad. Traditional Afro-Caribbean drumming in Carriacou and Trinidad feature numerous commonalities thanks to a shared history of francophone settlement.[44]

---

[41] Gage Averill, *A Day for the Hunter, a Day for the Prey: Popular Music and Power in Haiti* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 217n; 239–240.

[42] Lorna McDaniel, *The Big Drum Ritual of Carriacou* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1998), 88.

[43] Averill, *A Day for the Hunter*, 217n.

[44] With the Cedula of Population in 1783, The King of Spain encouraged French planters from neighboring islands to settle in Trinidad, luring them by grants of land proportional to the number of slaves they brought with them. By the time the British took Trinidad in 1797, French Creole speaking slaves formed the majority of the Trinidadian population. Because of this influx of francophone slaves, some aspects of Afro-Trinidadian folk music came to closely resemble that of the French West Indies. During

"Buller" is no doubt an Anglicization of *boula*, another common drum name in the Caribbean, especially in francophone or formerly francophone regions. Haitian *Rada* batteries include a supporting boula drum. Gaudeloupean gwo ka features at least two boulas accompanying the lead drum. Similarly, Carriacouan Big Drum ensembles feature two boulas accompanying the lead cutter. Trinidadian kalenda ensembles share a common heritage with Big Drum and therefore the two are strikingly similar, each featuring barrel-shaped goatskin drums called buller (or boula) and cutter. These drums perform similar roles in each ensemble as well, supporting and leading respectively.

Lorna McDaniel, who has extensively studied Carriacouan Big Drum, suggests that boula is an Anglicization of the now obsolete *fula*,[45] a term she suggests is derived not from African roots, but from the French *refouler*, meaning "to repulse" or "drive back."[46] This claim is difficult to accept, however, given the prevalence of the word boula throughout the francophone Caribbean. Perhaps a better explanation is that boula and fula—or as it is often spelled and pronounced in Trinidad, *foulé*—at one time existed alongside each other either as synonymous or separate but related roles. This could explain the presence of both a buller and foulé in Lennox Pierre's descriptions of Trinidadian tamboo bamboo. Indeed, kalenda ensembles served as an important musical model for tamboo bamboo, and—today at least—boula and foulé seem to be

---

the colonial period, Carriacou was first settled by the French, changed hands a few times, and eventually was ceded to the British in 1783.

[45] McDaniel, *The Big Drum Ritual of Carriacou*, 88.

[46] Jean Mergault, "Refouler," *Dictionnaire Français-Anglais* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1983), 393.

synonymous within the kalenda ensemble.[47] If foulé is synonymous or at least related to buller, then it makes perfect sense that Isaac would refer to the supporting tassa as a buller.

It is clear, then, that the terms “cutter” and “foulé” have been adopted into the tassa ensemble from an exogenous Creole model. What does it mean when nomenclature of one ensemble is mapped upon another? This kind of transference indicates at the very least a recognition of some kind of similarity between the two ensembles. Steelband innovators of the 1940s and 1950s, for example, borrowed a naming scheme from European art music to describe their instruments. Gone were the ping-pongs, cuff booms, and grumblers characteristic of the early days of pan, these replaced by more refined basses, tenors, cellos, and guitars.[48] The adoption of orchestral nomenclature reflected steel pan’s mid-century trajectory toward legitimization as both a “real” musical instrument and a respectable symbol of Trinidadian nationalism. Ideas about ensemble hierarchy were already in place by the time names were changing, therefore, the identification of pan bands with Western orchestras strengthened ensemble stratification and led to important innovations in the arrangement of steelband repertoire in ensuing decades. Therefore, while the ensemble was not restructured to suit an imposed nomenclature, the native divisions within the nascent steelband were reinforced by identification with a more “legitimate” ensemble paradigm.

---

[47] See for example: Errol Hill, *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1972), 46–47; Lorna McDaniel, “Trinidad and Tobago,” ed. Dale A. Olsen, *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 959.

[48] Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge*, 51.

I suspect the mapping of Creole names upon tassa catalyzed a similar strengthening of the four-parts of the tassa ensemble. Sharar's description of nineteenth-century dhol-tasha certainly indicates that tassa, dhol, and jhanjh were commonly played in an ensemble in the past, though he makes no clear reference to a differentiation between roles corresponding to Trinidadian cutter and foulé. Both Richard Wolf and Peter Manuel confirm that contemporary dhol tasha groups commonly comprise a four-part ensemble, though these roles—especially those corresponding to Trinidadian foulé and jhal—are perhaps not as essential as they are in Trinidad.[49] With this precedent in mind, it would be wrong to assume that the coalescence of the contemporary tassa ensemble was dependent upon Afro-Trinidadian models. Nonetheless, it is possible that along with borrowed Creole nomenclature came ideas about drumming hierarchy that reinforced the multilayered-ness of the tassa ensemble. In kalenda drumming, tassa musicians perhaps found an intriguing corollary to their own music, and therefore adopted the terms cutter and foulé (and also buller, though this term is obsolete in tassa drumming today) as these roles became distinct and standardized within the tassa ensemble. As will be discussed in the following chapter, the music of tassa itself remains rooted in Indian style and repertoire and bears little overt Afro-Caribbean influence. The borrowing of a naming scheme, however, importantly suggests that tassa did not develop in a vacuum.

[49] Richard Wolf, E-mail to author, November 25, 2012; Peter Manuel, E-mail to author, November 24, 2012.

Summary

The analysis of this chapter has demonstrated Trinidadian tassa's links with Indian dhol tasha. In Trinidad, the ensemble retains the four-part, three-instrument configuration of its Indian forebears, while the manner of playing each instrument has also remained largely the same. As will be discussed in chapter five, the relative isolation of Indian communities, both physically and socially, functioned in part to preserve links with Indian traditions. As such, Indo-Trinidadian musical activities, including tassa, remained fundamentally untouched by Afro-Creole musical influence. The instruments and technique of the tassa ensemble therefore reflect this isolation yet simultaneously suggest an inner creativity, an idiogenerative impulse largely unreliant on exogenous input.

As described in the analysis above however, tassa is certainly not a static object, but a dynamic ensemble that responds to innovation while retaining a core set of distinctly Indo-Trinidadian characteristics. As my analysis shows, each instrument features some degree of technical modification from its original form. While some of these changes were prompted by necessity, others appear to have been idiosyncratic responses to and facilitators of increasingly virtuosic technique and repertoire. First, the shrinking size of the jhal allowed for faster and cleaner performance. Comparison of today's jhal playing with that heard on the Cook and Lomax recordings is a clear indication of this. Second, the use of fiberglass chopes is another innovation aimed at developing more durable and responsive sticks. And finally, the nut-and-bolt tassa similarly provides for durability and convenience yet also facilitates a transformed aesthetic that tends toward tuning of higher-pitched drums, more volume, and, without the need to heat the drum, longer performances. With these modifications also came

corollary innovations in technique. The speed and virtuosity of contemporary Trinidadian tassa simply could not be achieved with the resources available to tassa drummers just forty or fifty years ago. In the following chapter, I continue discussion of tradition and change in tassa performance practice by way of musical analyses of common repertoire.

CHAPTER 3
REPERTOIRE

Since tassa is a Caribbean musical phenomenon, one might assume a certain degree of fusion with Afro-Trinidadian musics. Yet, there is little evidence to suggest musical creolization at anything more than surface level in tassa repertoire. Analysis of common repertoire on the contrary reveals that tassa drumming draws upon an eclectic mix of source material adapted within a cohesive Indo-Trinidadian musical scheme characterized most importantly by, as discussed in chapter two, instrument morphology and ensemble stratification; and as examined below, consistent formal structure and compositional strategies. These aspects were distilled from and continue to be informed by reified fragments and reconstructions of North Indian musical style as they developed in isolation from India.

"Any assessment of human musicality," writes John Blacking, "must account for processes that are extramusical."[1] In this chapter, I provide musical analysis that points to tassa drumming as existing within an insular musical system (though not an all together closed one) that is at once removed from its Indian ancestry and in many ways detached from Afro-Creole musical influence. Proceeding from Blacking's insistence that "because music is humanly organized sound, it expresses aspects of the experiences of individuals in society," tassa comes into view as reflective of the Indo-Trinidadian experience in diaspora.[2] While Indians were relegated to insular, rural communities throughout the colonial period, many traditions were preserved,

[1] John Blacking, *How Musical Is Man?* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1973), 89.

[2] Ibid.

transformed, and created anew without a great deal of outside motivation. Upon emergence from industrial segregation in rural areas throughout the 1900s, Indo-Trinidadians continued to be relegated to outsider status. Therefore, the musical insularity evident in tassa reflects a broader notion of Indo-Trinidadian cultural isolation. The transformative, idiogenerative processes inherent in this socio-cultural sequestration, discussed in more depth in later chapters, gave rise to a multilocal identity—at once Indian and Caribbean, insider and outsider—that continues to inform Indo-Trinidadian belonging.

General Characteristics of Tassa Repertoire

Tassa repertoire is surprisingly diverse despite the ensemble's lack of conventional melodic or harmonic capabilities. Though I leave more detailed description of tassa's performance contexts for chapter four, it should be emphasized at this point that the core of tassa's repertoire lies in accompaniment for Hindu weddings and Muslim *Hosay*, the local term for the Shi'a Muharram observance. My fieldwork has focused entirely upon wedding repertoire. Therefore, the dynamic and historically significant music associated with Hosay is largely beyond the scope of the present study.[3] As such, this chapter aims to survey tassa repertoire as commonly performed during the three-day set of Hindu wedding rituals.

In tassa parlance, "hands" are composite rhythms composed of layers of musical material contributed by the four instruments of the ensemble. Therefore, hands are distinguished from one another according to the variations within these layers. The

[3] The most comprehensive coverage of *Hosay* tassa includes the following: Korom, *Hosay Trinidad*; John Bishop and Frank J. Korom, *Hosay Trinidad* VHS (Documentary Educational Resources, 1998); Manuel, "Tassa Drumming."

bass, jhal, and foulé work together to create a foundational groove upon which the cutter contributes both hand-specific "cuts" and stylistically appropriate improvisations. In general, there are three musical units that comprise the formal structure of tassa hands. Two of these, *theka* and *taal*,[4] are always present, while the third, *barti*, is less common.

In Hindustani classical music the term "theka" refers to a skeletal articulation of the *tâl*, the rhythmic cycle of a given composition. In Trinidadian tassa, however, the theka is simply the basic composite ostinato of a hand, usually in duple or quadruple meter. In relation to theka, the barti of tassa drumming is a contrasting, usually short section of music that commonly features rhythmic and metric articulation distinctly different from its corresponding theka. Chowbola is the most common hand that features both theka and barti and the only such hand described at length below. As Manuel points out, the closest analog to theka/barti is found in a number of Indo-Caribbean singing genres. *Kabir bhajan* and *thumri*, for example, feature distinct theka and barti sections as do the corresponding tassa hands derived from these genres.[5]

Though cognate with the Hindi term tâl, a tassa taal has nothing to do with the kind of prescribed metrical cycles of Hindustani classical music. Rather, the taal of Trinidadian tassa is essentially a cadential rhythmic sequence that cues the ensemble to start, stop, change tempo, or transition into barti or another hand. Many hands also incorporate taals that do not serve any transitional purpose but function only to inject

[4] Perhaps a more accurate spelling is "tal" as derived from the Hindi *tâl*. However, Trinidadians often render the spelling "taal" as in Tassa Taal, the name of the oldest annual tassa competition in the country. I retain this spelling here for clarity.

[5] A demonstration of the theka and barti sections of kabir bhajan and thumri singing can be seen on Manuel, *Tassa Thunder*.

musical variety into performance. I refer to these as “inside” taals and to all others as “exit” or “end” taals depending upon their function (i.e. exiting a musical section or ending the hand). It is the cutter’s responsibility to “break” or signal the taal at appropriate times. As the cutter breaks taal, the bass and jhal interrupt their ostinato patterns and join with rhythms specific to the taal. The foulé often also joins in unison with the cutter, but may in many cases continue to play the basic foulé pattern. There are a handful of all-purpose taals that are appropriate for a variety of hands (see the end taals for nagara and chutney, for example). However, many hands include specific taals that are relatively standardized. A number of hands also include more than one distinct taal (as in nagara, for example).

Hands are rarely played singly; only in exhibition or in the recording studio are hands artificially isolated from one another. Rather, they are usually played together as a suite. Though there are certain conventions as to how hands should progress—tikora, for example, is often framed as a welcoming or introductory hand and therefore often played first—there are no hard and fast rules that dictate how hands are ordered within such a set. An important exception is in music for Hosay where the sequence of hands is intended to accentuate the Karbala narrative (figure 3-1).[6] Drummers often talk of playing “one or two hand[s] of tassa” at a wedding or other function. In this case, the term “hand” does not refer to individual composite rhythms, but to the suite that contains them. Some drummers suggested to me that the typical number of rhythms in a suite is five (though this is not necessarily true based upon my observations), therefore drummers of long ago must have seen a similarity in the number of rhythms and fingers

[6] Korom, *Hosay Trinidad*, 167.

on their hands. Only later, they assert, did “hand” also come to mean the individual items within a suite. Whatever its original application, the Trinidadian term “hand” is indeed cognate with the Hindi *hath*, a term that Manuel reports is used by North Indian nagara drummers to refer to the individual rhythms they play.[7] To avoid confusion, I exclusively use “hand” to refer to individual composite rhythms.

Figure 3-1. Drummers accompany a tadjah procession during Hosay. St. James, Trinidad. January 2009. Photo by Nicholas Laughlin.

The repertoire of commonly played tassa hands is quite small, perhaps no more than fifteen. Inexperienced drummers are limited to only about five or six, while veteran drummers claim to know upwards of thirty. These hands fall into two broad emic categories: those played for Hosay and those played for Hindu weddings. While Hosay

[7] Peter Manuel, E-mail to author, March 16, 2009.

hands are (or should be) exclusively performed for Hosay, the latter categorization is perhaps a bit misleading. In reality, these hands are appropriate for any number of functions—birthday parties, Carnival, political events, etc.—but receive their most widespread use as accompaniment for the three days of Hindu wedding rituals. In the past, tassa was also commonly performed for a number of Hindu life cycle ceremonies. This has largely fallen out of fashion, though bands are sometimes hired to accompany cremations and funerals.

Hosay hands are specifically used to accompany the Shi'a Muharram observance. Seasoned drummers suggest that the performance of Hosay hands in any context outside of Hosay is disrespectful. Nonetheless, a number of bands often play Hosay hands at weddings, a practice that stakeholders in tassa tradition look upon with disgust. According to Sanjeet Soogrim-Ram,

> I was taught that playing Hosay hands at weddings is wrong because Hosay is NOT a celebration…but a commemoration of… Imam Hussein and his Brother Hassan. So it is [about] funeral and war. Also vice versa, one cannot play wedding hands at Hosay. Today it is common for many tassa drummers to be playing Hosay hands at weddings.[8]

In this sense, Hosay hands represent the only sacred category of tassa repertoire. Though tassa is played for Hindu functions, the drums and the music they provide are not necessarily sacred.

Wedding hands include dancing or "breakaway" hands and processional hands; some hands can serve in both capacities. Breakaway hands are frenetic, up-tempo hands like nagara, dingolay, chutney, and calypso hand meant to facilitate dancing at specific points during the three days of Hindu wedding rituals. Played at walking tempo,

[8] Sanjeet Soogrim-Ram, E-mail to author, April 28, 2013.

breakaway hands (especially calypso) may occasionally be used for processional accompaniment during *matikor* or *lawa* (see below). However, the processional hand par excellence is the aptly named wedding hand, a complex and regal hand with emphatic bass motives. All of these wedding hands are also common in a number of other contexts. One might hear breakaway hands played for parties, celebrations, or even as entertainment in West Indian nightclubs in Florida, while wedding drum in particular might be used to welcome local and international dignitaries during political rallies or national events.

So-called classical hands may also be played during weddings either as introductory hands or for entertainment during particularly tedious parts of the ritual. Despite their colloquial classification, classical hands have little to do with North Indian classical music. Rather, they are by and large esoteric adaptations of rhythms used in musics of Bhojpuri heritage common in the Caribbean, especially Indo-Caribbean vocal genres, like *thumri*, *druphad*, *tillana*, and *kabir bhajan* among others, and from vernacular North Indian metric schemes as is the case with chaubola and *khemta* hands. Owing to their relative complexity, most classical hands are not common in the repertoire of beginning and average drummers. However, there are some classical hands, like tikora and chaubola, for example, that are among the most common hands (though they primarily serve as introductory music leading to other hands). These two overlapping categories—wedding and classical hands—comprise the bulk of tassa repertoire.

Notes on Musical Analysis and Transcription

Tassa repertoire deserves a great deal of analytical attention though very little work has been devoted to such an endeavor. Among ethnomusicologists, Peter Manuel

has heretofore made the greatest contribution in this regard based upon his work with drummers in Trinidad, Guyana, and New York.[9] With his depth of knowledge regarding North Indian musical traditions, Manuel provides insightful comparisons that shed light on both musical and socio-historical trends. I am grateful to him for sharing materials and conversations that have aided in my own analysis. Our collective work, however, is only the first small step toward formally examining the depth, abundance, and profound vibrancy of tassa repertoire.

Musical analysis provides a quantitative framework from which to scrutinize stylistic continuity. In this way, my analysis below, in dialog with Manuel's work, seeks first to identify a loosely normative structural pattern as manifest in existing repertoire and as informs composition of new hands. Analyses of individual hands in historical and contemporary perspective secondly address issues related to creolization, innovation, and creativity across the repertoire.

Though I aim for breadth, I also work from a relatively small, though I think representative, sample of tassa recordings for my analyses. The first substantial recordings of Trinidadian tassa were released by Emory Cook in 1956. Alan Lomax subsequently recorded tassa during his tour of Trinidad and Tobago in 1962. These two resources offer important points of comparison for contemporary tassa practice. I also draw upon commercially available tassa recordings released by Country Boys Tassa Group, Caribel Fun Lovers Tassa Group, San Juan Youngstars Tassa Group, and a

[9] In the following sections, I reference Manuel's transcriptions in his forthcoming volume *Tales, Tunes, and Tassa Drums*. For more on the relation of tassa to other Indo-Caribbean and North Indian musics, see also Peter Manuel, "Indo-Caribbean Folk Music from Oral Tradition to Cyberculture," in *Re-constructing Place and Space: Media, Culture, Discourse and the Constitution of Caribbean Diasporas*, ed. Kamille Gentles-Peart and Maurice L. Hall (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2012), 53–72; Manuel, *Tān-singing*.

band led by Emamalee “Numbers” Mohammed (these are cataloged in more detail in the discography in Appendix A). Additionally, I have made numerous audio and video recordings in the field that have aided my analysis. The bulk of my field recordings focus on the music of Trinidad and Tobago Sweet Tassa, a group founded and led by my tassa teacher Lenny Kumar, with branches in south Trinidad and Tampa, Florida. Appendix D comprises twelve audio examples (as embedded objects) as performed by T&T Sweet Tassa. Objects D-1 through D-7 are an excerpt from a larger suite of hands. For ease of listening, I have separated them into individual audio tracks. When played consecutively, however, the resulting twenty-one minutes of audio is representative of how a suite of hands is performed in practice. Objects D-8 through D-12 were recorded individually in a relatively controlled recording environment in August 2012. For the reader’s convenience, my transcriptions below are cross-referenced with the audio examples upon which each transcription is based. However, the transcription excerpts in this chapter as well as the full transcriptions in Appendix B should be regarded as general roadmaps rather than definitive arrangements of each hand.

Indeed, there is no authoritative arrangement of any tassa hand and certainly repertoire changes over time. This is quite evident in comparing Cook’s and Lomax’s recordings with the repertoire of today’s tassa bands. In a similar comparison, however, one will hear striking continuities. Despite the lack of a strictly normative canon, there is however general consensus among drummers about the skeletal forms of each component of this communally maintained repertoire. Individual drummers and bands may routinely practice variants of this or that hand, yet their variation does not deviate so much from the norm as to preclude recognition of the repertoire by their musical

peers. With such a tradition of variation, it is difficult to create a transcription that reflects the dynamism of the repertoire.

As is often the case with many non-Western musics, tassa is difficult to quantify using Western musical notation. While much of the repertoire is best “felt” in duple or quadruple meter, downbeats are frequently ambiguous. Moreover, the metric disagreements between and often within sections of music (taals in particular) stymie efforts to impose a Western sense of regularity upon the music. That being said, conventions of the repertoire frequently establish a sense of equilibrium (or dis-equilibrium as the case may be) in patterned ways. The notation of the micro-timing of particular strokes is also problematic. This is perhaps most obvious in the pervasive intermixing of “swung” and “straight” eighth and sixteenth note patterns across the repertoire. For example, the default eighth-note foulé pattern is virtually always swung, even if the cutter or bass may be sounding non-swung rhythms. This kind of rhythmic discrepancy is difficult to notate with clarity. The reader is therefore advised to regard my transcriptions as best understood when used in conjunction with provided and referenced audio examples. I have also created a notational scheme, based upon modified Western percussion notation, to convey idiosyncratic tassa techniques. The notation key in Appendix B should aid the reader in understanding this scheme.

Variation and improvisation is an important part of tassa performance. Bass and jhal players frequently introduce a modicum of variation in their ostinato parts (though the foulé should and virtually always does not), the cutter by definition engages in virtuosic improvisation throughout any given performance. Therefore, it is virtually impossible to convey a normative performance experience using conventional notation.

As such, I omit variation and improvisation from my transcriptions, though I often provide limited transcription of idiosyncratic cutting passages played virtually the same by every cutter.

Folk and Classical Hands

As mentioned above, many tassa hands have entered the repertoire by way of adaptation from Indian and Indo-Caribbean musical source material. In this section, I describe four of these hands: tikora, chaubola, nagara, and wedding hand. This is but a small sample of a great many hands that easily fall into this category. I limit my discussion to these four as they are among the most common. Though some hands like nagara, wedding hand, and others most likely coalesced as part of the tassa repertoire sometime after Indians first came to Trinidad, I discuss them here as largely indebted to identifiable North Indian forebears (though in the case of tikora, there is no clear precursor).

Tikora

Object D-8

Tikora is a classical wedding hand that is regarded as an introductory hand and as such is usually played first in a suite. Lenny Kumar suggests that with tikora, “you introduce yourself” then proceed through other hands. Interestingly, this notion of introduction is carried over on the Fun Lovers, Country Boys, and Youngstars CDs where tikora appears as the first track on each. Just as nagara hand (discussed below) is drawn from rhythms typically played on the North Indian *nagara* drum pair, it is possible that tikora too is derived from typical rhythms played upon an eponymous Indian drum. Writing in 1884, Platts defined the word “takora” as “the sound of a drum;

the treble end of the Moorish kettle-drum."[10] Manuel suggests this "Moorish kettle-drum" is tasha.[11] However, Martin's 1838 sketches of a set of north Indian instruments include both tasha and a distinctly different semi-spherical drum he labeled "tikara" (figure 3-2; see figure 2-17 for full sketch). From an organological perspective, the instrument is certainly a kettledrum that bears striking resemblance to nagara as well as the large clay dabbu tassas popular in Trinidad. Given that a drum called "tikara" has heretofore been absent from the literature surrounding North Indian music and noting Manuel's assertion that none of his Indian informants were familiar with the word "tikora," Martin's image could very well be misidentified. However, he quite accurately identifies other instruments in his sketches. Therefore, it is not wholly unreasonable to suggest that this is indeed a drum named "tikara" and that its repertoire, whatever it may have been, perhaps served as a model for the tassa hand tikora.

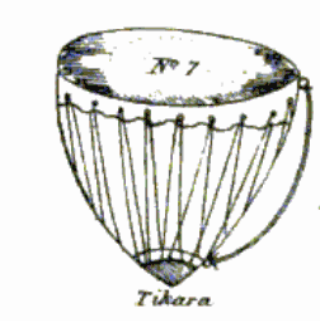


Figure 3-2. Detail of tikara drum. Sketch reproduced from Martin, *The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India*, Vol. III (London: 1838), 601.

[10] John T. Platts, "Ṭakorā," *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English.* (London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1884), 358.

[11] Manuel, "Tassa Drumming."

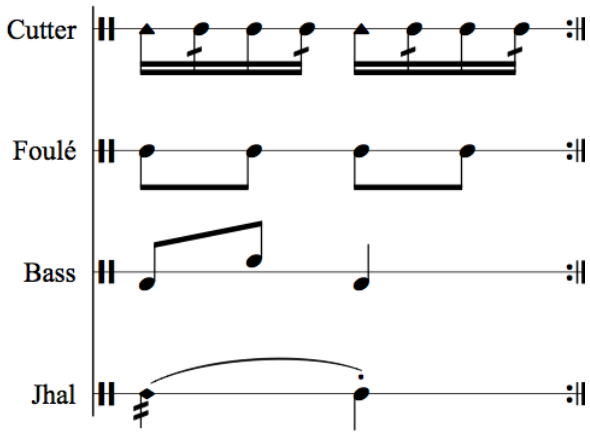


Figure 3-3. Tikora theka.

The theka for tikora is sparse in the foulé, bass, and jhal, therefore leaving room for a “busy” cutter line characterized by a specific rolling technique. The cutter’s non-dominant hand plays buzz rolls on the second and four sixteenth notes, leaving the dominant hand to alternately place downbeat accents on the edge and center of the drum (figure 3-3). As suggested by Manuel’s transcription, a variant of this technique (in my experience, a less common variant) requires both hands to roll instead of only one. In either case, the rolls are punctuated by subtly accented single strokes in the midst of the rolling. Lenny Kumar routinely places these single strokes on beats one and/or two, though I have heard other drummers who place them in a slightly more syncopated pattern.

Cutters will often play improvisatory passages in tikora that diverge from the rolling technique, but are usually built from it. This improvisation is often quite brief and returns to the basic pattern rather quickly. By convention, tikora is a rather brief hand, rarely continuing for much more than two minutes or so in performance. On each of the Fun Lovers, Country Boys, Youngstars, and T&T Sweet Tassa recordings, tikora runs

for less than two minutes. Emamalee Mohammed stretches his rendition out to more than five minutes though his cutting makes extensive use of highly repetitive rhythmic motives.

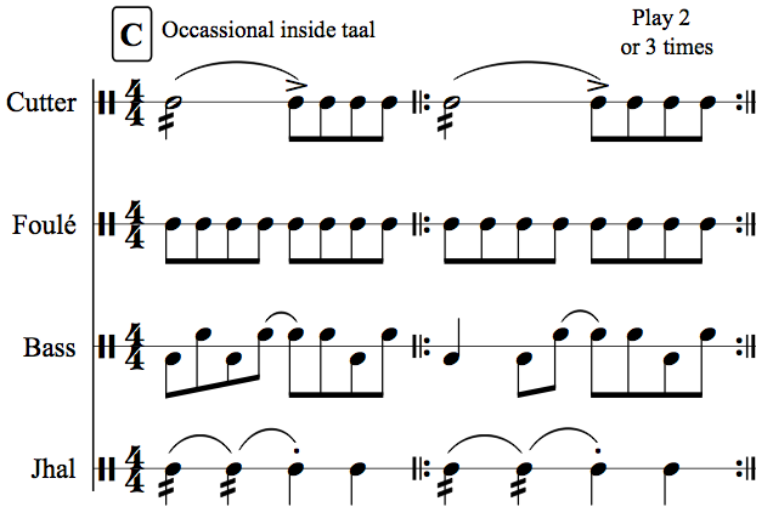


Figure 3-4. Tikora inside taal.

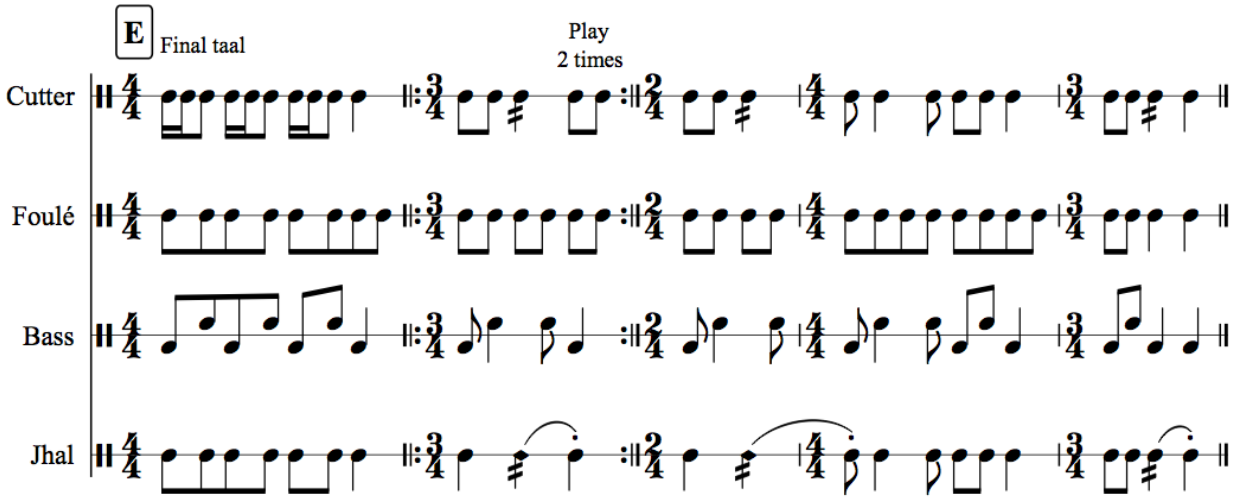


Figure 3-5. Tikora end taal.

There are two taals commonly played for tikora. One is what I call an “inside” taal, that is a taal that does not signal a musical change but is inserted only for musical interest; and one is what I call an “end” taal, that is a taal that signals the end of the

hand and instructs the band to stop or continue to the next hand. In figures 3-4 and 3-5, I have transcribed these taals as heard in Object D-8. The inside taal can be played with some variation, though the half-note roll/four eighth-note pattern is always present. While the inside taal is specific to tikora, the end taal is rather generic despite its metric irregularity (the end taal is the same for tikora, chaubola, and nagara therefore suggesting an association with classical hands). In transcribing this taal, I have strategically placed bar lines to emphasize the phrasing as Lenny Kumar articulated it to me.

My transcription describes the most common variant of tikora frequently referred to as wedding tikora. There are other variants (figure 3-6). The hand called *bhatee* or *bhatee drum* is identifiable as tikora given the presence of the rolling figure in the cutter line, yet uses a significantly different bass line and often features a different inside taal. Moreover, the cutting for bhatee is distinguished by a focus on triplet figures, though some cutters emphasize this more than others.[12] *Nadidin* is another tikora variant, though less common than bhatee.[13] Its most distinguishing feature is yet another divergent bassline featuring a prominent two beat rest. Hosay tikora is yet another variant played exclusively for Hosay.[14] Perhaps the most obvious link between Hosay tikora and other variants is the presence of the cutter's rolling technique though it is conventionally rather sparse in comparison. Moreover, Hosay tikora features its own

[12] Bhatee can be heard on track thirteen (listed as "Tikoraa (2)") on Caribel Fun Lovers Tassa Group's CD, as the first hand on track nine on Country Boys Tassa Group's CD, and as the first hands on tracks five and seven on San Juan Youngstars Tassa Group's CD.

[13] Nadidin can be heard as the second hand on track seven of Country Boys Tassa Group's CD.

[14] Hosay tikora can be heard as the first hand on track three of the Country Boys Tassa Group's CD and as the first hand on track three of Emory Cook's *East Indian Drums of Tunapuna Trinidad*.

distinct bassline. Drummer Raiaz Ali—whose family is associated with the venerable Ghulam Hussein yard, the oldest Hosay yard in St. James—suggests that wedding drummers introduced Hosay tikora into the Hosay repertoire rather recently. Manuel quotes Ali: “Since I [was] a little boy, I never hear my father or grandfather say anything about Hosay tikora.”[15] Nonetheless, Hosay tikora has been around at least since the mid-1950s given it appearance on Cook’s recordings from that time.

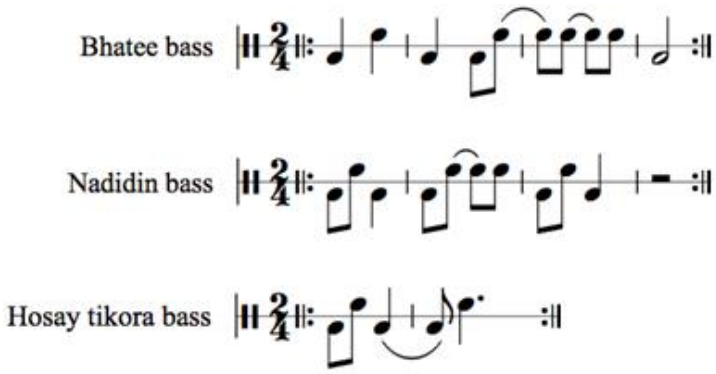


Figure 3-6. Bhatee, nadidin, and Hosay tikora basslines.

Chaubola

Object D-2

According to Manuel, the word *chaubola* (*chowbola* or *chowbhola*) references a poetic form commonly used in nautaki theatre, the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Trinidadian manifestations of which often rendered songs in a sequence that comprised a metrically free *doha*, a chaubola accompanied by nagara drumming, and an up-tempo *daur.*[16] These prosodic forms played a significant role in the coalescence of local-classical singing. Given the peculiar development of local-classical music—

[15] Quoted in Manuel, “Tassa Drumming.”

[16] Manuel, *Tān-singing*, 30–31.

emerging as a coherent genre from the fragmented retentions of indentured immigrants—"chaubola" eventually came to refer to a generic quadruple meter used to accompany singing. It is from this conceptualization of the term that the tassa hand apparently derives.

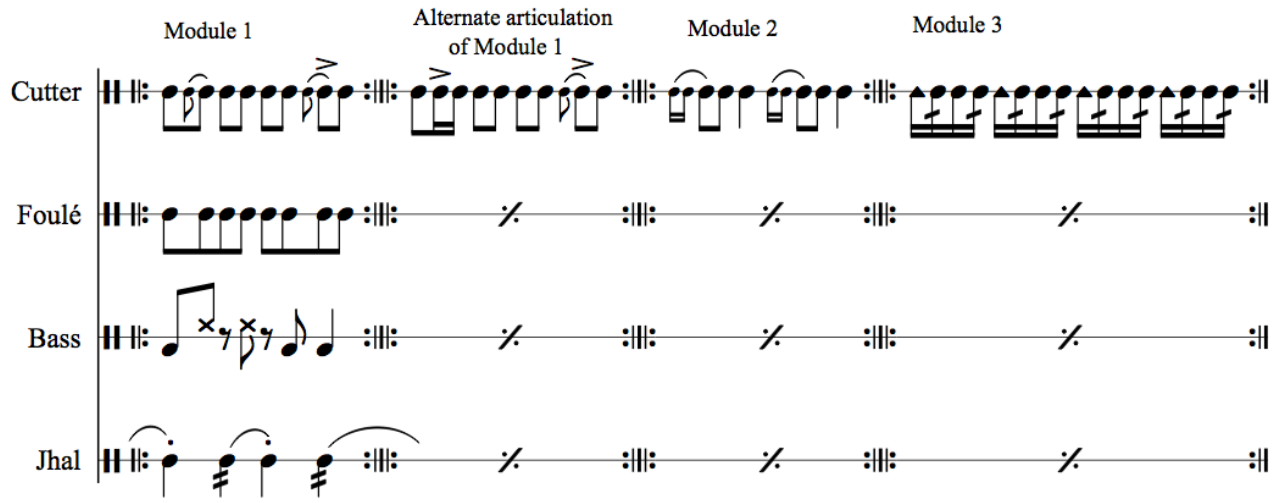


Figure 3-7. Chaubola cutter modules.

Chaubola comprises both a theka and barti. The theka is rendered in quadruple meter and features at least three idiosyncratic and rather formulaic cutting passages.[17] I find it best to consider these as cutter modules that can be deployed in nearly any order (figure 3-7). A common feature of modules one and two is the emphasis on the second half of beat one. This is most obvious with the accented flam of module one, though it is also hinted at by the drag-like figure (which approximates a technique characteristic of

[17] Manuel identifies four. In my experience, the pattern he labels "chugging" is best considered a variant of the tikora-like pattern, the difference being that in the "chugging" pattern the offbeat chope does not roll but only taps the head. Therefore, I do not include it here. Moreover, this pattern was not common among the bands I had the opportunity to hear in south Trinidad. It therefore may be a particular feature of north style drumming, though it does not appear on the San Juan Youngstars recording and appears only in passing in Emamalee Mohammed's rendition. These performers are based in north Trinidad, San Juan and Tacarigua, respectively.

nagara hand) in the same place in module two, though its emphasis is somewhat diluted by a similar figure on the “and” of beat three. In module three, the offbeat rolling pattern effectively ruptures this pattern in the cutter line, though the upbeat touch strokes in the bass maintain the groove. Furthermore, typical cutter improvisations tend to also revolve around elaborating this focus on the upbeat of beat one. Manuel accurately describes this focal point as a “syncopated kick” that establishes a certain tension that is resolved only on the following downbeat at which point the cycle begins with another syncopated kick.

While Manuel suggests these modules generally follow a particular sequence, this is not the case in my experience. Rather, cutters tend to begin with module one and subsequently incorporate each other module as they see fit in no particular order, often omitting some or returning to previously played modules, all the while improvising elaborations of them. Each rendition of chaubola on the source recordings in Appendix A, for example, follow a distinctly different pattern, none of which conforms to Manuel’s proposed sequence apart from beginning with module one.

At any rate, there are two taals played for chaubola. The first is a hand-specific taal comprised of a thrice-repeated rhythmic figure in quadruple meter. It is generally played at three points: once as an inside taal, once to transition from the theka to the barti, and once to exit the barti. The end taal for chaubola is the same as that played for tikora (figure 3-5).

Chaubola features a barti section that is common to numerous classical hands and is indeed a fascinating musical construction that emphatically resists notational quantification despite its sonic simplicity. I have transcribed the barti in 2/4 meter for

convenience though in practice the music tends toward slightly elongated strong beats, tending at times toward a 6/8 feel, therefore giving the rhythm a galloping groove. This metrical feeling is emphasized by a specialized tassa technique in which the player gently and briefly rubs the drumhead's surface with the tip of the chope (Lenny Kumar indeed called it a "rub" as he explained the stroke to me). This is unlike the softly articulated "ghost notes" commonly used in dingolay and a few other hands. Rather, the intention is clearly to create a fricative sound to further enliven the galloping feel.

Before proceeding to the next hand, it would be an injustice not to mention Emamalee Mohammed's rendition of chaubola as recorded on his *Tassarama* CD. To say the least, it greatly diverges from the normative model I have described above while maintaining many salient features that identify the hand as chaubola. Mohammed smoothly weaves in and out of the rhythmic modules described above while elaborating upon them in virtuosic ways that must be heard to appreciate. Intriguingly, he plays module three only once and very briefly toward the end of his five-minute rendition. Furthermore, his performance relies heavily on a sixteenth-note figure (as hinted at by measure four and five of Manuel's transcription of typical chaubola cutter patterns) that develops into a full-fledged module in its own right.

Mohammed's execution of taals also is inconsistent with what one would expect from a contemporary performance of chaubola. First, his inside and exit taals are very different (figure 3-8, A) and more closely resemble taals played for steelpan hand ("Imitation Steel Band") by Rahamat Ali and company as recorded by Emory Cook in the 1950s. Mohammed also introduces what functions as a minor inside taal (letter B in figure 3-8). Though this rhythm constitutes a very common cutter pattern (both on

Cook's and Lomax's recordings as well as in contemporary practice), I have never heard it constructed as Mohammed and company deploy it here. Namely, the bass and jhal briefly interrupt their ostinato to join in dialog with the cutter.

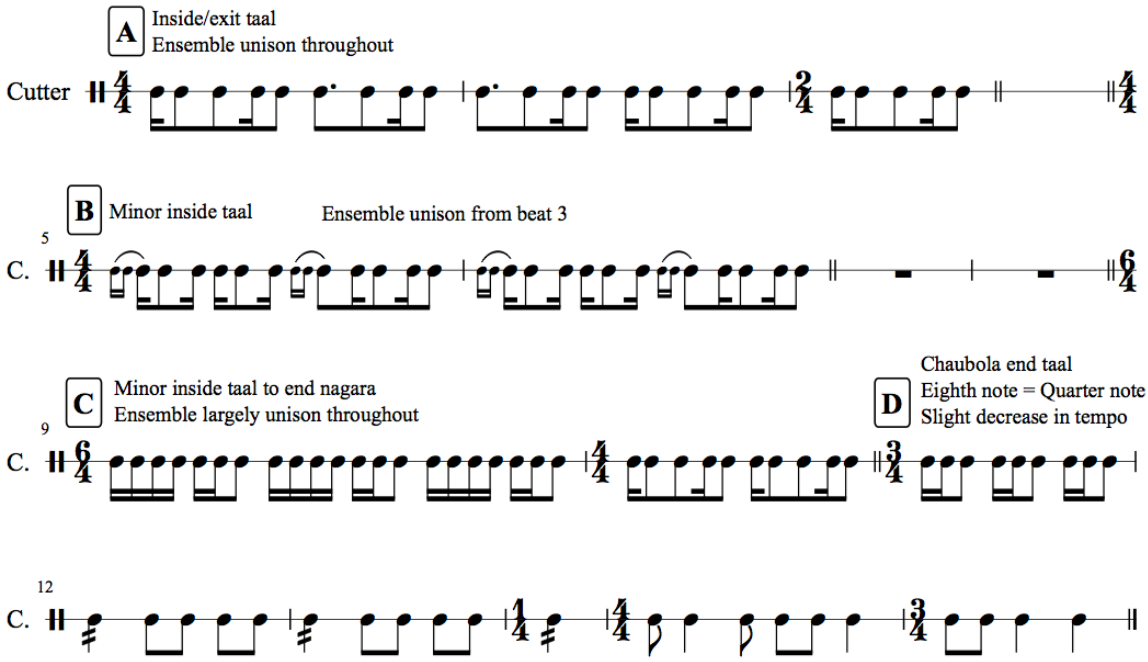


Figure 3-8. Emamalee Mohammed's rendition of chaubola taals.

Perhaps of most interest in this performance is Mohammed's treatment of the barti. At the point where one would expect it to begin, that is after the exit taal which occurs at about 2:00, there is no barti in the conventional sense. Rather, Mohammed instead modifies the timbre of his cutting by landing his chopes on the extreme edge of the drum. This is a clear break from what comes before and after. Where a conventional barti is executed in a contrasting meter and with a contrasting ostinato, Mohammed here varies timbre rather than metric or rhythmic elements. Moreover, after about thirty seconds of cutting in this fashion, Mohammed transitions into module two at which point the band follows his lead and begins a brief episode that takes on all the features of nagara hand. After another thirty seconds, Mohammed breaks taal and returns to the

familiar chaubola theka only to take up another short nagara episode immediately before the end taal. To finish, Mohammed employs two back-to-back taals as is his fashion to do (letters C and D in Fig 3-8). Therefore the end taal is a complex conglomeration that combines (in modified form) the minor inside taal with a variant of the conventional chaubola end taal.

Emamalee Mohammed's rendition of chaubola is somewhat out of place in contemporary tassa practice. Its animated dialog among cutter, bass, and jhal and its purposeful confusion of hands and taals harkens to an era of tassa performance that prefigured today's streamlined arrangements. Though contemporary drummers might consider Mohammed's chaubola cluttered, a close listening reveals a clear mastery of the repertoire.

Nagara

Object D-9

Nagara is a North Indian semispherical drum pair comprising one relatively large and one relatively small drum. The drums rest on the ground and are played with two sticks. The nagara set is closely related to tasha in terms of morphology and Indo-Persian heritage.[18] In the past, nagara drumming was apparently widespread throughout the Indo-Caribbean, including Trinidad. Though it may have been played in a variety of contexts, nagara served an especially important role in accompaniment for nautaki theatre. For informal gatherings, nagara also accompanied *biraha*, a vernacular song form characterized by extemporaneous Bhojpuri singing (Trinidadians sometimes

[18] Kathryn Hansen, *Grounds for Play: The Nautaki Theatre of North India* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 210, 213; Sharar, *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*, 152–153.

call biraha the “Indian calypso” because of its extemporaneousness). Though nagara drumming has faded in the Caribbean, it is still remembered by many of the older tassa drummers I talked to. Moreover, the basic pattern nagara drummers played to accompany song and dance is preserved in the cutter line of the tassa hand named nagara. Evidence suggests that tassa bands accompanied biraha singing—a role traditionally relegated to nagara—since at least the early 1960s though this association probably has a lengthier history in Trinidad.[19] Biraha singing has itself faded along with the decline of Bhojpuri as a common language among Indo-Trinidadians. It is today the domain of a few elderly musicians whose grasp of Bhojpuri is strong enough to extemporize. During a fieldwork trip in 2011, I met Samlal “Sham” Singh, age 86, who demonstrated for me his ability to cut nagara on tassa while simultaneously singing biraha.

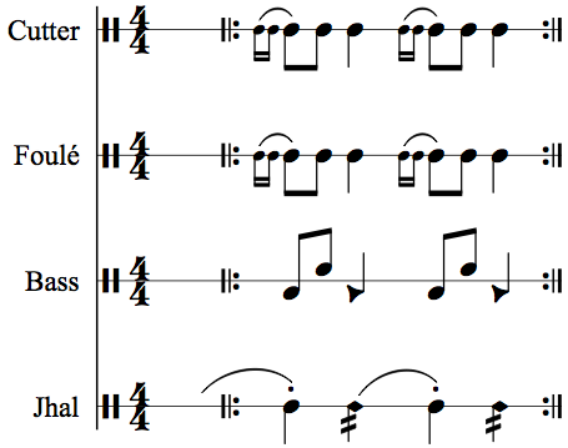


Figure 3-9. Nagara theka.

[19] Lomax recorded two birahas sung by Mike Mathura with accompaniment from a tassa band playing nagara hand. In the recordings, the cutter breaks taal leading into more active improvisation between the “verses” of the song, presumably for Mathura to dance. At the end of the first five-minute performance, an audience member shouts, “You one of the best, Mike!” Association for Cultural Equity Sound Recordings, Caribbean 1962, Charlieville 5/62: “Biraha (I),” “Biraha (II),” T1089.0, Tracks 2-3.

Nagara's most prominent motive, characterized by a drag-like stroke on beats one and three in the tassa lines, is the hallmark of nagara (figure 3-9). Cutters often also incorporate this stroke into their improvisations. As described above, a variant of this motive is integral to the conventions of chaubola as well. As a brisk and lively hand appropriate for vigorous dancing, nagara offers ample opportunity for complex cutter improvisation.

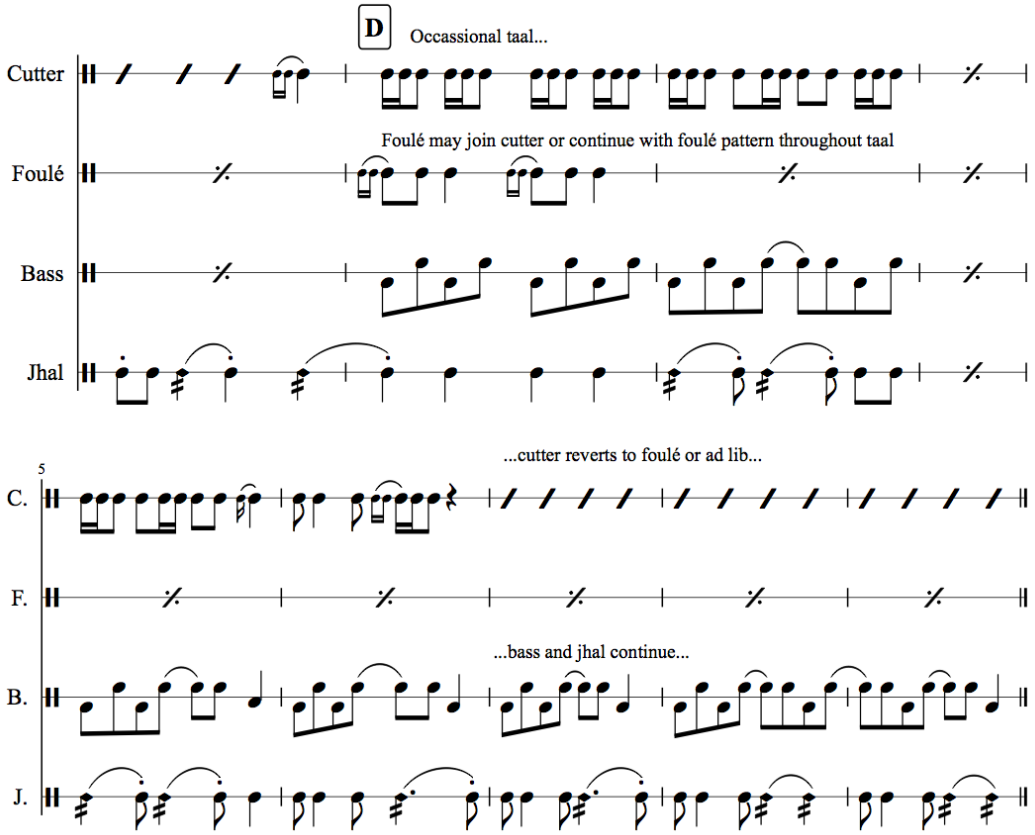


Figure 3-10. Nagara inside taal with three-measure bass and jhal tag.

Though a number of generic taals are appropriate for nagara, Manuel identifies several nagara-specific taals that need no repeating here. However, his analysis focuses on the cutter patterns exclusively. In nagara in particular, the cutter and bass (with jhal often following the bass) commonly engage in what might be regarded as call-

and-response patterns during the taals. The extent of this dialog varies among bands, but is an important aspect of nagara and should not be overlooked. In figure 3-10, for example, I have transcribed a version of the first taal Manuel lists in his discussion of nagara. This taal, as played by Trinidad and Tobago Sweet Tassa on Object D-9, includes a three-measure tag within which the bass and jhal continue and elaborate their lines while the cutter reverts either to the foulé part or to improvisation. Though T&T Sweet Tassa's arrangement of this taal is greatly influenced by the musicianship of bass player George Baboolal, this kind of cutter/bass dialog is not unique. It can be heard in varying degrees, for example, in Fun Lovers Tassa Group's and New York-based Boodoosingh Tassa Group's renditions of nagara.

Wedding Hand

Object D-5

Wedding hand[20] is played for the most anticipated events of a Hindu wedding, namely the entrance (or arrival, if not a house wedding) of the bride, arrival of the *barat* (groom's entourage), and often for the sendoff of the newlyweds. Wedding hand is unique among wedding-oriented tassa hands for several reasons. Most saliently, the bass takes on the most prominent role, though the cutter remains the leader of the ensemble guiding the bass through a sequence of rhythmic modules. Moreover, wedding hand's metric structure is decidedly asymmetrical and categorically defies conventional analysis; this is in contrast to the majority of wedding repertoire, which for the most part is easily conceptualized as duple or quadruple in nature. Further

[20] In all cases, "wedding hand"—be it north or south—is commonly referred to as "wedding drum."

complicating analysis are two distinct though quite similar variants known as north wedding hand and south wedding hand.

In the analysis below, I focus upon a single performance of wedding hand played by T&T Sweet Tassa at the wedding of Vishal Deo, a member of the band currently residing in Florida who traveled with his then-fiancé to Trinidad for their nuptials in April of 2011. This rendition of wedding hand is a variant of south wedding hand. As the name implies, this hand is played primarily by bands in South Trinidad, geographically defined as the area lying beyond the southerly slopes of the Central Range. Colloquially, "South" is more specifically defined as the region lying south of San Fernando (and including it) and stretching from the western tip of the southern peninsula to Mayaro Bay in the east. Drummers I talked to gave varying reasons why South drummers developed an idiosyncratic version of wedding hand, though most suggested it was the relative rural isolation and large Indian population of the region that fostered an insular community of musicians who cultivated their own style. While this is a plausible hypothesis, it does not fully explain the divergence between north and south wedding hand and further urges one to consider why most other hands played by north and south drummers are virtually identical. Even among bands that play south wedding hand, there are considerable variations beyond a few common modular rhythms.[21] Nonetheless, the performance transcribed here should provide general notions about the formal structure of any rendition of wedding hand, north or south.

[21] Of the sample of recordings referenced in this chapter, Country Boys Tassa Group's rendition is closest to T&T Sweet Tassa's. The latter, however, is more elaborate, including a greater number of thekas and taals. The limits of the recording studio, however, could very well have abbreviated Country Boys' performance. All other sampled recordings of wedding hand feature markedly different arrangements, though each is easily identifiable.

The defining structural characteristic of wedding hand is its alternation of a collection or "set"[22] of modular thekas and taals, the distinctiveness of which is largely determined by the bass. In the case of wedding hand, the meanings of theka and taal are necessarily modified beyond the basic definitions established above. Wedding hand thekas are best considered holding patterns in which the bass plays a repetitive ostinato in anticipation of a cue from the cutter to proceed. Depending upon the cutter's preference and the progress of the accompanied action, thekas may be played for relatively long or short periods. Given the lengthy arrangements common among more knowledgeable bands, thekas are frequently brief, therefore allowing for an efficient progression through the formal components of the hand. In contrast to the succinct taals played for other hands, wedding hand taals are complex—and at times lengthy—rhythmic sequences.

Table 3-1. Formal structure of wedding hand.

Section	Rehearsal Letter	Structural Component
I	A	Taal 1
	B	Theka 1
	C	Theka 1 Exit Taal (Same as Taal 1)
	D	Theka 2
	E	Theka 2 Exit Taal (Taal 1 fragment)
	F	Tacit Bass1
II	G	Taal 2A
	H	Tacit Bass 2
	I	Taal 2B
	J	Tacit Bass 3
	K	Taal 2C
	L	Tacit Bass 4
	M	Taal 2D
III	N	Theka 3
	O	Theka 3 Exit Taal (Taal 2 fragment)

[22] See discussion of wedding hand in Manuel, "Tassa Drumming."

P	Theka 4
Q	End Taal

Though taals do not feature ostinatos, wedding hand taals and thekas have some rhythmic fragments in common. Throughout a performance of wedding hand—and during taals in particular—the bass becomes the most prominent instrument in the ensemble, sounding out quasi-melodic sequences that distinguish taals and thekas from one another. At several points, the bass is tacit, creating metrically static points of repose allowing for extended moments of cutter improvisation. At the appropriate time, the cutter cues the bass to (re)enter with the next taal in the sequence. Throughout wedding hand, the jhal keeps time using a basic upbeat-emphasizing pattern and joins the bass during taals; meanwhile the foulé pounds out an unwavering, slightly swung eighth-note ostinato, landing the chopes firmly and directly in the center of the drum. This hammering foulé, the music's unique formal structure, and prominence of the bass cause wedding hand to stand out among wedding repertoire.

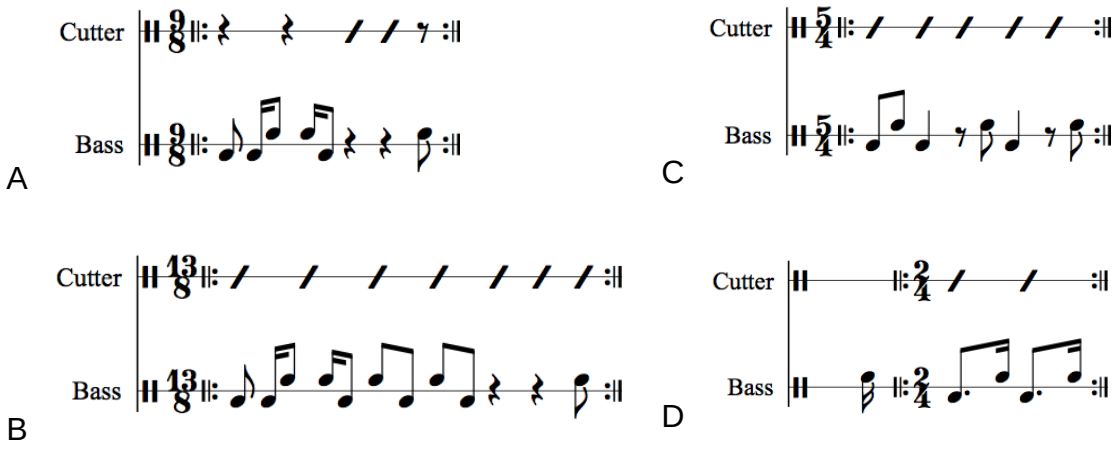


Figure 3-11. Wedding hand thekas. A) Theka 1, B) Theka 2, C) Theka 3, D) Theka 4.

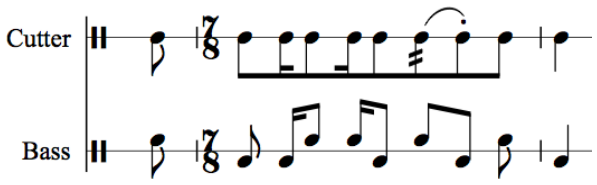


Figure 3-12. Wedding Hand, Taal 1.

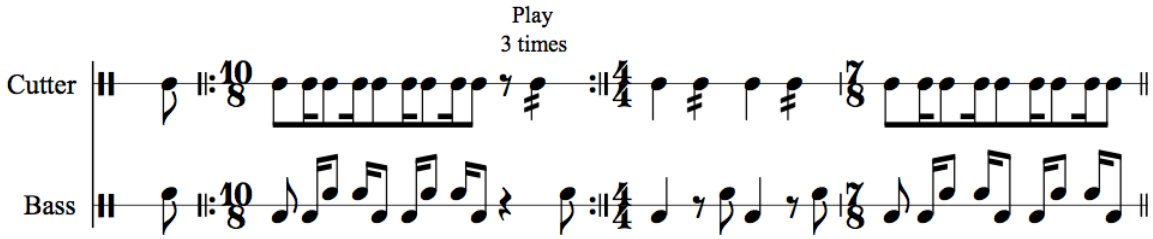


Figure 3-13. Wedding Hand, end of Taal 2.

In Object D-5, T&T Sweet Tassa play wedding hand with four thekas and six taals which comprise an overarching form with three interrelated sections diagramed in table 3-1. Thekas 1 and 2 appear at the beginning of the arrangement while thekas 3 and 4 appear at the end (figure 3-11). While theka 1 may be regarded as a diminution of Taal 1 (figure 3-12), Theka 2 may be regarded as an augmentation of it. Theka 3 is seemingly unrelated to any other material, while Theka 4 is a diminution of the sixteenth/dotted-quarter pattern first heard in Taal 2A (measure one of figure 3-13). The middle section of wedding hand consists of a series of four variations (Taal 2A through Taal 2D), each ending with a characteristic three-part passage indicated in figure 3-13 that is essentially an augmentation of Taal 1. These variations are indeed the “meat” of this hand. They are a joy for drummers to play and a delight for audiences to witness. The fourth and final taal is a generic end taal.

In comparison to other hands discussed in this chapter, wedding hand is indeed anomalous. Where most common hands have regular metric schemes and therefore a moderately clear sense of downbeat, this is lacking in wedding hand. A perfunctory

examination, however, will reveal that wedding hand sounds very much like a Hosay hand called *teen chopa* (*Hosay teen chopa*, *teen chopra*, *tîn chopra*).[23] Moreover, teen chopa shares with wedding hand (both north and south) strikingly similar rhythmic passages, metric irregularities, aspects of musical structure, and prominence of the bassline. This leads Manuel to logically surmise that wedding hand is indeed derivative of teen chopa.[24] In turn, the irregular metric passages in particular suggest a strong connection between teen chopa and the practice of adapting lexical patterns (i.e. *La ilaha illa Allah…* ["There is no God but Allah…]) for performance on dhol by North Indian Muharram drummers.[25] The lexical meaning of these dhol passages has been long forgotten by Trinidad Hosay drummers though the drumming itself has taken on greater meaning in their absence.[26] There is no clearly delineated path by which teen chopa might have been adapted into wedding hand. Manuel's informants suggest an obsolete variant called "wedding tîn chopra" most likely gave rise to wedding hand.[27] This or some similar transference from Hosay repertoire into wedding repertoire indeed seems likely. However, drummers I talked to acknowledged the similarities between teen chopa and wedding hand, yet ultimately cited the convention of keeping Hosay hands out of weddings as evidence that the two are not related. This application of current conventions to explain historical developments tellingly demonstrates a streamlining of

[23] Lenny Kumar and others indicate the name to mean "three chopes" and therefore "three beats." The name of the hand, however, seems to have little bearing on the actual structure of the music.

[24] Manuel, "Tassa Drumming."

[25] Ibid.; Wolf, "Embodiment and Ambivalence," 100–101.

[26] Korom, *Hosay Trinidad*, 164–169.

[27] Manuel, "Tassa Drumming."

musical categorization, one in which separation of Hosay and non-Hosay repertoire is perhaps more strict today than in the past.

Caribbean Hands

A number of common tassa hands likely emerged well after Indian immigration and, according to conventional wisdom, benefited from cultural and musical exchange between Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians. In this section, I discuss two such hands: dingolay and calypso.

Dingolay

Object D-10

"Dingolay" is a Creole word meaning "to twist and turn" or to "dance with elaborate movements."[28] Therefore, the hand is aptly named for its function as the breakaway hand par excellence. By virtue of its name and "hotness" of its rhythmic character, dingolay is often assumed to have been influenced at least to some degree by African drumming. Critical listening suggests dingolay on the contrary bears a much closer and indeed more logical continuity with percussive patterns that accompany a variety of Bhojpuri-derived Indo-Caribbean musics. The Krishna bhajan Lomax recorded in Charlo Village in 1962, as just one example, features a dhoalk pattern analogous to dingolay's foulé ostinato.

Dingolay likely assumed its current form sometime before the mid-1950s. Cook's 1956 recording features a tassa hand he labeled "Hussaya Festival," which upon closer inspection is essentially what we know today as dingolay, complete with rudimentary

[28] Lise Winer, ed., "Dingolay," *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad & Tobago* (Montreal, Quebec and Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 298.

taals. Though there is no evidence of the hand's proper name (only Cook's apparently imposed labeling which cannot be wholly trusted; he identified Hosay *mahatam* as "Wedding Dance," for example), it is safe to assume that the formal structure of the music itself was well known at the time at least among the group of drummers Cook recorded. When I played Cook's recording for Lenny Kumar, he was incredulous, asserting quite surprisingly, "I didn't think that anyone from 1956 would have that kind of rhythm!" Lomax also recorded a band from Pasea Village playing a hand labeled "dingolay" that closely resembles contemporary renditions of the hand, including taals, but with a slightly different articulation in the foulé.

Dingolay's foulé pattern can be reduced to the rhythm shown in figure 3-14. As I was learning dingolay, Lenny Kumar indicated this to be the foulé's core rhythm, though in practice drummers virtually always play a busier sixteenth-note pattern including what I call "ghost notes," strokes that act as filler yet are essential to the overall boisterous character of the hand. This busier pattern is indicated in figure 3-15 including bracketed ghost notes.

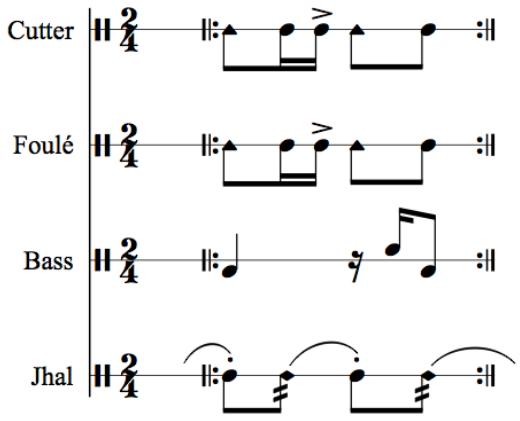


Figure 3-14. Dingolay theka with simplified foulé.

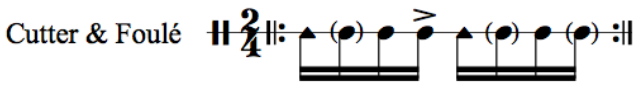


Figure 3-15. Dingolay foulé with bracketed ghost notes.

Though executed with considerable variation, three distinct taals have been played in dingolay since at least the 1950s. The first two are inside taals while the third is an end taal. In the following pages, I compare historical renditions of these taals side by side using Cook's recording of Rahamat Ali and company form the mid-1950s, Emamalee Mohammed and company's recording from the 1990s, and a recording I made of Trinidad and Tobago Sweet Tassa led by Lenny Kumar in August of 2012. I chose these recordings as representative of three generations of tassa performance: Ali represents an "old school" approach while Mohammed—who was already a respected member of the aging tassa vanguard at the time of his recording—represents a transitional period. Kumar, now in his early 40s, is still today an active performer and innovator.

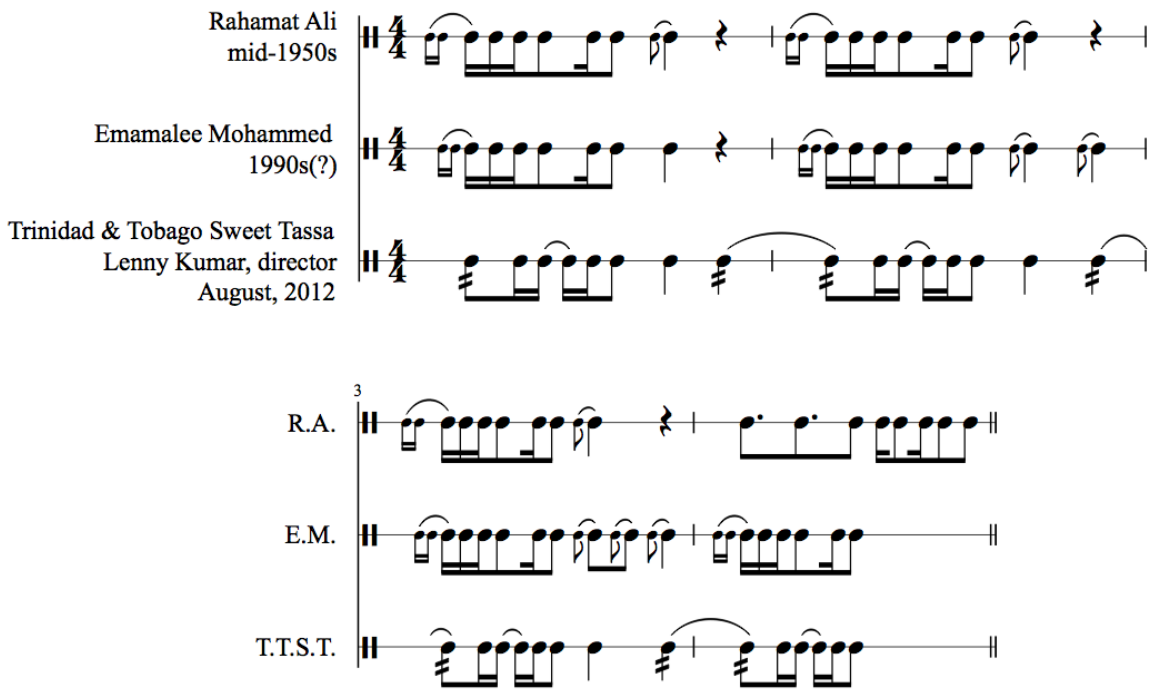


Figure 3-16. Comparison of cutter pattern, dingolay, taal one.

Figure 3-16 features a comparison of taal one (the first inside taal) as played in these three examples. Ali's and Mohammed's renditions of taal one are virtually identical save for rhythmic elaboration at the end of the phrase. T&T Sweet Tassa incorporates two variants of this taal into their arrangement of dingolay. The first variant (transcribed in figure 3-16) diverges somewhat from Ali's and Mohammed's renditions. The most important difference is the buzz rolls that maintain momentum through the space where rests would normally be. This motion is further emphasized in the bass and jhal whose patterns also move through the rests. The second iteration of taal one in T&T Sweet Tassa's rendition discussed below is nearly identical to Mohammed's. However, it comes as a tag tacked onto taal two as in figure 3-18.What I call taal two is essentially composed of sixteenth notes with alternating accents between the right and left chopes. This taal as played in the three examples is transcribed in figure 3-17.

Though there is some variation between the examples, the large-scale rhythmic scheme of each is rather homogenous. Differences lie primary in the preparation and the ending of the taal. Ali does not prepare the taal with what is today a common eighth not pattern as played by Mohammed. Rather, he most likely gives a visual cue, as is common among players today, to signal the preparation of the taal which the band then follows. T&T Sweet Tassa includes two variants of this taal in their arrangement; the first is transcribed in figure 3-17. Lenny Kumar replaces the eighth-note preparation bar with a full measure of buzz rolling. Yet, the most interesting aspect of this iteration is the last measure in which the cutter and foulé execute a couple of unison rolls and land quite forcefully on beat four; all the while the bass and jhal play unison rhythms in sync with the tassa lines. After such a busy theka, this sparse pattern creates something of a

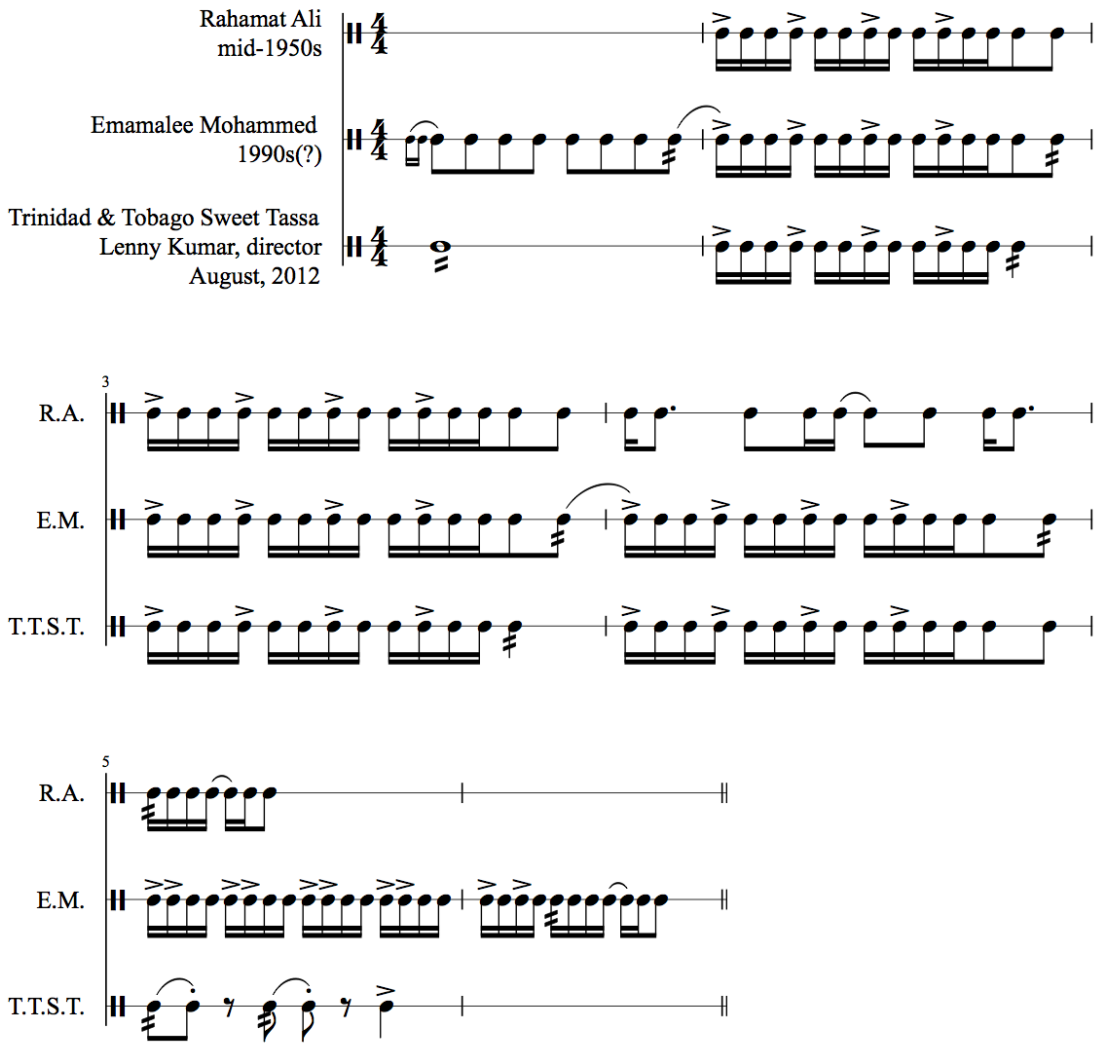


Figure 3-17. Comparison of cutter pattern, taal two, dingolay.

rhythmic vacuum that surprises the ear and is unlike any other arrangement of this taal that I have heard. This taal also appears in a number of classical tassa hands recorded by Lomax in 1962, including *tilana*, *dhurpat* (*dhrupad*), and *sadwa*, the last of which bears very close resemblance to contemporary renditions of dingolay both in terms of theka and taal. Moreover, similar patterns corresponding to dingolay's theka and taal

are quite common in folk-oriented dholak playing.[29] The prominence of dingolay-associated rhythms in classical hands and in dholak performance, lends credence to a strong affinity with Indo-Trinidadian musical aesthetics.

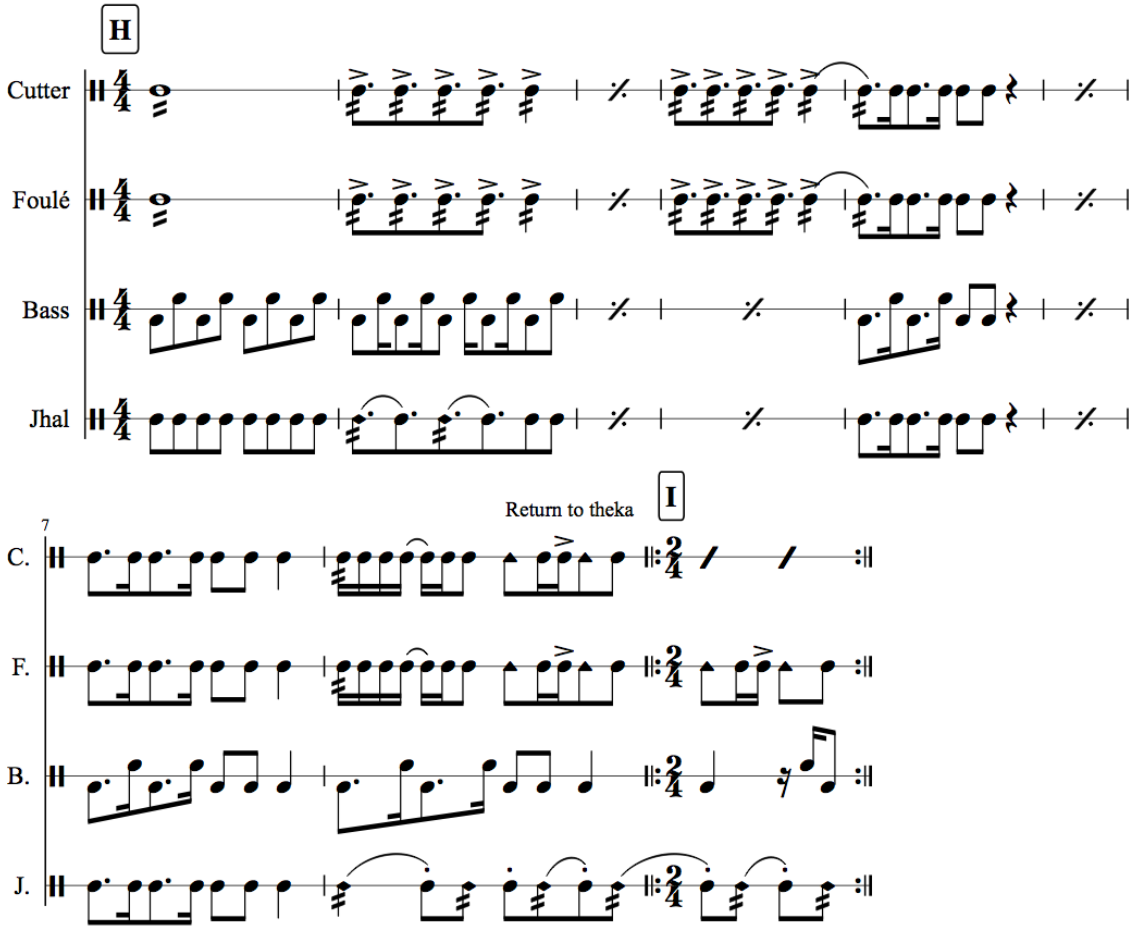


Figure 3-18. T&T Sweet Tassa's second iteration of taal two in dingolay.

The second iteration of taal two in T&T Sweet Tassa's rendition occurs near the end of their arrangement (figure 3-18) and deserves some special attention. This second time around, the accented target notes of the first iteration have been

[29] For example, Myers documented a dholak taal quite similar to what I have labeled as dingolay taal two played by a female drummer accompanying Bhojpuri lachari singing at a Hindu wedding in Felicity during fieldwork in the 1970s. Myers, *Music of Hindu Trinidad*, 166–167; CD Track 5.

transformed into buzz rolls. Even though the articulation of the standard taal is now missing, a seasoned listener will easily identify the taal based upon the accents alone. As mentioned above, the second iteration of taal one, now nearly identical to Mohammed's articulation, proceeds seamlessly from the final roll of taal two (five measures after H).

The customary end taal for dingolay is a short and simple pattern (figure 3-19). Bands play variations of it, yet for the most part it has become dingolay's standard end taal. A comparison of this end taal with taal two as articulated by Ali suggests that today's end taal is a rhythmically elongated form of the final section of taal two.

Figure 3-19. Dingolay end taal.

Calypso

Object D-11

Calypso hand is alternately referred to as steel pan (or iron hand), though this nomenclature is a matter of debate. Some agree with Sanjeet Soogrim-Ram who suggests that the two hands are one in the same and asserts that the hand should properly be called calypso hand since it is calypso that steel pans play (i.e. it would not make sense to say that calypso plays steel pan). Others, however, identify subtle variances between calypso hand and steel pan hand. Analysis of recordings by bands that differentiate between the two, however, reveals the only significant differences

being in the number, composition, and placement of taals.[30] For clarity, then, I will refer to this hand as calypso hand.[31]

Nagara, dingolay, and calypso hand are the most common and enduring breakaway hands, though when executed at a walking tempo calypso might be played as a processional hand from time to time. Many drummers I talked to generally assume that calypso hand is modeled upon aspects of the Afro-Trinidadian pop music genre calypso. This is most clear in the bass, whose theka pattern closely mirrors the kind of *habanero* rhythm typical of classic calypsos as performed by steelbands "on the road."[32] Shannon Dudley's transcription of a typical "dudup rhythm" played on an early dual-pitched "boom" pan is indeed rhythmically identical to the bass's theka pattern for calypso hand (figure 3-20).[33] Calypso hand's affinity with steelband style is further emphasized by the foulé's theka whose subtly articulated sixteenth-note ostinato emphasizes a rhythmic pattern virtually identical to that typically played by the congas in a steelband's engine room (figure 3-21). Steel pan pioneer Neville Jules intriguingly suggests that this conga pattern was in turn derived from the foulé rhythms of tamboo bamboo.[34]

[30] Compare, for example, "Iron Hand" and "Calypso," tracks eight and nine respectively on Caribel Fun Lovers Tassa Group's CD.

[31] Tassa drummers usually refer to the hand simply as "calypso." I use "calypso hand" here to eliminate confusion between the pop music genre and the tassa hand.

[32] Manuel, "Tassa Drumming."

[33] Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge*, 277.

[34] Ibid., 45–46.

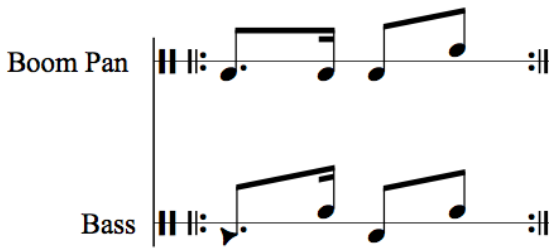


Figure 3-20. Comparison of “dudup rhythm” and calypso hand bass pattern.

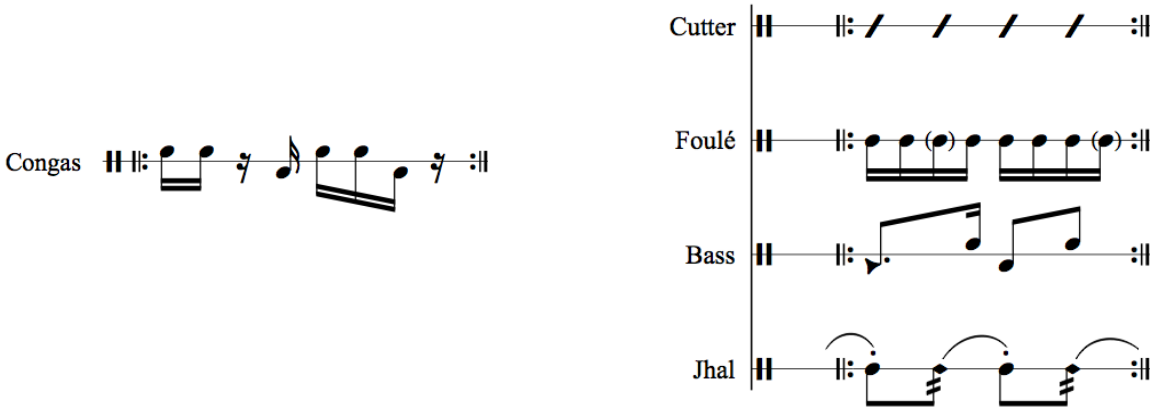


Figure 3-21. Comparison of steelband conga pattern and calypso hand theka. The tassa notes in parentheses are ghost notes.

Cook identifies his recording of calypso hand as “Imitation Steel Band.” The foulé and bass patterns discussed above are clearly present in this performance as is an abbreviated variant of the taal typical of calypso hand as it is played today. Therefore calypso hand had largely assumed its current form at least by the mid-1950s. While Manuel’s informants suggest a drummer named Cyril Raymond composed calypso hand, Krishna Soogrim-Ram quite emphatically insisted that it was composed by legendary tassaman Harry Latchman. Putting aside both of these largely unverifiable claims, it is nonetheless clear from circumstantial evidence that calypso is indeed a New World creation and not an import from India. First, its name is identifiable as a Creole

song form. And, second, some of its structural elements correspond with striking similarity to those of typical steelband repertoire. Simultaneously, however, calypso hand bears typical musical characteristics of tassa repertoire including the presence of taals and theka arranged in conventional fashion.

Recently Composed Hands

As we have seen so far, tassa repertoire is largely generated based upon pre-existing musical models distilled into composite rhythms compatible with the tassa ensemble and consistent with conventions of performance including the creation or adaptation of theka, taal, and (at least in the case of classical hands) barti. Popular repertoire emerging since the late 20th century continues to follow this pattern. As discussed below, a hand called “chutney” developed according to this pattern and has since received widespread performance in Trinidad and Tobago and throughout the diaspora. Composition of new, original repertoire is indeed quite common though only on rare occasions do these creations enter the mainstream tassa canon with the kind of permanence enjoyed by chutney hand.[35] With the advent of formal competition and a move toward staged tassa performances, a number of bands routinely create new hands, some of which follow familiar generative practices and some that buck this trend in important ways.

Chutney

Object D-12

[35] See for example “Country Boys Mix” on Country Boys Tassa Group’s CD and “We Own Ting” on Caribel Fun Lovers Tassa Group’s CD.

Chutney is an Indo-Caribbean popular music genre emerging from Bhojpuri-derived vernacular songs like *lachari*, bawdy tunes sung by women accompanying themselves on *dholak* (a small two-headed barrel drum), *chac-chac* (West Indian maraca-like shakers), and *dhantal* (a native Indo-Caribbean idiophone comprising a metal rod and horseshoe-shaped beater).[36] These lively songs sung in Bhojpuri explore sexually suggestive themes and were most often sung during matikor, lawa, and other occasions when women gathered together. During Myers' fieldwork in the 1970s and early 1980s, this repertoire of bawdy songs was often referred to as "hot," like "chutney."[37] From the 1970s, Sundar Popo, Anand Yankaran, Drupatee Ramgoonai, and others began staging arrangements of lachari-like songs sung with a mixture of Bhojpuri and English and featuring orchestrations consisting of dholak, dhantal, harmonium, synthesizers, drum machine, and a horn section. Over the ensuing decade, this new genre came to be called "chutney" and surged in popularity among Indo-Trinidadians at home and in diaspora; covers of Popo's songs still today find their way into Bollywood films. Since the 1990s, a number of fusions have emerged that take advantage of mixing chutney with other musical genres. Chutney-soca, which blends Indian-oriented orchestration and melodic contours with a soca-like groove, is the most popular and profitable of these.

Lenny Kumar claims to have composed chutney hand for tassa using women's folk songs as his model:

[36] Myers, *Music of Hindu Trinidad*, 162–172; Ramnarine, *Creating Their Own Space*, 106.

[37] Myers, *Music of Hindu Trinidad*, 55–56.

> Chutney music that they have… now [referring to chutney-soca] is not chutney music… Chutney started from… *barahi* and *chaiti*[38] [where] women, they sing folk songs. When women singing them songs, the beat they does play is chutney beat. My mother does play that style of dholak and it's there I get that from.[39]

Figure 3-22 illustrates rudimentary dholak and dhantal patterns one might hear accompanying this kind of chutney singing.[40] When compared alongside the foulé pattern commonly played on tassa for chutney hand, the two are indeed quite similar. The foulé closely follows the dhantal pattern yet includes a flam on the second eighth note of beats two and four, thus emphasizing similarly positioned offbeat dholak strokes. Perhaps one of the most important features of the chuntey foulé is its asymmetry, a full four-beat pattern in contrast to all the two-beat foulé patterns examined thus far. The foulé is indeed the most characteristic aspect of the hand with little else to differentiate chutney from other breakaway hands.

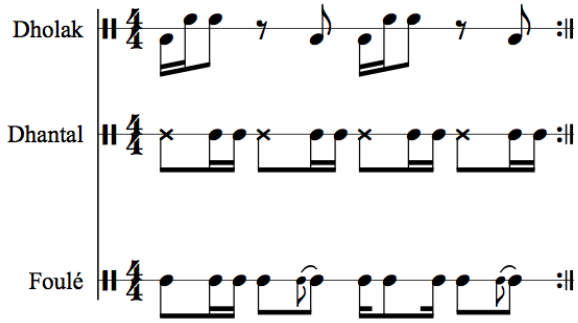


Figure 3-22. Comparison of chutney patterns with foulé for chutney hand.

[38] Hindu ceremonies performed twelve and six days, respectively, after birth of a child. Like matikor and lawa, these rituals are the domain of women and included suggestive dancing along with "hot" songs like lachari. Rasika Dindial's contemporary chutney song "D'Chamine" ("The Midwife") at one point humorously details the exploits of a devious husband who sneaks into a barahi ceremony to watch the women dance.

[39] Lenny Kumar, Interview by author, April 24, 2011.

[40] For other common dhantal patterns, see Ramnarine, *Creating Their Own Space*, 67.

The taals played for chutney are for the most part similarly generic. Bands generally use the two inside taals from dingolay, though some cutters incorporate a one-measure quarter-note pattern here and there to evoke a common dholak variation that in some arrangements functions like a mini-taal signaling a brief stop-time effect. Lenny Kumar includes an elaborated and elongated version of this quarter-note taal (without the stop-time effect) in his arrangement of chutney (figure 3-23). With its suddenly intense eighth-note patterns, this taal in clearly indebted to fast, virtuosic chutney-style dholak playing.

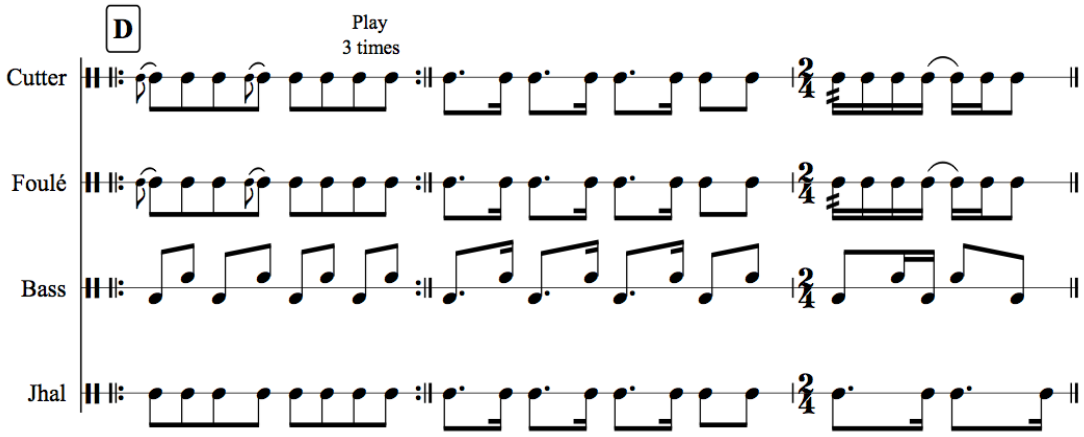


Figure 3-23. Lenny Kumar's inside taal for chutney hand.

Some bands play a variant of chutney hand called chutney-soca. The fundamental differences in this hand include a faster tempo, more rhythmically active foulé (though maintaining the same outline as the chutney foulé), and a soca-derived bassline (figure 3-24).

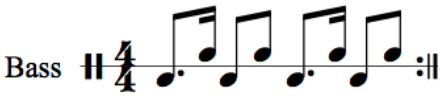


Figure 3-24. Bass pattern for chutney-soca hand.

George of the Jungle

Object D-7

Always the innovator, Lenny Kumar continues to compose new hands. In 2009, T&T Sweet Tassa's winning entry in the National Tassa Competition (discussed in chapter five) included a hand he calls Punjabi and is modeled upon a typical *bhangra* groove. More recently, Kumar composed a quasi-samba hand based upon rhythmic motives he heard in the theme song for the 1960s cartoon "George of the Jungle." In this hand, which he simply calls George of the Jungle, all parts of the ensemble essentially play the same repeated pattern (figure 3-25). The cutter's improvisations generally hover quite close to the foulé pattern, forgoing flashy virtuosity. The inside taal, which includes a three-measure preparation, is adapted from the rhythm of the text "Watch out for that tree!" from the original and includes a one-beat rest at the end to provide a sense of repose before returning to the theka.

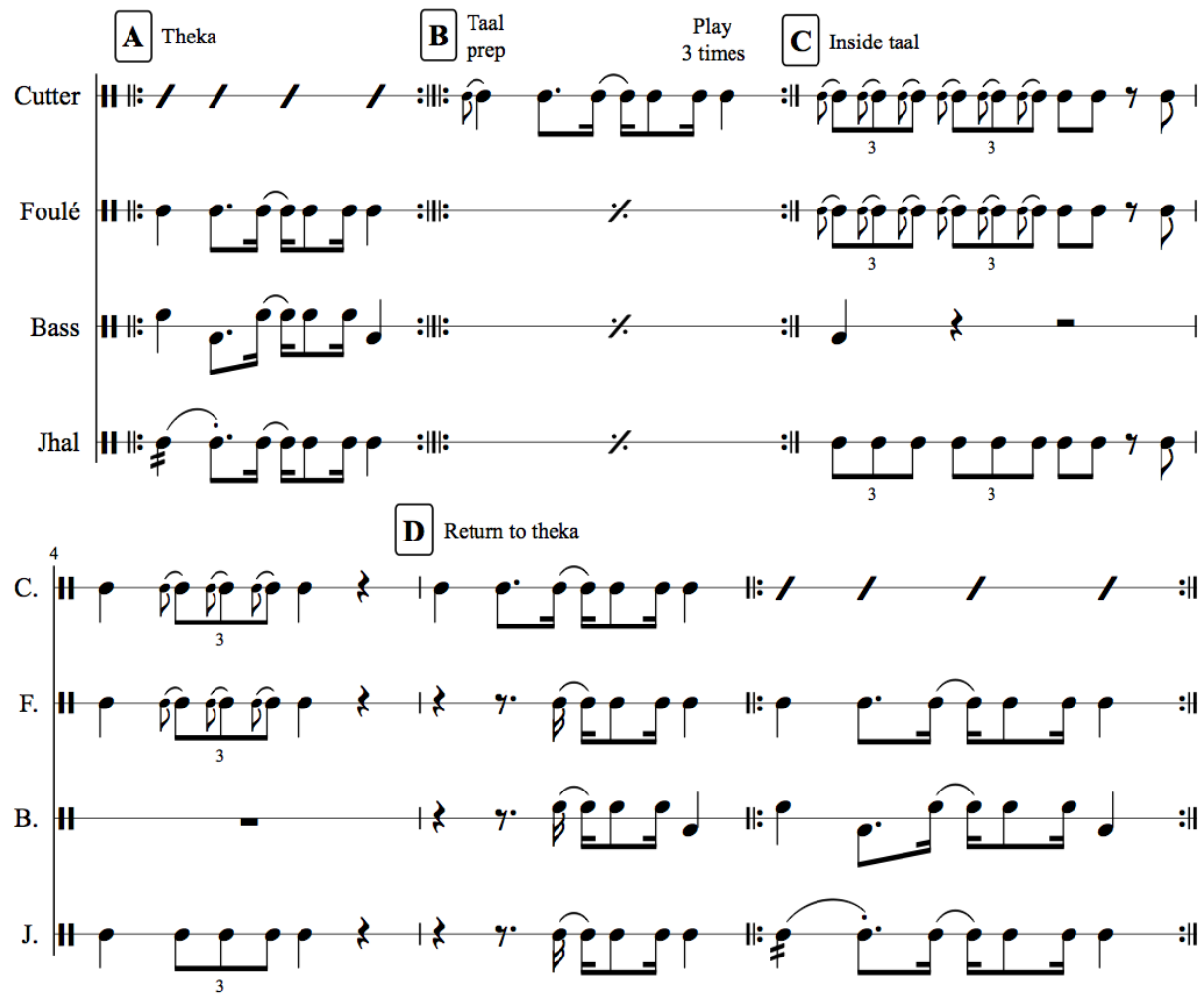


Figure 3-25. George of the Jungle theka and taal.

Collective Composition

Not all new compositions are based on preexisting music, and very few are attributable to a single composer. An interesting example of collective—and indeed spontaneous—composition was illustrated one evening at a matikor in St. Madeline near San Fernando when Lenny Kumar, members of T&T Sweet Tassa, and I were liming during some downtime. We were chatting by Lenny's car when someone started tapping out rhythms on the hood. Soon, someone else joined in, then someone else, until everyone was tapping out an improvised composite rhythm with jhal, bass, cutter,

and foulé parts. Like in George of the Jungle, Lenny's cutter parts in this new piece rarely ventured too far afield from minor elaborations of the foulé and bass patterns.

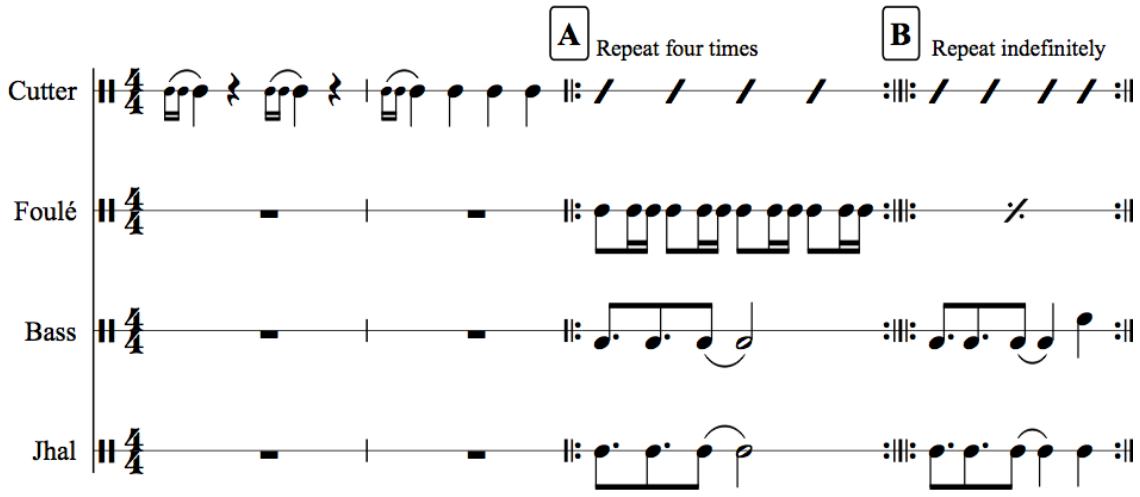


Figure 3-26. Partial transcription of hand improvised by T&T Sweet Tassa.

After a few minutes of arranging parts and continuing to practice by tapping on the car's hood, a new hand was born (figure 3-26). When the band was called to play again at the end of the night's rituals, they premiered this new hand in the evening's performance, the first time it was played on any instrument other than the car's hood! A week later at another wedding, they also inserted this new hand into a post-wedding *jassle*. It has since become a regular part of their repertoire though it has yet to be named.

Summary

Analysis in this chapter has pointed toward Trinidadian tassa as principally informed by Indo-Trinidadian musical aesthetics emerging primarily from North Indian vernacular traditions. As described in chapter two, dhol tasha in India and Pakistan is a non-erudite ensemble used in a variety of sacred and secular contexts, a status that has been retained by tassa ensembles in the Caribbean. Therefore, one expectedly finds

folk rhythms (e.g. nagara) and metric cycles (e.g. chaubola) in Trinidadian tassa repertoire. Given this grounding in folk practice, tassa drummers have not cultivated a set of theoretical precepts as might be found in Hindustani classical tradition. Though most drummers can discuss aspects of musical form, virtually none are able to articulate concepts related to the placement and identification of downbeats or beat counts in general, much less more complex notions of metric cycle. This is clearly not to say, however, that drummers have not fostered emic systems of understanding that serve their needs.

Despite the focus on vernacular elements, aspects of Hindustani classical music are marginally manifest in taal, theka, and barti. As described above, the notion of taal and theka in particular are reconceptualized as applied to tassa, a practice that reflects corresponding rearticulations of them in local-classical singing, a thoroughly Indo-Caribbean genre itself formed from fragments of North Indian vernacular and light classical musics. In both tassa and local-classical singing, Indo-Caribbean musicians were obliged to fashion repertoire and performance practice from Indian musical praxis, such that their progeny would cultivate fascinatingly vibrant and virtuosic traditions rooted in Indian sensibilities yet wholly Caribbean.

Though surface-level listening may suggest to the unaware that the tassa ensemble bears significant affinity with Afro-Creole drumming, analysis of tassa repertoire indicates no fundamental fusion with Afro-Trinidadian musical style. For example, dingolay is often assumed to exhibit some sense of African musical aesthetics. Korom illustrates this point quite clearly by referring to dingolay as “a hybrid

hand influenced by indigenous soca rhythms."[41] On the contrary, dingolay quite clearly assumed its present form by the mid-1950s, nearly two decades before calypsonian Lord Shorty's 1972 release of "Indrani," often regarded as the first soca song.[42] In this case, I think dingolay more logically corresponds to an Indo-Trinidadian source, as mentioned earlier, than an Afro-Trinidadian one. My analysis further shows that rhythms typically played by bass pans and instruments of the steelband's engine room form an integral part of calypso hand's musical material. Yet, this music is adapted in patterned ways to fit the conventions of tassa repertoire, complete with theka and taals.[43] This is also the case with more recent additions to the repertoire including chutney hand and George of the Jungle.

Despite only marginal input from Afro-Caribbean sources, tassa is nonetheless a distinctly Caribbean phenomenon despite its essentially Indian character. As Manuel suggests, tassa could not have acquired a repertoire drawn from such eclectic sources outside of the Caribbean context.

> The most important generative phenomenon guiding the evolution of Trinidadian tassa music has been a process of creative development and elaboration occurring on purely Indian structural and aesthetic lines. This process—equally evident in local-classical music—generates musical idioms in some ways distinct from anything found in India, but which are nevertheless overwhelmingly Indian in character rather than acculturated or creole.[44]

---

[41] Korom, *Hosay Trinidad*, 167.

[42]Though a topic of hot debate in some circles, Trinidad music aficionados and academics alike furthermore assert that Shorty's invention of soca relied heavily on the fusion of chutney-like dholak and tassa grooves with calypso as is apparently evident in "Indrani" among other 1970s-era Lord Shorty songs. Tejaswini Niranjana, *Mobilizing India: Women, Music, and Migration Between India and Trinidad* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 89.

[43] Manuel also discusses *kalinda* hand, which is evidently derived from the eponymous Afro-Trinidadian genre. Manuel, "Tassa Drumming."

[44] Ibid.

In other words, the musical system that nurtures tassa is one born from fragmented Indian survivals, retentions, and rearticulations organized in a way distinct from their Indian forebears but compatible with a general Indian, rather than Creole musical aesthetic.[45] This musical structure implicates a broader social structure in which Indo-Trinidadians have historically been held at some distance from mainstream society. With such cultural segregation, indentured Indians and their descendants maintained, reconstructed, and rearticulated Indian traditions with little fundamental interruption from colonial elites or Afro-Trinidadian compatriots.

[45] Ibid.

CHAPTER 4
"I GOIN' IN A MATIKOR TO SEE THEM LADIES FÊTE:" HINDU WEDDINGS AND TASSA PERFORMANCE

Hindu weddings are a center of familial and communal activity where Indo-Trinidadians remember and reaffirm multilocal identities. Largely separated from but not exclusive of mainstream Afro-Creole culture, weddings are spaces where Indo-Trinidadian cultural memories and identity orientations are enacted in tangible ways. While few attendees pay close attention to tedious wedding rituals, most will wear Indian clothes and eat Indian food and many will admire or be moved to dance by tassa. Though wedding DJs and ostentatious Indian orchestras have displaced many aspects of traditional wedding music, tassa remains very much an iconic soundtrack for specific components of Hindu wedding rites, specifically *lawa*, *matikor*, and *agwaani* among others. As an embodied music, one that facilitates religious rituals as well as celebratory revelry, tassa has emerged as a multivalent, yet powerful symbol of Indo-Trinidadian identity via repeated association with these common practices.

As indicated in the previous chapter, wedding repertoire forms the core of common tassa hands. Likewise, weddings are the most common venue for tassa performance. As year round events, weddings provide a space for beginning drummers to cut their teeth, for developing bands to rehearse and perform, and for seasoned bands to test the waters with new arrangements and sometimes new material. Weddings also importantly provide an opportunity for bands to informally compete with one another during good-natured *jassling* sessions. Though jassling results in loud, noisy, and often aggressive showboating on the part of opposing bands, jassles are welcome wedding events and indeed add to the excitement of wedding-day festivities.

Moreover, they provide a public forum for friends and neighbors to critique musical performances and promote one's skills as a drummer.

In this chapter, I provide a descriptive analysis of Hindu wedding tassa performances. While I frequently draw upon specific events to illuminate particular points, my narrative largely represents an amalgamation of ethnographic experiences both in Trinidad and Florida.

Introduction: Matikor, Lawa, and Agwaani

Until 1945, colonial law in Trinidad and Tobago did not recognize Hindu marriages without a separate civil registration.[1] Hindu couples who joined "under the bamboo," that is under the maro (traditional wedding canopy), without a civil component often faced legal troubles down the road, not least of which were rights of inheritance for widowed spouses and ostensibly illegitimate children. Despite these and other state-sponsored colonial policies aimed to subdue and control Indians, the Indo-Trinidadian community maintained a striking number of Indian socio-religious practices.

For Hindus in particular, this is due in no small part to the dominance of *Sanatan Dharma*, the most influential local form of Hinduism. Sanatan Dharma ("the eternal law") is synonymous with "orthodox" Hinduism. While the diversity of Hindu practices make it virtually impossible to identify a homogenous orthodoxy, Sanatan Dharma is characterized by a reliance on Brahmanic leadership and intricate rituals. A variety of Hindu reform movements have challenged the dominance of Sanatan Dharma in the Caribbean over the years, most importantly *Arya Samaj* beginning in the early 1900s. In

[1] Sat Maharaj, "Hindu Marriage and Indian Soap," *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian* (Trinidad and Tobago, January 3, 2013).

contrast to Sanatan Dharma, Arya Samaj holds that the caste system is a corruption of Vedic tradition, therefore directly challenging those—like the Sanatanists—who argue for the primacy of the priestly caste.[2] Sanatanist Brahman priests in Trinidad persistently pushed back against heterodoxy, eventually consolidating their power under one banner in 1949 with the creation of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (SDMS; "Sanatan Dharma General Council").[3] The SDMS immediately used its collective financial and political influence to advocate for Indian, particularly Hindu, interests across the country.

A significant aspect of their program included construction of temples and schools, often in close proximity to those operated by competing religious organizations. While working in the village of Felicity in the 1950s, a time when the SDMS first began to wield national influence, Morton Klass witnessed the opening of an SDMS school very near a Presbyterian Canadian Mission (C.M.) school. One of the C.M. schoolteachers had converted from Hinduism at age fourteen so he could leave the canefields for better work at the school; a "thoroughly insincere Christian," he subsequently "reconverted" to Hinduism to work at the SDMS school.[4] This anecdote is emblematic of the ways SDMS influence gained in strength throughout the latter half of the twentieth century, the operative results being a more powerful collective Hindu voice in local politics and a more homogenously practiced Hinduism in Trinidad and Tobago.

---

[2] Morton Klass, *Singing with Sai Baba: The Politics of Revitalization in Trinidad* (Prospect Heights, Il: Waveland Press, 1991), 38–39.

[3] Ibid., 39.

[4] Klass, *East Indians in Trinidad*, 141.

Even before the advent of the SDMS, however, the largely rural Indian population had begun to settle upon commonalities of worship and belief pieced together from disparate Hindu practices. Klass notes:

> There is considerable variation among the villages of northern India, even when they are not widely separated, in terms of which festivals are locally celebrated. It is impressive that, despite this background, the villagers of [Felicity] should have achieved such a large measure of uniformity in the religious sphere over the years… What stands out is that there is overall agreement as to which holidays should be celebrated, by whom, and in what way.[5]

With the SDMS, came streamlining and codification of this distinctly Indo-Caribbean pattern. Most relevant at present, the most common form of the Hindu marriage ceremony in Trinidad and Tobago is that sanctioned by the SDMS. The remainder of my discussion of Trinidadian Hindu weddings highlights this type of ceremony and excludes those practiced by relatively marginal sects including among others Arya Samaj, the Divine Life Society, and so-called "Madrasis," those descendants of immigrants from Madras who follow Kali-centered rites sometimes involving animal sacrifice, a practice abhorrent to Sanatanists.

In India, auspicious dates for Hindu weddings are generally chosen by learned religious authorities based upon correlation of couples' respective horoscopes with celestial charts. This practice remains a theoretical aspect of Trinidadian weddings, though its import is greatly reduced. In his slim volume *Rites, Rituals, and Customs Associated with the Hindu Marriage Ceremony in Trinidad and Tobago*, Ramsundar Persad acknowledges the practice of determining wedding dates based upon astrological observations: "Marriage being regarded as religious and spiritual, it is

[5] Ibid., 237.

required that the rituals of marriage should follow this requirement."[6] Along with suggesting that "marriage should be celebrated when the moon is increasing and during the northern course of the sun," Persad provides a few examples of auspicious dates and a few to be avoided. This calculation of auspiciousness, however, is largely downplayed in practice. Though wedding rituals spanned an entire week in the past,[7] today they generally run a course of three days, typically beginning on Friday evening and lasting through Sunday afternoon when the wedding proper takes place. Therefore, when wedding dates are determined by astrological favorability, they are virtually always rounded to the nearest weekend. As Myers' informant Suruj Pandit suggests, "Every Sunday is auspicious day now."[8]

Weddings involve the most intricate complex of rituals in the entire Trinidadian Hindu ritual corpus, beginning with engagement and ending with the "second Sunday" a week after the wedding when the bride traditionally leaves her family home for the last time to join her husband's family.[9] Within this corpus of rites and traditions, pundits conduct only the central wedding rituals while all others are planned and carried out collaboratively by family and friends. Steven Vertovec observes, for instance:

> Certain people generally know what to do at each stage of these informal but complicated proceedings; others correct, modify, or criticize them; most know through which sequence to move at what time; some have their own interpretations of what various items or motions mean. At each point, certain

[6] Ramsundar Persad, ed., *Rites, Rituals and Customs Associated with the Hindu Marriage Ceremony in Trinidad and Tobago* (Curepe, Trinidad: Praimsingh's Pooja Bhavan, n.d.), 7.

[7] Myers, *Music of Hindu Trinidad*, 153.

[8] Ibid., 152.

[9] Steven Vertovec, *Hindu Trinidad: Religion, Ethnicity, and Socio-Economic Change* (London: MacMillan, 1992), 202.

> persons prescribe what is to be obtained, created, or undertaken; others follow their lead and quickly habitualize the pattern.[10]

Most relevant at present are *matikor* and *lawa*, two of these kinds of folk rituals. They form part of a sequence of rites simultaneously performed at the respective homes of the bride and groom in the days leading to the wedding proper.

Importantly, matikor and lawa fall within the domain of women. In reference to matikor in particular, but also applicable to lawa, Persad vaguely suggests that "the ritual is for the appeasement of the elements: earth, air, fire, water, and ether" and to bring favor upon the bride and groom.[11] More specifically, however, the two rituals are clearly rooted in rites to ensure fertility for the new bride and other women in the community. These rites are indeed communal activities that are just as much about history, heritage, and womanhood as they are about the efficacy of ritual performance. Rosanne Kanhai, for example, metaphorically frames matikor as an affirming, expressive space for Indo-Caribbean women:

> Matikor provided a rare opportunity for plantation and post-plantation women to claim a space of celebration and articulation… They shared gossip and jokes, sang traditional songs, and performed dances that were celebratory and sexually suggestive. Matikor was a place of healing where women could act out their resistance against the degradation and depersonalization imposed upon them by the ruling class… Communal religious rituals were embedded in matikor activities, thus bringing together the sacred and the profane, the carnal and the spiritual, the political and the social… Against a backdrop of Afro-Caribbean majority, matikor remains a closed, ethnic space where Indian women do not carry the burden of minority status.[12]

---

[10] Ibid., 204–205.

[11] Persad, *Rites, Rituals, and Customs*, 9.

[12] Rosanne Kanhai, ed., *Matikor: The Politics of Identity for Indo-Caribbean Women* (St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago: School of Continuing Studies, the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, 1999), xi–xii.

As both matikor and lawa are folk traditions largely outside pundits' purview, there are indeed variations in their performance, yet one is able to describe such events in general terms.

Matikor

Matikor usually takes place on Friday evening, commonly referred to as "matikor night." The term matikor (alternatively mathkor, maticore, matikonwa,[13] muti kurwa,[14] etc.) roughly means "digging dirt," from Bhojpuri *matti*, "earth," and *khora*, "dig" (cognate with Hindi *miṭṭī khudā'ī*).[15] The corresponding Guyanese ritual is most commonly called *dig dutty* (literally, "dig dirty").[16] This nomenclature is derived from the primary action of matikor, which involves digging the earth. Trinidadian writer Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming describes a fictionalized though not atypical account of matikor:

> So, you want to know what happen that night, eh? The night of Champa's matikor. The Friday night before the wedding when all the women in the village and all the young girls went to the river to dig up pure dirt and collect clean water and to pray for blessings for Champa in she married life. To ask Goddess Ganga, who is the mother of rivers, and Mati, Mother Earth herself, to come to Champa's wedding and bless she with happiness and later on, with children. It was the duty of the already married women to show Champa what to do on she wedding night. To help them do this, they carried baskets of shiny, purple baigan [eggplant, to use as phallic objects] to the river where they did sing rude chutney songs and dance to tassa drumming.[17]

[13] Myers, *Music of Hindu Trinidad*, 153.

[14] Vertovec, *Hindu Trinidad*, 203.

[15] Lise Winer, ed., "Matikor," *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad & Tobago* (Montreal, Quebec and Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 587.

[16] Narmala Halstead, "Knowledge as Gifts of Self and Other," in *Knowing How to Know: Fieldwork and the Ethnographic Present*, ed. Narmala Halstead, Eric Hirsch, and Judith Okely (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 101.

[17] Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming, "The Night of Champa's Matikor," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 7, no. 1 (2009), http://anthurium.miami.edu/volume_7/issue_1/manoo-rhaming-nightofchampa.html.

The sort of matikor imagery called upon by Manoo-Rahming is indeed powerful among Indo-Trinidadians, men and women alike. Chutney and local-classical singer Rasika Dindial's song "Maticoor Night," a favorite of wedding DJs both in Trinidad and in diaspora, similarly captures the joyous and celebratory mood of this evening event. With moderate-tempo accompaniment from a synthesizer (imitating the timbre of a harmonium), dholak, and dhantal, Dindial sings:

> I goin' in a matikor to see them ladies fête,
> I goin' in a matikor to see them ladies fête.
> They goh fête for so, they goh can't catch-a they breath![18]
> I goin' in a matikor to see them ladies fête.

At this point, the dholak breaks taal; a drum machine enters and the tempo increases as the singing continues with characteristic Trinidadian English mixed with Bhojpuri:

> They don't really care what anybody say.
> Matikor night is for ladies to get away...[19]
>
> When they go to dig the dirt, the tassa does play.
> As soon as they finish, they does get away…
>
> They goin' back in the tent,[20] and they still dancin',
> They tellin' the tassaman, "Doh stop playin'!"[21]
>
> Matikor night is for ladies to get away…

In these lines and those that follow, Dindial effectively outlines the major components of the matikor ritual as discussed below.

---

[18] I'm going to the matikor to see the ladies party/They're going to party so hard, they won't be able to catch their breath.

[19] "Get away" here is synonymous with "breakaway," meaning to dance with abandon.

[20] Temporary "tents" constructed from corrugated metal (or similar material) and supported by bamboo poles are commonly erected in a yard, parking lot, or other open area to protect wedding guests from the elements.

[21] "Don't stop playing!"

Around dusk, women begin to gather at the family home. Food and drink has been prepared, and often a DJ has been hired to play chutney and Bollywood film songs to entertain guests. Some families are able to hire an Indian orchestra, usually comprising at least a rack of synthesizers, a drum machine, and a male and female pair of singers; larger groups might also feature dholak, dhantal, guitar, and electric bass. I once attended a rather non-traditional matikor where the family had hired the band Trin-d-Pop, a band equally versed in film songs, chutney, and high-energy soca. Along with tassa, these kinds of music—DJs and professional bands—have largely displaced the traditional singing described by Manoo-Rhaming and discussed in the previous chapter as the precursor to contemporary chutney.

As dark falls, the women begin to prepare for matikor puja. The betrothed's mother *teekays*[22] ("blesses") the bass drum of the tassa ensemble (figure 4-1).[23] As the drummer holds the instrument perpendicular to the ground, she places five dots of *sindoor* (vermillion powder) on the edge of the upward-facing drumhead. On top of each dot, she places *paan* (betel) leaves, paan nuts, flowers, coins, and rice. Once these are in place, she opens the end of her headscarf (*orhni*; *oḍhanī*[24]) within which she catches all the items as the drummer tips the drum and lightly taps the head with the dankar. She then places the items back upon the drumhead, this time in a disorderly pile, and

[22] Persad, *Rites, Rituals, and Customs*, 8–9.

[23] I use English language kinship terms to indicate the prescribed kin who should perform various rituals. I base these on consensus among Myers, Vertovec, Persad, and my own observations. In all cases, stand-ins—including complete strangers—may be used if the prescribed kin are not available. These stand-ins subsequently become the prescribed kin for the purposes of the present ritual. Stand-ins are particularly common in Florida where extended families may not be present. For more on this kind of ritual-specific kinship, see Klass, *East Indians in Trinidad*, 107.

[24] Myers, *Music of Hindu Trinidad*, 153.

once again she catches the items in her headscarf. This process is repeated five times, at the conclusion of which she carries away the mixture in her headscarf (and, in my experience, usually dumps it on the ground or in the garbage after fishing out the coins). The drummer wipes away any remaining residue, though the sindoor leaves permanent stains on the drumhead.

A

B

C

Figure 4-1. The betrothed's mother teekays the bass. St. Madeline, Trinidad. August 2012. A and B) items are placed upon the drumhead, C) these items are caught in her headscarf.

Drummers I talked to were unable to give any theological reason for blessing the bass apart from a vague assumption that the drums need to be purified. Tassa is not sacred according to Trinidad Hindu tradition, and drumming is certainly not required for the efficacy of religious ritual. If the purpose is to purify the drums, why do they not also teekay the tassas, the jhal, and the drummers themselves? The practice may very well extend from some kind of taboo against skin drums. After all, members of the untouchable *chamar* leatherworking caste were hired as drummers in the past, though caste is largely a non-issue in Indo-Caribbean contemporary experience apart from religious leadership. Furthermore, if the idea is to maintain purity, conventional Hindu practice tends toward keeping impure items out of pure spaces, not to invite them in and much less to make physical contact with them. The practice of teekaying the bass therefore makes more sense when examined not from a theological angle, but an economic one.

During the teekaying process, the betrothed's mother will often place some paper money—perhaps forty to one hundred dollars—upon the head along with the other items. The drummer will pocket this cash while tapping the other items into the headscarf. More often than not, she will also give the drummer a *seeda*, a small sack traditionally containing rice, flour, oil, money, and other subsistence items. Lenny Kumar suggests that the practice of teekaying the bass actually grew up around the act of giving the seeda, a method of payment in days gone by. The seedas given to tassa drummers today, however, are largely symbolic, and often contain only a bottle of rum and sometimes the band's payment for the weekend (though drummers are more often

paid at some other point after services are rendered). Consumption of rum and alcoholic beverages of any sort are however taboo for the duration of wedding rituals (yet, one can always find a group of men a small distance from the festivities gathered around a car's open trunk full of rum and beer).

After blessing the bass, the betrothed's unmarried sister is recruited to carry a tray of ritual items on her head (in the same manner as in figures 4-5 and 4-6). Tassa drumming signals to gathered guests that the matikor procession is about to depart. The band then leads the women in procession with the tray-bearing girl walking just behind the drummers to a small clearing by a body of running water. In Trinidad, I have seen matikor take place by a creek, a river, and at a neighbor's water spigot. In central Florida, flowing water is more difficult to come by in densely packed suburban neighborhoods. In this case, matikor might take place by drainage ponds, fire hydrants, and sometimes without adjacency to water at all. When the procession reaches its destination, oftentimes after dangerously dodging traffic, tassa ceases and the drummers relax at a distance. At this point the puja begins. In the past, women would sing songs during the procession and throughout the puja (this can be heard in Lomax's recordings, for example). With the loss of the Bhojpuri language among more recent generations, this tradition is in decline. Only on a few occasions did I witness Bhojpuri songs sung during matikor puja, the most extensive repertoire of which was provided by a hired group of singers reading from chapbooks at the wedding of a well-to-do pundit's daughter.

By the light of a flambeau or diya, the betrothed's sister uses a cutlass (machete) or colorfully decorated garden hoe to clear away brush and grass, exposing a small patch of dirt. Then, the betrothed's mother places paan leaves, oil, sindoor, paan nuts,

Figure 4-2. Matikor puja. A and B) The betrothed's mother performs matikor puja [using corn instead of rice in A], C) older women assist, D) the betrothed's mother catches dirt in her headscarf. St. Madeline, Trinidad, August 2012. Screen captures from video by Olga Ballengee.

rice, and flowers in five places on the earth (figure 4-2). She then sprinkles water on the items (the water can come from the creek or river, but is often carried in a *lotah* [brass pot] on the tray along with the other items). The betrothed's sister then digs a few handfuls of earth that is collected in the betrothed's mother's headscarf to be carried back to the home where it will be used symbolically in constructing the marriage altar. At this point, the primary aspects of the puja have concluded and *khurma* (sweet fried

paneer) is distributed as *prasad* (food consumed as a religious offering) to those in attendance while sindoor is applied to the foreheads of all married women.

Typically the presence of men is taboo during matikor, especially at the puja and subsequent dancing. The only men present during intimate moments are usually wedding photographers and tassa drummers. Writing of his fieldwork in the 1950s, Klass noted that "men who violate the privacy of a women's party [i.e. matikor and lawa] are peremptorily and scathingly ordered away."[25] In common practice today, however, a few men and boys are almost always standing in the shadows, looking on and talking amongst themselves. That too is my place. In the many weddings I attended during my fieldwork, I never felt comfortable to intrude further upon women's spaces. In August of 2012, my wife Olga accompanied me to Trinidad to help with audio and video recording for the film *Sweet Tassa: Music and Tradition of the Indo-Caribbean Diaspora*. As a woman, Olga was able to more closely observe the puja, and it was only upon review of her tapes that I got my first up close view of matikor and lawa pujas despite years of studying tassa.

During the distribution of khurma and sindoor, the tassa starts again, this time playing breakaway hands (figure 4-3). Women young and old are encouraged to join the dancing. Some wine ("wind") their waists, a typical Trini movement, while others raise their arms and spin gracefully. Most often, the party will form a circle; less enthusiastic dancers tend to ring more boisterous soloists or couples who come and go from the center. Commonly, older women will be among the first to enter the circle engaging in humorous and sexually suggestive dancing. On several occasions, I have witnessed an

[25] Klass, *East Indians in Trinidad*, 192.

aged auntie emerge from the crowd, lift the hem of her dress, slip it through one clasped hand to form a phallic extension about her groin, and proceed to thrust her pelvis in mid air or against another dancer. Sometimes a cucumber or eggplant serves the same purpose. As the dancing continues, teenagers and younger girls will also take to the center. While they wine and mildly gyrate, it is rare for them to engage in highly suggestive displays in front of their mothers, aunties, and grandmothers.

Figure 4-3. Ladies dance to tassa after matikor puja. St. Madeline, Trinidad. August 2012.

Overtly sexual dancing is meant to mimic and in some way instruct about the sexual act. Moreover, this kind of dancing is expressly done in the safety of women's space. Among older women—who are indeed the most suggestive dancers—the lewdness remains there, though young women might dance equally as suggestively among their peers at parties and nightclubs. Klass noted, for example, "the women of [Felicity], who tend to be demure, shy, and self-effacing normally, become bawdy,

raucous, and riotous when they gather together on such occasions."[26] This kind of dancing is indeed an expected part of matikor tradition and further links the occassions with fertility rites.

After a suite of breakaway hands lasting for about twenty minutes, the tray is placed again on the young girl's head, the tassa band transitions back into a processional hand, and the group returns. The bride and groom at their respective homes are now ready for *hardi* (turmeric paste) to be smeared upon them by five young girls. The first of three such rubbings in as many days, this particular rite has a dual effect: it ritually purifies the body and purportedly softens and brightens the skin in preparation for the wedding day.

Cooking Night

Saturday night is commonly called "cooking night" since much of the evening's activities are centered on preparing food for the next day. This name is comparable with the less common Bhojpuri-derived term "batwaan night" (from *bhatwān ki rāt*, roughly meaning "preparation of wedding foods"[27]). Virtually every Trinidad Hindu wedding features the same foods: curry *channa* (chickpeas) and *aloo* (potato), pumpkin, curry mango, *baigan choka* (stewed eggplant), *dhal* (split peas), *bodi* (a kind of green bean), rice, and generous helpings of *paratha roti* commonly called "buss-up-shut" ("busted up shirt") thanks to its thin, flaky, scrambled texture (figure 4-4). In addition to alcohol, meat is also taboo during the three days of rituals. Cooking night is often also called "farewell night," this indicating that it is the final evening of singlehood for the bride and groom.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Persad, *Rites, Rituals, and Customs*, 153.

Similar to matikor, cooking night takes place simultaneously at the bride and groom's respective family homes. Guests are given food and drink and are entertained by DJ music or an Indian orchestra. Sometimes young girls will present a Bollywood-style choreographed dance. Often enough, a tassa band may also be hired, though their job is only for entertainment; tassa bands have no particular ritual duties to perform on cooking night.

Figure 4-4. Some typical wedding foods. Curry channa and aloo, rice and dhal, buss-up-shut, bodie, and pumpkin served on a banana leaf.

Apart from cooking, the evening's agenda includes two major components. First, hardi is once again smeared upon the betrothed. Second, and more importantly, women gather to parch a few handfuls of paddy rice[28] (*lawa*) to be used in the Sunday morning lawa ritual and subsequently tossed into the Sacred Fire while the bride and groom circumambulate it during the final stages of the wedding proper on Sunday afternoon.

[28] I observed families in Trinidad and Florida use popcorn instead of rice. It is apparently a recent trend. I have yet to come across a definitive explanation why popcorn is a suitable and apparently popular substitute. However, the smell, taste, and appearance of popped paddy rice closely approximates popcorn. For example, Lomax mistook parched rice for popcorn in his observations of a lawa in 1962.

The betrothed's father's sisters parch the rice. Traditionally, this is done by dropping the rice into a metal pan placed upon a *chula* (small clay oven) and stirring the grains with a whisk or small broom made from the hard stems of coconut fronds. Most often today, the chula is replaced by a propane-fed heating element therefore providing for portability.

Figure 4-5. Sunday morning procession going for lawa. Charlo Village, Trinidad. May 1962. From the Alan Lomax Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress. Used courtesy of the Association for Cultural Equity.

Myers' fieldwork from more than thirty years ago documented an already declining repertoire of songs women sang for various parts of the wedding, including while parching lawa.[29] For the most part, parching songs are rarely sung today. In their place, a DJ might play a chutney tune from overpowered loudspeakers. Rikki Jai's 2006

[29] Myers, *Music of Hindu Trinidad*, 154; 206–208.

chutney-soca hit “Mor Tor” is a particular favorite in this regard as its text is drawn from a traditional Bhojpuri-language lawa partching song sung by older Indo-Trinidadian women. In all cases, the music should be somewhat upbeat to facilitate dancing. As such, if a tassa band is hired, they might accompany the parching ceremony.

Figure 4-6. Women going for lawa led by T&T Sweet Tassa. Santa Flora, Trinidad. August 2012.

Lawa

On Sunday morning, each of the betrothed undergoes a final hardi rubdown, the bass is once again teekayed, and women “go for lawa” (figures 4-5 and 4-6). For the latter, the parched rice from the night before is placed upon a tray along with another set of the same items used for matikor. A young girl is again recruited to carry it. As before, the tassa leads the procession, this time toward a neighbor’s home, preferably near the place where matikor puja was done on Friday night. Myers’ informant Kamini indicates that matikor and lawa are “the same process.”[30] While the procession, parts of

[30] Ibid., 154.

the puja, and subsequent dancing of lawa resemble that of matikor, the core of lawa is markedly different.

Lawa should be done indoors, though it is acceptable to simply be under some kind of cover: the underside of a raised house, a covered walkway, or garage will do. Once the procession has arrived, the drumming stops. The betrothed's mother then places five oil and sindoor dots on the floor or ground as the case may be (these are the "red marks on the floor" that Lomax refers to below) and covers these with other ritual items as was done in teekaying the bass and in matikor puja. Sometimes, a piece of cardboard or plywood is used to keep the sindoor from staining the floor. Perhaps more often, however, this part of lawa is skipped over.

At this point, the betrothed's mother and an older female relative sit facing one another and cover their heads with a bed sheet. Other women may help by holding the sheet so it does not fall off. In all cases, the action performed under the sheet should not be seen by anyone. Under cover, the women pass the parched rice back and forth between one another five times. Though many Trinidadian Hindus know what to do in particular ritual contexts, they often have little idea why they do it or what the rituals mean.[31] Those in the know, however, understand this passing of rice to symbolize sexual intercourse, or as Lomax describes it below, "the exchange of the fertile principle of the child between the two parties of the marriage." Throughout the passing of the rice, the gathered women traditionally sing bawdy Bhojpuri songs. The repertoire of such songs was apparently much richer and more broadly understood in times past, evidenced by Lomax's 1962 recordings and Myers' 1970s fieldwork. Today some older

[31] Vertovec, *Hindu Trinidad*, 205.

women know a song or two, but do not expressly understand their Bhojpuri texts. As such the repertoire has dwindled to only a handful of tunes with repetitive refrains.

After the women have finished exchanging the rice, the tassa band begins playing breakaway hands for dancing. The dancing is equally as suggestive if not more so than that of matikor. Indeed, lawa dancing can be quite vulgar, perhaps because it is done in relative privacy compared to the open-air matikor ritual and because the lawa group is generally smaller and the participants therefore less inhibited. There is always a half-joking paranoia that men will come around “peeping” at the women while they dance. When the dancing is finished, the tassa band transitions back into a processional hand to lead the group back home.

Lomax provided on-the-spot commentary for a lawa he observed in Charlo Village in 1962. Though his impromptu symbolic analysis could use some revision, Lomax’s now fifty-year-old account is worth quoting at length as it bears striking relevance to lawa performances today. I have partially transcribed his words below. Figures 4-5 and 4-7 contain photos taken by Lomax during this lawa.

> When we arrived this morning, the drums—the two kettledrums, the big bass drum, and the cymbals were drumming away like crazy. They played two or three wedding pieces, long pieces, and then the women’s procession marched to go down the road. In the front of the procession there was a woman with a tray covered with a cloth; she was immediately behind the drummers and then came a crowd of about thirty women with their head veils on. They walked down to the mill and went inside. The drummers remained outside. All the women went into the interior of the building.
>
> There… the contents of the tray were exposed: it was the popcorn [he mistakes parched rice for popcorn] that was popped before. Three or four red marks were put on the floor. And the mother sat down next to the tray of popcorn, and she and another woman—with their heads both covered with a cloth, a cloth that covered both heads and joined them—poured the popcorn back and forth [between two tin trays] several times. They were very careful not to lose a grain of popcorn. There was a great deal of laughter and singing during this period of

the ceremony. And after this was over and all the popcorn had been passed back and forth several times symbolizing the exchange of the fertile principle of the child between the two parties of the marriage, the drumming continued and the

A

B

Figure 4-7. Dancing at lawa. A) dancer with raised arms and twisting waist, B) woman in right foreground extends her apron in phallic imitation. Charlo Village, Trinidad. May 1962. From the Alan Lomax Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress. Used courtesy of the Association for Cultural Equity.

> women put coal [he means sindoor], red marks, along the hairline; woman by woman was decorated with great messy splotches of red, a clear vaginal and menstrual and birth symbol. There was a great deal of laughter over this, and the party grew merrier and merrier as this continued…
>
> [Then] there proceeded a period of about fifteen minutes of very vigorous and sensual dancing. One woman picked her two great breasts up in her hands and shook them as she danced. Another woman imitated male masturbation. All the women were moving their hips and their bellies, although their foot movements were small… After the dancing was over, the handsome young woman with the gold teeth and the orange brown dress put the popcorn back onto her flat tray, put it on her head, and following her, the women moved out of the house and back down the road with the drummers in the lead; the women still singing their marriage song…
>
> And when this was done, the mother came and passed two red dollar bills across the surface of the big drum—the big red drum, the big powerful… male symbol that had provided all the pleasure[able] feeling to the whole ceremony that had just taken place.[32]

In contrast to Lomax's account, contemporary lawa rituals feature very little singing. Otherwise, he may as well be describing lawa as it is performed today. As discussed in the previous chapter, the decline of Indian native languages in Trinidad resulted in the loss of the lexical meaning of the bass passages in Hosay tîn chopra. In turn, the drumming took on increased narrative significance. This too is the case for wedding singing. As Bhojpuri has disappeared as a native language among recent generations, the songs to accompany various stages of the Hindu wedding—songs that have largely been the domain of women—have likewise declined. The few who sing

[32] Association for Cultural Equity Sound Recordings, Caribbean 1962, Charlo Village 5/62: "Commentary on wedding by Alan Lomax (II)," T1102.0, Track 8.

them today largely do not understand the words apart from a general impression remembered from times past. DJ music, chutney songs like Dindial's "Maticoor Night" or Rikki Jai's "Mor Tor," and tassa have filled the void in important ways. Tassa is especially meaningful in this regard. In the past, tassa often accompanied many different kinds of singing. This is the case for biraha, as discussed in chapter two, which was more commonly accompanied by nagara in north India. As documented by Lomax and Myers and corroborated by drummers I talked to, tassa also accompanied wedding songs, though this is not the case today. As the texts and tunes of these songs faded, the tassa remained, to some degree absorbing the emotional and affective character of matikor and lawa songs in particular.

Agwaani

Given that matikor and lawa take place simultaneously at the bride and groom's respective family homes, two tassa bands—one on the "girl's side" and one on the "boy's side"—are usually hired to facilitate festivities in each location. Once both families have completed the lawa by about noon on Sunday, the *barat* (groom's entourage) begins preparing a motorcade to the bride's home, temple, or other wedding venue. A "mike man" often leads the barat by driving a car fitted with megaphone-style speakers blasting Bollywood film songs. The music signals to the community that a wedding ceremony is about to begin. In the summer of 2012, I attended two separate weddings in which the mike man role was occupied by sound trucks. Usually used to blast the latest soca hits during Carnival parades, these small flatbed trucks are piled high with enormous speakers. One of the weddings was held in a tightly packed residential neighborhood with streets so narrow no other vehicles could pass the truck as it thumped down the road. With their audible intrusions into the private spaces of all within

earshot, mike men, sound trucks, and tassa drumming all seek to sonically demarcate Indo-Trinidadian cultural territory when a wedding is nearby.

The barat usually stops a short distance from the wedding venue. This signals the commencement of *agwaani* (welcoming of barat).[33] The men exit their vehicles and continue to walk in front of an elaborately decorated car, complete with garlands of flowers, within which the groom and close male family members are driven. The tassa band hired by the groom's family leads this entourage. Meanwhile, men from the bride's family begin to walk toward the groom's entourage. The second tassa band leads this side. As the two families move very slowly toward one another, taking halting steps as directed by the pundit, the tassa bands slip to the side of the road and allow the fathers of the bride and groom to embrace. After their embrace, women come to greet the groom and escort him out of his car. Agwaani ends as the groom, fathers, and pundits

[33] Persad, *Rites, Rituals, and Customs*, 12.

Figure 4-8. Post-agwaani wedding jassle. Aranguez, Trinidad. July 2007. Rolling Thunder Tassa Group (in black) and D'Evergreen Tassa Group (men in green and female jhal player).

proceed to a space prepared for *dwaar puja*.[34] From the moment the barat arrives and into the beginning moments of dwaar puja, the two bands play wedding hand asynchronously such that their competing sounds create a sort of sonic chaos.[35] The bands continue to play like this until the presiding pundit or other authority figure has had enough and tells them to stop.

Wedding Jassles

These cacophonous agwaani tassa sessions often turn into *jassles*, musical battles between opposing bands (figure 4-8 and 4-9). After the wedding is over, both bands also return to play for the send off of the bride and groom after which they usually engage in a much more intense jassle. Usually good-natured, these confrontations can sometimes lead to physical blows if emotions flare. There is indeed a lot at stake. A poor showing is not only embarrassing, but could result in the loss of revenue as potential customers look elsewhere for a better band. Jassling is also an important aspect of Hosay, though in this context, the clashes are more organized and often rationalized as part of the martial symbolism of the observance.[36]

In wedding jassles, bands usually attempt to best each other on a number of fronts. First and foremost, jassling is a test of a band's depth of knowledge of the

[34] Ibid., 13.

[35] Some bands opt to begin with tikora, then proceed to wedding hand. Sometimes, bands will move from tikora through a classical hand or two before starting wedding hand, though this is not common in my experience.

[36] Korom, *Hosay Trinidad*, 180.

repertoire. Given tassa's limited musical canon, each band is likely to know the same hands. Yet, a more knowledgeable band will keep uncommon hands in reserve to "pull out" during a jassle. (This is very similar to the practice of preparing a "bomb tune" to

A

B

Figure 4-9. Scenes from a wedding jassle. Charlo Village, Trinidad. May 1962. The band depicted here is jassling with the band depicted in figure 4-5 (the opposing bass drummer's arm and dankar are visible in B). From the Alan Lomax Collection, American Folklife Center, Library of Congress. Used courtesy of the Association for Cultural Equity.

"drop" on an unsuspecting opponent during steelband clashes of the 1950s and 1960s; the practice survives today in the Bomb Tune Competition, which is a regular part of Panorama, the annual national steelband competition.[37]) These hands may include more esoteric classical hands or newly composed material, though the latter is rare. Jassles often proceed in a question-and-answer fashion; as one band pulls out a hand, the other answers it by playing it back then switching to a new hand. The opposition must then match the new hand, and introduce yet another. Hands asynchronously overlap, contributing to a loud and confusing spectacle. The jassle proceeds in this fashion until one of the competitors exhausts its store of new material. It is an embarrassment for a band to run out of hands to play while the other continues to demonstrate its depth of knowledge. It is therefore a tacit admission of defeat when a band is forced to either revert to a previously played hand or simply quit and walk away.

Bands are also judged on the quality of improvisation displayed by the cutter. Both drummers and audiences alike appreciate a cutter who can at once honor traditional tassa style by playing familiar cuts while also demonstrating an ability to innovatively mold improvisation in musically interesting and creative ways. During jassles, the cutter's improvisation speaks to the player's virtuosity, which is ideally at a

[37] The "bomb tune" most often was an arrangement of Western art music done in calypso style. Bands practiced these tunes in secret and would "drop" them during informal steelband clashes during Carnival time. In the early days of the bomb tune practice, opposing bands were often caught off guard and would have nothing nearly as unique to answer the challenge. For a detailed account of the history and practice of the bomb tune, see Shannon Dudley, "Dropping the Bomb," in Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge*, 113–135.

more advanced stage than the opposing cutter. Simultaneously, the cutter aims to throw off the opposing band's focus with well-placed and surprising cuts. Jassling indeed is the ultimate test of a cutter's control of the ensemble; one must focus on leading the band while attempting to best the other at the same time. Some inexperienced cutters tend to rely on overwhelming volume to throw off the opposing band. However, this can backfire if a cutter relies on greater volume alone without attention to quality of performance. A band whose performance falls apart due to lack of concentration comes across as amateurish and is quickly dispatched by a more experienced opposition.

Some cutters also rely on tricks or gimmicks to surprise the opposing band and please the crowd. In 2007, I saw a light-hearted jassle at a Ramayan in Dinsley Village (which is an odd place to find a jassle; they usually happen only at weddings). The cutter of one band was a skilled player who was holding his own and in no need of resorting to gimmicks to prove himself. At a certain point, however, he suddenly flipped over his nut-and-bolt drum and began playing on the metal shell. This surprising move prompted cheers and laughter from some in the crowd, while his performance immediately lost credibility among others. My friend Kalloo, a dholak player who had invited me for the evening, was visibly displeased with the drummer's antics; he suggested they only made the cutter look silly.

In the summer of 2012 in the small community of St. Madeline just east of San Fernando, I witnessed one of the most intense wedding jassles I have ever seen. It was a temple wedding, and I was tagging along with Lenny Kumar and T&T Sweet Tassa who were hired by the bride's family. The band hired by the groom's family was an ad hoc group organized by a drummer who had a history of boastfulness. The post-

agwaani jassle featured some interesting moments, but the enclosed courtyard of the temple was an inconvenient space for a prolonged contest and the pundit was adamant that the noise should cease once the groom had entered the temple. With the jassle cut short, Lenny, some of the band members, my wife, and I went to friend's house a few blocks away to relax until the wedding was over and tassa was again needed to send off the newlyweds. After a few hours of liming, we heard the sound of the other band and decided to make our way back down the hill. I had to gather some camera equipment before setting out, so I reached the temple a minute or so later than Lenny and the other band members. By the time I got there, an intense jassle was in full swing.

I had a difficult time finding a good vantage point since a substantial crowd had already surrounded the drummers on all sides. With both Lenny and his opposing cutter being seasoned drummers, the two bands initially matched each other hand for hand. However, the opposing band quickly began falling apart; the foulé and jhal players were younger and relatively inexperienced, and the cutter was far too focused on besting Lenny than holding his own band together. After about ten minutes of jassling, Lenny pulled out George of the Jungle. The opposing cutter laughed, then attempted to mock Lenny by playing along with this unfamiliar hand, which he had quite a bit of trouble doing. After playing through George of the Jungle for a while, Lenny flamboyantly stretched out his left arm and handed one chope to Keron, his fouléman. With his right hand, Lenny then gave the cue to begin chaubola and subsequently demonstrated his ability to cut with only his right hand. This clearly surprised the opposing band, that had all but stopped playing by this point. After a minute or two, Lenny signaled the end taal, and T&T Sweet Tassa ceased drumming. Lenny immediately bowed to the opposing

cutter and sarcastically declared, “Hey brother… you is the best.” The opposing cutter, who was clearly outplayed, frustratedly retorted, “I am the boss! And I can prove that any time!” In this case, T&T Sweet Tassa had largely proven its superiority before Lenny resorted to his one-handed gimmick. The implication of this gesture—namely that the opposing band was easily bested even “with one hand tied behind my back”—was not lost on the gathered crowd, many of whom praised Lenny’s playing and congratulated T&T Sweet Tassa on a job well done.

Summary

While speaker-thumping DJs and loud Indian orchestras may have forced the demise of Bhojpuri wedding songs, tassa stubbornly remains the most essential musical element of the Indo-Trinidadian wedding soundscape. As an accompaniment for weddings, tassa is linked with rites that bring together friends, neighbors, visitors from abroad, and passersby in ritual and communal revelry; tassa accompanies and activates this celebration of tradition. In all cases—matikor, lawa, agwaani, and jassles—the sound of tassa boisterously announces the most anticipated parts of the wedding while simultaneously demarcating and reaffirming Indo-Trinidadian cultural space. The latter is all the more apparent in diaspora; in the densely-packed residential subdivisions of central Florida, tassa drumming represents an audible intrusion into surrounding multicultural space, often prompting calls to police by unsympathetic neighbors.

The various rituals that require tassa accompaniment feature a certain flexibility. As such wedding repertoire is necessarily flexible as well. A good cutter understands at least the major parts of the accompanied action and can therefore adjust the music accordingly by changing tempo, moving on to another hand, or playing cuts that best

complement the dancing. With repetition, drummers become intimately aware of the "right" way a ritual should be performed. This is especially the case with teekaying the bass. Experienced drummers often end up guiding the betrothed's mother through this rather complicated process. Jassles are a particularly fascinating aspect of tassa performance practice. They are an expected and welcome component of wedding day festivities despite their often aggressive and cacophonous nature. Most importantly, jassles present an intrinsic mechanism for putting drummers' skills on display for the entire community to see and hear.

Despite intimate association with Hindu weddings, neither the tassa ensemble nor the music it provides is considered particularly sacred. Therefore, tassa is just as likely to be heard in a nightclub or accompanying a solemn Hosay procession as it is to facilitate a matikor dancing session. The drummers themselves also represent an eclectic mix. Though drummers are predominately Hindu, so are most Indo-Trinidadians. There is no taboo against Muslims or Christians drumming for Hindu weddings, just as there is none against Hindus or Christians to drum for Hosay. In this way, the popularity and ubiquity of tassa suggests an intra-ethnic common ground among Hindu, Muslim, and Christian Indo-Trinidadians explored more deeply in chapters six and seven. Tassa's ability to transcend boundaries within the Indo-Trinidadian community no doubt facilitated the rise of formal tassa competitions in the 1980s. In the following chapter, I discuss ways in which wedding repertoire and images associated with Hindu weddings become important in these formal contests.

CHAPTER 5
TRADITION AND TRANSFORMATION IN COMPETITIVE TASSA PERFORMANCES

The often-intense jassles that routinely crop up at Hindu weddings, Hosay and less commonly at other venues pit tassa bands against one another in a musical battle for honor and prestige. In this sense, jassling is perhaps an extension of north Indian practice. Sharar, for example, described tasha drumming contests as a regular part of Muharram in nineteenth-century Lucknow. However, musical competition has a long and robust history in Trinidad as well. Freed slaves, for instance, staged informal singing contests amongst themselves as early as the 1830s.[1] This test of verbal skills eventually developed into *picong*, a style of good-natured, extemporaneous calypso aimed at besting a musical opponent. Indeed, Carnival bands have long competed with one another in numerous ways. Even after the banning of African skin drums in the 1880s and tamboo bamboo in the 1920s, an aggressive competitive spirit remained in frequent steelband clashes of the mid-twentieth century. By that time, formal masquerade, calypso, and steelband competitions were a regular part of the Carnival season. By the 1990s, the competitive model established by these contests had been extended to all manner of Trinidadian musical competitions.

While wedding jassles are at least in part rooted in dhol tasha tradition, the advent of formal tassa competitions in the 1980s are perhaps best considered a trope on the broader phenomenon of Trinidadian music contests, for the latter diverges greatly from the head-to-head battle engendered by the former. Though fleeting tassa contests continue to be organized here and there, the two most enduring formal

[1] Jocelyne Guilbault, *Governing Sound: The Cultural Politics of Trinidad's Carnival Musics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 68.

competitions are Tassa Taal and the National Tassa Competition. With strict regulations regarding expectations of performance—and cash prizes and potential prestige to back these up—competitions have shaped tassa performances both on and off the competition stage in noticeable ways, most importantly in a move toward slick arrangements of a few common hands. This comes at the expense of an increasingly esoteric set of classical repertoire that is quickly disappearing as older drummers pass away.

On the socio-political front, formalized tassa competitions also seek to legitimize tassa drumming as deserving of critical attention within a nationwide competitive forum. In this way, tassa competitions elevate tassa from a village folk music, to one of national import. Competitive rules and regulations demonstrate that tassa drumming is capable of being scrutinized, deconstructed, and adjudicated just as Trinidad and Tobago's more mainstream musicultural commodities, calypso and steelband. While the mechanism of competition propels tassa out of the communal and functional spaces it has traditionally occupied and into the realm of the staged and folkloric, this transformative process refocuses attention upon tassa drumming as a unique and encapsulating Indo-Trinidadian musical expression.

Contesting Tradition

The 1970s were a tumultuous period for Trinidad and Tobago. First, ripples of the Black Power Movement reached the country in 1970, this evidenced by a series of sometimes-violent demonstrations against the Afro-Saxon ruling class that rocked Port of Spain early in the year. Black Power leaders tried early on to co-opt Indo-Trinidadians into the Movement by virtue of a common history of exploitation by colonial elites. Indo-Trinidadians, however, reacted with skepticism and distrust. After all, since the

indenture period, Indo-Trinidadian identity had been defined in many respects in counterpoint to that of Afro-Trinidadian orientations.[2] Therefore, attempts to impose "blackness" upon Indo-Trinidadians had the unforeseen affect of further distancing them from their Creole compatriots.

At nearly the same moment, the sugar workers union, comprised primarily of Indo-Trinidadians, went on strike in Central Trinidad. With the threat of other labor and political organizations staging actions in solidarity, Prime Minister Eric Williams declared a state of emergency. In general elections the following year, opposition parties called for a boycott at the polls citing perceived corruption of the electoral process by Williams' ruling party, the Peoples National Movement (PNM), which has historically been linked with Afro-Trinidadian interests. The PNM expectedly swept the elections, thus assuring that the primarily Indo-Trinidadian opposition would not figure in national politics for the remainder of the decade.

The global energy crises of the 1970s further complicated matters as Trinidad and Tobago's oil production boomed, bringing with it unprecedented revenues that all sides claimed were misspent in some way or another. Nonetheless, average Trinidadians, especially those working in petro-chemical production in Central and South, saw their wages and standards of living rise rather dramatically. For many Indo-Trinidadians, the economic shift from agriculture to industry meant a shift from lower- to middle-class status.[3] This affluence in turn spurred an Indo-Trinidadian renaissance, partially in reaction to the Black Power Movement and the PNM's subsequent

[2] Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad?*, 230.

[3] Ibid., 232–233; Vertovec, *Hindu Trinidad*, 143–154.

consolidation of political control.[4] This renaissance importantly saw a resurgence of socio-religious and cultural practices, especially an increase in the performance and promotion of Indo-Trinidadian arts like never before; most relevant at present, this included the organization of a number of amateur music competitions.

Mastana Bahar

The television program Mastana Bahar (Joyful Spring) is perhaps the most enduring example. Structured as an Indo-Trinidadian talent contest, Mastana Bahar was based upon a competitive model exemplified by calypso and steelband contests, one consisting of a series of semifinal and final rounds in each of which entrants give individual staged performances that are adjudicated by a panel of judges.[5] Conceived by Sham Mohammed, a member of a politically and culturally influential family including Moen and Kamaluddin Mohammed, Mastana Bahar premiered in 1970 and has since become Trinidad and Tobago's longest running television show and is still produced by members of the Mohammed family. The program is open to all ages and races, featuring a number of preliminary heats staged at various locales across the country and a final round at the end of the series. With the competition's open format, all entrants compete against one another regardless of their talent. As such, local-classical singers, Bollywood dancers, and Indian orchestras are lumped together along with a variety of other acts including tassa bands. Prior to Mastana Bahar, there were virtually no other enduring venues for formal competitive tassa performance.

[4] Ray Kiely, *The Politics of Labour and Development in Trinidad* (Kingston, Jamaica: The Press University of the West Indies, 1996), 114–131; Manuel, *Tān-singing*, 12; Vertovec, *Hindu Trinidad*, 124–127.

[5] Manuel, *Tān-singing*, 51.

Figure 5-1. Harry Lutchman Tassa Group's performance on Mastana Bahar. A and B) Actors playing a bride, groom, and pundit appear on stage with Harry Lutchman Tassa Group, C and D) female dancer. Screenshots from Mastana Bahar finals of 1983.

Many bands have been featured on Mastana Bahar over the years, including a memorable appearance by the Harry Lutchman Tassa Group in the 1983 final round. In this performance, the four members of the band took the stage in carnivalesque Indian outfits, complete with sequined crowns, and played a suite of hands that included tikora, *khemta* (a classical hand), dingolay, and calypso hand. While the band played, three actors sat around a stylized marriage altar: two dressed as a Hindu bride and groom sat on one side of the altar while another dressed as a pundit simulated ritual actions typical of the marriage ceremony (figure 5-1). When the band began to play dingolay, an Indian

dancer emerged, her movements perhaps best described as an amalgam of generic Bollywood poses combined with typical Trini gyrations.

Harry Lutchman Tassa Group's performance represents a distillation of reality into theatre that clearly plays upon the symbolic and functional importance of tassa as an indispensible accompaniment for Hindu weddings. The performance, however, takes great liberties in expressing these associations. Tassa would never accompany the rites associated with the marriage proper as is reenacted in this performance. Rather, drumming typically accompanies pre-marriage matikor, lawa, and agwaani and the post-marriage send off; jassling is of course a secular component of the post-marriage festivities as well. Likewise, tassa would never accompany classical dance; the appearance of the dancer seems only to highlight the role of dingolay and calypso as breakaway hands and to add visual flair to an otherwise stoic group of performers on stage. The performance therefore compresses the kind of protracted tassa performance one might typically find in a traditional context into the constraints of a five-minute staged spectacle. This kind of "acting the music" is typical of calypso contests as well as eclectic performing arts entries in the ever-popular Prime Minister's Best Village Competition, a contest initiated by Eric Williams after independence to encourage the development of local cultural art forms.

Tassa Taal and the National Tassa Competition

The competitive format established by Mastana Bahar, one in turn gleaned at least in part from calypso and steelband competitions, readily served as a model for tassa competitions and continues to nurture the spectacle of such contests. In 1984, the Penal branch of Republic Bank of Trinidad and Tobago (RBTT) began sponsoring the country's first national tassa competition. The contest began as part of a "new corporate

responsibility drive" on the part of RBTT who charged each of its local branches with organizing social activities for its respective service areas. Augustine Young Lai, Penal branch manager at the time, consulted a handful of commercial customers regarding ideas for a community program. Discussions among customers and staff soon turned to the idea of a tassa competition. Current RBTT representative in charge of coordinating the competition Naresh Ragoonanan recalls that the contest was first organized under the name Tassa Rama, though "this was later changed to reflect the purpose of the competition[,] as Taal means rhythm, thus Tassa Taal means the rhythm of the tassa."[6] Tassa Taal quickly became a popular community event, drawing bands and audiences from across the country. Given the climate of Indo-Trinidadian cultural resurgence of the 1980s, conditions were well suited for the emergence of a well-funded, well-organized, and persistent Indo-Trinidadian folk music competition nurtured by the dominant Indo-Trinidadian demographic of South Trinidad.

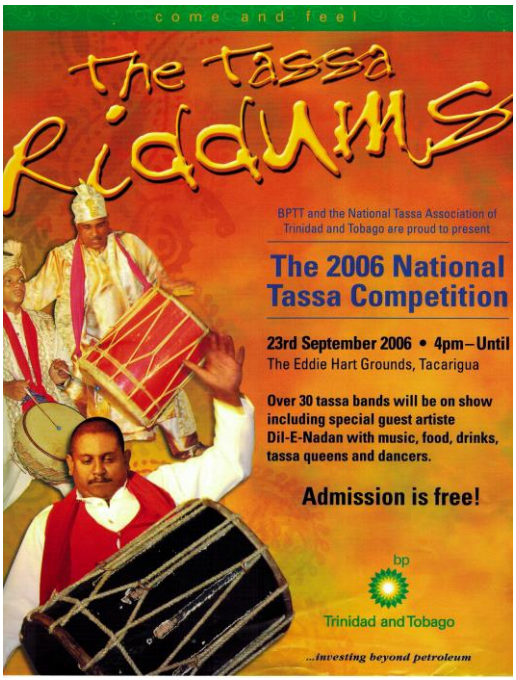
Other grassroots competitions would come and go for nearly two decades until veteran entertainment promoter Vijay Ramlal-Rai began staging an annual competition under the purview of the Tassa Association of Trinidad and Tobago (TATT), an organization he founded and assumed presidency of in 2000.[7] The TATT competition was first billed as the National Tassa Monarch Competition to reflect the nomenclature of Carnival-time competitions (e.g. Calypso Monarch, Soca Monarch, Chutney-Soca

[6] Naresh Ragoonanan, E-mail to author, June 12, 2013.

[7] Ramlal-Rai is also founder and president of National Cultural Promotions of Trinidad & Tobago, the national Chutney Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago, the Carnival/Cultural Judges Association of Trinidad and Tobago (this organization oversees judging for TATT's tassa competitions), Trinidad and Tobago Copyright Collection Organisation, and Trinidad and Tobago Entertainment Company. As discussed in chapter five, Ramala-Rai is also leading the push to make tassa the country's second national instrument.

Monarch, etc.), but has since been renamed the National Tassa Competition of Trinidad and Tobago with sponsorship by British Petroleum, Trinidad and Tobago (bpTT) (item A in figure 5-2). Though various promoters and community organizations plan occasional competitions (such as Tassabration, which is partly sponsored by TATT [item B in figure 5-2]), Tassa Taal and the National Tassa Competition are the most enduring and indeed most prestigious. In the following discussion of these tassa competitions, the reader is advised to refer to Appendix C for full copies of all referenced rules, regulations, and score sheets.

A



B

Figure 5-2. Posters advertising tassa competitions. A) The 2006 National Tassa Competition, B) 2007 Tassabration.

Rules, Regulations, and Performance Expectations

Tassa competitions tend to be ostentatious affairs. Bands usually perform on a raised platform or a proper stage with lights and sound reinforcement. Those who can afford it will buy elaborate Indian-style costumes. A number of clothing shops around

the country carry Indian outfits generally worn by a groom and other men in a wedding party. As such, it is not uncommon to see a four-member tassa band on the competition stage dressed like identical Bollywood grooms, complete with sequined turbans and pointy up-turned shoes. Bands with corporate sponsorship—like the Tropical Power Country Boys Tassa Group, the Caribel Fun Lovers Tassa Group, and the RBTT Dragon Boys Tassa Group—are able to buy less generic and therefore more distinctive and colorful outfits. While some tassa competitions award a special Best Dressed title that has no bearing on bands' overall placement, other contests directly figure dress into bands' final scores. The scoring rubric for the 2007 Tassa Taal allotted 10% to "Dress Appearance" while there is no specific dress category allocated in the judging rubric for the National Tassa Competition (though judges could conceivably take dress into consideration as part of their marks in the "Presentation" criterion that accounts for 10% of bands' overall scores). Bands that wear elaborate Indian dress are generally the only ones selected as Best Dressed, this therefore reinforcing tassa's expected association with Indianness, no matter the degree to which these costumes signal a largely imagined and romanticized connection to India.

In Tassa Taal and the National Tassa Competition, bands are given a short space of performance time on stage (twelve minutes for Tassa Taal and ten minutes for the National Tassa Competition). Within this period, bands are expected to play five different hands. Judging rubrics for each competition give substantial weight to "rhythm and harmony," that is rhythmic precision and balance within the ensemble. This category counts for 35% in Tassa Taal and 25% in the National Tassa Competition. Both contests also stress bands' behavior while on the competition grounds. In the 2007

Tassa Taal, “conduct” counted for 15% of bands’ scores (since reduced to 10%) while 20% was allotted for “discipline” in the 2005 National Tassa Competition.

Despite these similarities, judging criteria differ between the two competitions in important ways. Tassa Taal allocates 35% of bands’ scores to “purity of hand.” This criterion evaluates the accuracy of each hand’s interpretation and as such the authenticity of performance. This interest in authenticity is highlighted in the rules for the 2007 Tassa Taal:

> 3) Points will be lost for any other hand played not mention[ed].
> 5) Hands: Tikora, Chowbola, Classical Wedding Hand, Dingolay, Kalinda.[8]
> 11) Each group must be represented by not more than four (4) performers: Cutter Man, Foolay Man, Jhaal Man and Bass Man
> 12) The only pieces allowed: Cutter, Foolay, Jhaal, Bass.

Rules eleven and twelve effectively limit bands to the customary set of four instruments and four players, therefore leaving no room for innovation, neither in number of players nor instrumentation. Meanwhile, rules three and five give express guidelines for the music bands should play, even to the point of indicating that deviation from the prescribed hands—either through omission or replacement—results in an unspecified deduction. In 2010, the strictness of these guidelines were revised upon complaints by bands who wanted more room to showcase innovation.[9] From the 2010 competition until present, the contest guidelines now provide for a “Hand of Choice” in addition to tikora, chaubola, wedding hand, and calypso, all of which are decidedly traditional and very common hands. The hand of choice may be a new composition or some other

[8] Kalinda is a breakaway hand apparently derived from Afro-Trinidadian drumming to accompany Carnivaltime kalenda stick fights.

[9] Naresh Ragoonanan, E-mail to author, June 12, 2013.

hand. Moreover, the rules now also allow for up to six performers on stage at a time, therefore reflecting many bands whose personnel includes extra players beyond the traditional four. Despite these revisions that indeed allow for a modicum of innovation, Tassa Taal nonetheless steers performances according to traditional expectations and largely limits them to music commonly played as processional or breakaway wedding hands.

On the other hand, the judging criteria for the 2005 National Tassa Competition placed significant weight (20%) on assessing each band's ability to "break taal" (to change from one hand to the next) with no explicit consideration of the overall accuracy of each hand's interpretation. Though bands were free to perform any five hands of their choosing, at least one was required to be an original composition. Fully 25% of each band's overall contest score was based upon assessment of this "original piece," though no specific guidelines were given for judges to evaluate it. Despite the ambiguity of the National Tassa Competition's judging criteria, the required original composition indicates a progressive interest not found in the judging criteria for Tassa Taal. Where Tassa Taal for the most part rewards contestants for authentic interpretation of a set of canonic repertoire, the National Tassa Competition places greater emphasis on creativity and innovation. When compared against the standards that drummers use to evaluate each other during wedding jassles, the divergent directions of these competitions are not altogether incongruent. In jassling, bands routinely test each other in terms of depth of knowledge and accuracy of interpretation but also value innovative deployment of uncommon and, on occasion, original composition. Indeed, including the

requirement of an original piece in the National Tassa Competition is an effort to inject innovation and creativity into what is otherwise a rather static repertoire.

Extra-musical elements also enhance the competition experience. In addition to the afore-mentioned glitzy costumes, competitors often supplement their performance with dancers, props, and actors on stage, much like Harry Lutchman Tassa Group's Mastana Bahar performance described above. The guidelines for the 2005 National Tassa Competition, for example, explicitly allowed dancers to complement each band's performance with the stipulation that "the dancer should choreograph the presentation to add value to the rendition." A prize was also awarded for Best Tassa Dancer. With colorful costumes, dancers, and elaborate props, competition often takes on a carnivalesque atmosphere. To illustrate, I discuss below an elaborate example of a competitive tassa performance, T&T Sweet Tassa's winning entry in the National Tassa Competition held in Debe on August 29, 2009.

"We're All Under the Umbrella of T&T:" A Competitive Tassa Performance

T&T Sweet Tassa's performance featured Lenny Kumar on cutter, Keron Ramkeessoon on foulé, George Baboolal on bass, and Kevin Mohammed on jhal. The band wore elaborate Indian dress, but they were quite visually overshadowed by a total of thirteen ancillary dancers and actors on stage. Throughout the nearly eight-minute performance, actors maintained poses that each represented contexts in which tassa is often heard. On stage left, there were actors evoking a Hindu wedding dressed as an Indian bride and groom and standing under a maro improvised from a garlanded red umbrella. Joining them were actors dressed as a Carnival masquerader and as Krishna, these to respectively represent Carnival and the Hindu Ramleela festival that is

particularly vibrant in Trinidad and Tobago. On stage right, there were Afro-Trinidadians miming performance on a steel pan and a small djembe, these meant to suggest

A B

C D

E F

Figure 5-3. T&T Sweet Tassa's performance at the 2009 National Tassa Competition. A) Punjabi, B) nagara, C) chutney, D) dingolay, E and F) calypso.

Lenny's frequent collaborations with steelbands and African drummers. Joining these drummers were two young men wearing long white kurtas and holding a miniature tadjah, this indicating tassa's role in the Hosay observance. Two other young men stood behind the band holding aloft a large banner bearing the band's name and contact information. As the music progressed from one hand to another, groups of dancers passed across the stage acting out vignettes representative of Trinidadian multiculturalism (figure 5-3).

The first hand was the band's original piece, a hand Lenny created based upon *bhangra* rhythms that he calls "Punjabi." Three dancers in white costumes trimmed with purple sequins appeared on stage with Bollywood-inspired choreography. These dancers were intended to represent Indo-Trinidadians' roots in India. The band then transitioned into nagara, this accompanied by a vignette depicting matikor. A small procession entered from stage left led by a young girl carrying a tray on her head followed by four older women wearing headscarves, one carrying a long garden hoe. Once the procession crossed to stage right, the women lowered the tray to the ground

while the hoe-wielding woman began to mime digging the earth. Once this scene was established, all five commenced dancing in a sexually suggestive manner, much to the approval of the gathered crowd. Lenny then broke taal to transition into chutney hand. With this emerged a solo female dancer with a Carnival-style who Lenny described as a "belly dancer." This is the only incongruous vignette in the performance. It seems the dance had no intended ideological associations with the music; it was merely for entertainment.

The fourth hand was dingolay accompanied by two teenage girls in red, white, and black costumes dancing a hybrid of Indo- and Afro-Trinidadian styles. This transitioned into calypso at which point a solo female dancer emerged with dress and choreography typical of Afro-Trinidadian *bèlè* dancers. Lenny suggested an "African" dancer was appropriate to accompany calypso hand, which as discussed in the previous chapter, is derived from Afro-Trinidadian musical forebears. Both calypso and bèlè share roots in the music and dance transplanted from neighboring French islands in the late 1700s.

As Lenny signaled the band to increase the tempo of calypso, dancers began forming the final vignette downstage right. The bèlè dancer continued her choreography as the dancers from dingolay came out to flank her. A female actor in a Chinese costume began moving from upstage to downstage right behind them. Then, a male dancer in white trousers, a red sequined top, and a black sash draped across his shoulder, therefore embodying an image of the national flag, danced Carnival-style into the center of the group. As the music's tempo increased in tempo and intensity, fireworks shot up from behind the stage and the male dancer thrust aloft a large red,

white, and black umbrella to symbolize, as Lenny describes it, that “we’re all under the umbrella of Trinidad and Tobago.” With a final taal, the band took a bow and the crowd roared with enthusiasm.

Tradition Contested

In general, competitive tassa performances diverge considerably from what might be regarded as “more traditional” performances in a wedding context. The music is not used to facilitate procession, accompany improvised dancing, or announce the arrival of the bride and groom. Rather, bands’ performances are encouraged by competition regulations to emphasize form over function. In the following pages, I summarize four important ways that competitions deviate from wedding performances, namely repertoire, narrative, spectacle, and competitive format.

Repertoire

With stipulations invariably requiring bands to play common wedding-appropriate hands, Tassa Taal in particular emphasizes what is perceived to be fundamentally traditional repertoire and ensemble arrangement. In this way, conceptual linkages with wedding performances are unambiguous even if competitive performance is expected to be necessarily more flashy and virtuosic than run-of-the-mill wedding music. Repertoire requirements as laid out for the National Tassa Competition maintain similar association with wedding repertoire, yet also give ample incentive for innovation and creativity. As discussed in chapter three, new compositions are sometimes introduced in wedding contexts, however original compositions receive more exposure, appreciation, and critique in the context of competition.

The brief time slot allotted in competition is intended for bands to distill their most impressive skills into a compelling staged show. One result is that hands traditionally

played for extended periods of wedding procession or dancing are abbreviated, their full-scale development cut short in favor of artful arrangement. In all cases, repertoire is prescribed according to competition rules. Though hands may be rotated from year to year, they rarely fall outside of the handful of common hands discussed in chapter three. Wedding hand is sometimes an option, though Hosay hands are never required in competition, this keeping in line with the notion that they should not be performed outside of Hosay. Therefore, the rules and regulations of competitive tassa performances essentially require a highly stylized suite of wedding-appropriate hands. Over time, these hands, in their showy arrangements, work their way back into bands' wedding performances with the ultimate result being a reduction in the diversity of wedding and classical hands common in times past.

The expectations of competitive tassa performance strongly emphasize form over function. Where good cutters can read an audience of dancers in the context of a lawa or matikor performance and therefore know when and where to break taal for maximum effect, successful competitive tassa performances are largely built upon pre-arranged sequences that, as noted above, limit the full development of each hand. Rehearsed arrangements feed back into expectations of virtuosity while simultaneously limiting the cutter's need to pay full attention to accompanied actions in a traditional, non-competitive setting.

Narrative

Varying concepts of narrative are important for competition success. In some cases, this may be as simple as arranging hands in a way that emphasizes a typical musical development. For example, playing tikora and other classical hands first then proceeding to breakaway hands demonstrates participants' knowledge of the "right way"

to progress through a drumming suite. More commonly, however, bands use props, actors, and dancers to draw upon notions familiar to competition judges and audiences who are primarily Indo-Trinidadians. This tradition is clearly indebted to precedents of "acting the music" as seen in calypso competitions, Mastana Bahar performances, and the Best Village competition among other sources.

As demonstrated both by T&T Sweet Tassa's National Tassa Competition performance and by Harry Lutchman Tassa Group's appearance on Mastana Bahar (a performance that indeed prefigured the advent of elaborate competitive tassa arrangements), images of Hindu weddings are common and can be particularly effective in rousing crowds' appreciation by combining elements of visual storytelling with an otherwise musical narrative. As in T&T Sweet Tassa's performance, layers of deeper musical and socio-historical meaning are frequently embedded competitive performances. Rather than limiting himself exclusively to Indo-Trinidadian images, for example, Lenny Kumar expressly intended to emphasize tassa's place within the multicultural framework of Trinidadian society. Therefore the staged symbolism of T&T Sweet Tassa's performance as described above centers on a broader narrative about national belonging deployed by way of a distinctly Indo-Trinidadian art form and presented within nationwide competitive forum.

Spectacle

Competitive tassa is not just about the music. Indeed, music is often backgrounded, both literally and figuratively, as bands assume an extreme upstage, static position allowing for ancillary performers to act the music in the downstage area closest to the audience. Music and dance come together with elaborate costumes, props, stage lighting, and sound reinforcement to create an amalgamated spectacle that

often overshadows the music itself. With the aid of such a spectacle, bands can play a simple arrangement of hands and still come out on top. On the other hand, musical risk taking and therefore uncanny innovation is not always rewarded if judges are not impressed with extra-musical elements of performance. Competitions are also spectacles in and of themselves. With upwards of thirty bands in some rounds, the sheer number of performances and collection of so many drummers in one space at a time can be astounding. Local radio, television, or cultural celebrities often emcee competitions while commercial vendors hawk their wares around the competition grounds and DJs play soca and chutney through massive sound systems in the interstices between performances. These elements all contribute to a heightened sense of occasion for both contest participants and audiences alike.

Competitive Format

As described above, the most likely competitive models for tassa contests are Mastana Bahar and Carnival-time calypso and steelband competitions, all of which feature preliminary and final rounds with judging criteria focused upon both musical and non-musical elements. Importantly also, entrants in these contests are given a specified amount of time on stage, with consecutive individual performances throughout the course of an event. Though this is a common competitive model for a wide variety of contests in Trinidad and elsewhere, it has no precedent within tassa tradition in and of itself. Indeed, the most immediate competitive format in this regard is jassling. Though the unwritten rules governing wedding and Hosay jassles make at least a partial appearance in the judging criteria for formal competitions, there are clearly fundamental differences. Most importantly, formal competitions lack the kind of hand-for-hand battles between two simultaneously performing bands that form the foundation of jassling. To

my knowledge, there has never been any attempt to incorporate this kind of competitive format into formal competitions.

Extra-musical factors like behavior, dress, and overall presentation (including actors and dancers) are significantly important for success in formal contests. Bands with corporate sponsorship generally fare better in this regard as they are better able to offset costs, while an unsponsored band might end up spending more money out of pocket than they could hope to recoup from competition winnings. Prize money is indeed rather minimal; the 2013 Tassa Taal winner received only TT$10,000 (about US$1700), a rather paltry sum when divided among four musicians and an even paltrier sum considering the costs associated with building props and costumes for a stage full of ancillary performers.[10] Prize money, however, is not the most important incentive for most bands who routinely earn more by performing for weddings and other functions. Rather, it is the prestige of winning that drives most to compete. Not only can a band boast a first place trophy, they also receive nationwide publicity in newspapers, on the radio, on television in some cases, and more recently on social media sites like Facebook and YouTube. This in turn leads to winners being hired for more gigs. A band who does consistently well over the years can turn tassa into a decent secondary income stream. Virtually no one, however, can live from tassa alone.

Citing both an unfair advantage in favor of sponsored bands and the tendency toward carnivalesque spectacle rather than musical competition, many drummers have consistently argued for removal of extra-musical criteria from judging rubrics, thereby

[10] "Big Money up for Grabs at Tassa Taal," *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian* (Trinidad and Tobago, May 20, 2011).

refocusing attention on the music alone. Indeed, Lenny Kumar, Muskesh Ragoo, and others have gone so far as to suggest that competition is a divisive force fracturing the tassa community. Some advocate the abolition of formal competition in favor of what Kumar calls “tassa showcases” in which bands can exhibit their skills without having to compete with one another; ticket sales and vendor fees from the event could also go toward a substantial appearance fee for each band, ensuring that no one walks away empty handed.

Consistent claims of corrupt or inept judging exacerbate this negative view of competition. Given the insular nature of tassa student-teacher relationships, competitions are routinely judged by mentors, protégés, or other relations of competitors. On the flip side, bands are just as likely to be judged by rivals. Further frustrating matters, contest organizers—who are rarely musicians themselves—commonly recruit judges who are not tassa drummers nor have any musical training. After a particularly disappointing experience with apparently inept judging, Ragoo expressed his frustration in a Facebook message to the supporters of his band D’Evergreen Tassa Group:

> Were you there last night to witness what happened? Once again, this competition reeked with poor judging and the same old thing year after year. We had numerous meetings with the organisers for this event and a lot of the same things happened again. One is having a whole dance school on the same stage as the drummers, blocking them from view, and putting full attention to the gyrating dancers. The main hand to be judged on was the creative piece. Wow! I heard some bands play [hands] that had nothing to do with creativity… I am beginning to wonder again, how come alot of the 40 plus tassa groups did not bother to show up for the qualifying round. Did they know something I didn't? Hmmm… Will tassa ever reach somewhere in Trinidad when individuals decide who will win before the event takes place?[11]

[11] Mukesh Ragoo, Facebook message to D Evergreen Tassahulics Group, August 30, 2009.

In response to consistent complaints like these, organizers have tried to mitigate problems by soliciting suggestions from the competitors and implementing democratically agreed upon improvements. Still, accusations abound and will probably never completely go away. Tellingly, the same sorts of problems have long plagued calypso and steel band judging as well.

The National Stage

Jocelyne Guilbault frames Trinidad Carnival as a "political technology" within which "cultural politics of race, nation, and diaspora" are articulated and refocused.[12] While the history of contemporary Carnival is rooted in the spontaneous creativity of enslaved Africans and their descendants, state entities effectively usurped control of Carnival revelry by the 1950s and have since played an important role in regulating mechanisms of cultural identification, including Carnival-time music competitions. As state-deployed implements of subsidy and control, music competitions associated with Carnival, especially Calypso Monarch and Panorama, "have normalized the inclusion and exclusion of specific sounds, people, and identities."[13] As discussed more in chapter six, one effect of this was the concretization of Afro-Trinidadian culture—especially Carnival, calypso, and steel pan—as national culture. In this light, the socio-political drama so often embedded in calypso and pan competitions therefore takes on national import.

Dudley reminds, however, that Carnival-time competitions are essentially "invented traditions"—that is, recent creations given socio-historical significance through

[12] Guilbault, *Governing Sound*, 40.

[13] Ibid., 68.

repeated association with important cultural occasions or ideas—that have considerably reshaped the communal musical practices they purport to celebrate and preserve.[14] Though this transformation from "street music" to a staged, presentational style is implicated with complex, multivalent motivations, the expectations of music contests have clearly shaped musical style and musicians' orientations toward musical performance. For steel pan in particular, Dudley notes, for example:

> [Pannists] may enjoy playing for dancers, but they also aspire to master a cosmopolitan repertoire, and they pride themselves on the kinds of discipline, uniformity, and formal complexity that are associated more with concert stage performances of the classics than dance parties. The Panorama competition has encouraged such aspirations to presentational standards of performance, affecting both the structure of the music and the manner of rehearsal and performance.[15]

The repercussions of this transformation are a popular subject of debate, with many old school pannists and arrangers lamenting the "agenda" bound up in formally adjudicated contests.[16] There is little doubt, however, that the presentational mode of pan performance, as exemplified in Panorama, has been subsumed within the rubric of a similarly transformed notion of tradition redefined according to contemporary trends.

State control of Carnival and Carnival-time competitions in the mid-1900s were clearly an effort to subsidize, promote, and control the production of national culture. This notion of competition-as-improvement persists today (and is discussed further in chapter six). Dudley indeed suggests that an often-cited premise for staging music competitions in Trinidad and Tobago is to motivate performance "to new heights of

[14] Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge*, 212.

[15] Ibid., 213.

[16] Ibid., 202.

excellence" through incentivizing exemplary performance as delimited by contest rules and regulations.[17] These sentiments are echoed in the words of Tassa Taal coordinator Naresh Ragoonanan who frames the advent of tassa competition as rooted in a desire to garner national attention for tassa:

> The [advent of the Tassa Taal] competition came at a time when tassa was considered less than the other art forms in Trinidad and Tobago. The art form suffered from a stigma of being one of low standard and skill. Very few [people] know the tassa as we know it is unique to Trinidad and Tobago. The [individual drums of the ensemble] can be found in India but the combination of the cutter, foolay, bass, and the jhange is unique to Trinidad and Tobago. Like the steel pan it is indigenous to us. The tassa competition being [put] on by [an] organization like Republic Bank allowed for tassa to be view[ed] on a stage of elevated value. The reputation of the Bank loaned itself to the art form and allow[ed] the image of tassa to be lifted.[18]

The National Tassa Competition was initially organized with similar goals. More to the point, however, the National Tassa Competition serves as a symbolic center in Ramlal-Rai and TATT's current push to make tassa a second national instrument as described in the following chapter. As discussed earlier, the constraints of tassa competitions point toward a perception of tassa as "traditional," with strict regulations that act to preserve and amplify tassa's traditionality. Just as Dudley suggests Carnival-time music competitions have shaped performance in a way that disrupts the communal practices they seek to maintain, so too do tassa competitions dislocate and decontextualize wedding repertoire for the competition stage.

Neither of the two tassa competitions discussed in this study are synchronous with the Carnival season. On one hand, it is simply a practical matter to stage tassa

[17] Ibid., 203.

[18] Naresh Ragoonanan, E-mail to author, June 12, 2013.

contests outside of Carnival since the nation's energy is understandably focused on masquerade, calypso, soca, and pan during this period. On the other hand, however, the organization of significant and purportedly national competitions without reference to the nationalist frame of Carnival revelry suggests a move toward nationalizing tassa performance on its own terms in an Indo-Trinidadian space of revelry and celebration. Meanwhile, though "competition is a ubiquitous mode of human interaction with a complex logic and organizing impulse of its own,"[19] it is difficult to ignore the similarities between the operative mechanisms of tassa and Carnival-time competitions. With a similar competitive format and motivations for organization, tassa contests come into view as a trope on the broader phenomenon of music competitions in Trinidad and Tobago and therefore suggest a desire to advance tassa performance as equally deserving of the kind of critical attention afforded calypso and steel pan in their respective, state-sponsored competitions. Tassa contests therefore seek to foster a national forum for comparison, critique, and improvement conceptually linked with, separate from, yet equal in stature to Carnival-time competitions, however unlikely the latter may be in practice. In this way, tassa competitions are one vehicle for not only claiming, but performatively activating Indo-Trinidadian space within a particularly important tradition of national competition.

Summary

The changes in tassa performance practice catalyzed by competition are similar to those described by Amy Stillman in her work documenting Hawaiian *hula*. Stillman notes that the expectations of formal hula competitions have spurred changes both in

[19] Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge*, 203.

repertoire and performance practice. Though hula contests were first organized in the 1970s as a means to generate interest in and therefore preserve hula, Stillman notes that competitions also fostered transformations that gave rise to new understandings about and orientations toward tradition:

> That competitions have become venues of prestige accounts in large part for their impact on the hula tradition, in terms of both repertoire and performance… The formulation of rules and regulations imposes constraints on performance; working around those constraints has resulted in solutions that depart from customary procedures in presentation and enactment. To some extent, those same constraints can also be indicative of particular perspectives on traditionality in terms of what they explicitly exclude.[20]

In the case of hula contests, "traditional" repertoire is redefined for the stage, expressly excluding tourist-oriented performances and including newly composed choreography that meets the demands of judging criteria and audience expectations. In the case of the latter in particular, hula competitions have shifted attention away from the functionality of hula and toward staged spectacle:

> Developments in the hula tradition, as practiced in hula competitions, manifest a clear orientation toward an emphasis on purely visual aspects of appearance and movement. The intent is to impress audiences. Part of what impresses is excellence, innovations, or visual display within individual performances that are presented onstage; part of what impresses is the sheer spectacle of events that feature mass numbers of consecutive performances.[21]

Despite significant numbers of hula practitioners who eschew the perceived inauthenticity of competitive hula and therefore distance themselves from contests, Stillman concludes that competitions should rightly be regarded as an extension of tradition:

---

[20] Amy Ku'Uleialoha Stillman, "Hawaiian Hula Competitions: Event, Repertoire, Performance, Tradition," *The Journal of American Folklore* 109, no. 434 (1996): 375.

[21] Ibid.

> Initially intended as venues for the presentation of hula and the celebration of its survival in the late 20th century, hula competitions have provided stages for innovative creativity; those stages in turn provide critiques of approval or disapproval in the forms of judges' evaluations and audience response (which do not always correspond). Having become a vital part of what is presented on a competition stage, creativity has been restored within the hula tradition itself, thereby anchoring contemporary hula practice in the realm of a truly living, rather than merely preserved, tradition. Thus, for all the controversy they can provoke from time to time, and for all the changes they have already effected in the hula tradition, hula competitions have in fact become robust celebrations of flourishing Hawaiian cultural practices.

There are important parallels between Stillman's observations and my own about competitive tassa. While tassa contest rules reinforce a rather limited set of common hands while simultaneously driving performance toward slick, staged arrangements, the resulting changes in repertoire and performance have come to represent a vital component of tassa practice that is now an irrevocabe part of tassa tradition. While Stillman suggests creativity has anchored contemporary hula performances, tassa competitions by comparison are anchored in the repetition of what is deemed "traditional" in the form of a few common wedding hands. Competition regulations furthermore reward bands that create polished arrangements of this limited repertoire, therefore de-incentivizing knowledge of a broad repertoire of increasingly rare classical hands, most of which would not be very exciting to put on stage given current competitive conventions anyway.

Nonetheless, competitions have injected new ideas into tassa performance practice. The National Tassa Competition's requirement of an original composition is indicative of the ways in which competitions are mechanisms for change. Though newly composed hands rarely become a regular part of the repertoire, especially since a new hand is required year after year, the emphasis on new composition "takes tassa to the

next level," as Lenny Kumar often says. Moreover, competitions have introduced an alternative competitive format, one that mitigates the aggression of jassling while by its very nature allowing competitors to enter on an even, egalitarian footing despite perennial protests against perceived failings in adjudication. Overall, competitions have subtly encouraged tassa bands to be entertainers, not just facilitators of lawa, matikor, and agwaani.

In the end, competitions situate tassa as more than noisy village music, but a legitimate art form deserving of serious recognition. Unlike the Chutney Soca Monarch competition, which has been a part of Carnival festivities since 1996 and, as Dudley asserts, "constitute[s] a claim by East Indians for their place in a national culture that has been officially defined… in Afro-Trinidadian terms,"[22] I suggest that the establishment of tassa competitions outside of the nationalist context of Carnival represents an alternative narrative of nationality that need not depend upon Carnival, and therefore mainstream Afro-Creole culture, as a touchstone of legitimacy. In chapter six, I continue with a discussion of Trinidadian racial politics and tassa's role within it.

[22] Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge*, 217.

CHAPTER 6
CO-NATIONAL INSTRUMENTS? RACE, CREOLIZATION, AND MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AS EMBLEMS OF TRINIDADIAN IDENTITY

Forged from the love of liberty
In the fires of hope and prayer
With boundless faith in our destiny
We solemnly declare:

Side by side we stand
Islands of the blue Caribbean sea,
This our native land
We pledge our lives to thee.

Here every creed and race find an equal place,
And may God bless our nation
Here every creed and race find an equal place,
And may God bless our nation.[1]

In this chapter, I discuss Trinidadian understandings of creolization in constructing orientations toward national belonging by examining the current debate over musical instruments as markers of national identity. In doing so, I situate tassa as a particularly emblematic encapsulation of Indo-Trinidadian identity, one that transcends intra-ethnic boundaries of religion, gender, and class. I begin by describing colonial constructions of race and show how racial division was by the mid-twentieth century translated into political rivalry based upon inclusion and exclusion from a nationalized creole culture. I then describe events surrounding the institutionalization of steel pan as Trinidad and Tobago's national instrument and Indo-Trinidadian challenges to it, especially the proposal of tassa as co-national instrument. I conclude by discussing new perspectives offered by contemporary Trinidadian multicultural discourse and suggest

[1] "Forged from the Love of Liberty," Trinidad and Tobago's national anthem, written by Patrick Castagne.

two possible Indo-Trinidadian orientations toward national belonging as exemplified in the national instrument debate.

"Creole" and "creolization" have diffuse and complex meanings in the broad range of erudite and vernacular contexts in which these terms are routinely deployed. The Anglophone term "creole" is derived from the sixteenth-century New World Spanish word *criollo*, meaning "a committed [white European] settler, one identified with the area of settlement, one native to the settlement though not ancestrally indigenous to it."[2] Moreover, *criollo* and its Portuguese cognate *crioulo* tended in this period to indicate a white person born in New World colonies. Robin Cohen and Paola Toninato point out, however, "things soon got rather more complicated;" they suggest a four-fold "Creole recipe" evident in the colonial era:[3]

> First, we have the colonial, born in the old country, or anchored there psychologically and affectively. Second, we have the Creole, born in a new place of foreign parents, who nonetheless identifies with his or her immediate surroundings or is so identified by others. Third…, are the indigenous people whose ancestors had lived there for so long that they are assumed to, or claim to, 'belong' to the land. We can add one final element—imported labourers (often African slaves) who were put to work in the plantations and enterprises usually established by the colonial powers and managed by the Creoles. Creolization was the outcome of the interactions—cultural, religious, linguistic, economic, political and sexual—between these four groups.[4]

Eventually, the epithet "Creole" came to be applied to "someone with foreign origins… that had now become localized and blended."[5] The specific meanings of "Creole" would

[2] Robin Cohen and Paola Toninato, "The Creolization Debate: Analysing Mixed Identities and Cultures," in *The Creolization Reader: Studies in Mixed Identities and Cultures*, ed. Robin Cohen and Paola Toninato (London: Routledge, 2010), 3.

[3] Ibid., 3–4.

[4] Ibid., 4.

[5] Ibid.

vary from place to place. Where it originally indicated a foreign-born white person, in Trinidad, as just one example, “Creole” had by the nineteenth century come to mean a colony-born person of African heritage. Perhaps though as a sign of the term’s diffusion, Rev. J.G. Pearson (quoted at length in chapter six) wrote of the “Creole Coolie,” indicating a colony-born Indian, in 1890s Guyana.[6]

In disciplinary terms, linguists studying creole languages in the 1800s were first to mention the notion of “creolization” as a process of generating something new out of constituent parts. By the 1970s, social scientists had widely appropriated this linguistic concept as a metaphor to describe broader socio-cultural processes of cultural hybridity. This “conceptual shift” is rooted in a “powerful analogy:” where linguistic creolization describes to the creation of new languages, cultural creolization connotes the creation of new cultural formations emerging upon long term interaction among parent cultures.[7] Embedded in this idea is an assumption of resilience and creativity at points of contact—often under harsh conditions like slavery or forced exile—resulting in novel practices that eventually come to characterize cultural regions. Tina Ramnarine, for example, describes the Caribbean as a “beautiful cosmos” of conflicting orientations, which, by virtue of their abrasion, results in continued construction and negotiation of socio-cultural meaning.[8] With time, the tensions and products of such a process form a

[6] J.G., Rev. Pearson, “The Life History of an East Indian in British Guiana,” *Timehri: The Journal of the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society of British Guiana* New Series, no. 11 (1897): 136cultu

[7] Cohen and Toninato, “The Creolization Debate,” 11.

[8] Tina K. Ramnarine, *Beautiful Cosmos: Performance and Belonging in the Caribbean Diaspora* (London: Pluto Press, 2007).

familiar, understandable, and comfortable anchorage upon which individuals and groups moor their identities.

As Aisha Khan points out, however, processes of creolization are often taken for granted both by academics and the ruling classes of post-colonial nation-states who appropriate its purported power "to recuperate the subaltern and the marginal, to bring agency, resistance, and resilience back to the disempowered."[9] When regarded as "a domain in which people—all people—participate in equally meaningful…[and] equally empowering ways," the analytical frame of creolization—and correlate concepts including hybridity, fusion, and more recently, multiculturalism—tends to blur or even ignore hegemonic strategies of control and subordination.[10] To reinvigorate the analytical import of creolization, Khan therefore calls for a turn away from the abstract and toward analysis of "specific relations of power in particular contexts" to provide more concrete ethnographic insight into the processes of creolization in practice. In an effort to answer this call, this chapter examines the current debate over national instruments in Trinidad and Tobago as a case in point.

By the mid-twentieth century, the rise of party politics allowed the so-called Afro-Saxon middle class to inherit power from British elites in the run up to independence in 1962. With the advantage of political supremacy, this new ruling class set about defining Trinidadian nationality in opposition to foreign political and cultural models. Creolization, narrowly defined in terms of Afro-European hybridity, emerged as a marker of Trinidadian indigenousness and also therefore of cultural authenticity. This authenticity

[9] Khan, "Journey to the Center of the Earth," 273.

[10] Ibid.

was then concretized in the promotion of distinctly Afro-Trinidadian expressive arts, especially steel pan, as national culture. Indo-Trinidadian demands for inclusion in the national portrait have routinely been met with reluctance by the state and strident opposition from Afro-Creole stakeholders. The abrasiveness of Trinidadian racial politics raises questions about the expectations of creolization. If, as the state's rhetoric tends to indicate, Trinidad and Tobago is an inclusive nation where, as quoted in the text of the country's national anthem at the opening of this chapter, "every creed and race find an equal place," from whence do ethnocentric disputes arise and how do Trinidadians resolve them using the rubric of creolization?

Patterns of Race-based Competition in Trinidad

Proceeding from Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Amar Wahab characterizes Trinidadian colonial elites' preoccupation with race as a necessary aspect of maintaining order. As a "colonial invention," representations of difference "were integral to the production of colonial authority."[11] Stereotypes distilled from Europeans' ways of "knowing"—in a Saidian sense—the laboring masses in relation to themselves therefore helped justify, educate about, and reinforce the colonial social hierarchy.[12] In the following pages, I discuss ways in which elite conceptions of racial difference affected racial tensions during the colonial period and were transmuted into political rivalries by the mid-1900s.

[11] Amar Wahab, *Colonial Inventions: Landscape, Power and Representation in Nineteenth-Century Trinidad* (Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 7.

[12] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 31–49.

Racial Tensions in the Colonial Era

Novelist and historian Charles Kingsley's extensive travelogue *At Last: Christmas in the West Indies* provides numerous examples that illustrate elite conceptions of race in nineteenth-century Trinidad. An engraving facetiously labeled "Waiting for the Races" (figure 6-1) is particularly illustrative in this regard. It depicts three groups of onlookers gathered at the rail of a horseracing track, each group representing Trinidad's three most prominent non-European "races."[13] The engraving is presented without comment, save its title, yet clearly is meant to visualize the stereotypes Kingsley constructs in his writing. The Indians occupy the center third of the image and are depicted as a cohesive family unit with the upright father figure dominating the center of the frame. Flanking them are a group of Negroes and a Chinese couple, the former depicted as slouched and lazy and the latter as drab, distant, and statuesque. Tellingly, each group keeps to itself.

[13] Charles Kingsley, *At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies* (London: MacMillan and Company, 1889), 304.

Figure 6-1. “Waiting for the Races.” Charles Kingsley, *At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies* (London: MacMillan and Company, 1889), 304.

Throughout *At Last*, numerous passages compare Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians in particular, setting up a normative dichotomy that pits the lazy, unreliable Negro against the demure, hard-working “Coolie:”

> If you took notice of a [Coolie] child, not only the mother smiled thanks and delight, but the men around likewise, as if a compliment had been paid to their whole company… A Coolie cow or donkey is petted, led about tenderly… I wish I could say the same of the Negro. His treatment of his children and of his beasts of burden is, but too often, as exactly opposed to that of the Coolie as are his manners. No wonder that the two races do not, and it is to be feared never will, amalgamate; that the Coolie, shocked by the unfortunate awkwardness of gesture and vulgarity of manners of the average Negro, and still more of the Negress, looks on them as savages; while the Negro, in his turn, hates the Coolie as a hard-working interloper, and despises him as a heathen.[14]

Kingsley’s off-handed observation that the two races might never “amalgamate” is eerily prescient. Yet, in truth, the non-amalgamation of Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians throughout the colonial period owes much to a colonial policy of divide and rule rather than biogenetic or even socio-cultural incompatibility. The laboring classes’ racialized views about each other very much resemble those imposed upon them by elites. Much recent scholarship has indeed demonstrated how British conceptions of race, coupled with the psychological and economic hardships of slavery and indentureship, catalyzed inter-ethnic rivalry between Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians.[15] As each group lacked power on its

[14] Ibid., 100–101.

[15] See especially Marianne Ramesar, “Recurrent Issues Concerning Immigrants to Trinidad,” in *Calcutta to Caroni: The East Indians of Trinidad*, ed. John La Guerre (St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago: University of the West Indies Extra Mural Studies Unit, 1985), 135–152; Brinsley Samaroo, “Politics of Afro-Indian Relations in Trinidad,” in *Calcutta to Caroni: The East Indians of Trinidad*, ed. John La Guerre (St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago: University of the West Indies Extra Mural Studies Unit, 1985), 77–92; Brereton, *Race Relations*; Patricia Mohammed, *Imaging the Caribbean: Culture and Visual Translation* (Oxford: MacMillan, 2009), chapter 7; Wahab, *Colonial Inventions: Landscape, Power and Representation in Nineteenth-Century Trinidad*, chapter 4.

own to fight against the violence of bound labor and colonial racism, the result was an inward turn in which they vented frustrations upon each other. In the colonial era, this rivalry was compounded by wage competition.

The indenture system first brought Indians to Trinidad in 1845 and dropped the last shipment in 1917. Afro-Trinidadian labor groups consistently argued against Indian indenture under the premise that the importation of evermore workers depressed wages for all unskilled laborers. This, of course, was exactly the point. Numerous commentators have described how Trinidadian ex-slaves had little reason to remain tied to estates after emancipation. Rather than work under conditions little changed from their time in bondage, freed blacks moved to urban areas or more often tended to subsist on their own terms squatting on abundant vacant land. In the absence of a labor surplus, those who remained on the plantations could work at a decent wage. However, with a steady stream of contract labor facilitated by Indian immigration, wages were suppressed to a point unattractive for all but the most desperate.[16]

Indentured Indians for their part were bound by contracts that paid meager task-work wages. Moreover, they were confined to their respective estates and faced stiff penalties including fines and jail time for being absent without permission. Any indentured Indian venturing off the estate had to obtain a pass. Likewise, time-expired and colony-born Indians were required at all times to carry so-called “free papers” indicating their status as non-indentured. Despite these and other discriminatory policies, most Indians decided to forego repatriation when their contracts were up and usually settled in predominantly Indian villages adjacent to their former estates. In the

[16] Brereton, *Race Relations*, 190.

latter stages of indenture, time expired Indians were given incentives of cash and grants of Crown lands to remain in Trinidad. This was meant to offset costs of repatriation and to encourage the growth of a peasant class independent of estate care. As such, most who stayed earned personal income by cultivating their own land and by working seasonally on the estates. In 1901 only 8.5% of Indians and their descendants in Trinidad and Tobago remained under indenture, though the majority were still engaged in cultivation.[17] This resulted in a concentration of Indo-Trinidadians in rural areas where access to education and participation in economic and political centers of power were out of reach until well into the 1900s.[18]

Upon coming to Trinidad, Indians (and indentured Chinese for that matter) were introduced into an already firmly established social order: blacks at the bottom and plantocratic whites at the top with middle class mulattoes and poor whites in between. As late arrivals in this scheme, Indian immigrants and their descendants were essentially forced to exist outside of it. As an 1885 issue of *New Era*, a periodical of the black and mulatto middle class, suggested:

> The Coolie is notoriously *with* us only, but not *of* us. He gives nothing for what he takes, and thus contributes but little to the wealth of the country. He hoards his treasure to take it back to his native land, and while among us, consumes hardly anything of our imports.[19]

Though it would be a stretch to suggest indentured Indians were ethnically homogenous, most were indeed culled from the peasantry of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Therefore, despite some regional (a minority were recruited from south India and

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ramesar, “Recurrent Issues Concerning Immigrants to Trinidad,” 144–145.

[19] Quoted in Brereton, *Race Relations*, 188.

embarked from the city of Madras) and religious differences (the majority were Hindu, though many Muslims and a handful of Christians were also among the indentured), most Indians had Bhojpuri culture in common, which eased their post-indenture settlement and resulted in cloistered Indo-Trinidadian communities that preserved cultural and psychological continuities with India more strongly than Afro-Trinidadian links with Africa. Perhaps because of this, and despite generations of settlement, it took Indo-Trinidadians until the middle of the twentieth century to begin to shed their outsider status. Until then Indians were often regarded as interlopers, little more than transient "infiltrators" as they were labeled as late as 1946.[20]

With Indo-Trinidadians largely excluded from colonial systems of control, the state was relatively free to implement discriminatory policies that ensured the continuity of an uneducated class of Indians while simultaneously discouraging (or at least not encouraging) Hindu and Muslim religious practices. By the early 1900s, these kinds of policies were often indirectly biased against Indians, couched in a consensualist approach to governance whereby they were wrongly assumed to form an integrated segment of a broader West Indian political unit.[21] In this way, the particular concerns of Indo-Trinidadians, whether related to issues of race, religion, or working conditions on the estates, were frequently ignored or at best unknown to those in power. Despite official consensualism, however, colonial elites clearly recognized Indians as a unique segment of society as evidenced by, among other policies, special laws prohibiting Hindu and Muslim clergy from being recognized as marriage officers, laws forbidding

[20] Trinidad and Tobago's 1946 census described Asians as "infiltrators." Mohammed, *Imaging the Caribbean*, 253n.

[21] Samaroo, "Politics of Afro-Indian Relations in Trinidad," 80.

Hindus to cremate their dead, and government support for Canadian Mission schools that almost exclusively served Indian students, even to the point of providing instruction in Hindi.[22]

Party Politics as Racial Politics

Meanwhile, Afro-Trinidadians were already socialized within the colonial system. Indeed, it was the so-called "Afro-Saxon" middle class—Christian, educated, and relatively wealthy blacks and mulattoes—who were gradually bequeathed power as the British ruling class receded early in the 20th century. With the rise of labor unions' political assertiveness after World War I, race became an important factor in determining individuals' political allegiances. Thanks to Indians' attachment to the sugar industry, they often sided with Indo-Trinidadian politicians arising from the ranks of the sugar unions, most importantly Adrian Cola Rienzi, a charismatic socialist labor leader, and Bhadase Maraj, an often-ruthless businessman whose personal wealth helped found the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha. Afro-Trinidadians largely rallied around Oxford-educated historian Eric Williams who had returned to Trinidad and Tobago in the late 1940s after a brief stint teaching at Howard University. Entering civil service as Deputy Chairman of the Caribbean Research Council, Williams soon turned to politics. In 1956, he formed the Peoples National Movement (PNM), a nationalist political party founded upon the refutation of foreign cultural models. In general elections that year, the PNM won thirteen of twenty-four elected Legislative Council seats, and after a month of debate, the Secretary of State for the Colonies finally granted Williams, as leader of the majority party, the right to appoint the remaining five members of the

[22] Ibid., 81.

Council.[23] In all, the PNM controlled eighteen Council seats establishing a clear majority with Williams as Chief Minister. This early success gave the PNM an advantageous incumbent status in the 1961 elections when Trinidadians would essentially decide who would lead the colony to independence in 1962. As independence loomed, however, debates about the country's national identity reflected and indeed amplified race-based rivalries.

Williams received considerable pushback from members of the Democratic Labour Party (DLP), the largely Indo-Trinidadian opposition to the PNM initially led by Bhadase Maraj. In elections for the nascent West Indian Federation, within which Trinidad and Tobago was allotted ten seats, the DLP emerged with a six to four majority against the PNM. The DLP's success was widely credited to their ability to win the support of rural Indo-Trinidadians who turned out en mass on election day. Frustrated by what he perceived as an opposition rooted in racial rivalry, Williams gave a now-immortal speech in Woodford Square a week after the election in which he characterized leaders of the DLP as a "recalcitrant and hostile minority… prostituting the name of India for its selfish, reactionary political ends."[24] Williams was referring to a letter he received presumably from the DLP in which he was accused of supporting "his own kind" at the expense of "the Indian nation." According to one present in Woodford Square that day, the remainder of Williams' speech "contained generous ingredients of abuse" lobbed at the Indian community, which in its apparent anti-PNM stance

[23] Kirk Meighoo, *Politics in a Half Made Society: Trinidad and Tobago 1925-2001* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2003), 44.

[24] Quoted in Daurius Figueira, *Simbhoonath Capildeo: Lion of the Legislative Council, Father of Hindu Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago* (Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2003), 236.

"represented the greatest danger facing the country."[25] Williams was unapologetic about his choice of words, yet they have certainly lived to haunt the PNM ever since. In the evaluation of one recent commentator, "the phrase ['recalcitrant and hostile minority'] has become a virtual get out of jail free card for members of the Indian community hellbent on an ethnocentric agenda."[26]

Perhaps to ease tensions, Kamaluddin Mohammed, an Indian member of the PNM (and brother of Sham Mohammed discussed in the previous chapter), promoted "interracial solidarity" in a campaign speech in 1960, urging "all religious groups should make a drive to educate their members with a view to preparing them for complete integration in our cosmopolitan society."[27] "Solidarity" and "integration," however, were exactly what Indo-Trinidadians feared; in the minds of many, it was code for miscegenation, religious conversion, and cultural homogenization. The debate grew so fierce that Hindu businessman Hari Persad Singh published a number of anti-nationalist pamphlets advocating drastic action to counter Afro-Trinidadian hegemony. In a pamphlet titled *Hour of Decision*, Singh's frustration is evident as he suggests that racist policies negatively affecting Indians provided "no alternative than to demand partition of the country into Negro and Indian states."[28] Thankfully, this demand was never met.

---

[25] Quoted in Scott B. MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago: Democracy and Development in the Caribbean* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1986), 119.

[26] The Pantomime, "So... About That Recalcitrant and Hostile Minority...," *The Eternal Pantomime: One Woman's Take on the Politics and Culture of Trinidad and Tobago*, August 27, 2012, http://eternalpantomime.com/2012/08/27/so-about-that-recalcitrant-and-hostile-minority/.

[27] Kamaluddin Mohammed, *Unifying Our Cosmopolitan Community: A Speech on Interracial Solidarity* (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad: P.N.M. Pub. Co., 1960), 2.

[28] H. P. Singh, *Hour of Decision* (San Juan, Trinidad: Vedic Enterprises, n.d.), 10.

Echoes of mid-century tensions are clearly evident in the racially charged politics of the 1970s as mentioned in chapter five, and they certainly show no sign of going away. In 1995, Basdeo Panday was elected the nation's first Indo-Trinidadian prime minister, and in 2010, Kamla Persad-Bissessar became the second Indo-Trinidadian

Figure 6-2. Oceanic and maritime imagery of Indian presence in Trinidad and Tobago. A) Indian arrival monument depicting a ship with an Indian family inside (note the garlands of flowers placed upon the ship and its occupants reflecting similar treatment of murtis of Hindu deities and portraits of revered ancestors), Cedros, Trinidad, August 2012; B) cover of a children's coloring book; C) a model of the ship that brought the first Indian immigrants to Trinidad (note the black plastic emblazoned with the words "kala pani" that supports the ship), Maha Sabha Indian Caribbean Museum, Carapichaima, Trinidad, August 2012; D) advertisement for Indian Arrival Day festivities in south Florida.

and first female prime minister. In both cases, anxieties about Indian infiltration into the highest ranks of government were expressed in various public forums. More recently, Hilton Sandy, a Tobago PNM representative, allegedly warned a group of supporters in early 2013 that voting for the People's Partnership (the coalition headed by Persad-Bissessar) would result in a "Calcutta ship" invading Tobago:

> That ship is waiting to sail to Tobago; they are waiting to get the results of this election, if you bring the wrong results, Calcutta ship is coming down for you! You must stop that ship![29]

Sandy's evocation of a "Calcutta ship" invading Tobago draws upon a symbolically important image of Indian presence in Trinidad, that of the Indian voyage across the *kala pani* (black water) from India to the Caribbean (figure 6-2). While Indo-Trinidadians evoke this image as a touchstone of their Indian heritage, Sandy turns this notion on its head, appropriating the ship as an ominous emblem of invasion, infiltration, and creeping hegemony.

Stacy-Ann Wilson characterizes racial politics in Trinidad and Tobago in self-sustaining terms. "Political elites" at the state level co-opt "the fears and prejudices of the electorate," she suggests, "as part of their strategy for regime survival and control."[30] As discussed above, the seminal rift between Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians began with colonial elites' imposed racial stereotypes. By the rise of party politics in the mid-1900s, these stereotypes had become normative categorizations among average Trinidadians. In Wilson's estimation:

---

[29] "TOP Accuses Opponents of Waging Race War," *Trinidad Express* (Trinidad and Tobago, January 6, 2013).

[30] Stacy-Ann Wilson, *Politics of Identity in Small Plural Societies: Guyana, the Fiji Islands, and Trinidad and Tobago* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 151.

> Cultural contestation—that is, competition between Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians for equal recognition and respect—is ultimately what fuels ethnopolitics and the electorates' adherents to ethnopolitical dialogue in Trinidad and Tobago. Therefore, it is not simply a matter of material benefits and political power, but of symbolic benefits and issues of respect and dignity.

The post-independence era has been marked by Indo-Trinidadians seeking respect for their needs and wants by, as Khan points out, "press[ing] the state for recognition and opportunity on the basis of an ethnocultural distinctiveness that resonates alterity in a kind of Catch 22."[31] From a hegemonic perspective, to be "Indian" necessarily falls outside of the Creole mainstream. Yet, to become "Creole," that is to be fully accepted, one must cease to be "Indian."

Music and Nation

Unlike early New World nationalist movements in which landed classes sought to break ties, largely over economic reasons, with European metropoles,[32] a general feature of mid-20th-century nationalisms in the Caribbean was a culturally aware and politically assertive middle class desire to define an indigenous national identity dialectically opposed to that of a ruling class whose cultural roots lay elsewhere. Music often played a central role in nationalizing a new sense of rooted identity.[33] Numerous commentators have shown how, in the Caribbean region especially, re-definitions of nation relied heavily upon recovered or reinvented Afro-Caribbean idioms, especially music and dance, in the absence of easily identifiable indigenous practices.[34] In turn,

[31] Khan, "Creolization," 243.

[32] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, chapter 4.

[33] Thomas Turino, "Nationalism and Latin American Music: Selected Case Studies and Theoretical Considerations," *Latin American Music Review* 24, no. 2 (2003): 169–209.

[34] See, for example, Paul Austerlitz, *Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997); Averill, *A Day for the Hunter*; Robin D. Moore, *Nationalizing Blackness:*

the nationalist sentiment stirred by the reification of such forms played a significant role in validating self-rule. This was certainly the case in Trinidad and Tobago as the PNM prepared for independence in the early 1960s. Steumpfle suggests, for example, the "celebration of local folk culture was part of an effort by the African and colored middle class to define a Trinidadian cultural identity which in turn could help justify claims for political autonomy."[35] In other words, as representatives of a dominant culture group, the PNM linked Afro-Trinidadian culture with national culture and thereby marginalized Indo-Trinidadian cultural expression, an equation that Indo-Trinidadian stakeholders have been battling ever since. In particular, Williams and the PNM identified Carnival, calypso, and steel pan as symbols of the burgeoning nation. In the following pages, I discuss how pan in particular rose to prominence as Trinidad and Tobago's national instrument.

Steel Pan and Trinidadian Nationalism

In the late 1920s, a small but influential middle-class Trinidadian intelligentsia urged a break from metropolitan cultural models, especially in the arts.[36] Many of these thinkers belonged to The Maverick Club, a reading group of educated Afro-Trinidadians who had a common interest in literature, art, and music. C. L. R. James later recalled the impact of his membership in the Club:

> It came into existence in Trinidad after World War I. People said that Negroes could not organise anything. The Maverick Club consisted solidly of Negores… It is part of the history of nationalism in Trinidad. I ought to know. I was just from Queen's Royal College and I was familiar with Wordsworth, Keats, Dickens and

Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940 (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).

[35] Stuempfle, *The Steelband Movement*, 122.

[36] Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad?*, 194–195.

> Thackeray, Flaubert, and Victor Hugo. I had some knowledge of English politics. But in the Maverick Club… others were reading W. E. B. Du Bois, they read an American Negro magazine called *The Crisis.* They were familiar with the Negro Question in the United States. About all this I knew nothing. They were not militant, but the intellectual atmosphere and the very existence of the club was a symbol of things to come.[37]

The group founded a literary magazine edited by Alfred Mendes called *Trinidad*. It was published only twice, once at Christmas 1929 and again at Easter 1930. Two of James' earliest short stories, "Triumph" and "Turner's Prosperity," appeared in this magazine. Typical of the works published in *Trinidad*, these stories were set in working-class neighborhoods and featured narratives that centered on the hard-won successes and failures of working-class Afro-Trinidadians, plots that starkly contrasted with the middle-class experience of the Club's membership.

Having recently returned to Trinidad after studying journalism at City College of New York, Albert Gomes befriended the Club and helped the group publish a new magazine called *The Beacon* in March 1931.[38] As editor, Gomes published twenty-eight issues over the next three years featuring stories that reflected its authors' left-leaning, anticolonial ideology and earned *The Beacon* a reputation as an anti-establishment magazine.[39] *The Beacon* featured a variety of literature including news, fiction, reviews, and commentary. Trinidadian intellectuals of all ethnic backgrounds gravitated toward *The Beacon* forming a loose organization that scholars would later call the Beacon Group. Unlike the Maverick Club, the Beacon Group was multiracial and coalesced

[37] C. L. R. James, "Without Malice," *The Nation* (Trinidad and Tobago, February 28, 1959).

[38] Reinhard W. Sander, "Alfred H. Mendes," in *Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, ed. Daryl Cumber Dance (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1986), 319.

[39] Ibid.

around the common experience of opposition to colonialism. Influenced in no small way by the *négritude* movement, *Trinidad* and *The Beacon*, however short-lived, allowed a space for testing then-radical notions of Trinidadian national identity built upon a rejection of metropolitan hegemony yet paradoxically dependent upon colonial power structures—parliamentary government, the banking system, education, etc.—to achieve independence.

As early as emancipation in the 1830s, whites had already reluctantly relinquished creative control of Carnival to the masses. Since that time, Afro-Trinidadians shaped festivities in their own ways, importantly giving rise to two of Trinidad's most important cultural identifiers outside of Carnival itself, namely calypso and steel pan. Calypso emerged as a distinct carnival song genre around the turn of the twentieth century, with steel pan developing in close contact with it, first as an accompaniment for singing and later emerging as an ensemble of pans in the 1930s whose core repertoire still today includes arranged instrumental versions of popular calypsos. Steel pan's origin story is well known among Trinidadians and often recited in abbreviated and stylized forms at national events, its history drawn upon to evoke a sense of collective identity and shared history.

Figure 6-3. Tenor steel pan. Photo by Debangsu Sengupta.

Figure 6-4. Sagicor Exodus Steel Orchestra rehearsing in their panyard. St. Augustine, Trinidad. February 2009. Photo by Georgia Popplewell.

The main points of steel pan's story of invention and emergence are as follows:[40] With restrictions on drumming among Afro-Trinidadians in the 1880s, revelers were forced to turn to alternative materials to make music. First, drummers took up bamboo tubes of various lengths, stamping them on the ground with one hand and tapping out rhythms on the tubes' sides with a stick in the other hand. Hierarchically, large tubes approximated rhythms of lower-pitched drums while small tubes approximated the lead or "cutter" role as alluded to in chapter two. This ensemble of bamboo stamping tubes came to be known as tamboo bamboo in reference to the Creole word *tambu*, meaning "drum" (from French "tambour"). Colonial authorities, however, frowned upon tamboo bamboo for many of the same reasons drums were banned: the music was offensive to elites' ears and moreover served as a site of Afro-Trinidadian solidarity. Furthermore, bamboo tubes were easily repurposed as weapons during frequent clashes between Carnival bands of this period. For these reasons, authorities cracked down upon tamboo bamboo just as they had upon its skin-drum forebears. During long periods of revelry, moreover, bamboo instruments would eventually disintegrate under the constant pressure of repeated stamping. Some musicians therefore began taking up discarded bits of metal—paint cans, dustbins, biscuit tins, etc.—to replace their broken tubes. Musicians began to notice that pounding upon metal containers produced concave indentions whose relative pitches could be determined with strategic tuning. By the 1930s, tamboo bamboo was largely displaced by bands of metal instruments—by that time made almost exclusively from oil drums and large biscuit tins—organized

[40] The narrative in this paragraph is distilled from my own discussions with Trinidadian musicians, countless reports in the popular press and news media, and summaries of relevant points in the following: Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge*; Stuempfle, *The Steelband Movement*.

around the tamboo bamboo model with its stratified instrumental layers. With successive refinements throughout the twentieth century, steel orchestras emerged capable of playing all genres of music and forming a profoundly important part of the soundscape of Trinidad and Tobago. As a testament to the popularity and uniqueness of this Trinidadian invention, steelbands are common throughout the world where non-West Indians have organized talented orchestras. Therefore, the steelband was born out of creative necessity catalyzed by colonial oppression that forced Afro-Trinidadian musicians away from skin drums to tamboo bamboo and eventually to the invention of the steel pan whose sound has mesmerized the world.

Gomes in particular was perhaps the earliest public champion of the nascent steelband movement. In it, he saw the potential to rally Trinidadians around an expression they could call their own. Perhaps frustrated with elitist characterizations of steel pan as mere "can beating," [41] Gomes opined in a 1946 *Sunday Guardian* column, "Why is the average, educated Trinidadian such a prissy milksop as regards all forms of self-expression that are indigenous to his native land?"[42] He elaborated:

> Most of the critics of the steel orchestra miss the real point. What is important is not whether the steel orchestra offends the ear, edifies or outrages good taste. Such considerations are irrelevant. It is as a social phenomenon that the steel orchestra must be viewed—and with its own, natural context. Is it any argument against the rather bizarre method of self-expression to insist that its votaries are drawn from the dregs of the social milieu? So what if they are?[43]

[41] Stuempfle, *The Steelband Movement*, 65; 120.

[42] Quoted in ibid., 80.

[43] Ibid.

Figure 6-5. “A Tribute to the Steelband Movement.” A monument erected by the Town Beautification Committee of San Fernando Borough Council in December 1977. San Fernando, Trinidad. Photo by Eric Mannweiler.

Gomes asks detractors to examine steel pan on its own merits, not to “expect apples from mango trees.”[44] Moreover, he and other likeminded proponents of pan importantly situated the steelband as an art form, an embryonic one to be sure, but an art form nonetheless. In the words of one advocate, “if we denounce it as an abomination we deny ourselves an expression of art.”[45] Part of both the elites’ and the public’s negative view of pan came from pan’s association with gang-like, unemployed ruffians. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, bands often clashed with each other, during Carnival

[44] Ibid.

[45] Ibid., 82.

especially though the violence was ever present throughout the year.[46] With the support of Gomes and other public figures, bandsmen formed the Steel Band Association in the early 1950s, an organization aimed at mitigating violence and advocating for the needs of the emerging steelband movement.

As they rose to prominence in the mid-1950s, Williams and the PNM latched onto Carnival, calypso, and pan as symbols of the burgeoning nation. One strategy in doing so was the nationalization of Carnival through the authority of the newly created Carnival Development Committee (CDC), which was charged with overseeing, promoting, and subsidizing Carnival arts.[47] By 1959, the CDC had assumed control over the previously commercially sponsored Carnival Queen competition and established, among other promotional programs, regional and national calypso and steel pan competitions. The prize money from these contests catalyzed continued development in these genres while simultaneously greasing the palms of PNM supporters across the country. Williams also took advantage of formal and informal communication networks, like the Steel Band Association, that pan players had forged for themselves. Like politicians before him, Williams engaged steelbands for political support, but did so in a much more systematic way. The PNM gave preferential status to steel pan musicians in terms of jobs and housing and routinely hired bands for political events.[48] This political patronage spurred innovation and experimentation, allowing for the refinement and growth of the steel pan. In turn, bandsmen, their families, and their audiences gave their

[46] Ibid., 87–89.

[47] Ibid., 120; Guilbault, *Governing Sound*, 48.

[48] Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge*, 77.

support to Williams and the PNM. Moreover, the PNM's support led to opportunities for pan performance outside of Carnival, especially for political rallies and nationally observed holidays and other events, thereby linking steel pan with celebrations that highlighted national unity. This kind of state-subsidy continues today.

Williams died in 1981, and in 1986, the PNM was ousted for the first time in thirty years by the National Alliance for Reconstruction, a coalition party led by A.N.R. Robinson. By the late 1980s, however, the economic situation was dire, and many began to lose faith in Robinson's leadership. In July 1990, in the midst of this economic and political strife, the radical Muslim organization Jamaat al Muslimeen staged a *coup d'état*, taking control of Trinidad and Tobago Television (the only broadcast station at the time) and Red House, home to Trinidad and Tobago's Parliament where for six days its members were held hostage.[49] Meanwhile, widespread looting and violence broke out across Port of Spain leaving at least twenty-two dead and many more wounded. The situation ended in the Jamaat Al Muslimeen's surrender though none in the group was prosecuted thanks to a promise of amnesty. In the wake of the coup, the public was on edge and the already shaky government continued its downward spiral. New elections were called for the following year, and the PNM once again regained control, this time under the leadership of Prime Minister Patrick Manning. In part to reset

[49] For a fascinating account and analysis of the state of the country during and after the coup, see Kevin K. Birth, *Bacchanalian Sentiments: Musical Experiences and Political Counterpoints in Trinidad* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 157–167.

national confidence in the wake of recent events, Manning declared steel pan Trinidad and Tobago's national instrument in his Independence Day address in 1992.[50]

Just as Williams framed Carnival as a unique expression of national culture in the 1950s, so too did Manning evoke an image of national cooperation as exemplified in the ingenuity and creativity inherent in the history and practice of steel pan performance:

> Other societies often use their creativity to make weapons of destruction. It is a happy circumstance that we have used ours to make music. And while it is true in this country we play many kinds of music, the steelpan as a musical instrument is the one which we ourselves invented. In declaring that the steelpan is our national music instrument we direct the nation's attention to a path of development which we neglect at our own peril. For unless we are prepared to look to creativity and invention in our search for national problem solving devices we shall bequeath a legacy of diminishment for which generations to come will never forget us.[51]

Manning's decree affirmed what had been taken for granted unofficially by the state as evidenced by decades of subsidies for pan education, performances at home and abroad, and national competition. Tellingly, however, neither Manning nor any member of government debated the issue before Parliament and still today the instrument's official status remains only by virtue of this prime ministerial decree; there is no Parliamentary legislation to back it up. If the issue had been raised in Parliament, the country's noisy stakeholders of culture surely would have stymied productive debate. True to form, their vehemence commenced in earnest in Trinidad and Tobago's daily newspapers in the days and weeks after Manning's proclamation.[52]

---

[50] Daina Nathaniel, "Finding an 'Equal' Place: How the Designation of the Steelpan as the National Instrument Heightened Identity Relations in Trinidad and Tobago" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Florida State University, 2006), 103–104.

[51] Quoted in Ibid., 92.

[52] Ibid., 92–93.

The promotion of steel pan as a national instrument was part and parcel of a nationalist project that, as we shall see below, continues its transformative processes still today. State support of the development and refinement of pan deeply involved a "reformist fusion of local, non-cosmopolitan instruments, sounds and genres within a largely cosmopolitan aesthetic, stylistic, and contextual frame."[53] Through the "political technology"[54] of Carnival, pan became enmeshed with identifications of Trinidadian nationhood. Moreover, long-term state attention—and especially state subsidies—resulted in the refining of the steelband into a cosmopolitan steel orchestra whose sustained popularity in "trans-state contexts" lend greater import to its status as a national symbol.[55]

The National Instrument Debate

While numerous commentators praised pan's elevation to national instrument, others cited the move as yet another act of unequal representation. Always an outspoken critic of the state, Secretary General of the SDMS Satnarine Maharaj (son-in-law and successor of SDMS founder Bhadase Maraj) railed against Manning: "How can we talk of an equal place for every creed and race and of unity in cultural diversity when the State is imposing a special musical interest on us?"[56] Maharaj went on to suggest that dholak and tassa, both ubiquitous Indo-Trinidadian instruments, were good candidates for elevation to national instrument status along with pan. In practically the

[53] Turino, "Nationalism and Latin American Music," 175.

[54] Guilbault, *Governing Sound*, 40.

[55] Turino, "Nationalism and Latin American Music," 199.

[56] Quoted in Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge*, 146.

same breath, however, Maharaj revealed a certain naivety about tassa as he claimed it "is used in Carnival more than even steelpan."[57] Whereas tassa bands have routinely performed in Carnival both as individual groups and as attachments to steelband engine rooms for decades, Carnival is certainly a pan-dominated, or at least historically pan-associated, musical space. Therefore Maharaj's comments clearly depart from reality. Nonetheless, his words should not be wholly dismissed as simplistic race-based pretentiousness, for such a characterization speaks to a desire on the part of stakeholders to re-insert markers of Indo-Trinidadian-ness into the historico-nationalist narrative of Trinidad and Tobago, one in which they have been consistently left behind.

This strategy has been a common trope for Indo-Trinidadians as they have struggled to maintain traditional values and customs while being expected to assimilate into contemporary creole society. As early as 1945, for example, Timothy Roodal, then an elected member of the colonial Legislative Council, suggested that indentured Indians came "to the rescue the [sugar] industry" and therefore "the stabilization of the [colony]," which at the time was suffering economically for a number of reasons, not least of which was emancipation.[58] Though the indenture system may indeed have had the effect of improving the economic situation, it is unlikely that Indians emigrated with intentions of saving the colonial economy. Despite their motivations, Indians were essentially pawns in a plantocratic scheme of wage control, a scheme that certainly helped make the plantation economy profitable after emancipation, at least for a short while. Roodal's tone therefore is perhaps a bit too self-congratulatory.

---

[57] Ibid.

[58] Quoted in Ramesar, "Recurrent Issues Concerning Immigrants to Trinidad," 136.

Yet, the narrative of Indians as saviors of Trinidad and Tobago stubbornly persists. Echoes of this trope are evident in a 2009 *Newsday* article rehashing the history of Indian Arrival Day, the national holiday commemorating the landing of the first shipload of Indians on May 30, 1845:

> The Sunday Newsday spoke with several religious leaders and scholars who looked at why East Indians were brought to these shores, their contributions to Trinidad and Tobago, their struggles, culture and beliefs.
>
> It was agreed that the East Indians were brought to rescue [Trinidad and Tobago's] dying sugar industry, but even before the saving grace of the indentured labourers, there were the Chinese, Portuguese and Syrians. However, they were unable to withstand the long hours spent under the scorching sun or life within the barracks where they were delegated to live.[59]

In this passage, not only is the trope of Indians-as-saviors faithfully deployed, it is augmented and justified by suggesting Indians' superiority over other ethnic groups who were implicitly too fragile for work in the canefields. The comparison is at best misleading. In reality, the trade in Chinese laborers ended around the same time sugar production was expanding in Trinidad, therefore significant numbers of Chinese could not be procured.[60] From 1852 until 1870, the year when legal exports of Chinese workers to the region were suspended, only about 24,000 Chinese entered the entire Caribbean, excluding Cuba.[61] The Portuguese, mostly emigrating from Madeira, were already decimated by famine and disease before their indenture, which likely accounts for their greater mortality.[62] Moreover, they made up a relatively small number of the

[59] Carol Matroo, "East Indians in Trinidad--Struggle and Survival," *Trinidad and Tobago Newsday* (Trinidad and Tobago, May 24, 2009).

[60] Northrup, *Indentured Labor*, 58.

[61] Ibid., 61.

[62] Ibid., 121.

overall indentured workforce in Trinidad. Of all Caribbean destinations, Guyana received the greatest number of Portuguese immigrants where by virtue of their light skin they formed an entrepreneurial buffer class between the elites and laboring masses.[63] The "Syrians" hailed from the region today occupied by Syria and Lebanon and for the most part did not come to Trinidad and Tobago as indentured workers. Most were Christians who fled oppression in their homelands beginning in the late 19th century, and like the light-skinned Portuguese, they more easily assimilated into the upper echelons of society and subsequently established profitable international trading networks.[64] As such, relatively few chose to work in the canefields.

As discussed below, steel pan was the target of a similarly revisionist history as early as the 1980s. Stories of pan often frame its emergence as a coalescence of European and African elements, valorizing the efforts of young, black, lower-class pioneers like Winston "Spree" Simon and Ellie Manette among many others. Indo-Trinidadians are rarely mentioned as associated with these early experiments or later refinements until the 1970s when Jit Samaroo emerged as both a talented pannist and even more talented arranger; his success as arranger for Renegades steelband has made him a living legend and a celebrity in pan circles the world over.[65] Moreover, pan today is a site of inclusion for all sectors of Trinidadian society, and players from around the world, especially North America and Japan, augment steel bands during Carnival

[63] Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar*, 17.

[64] John O. Voll, "Muslims in the Caribbean: Ethnic Sojourners and Citizens," in *Muslim Minorities in the West: Visible and Invisible* (Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002), 267.

[65] Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge*, 167–171.

season. Nonetheless, and contrary to what official state estimations indicate,[66] Indo-Trinidadian participation in pan performance has never been equal to that of Afro-Trinidadians. By comparison, Afro-Trinidadian participation in tassa performance has never been equal to that of Indo-Trinidadians. While Afro-Trinidadians take part in drumming for Hosay, relatively few regularly participate in tassa performance at weddings and other events.

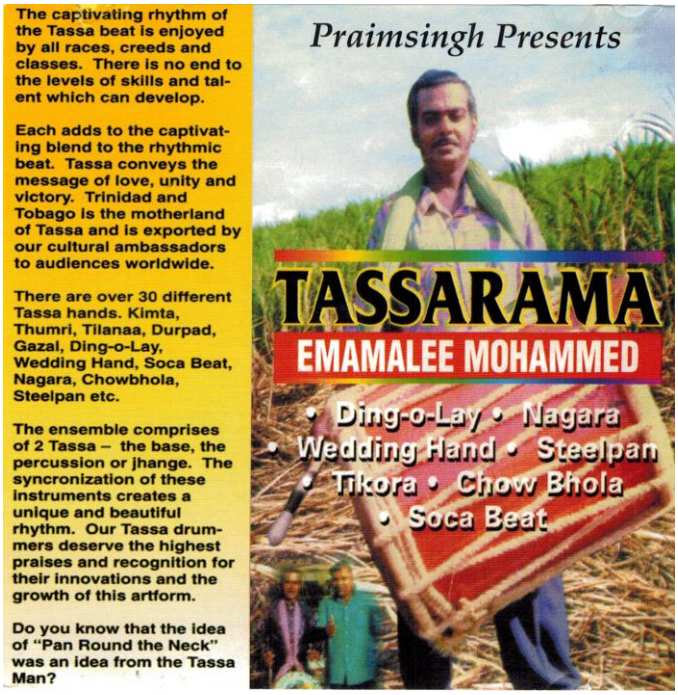


Figure 6-6. The cover of Emamalee's Mohammed's *Tassarama.*

During my fieldwork in 2007, tassa drummers too young to have first-hand knowledge of pan's early days routinely related to me that the first pan builders got their ideas from tassa drummers. A statement to this effect is also prominently featured on the cover of Emamalee Mohammed's *Tassarama* CD (figure 6-6). Produced by Ajeet Praimsingh, an Indo-Caribbean entertainment promoter and owner of two popular

[66] William Aho, "Steelband Music in Trinidad and Tobago," *Latin American Music Review* 8, no. 1 (1987): 49.

Indian-oriented retail stores in Trinidad, the cover features a photo of Mohammed with a bass around his neck standing in a canefield. To his left is a block of text describing tassa's place in Trinidad, which is concluded with the pointed question: "Do you now that the idea of 'Pan Round the Neck'[67] was an idea from the Tassa Man?" Despite their prevalence, these kinds of claims were certainly incongruous to what I thought I knew about pan.

Then, I happened upon research by anthropologist Kumar Mahabir (mentioned in the opening of chapter one) who has been at the forefront of a particularly positive, revisionist history of Indian presence in the Caribbean. Most relevant at present is his manuscript titled *The Influence of the Tassa on the Making of the Steelband* in which he draws upon personally collected oral histories, newspaper accounts, and other sources that point to a greater participation by Indo-Trinidadians in the early years of pan than has conventionally been reported. His argument proceeds from the following observation:

> [A] 1984 announcement that there would be a launching of a J'ouvert Band in Port-of-Spain with music supplied by Fireflight, Pan Vibes and St James Tassa Drummers… is more symbolic than new… The anthropologist would have seen syncretism of two cultural streams in one procession; the common man would have been imaginatively awakened to see the similarities of the two sticks, and the postures of the drummers with their pan and tassa thongs around their neck, and wonder if one could not have possibly influenced the other in its creation.[68]

Mahabir essentially argues for a common ancestry between tassa and pan, the first inkling of which is evidenced by players using two sticks to beat a percussion instrument

[67] The oldest style of steelband so-called because pans are suspended around the players' necks to facilitate mobility.

[68] Mahabir, "The Influence of Tassa," 8.

strung around the neck. He goes on to suggest the tempering of pans over a flame was apparently inspired by fires used to raise the pitch of tassa drums. Even the idea to use large metal containers for pans was stimulated by tassa builders who used a metal biscuit container as the shell of the bass. For Mahabir, all this adds up to evidence for tassa's vital importance in the history of steel pan.

However, suspending a drum around the neck and beating it with sticks is certainly not an idea original to tassa. Neither is employing heat to affect pitch or using discarded metal containers as percussion instruments. As such, I therefore agree with Dudley that Mahabir's claims are difficult to accept.[69] Nonetheless, this notion has found its way into a number of unlikely academic sources. In his astute history of the Hosay Massacre, Kelvin Singh cites Mahabir to suggest that "cultural collaboration rather than cultural competition resulted in that remarkable cross-cultural invention, the steel-pan, which was evidently inspired by the tassa drum."[70] So too does Steumpfle site Mahabir, going so far as to claim tassa as a model for steelbands on par with tamboo bamboo and European-style marching bands.[71] Moreover, it is also likely that Mahabir's ideas account for similar claims made on the cover of *Tassarama* and by the drummers I talked to as described above. No matter the accuracy of Mahabir's claims, however, the widespread acceptance of them indicates a desire on the part of Indo-Trinidadians to claim pan's history, to situate the impetus for pan's development not on the innovations of Afro-Trinidadian pan builders alone, but also within the traditions of the Indian

[69] Dudley, *Music from Behind the Bridge*, 145n.

[70] Kelvin Singh, *Bloodstained Tombs: The Muharram Massacre 1884* (London: Macmillian Caribbean, 1988), 32.

[71] Stuempfle, *The Steelband Movement*, 40.

community, thus undermining the accepted Afro-European narrative of the instrument. By inserting themselves into this narrative, Mahabir and others who promote his claims argue not only for a reconsideration of the history of pan, but also the history of Trinidad and Tobago itself, one that equally considers their role in shaping the country's most visible national symbol.

The implications of this notion were heightened when Mahabir along with Vijay Ramalal-Rai (the founder and president of the Tassa Association of Trinidad and Tobago as discussed in chapter five) reinvigorated the national instrument debate when they launched a campaign to make tassa Trinidad and Tobago's co-national instrument alongside pan. Though, as mentioned above, Maharaj had passingly proposed tassa as co-national instrument shortly after Manning's 1992 pronouncement, Mahabir and Ramlal-Rai's efforts were more systematic and indeed widely publicized with a weeklong exhibit detailing the history of tassa at the National Museum in May 2005. An *Express* story with the headline "Call for a Second National Instrument" described the event while directly quoting Mahabir's manuscript at length.[72] The article also reported that meetings with representatives of the Culture Ministry and Prime Minister Manning to discuss the elevation of tassa's status had already taken place. Yet, the *Trinidad Guardian* reported in December of the following year that Mahabir and Ramlal-Rai were still waiting for a reply.[73] At the time of this writing, the state has still yet to take action.

As gleaned from my discussion with Ramlal-Rai in 2007 and from various media reports, the main points of their argument at the time highlighted the widespread use of

[72] "Call for a Second National Instrument," *Trinidad Express* (Trinidad and Tobago, June 8, 2005).

[73] Adrian Boodan, "Take Tassa to the Next Level," *Trinidad and Tobago Guardian* (Trinidad and Tobago, December 16, 2006).

the instrument at Hindu weddings, Hosay observances, Carnival, and myriad other contexts. It was also significant that tassa, though originating in India, arrived on the island long before the advent of pan, and like pan, underwent a series of technological modifications to achieve its present form. Mahabir's evidence of tassa's influence upon pan and the performance of tassa by Afro-Trinidadians, especially at Hosay, was mentioned, but not expressly emphasized.

Expectedly, numerous observers disagreed with these criteria. In a post titled "Cheap Politics and Racism Cannot Beat the Steelpan," A. A. Hotep, a commenter on the *Trinidad and Tobago News Blog*, suggested that the push to make tassa a co-national instrument was yet another instance of an apparent tradition of Indo-Trinidadian separatism:

> This call is being made in another political attempt to solidify Indians behind the notion that they are a persecuted group. The dishonest motive behind the call is why I would not even entertain it… Indians were not dragged to these islands as slaves, and as hard as some try, they cannot show proof that Africans, and even the PNM government, systematically persecuted Indians in this country. The fact that Indians are not symbolically represented in several aspects of this country is largely due to their own unwillingness to be a part of aspects of Trinidad and Tobago.[74]

Others countered with a more productive argument that centered on the indigenousness of pan and the foreignness of tassa. Even if tassa had been modified in Trinidad and Tobago, they argued, the fact remained that its origins lay in India while pan, despite its Afro-Caribbean musical aesthetics, had clearly been invented on Trinidadian soil.

During subsequent trips to Trinidad in 2011 and 2012, I found that the argument

[74] A. A. Hotep, "Cheap Politics and Racism Cannot Beat the Steelpan [23 December 2006]," Trinidad and Tobago News Blog, online [accessed 24 April 2008]: <http://www.trinidadandtobagonews.com/blog/?p=146>.

for tassa's national instrument status had received considerable revision. When I visited with Ramlal-Rai again in 2011, we discussed the criteria that made tassa worthy of being a national instrument. Rather than mentioning tassa's Indian origin, its widespread performance in Trinidad and Tobago and its diaspora in North America, or the claim that tassa gave rise to pan, he this time emphasized tassa's very literal indigenousness in direct opposition to the ostensible foreignness of steel pan:

> If you really do a greater analysis of [pan and tassa], you will see that tassa is truly more a national instrument in its totality than pan. Because why? Pan came to this country with oil in it. Our nationals used the empty drums and tuned it to make sounds, so we get different notes coming out of the drums. Tassa on the other hand, from every aspect of it, is a national instrument… The clay to make the shells is Trinidad clay. The skin to make the drums is our animals, our goats, our sheep, or what have you. The sticks are local material. The players are born here… So, every aspect of it is 100%-plus a national instrument compared to the pan… Those metal drums [for pan] were not made here in Trinidad, they were made in some other country.[75]

On August 23, 2012, only a few days away from the celebration of the country's fiftieth independence anniversary, TATT held a public demonstration on Brian Lara Promenade in downtown Port of Spain. Partly to draw positions for the upcoming tassa competition, the occasion featured drummers from around the country holding placards with hand-written slogans in favor of tassa's elevation to national instrument status. In an *Express* article covering the event, Wendell Eversley, vice-president of TATT, recounted the same argument that Ramlal-Rai had related to me more than a year before:

> The drum did not come here as the pan came. (The material used to make the pan) was not made in Trinidad. But when you look at the tassa, it is something that is a product of Trinidad. The goat (skins) from here, the stick, which is made from cane, is from Trinidad. That is why we are calling on the authorities of the day to make this instrument the second national instrument of Trinidad and

[75] Vijay Ramlal-Rai, Interview with author, April 30, 2011.

> Tobago… The pan was imported. Although the pan music was created here, the actual pan was imported. We don't make the steelpan here. We created the steelpan music… The first steelpan came here with oil or gas and we take that and make the pan out of it.[76]

As I talked with drummers in 2011 and 2012, I occasionally encountered some who likewise quoted nearly verbatim the same justification for tassa's elevation to national instrument status.

Though the criteria first used to promote tassa's status as a national instrument had some ground to stand on, the revisions subsequently adopted by TATT to justify tassa's indigenousness are circuitous and unnecessarily complex. Essentially, the argument centers upon the apparent fact that tassa is made from Trinidad itself—the clay, the cane, the animals raised there—while the materials for pan are imported. As discussed in chapter two, however, the clay tassa is virtually obsolete today, largely replaced by nut-and-bolt tassas fashioned from all foreign-made materials. Though the original materials for pans were imported and remained that way for some time, recent innovations have changed that, most importantly the invention of the so-called Genesis Pan (or G-Pan for short), a new generation of pan designed and built from the ground up by Trinidadians in Trinidad and Tobago.[77] When examined in context, therefore, TATT's argument begins to fall apart. Despite this lack of coherence, however, the widespread similarity of opinion among tassa drummers and their similarly abrupt narrative modification between 2005 and 2011 is surely the influence of a certain

[76] Keino Swamber, "Honour Tassa Just Like Pan: Call to Make Drum Second National Instrument," *Trinidad Express* (Trinidad and Tobago, August 24, 2012).

[77] Nestor Sullivan, "Issues Surrounding the Latest Steelpan Development - the G-Pan: An Unfair Advantage for a Few?," *Panonthenet.com*, December 2, 2009, http://www.panonthenet.com/news/2009/dec/gpan-12-2-09.htm.

cohesion among the tassa community thanks especially to the organizational skills of Ramlal-Rai as facilitated via a national forum like TATT. Though it is unfortunate that such a forum is used to disseminate dubious historical and musicological claims, it nonetheless demonstrates new ways that information about tassa is circulated and how this information engages in dialog with society at large and the broader socio-historical narrative of Indo-Trinidadian belonging.

Challenges to pan's singular status as national instrument have expectedly drawn degrees of criticism from many directions. While some commentators have labeled advocates of an Indo-Trinidadian national instrument as purveyors of "roti rhetoric,"[78] others are more sympathetic. Among drummers themselves, there are varying degrees of opinion. Lenny Kumar, for example, refutes the popular TATT line by suggesting that tassa should not be a national instrument. As one of few tassa drummers who have had the opportunity to travel to India, Lenny has seen tasha drumming first hand. This in addition to his family history—he traces his drumming lineage to his India-born great-grandfather—is clear evidence that, despite its "reinvention" in Trinidad, tassa is not all together indigenous to Trinidad:

> Being a tassa drummer, I'd be happy to know that we get recognition, it's a high recognition to get [tassa as] the second national instrument… But with my knowledge, I know it will be impossible to do… One, it's a percussion instrument, so you only play rhythm. An instrument that can play your national anthem should be your national instrument, or even your second… [Tassa] was not created here. It was not invented here; it was *reinvented* here. Those are the two main aspects of it. And when you go deep into it, anybody who does research will know that it can't be. It can be *respected* as a second national instrument, but it can't *be* the second national instrument… If we get the recognition for that, we got to say, "All right, we climbin' the ladder!" But the truth of it, it can't be.[79]

[78] Terry Joseph, "Roti Rhetoric," *Trinidad Express* (Trinidad and Tobago, March 29, 2000).

[79] Lenny Kumar, Interview with author, April 24, 2011.

Perhaps the most vehement refutation of tassa's status as a potential national instrument comes from steel pan stakeholders who see any challenge to pan as unpatriotic. Following the public display by TATT in 2012, Pan Tinbago—the successor of the Steel Band Association and currently the state-subsidized organization that promotes pan and serves as the governing body for a number of pan competitions—issued an official position in response to the issue. The statement is partially transcribed below with formatting and capitalization preserved from the original:

> In order for an instrument to be considered to be a National Musical Instrument, it should be (a) indigenous to the country and (b) musical, i.e. able to play the songs of the country.
>
> We know of no other musical instrument in Trinidad and Tobago that satisfies these two (2) criteria other than THE STEELPAN.
>
> We, therefore, state categorically that THE STEELPAN is the ONLY NATIONAL MUSICAL INSTRUMENT.
>
> That persons should consider and present another instrument to be accepted as a national musical instrument, even as it does not satisfy the criteria betrays a non-acceptance of THE STEELPAN. That the instrument(s) being presented is of perceived and questionable Indian origin, betrays a belief that STEELPAN is African. It also betrays a notion of affirmative action, meaning that if STEELPAN is African, then there must be something Indian. The puerility of this idea does not deserve even our censure.[80]

The tone of Pan Trinbago's statement in many ways reflects Yelvington's characterization of the PNM's vision of national culture, namely in its implications that TATT's position is unpatriotic and racist. Furthermore, the statement betrays a frustration with the "puerility" of race-based assertions of nationalism, a frustration

[80] Pan Trinbago, "The Steelpan - National Instrument of Trinidad & Tobago - Official Statement from Pan Trinbago," *When Steel Talks*, September 12, 2012, http://www.panonthenet.com/news/2012/sep/pantrinbago-steelpan-national-instrument-9-12-2012.htm.

certainly shared by a significant number on both sides of the coin. Tellingly, Pan Trinbago's position suggests that tassa is not indigenous to Trinidad and Tobago and moreover probes tassa's very Indian-ness by claiming it is of "questionable Indian origin." Probably meant to indicate that tassa's roots ultimately lie in Persia rather than India, this barb is likely a re-articulation of academic research conducted by Peter Manuel and others that in abbreviated form is readily available on the Internet. For example, the "tassa" entry in Wikipedia, the first line of which rightly suggests tassa is "presumably of Persian derivation," relies significantly upon Manuel's published research.[81]

Despite early overtures to the contrary, there has yet to be any positive response from the state in reference to tassa's elevated status.[82] This silence is telling of the state's precarious position on the matter: acknowledging tassa as co-national instrument would at once show weakness by giving in to special interests while simultaneously demeaning the symbolism of steel pan. Emblematic of pan's status, Persad-Bissessar presented United States Vice President Joe Biden with the gift of a steel pan upon his recent visit to Trinidad and Tobago for discussions of a proposed Caribbean Community (CARICOM) treaty. Perhaps also emblematic of the penetration of the national instrument debate, comments in an online forum reporting on the Vice President's visit quickly turned away from the treaty negotiations.[83] One post pointedly

[81] "Tassa," *Wikipedia*, accessed May 25, 2013, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tassa.

[82] Carolyn Kissoon, "Tassa Soon a National Instrument," *Trinidad Express* (Trinidad and Tobago, September 18, 2003).

[83] Ria Taitt, "Brutal Talks," *Trinidad Express* (Trinidad and Tobago, May 28, 2013), http://www.trinidadexpress.com/news/BRUTAL----------TALKS-209279891.html.

asked “What is [Satnarine Maharaj] saying ‘bout the pan now Kamla brave [i.e. admitting that pan is a national symbol]?” Another referenced Maharaj’s recent objection that steel pan should not be taught in Hindu schools if funds were not also provided to teach Indian instruments:

> The same STEELPAN that Sat… don’t want in schools cause that is not “their” thing is the same pan that captured Biden’s imagination!!!!! That to me was one of the most profound aspects of his visit[.] [T]he stone that the builder rejected!!! [I]f that is not a wake up call to all those who don[‘]t know we are TRINIDADIANS FIRST[,] not Indians and Africans.

Summary: Multiculturalism, Fusion, and National Belonging

More than simply provide justification for political autonomy, the reification of neo-African art forms in post-independence Trinidad and Tobago emphasized Afro-Trinidadian indigenousness in direct counterpoint to others’ foreignness. This of course is particularly problematic for Indo-Trinidadians who are perceived to express more distinct continuity with Indian culture than integration with the Afro-European creole mainstream.[84] Given this expression of difference, Indo-Trinidadians have been largely excluded from participating in the inscription of West Indian identity in any more than a “token” way.[85] Therefore, one reason that the push for tassa’s official status has been received negatively has much to do with its historical absence from celebrations of national import. Where steel pan came of age through repeated association with nationally significant performance contexts including Carnival and government-subsidized festivals and competitions, tassa has until very recently been confined to the Indo-Trinidadian community where it has remained an “Indian thing.”

---

[84] Stuempfle, *The Steelband Movement*, 122–123.

[85] Christopher Laird, “Pat Bishop,” *Eye to Eye: Ways of Seeing* (CaribbeanTales Worldwide Distribution, 2010).

Deep political antagonism divided largely along racial lines has had lasting effects. For Afro-Trinidadian stakeholders, this division is still today frequently expressed in terms similar to those of Williams and the PNM in the 1950s, namely frustration with Indian non-assimilation. Meanwhile, Indo-Trinidadian stakeholders, especially the outspoken Satnarine Maharaj and his SDMS compatriots, have consistently decried what they see as "cultural terrorism" against non-Afro-Trinidadians.[86] However warranted bids for greater Indo-Trinidadian inclusion may be, the public at large—inclusive of Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians, among others—frequently perceive these kinds of arguments, often expressed in convoluted ways, as little more than petty antagonism.

In recent decades, the socio-political divisions that give rise to these kinds of contestations of nationality have prompted greater attention by the state and indeed sparked a corrective course that defines a concept of nation in reference to the ideal, if not the mythology, of racial accord. Such a rhetoric of inclusion, couched in the post-colonial frame of multiculturalism, is predicated upon "a premise of collective individuality"[87] comprising a "composite culture"[88] of distinct, yet mixed ethnic components rather than a thorough and homogenous cultural fusion that the concept of creolization has traditionally implied. The state often draws upon music and musical instruments as emblems of this multiculturalism. For example, in the summer of 2012, the year of Trinidad and Tobago's fiftieth anniversary of independence, the government

[86] D. Parsuram Maharaj, *Clash of Cultures: The Indian-African Competition in Trinidad* (Arima, Trinidad: The Indian Free Press, 2002), 21.

[87] Khan, "Creolization," 244.

[88] Maharaj, *Clash of Cultures: The Indian-African Competition in Trinidad*, 21.

distributed banners and posters featuring numerous national slogans to be displayed in public areas throughout the country. One rather ubiquitous banner featured images of pan, tassa, an African drum (like that used for kalenda drumming), a *cuatro* (representing *parang*, a Spanish-language song genre cognate with Hispanic *parranda* and popular during Christmas and Easter), and European brass instruments. These images were set against the often-quoted line from the national anthem: “here every creed and race find an equal place” (figure 6-7). These banners clearly intended to evoke the associative qualities of the instruments’ respective musical genres and more importantly the constituent ethnic groups with which each genre is popularly associated. The juxtaposition of images and text therefore suggest a certain unity in diversity, here deployed within the frame of an evocation of musical practice.

Figure 6-7. Banner promoting Trinidad and Tobago's fiftieth year of independence. This was photographed hanging in a Port of Spain department store, though many similar banners were distributed throughout the country. August 2012.

In her 2010 Indian Arrival Day address, Prime Minister Persad-Bissessar more concretely links notions of musical mixing with cultural mixing while alluding to her administration's position on multiculturalism:

> We've had too much quarreling for culture space. Instead, we should be inviting each other into the cultural space we each occupy. The physical barriers and the psychological boundaries between the cultures must be removed through the promotion of both uniqueness as well as similarities of each culture… We can never develop a nation, we will never unite a society, we will never bring to an end perceptions of discrimination, until we courageously put in place a policy frame that makes every group feel secure, appreciated, celebrated, and that their contributions are recognized to nation building… [We] have seen the creativity of our people in the way they have merged aspects of our cultural traditions. The fusion of the rhythm of the tassa and African drums symbolizes the energy of our people when they come together.[89]

Perhaps indicating the depth with which musical metaphors inform Trinidadian identities, Persad-Bissessar here evokes the notion of musical fusion as a metaphor for the state's ideal of multiculturalism. It is unclear, however, which particular fusions of tassa and African drums Persad-Bissessar is referring to. While these kinds of collaborations are not unheard of, they are certainly few and far between and quite often orchestrated by state-sponsored organizations in an explicit effort to showcase musical and therefore cultural mixing (figure 6-8). In this way, musical fusion becomes a mechanism of the state that emphasizes multicultural policy. These state-sponsored "performance projects"[90] may be rightly read as artificial concoctions that propagandize the state's multicultural ideals. Placing the impetus for fusion squarely on the state,

[89] "PM Persad-Bissessar's Indian Arrival Day Address," YouTube video, 1:55, posted by "CNC3Television," June 1, 2010, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mW2jtkJ7Ygc.

[90] Ramnarine, *Beautiful Cosmos*, 107.

however, denies the kind of individual agency implied both by a classic understanding of creolization and more recent multicultural discourse.

A

B

Figure 6-8. Music and dance performances at the launch of Patriotism Week 2013 organized by the Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration. A) T&T

Sweet Tassa performs alongside a group of African drummers, B) a scene from Shiv Shakti Dancers and Malick Folk Performers' combined choreography. Photos from the Ministry's Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/ministryofdiversitytt

There are indeed many instances of grassroots Afro/Indo musical fusions. As a prime example, chutney-soca is often hailed as the epitome of Indo- and Afro-Trinidadian musicultural mixing with its grounding in Indo-Trinidadian chutney deployed within the aesthetics of Afro-Trinidadian soca. However, performers and audiences associated with chutney-soca are overwhelmingly Indo-Trinidadian, and the content of chutney-soca songs is undoubtedly most relevant to Indo-Trinidadian music consumers. Therefore, chutney-soca comes into view as a musicultural fusion, but one that operates largely on Indo-Trinidadian terms. Similarly, numerous steelbands have collaborated with tassa bands over the years, especially when performing arrangements of calypsos with Indian or *dougla* (a local term for the biogenetic mixture of African and Indian) themes. More often than not, however, tassa largely functions as an addition to the steelband rather than an integral part of the musical texture. Moreover, individual musicians often organize performance projects of their own aimed to showcase Trinidadian multiculturalism. An exemplary instance is T&T Sweet Tassa's performance for the National Tassa Competition described in chapter five. In this case, despite the absence of musical fusion, emblems of multiculturalism are nonetheless apparent, embodied in dance and the presence (though silence) a of steel pan player and an African drummer in the midst of a competitive tassa performance.

In discussing musical fusions, Ramnarine notes that "fusion challenges the concepts of bounded, discrete cultures" while simultaneously reinforcing "the boundaries of the 'multicultural' through the persistent ideology of fusion as a creative

space in which musical traditions or bearers of distinct traditions meet each other."[91] From this perspective, music is a "safe space"[92] where individuals' and groups' respective socio-cultural experiences are made audible. In the specific case of musical fusions, the timbres, textures, and instruments associated with disparate streams of ethnicity and identity combine in ways that reflect current and potential social structures. While the notions of fusion and multiculturalism, either musical or otherwise, can "foster diverse creativities as well as forge new creativities and new identities," Ramnarine rightly warns that "both are only conceptually possible if one's point of departure is the celebration of cultural distinctiveness, of cultures as discrete and separable."[93]

Herein lies the conundrum of Trinidadian orientations toward nationality. On one hand is the celebration of being Creole, of being fused and multicultural, while on the other is the paradoxical necessity of difference upon which fusions are purportedly founded. According to the state's position as explicated by Persad-Bissessar above and contrary to state rhetoric of the mid-twentieth century, these two modes of identity are not contradictory; one can remain rooted in a particular ethnic "space" while also maintaining allegiance to an inclusive national portrait. Within this system, however, tensions frequently arise as individualities come into conflict where one group is perceived to have advantages over another. These tensions are resolved—or at least processed—by two principal strategies as exemplified in the national instrument debate. One is to insist upon preserving the status quo, namely the dominance of Afro-Creole

---

[91] Ibid.

[92] Brenda F. Berrian, *Awakening Spaces: French Caribbean Popular Songs, Music, and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

[93] Ramnarine, *Beautiful Cosmos*, 107.

identifiers, as a model for nationality. This is demonstrated in the defense of pan as emblematic of indigenousness and the dismissal of tassa as foreign. Another strategy, highlighted by the proposal of tassa as co-national instrument, is to demand equal representation by drawing upon the state's own rubric of multiculturalism that purports to foster equality among the nation's ethnic groups.

These strategies reflect Viranjini Munasinghe's identification of "two potential national narratives" in Trinidad and Tobago, "one of homogenization through racial and culture mixture… and one of the continuation of ancestral diversitites."[94] The former, according to Munasinghe, is the dominant one and characterized by a claim to indigenousness via "creolization," a cultural *callaloo*[95] within which all parts receive equal treatment and are given equal recognition by the state. This concept of "creole," however, is largely formulated in Afro-European terms as it emerged in tandem with the inheritance of power by the Afro-Saxon middle class in the independence era. Though theoretically inclusive, in practice Trinidadian creoleness routinely excludes expressions of alterity that do no conform to the dominant narrative. A second nationalist narrative is one exemplified by a cultural "tossed salad" in which constituent culture groups maintain their ethnic identities, but continue to mix. As Munasinghe suggests, "Indo-Trinidadian leaders' insistence on supplanting the callaloo model of society with that of the tossed salad suggests that the identification of the particular unit within which purities or

[94] Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad?*, 6.

[95] Callaloo is common Caribbean dish and culinary metaphor for creole culture. Though various dishes by the same name are found all over the Anglophone Caribbean, Trinidadian callaloo is a side dish with a soupy texture made from stewed *dasheen* (a leafy, spinach-like green) combined with any number of other ingredients. With its stewed, sometimes lumpy, frequently spicy, and always tasty texture, the affinities with creolized culture are conspicuous.

mixtures are embodied… has considerable symbolic import in determining which purities are considered nationally legitimate."[96]

By contrast, the state's current multicultural stance falls somewhere in between these opposing narratives. While Afro-European emblems—most importantly Carnival, calypso and steel pan—continue to receive state sanction and support, Indo-Trinidadian cultural markers have made inroads into the nationalist pantheon since the 1980s. When the PNM lost political control in 1986, the new National Alliance for Reconstruction government increased subsidies for Indo-Trinidadian cultural programs, an increase that was somewhat reduced upon the breakup of NAR and ousting of prominent Indo-Trinidadians from the party.[97] Under periods of PNM control (1991-1995; 2001-2010), the government largely maintained levels of subsidy for Indo-Trinidadian activities. Overall, however, Carnival, calypso, and steel pan have always received the lion's share of state support.[98] With Pandey's election as Prime Minister in 1995 also came a number of reforms including the official establishment of Indian Arrival Day as a national holiday (this coincided with a similar institutionalization of Spiritual Baptist Liberation Day, a national holiday commemorating the 1951 repeal of legislative restrictions on the neo-African Spiritual Baptist religious practice). More recently, Persad-Bissessar's administration immediately reformed the Culture Ministry into the Ministry of the Arts and Multiculturalism and established a new Ministry of National Diversity and Social Integration, each of which is tasked with developing

[96] Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad?*, 87.

[97] Diethrich, "'Living in Both Sides of the World'," 284.

[98] Ibid., 288.

programs that promote and actualize inclusivity, though one predicated upon the potentially though unintentionally divisive dogma of multiculturalism.

The multicultural policy of the state in part fuels extreme callaloo and tossed salad socio-political stances by granting tacit validity to both. By retaining Afro-Creole symbols like steel pan while rhetoricizing that every stream of ethnicity is entitled to "an equal place," conflicts will continue to rise. Figure 6-9 contains a photo taken inside Piarco International Airport of a small display that was one component of a larger installation celebrating Trinidad and Tobago's fiftieth independence celebrations which included a massive exhibit detailing steel pan's history in the airport's main hall. Several photo collages, like the one pictured here, lined the corridor leading to the airline gates

Figure 6-9. Photo collage in Piarco International Airport.

on the south side of the airport. Collectively these collages featured portraits of prominent Trinidadians, mostly calypsonians and other entertainers with few Indo-Trinidadians among them, and depictions of iconic religious rites and festivals (including

images of Hosay and a Hindu wedding) imprinted upon semi-spherical boards in a pattern that emulated the dispersion of notes on a steel pan. The intention is clear: pan is evoked as an encapsulation of Trinidadian society, a foundational symbol that metaphorically contains all points of Trinidadian identity. Such a metaphor quite profoundly illustrates the precarious and certainly unavoidable juxtapositions posed by state promotion of multiculturalism.

Tensions arising from such juxtaposition are apparent in the debate over national instruments. As a symbol of the creolized nation, steel pan represents an undeniable indigenousness. As Pan Trinbago implies, steel pan is not African, but a product of Trinidadian creativity and ingenuity. For some Indo-Trinidadians, however, the singular status of pan, as a product of African and European—not Indian—musical traditions, is symptomatic of a broader problem of Indo-Trinidadian cultural invisibility. As pan is an ostensible icon of national inclusion, the revision of its history to include Indo-Trinidadian contributions (as exemplified in Mahabir's research) and the offer of tassa as a co-national instrument are revisionist strategies that challenge the dominant rhetoric of a creolized nation while tacitly critiquing the failings of multiculturalism as state policy. In chapter seven, I bring together the analyses of previous chapters to continue a more in-depth discussion of creolization and Indo-Caribbean nationalism.

CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION: TASSA, COOLITUDE, AND INDO-TRINIDADIAN NATIONALISM

"…for I am a Creole by my rigging, an Indian by my mast…"

- Khal Torabully[1]

In an 1897 Guyanese agricultural journal, an unassuming piece titled "The Life History of an East Indian in British Guiana" is nestled among articles on sugar cultivation, nesting birds, and boa-constrictors.[2] The author Rev. J.G. Pearson begins by suggesting that, of the constituent races of the colony, "none… are so unique and none so uniform as that of the 'Indian.'"[3]

> The East Indian… of whom I am thinking as I write this, is but the link between the race, as we know it in the East, and that we hope for in this corner of the West. He of whom I speak is commonly known as the Creole Coolie.[4]

Pearson continues, describing the hypothetical life story of a Guianese-born Indian named Rampersaud:

> Rampersaud… has got on fairly well, he has been put into the weeder's gang first [receiving average pay] and then into the shovel gang [receiving above average pay], he has become a very fair cricketer, and plays mostly on Sundays when the patch of rice or herd of cattle do not claim his attentions. He is still thrifty and counts every bitt many times before he spends it. But he must spend something and it is seldom with all his haggling that he scores off John Chinaman… At twenty Rampersaud is a stronger and better developed man than his father. He will eat meat, flesh meat, he will take a schnap if any one offers it, and, his forbears would be startled to see his upright jaunty bearing and hear his cheery 'marnin sir,'

[1] Marina Carter and Khal Torabully, *Coolitude: An Anthology of the Indian Labour Diaspora* (London: Anthem Press, 2002), 218.

[2] Pearson, "The Life History of an East Indian in British Guiana."

[3] Ibid., 136.

[4] Ibid.

> as he meets the white man… He is the link between two orders, the old and effete and the new, the vigorous, manly, free, and self-reliant.[5]

Here, Pearson comments upon a transition from immigrant to native, from outsider to insider, from transient to resident. The author is keen to call upon the hybrid nature of Caribbean life and ends his narrative with a ponderously open question: "What shall be the future of this section of our community?"[6]

Much like Pearson describes the transformation of the hypothetical Rampersaud from a foreign entity into one rooted in the "creole" experience, analysis throughout this dissertation has illuminated tassa as an ensemble and genre of music that references Indian roots and a Caribbean homeland through its "reinvention" in diaspora. The corpus of tassa's musical practice—including instrument construction, playing technique, repertoire, and performance contexts—suggests an embodied multilocal identity, one at odds with and simultaneously part of Caribbean creole society. In this chapter, I draw upon examples presented throughout the dissertation to discuss overarching themes of Indo-Trinidadian orientation toward and participation in creolization and national belonging as articulated in musical discourse about tassa drumming.

I frame my analysis by first reviewing relevant aspects of W.E.B. Du Bois' notion of double consciousness and its contribution to the coalescence of the négritude movement. In these socio-cultural critiques, one finds a recognition and valorization of a dialectic identity whose conflicting poles foster at once an uneasiness of self and a

[5] Ibid., 143–144.

[6] Ibid., 146.

sense of familiarity in unsettlement. For négritude thinkers in particular, post-colonial blackness is enmeshed in desire to "root oneself in oneself," rather than look to far off metropolitan models for affirmation of identity. The analytical strategies of négritude lend themselves to reinterpretation in Khla Torabully's poetics of coolitude, which I draw upon to frame my discussion of what I call Indo-Creole identity. I ultimately conclude that tassa is exemplary of this notion of Indo-Creole in that the ensemble and the music is structured within a worldview that references India as a place of origin and the Caribbean as home.

Double Consciousness

In *The Souls of Black Folk*, Du Bois outlines a life surrounded by the "Veil," a socially constructed color-line demarcating the bounds of inclusion and exclusion:

> I held all beyond [the Veil] in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows. That sky was bluest when I could beat my [white] mates at examination-time, or beat them at a foot-race, or even beat their stringy heads. Alas, with the years all this fine contempt began to fade; for the words I longed for, and all their dazzling opportunities, were theirs, not mine.[7]

Du Bois' explicated his desire to belong in a social space where he would never be fully welcomed in terms of an impossibly unresolved dialectic, a "double consciousness," which by its very nature nourishes the formation of a complex identity based upon the tension of a pair of opposing and mutually reaffirming poles:

> After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world,—a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness,—an

[7] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk*, 6–7.

> American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.[8]

Du Bois ascribes a sense of self as arising from living in both worlds at once. His selfhood is not drawn solely from his African past nor exclusively from his American present, but from the history of Africans in America and the intimately personal experiences of living as a second-class citizen in his own country.

This was the inevitable legacy of slavery in the United States. Years after emancipation, Du Bois laments that "the Nation has not yet found peace from its sins; the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land."[9] Du Bois importantly positions the emergence of his "twoness" within the context of New World experience unlike later Pan-African intellectuals whose rhetoric largely centered on an imagined African homeland as a font of self-identification (if not also self-worth). Even after his Marxist turn in the decades after *The Souls of Black Folk*, prompted primarily by his growing frustration at the slow pace of granting equal rights to all Americas, Du Bois clearly frames double consciousness in relation to New World inclusion and exclusion, as rooted "not in opposition to or contempt for other races, but rather in large conformity to the greater ideals of the American Republic;" an identity forged by, marginalized from, and yet loyal to the nation.[10]

Traces of Du Bois are felt in a number of post-colonial socio-political critiques rippling throughout the 20th and 21st century black Atlantic, that large area of the world

[8] Ibid., 7.

[9] Ibid., 10.

[10] Ibid., 15.

most affected by African slavery and its racist legacy.[11] The advent of the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s and 1930s coincided with, was fueled by, and reflected the activism of Du Bois. The artistic expression of this movement—the novels of Zora Neale Hurston, the poetry of Langston Hughes, the paintings of Aaron Douglas, the music of Duke Ellington and Billy Holiday—seemed to prove Du Bois' assertion that blacks could not only navigate the machinery of American high culture, but also excel at it. Furthermore, the visual art, literature, music, and philosophy of this self-described Nigerrati eloquently drew upon African-American experience to inform its style, context, and character. Thus, the creative output of the Harlem Renaissance embodied double consciousness both in terms of execution and content.

Négritude and Afro-Creolization as Indigenization

Owing quite a debt to Du Boisian ideology, négritude emerged in Paris among a group of French colonial expatriates in the 1920s. The nineteenth-century assimilationist philosophy of French colonialism sought to Frenchify indigenous peoples in overseas territories both in terms of national ideology and imperial bureaucracy. This effort was meant to foster an expanded sense of national unity as diverse peoples became French. In practice, of course, the colonies were always held at some distance. By the end of World War I, elites came to "curiously" regard the cohesion of France and her colonies as a symbol of the "durability of a self-contained French nation."[12] For many colonial subject-citizens, however, the aims of assimilation seemed only to confirm the

[11] Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*.

[12] Gary Wilder, *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 4.

disruption of traditional points of cultural reference by an absurdly demanding conformity.[13]

The négritude movement coalesced around young African and Antillean students who began to question the "double-bind of colonial racism" resulting from French colonial rule.[14] Inspired by Du Bois and the Harlem Renaissance, the leading figures of négritude were both poets and political thinkers born in French overseas territories: Martiniquean Aimé Césaire, French Guianese Léon Damas, and the future first president of Senegal, Léopold Senghor. Each brought with them a keen eye for cultural observation that had been conditioned through metropolitan political hegemony in their respective homelands.

In poetry and prose, this group cultivated an on-going critique of the imperial nation-state that highlighted contradictions inherent in French assimilationist rhetoric that foregrounded metropolitan perspectives on history, culture, and politics and ignored experiences of colonial citizens, many of whom were African or of African heritage. In their creative output, the trio strategically appropriated the pejorative term *négre*, one encumbered by centuries of racist baggage, to negate the notion that "négritude," or "blackness," was inherently inferior. As a discursive practice, négritude signaled a reclaimed African history, one that celebrated blackness and the black experience as an equally valid component of an increasingly globalized and therefore non-Eurocentric society. Importantly, though the movement often took up African symbols as emblems of its ideology, the rhetoric négritude did not depend upon African purity, but indeed was

[13] Ibid., 5.

[14] Ibid.

built upon “rooting oneself in oneself,” upon celebrating the modern and necessarily hybrid black experience, rather than looking exclusively to Europe for validation of one’s identity and self worth.[15]

The emergence of nation-states are frequently predicated upon the consolidation of a dominant class’s power over subordinate groups legitimized “in terms of a shared culture and history” that ostensibly unites disparate ethnic and class groups within the state “without reference to any [racial or class] divisions that continue to persist.”[16] Despite an official position that was inclusive of all races and classes, the Afro-Trinidadian political hegemony of the mid-twentieth century either consciously or unconsciously drew upon the empowering ideology of négritude to construct an Afro-Creole-centric notion of nationality that functioned to affirm Afro-Trinidadians as the de facto indigenous people of the land and therefore the legitimate arbiters of national culture. As discussed in chapter six, in Trinidad and Tobago indigenousness was a concept principally framed in terms of creolization. Nationalist elites like Gomes and Williams, for instance, saw the steel pan as an encapsulation and embodiment of the Trinidadian creole experience as defined in terms of Afro-Creole-ness. With nationalist support, the rather meteoric rise of pan from a folk instrument to an emblem of national folklore put into motion an emergent creole vitality and hybrid creativity that exemplified the post-colonial nation.

---

[15] Léopold Sédar Senghor, “Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century,” in *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*, ed. Gaurav Desai and Supriya Nair (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 183.

[16] Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Basel: Gordon and Breach, 1994), 36.

With the ascension of the PNM, money and power subsequently concretized Afro-Creole culture as "indigenous" and subsequently intensified racial rivalries between Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians. In one of the few mentions of national politics in his ethnography of rural Indo-Trinidadians during the independence era, Klass notes: "Villagers sincerely believe that the Negro of Trinidad wants to keep 'us' down, and that the PNM, whatever its stated objectives, really has only one objective; to 'raise' the Negro and 'keep down' the Indian."[17] Indo-Trinidadians were not included in the emerging image of creole nationality thanks to their estrangement from mainstream society and therefore their estrangement from a convenient model of creolization. "Physical isolation on remote estates, alien status, lack of education, and language difficulties—all largely engineered by the state—" preserved Indo-Trinidadian invisibility in the eyes of colonial elites throughout much of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[18] This precedent resulted in continued marginalization from the nationalist portrait even with the advent of party politics in the 1950s, the effects of which, as described in chapter six, resonate still today even with the state's turn toward a policy of multiculturalism.

As Khan points out, socio-political rhetoric deployed via an abstraction of creolization often conceals hegemonic mechanisms of control that (erroneously) claim to equally represent and empower diverse ethnic groups within contemporary nation-states.[19] In this study, I have used musical analysis in concert with ethnographic work

[17] Klass, *East Indians in Trinidad*, 244.

[18] Munasinghe, *Callaloo or Tossed Salad?*, 182.

[19] Khan, "Journey to the Center of the Earth," 273.

as one means to better understand the processes of creolization in Trinidad and Tobago as articulated in practice.[20] As music is one of the most important means by which creolized identities are expressed in Trinidad and Tobago, this work begins to shed light on Indo-Trinidadians' participation in and responses to creolization and, by extension, orientation toward national belonging. In the following pages, I explore these notions as explicated in musical discourse about Trinidadian tassa drumming.

Why Tassa?

At this point, I return to a question posed early in chapter one: Why tassa? What about tassa is able to foreground Indo-Trinidadian multilocality in a productive and powerful way? What is it about the music of the tassa ensemble that activates Indo-Trinidadian identity? And perhaps more to the point of this study, what does an analysis of tassa say about Indo-Trinidadian creolization and nationality?

Indo-Trinidadian Musical Aesthetics

One component of the answer to these questions, revealed by musical analysis, is the coherent Indo-Trinidadian musical system within which tassa resides. In chapter two, I described the organology of the tassa ensemble, noting particular ways that experiments in morphology and construction techniques developed in tandem with an increasingly virtuosic repertoire. And while the repertoire itself expresses strong affinities with North Indian vernacular styles, analysis in chapter three affirms that Caribbean tassa is nurtured by a distinct Indo-Caribbean musical system reflective of Indo-Trinidadians' historic alienation from centers of power. Moreover, this musical system is a flexible one, encouraging adaptations, innovations, and invention via

[20] Ibid.

numerous idiogenerative routes as evidenced in changes in instrument construction, repertoire, and performance practice. Most importantly, analysis suggests that this system is not dependent upon mimicking or drawing significant syncretic elements from Afro-Creole musical models. Where conventional wisdom would suggest that tassa is a creolized music, one reliant on fusion of Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian musical ideas, analysis indicates that to the contrary that tassa repertoire is organized along the lines of idiosyncratic Indo-Trinidadian notions of musical aesthetics and that tassa performance is largely the domain of Indo-Trinidadian musicians and audiences. Therefore, a close look at the music itself provides a point of comparison that supports ethnographic work by Klass, Clarke, and Vertovec, all of whom claim Indo-Trinidadians have remained culturally distinct from and resistant to the hegemonic influences of Afro-Creole society even through a period of increased urbanization and industrialization through the latter half of the twentieth century.

This is not to say that tassa has developed in a hermetically sealed cultural bubble. The very nomenclature of the ensemble and the advent and continued vitality of formally adjudicated tassa competitions, whose most important structural model lay in Carnival-time calypso and pan contests, suggest, as just two potent examples, that notions about tassa have proceeded in dialog with mainstream Afro-Trinidadian society in pronounced ways. Nonetheless, it is quite apparent that tassa retains a core set of identifiable Indo-Trinidadian musical and aesthetic characteristics with no fundamental input from Afro-Trinidadian sources. While tassa features instruments, timbres, musical structure, and performance practice that reference India as a place of origin, these very same elements, by virtue of their reinvention and codification in the Caribbean diaspora,

equally reference Trinidadian identity. Tassa therefore embodies, as Ramnarine also claims for chutney, a "politics of location"[21] in which "multilocal belonging… is built on local and global" orientations.[22] This sentiment is echoed by Manuel as he succinctly suggests:

> Tassa, in a word, is thoroughly Indian without being a mere retention (like chowtal); at the same time, it is thoroughly Trinidadian, while owing very little to Afro-creole influence. It is thus quintessentially Indo-Trinidadian, and perhaps more than any other aspect of culture, it illustrates how vital and dynamic an entity in that category can be. It also reflects how a spirit of eclectic openness, adaptation, and innovation can characterize Indo-Caribbean culture and need not be associated with Afro-creole society.[23]

Intra-ethnic Appeal

Another part of the answer is that tassa transcends Indo-Trinidadian intra-ethnic boundaries. "The Indo-Caribbean community is not a monolithic entity," as Manuel points out, "Rather… its collective notions of identity have been the subject of ongoing vigorous contestation and negotiation."[24] While collective Indo-Trinidadian identity is in many ways structured in opposition to what it is not—e.g. Afro-Creole—rather than what it is, numerous beacons of identity transcend difference to unite Indo-Trinidadians. In general, these include some aspects of foodways, language, kinship, and creative expression in addition to a deeply intoned cultural memory embedded in notions of exile from India and the continued forging of new cultural spaces in diaspora (see figure 5-2,

[21] Ramnarine, *Creating Their Own Space*, 144.

[22] Ibid., 1–2.

[23] Manuel, "Tassa Drumming."

[24] Manuel, *Tān-singing*, 183.

for example). I suggest tassa is among these emblems of collective identity that penetrate across divisions of religion, gender, and social class.

As discussed in chapter four, individual tassa drummers' religious affiliations are largely irrelevant in tassa's various performance contexts, with Hindu, Muslim, and Christian musicians regularly drumming for Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and secular events. This is indicative of a broader Trinidadian socio-religious tolerance, which is especially pronounced in the Indo-Trinidadian community. For example, Lenny Kumar was born into a Hindu family but converted to Presbyterianism in his twenties, even rising to a position of leadership as president of his church's congregation. As a Christian and one of the most respected drummers in Trinidad and Tobago, Lenny easily reconciles his participation in Hindu and Muslim rites by privileging his identity as a musician; as a drummer, any opportunity to perform is an opportunity to build a positive reputation for himself, his band, and tassa in general.

Even across divisions of denominational religious orientations, tassa emerges as a space of common ground. For example, some Indo-Trinidadians who trace their origins to south India practice a style of Hinduism divergent from those of predominantly Bhojpuri descent. These "Madrasis," as they are called in Trinidad and Tobago, are generally looked upon with a mixture of suspicion and contempt by self-appointed "orthodox" Sanatanist Hindus, an antagonism that likely extends from indenture-period conflicts between north and south Indians on the plantations.[25] As Manoo-Rhaming

[25] Most indentured Indians embarked from Calcutta. According to Look Lai, "the Madras contribution to Indian labor in the Caribbean was fitful and sporadic." According to Geoghegan's report on Indian labor in 1873, between 1842 and 1870 a total of 4992 laborers embarked from Madras for Trinidad, and Look Lai further notes another 322 arrived in 1871. Between 1906 and 1916, eight ships carrying passengers from Calcutta and Madras brought a total of 3,375 Madrasis. Many intra-ethnic Indo-Caribbean conflicts on the plantations and in emergent Indian communities off the estates were caused by cultural—largely in terms of language—differences between Madrasis and other Indians. Look Lai, *Indentured Labor, Caribbean*

recalls, rather tongue-in-cheek, “As a child growing up in Trinidad, I heard stories of Madrasi people: how they cried when a child was born and celebrated when someone died; how they were blood-drinking, Kali-Mai worshippers; how they were different from us Hindus.”[26] While Madrasi drumming is most often linked with the *tapu* frame drum, tassa has also been common since at least the early 1960s (and probably long before) when Lomax recorded drummers, presumably Madrasi themselves, playing tapu and tassa in the same recording session. Moreover, a tassa hand called “madrasi” drawn from tapu rhythms is today quite common among many veteran tassa drummers across the country. This example therefore suggests that even where ideological schisms divide sectors of the Indo-Trinidadian community, in this case Hindus, tassa remains to bridge the gap, however symbolic this link may be.

Tassa is undoubtedly a male-oriented tradition, one often framed by notions of aggression and masculinity, especially when it comes to jassling. While patterns of transmission and gender expectations have historically dictated male-oriented tassa lineages, Indo-Trinidadian women nonetheless have steadily been accepted within the tassa community in recent decades. Both of Lenny’s daughters, for example, are good drummers and have formed the T&T Sweet Tassa All-Girls Band along with two

Sugar, 35–36; 122–124; J Geoghegan, *Note on Emigration from India* (Calcutta: Government of India Department of Agriculture, Revenue, and Commerce, 1873), 70; 80.

[26] Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming, “Uncloaking Our Madrasi Heritage: Dedicated to You, Kenny-Mother,” *The Caribbean Writer* 16 (2002), http://www.peepaltreepress.com/review_display.asp?rev_id=252.

Figure 7-1. T&T Sweet Tassa All-Girls Band. Left to right: Teri Beri, Tameeka Parasramsingh, Lenora Kumar, and Lennita Kumar. Princes Town, Trinidad. August 2012. Photo by Heather Hall.

Figure 7-2. D'Evergreen Tassa Group. Left to right: Donna Ramsumair, Kumar Ragoo, Ravinath Sookoo, and Mukesh Ragoo.

neighborhood friends. While, all-female groups are not unheard of, they are certainly not the norm. Rather, women are more often included as players in mixed-sex ensembles where they frequently serve as temporary stand-ins for male players and are virtually always relegated to playing jhal. A notable exception is Donna Ramsumair, wife of Mukesh Ragoo and self-described "tassa queen," who is a supremely talented jhal player in D'Evergreen Tassa Group (figure 7-2). Ramsumair, however, is not the first female member of the band; she inherited her position as D'Evergreen's primary jhal player from Ragoo's sister, who is a talented musician in her own right, when she married and moved south away from the band's home base in Santa Cruz. Where contemporary frames of feminist reference might better critique the gendered power relations evident in such a male-dominated musical practice, the inroads women have heretofore made into tassa culture as musicians, not simply supportive wives or sexy dancers, is certainly laudable and indeed indicates tassa's ability to transcend gender boundaries.

Tassa also penetrates socio-economic class. Bollywood film songs, local-classical singing, and songs of religious devotion including various genres of bhajans among other musics produced and consumed primarily by Indo-Trinidadians are widely popular yet have arguably failed to cut across class divisions as perhaps tassa does. The chutney controversy of the early 1990s, for example, points to ways in which many "respectable" middle- and upper-class Indo-Trinidadians distance themselves from popular expressions divergent from their typically conservative and religiously orthodox perch of cultural superiority.[27] Even today, when chutney and chutney-soca have more

[27] Manuel, *Tān-singing*, 187–188.

or less entered the mainstream of Indo-Trinidadian pop culture, these genres are looked down upon by those who would rather promote cultural expressions deemed more traditional, that is more purely Indian. In my experience, tassa has not received this kind of treatment. Despite a popular conception of tassa drummers as drunkards and ruffians (coincidentally paralleling the reputations of early steel pan musicians), the upper echelon of Indo-Trinidadian society often laud tassa as a quintessential Indo-Trinidadian art form, one worthy of the community's appreciation, support, and subsidy. This is demonstrated by the push to make tassa co-national instrument and by RBTT's enduring sponsorship of Tassa Taal.

Creolization and Indo-Trinidadian National Belonging

In the end, tassa exhibits an archetypal Indo-Trinidadian musical aesthetic imbued with a multivalent politics of location that through association with virtually every sector of the Indo-Trinidadian community has become emblematic of a collective, multilocal identity. In a very real sense, tassa represents a space of remembering an Indian past and celebrating a Caribbean present. Under such scrutiny, tassa is exemplary of what might be considered a counterhegemonic creolization, a coalescence of an "Indo-Creole" culture defined, in contradistinction to Afro-Creole dominance, in terms of its own idiogenerative creativity in reaction to the particular stresses of Indo-Trinidadian diasporic experience. From this perspective an alternate indigenousness emerges from which Indo-Trinidadians' can claim an equal place. In tassa, Indo-Trinidadian assertions of self, community, and nation coalesce within a complex musical discourse conditioned by a broader equation of Trinidadian music and identity. This is made all the more apparent by virtue of tassa emerging as a beacon of

Indo-Trinidadian-ness, dialectically opposed to steel pan, in the national instrument debate.

As mentioned previously, notions of “Creole” and “creolization” are especially problematic given their diffuse historical and conceptual meanings. Importantly in the case of Trinidad and Tobago, the notion of “Creole” is popularly synonymous with blackness and Afro-Trinidadian-ness. At the same time, however, the equally diffuse idea of Trinidad and Tobago as a creole society, this as explicated in contemporary state-sponsored promotion of multiculturalism, is deployed in reference to a theoretically inclusive sense of cultural fusion. I therefore deliberately juxtapose the ideas of “Indo” and “Creole” into “Indo-Creole” in an effort to recover creolization from its acquired Afro-centricity. This conceptual fusion furthermore encourages a productive reconsideration of creolization as a prerequisite to indigenousness and therefore national belonging while maintaining the conceptually separate spaces that Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians cultivate via diasporic practice.

Situating Indo-Trinidadian experience within the indigenizing mechanism of creolization necessitates conceptual clarification. Throughout this study, I have argued that tassa exists within a coherent musical system largely removed from Afro-Trinidadian influence. I have further argued that tassa is emblematic of Indo-Trinidadian experience in that this musical system is dependent upon retention of, even rootedness in, India as a place of origin. As evidenced by a history of antagonism directed against Indo-Trinidadian counterhegemony, the perseverance and concrete articulations of a deep-seated Indo-Trinidadian cultural memory—one that stubbornly refuses to recede despite generations of Caribbean-ness—has been historically perceived as anti-creole;

that tassa, despite a great degree of transformation in diaspora, is vehemently denied indigenousness in the national instrument debate is indicative of such a perception.

Creolization is by definition a concept reliant upon notions of cultural mixing. From a musicological perspective, steel pan, for example, is quite clearly the product of a confluence of African and European aesthetics. By contrast, I have argued that tassa has resisted musical influences exogenous to Indo-Trinidadian culture. Does this therefore imply tassa has not been subject to processes of creolization? I think not. Tassa is indeed steadfastly planted within a stream of Indian influence where its musical structures and rhythmic material are drawn primarily from other Indo-Trinidadian musics, especially genres of local-classical singing. As Manuel argues, cultural mixing has indeed marked tassa's development, but it has occurred largely along intra-ethnic lines, drawing strength from diverse Indian traditions as reconstructed and rearticulated in diaspora, therefore involving little fundamental input from Afro-Trinidadian sources (or any other stream of influence for that matter).[28] With a reliance on this sort of idiogenerative impulse, a creativity that is negotiated from the inside out, tassa is exemplary of the variegated processes of diffusion, appropriation, and adoption that characterize creolization.[29]

Indo-Trinidadians sometimes situate themselves as living in two worlds at once, even "living in both sides of the world,"[30] by virtue of their simultaneous Indian-ness and

[28] Manuel, "Tassa Drumming."

[29] François Vergès, "Indian-Ocenaic Creolizations: Processes and Practices of Creolization on Réunion Island," in *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, ed. Charles Stewart (Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007), 148.

[30] Diethrich, "'Living in Both Sides of the World'."

Caribbean-ness. Through the lens of Du Boisian double consciousness, Indo-Creole identity comes into view as a multiply subjective orientation to diasporic experience. While on the one hand Indo-Trinidadians have historically lived a life behind the "veil" of imposed racial subjectivities, they have cultivated amongst themselves a vibrant, creative, and enduring sense of self and community in reference to a shared history and experience of dislocation. In this way, everyday Indo-Creole practice becomes an implicitly counterhegemonic means of re-location. Moreover, as with the push for tassa's status as national symbol, pointedly cultural projects championed by the Indo-Trinidadian middle class frequently implicate everyday practice with acutely political and therefore national import.

Coolitude: Toward a Theory of Indo-Creole

While Indo-Creole identity encounters Trinidadian nationality as a particularly productive set of indigenizing characteristics, the notion of Indo-Creole further engages the global indentured Indian diaspora by foregrounding its Du Bosian "two-ness" as a foundation of communal identity. In this way, Indo-Creole interfaces with Khal Torabully's far-reaching concept of coolitude, which suggests a fundamental and embodied duality by which the Indian indenture diaspora orients itself inwardly and outwardly. Torabully attempts to recuperate the pejorative term "coolie" in much the same way as négritude claims to do for "negre." By examining culture through the frame

of coolitude, Torabully seeks to "revoice the coolie" by acknowledging "the acclimatization of Indian culture to a plural landscape."[31]

The force that gives rise to this revoicing is a central metaphor of "the voyage," the journey across the kala pani that took indentured laborers to their varied destinations. By acknowledging and remembering "the journey that transformed Indians into coolies," the diaspora begins to understand its transformed and transformative identity as one separate from yet planted within and dependent upon a "multicultural [host] society."[32] In his poetry, Torabully routinely returns to the metaphor of being in motion—of crossing the kala pani, of being aboard ship, of an imaginary return home—while he and others have also pointed out similar tropes in diasporic literature of the Caribbean, Réunion, Mauritius, and Fiji.[33] The notion of familiarity in unsettlement ultimately becomes a hallmark of Indian diasporic identity as coolitude "broadens the concept of the 'Indian abroad' or the Indian diaspora into the consciousness of a mosaic, complex vision, acknowledging the traumatic and constructive potential of the Voyage/exile."[34] In its favoring of Indo-centric metaphors, however, some have criticized the essentialism of coolitude.[35] Like négritude and Black Power, whose Afro-centric

---

[31] Carter and Torabully, *Coolitude*, 214–215.

[32] Shivani Sivagurunathan, "A 'Coolitudian' Caribbean Text: The Trajectory of Renewal in David Dabydeen's *Our Lady of Demerara*," in *Readings in Caribbean History and Cutlure: Breaking Ground*, ed. D. A. Dunkley (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2011), 206.

[33] English-language sources include Srilata Ravi, *Rainbow Colors: Literary Ethno-topographies of Mauritius* (Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2007); Véronique Bragard, *Transoceanic Dialogues: Coolitude in Caribbean and Indian Ocean Literatures* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2008); Sivagurunathan, "A 'Coolitudian' Caribbean Text: The Trajectory of Renewal in David Dabydeen's Our Lady of Demerara."

[34] Carter and Torabully, *Coolitude*, 194.

[35] For example, Shalini Puri, *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 266, n39.

emblems served to alienate non-Africans, coolitude has a similar potential despite Torabully's claim that it "emphasize[s] the community of visions between the slave and the indentured laborer… despite the fact that these two groups were placed in a situation of competition and conflict."[36]

Though coolitude has yet to gain currency as a mode of analysis beyond the study of literature emerging from the Indian labor diaspora, it nonetheless provides a compelling and far-reaching coherency to the experiences of indentured laborers and their descendants across the globe. As the case of Trinidad and Tobago indicates, contemporary Indo-Trinidadian identity is very much dependent upon a still-palpable memory of exile, struggle, and emergence that is no doubt common to parallel diasporic sites within and outside the Caribbean. The kala pani, along with its associative maritime symbolism, is indeed a profoundly common trope in Indo-Trinidadian popular and academic discourse, simultaneously representing the perilous middle passage from India, signaling a celebration of arrival, and serving as a powerful metaphor of exile and the forging of new lives and new identities (see, for example, figure 6-2).

Coolitude also intersects with Afro-European processes of creolization in important ways:

> The coolie became involved in the building of a new identity in the land where he/she had settled. In this *mise en relation*, new patterns were evolved, though the process was difficult… This was due to the fact that the arrival of the coolie complexified a creolization process already under way, upsetting the social strategies of the former slaves, bringing new demographic realities.[37]

[36] Carter and Torabully, *Coolitude*, 150.

[37] Ibid., 191–192.

The trauma of dislocation, of "sociocultural exclusion" from the mainstreaming of Afro-European creolization, therefore prompts "an inward-looking identity '*repli identitaire*.'"[38] This inward turn, facilitated by industrial, geographical, and political segregation, therefore catalyzes the shaping of new diasporic identities branded by a ruptured orientation toward an increasingly distant and idealized India and progressively rooted orientations toward a hostland at best ambivalent to Indian presence. This *repli identitaire*, therefore, provides the impetus for an insular procreativity—the idiogenerative impulse discussed at length in this study—that gives rise to rearticulated, reconstructed, and newly composed expressions of Indian-ness.

Coolitude provides an interesting perspective for framing Trinidadian Indo-Creole identity while allowing for conceptual linkages with other Indo-Caribbean communities in the Caribbean region as well as the co-mingling Indo-Caribbean diaspora in North America and Europe. In my experience in Florida, for example, Trinidadian- and Guyanese-Americans tend to gravitate toward one another as cultural cohorts in ways that reconstitute the racial divisions of their respective homelands. Most fascinating, however, is that Indo-Trinidadians and Indo-Guyanese form a particularly cohesive community distinctly separate from the substantial south Asian Indian diaspora in Florida. Despite the common thread of a generalized Indian culture and, most often, Hindu religious practice, one finds that south Asian Indians and Indo-Caribbeans rarely associate with one another in everyday practice. This is quite conspicuous, for example, in the presence of Hindu temples that largely cater to one or the other group, but rarely both. For example, Shiva Mandir in Plantation, Florida is a Caribbean-oriented temple

[38] Ibid., 192.

Figure 7-3. Tassa class at Shiva Mandir. Plantation, Florida. June 2007.

temple was built by the Florida Hindu Organization, which was founded by Caribbean pundits in 1981. Today, the temple serves not only as a place of worship, but also a center of south Florida Indo-Caribbean activity, including tassa classes taught by Romeo Ragbir (figure 7-3). The affinity that Indo-Caribbean-Americans have for one another, regardless of their country of origin, in concert with their relative indifference to south Asian Indian-Americans, and in line with the transformative processes suggested by Torabully's coolitude, indeed suggests a cohesive Indo-Creole identity that persists even in transnational contexts.

In a final analysis, I suggest that tassa is quintessentially Indo-Creole. What we find upon close inspection is an ensemble and genre of music that has taken a particularly striking Caribbean trajectory despite only marginal input from Afro-Creole sources. Rather, the creativity and ingenuity of Indo-Trinidadians, as an Indo-Creole community, provides the most important transformative mechanism by which tassa so greatly diverged from its dhol tasha forebears. In this way, the indigenization of tassa reflects a similar metamorphosis of Indo-Trinidadian identity from outsider to insider, from Indian to Indo-Creole.

APPENDIX A
DISCOGRAPHY

Referenced Sound Recordings

The musical analyses in chapter three are in part prepared in reference to the recordings below in addition to the included examples in Appendix D.

1956 *East Indian Drums of Tunapuna Trinidad*. Cook 5018. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.

1. Hussaya Festival
2. Wedding Dance
3. Ceremonial Drums
4. Imitation Steel Band

"Hussaya Festival," is actually a rendition of dingolay complete with taals. "Wedding Dance" seems to be an up-tempo rendition of *mahatam*, a Hosay hand commonly associated with war and decidedly not appropriate for wedding nor dancing. "Ceremonial Drums" is a suite of four hands identified by Lenny Kumar as Hosay tikora, Hosay teen chopa, nagara, and nabi sarbat. "Imitation Steel Band" is analogous to the contemporary calypso hand.

1962 "Caribbean 1962 Collection." *Association for Cultural Equity Sound Recordings*. Online database: http://research.culturalequity.org/get-audio-ix.do?ix=session&id=10&idType=collectionId&sortBy=abc

The Association for Cultural Equity curates Alan Lomax's photographic and recording archives. Two sub-collections of the Caribbean 1962 Collection, "Charlieville 5/62" and "Charlo Village 5/62," feature numerous tassa recordings in addition to other Indo-Trinidadian musics, mostly song genres. Parts of these collections are commercially available as *East Indian Music in the West Indies* (Rounder 1999) as listed below. Other tracks containing Hosay tassa have also been published on *Trinidad: Carnival Roots* (Rounder 2000).

n.d. Emamalee Mohammed. *Tassarama*. Curepe, Trinidad: Praimsingh.

1. Ding-O-Lay
2. Nagara
3. Wedding Hand
4. Steelpan
5. Tikora
6. Chowbhola
7. Soca Beat

n.d. Caribel Fun Lovers Tassa Group. *Jus 4 U*. Trinidad: Rockin' Randy Inc.

1. Tikoraa (1)
2. Wedding Hand
3. Chowbola
4. Classical Dingolay
5. Nagaraa
6. Dingolay / Bhangra
7. Chutney Mix
8. Iron Hand
9. Calypso
10. We Own Ting (1)
11. Soca / Dingolay
12. We Own Ting (2)
13. Tikoraa (2)

n.d. San Juan Youngstars Tassa Group. *Tassa Rhythms*. MAS-CD 1250. Richmond Hill, NY: Masala Records Inc.

1. Tikora, Chowbola
2. Nagarra, Dingolay
3. Hossaytikora, Hossay Mahathana
4. Dingolay, Kalendar
5. Bhatee drum, Nagarra
6. Chutney Beat, Dingolay
7. Bhatee drum, Nadidin
8. Hosayteen chopra, Hosay nabisarbut
9. Wedding Drum, Dingolay
10. Tikora, Nagarra Dingolay, Kalendar
11. Chutney beat, Chutney Soca Hand

n.d. Country Boys Tassa Group. *DS Production Presents Country Boys Tassa Group*. Richmond Hill, NY: Donald Singh.

1. Tikora
2. Nagara
3. Dingolay
4. Kalinder
5. Chutney
6. Wedding
7. Countryboys Mix
8. Cool Down
9. Tikora / Chowbolay
10. Medley

Consulted Sound Recordings

Though not specifically referenced in the dissertation text, the recordings below were nonetheless consulted in my research.

1999 *East Indian Music in the West Indies*. Rounder 11661-1723-2. Cambridge, MA: Rounder Records Corp.

1. Ramayan Chaupai
2. Tan Singing (Thumri)
3. Tan Singing (Holi)
4. Tassa
5. Women's Lullaby
6. Sohar
7. Grinding Song
8. Wedding Song
9. Madrasi Funeral Drumming
10. Guadeloupe Kali Ceremony
11. Ghajan
12. Birha
13. Chowtal
14. Interview

1999 Romeo and the Boys. "Tassa Hands." *Caribbean Percussion Traditions in Miami*. HASF CD01. Miami, FL: Historical Association of Southern Florida.

The music on this track is performed by students of Romeo Ragbir based in Plantation, Florida. This is a good example of how a suite of hands is played in context. The music was recorded at a Guyanese Hindu wedding in Miami. The liner notes suggest the hands in this suite include "tikora," "fine hand," "nagara," and "chowbola" ("fine" is synonymous with "classical" in tassa parlance). However, it is clear that two of these are mislabeled. I suggest the hands are in actuality tikora, chaubola, nagara, and dingolay.

APPENDIX B
MUSICAL TRANSCRIPTIONS

Notation Key

Tassa Notation

Stroke to center of head

Stroke to edge of head

“Ghost” note (e.g. Dingolay)

Flam stroke

Drag-like stroke

Buzz roll

Singled-handed buzz roll (e.g. Tikora)

Bass Notation

Low- and high-pitched open strokes

Touch stroke (for high-pitched side only; e.g. chaubola)

Closed stroke (i.e. open stroke muted immediately)

Jhal Notation

Crash stroke allowed to ring

Sizzle stroke with cutoff

Transcriptions

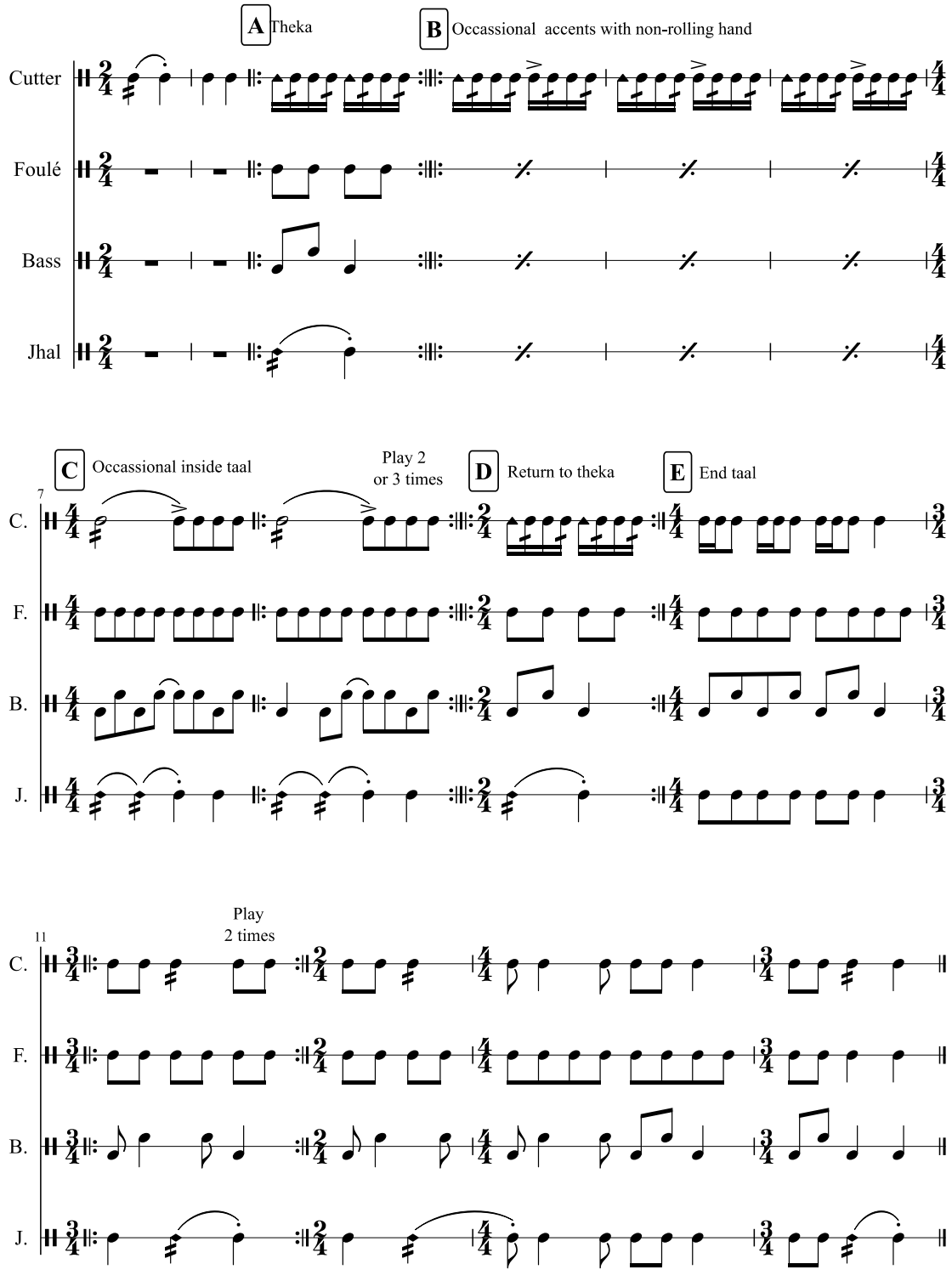
The following transcriptions are intended to provide a general outline of each hand discussed in chapter three and are chiefly drawn from recordings of performances by Trinidad and Tobago Sweet Tassa. I provide references to audio examples for the reader's convenience. The transcriptions below do not by any means include a full record of every musical sound within the given audio examples, yet should provide a roadmap to orient one's listening.

Instances of micro-timing present particular obstacles for transcription. In virtually all cases, for example, eighth and sixteenth notes are slightly swung according to the conventions of tassa performance. For clarity, however, I have chosen to notate all eighth and sixteenth notes without reference to their swung characteristics with the exception of special instances (as in wedding hand, for example) where important rhythmic passages deserve particular attention to detail. Tempos markings are also omitted given that tempos vary among renditions of the same hand. Occasional indications of relative increases in tempo are provided where appropriate. In practice, however, many breakaway hands tend to speed up upon approaching the end taal.

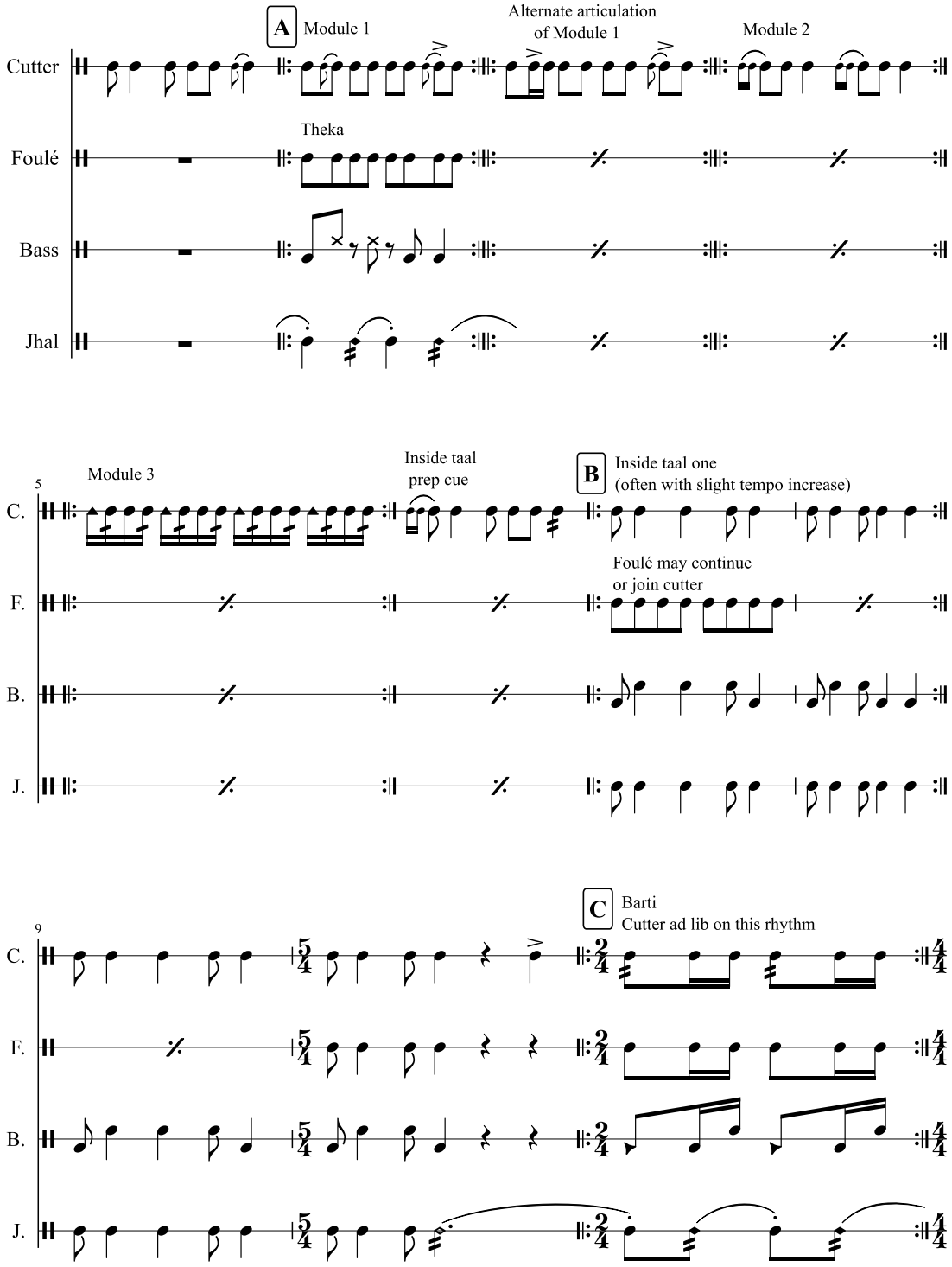
Time signatures are indicated only for ease of reading since in practice the sense of downbeat is often ambiguous. This is especially apparent in wedding hand, where I have done my best to provide a more literal transcription of the referenced recording than in other examples. I have assigned time signatures for this hand largely to emphasize rhythmic clarity. However, the metric qualities of wedding hand could very well be heard and felt differently by another analyst. For wedding hand, I have also omitted the foulé and jhal parts to highlight the interaction between the cutter and bass. This is not to say that the omitted parts are not important; indeed the foulé for wedding

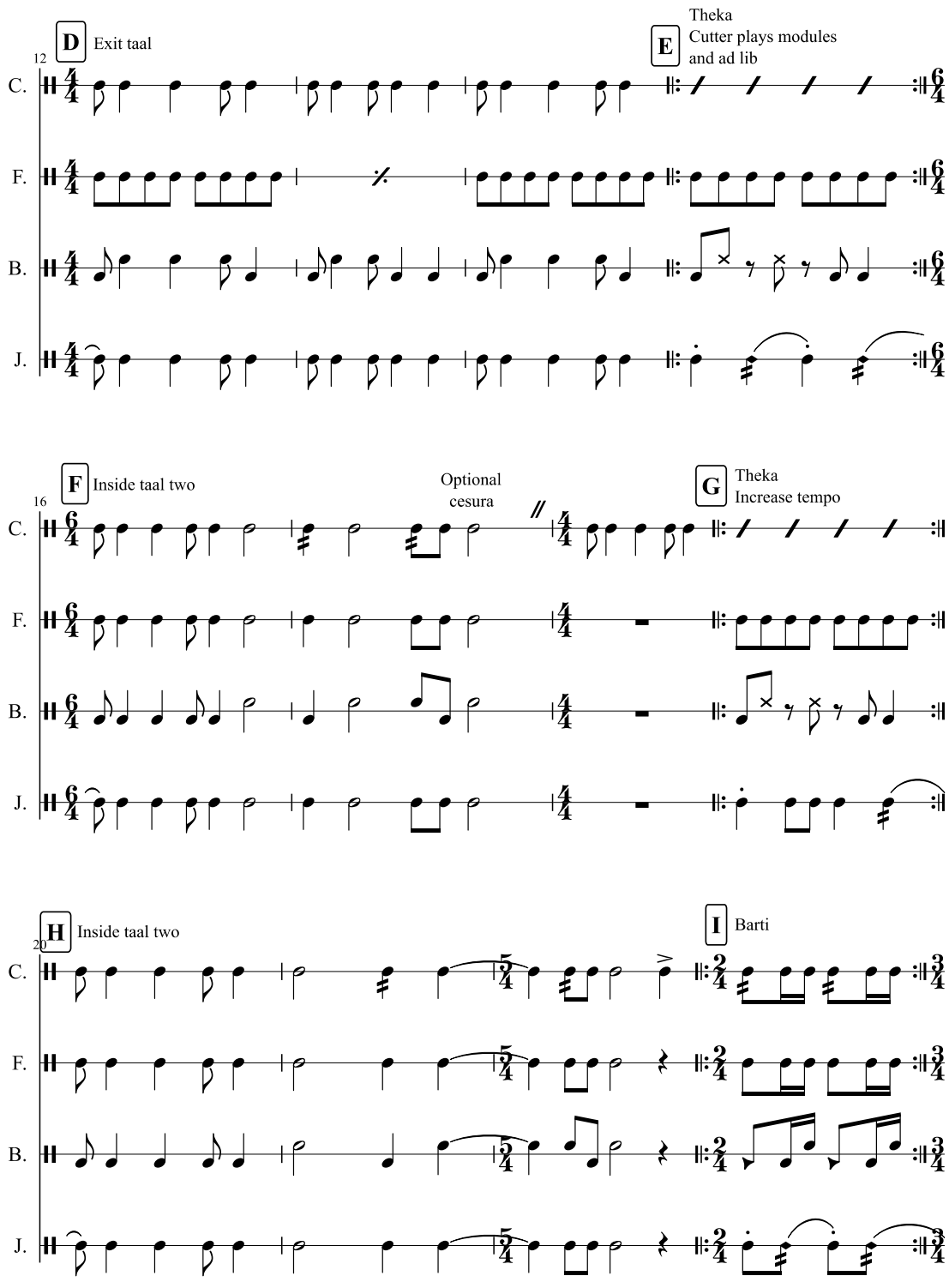
hand, for example, is perhaps the most distinct of any hand in the wedding repertoire. Nonetheless, it is ideally static and unchanging, and the jhal usually follows the bass (though in the referenced performance, the jhal often diverges from the bass at key points), therefore the omission of these parts is only for practical reasons. I rely on the listener to correlate the missing lines of notation with the transcribed material by following along with the audio.

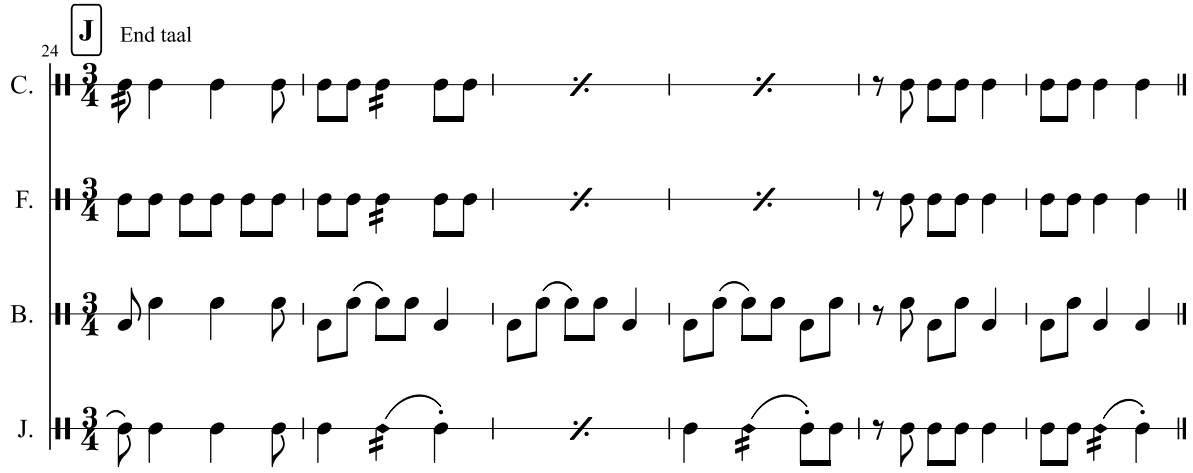
Tikora


A Theka
B Occassional accents with non-rolling hand
Cutter
Foulé
Bass
Jhal
C Occassional inside taal
Play 2
or 3 times
D Return to theka
E End taal
7
C.
F.
B.
J.
Play
2 times
11
C.
F.
B.
J.

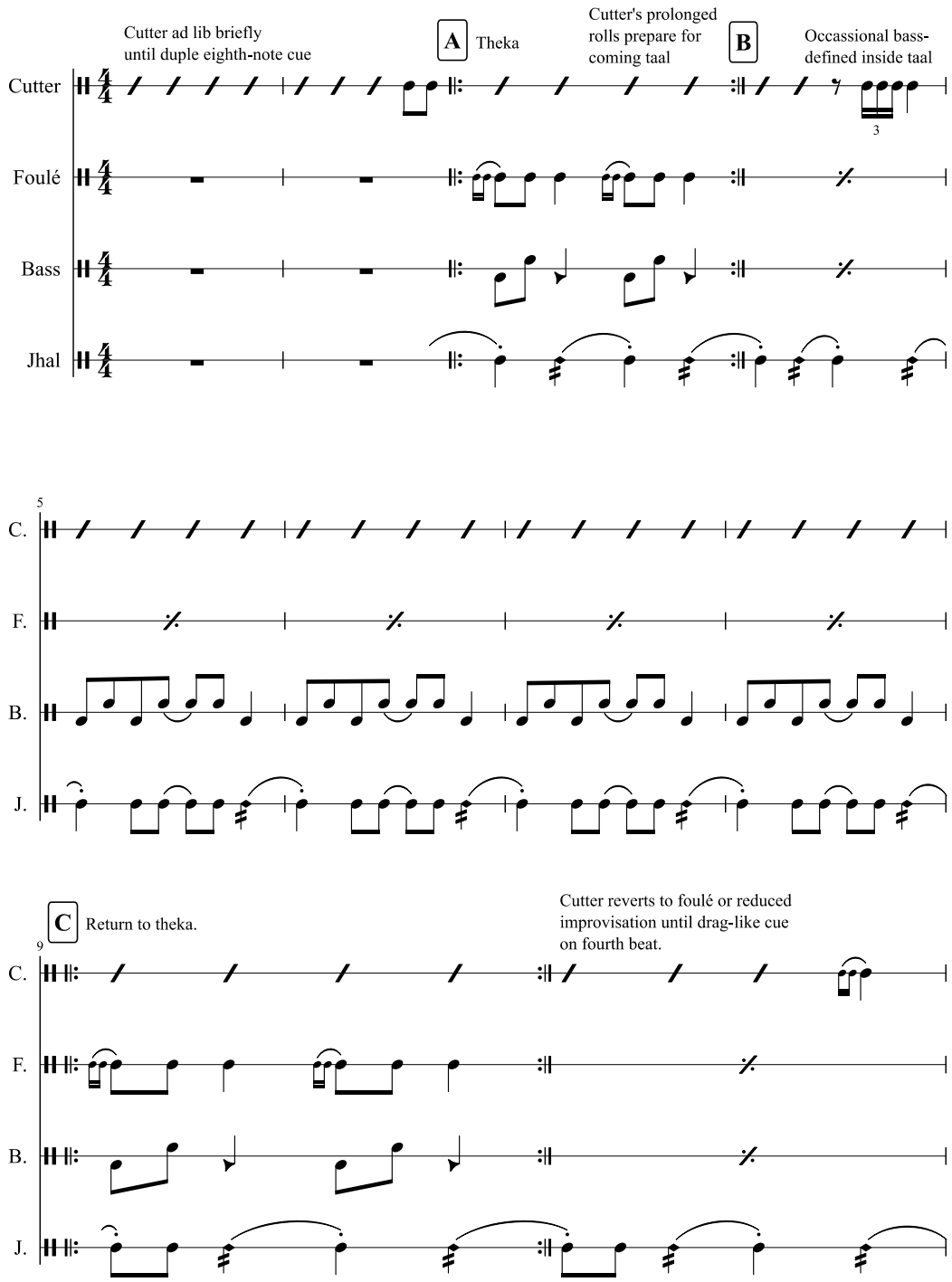
Chaubola

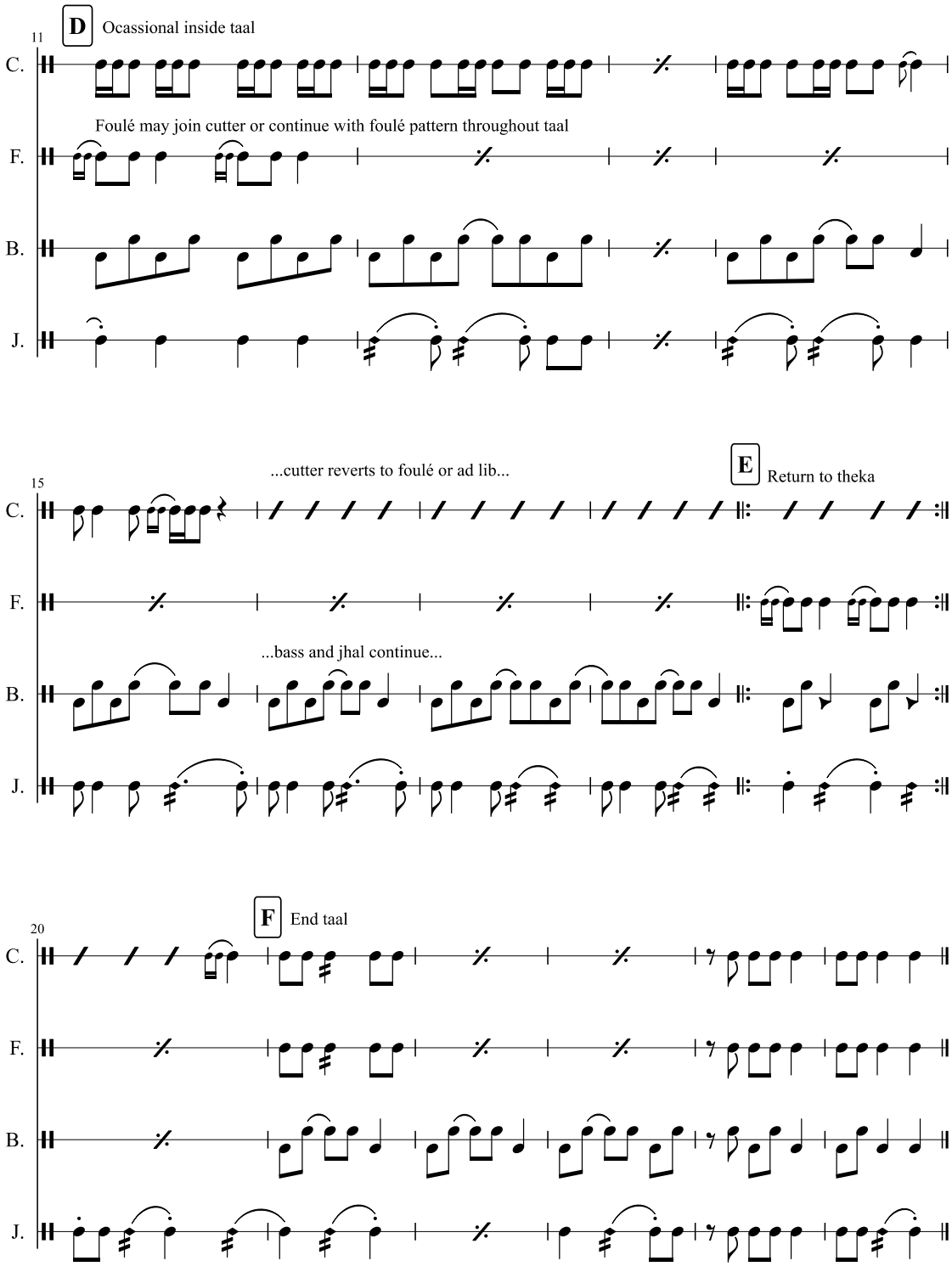

A
Module 1
Alternate articulation
of Module 1
Module 2
Cutter
Theka
Foulé
Bass
Jhal
5
Module 3
Inside taal
prep cue
B
Inside taal one
(often with slight tempo increase)
C.
Foulé may continue
or join cutter
F.
B.
J.
9
C
Barti
Cutter ad lib on this rhythm
C.
F.
B.
J.


12
D
Exit taal
E
Theka
Cutter plays modules
and ad lib
C.
F.
B.
J.
16
F
Inside taal two
Optional
cesura
G
Theka
Increase tempo
C.
F.
B.
J.
20
H
Inside taal two
I
Barti
C.
F.
B.
J.


J
End taal
24
C.
F.
B.
J.

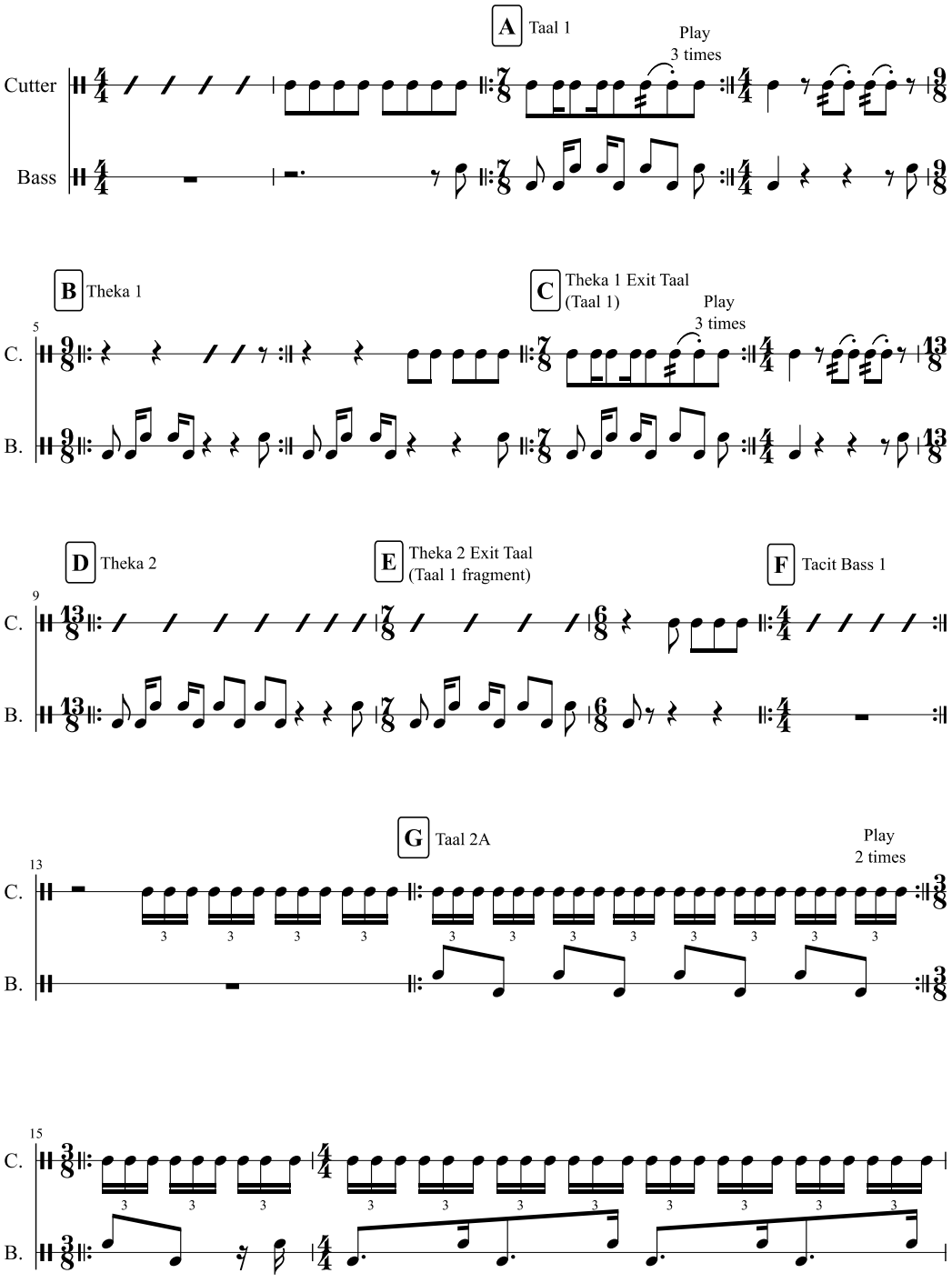
Nagara

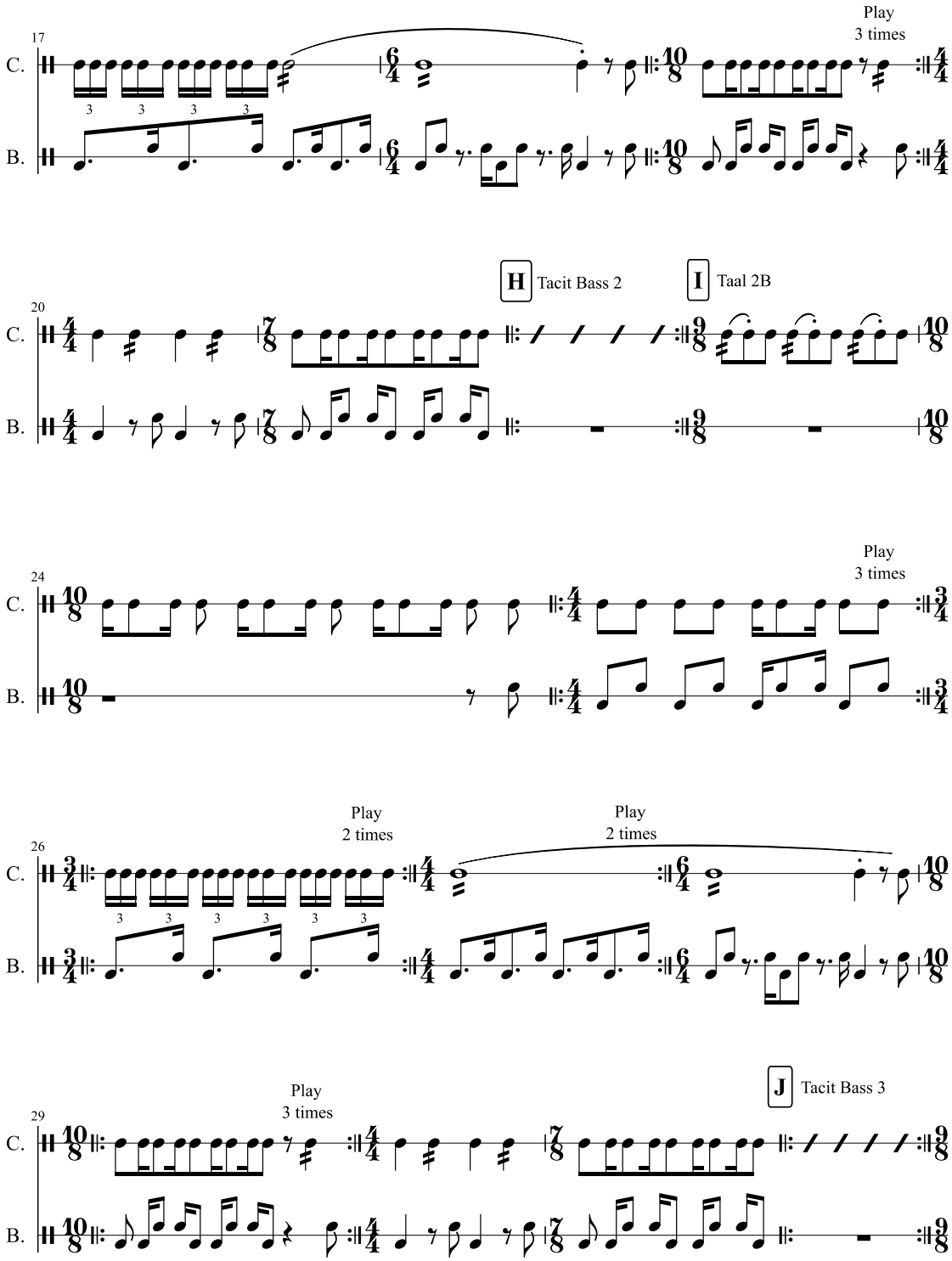

Cutter ad lib briefly
until duple eighth-note cue
A
Theka
Cutter's prolonged
rolls prepare for
coming taal
B
Occassional bass-
defined inside taal
Cutter
Foulé
Bass
Jhal
3
5
C.
F.
B.
J.
C
Return to theka.
Cutter reverts to foulé or reduced
improvisation until drag-like cue
on fourth beat.
9
C.
F.
B.
J.

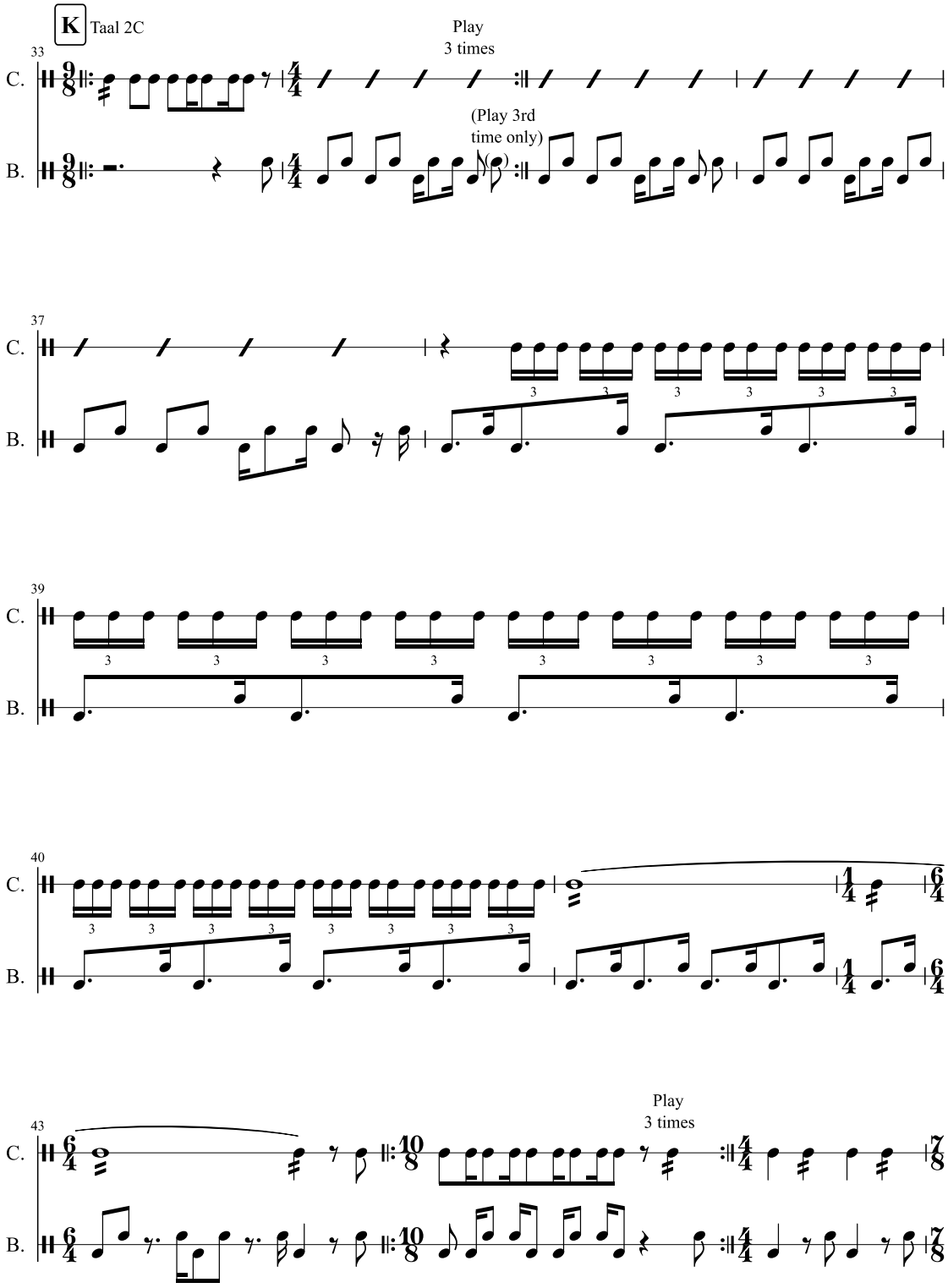

D
Ocassional inside taal
11
C.
Foulé may join cutter or continue with foulé pattern throughout taal
F.
B.
J.
...cutter reverts to foulé or ad lib...
E
Return to theka
15
C.
F.
...bass and jhal continue...
B.
J.
F
End taal
20
C.
F.
B.
J.

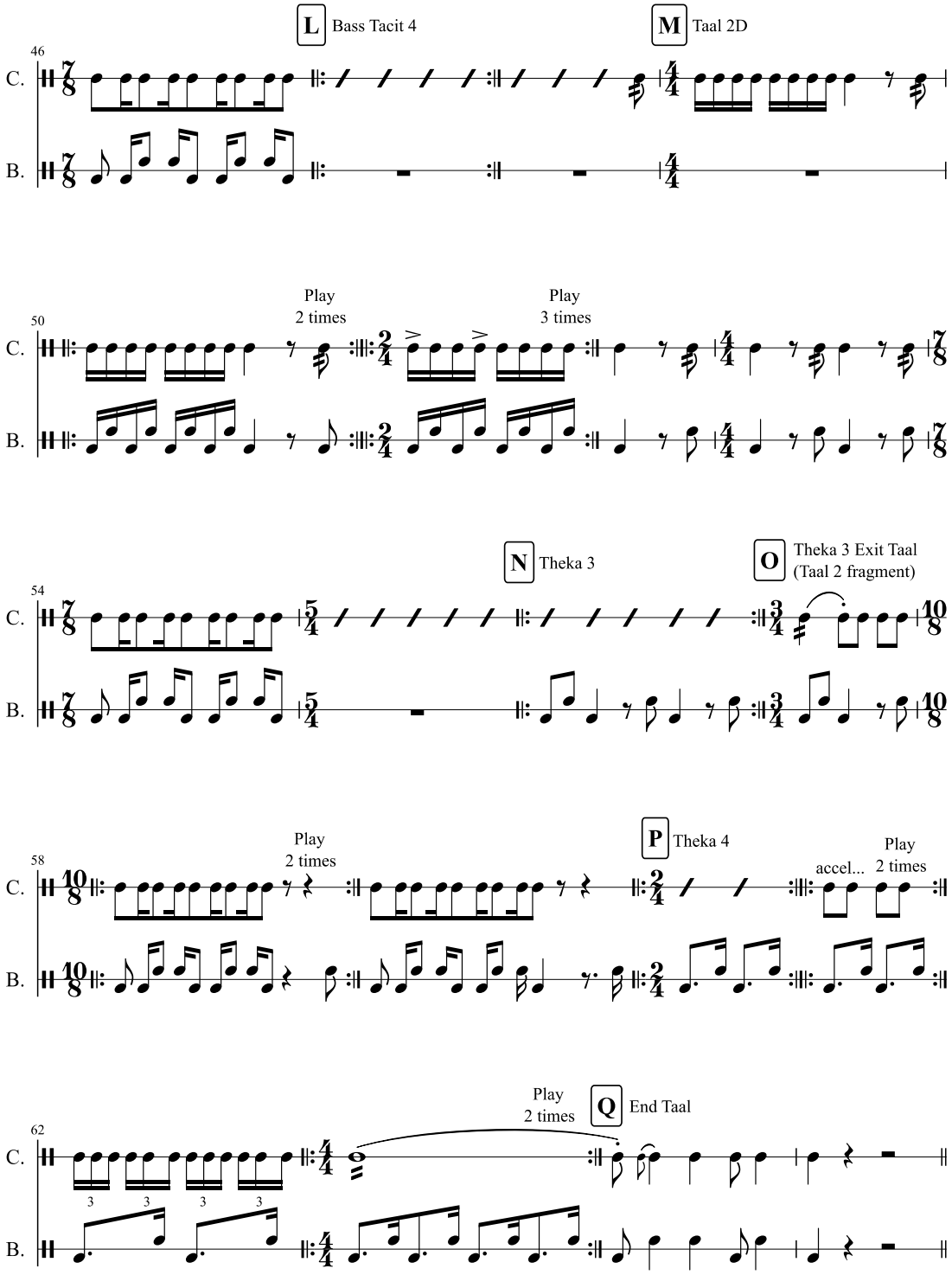
Wedding Hand

Eighth note remains constant.

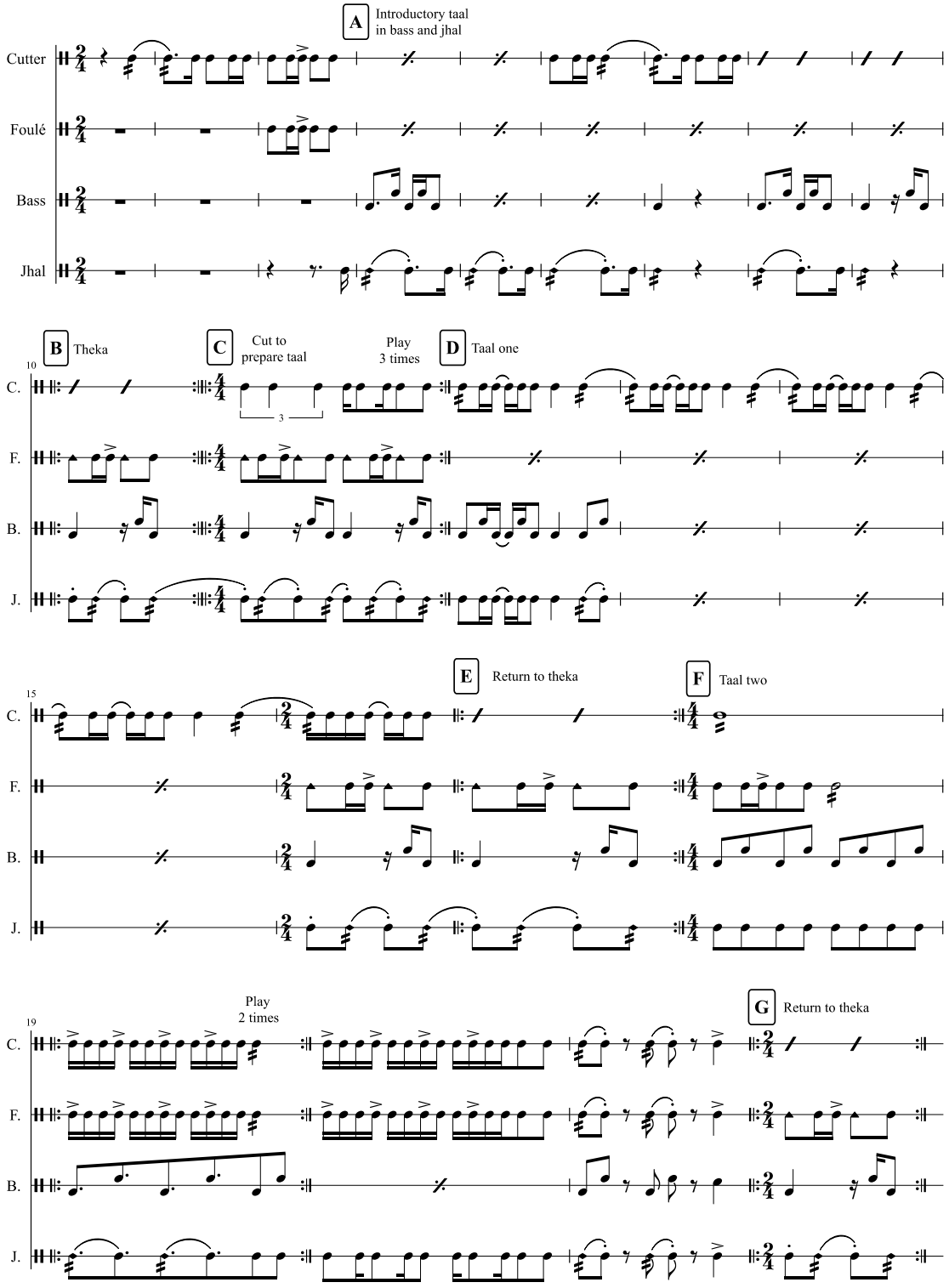


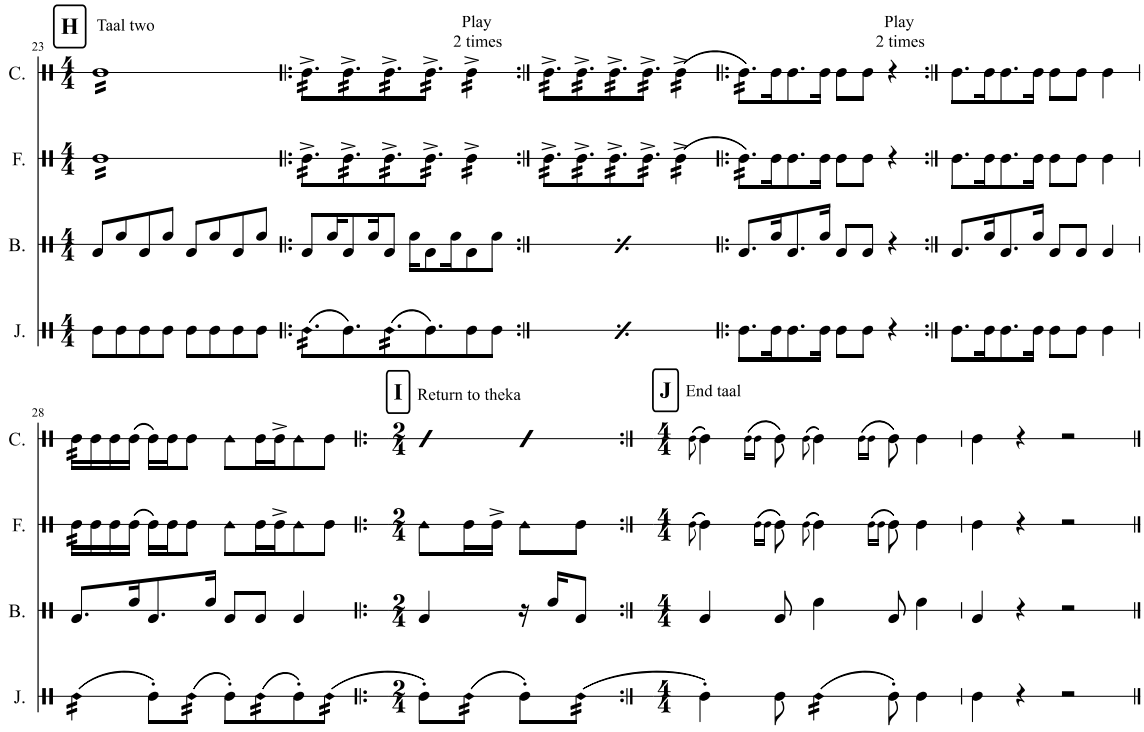

17
C.
B.
Play
3 times
20
H Tacit Bass 2
I Taal 2B
24
Play
3 times
26
Play
2 times
Play
2 times
29
Play
3 times
J Tacit Bass 3


K
Taal 2C
Play
3 times
(Play 3rd
time only)
C.
B.
33
37
39
40
43
Play
3 times

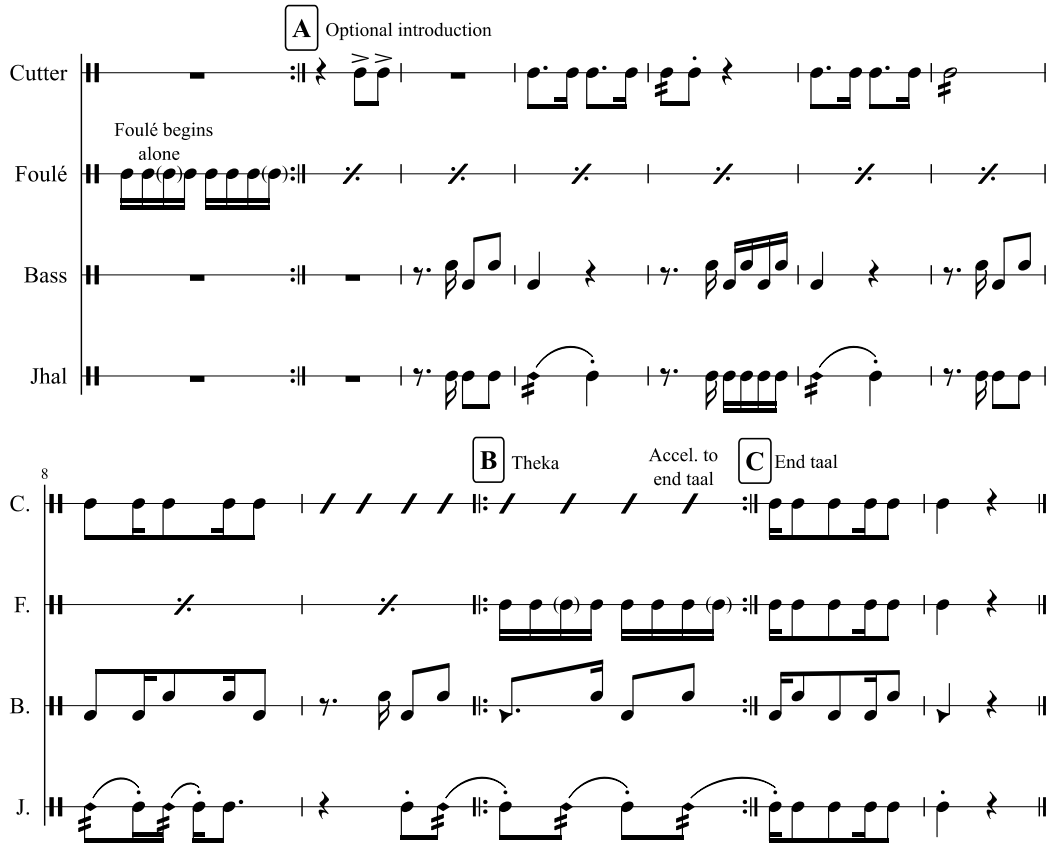

L Bass Tacit 4
M Taal 2D
46
C.
B.
Play
2 times
Play
3 times
50
N Theka 3
O Theka 3 Exit Taal
(Taal 2 fragment)
54
Play
2 times
P Theka 4
accel...
Play
2 times
58
Play
2 times
Q End Taal
62

Dingolay

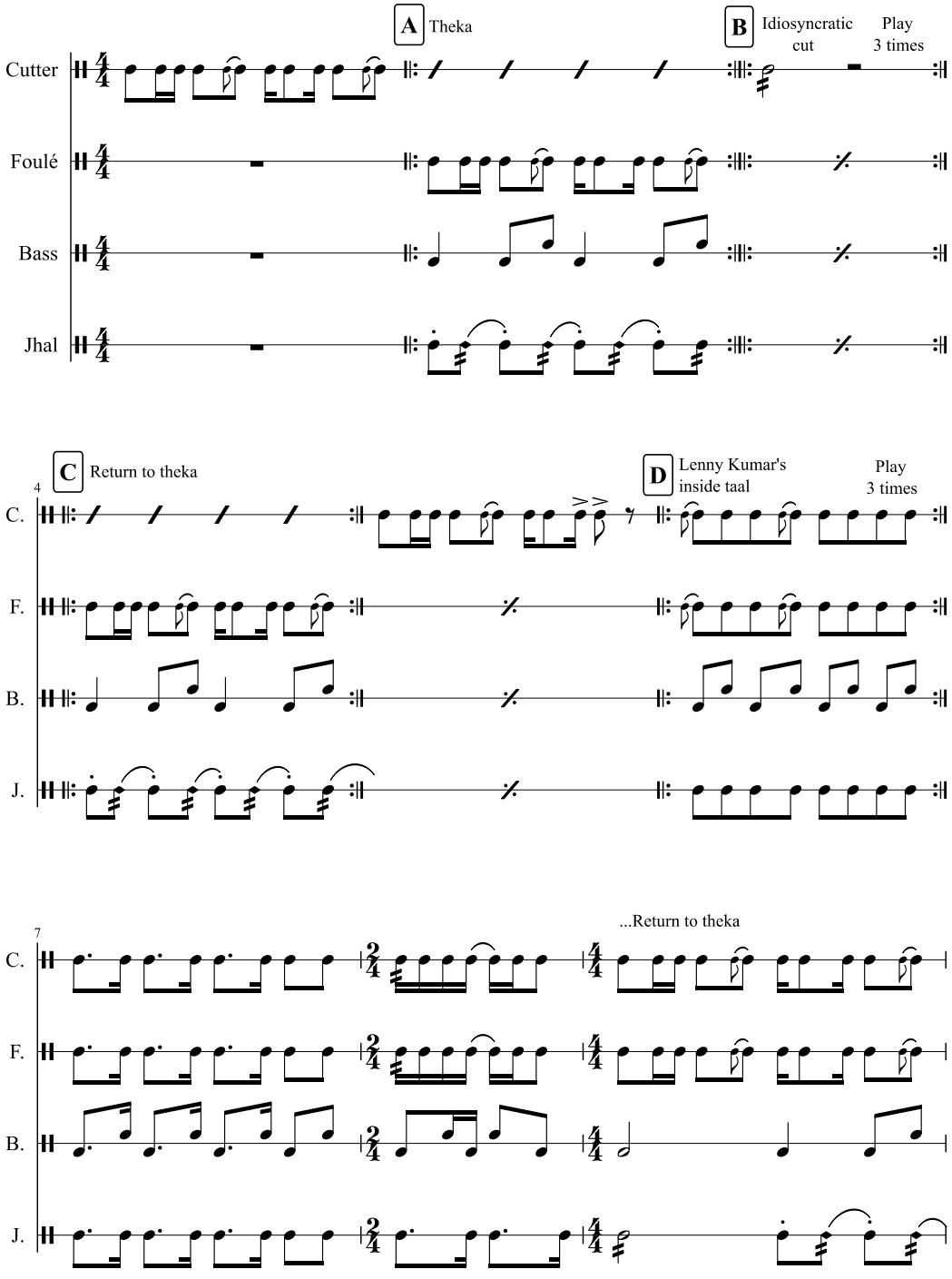

A
Introductory taal
in bass and jhal
Cutter
Foulé
Bass
Jhal
B
Theka
C
Cut to
prepare taal
Play
3 times
D
Taal one
10
C.
F.
B.
J.
E
Return to theka
F
Taal two
15
Play
2 times
G
Return to theka
19

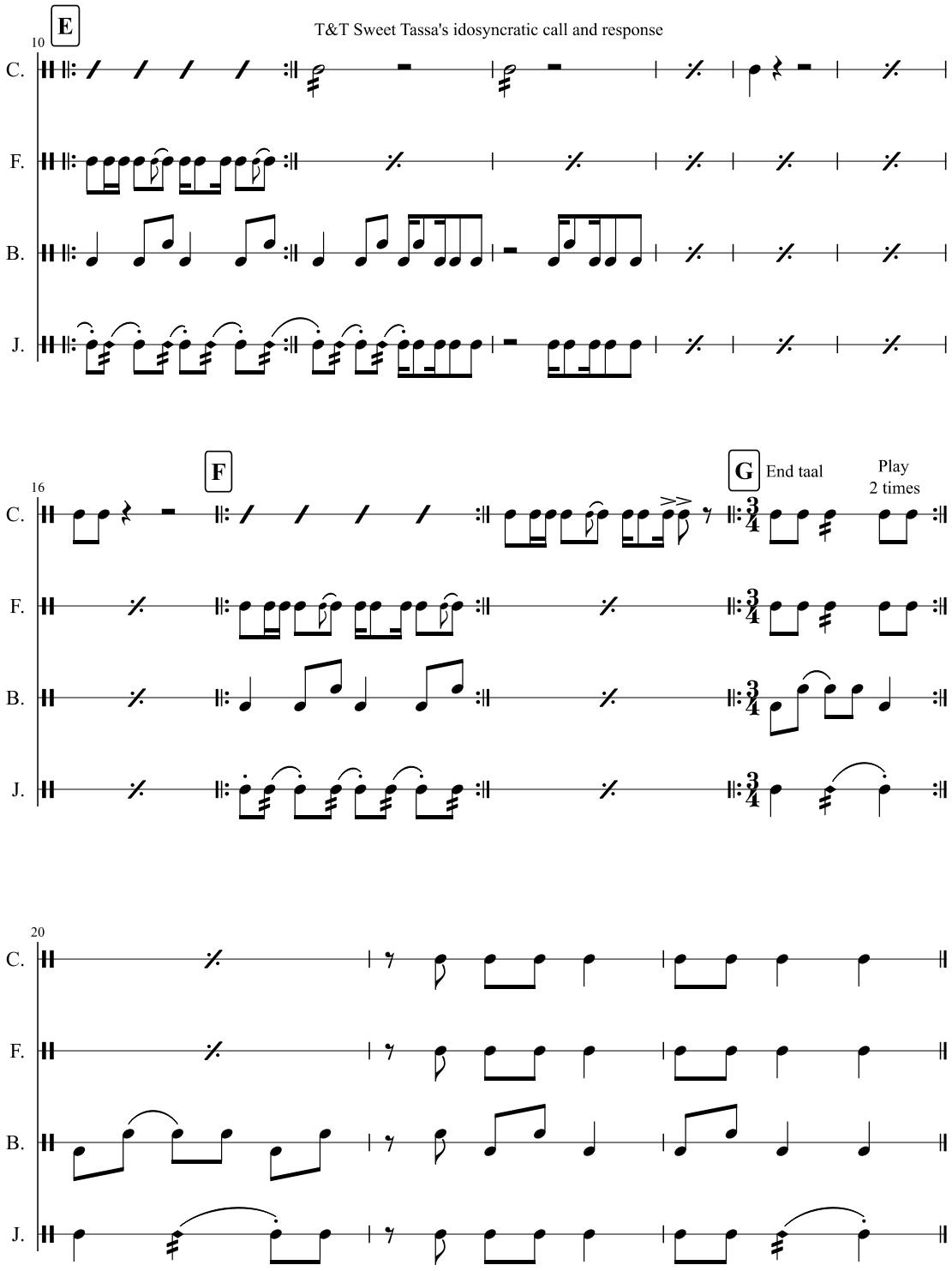

H
Taal two
Play
2 times
Play
2 times
23
C.
F.
B.
J.
I
Return to theka
J
End taal
28
C.
F.
B.
J.

Calypso Hand

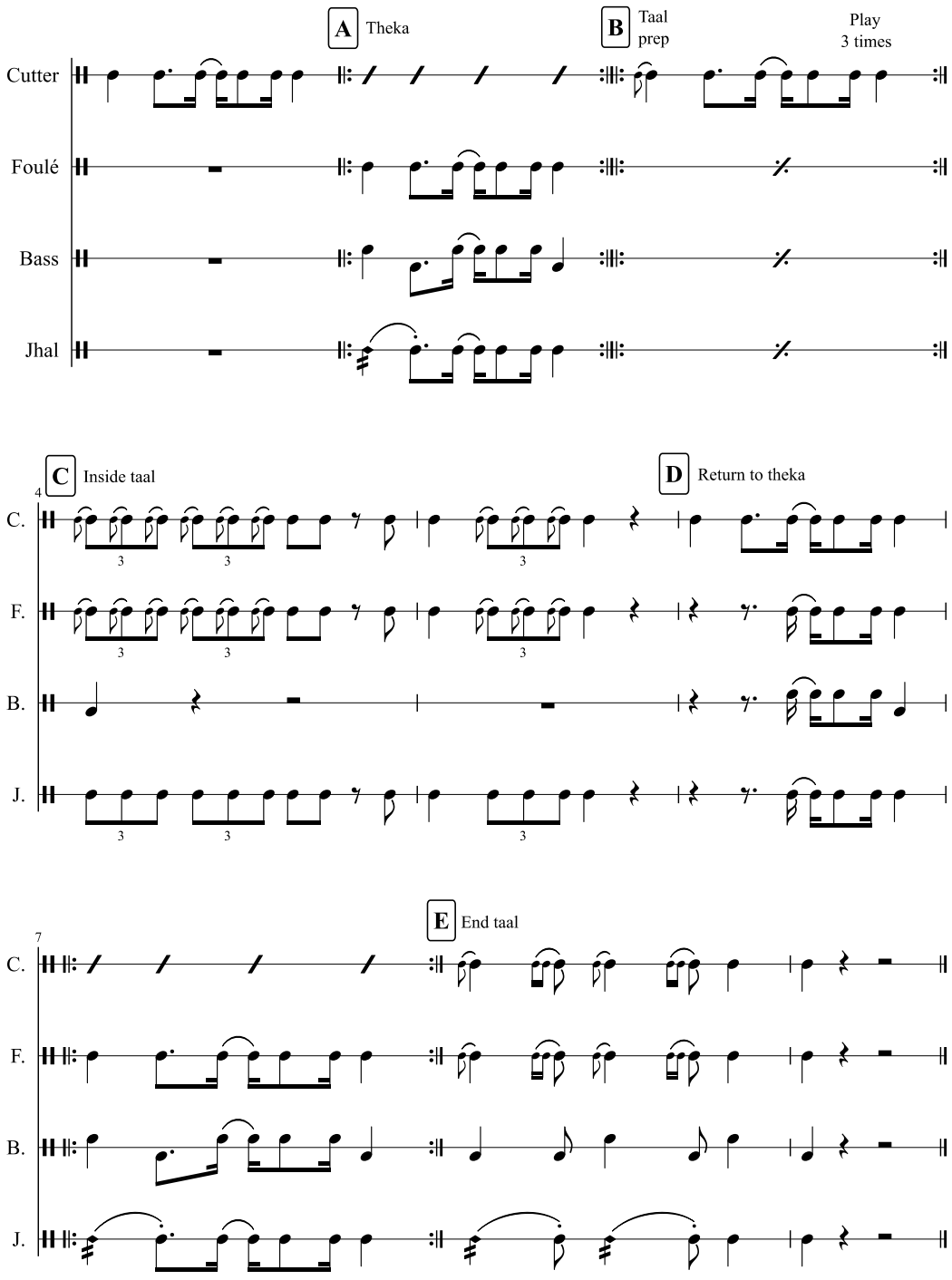


Chutney


A Theka
B Idiosyncratic cut
Play 3 times
Cutter
Foulé
Bass
Jhal
4
C Return to theka
D Lenny Kumar's inside taal
Play 3 times
C.
F.
B.
J.
7
...Return to theka


T&T Sweet Tassa's idosyncratic call and response
E
10
C.
F.
B.
J.
F
G
End taal
Play
2 times
16
20

George of the Jungle



APPENDIX C
TASSA COMPETITION RULES AND SCORE SHEETS

2003 National Tassa Monarch Competition Rules and Guidelines

2003 National Tassa Monarch Competition of Trinidad & Tobago:

Rules and Guidelines:

1. All contestants participating in the 2003 National Tassa Monarch Competition of Trinidad and Tobago on Saturday 30th August 2003 must fill out a Registration Form.

2. Registration fee for all competing Tassa Groups is Twenty Dollars ($20.00)

3. Contestants should properly display the name of their Tassa Group.

4. Each Tassa Group is allowed ten (10) minutes on stage for their Performance.

5. Tassa Groups shall be instructed by the stage-manager in keeping with the smooth flow of the competition.

6. All Tassa Groups will be allowed to perform five (5) hands out of seven (7) hands in any order i.e.: -
Tekoraa; Chowbhola Bhajan; Naagaraa; Wedding Hand; Dingolay; Steelpan Hand; Chutney Hand. (Please inform us of your choice of hands)

7. Each Tassa Group can have dancers during their performances.

8. All Groups are asked to be at the Venue by 4:00 p.m. on Saturday 30th August 2003 at Saith Car Park, Chaguanas.

9 All Groups are reminded that there is a special prize for the Best Dress Tassa Group.

10. Judging Criteria: -

Taal	25 points
Timing	20 "
Simultaneous Coordination	25 "
Presentation	20 "
Discipline	10 "

11. Judges decision is FINAL.

2005 NATIONAL TASSA COMPETITION OF T & T

Preliminary Rules and Guidelines:

1. All Tassa Bands participating in the **Preliminaries** of the 2005 National Tassa Competition of Trinidad and Tobago on **Sunday 7th August 2005** at the **Himalaya Club in Barataria** must fill out a Registration Form.

2. Registration fee for all Tassa Bands is Twenty Dollars ($20.00)

3. Contestants should properly register the name of their Tassa Band on the prescribed Registration Form.

4. Each Tassa Band is allowed ten (10) minutes on stage for their Performance.

5. All Tassa Bands will be allowed to perform five (5) hands including **the Band's Original Piece** in any order. However, order of Hands must be clearly written in the Registration Form.

6. Each Tassa Band is allowed to have dancers during their performances. The Dancer should choreograph the presentation to add value to the rendition.

7. All Bands are asked to be at the Venue by 4:00 p.m. on Sunday 7th August 2005

8. All Bands are reminded that there are special prizes in the Final the Best Dress Tassa Band, People's Choice, Most Promising and Best Tassa Dancer.

9 All Bands registered to perform at the Competition must agree to perform on the Main Stage in order of appearance, failure to give a live performance on Stage Renders the Band to be disqualified from the Competition and would be liable to pay a sum greater than the first prize of the competition.

10. The Organisers shall take whatever actions deems necessary to recover the said Sum of monies as outline in Rule 9 including Legal Action.

11. The stage-manager shall instruct all Tassa Bands accordingly in keeping with the Smooth flow of the competition.

12. **Judging Criteria:**

	Points
Timing (Rhythm and Harmony)	25
Band Original Piece (including Tonal Quality)	25
Breaking Taal (changing from one beat to the next)	20
Discipline (Overall)	20
Presentation (Stage)	10

13. No off-stage performance by Tassa Band/s will be allowed to play while the Competition is in progress.

14. Judges decision is FINAL.

2007 Dinsley Community Residents Association Tassabration Score Sheet

(Text identifying the judge and band has been expunged)

2007 Dinsley Community Residents Association.

Tassabration.

Sunday 17th June 2007.

Judges Score Sheet Band No:__ ____

Name of Tassa Band:__ _____

Judging Criteria	Points	Score
Timing (Rhythm & Harmony)	25	
Tonal Quality	25	
Breaking Taal (from one beat to another)	20	
Discipline (overall)	20	
Presentation	10	
Total	**100**	

All participating Tassa Bands/Groups should not exceed more than ten (10) minutes on Stage and are required to play any five Hands.

[ ] Tekorra [ ] Bhajan Chowbhola [ ] Naagaraa

[ ] Steel Pan [ ] Wedding Hand [ ] Dingolay

[ ] Chutney Soca Hand

Judge's Remarks:

____ _____

_____

_____

Judge No:_ Signature: __ _____

Tassa Taal 2007 Rules and Regulations

TASSA TAAL 2007

RULES AND REGULATIONS

1) Each Tassa Group must be registered with the organization in order to compete.

2) All players must be members of their respective bands.

3) Points will be lost for any other hand played not mention.

4) Time-hands to be played in strict order and not exceed ten (10) minutes.

5) Hands: - **Tikora, Chowbola, Classical Wedding Hand, Dingolay, Kalinda.**

6) Points will be lost for exceeding time.

7) Points will be lost for time wasting.

8) Groups must be assembled at The Samar Entertainment Centre, Debe by 1:30pm.

9) Points will be lost for late arrival / if the group is not available for position drawn on the day of the competition.

10) All members of the group must be properly attired.

11) Each group must be represented by not more than four (4) performers:-
Cutter Man, Foolay Man, Jhaal Man and Bass Man – Free to Interchange.

12) The only pieces allowed -4- **Cutter, Foolay, Jhaal, Bass.**

13) Points shall be won for the tonal quality of drums, clarity of sounds of each style or hand of drumming, purity of style and harmony and rhythm of instrument during performance.

14) The performers of each group must maintain a high standard of conduct.
Their behaviour must, at all times, be exceptionally good.

15) No smoking or consumption of alcohol will be permitted on stage.

16) Anyone who is believed to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol can cause his group to be disqualified.

17) Abuse, insult and/or annoying language to any official, judge or any other person before, during and after the competition can also lead to disqualification of both individual and group from future competitions.

THE COMPETITION WILL BE JUDGED UNDER THE FOLLOWING HEADINGS:-

Dress Appearance	**10**
Purity of Hand	**25**
Rhythm and Harmony	**30**
Presentation and Performance	**20**
General Conduct/Behaviour	**15 →**
TOTAL	**100**

- Before during and after the band performs e.g. excessive alcohol.
- Loud drumming while other groups are on stage.

The judges' decision shall be final.

PRIZES:	**First**	**$6,000.00**
	Second	**$4,000.00**
	Third	**$3,000.00**
	Forth	**$2,000.00**
	Fifth	**$1,000.00**
	Best Dressed Band	**$700.00**
	Best Newcomer	**$700.00**
	Best Appearance	**$700.00**
	People's Choice	**$700.00**
	Appearance Fee	**$300.00 each**

Tassa Taal 2013 Rules and Regulations

T A S S A T A A L 2 0 13

RULES AND REGULATIONS

1) Each Tassa Group must be registered with the organization in order to compete.

2) All players must be members of their respective bands.

3) Points will be lost for any other hand played not mentioned.

4) Time-hands to be played in strict order and not exceed twelve (12) minutes.

5) Hands: - **Tikora, Chowbola, Classical Wedding Hand, Calypso, Hand of Choice.**

6) Groups will be allowed to play a **Hand of Choice.** This hand can be an original composition. The hand must be played last in the performance and the name of the hand must be submitted prior to the day of Tassa Taal.

7) Points will be lost for exceeding time.

8) Points will be lost for time wasting.

9) Groups must be assembled at The Samar Entertainment Centre, Debe by 1:30pm.

10) Points will be lost for late arrival / if the group is not available for position drawn on the day of the competition.

11) All members of the group must be properly attired.

12) Each group must be represented by not more than six (6) performers:-
Cutter Man, Foolay Man, Jhaal Man and Bass Man – Free to Interchange.

13) The only pieces allowed - **Cutter, Foolay, Jhaal / Jhaanj, and Bass.**

14) Points shall be gained for the tonal quality of drums, clarity of sounds of each style or hand of drumming, purity of style and harmony and rhythm of instrument during performance.

15) The performers of each group must maintain a high standard of conduct.
Their behaviour must, at all times, be exceptional.

16) No smoking or consumption of alcohol will be permitted on stage.

17) Anyone who is believed to be under the influence of drugs or alcohol can cause his group to be disqualified.

18) Abuse, insult and/or annoying language to any official, judge or any other person before, during and after the competition can also lead to disqualification of both individual and group from future competitions.

THE COMPETITION WILL BE JUDGED UNDER THE FOLLOWING HEADINGS:-

Purity of Hand	**35**
Rhythm and Harmony	**35**
Dress, Presentation and Performance	**20**
General Conduct/ Behavior	**10 →**
TOTAL	**100**

- Before during and after the band performs e.g. excessive alcohol.
- Loud drumming while other groups are on stage.

The judges' decision shall be final.

PRIZES:	**First**	**$10,000.00**
	Second	**$8,000.00**
	Third	**$6,000.00**
	Fourth	**$4,000.00**
	Fifth	**$2,000.00**
	Best Dressed Band	**$1,000.00**
	Best Presentation	**$1,000.00**
	People's Choice	**$1,000.00**
	Appearance Fee	**$400.00 each**

APPENDIX D
AUDIO EXAMPLES

Objects D-1 through D-7 are excerpts from a longer performance at a wedding in Carapichaima, Trinidad in April 2011. Though played as a suite of successive hands during this performance, each hand is here separated into its own track for ease of listening. These are monaural recordings.

Object D-1. Tikora (wedding suite) (.mp3 1 MB)

Object D-2. Chaubola (wedding suite) (.mp3 3 MB)

Object D-3. Someri (wedding suite) (.mp3 1 MB)

Object D-4. Calypso (wedding suite) (.mp3 5 MB)

Object D-5. Wedding Hand (wedding suite) (.mp3 6 MB)

Object D-6. Nagara (wedding suite) (.mp3 3 MB)

Object D-7. George of the Jungle (wedding suite) (.mp3 1 MB)

I recorded Objects D-8 through D-12 in a controlled environment in August 2012. These are in stereo and therefore should aid the listener to more accurately distinguish instrumental parts.

Object D-8. Tikora (.mp3 1 MB)

Object D-9. Nagara (.mp3 5 MB)

Object D-10. Dingolay (.mp3 3 MB)

Object D-11. Calypso (.mp3 4 MB)

Object D-12. Chutney (.mp3 3 MB)

APPENDIX E
MAPS

A B

Figure E-1. Regional maps. A) the Caribbean, B) Trinidad and Tobago.

Figure E-2. Map of Trinidadian locales mentioned in the text.

LIST OF REFERENCES

Aho, William. “Steelband Music in Trinidad and Tobago.” *Latin American Music Review* 8, no. 1 (1987): 26–58.

Allsopp, Richard, ed. “Bull; Buller.” *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*. Mona, Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 1996.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised Edition. London: Verso, 1991.

Austerlitz, Paul. *Merengue: Dominican Music and Dominican Identity*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1997.

Averill, Gage. *A Day for the Hunter, a Day for the Prey: Popular Music and Power in Haiti*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.

Basch, Linda, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc. *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States*. Basel: Gordon and Breach, 1994.

Berrian, Brenda F. *Awakening Spaces: French Caribbean Popular Songs, Music, and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Birth, Kevin K. *Bacchanalian Sentiments: Musical Experiences and Political Counterpoints in Trinidad*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.

Bishop, John, and Frank J. Korom. *Hosay Trinidad* VHS. Documentary Educational Resources, 1998.

Blacking, John. *How Musical Is Man?* Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1973.

Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk*. New York: Pocket Books, 1903.

Bragard, Véronique. *Transoceanic Dialogues: Coolitude in Caribbean and Indian Ocean Literatures*. Brussels: Peter Lang, 2008.

Brereton, Bridget. “‘All Ah We Is Not One:’ Historical and Ethnic Narratives in Pluralist Trinidad.” *The Global South* 4, no. 2 (2010): 218–238.

———. “The Historical Background to the Culture of Violence in Trinidad and Tobago.” *Caribbean Review of Gender Studies* no. 4 (2010). http://sta.uwi.edu/crgs/february2010/index.asp.

———. *Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870-1900*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Carter, Marina, and Khal Torabully. *Coolitude: An Anthology of the Indian Labour Diaspora*. London: Anthem Press, 2002.

Clarke, Colin G. *East Indians in a West Indian Town: San Fernando, Trinidad, 1930-70*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1986.

Cohen, Robin, and Paola Toninato. "The Creolization Debate: Analysing Mixed Identities and Cultures." In *The Creolization Reader: Studies in Mixed Identities and Cultures*, edited by Robin Cohen and Paola Toninato. London: Routledge, 2010.

Crichlow, Wesley E.A. "History, (Re)Memory, Testimony and Biomythography: Charting a Buller Man's Trinidadian Past." In *Interrogating Caribbean Masculinities: Theoretical and Empirical Analyses*, edited by Rhoda Reddock. Mona, Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 2004.

Diethrich, Gregory Michael. "'Living in Both Sides of the World': Music, Diaspora, and Nation in Trinidad." Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2004.

Dudley, Shannon. *Music from Behind the Bridge: Steelband Spirit and Politics in Trinidad and Tobago*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Figueira, Daurius. *Simbhoonath Capildeo: Lion of the Legislative Council, Father of Hindu Nationalism in Trinidad and Tobago*. Lincoln, NE: iUniverse, 2003.

Geoghegan, J. *Note on Emigration from India*. Calcutta: Government of India Department of Agriculture, Revenue, and Commerce, 1873.

Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993.

La Guerre, John, ed. *Calcutta to Caroni: The East Indians of Trinidad*. St. Augustine, Trinidad: University of the West Indies Extra Mural Studies Unit, 1985.

Guilbault, Jocelyne. *Governing Sound: The Cultural Politics of Trinidad's Carnival Musics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007.

Halstead, Narmala. "Knowledge as Gifts of Self and Other." In *Knowing How to Know: Fieldwork and the Ethnographic Present*, edited by Narmala Halstead, Eric Hirsch, and Judith Okely, 92–109. New York: Berghahn Books, 2008.

Hansen, Kathryn. *Grounds for Play: The Nautaki Theatre of North India*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992.

Hill, Errol. *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1972.

James, C. L. R. “Without Malice.” *The Nation*. Trinidad and Tobago, February 28, 1959.

Kanhai, Rosanne, ed. *Matikor: The Politics of Identity for Indo-Caribbean Women*. St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago: School of Continuing Studies, the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, 1999.

Kartomi, Margaret J. *Musical Journeys in Sumatra*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2012.

Khan, Aisha. “Creolization Moments.” In *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, edited by Charles Stewart, 237–253. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007.

———. *Callaloo Nation: Metaphors of Race and Religious Identity Among South Asians in Trinidad*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004.

———. “Journey to the Center of the Earth: The Caribbean as Master Symbol.” *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 3 (2001): 271–302.

Kiely, Ray. *The Politics of Labour and Development in Trinidad*. Kingston, Jamaica: The Press University of the West Indies, 1996.

Kingsley, Charles. *At Last: A Christmas in the West Indies*. London: MacMillan and Company, 1889.

Klass, Morton. *Singing with Sai Baba: The Politics of Revitalization in Trinidad*. Prospect Heights, Il: Waveland Press, 1991.

———. *East Indians in Trinidad: A Study of Cultural Persistence*. Prospect Heights, Il: Waveland Press, 1961.

Korom, Frank J. *Hosay Trinidad: Muharram Performances in an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003.

Laird, Christopher. “Pat Bishop.” *Eye to Eye: Ways of Seeing*. CaribbeanTales Worldwide Distribution, 2010.

Look Lai, Walton. *Indentured Labor, Caribbean Sugar: Chinese and Indian Migrants to the British West Indies, 1838-1918*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

MacDonald, Scott B. *Trinidad and Tobago: Democracy and Development in the Caribbean*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1986.

Mahabir, Kumar. “The Influence of the Tassa on the Making of the Steelband: The East Indian Contribution to the Trinidad Carnival,” Manuscript. Trinidad and Tobago, 1984.

Maharaj, D. Parsuram. *Clash of Cultures: The Indian-African Competition in Trinidad*. Arima, Trinidad: The Indian Free Press, 2002.

Manoo-Rahming, Lelawattee. “The Night of Champa’s Matikor.” *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 7, no. 1 (2009). http://anthurium.miami.edu/volume_7/issue_1/manoo-rhaming-nightofchampa.html.

———. “Uncloaking Our Madrasi Heritage: Dedicated to You, Kenny-Mother.” *The Caribbean Writer* 16 (2002). http://www.peepaltreepress.com/review_display.asp?rev_id=252.

Manuel, Peter. “Indo-Caribbean Folk Music from Oral Tradition to Cyberculture.” In *Re-constructing Place and Space: Media, Culture, Discourse and the Constitution of Caribbean Diasporas*, edited by Kamille Gentles-Peart and Maurice L. Hall, 53–72. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2012.

———. *Tassa Thunder: Folk Music from India to the Caribbean* DVD, 2010.

———. *Tān-singing, Chutney, and the Making of Indo-Caribbean Culture*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2000.

———. “Tassa Drumming from India to the Caribbean and Beyond.” In *Tales, Tunes, and Tassa Drums: Retention and Invention in Indo-Caribbean Music*. Urbana-Champaign: University of Illinois Press, forthcoming.

Martin, Robert Montgomery. *The History, Antiquities, Topography, and Statistics of Eastern India, Vol. III*. London: Wm. H. Allen and Co., 1838.

McDaniel, Lorna. *The Big Drum Ritual of Carriacou*. Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1998.

———. “Trinidad and Tobago.” Edited by Dale A. Olsen. *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*. New York: Routledge, 1998.

Meighoo, Kirk. *Politics in a Half Made Society: Trinidad and Tobago 1925-2001*. Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2003.

Mergault, Jean. “Refouler.” *Dictionnaire Français-Anglais*. Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1983.

Mintz, Sidney. *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*. New York: Penguin, 1986.

Mohamed, Manshad. “For Ray the Beat Goes On and On.” In *Indo-Caribbean Music and Culture in Greater Toronto*, 87–89. Toronto, 2010.

Mohammed, Kamaluddin. *Unifying Our Cosmopolitan Community: A Speech on Interracial Solidarity*. Port-of-Spain, Trinidad: P.N.M. Pub. Co., 1960.

Mohammed, Patricia. *Imaging the Caribbean: Culture and Visual Translation*. Oxford: MacMillan, 2009.

Moore, Robin D. *Nationalizing Blackness: Afrocubanismo and Artistic Revolution in Havana, 1920-1940*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997.

Munasinghe, Viranjini. *Callaloo or Tossed Salad? East Indians and the Cultural Politics of Identity in Trinidad*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001.

Myers, Helen. *Music of Hindu Trinidad: Songs from the India Diaspora*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.

Nathaniel, Daina. "Finding an 'Equal' Place: How the Designation of the Steelpan as the National Instrument Heightened Identity Relations in Trinidad and Tobago." Ph.D. Dissertation, Florida State University, 2006.

Niranjana, Tejaswini. *Mobilizing India: Women, Music, and Migration Between India and Trinidad*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006.

Northrup, David. *Indentured Labor in the Age of Imperialism, 1834-1922*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Pan Trinbago. "The Steelpan - National Instrument of Trinidad & Tobago - Official Statement from Pan Trinbago." *When Steel Talks*, September 12, 2012. http://www.panonthenet.com/news/2012/sep/pantrinbago-steelpan-national-instrument-9-12-2012.htm.

Pantomime, The. "So... About That Recalcitrant and Hostile Minority..." *The Eternal Pantomime: One Woman's Take on the Politics and Culture of Trinidad and Tobago*, August 27, 2012. http://eternalpantomime.com/2012/08/27/so-about-that-recalcitrant-and-hostile-minority/.

Pearson, J.G., Rev. "The Life History of an East Indian in British Guiana." *Timehri: The Journal of the Royal Agricultural and Commercial Society of British Guiana* New Series, no. 11 (1897): 136–146.

Persad, Ramsundar, ed. *Rites, Rituals and Customs Associated with the Hindu Marriage Ceremony in Trinidad and Tobago*. Curepe, Trinidad: Praimsingh's Pooja Bhavan, n.d.

Platts, John T. "Ṭakorā." *A Dictionary of Urdu, Classical Hindi, and English.* London: W. H. Allen & Co., 1884.

Polak, Rainer. “A Musical Instrument Travels the World: Jenbe Playing in Bamako, West Africa, and Beyond.” In *Ethnomusicology: A Contemporary Reader*, edited by Jennifer Post. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Puri, Shalini. *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004.

Ramesar, Marianne. *Survivors of Another Crossing: A History of East Indians in Trinidad, 1880-1946*. St. Augustine, Trinidad: School of Continuing Studies, University of the West Indies, 1994.

———. “Recurrent Issues Concerning Immigrants to Trinidad.” In *Calcutta to Caroni: The East Indians of Trinidad*, edited by John La Guerre, 135–152. St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago: University of the West Indies Extra Mural Studies Unit, 1985.

Ramnarine, Tina K. *Beautiful Cosmos: Performance and Belonging in the Caribbean Diaspora*. London: Pluto Press, 2007.

———. *Creating Their Own Space: The Development of an Indian-Caribbean Musical Tradition*. Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2001.

Ravi, Srilata. *Rainbow Colors: Literary Ethno-topographies of Mauritius*. Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2007.

Said, Edward. *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

Samaroo, Brinsley. “Politics of Afro-Indian Relations in Trinidad.” In *Calcutta to Caroni: The East Indians of Trinidad*, edited by John La Guerre, 77–92. St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago: University of the West Indies Extra Mural Studies Unit, 1985.

Sander, Reinhard W. “Alfred H. Mendes.” In *Fifty Caribbean Writers: A Bio-Bibliographical Sourcebook*, edited by Daryl Cumber Dance. Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1986.

Senghor, Léopold Sédar. “Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century.” In *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*, edited by Gaurav Desai and Supriya Nair, 183–190. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005.

Sharar, Abdul Halim. *Lucknow: The Last Phase of an Oriental Culture*. Translated by E. S. Harcourt and Fakhir Hussain. New Delhi: Oxford India Paperbacks, 2012.

Shurreef, Jaffur. *Qanoon-e-Islam, or the Customs of the Moosulmans of India*. Translated by G. A. Herklots. London: Parbury, Allen, and Co., 1832.

Singh, H. P. *Hour of Decision*. San Juan, Trinidad: Vedic Enterprises, n.d.

Singh, Kelvin. *Bloodstained Tombs: The Muharram Massacre 1884*. London: Macmillian Caribbean, 1988.

Sivagurunathan, Shivani. “A ‘Coolitudian’ Caribbean Text: The Trajectory of Renewal in David Dabydeen’s Our Lady of Demerara.” In *Readings in Caribbean History and Cutlure: Breaking Ground*, edited by D. A. Dunkley, 205–226. Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books, 2011.

Stillman, Amy Ku’Uleialoha. “Hawaiian Hula Competitions: Event, Repertoire, Performance, Tradition.” *The Journal of American Folklore* 109, no. 434 (1996): 357–380.

Stuempfle, Stephen. *The Steelband Movement: The Forging of a National Art in Trinidad and Tobago*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995.

Sullivan, Nestor. “Issues Surrounding the Latest Steelpan Development - the G-Pan: An Unfair Advantage for a Few?” *Panonthenet.com*, December 2, 2009. http://www.panonthenet.com/news/2009/dec/gpan-12-2-09.htm.

Tinker, Hugh. *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas 1830-1920*. London: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Turino, Thomas. “Nationalism and Latin American Music: Selected Case Studies and Theoretical Considerations.” *Latin American Music Review* 24, no. 2 (2003): 169–209.

Vergès, François. “Indian-Ocenaic Creolizations: Processes and Practices of Creolization on Réunion Island.” In *Creolization: History, Ethnography, Theory*, edited by Charles Stewart. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, 2007.

Vertovec, Steven. *Hindu Trinidad: Religion, Ethnicity, and Socio-Economic Change*. London: MacMillan, 1992.

Voll, John O. “Muslims in the Caribbean: Ethnic Sojourners and Citizens.” In *Muslim Minorities in the West: Visible and Invisible*, 265–277. Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002.

Wahab, Amar. *Colonial Inventions: Landscape, Power and Representation in Nineteenth-Century Trinidad*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars, 2010.

Wilder, Gary. *The French Imperial Nation-State: Negritude and Colonial Humanism Between the Two World Wars*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

Williams, Eric. *History of the People of Trinidad and Tobago*. Buffalo, NY: Eworld, Inc., 1962.

Wilson, Stacy-Ann. *Politics of Identity in Small Plural Societies: Guyana, the Fiji Islands, and Trinidad and Tobago*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

Winer, Lise, ed. *Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad & Tobago*. Montreal, Quebec and Kingston, Ontario: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008.

Wolf, Richard K. "Embodiment and Ambivalence: Emotion in South Asian Muharram Drumming." *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 32 (2000): 81–116.

Yelvington, Kevin. "Introduction." In *Trinidad Ethnicity*, edited by Kevin Yelvington. London: MacMillan Caribbean, 1993.

Younger, Paul. *New Homelands: Hindu Communities in Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad, South Africa, Fiji, and East Africa*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Christopher L. Ballengee holds a bachelor of arts in music from Lenoir-Rhyne University (2001), a master of music in ethnomusicology from Bowling Green State University (2005), and a Ph.D. in ethnomusicology from the University of Florida (2013). Ballengee formerly served as adjunct lecturer in the University of Florida School of Music and adjunct professor of music and technical theatre at Santa Fe College. He currently is assistant professor of music at Anne Arundel Community College.