



LOVE AND ANXIETY: GENDER NEGOTIATIONS IN CHUTNEY-SOCA LYRICS

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Aisha Mohammed

Abstract

Chutney soca is commonly perceived to be a fusion of chutney, an Indo-Trinidadian folk music performed during Hindu weddings, and soca, which is Afro-Trinidadian fête music that developed through a mixture of calypso with soul.¹ Marriage, sex and the family are recurring themes in “classical” chutney music. When chutney makes the transition to chutney-soca, the themes remain but their articulation changes both literally, in the sense that English becomes the primary language, and figuratively, as their articulation is influenced by multiple sex/gender systems. It is my contention that in chutney-soca, Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian sex/gender belief systems come into intense interaction, causing symbolic disruptions in the Indian system of gender relations. These disruptions can result in the reconfiguration of gender relations for Indian women and men at a metaphoric level.² The desire of organizers of the Chutney-Soca Monarch

¹ For the rest of the paper, when referring to Indo and Afro-Trinidadians, I use the terms ‘Indian’ and ‘black’ respectively.

² Although chutney-soca is a fusion music, and depends on the participation of both black and Indian artistes, it is still widely considered to be an ‘Indian artform’ due to the prevalence of imagery derived from Indian homes and customs, as well as the mostly Indian audiences at chutney soca events. Newspaper headlines like “Plenty chutney, too little soca” (*TnT Mirror*, 6 February 1998) and “Too much ‘jump and wave’ in chutney soca” (*Trinidad Guardian*, 15 January 2001) point to this perception. They also reveal the anxieties of Indians invested in defining an Indian culture distinct from the ‘dominant Creole’ culture due to fears of assimilation and cultural erosion. For this reason, I contend that the disruption resulting from interaction primarily affects the Indian system of gender relations.

competition to make it marketable to a foreign audience by conforming to 'international' standards also introduces North American gender ideologies. In this paper, I will look at how women and men, within the framework of the competition, negotiate gendered identities primarily through song lyrics, simultaneously challenging and reinforcing prevailing gender ideologies.
