

A Feminist Analysis of Vivah ke Geet(Wedding Songs)

Vicky Vishal Shandil

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Abstract

This paper provides a collection of analysed wedding songs and is the third in a series of three papers that extrapolate how gender ideals are emphasized through popular folk practices. The folksongs at the centre of this paper were being actively performed in IndoFijian wedding ceremonies throughout Fiji and in some cases in weddings in various other nations where IndoFijian diaspora exist, therefore, practitioners of wedding songs are noted as significant sources in this paper. This paper reads these songs using a feminist lens that is informed by the works of several feminist authors but specifically using the theories put forward by Judith Butler. The analysis of the songs shows how certain patriarchal ideologies, and stereotypical feminine attributes are emphasised upon society and particularly females in a certain cultural and ethnic context.

Index terms— gender, performativity, femininity, indofijian, patriarchy.

1 Introduction

and is the third in a series of three papers that extrapolate how gender ideals are emphasized through popular folk practices. The folksongs at the centre of this paper were being actively performed in IndoFijian wedding ceremonies throughout Fiji and in some cases in weddings in various other nations where IndoFijian diaspora exist, therefore, practitioners of wedding songs are noted as significant sources in this paper. This paper reads these songs using a feminist lens that is informed by the works of several feminist authors but specifically using the theories put forward by Judith Butler. The analysis of the songs shows how certain patriarchal ideologies, and stereotypical feminine attributes are emphasised upon society and particularly females in a certain cultural and ethnic context. Keywords: gender, performativity, femininity, indofijian, patriarchy.

It is because some texts bear messages which work on us in a way of which we are not necessarily aware that I feel it is important to analyse texts carefully in terms of the systematic language choices which have been made. Close analysis may help the reader to become aware of the way that language choices may serve the interests of some people to the detriment of others. 2 1 For more information on wedding songs see (Shandil, Vicky. 2017 It is this quote from Sara Mills that becomes the rationale for the following chapter in that folksongs are being treated as pieces of discourses. This chapter will present an analysis and a close reading of folksongs sung at Sanatani Hindu weddings in Fiji to identify those features of Indo-Fijian that perpetuate hegemonic gender discourses. The songs that are analysed here are those that reflect gender hierarchy, normative heterosexual relationships, gender stereotypes, kinship norms and gender subversions. I have directly translated the songs into English from Fiji Baat and their depictions and portrayals have been kept consistent with the original songs (which are provided in the meanings in songs. The focus is on exposing within these Vivah ke Geet the repeated acts and images that validate gender expectations. The songs prove that while female singers/performers generally conform to such norms, there is a strong, if often untapped, potential for subversion of stipulated standards.

Subversive acts are favoured in Butler's theoretical construct as a means of freeing societies from biased gender notions. The Indo-Fijian society has by default always assumed a heterosexual existence. All vital social aspects have been designed on this very foundation including beliefs, values, family as well as economic and political enterprises. Butler problematizes heterosexuality and the identities formed through and within its ideological parameters. She suggests that heterosexual identities cannot be depicted as authentic as these are also constituted through repeated performances. 3 If heterosexuality was the natural type set human attribute then it would have

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46 no need to be enforced on individuals. To ensure its embodiment most if not all Indo-Fijian individuals growing
47 up in conservative Hindu homes are surrounded with heterosexually aligned discourses. The most important
48 feature of such discourse is its portrayal of specific gender identities mainly in a polemical binary divide which
49 is followed by lists of social expectations on conduct and attitude. Butler insists that 'to understand identity as
50 a practice, and as a signifying practice, is to understand culturally intelligible subjects as the resulting effects of
51 a rule-bound discourse that inserts itself in the pervasive and mundane signifying acts of linguistic life'. 4 Lia
52 Litosseliti and Jane Sunderland claim that 'discourse in a social practice sense is not only Pre-sexed agents are
53 made to comply with these guidelines by structuring esteemed human institutions like history, culture, education
54 and religion to reinforce the same ideologies through their practices and theoretical framework. Drenching social
55 discourses with sanctioned notions is vital to maintaining compliance to heterosexuality as this would ensure that
56 heterosexual oriented ideologies form constant points of reference for individuals.

57 representational but also constitutive'. 5 What they imply is that discourses do not merely display cultural and
58 social knowledge and practices but they also embody the capacity to influence social construction. While being
59 links to the past, discourses are devices that can impact future realities in all aspects of humanity, gender ideologies
60 being one of them. Butler iterates for instance, that heterosexuality survives through constant repetitions and
61 its survival is pivotal to the preservation of the patriarchally inclined gender hierarchy. 6 Surya Munro notes
62 that 'patriarchal systems also underpin the institution of heterosexuality; which depends on the normalisation
63 of opposite sex couples, and is reinforced by particular notions of the family, legitimacy and inheritance'. 7
64 Therefore, it is through the interplay of various asymmetrical ideologies that the Indo-Fijian patriarchy has
65 perpetuated a gendered society. Mills claims that 'ideology is often characterised as false consciousness or an
66 imagined representation of the real condition of existence'. 8 It must be noted that where subversion has created
67 counter narratives on gender the existence of complicity and conformity especially in the case of females have
68 reinforced orthodox values. A close reading of the following songs of Indo-Fijian wedding singers reveals their
69 gendered discursive characteristics. Since gender is an act that is performed repetitively, the singing of these songs
70 are gendered performances that occur in a social context, more specifically, Hindu Sanatani wedding functions
71 where both singers and listeners converge within an intersection of cultural, religious and social practices. Katie
72 Normington asserts that 'any performance by women is merely the portrayal of a set of learned gestures, a fictitious
73 act. In other words, women are never present upon the stage, instead the spectator From a feminist perspective the
74 image and status of women depicted in these ideologies are biased. However, due to their prevalence in discursive
75 practices they have been internalised as natural by both males and females. By problematizing heterosexuality,
76 a large part of Indo-Fijian belief system (including marriage) can also be problematized if not altered. The
77 cause for this transformative resistance lies in the fact that conservative ideologies persist in social discourses
78 through traditionally utilised means like folklore. While they successfully communicated sanctioned social norms
79 in the past, they have now evolved into modern forms to continue fulfilling the same task in the contemporary
80 society where they are being challenged by more progressive notions. views a representation of womanhood'. 9
81 The power regimes that form human subjects may also force them into displays of characteristics other than or,
82 perhaps more accurately, beyond those that have been internalised, in order to be accepted within their own
83 communities, that is to say, people do not necessarily internalise everything that is supposed to constitute their
84 (gender) identity.

85 In the case of the folksong performers what the audiences view is the depiction of Indo-Fijian womanhood
86 as determined by the Indo-Fijian patriarchal systems which regulate the signifying practices that eventuate into
87 gendered identities. This portrayal is meant to act as points of reiteration for other individuals being gendered.
88 10 and sing the songs at the weddings'.

89 While Harris recognises how society coerces people into certain positions it can also be noted that it is
90 within these restrictions that the performative nature of gender is highlighted through gender performances
91 that are below or beyond the set parameters of individual gender assignment. When women subvert within the
92 confines of cultural practices and rituals, they sustain sanctioned femininity and men momentarily forego their
93 regulation of women's conduct only to assume it with more consciousness of their privileged gender position. The
94 continuous performances of these songs prove that they are not mere strings of words tied together poetically to a
95 recreational end or they would have been abandoned at the advent of modern entertainment forms. It is evident
96 that VivahkeGeet transact a higher function that necessitates their survival as Agya points out that 'today
97 folk-singing has advanced so much that so many people's livelihood Most singers today prefer to do individual
98 performances and have three to four different musical instruments in their groups. Singers also use sound systems
99 including microphones and loudspeakers which permit the singers to sing solo whereas in the past women had to
100 sing in groups to be able to remain audible when many guests were present. Collette Harris explains ritualised
101 subversive practices as acts that solidify the place individuals hold in society. She states that:

102 The lengths of VivahkeGeet are arbitrary because they are composed to be performed. This gives the singer
103 the prerogative to repeat certain verses or omit them from their performances depending on the context and time.
104 In the past, weddings songs were sung mostly by a group of women who only had the dholak accompanying their
105 performance. Shallini reports that 'in olden days 20 or so women would just sit in a depends on it'. 12 However,
106 as this thesis has aimed to depict the Indo-Fijian gender situation is also manipulated through this medium.
107 Fundamentally, these songs embody power discourses; they represent social norms, gender stereotypes and specific
108 images that signify people's beliefs, conditioned values and ideologies. These songs personify hegemonic discourses

109 and allow them the corporeal position from which to impact society. Via the gender performance in their songs,
110 the singers either reinforce the ideas of womanhood or reflect subversive tendencies. In either case it is patriarchy
111 that is the actual beneficiary. Ruth Wodak notes that 'patriarchal inequality is produced and reproduced in every
112 interaction' mainly in a social setup where even subversive behaviour is ingeniously instrumentalized to produce
113 approved genders. 13 The importance of these songs is emphasised in Sholin's comments that 'these songs are
114 not jokes, they have a significant place in the entire ceremony. People need to know that this is not about money
115 and that when people want to come into this field they should realise and recognise the religious, cultural and
116 traditional value it holds'. 14 The language that is used in the wedding songs is gendered. Even though the songs
117 are performed through women's voices, the language largely fails to embody the specific qualities to be potentially
118 subversive of phallic ideologies as women perform what is expected of them rather than transcendent images. The
119 seemingly subversive songs in reality reinforce the asymmetrical gender standards rather than causing an inversion
120 of the androcentric status quo because the women mostly perform non-normative behaviour momentarily and
121 such performances are categorised as norm or just for fun. To break out of such profiling women singers have 'to
122 prove themselves possessors of intellectual and powerful voices, not just beautiful voices suitable for emotionally
123 expressive speaking (or singing)'. 15 II. Songs Portraying Males/Grooms are Ritually Superior

124 Songs 1 and 2 in the appendix are sung at the groom's home a day before the wedding and at the arrival
125 of the groom at the wedding venue respectively. The first song is a jovial song and is reflexive of the mood of
126 the groom's female relatives. While female family members, mainly cousins and friends, apply oil and turmeric
127 paste to the publicly exposable bodily 12 Agya, 2013. 13 parts of the groom (face, upper torso and legs), they
128 make fun of each other and the groom. These are more of pleasant exchanges of witty taunts, not genuine
129 insults. The apparent discomfort of the groom due to being surrounded by many females is exploited by the
130 singers. Grooms become uncomfortable because the restrictive spaces between males and females are temporarily
131 suspended for the performance of this ritual. Traditionally Indo-Fijian society strictly prohibits the mingling of
132 opposite genders where touching and unnecessary conversations transpire. Thus, the scenario where females are
133 allowed to physically touch a man in most parts of his body is only permissible as a sociocultural practice.

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

142 The third line of the song narrates how the groom's mother is standing behind her son and then the next
143 line pronounces that 'now everyone is adoring' her. This demonstrates the idea that the mother is adored as
144 the mother of a son rather than as an individual in her own right. She finds prominence in that social space
145 by being associated with the groom. Her physical positioning is also symbolic as she stands 'behind' the groom
146 (man), thereby representing the subordinate position of most women in a patriarchal society. Gangoli notes that
147 it is through the conformity of 'women within patriarchies' to 'relevant patriarchal norms of female behaviour'
148 that women gain social acknowledgement and in the adoration given to the mother of the groom in the wedding
149 ceremony we see a reward for conforming to motherhood. 16 Lateef adds that at a 'later period of the life cycle
150 a woman reaps the benefits of having endured the hardships of being a young wife and daughter-in-law in a
151 strange and sometimes hostile environment'. 17 Song Two also depicts the significance given to the groom. The
152 husband is always portrayed as more Hence, weddings in effect are social events in Indo-Fijian Hindu life where
153 women redeem the favours accumulated by aligning with patriarchy. dominant of the couple and this notion is
154 applied to the marriage rituals to confirm this hierarchy. Hindu custom implies the groom and his procession
155 has to be treated with utmost reverence throughout the ceremony. 18 The song narrates the event when close
156 family members of the bride present jeonato the groom. The song instructs that the groom be served in vessels
157 made with gold. He is to be given water from Ganges and Indus which are spiritually significant rivers for
158 Hindus. Serving the groom in golden utensils and giving him water from the holy rivers is indicative of his higher
159 status in relation to in-laws. The treatment he receives is comparable to a king's and nothing less is acceptable.
160 While reflecting good values this also indicates the high esteem in which the husbands are to be perceived by
161 wives. This custom sets the precedence for the bride and her family to always continue with such conduct for
162 the husband. To clarify the groom's standing, the song describes that his rest area is decked with flowers (line
163 7). This is significant because Hindus use flowers as items of worship presented to god during prayer and here
164 the groom gets the same honour. Even during the ritual where the bride's father officially and through religious
165 rites gives away his daughter in marriage, he has to view the groom as Vishnu, an important Hindu god. The
166 father offers his daughter, who has to be decked in gold, as an understanding, devoted, pure and healthy virgin.
167 Such rituals combined with years of submersion in androcentric discourses compel women to resign to their given
168 roles. Irigaray states that women begin to perform these roles 'so perfectly as to forget she is acting out man's
169 contra phobic projects, projections and productions'. 19 III. Songs Portraying Female Stereotype in the Specific
170 Role of Fua Therefore, songs that use the choicest adjectives to praise the groom are not idle words since they
171 reflect the hegemonic hierarchy of genders in Indo-Fijian society.

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172 The ritual of popping rice involves frying raw rice in oil in the mandap or the altar constructed within the
173 shed/hall at both the bride and groom's home. This ritual is observed on the night before the actual wedding.
174 The bride and groom's Fua 20 using some broom sticks as spoons fries the rice, and the popped rice is later used
175 in the actual wedding ceremony. In cases where there may be more than one Fua priority is given to the eldest
176 or the one who is seen to best fulfil social expectations. One of the privileges of being a female who conforms to
177 social norms is the opportunity to participate in such rituals. In this case being the groom's or bride's Fua qualifies
178 one to take up the central role in this ritual. However, the woman who is chosen to do this task must not be a
179 widow or a divorcee or someone with poor reputation. While the role belongs to the paternal aunt any woman
180 who wants to assume this traditional role in the ritual has to meet up with other specific conditions. Since
181 there are punitive consequences of deliberate and irrefutable subversion, women who fail to exemplify sanctioned
182 femininity and womanhood are denied access to such forms of public honour. In such ways a woman with a
183 questionable repute is often ostracised by society. Allowing such women's participation in significant religious
184 and cultural rituals would warrant the expression of displeasure from the wider social circles. Moreover, the
185 union between two families through marriage is only approved after careful scrutiny of family members on both
186 sides. Thus, distancing from relatives who do not comply with social conventions has been more of a norm with
187 Indo-Fijians.

188 The chosen woman dresses up in full cultural attire and is positioned inside the mandap, in full public view.
189 The attire also includes accessories like vermilion that is placed in the hair parting to depict her marital status.
190 She is constantly being commented on and praised by other women and relatives as she performs this task. As
191 the groom's (or bride's) paternal aunt performs her rituals in the mandap the wedding singers direct songs like
192 songs three and four describing her actions, appearance and also taunt her in good humour. For example, 'sitting
193 in the mandap the sister looks extremely bright' (Song 4 Line 1). If she is playful enough to respond to the
194 singer's comments through her gestures or facial expression then this leads to the singing of more songs, some of
195 which could assume a subversive and suggestive nature. Song three is an example of the type of songs that are
196 sung as a narration of the Fua's actions and the emotions of others in relation to this ritual. In this song her
197 brother-in-law's heart is shown to be beating heavily, 'Listen listen to the brother's heart beating against his chest
198 as his sister pops the rice' (Song 3 Line 1). The assumption is that the brother is overwhelmed by the amount of
199 money he has to pay the sister as is the custom during this ceremony. Male relatives are required to place neg
200 (monetary gift) for her effort. On the same note, it must be added that the woman who is at the centre of this
201 ritual playfully demands money to be placed beside her as she pops the rice. This role has become stereotyped,
202 and the seemingly subversive demands for money are culturally scripted. The money itself does not mark her
203 independence but exhibits kinship ties of dependence between the families. This also becomes an example of
204 redeeming accumulated favours for conformity to social obligations along kinship and gender expectations.

205 Through witnessing countless repetitions of such performances by other women, girls grow up internalising
206 such roles as inherently mandatory. They in turn perform the very same acts when they arrive at those junctures
207 further justifying this role's existence to the next generation of females. The point to note here is the portrayal
208 of a specific femininity that entails love for material goods and desire to look culturally fashionable.

209 Such qualities are perceived as gender norms depicting women as seeking opportunities to buy new clothes
210 and dress up for social functions. Butler emphasizes that gender is 'a regulatory norm' 21 and are actualised
211 through actions and these repetitive actions 'congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a
212 natural sort of being'. 22 Song 4 narrates the sister's role in the wedding which appears to revolve around the
213 customary goodwill payments. She is depicted as unsatisfied by any other gifts except money. Lines 3, 5 and
214 7 of Song 4 repeat the lyrics she wants more dollars. The point of interest in this scenario is the refusal of
215 the gifts by the sister. Even though the items being offered are typical materials associated with women, the
216 sister appears to prefer money to them. In one sense this action reflects the power of choice that a woman has
217 even in a traditional context. The fact that she understands that choosing money permits her more options
218 in purchasing whatever she desires instead of settling for what she is given, depicts her comprehension of basic
219 economic principles. This can be interpreted as an improvement of women's status from the post-girmit period
220 when they were economically dependent on men as the prevalent notion was that women could not cope with
221 'tiresome and physically demanding work on cane farms'. This implies that the sister's choice (song 4) of copying
222 the performances of sisters from other weddings causes this image to become part of Indo-Fijian culture's image
223 of femininity. In that sense, culture itself is both a portion of and the outcome of the process of gendering. 23
224 This coupled with security concerns due to the attitude of certain men against women as a result of the poor
225 reputation women had been given during the indenture period, women opted for protection and economic support
226 through marriage. The continuation of this practice in many ways resulted in the adoption of domestic work for
227 women and all economic activities for men. The naturalisation of this ideology was also one of the main reasons
228 for denying women education as it was perceived that they had no need for it when managing households. Lal
229 also mentions that 'Indian Indentured Women stood accused in the eyes of their own community as well as those
230 of the official world' 24 which led to a regulation of their femininity and sexuality. Such negative reports and the
231 lack of female political representation meant that little if any protests were made against such conventions by
232 the women who were most affected by them. Thus, the economic naivety and dependence of women became the
233 official status quo. 25 Another stereotype depicted in the song is the sister's compliance with a certain outward
234 appearance. As the song claims, she looks 'extremely bright' in the central position she occupies. In one sense the

235 woman in such a position experiences that empowerment and attention that one finds deficient in a patriarchal
236 set up. This could also be interpreted as a clever patriarchal ploy to release the build-up of gender and power
237 related tensions. The experience of being in a central position in a public sphere distracts women from the
238 underlying asymmetries that affect their daily lives. Other women can also look forward to such occasions when
239 they would once again assume significant positions publicly, even if temporary. The mention of money and gifts
240 is also pivotal because materiality has often been used as a method of ensuring conformity by women. Indo-Fijian
241 women have historically been kept economically dependent upon men. This has been a deliberate attempt to
242 ensure that men could use money and goods as leverage to sustain their submission. Lateef pronounces that one
243 of the main characteristics of the Indo-Fijian community has been 'male dominance and female subordination,
244 males as economic providers and females as the economic dependents, spatial and social confinement of women'
245 as well as 'male inheritance of family property'. This song however, portrays a woman who understands the value
246 of money and publicly demands it rather than succumbing to the lure of items. 26 It is conclusive that Lateef
247 notes the close reciprocity between female subordination and their economic depravity as one leads to the other
248 within a vicious cycle. She clarifies that by restricting women to the domestic realm they are 'denied access to
249 the labour market; consequently they are rendered economically dependent on males'. 27 Even in cases of violent
250 marriages women are forced to tolerate such treatment chiefly because relying on social welfare benefits and
251 aid from charitable organisations after divorce or separation remains an effective disincentive. ??8 24 Brij Lal,
252 'Kunti's Cry: Indentured Women on Fiji Plantations,' in *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, Vol.
253 22, No. 1, (Delhi: Sage Publications, 1985), 58. 25 See (Biman Prasad and Nalini Lata, *Institutions and Gender*
254 *Empowerment in the Fiji Islands*, in *Institutions and Gender Empowerment in the Global Economy*, Kartik Roy,
255 Hans Blomqvist and Cal Clark (eds.), (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2008), 223-240). 26 Lateef, 'Wife
256 Abuse Among Indo-Fijians,' 218. 27 Ibid. ??8 For more specific data on women's social and economic in Fiji
257 can be attained from the following sources: WadanNarsey, *Gender Issues Volume XX Issue X Version I*

258 2 Songs Portraying the Groom in Marriage

259 As stated earlier, weddings tend to reflect patriarchal values at work, mainly in the legalized and sanctioned
260 exchange of women. Songs 5 and 6 are focused on the attitude of typical grooms and their procession who enjoy
261 a culturally elevated position when compared to the bride's cohort. In the case of Song 5 the singer narrates the
262 arrival of the samdhi(the groom's father) with the wedding procession at the wedding venue. The point of view
263 adopted here is that of the bride's father because he calls the groom's father samdhi and he is also the one in
264 charge of welcoming the guests. Madhu clarifies that 'even though I am the one who is singing, it is understood
265 that these words are actually of the bride's father and mother'. ??0 in *Employment, Underemployment The*
266 *actual ritual that occurs during the welcome includes the bride's father washing the groom's feet and the prayer*
267 *offerings by the priest. This song also takes a turn towards gender subversion as the female singer calls the*
268 *groom's father 'naughty' (Song 5 Line 5). In the Indo-Fijian culture guests are accorded highest respect and in*
269 *conservative families, women veil their faces as a sign of this respect. While uttering such words cause subversion*
270 *of the codes of hospitality it must also be noted that within sanctioned femininity an Indo-Fijian woman it is*
271 *unorthodox cannot pass such comments at important guests. In the list of expected visitors to the residence of*
272 *a family with daughters, moreover, their daughters' grooms and grooms' fathers would appear right on the top*
273 *in terms of importance. The female singer oversteps her social limitations to publicly insult the most important*
274 *guest by calling him names and falsely suggesting that he is winking at other women.*

275 However, it would be totally inappropriate to suspect any malice on the part of the singers. This is because
276 the singer is performing a role that is part of the general custom and ritual of weddings. The female singer also
277 subverts her role by publicly insulting the groom's maternal uncle or 'Samdhi's brother-in-law' (Song 5 Line 8)
278 and this time associating him with the bride's mother. She insinuates that the groom's uncle is eyeing the bride's
279 mother, but this is highly unlikely due to the reverent relationship that is implied between these two as a result
280 of the marriage. The female singer, who should be respectful and silent in public due to the expectations of her
281 gender, assumes the authority to speak publicly. However, she not only speaks (through her songs) she utters
282 insults and invectives towards significant male personas within that social context. Jean Baudrillard's concept
283 of simulation which 'is to feign to have what one doesn't have' 31 fundamentally explains the women's position
284 in this situation. Culturally endorsed regulations are pre-instated to curtail or modulate the subversive acts
285 so patriarchal authority is never threatened as Baudrillard asserts that 'pretending or dissimulating leaves the
286 principle of reality intact'. ??2 Song 6 is a conversation between Rama who represents the groom and his mother.
287 It narrates the groom's departure to his bride's hometown for marriage to participate in the marriage contest to
288 win Sita. In the 3 rd line, Rama (the groom) is confidently asserting that 'I will break the bow, mother' and win
289 the contest. In other words, the groom implies that he can achieve everything with his ability. In the following
290 lines he goes on to state that he will destroy the pride of the other great warriors who will come to marry Sita
291 as well. He concludes that he will definitely bring her back as his bride. At every level this song depicts male
292 supremacy as it emphasizes Rama's prowess as a warrior and his confidence as a ruler and Sita becomes the
293 objectified However, he goes on to clarify that within pretence hides a more subtle fact in that the mere act of
294 faking problematizes reality. In this specific case when women can assume a subversive role depicts the potential
295 for this pretence to develop into an actuality.

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298 The women in this song are performing a certain gender script as discursively created by society. The
299 repetitions of these acts have over time established these behaviour patterns as normative. Furthermore, the song
300 promotes heterosexual relationships by emphasizing relationship titles within binary oppositions along gender
301 lines, for example, father/mother, brother/sister-in-law.

302 Even though people have the potential and freedom to act, their actions are controlled by social norms and
303 their acceptance of these regulations is what consequently validates these norms. Using gender performativity as
304 a theoretical construct it can be concluded that any alteration any individual initiates could lead to wider social
305 transformations. For example, the sister in the context of this song could decide to act out of the socially expected
306 mode of behaviour by not requesting neg or dressing differently thus discontinuing 'the repeated stylization'. ??9
307 This could potentially lead to the normalizing of the alternate behaviour into culture. The issue, nonetheless, is
308 that most women in such contexts act complicitly as it offers them substantial privileges and attention. trophy
309 that validates this. At no point in this song is Sita's choice reflected, however, it should be clarified that according
310 to legend she also desired marriage to Rama.

311 The above song is from an album by DayaWati, a popular wedding singer, whose songs are played in many
312 weddings around Fiji. This particular song is from an album produced specifically with songs sung for the
313 groom. Interestingly, nine out of the ten songs in this album parallel the groom with Rama, the Hindu God. As
314 a reincarnation of the supreme Hindu God, he was the crown prince and an acclaimed warrior. From a purely
315 narrative point of view he could be seen as a ruler and a powerful one at that. He in fact personified patriarchy,
316 being the most central character in a male dominated tale in the Ramayana. Analysing Rama as a character
317 in a literary text from a feminist perspective, he can hardly be classified as an ideal husband. This is because
318 he succumbed to societal pressure and rumours and doubted his wife's chastity after she had been in captivity
319 of an evil king (Ravana) for a certain period of time. Sita, his wife, had to endure a fiery trial to prove her
320 purity as a faithful wife. This serves as a typical example of victim blaming which still persists. The UNFPA
321 report states that 'ideas and attitudes on traditional gender roles are so engrained in Fiji that cases of sexual
322 harassment and abuse are often not thought of as criminal offenses, particularly if the woman's character or
323 modesty is considered questionable'. ??3 The portrayal of women in the same epic is mostly negative, as it is
324 Rama's step-mother who got him exiled and there is another female character Surpanakha who is the villain's
325 sister. She was a widow and tried to entice Rama and his younger brother but failed. Her jealousy led her to
326 Ravana where she heaped praises of Sita's beauty before him, leading him to kidnap Sita to force her to marry
327 him. Eventually, this series of events leads to war and the absolute destruction of Ravana's kingdom. Much of
328 Hindu life and art are dominated by the teachings of this holy book and undoubtedly the portrayal of women
329 here does have an influence on how women are viewed generically in society. The tradition of singing Vivah ke
330 Geet was adopted from the Ramayana and even songs today continue to be based on the themes and characters
331 from it. Similarly, the images of women and men and the expectations of both these genders are also influenced
332 by the images portrayed in the Ramayana and are discursively enforced through the songs. Bascom iterates that
333 folk art has traditionally been used in most societies as a social control mechanism whereby their exhibitions
334 have been wielded to make individuals assimilate or reject certain attitudes. 34 33 UNFPA, An Assessment of
335 the State of Violence, 19. ??4 Bascom, Folklore and Anthropology, 33

336 In a patriarchal society these songs would definitely carry male centred ideologies, thus providing constant
337 justification of the male dominated social structures. Weddings songs can simultaneously patronise as well as
338 discourage unacceptable attitudes. Brennis and Padarath who carried out a research focused on Indo-Fijian folk
339 songs also emphasised that 'the subject matter of the songs often illuminates moral and social issues which are
340 important'. ??5 V. Songs Narrating the Farewell of the Bride ??Sentimental) The farewell of the bride at the
341 conclusion of the wedding is depicted as emotional in Songs 7, 8 and 9. Shallini clarifies that 'I am adamant that
342 at two instances it is mandatory to shed tears to flow and that is at a funeral and at the farewell of a bride ? if
343 a bride departs without crying, in my view she is immature and that she is too modern'. ??6 More often than
344 not, the singer herself would shed tears and her voice would adopts a painful tone. Madhu adds that 'I have seen
345 brides breaking into tears after listening to my songs as they actually go around the fire or is being seen off'. ??7
346 What was pardoned at her natal household may not be pardoned at her in-laws, so she has to adjust to their
347 way of life. The mother must make it very clear that she has to consider her husband's parents as her parents,
348 and she should not run back to her mother for any form of advice or help. She no longer belongs here.

349 Even in commercialized audio albums, singers sing these particular songs sentimentally and this is sensed in
350 their voices. This is because in the traditional sense, this moment marks the severing of all the rights the bride has
351 in her natal family. Traditionally daughters lose all legal rights to their father's property as well upon marriage.
352 This was mostly because fathers would accumulate as much money, jewellery and other gifts of furniture and
353 clothes as was right for a daughter and present it at the moment of Kanyadaan. In many circumstances, daughters
354 could not ask for any further financial help from her father's family after the performance of this ritual. Her
355 husband's home becomes her new home and family and regardless of what she experiences it is part of her duty
356 to adopt and adjust her life to that environment. Shallini explains that at times singers assume the viewpoint of
357 brides' mother to tell the bride that 38 It is mostly unheard of that married daughters take care of their parents
358 in case of the absence or unwillingness of other siblings. In such cases the son-in-law and his immediate family's

359 consent was what influenced the eventual decision of whether the parents could live with her married daughter's
360 family. It should be noted however, that parents would exhaust all options before they would even consider living
361 in such an arrangement. This is simply because of the stigmatisation such situations could create in social circles.

362 Even though there are instances of Indo-Fijian couples settling with the bride's family, these arrangements
363 are sometimes tenuous, especially if the bride has other siblings living in the same house. In rural settlements
364 this was always highly unorthodox and was discouraged. Any woman returning to her natal household with or
365 without her husband became the target of gossip. The situation of any man who accompanied his wife in such
366 a situation would be worse. Gossip and insinuation may seem as feeble punishment for non-conformity to social
367 norms.

368 However, one only has to understand the workings of an average Indo-Fijian community to grasp how effectively
369 gossip is used as a social control in regulating behaviour of individuals. 39 Song 7 also portrays the departure
370 of the bride to her husband's home permanently at the conclusion of the marriage ceremony. It is sung at a
371 slower pace and some singers do employ a voice that depicts pain. The words and tone of this song makes one
372 feel that the bride feels compelled to let go of her past and embrace her future. Social expectations imply that
373 she removes the memories of her life with her natal household as it may interfere with her new life. Rubin states
374 that 'more constraint is applied to females when they are pressed into the service of kinship than males'.

375 The post girit society was mainly acephalous both politically and socially, thus communal discourses were
376 instrumental in forming and maintaining social conventions. Indo-Fijians have been extremely cautious of
377 becoming the topic of discussion in social circles and this fear to a great extent impacts their decisions. Even
378 though this mentality is gradually losing its hold, in most rural settings and to a substantial level in urban Indo-
379 Fijian societies, it continues to influence people's perceptions. To prevent becoming the centre of any critical
380 discourse people keep themselves in check and this is in itself evident of the social order that is discursively
381 sustained. 40 The singer in line 6 is using the narrative viewpoint of the bride who states that 'I have to set my
382 heart'. This implies that regardless of her personal stance social norms surrounding the act of marriage demand
383 that she coerces herself into submitting her life to another man.

384 The patriarchal nature of Indo-Fijian society dictates that a woman moves to her husband's household after
385 marriage and that all that she possesses or may attain in the future becomes her husband's as well. Line 8 is also
386 symbolic because the bride will be 'decorating' her husband's home which in a sense portrays her as an object of
387 attraction.

388 Nonetheless, before she can contribute to her marital life she first has to instate 'the desire for my husband'
389 in her heart. Marriage has created a false imposition to act out the role of a wife and submit to the husband
390 and fulfil the subsequent roles. She also has to assume the husband's surname and name her children after his
391 family name. Rubin goes on to write that 'a woman must become the sexual partner of some man to whom she
392 is owed as return on a previous marriage'. ??1 This she claims to be the means of maintaining the 'the flow of
393 debts and promises' 42 She sings 'sweet lullabies' an act that is repetitively mentioned in the song and she fulfils
394 all the essential duties of a primary caregiver. The last verse shows that the mother 'taught me and made me
395 literate, gave me education, made me worth marriage' (Verse 5). It basically points to the fact that the rationale
396 behind availing literacy and education to girls was to make them better wives and mothers rather than making
397 them independent. The fact that the mother was at the centre of all this grooming and preparation also depicts
398 how women play a significant role in getting other women to conform to gendered social expectations. The close
399 connection between mother and daughter as depicted among men. The departure of the bride may seem as a
400 minor occurrence to a bystander not privy of its real significance. But within Hindu rituals this is a symbolic act
401 that represents the subduing of a woman's natal ties and pre-marital life by the expectations of her married life.

402 Song 8 is sung at a slow pace for emotional effect. The fact that in this song the singer draws upon the
403 relationship between the mother and the daughter is in one sense the recognition of a mother's contribution to
404 the process of transforming a girl into a woman worthy of a man. Verse 1 briefly focuses on the father's role
405 where he is shown as the provider who owns the 'compound' in which she was nurtured. He is also shown as the
406 strong man who is able to place his daughter on his 'shoulders' (line 6). This act portrays the father's protection
407 over his daughter whereby he keeps her away from situations where things that could harm her chastity exist.
408 The mother, on the other hand, is portrayed as gentle and delicate throughout the song. ??1 Ibid. ??2 Ibid. in
409 this song validates the notion that Indo-Fijian girls also recognise the immense contribution of their mothers to
410 their overall nurturing into sanctioned femininity.

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

4 CONCLUSION

422 At the same time the purdah performs a dual role of filtering and controlling the learning experiences of the
423 child to ensure that she only learns and practices what is socially approved and sanctioned. While Lateef believes
424 in a recreation ??3 Song 9 while belonging to the category of emotional farewell songs is different in one key sense.
425 When in the other three songs the bride appeared to have passively negotiated with her situation, in this song
426 she assumes an accusing tone. The singer narrates the bride's emotions where she questions her removal from
427 her natal home. The choice of words is of interest as the vernacular word used by the singer is 'nikaal' which in
428 direct translation means 'being removed' (Line 2). Instead of stating that she is being sent or married the singer
429 opts to use removed which connotes coercion on the part of the bride's family. This is interesting as the bride
430 is not expected to question such patriarchally motivated traditions where women are mandated to live of gender
431 roles Butler also asserts the absence of any essentialist or inherent gender. If their views hold true than there is
432 every possibility that Indo-Fijian women can also perform gender roles and embody gender identities that differ
433 from the stereotypes conventionally enforced. The fact that most do not, confirms the power and efficiency of
434 patriarchal discourses that still achieve their aim of producing conforming females who in turn advocate the very
435 same values that render them complicit when seen from a feminist perspective. Wedding singers and their songs
436 form a vital link in the sustenance of these discourses.

437 at her husband's home. In fact, most females witness over time many women going through the very same
438 process. It is through such processes that women get to comprehend the social mechanisms that govern them
439 and direct their lives as gendered social beings. Despite the prevalent discourse however, it seems that the bride
440 presumed in this song finds a need to rationalise what is transpiring with her. What makes the song more emotive
441 is her debating with her parents. She questions that if her parents were to let her go eventually then 'Why oh
442 mother did you give me birth, Why oh father did you wait on me' (Verse 1). In one sense she is subverting her
443 gender expectation by questioning her separation via marriage by feeling betrayed. It is highly unlikely that she
444 was unaware of this eventuality as the overpowering and ubiquitous gender discourses that mandate a woman to
445 marry in order to fulfil all her stipulated roles is successfully in operation. This debate, however, problematizes
446 the notion that females are inherently and unconditionally aligned towards marriage and separation from their
447 natal households.

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

453 The weight of patriarchy appears to exact a particularly heavy burden on Fiji Indian females, commencing at
454 birth and continuing to the end of the lifecycle. From the day she is born, her presence is treated as a melancholic
455 occasion, and she is openly resented for not being born male. 44 Adinkrah, 'Patriarchal Familial Ideology,'
456 288.

457 Volume XX Issue X Version I However, there is not much complicit parents can say as they are also burdened
458 by social regulations. While they have to fulfil their own specific roles as parents, they also have to ensure
459 conformity in their daughter as society holds them responsible as custodians of culture and social values. The song,
460 nonetheless, is not void of meaning and the utterances made through it are definitely reflections that exist in some
461 quarters of society. It is possible that such rigid traditions have come under scrutiny and need to be rationalised
462 for those women who perceive themselves independent and well able to economically support themselves, their
463 husbands and families. Women in such circumstances, see no cause for the compulsion Accordingly, the bride calls
464 on her parents to 'open your mouth' (line 9) denoting that she wants them to explain their role in materialising
465 this scenario. home permanently for her in-law's residence. The composition and performance of such a song
466 reflects that folksingers who, though normally complicit to hegemonic patriarchal notions of gender and culture,
467 are also aware of the changing social situations and rising female consciousness that births contention against
468 out-dated practices. This song is an insight into the ever-growing female awareness of their empowerment both
469 economic and social. Tara proves this change when she concludes that 'nowadays even the brides do not cry as
470 much as they used to before'. 45 VI.

471 4 Conclusion

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

[Note: 2 Sara Mills, *Feminist Stylistics*(London: Routledge, 1995), 1.]

Figure 1:

Ruth Wodak

(London: Sage Publications, 1997), 13.

14 Sholin, 2013.

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

Figure 2:

478 also songs that are subversive of gender expectations and social norms regulating gendered individuals but are
479 void of power to question society as it is. ^{1 2 3 4 5}

¹Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Subordination,' 313.

²Litosseliti and Sunderland, 'Gender Identity and Discursive Analysis,' 13.6 Butler, 'Imitation and Gender Subordination,' 313.7 Munro, *Gender Politics*, 16. 8 Sara Mills, *Discourse*(London: Routledge, 1997), 32.

³Mayer, *Peasants in the Pacific: A Study of Fiji Indian Rural Society*, 1961, 67.19 Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, translated by Gillian Gell, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 53.20 Paternal aunt of the marrying individual.

⁴Butler, *Undoing Gender*, 53.22 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 43.23 Lateef, *Indo-Fijian Women-Past and Present*, 6.

⁵Lateef, *Purdah in the Pacific*, 103.

[Note: 29 Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 43. 30 Madhu, 2013.]

Figure 3:

480 (Chorus) With tumeric my son will be anointed, With the sounds of trumpets and musical instruments playing.
481 (Verse) Now his mother* stands behind the groom, Everyone adores the mother now, The trumpets are playing.
482 *mother can be replaced by other relational titles (for example, father, uncle, aunt) and the same lines can be
483 repeatedly sung.

484 SONG 2 TRANSLATION (Chorus) Sone ki thali me jeona paroso, Jeona jeo lo kripanidhaan.

485 (Verse 1) Ganga Jamuna se jalmangao, Ke?uwa gundh lo kripanidhaan.

486 (Verse 2) Longa ilaichi ke vera jodhwo, Wirwa kunch lo kripanidhaan.

487 (Verse 3) Phool newari ke sejh bichao, Sejia soe lo kripanidhaan.

488 (Chorus) Serve jeona* in a golden plate, Accept the jeona oh merciful.

489 (Verse 1) Get water from Ganges and Indus, Accept this drink oh merciful. (Verse 2) With clove and cinnamon
490 prepare the eateries, Accept the eateries oh merciful.

491 (Verse 3) Set the bed with flowers and foliage, Sleep on the prepared bed oh merciful.

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

498 SONG 3 (Verse 2) Brother and sister-in-law quickly come and give your sister a ring. But she does not want
499 a ring, she wants more dollars.

500 (Verse 3) Uncle and aunty quickly come and give the sister a bouquet of flowers, But she does not want a
501 bouquet, she wants more dollars.

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

506 SONG 5 ? Samdhi is the title that defines the relationship between the fathers of the groom and bride. While
507 the English vocabulary does not have an equivalent word, Fiji Hindi uses this term to represent this particular
508 relationship.

509 On the other hand, the mothers are given the title samdhin. ? Ghasita is the name of a carriage made from
510 wood that was used as a transport vehicle in cane farms and rural areas. It had no wheel and was simply dragged
511 on the ground by a horse or bullock using ropes. This song is sung in urban areas as well even though ghasita is
512 not used here and has not been used by most of the contemporary urban generation. This proves the fact that
513 folksongs have retained themes and content from the past. Most of Fiji's Indo-Fijian population actually share
514 the common history of indenture and cane farming. (Verse 3) Wahi re Janakpur maiya, Sita kuhari hai, Hum
515 unhise vyha rachiye.

516 (Chorus) I will go to Janakpur*, To get married mother.

517 (Verse 1) I will break the bow my mother, There in Janakpur, Great warriors will be present there in numbers,
518 I will meet them as well mother.

519 (Verse 2) There in Janakpur, There is a lot of pride, I will wipe off their pride mother.

520 (Verse 3) There in Janakpur, Sita is still single/virgin, She is the one I will marry.

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

522 .1 ? (mukholo) meaning open your

523 ? rakhi is a uniquely Hindu tradition where a sister ties a stringed bend on her brother's left hand during a
524 specially marked time of the year. It was a symbol of the sister's appreciation and acknowledgement of her
525 brother's presence. This practice is more commonly known as Raksha Bandhan (literally translated as bend of
526 protection) because that is exactly what the brother had to do. He had to offer protection to his sister. From a
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