

Indentured Musicians in the Arms of the Cosmos: Inheritance and Legacy

Chants of the cosmos permeated the soundscapes of those nineteenth-century maritime voyages that carried indentured Indian musicians to labour on plantations across the globe. British imperial policies on trade in sugar, tea, spices and other commodities had an indelible impact on the musical life of this Indian Diaspora. Musicians carried their musical instruments, practices and memories with them when they embarked on ships as indentured subjects. On board they also encountered and experimented with new musical ideas. In one of the few eyewitness accounts of the transportation of Indians as indentured subjects to the Caribbean, Captain Angel of the clipper ship 'Sheila' described the musical interactions of Indian migrants and crew members as they drummed and sang together on the journey from Calcutta to Trinidad, in 1877. This was a musical space of sacred chants and sea shanties.

Memory and creativity alike have shaped the rich musical expressions of the Indian Diaspora. The popular genre called 'chutney', for example, is linked with Indian sacred, classical and folk music expressions. It became widespread by the late 20th century, circulating in transnational spaces through diasporic networks, film markets and digital technologies. It highlights some of the shared features of contemporary musical landscapes across the Indian Diaspora as defined by their indentureship histories..

This lecture considers the broad contexts of music, indenture and postcolonial creativity. It sketches some of the musical histories of indentureship from patronage in Indian court life to the preservation of sacred chants (mantras) in diasporic recitations. It then looks at creative musical exchanges emerging from these musical heritages. By discussing the inheritance and legacy of indentured musicians, this lecture shows how musical traditions are connected in complex ways and how they narrate global histories.

Tina K. Ramnarine is a musician, anthropologist and global cultural explorer. She has published widely on musical performance, politics and arts responses to global challenges. Her publications include the books *Creating Their Own Space: The Development of an Indian-Caribbean Musical Tradition* (2001), *Ilmatar's Inspirations: Nationalism, Globalization, and the Changing Soundscapes of Finnish Folk Music* (2003), *Beautiful Cosmos: Performance and Belonging in the Caribbean Diaspora* (2007), and the edited volumes *Musical Performance in the Diaspora* (2007) and *Global Perspectives on Orchestras: Collective Creativity and Social Agency* (2017). With David Dabydeen and Maria del Pilar Kaladeen she co-edited *We Mark Your Memory: Writing from the Descendants of Indenture* (2018). She is Professor of Music at Royal Holloway, University of London.