

ABSTRACT

The *Ramayana* Tradition and Socio-Religious Change among Hindus in Trinidad, 1917-1990.

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This study seeks to explore socio-religious change among Hindus in Trinidad during the period 1917-1990. It posits that the Hindu community possessed its own processes and markers of transformation and mobility which operated both independent of and alongside those of the larger Trinidad society. It argues that transformation was occurring at two equally fundamental levels – in the private and in the public domains. The private domain encapsulates the more internal, intimate spheres of Hindu life such as family life, religious trends, village life and traditional social institutions. The public domain engages those issues which hinged on the Hindu community's interaction with the larger Trinidad society. The study also explores the *Ramayana* tradition that developed in Trinidad, and argues that this enduring aspect of Trinidad Hinduism has functioned as both a mirror and metaphor of socio-religious change among Hindus. Thus, the study uses the *Ramayana* tradition as a lens through which social change is examined.

The study analyzes the processes of compartmentalization, assimilation, rejection, "Christianization," and secularization, and the influence of modern and western elements as underlying factors in the unremitting reformulation of Trinidad

Hinduism. It proposes that, in order to retain what was perceived of as the fundamental aspects of religion and culture, and simultaneously to comply with the demands of their location in Trinidad's multicultural society, Hindus have had to strike the right balance between change and continuity. Therein, compartmentalization and selection have been identified as the paramount operatives. Finally, the study seeks to chart the journey of the Hindu community from its station, at 1917, at the bottom of Trinidad's socio-economic ladder, to one that, by 1990, was essentially integrated into the social, political and economic life of the country.

Keywords: Hindu, *Ramayana*, Trinidad Hinduism, socio-religious change, Sherry-Ann Singh.