ABSTRACT

Festivalisation
The Contemporary Performance of ‘festival’ Within the
East Indian Community in Trinidad

Deborah Le Anne Melissa Matthews

This study explores the ways in which the festival of Ramleela, one of the major means of showcasing a procreant basis of shared values and devotion for the East Indian community in Trinidad, is developing into a way through which an idealised vision of East Indian identity and a political worldview are articulated.

The culture of festivals is imperative to the society in which they exist, for they act as an exhibition ground for tradition and also as a means of human and social development. A reading of this enactment and the very notion of festival performance in Trinidad is crucial; the effects of a changing national tenet are portrayed in all the festivals (both religious and secular) that we celebrate and these festivals are the elements that herald us as a people to the global community.

The collective cultural identity of the Hindu community in Trinidad is mainly constructed through ritualistic behaviour and practices. Ramleela, a festival which is designed to reinforce the image of absolute devotion, purity and self-professed spiritual superiority of the Hindu Community, is a means to project a hyper-real image of devotees, while strengthening their convictions about themselves, their community and destiny. Because of this subscribers chose to give Ramleela a politicised nature utilising the festival as their voice. In consequence of this, the ritual theatre that is Ramleela must be viewed as a political act.

This dissertation explores Ramleela as ritual theatre and how the performance itself is shaped into a political construct in Trinidad, and some ways in which it is utilised in building and reinforcing identity and behaviour within the Hindu-Trinidadian community. It is a tangible representation of the determination by this group, which they have harnessed to validate the ideal self identity that forms the basis of their shared system of values.
Keywords: Ramleela; Trinidad & Tobago; Multiculturalism; Identity; Performance; Selfhood; Festival Spaces; East Indians; Indo-Trinidadian; Hinduism; Indianness; Racism; Sita; Rawan; Lanka; Ayodhya; India; Caribbean; Indentureship; Colonialism; Independence; Religion.