

PREFACE

In Trinidad, there exists a cultural mixture of peoples of African, Chinese, East Indian and European descent. When slavery was abolished in 1838, a process was started in Trinidad that resulted in a social situation considerably different from that of most of the other Caribbean islands. The numerical strength of the East Indians as well as their role in economics, the education system, politics and other aspects of the island's culture, make them an ethnic group of considerable importance. Consequently, for purposes of research, the East Indians are important as a major segment of the island's population.

There are considerably broader implications in a study of the East Indians of Trinidad. These are people who have been compelled to adapt themselves to a modified form of Western society. This is a study of one of the communities existing today in a plural society. The study of Felicity shows the reconstruction of a transported culture in an alien environment. It examines the Indians' economic social, political and cultural responses to their new environment.

When the East Indian undertook a sea journey, he violated the caste restrictions and the Hindu social system. Preparation for estate labour and the breaking up of families

and of the established social systems of the Indians further helped to deculturise them. Lack of common origin was another divisive factor amongst Indians. Yet the Indians had been able to reconstitute fragments of various aspects of their culture in Felicity and elsewhere by building their own homes and by achieving some measure of independence through land-ownership and small-farming. A common trait amongst Indians, whether Muslim or Hindu, was to become independent. Village organisation was also patterned after the institutions of their native land. Thus Felicity was, in the period under study, an essentially East Indian rather than West Indian society.

There were several East Indian villages existing during the period under study. Felicity provided the opportunity to study all aspects of rural East Indian life within the physical bounds of one community. My evidence is from official records, private papers, contemporary newspapers, such as the Port of Spain Gazette, literature on the subject and primarily and most importantly field work.

I interviewed persons in the management of the nearby estate and relevant material was gathered from estate records. Persons of importance in the county administration were also interviewed. Interviews were conducted with senior members of the community who could provide information about household composition, the nature of marital unions, occupations, caste membership, the network of family relations outside the village

and many other aspects. These elder villagers who had a storehouse of knowledge on the history of the village were of tremendous assistance in determining what Felicity was like in its early years. I was able to establish the physical features of the village and a comprehension of the way of life as it existed from the 1880s to 1945.

Interviews were also conducted with villagers who could offer information about certain special subjects. These included religious and political leaders, shopkeepers, small farmers, and those engaged in such specialised occupations as midwifery and crabcatching.

I lived most of my life in the village and had no difficulty in finding old people who had lived their entire lives in the village. Individual interviews were corroborated with one another and compared with what little has been published, such as Morton Klass' thorough and detailed account of life in the village in his East Indians in Trinidad.

The interviews were conducted during social visits to the informants' homes. They were not aware that they were being interviewed but conversation revolved around their past life. The style of the interview was free-flowing and conversational. There were a few minor, insubstantial digressions during conversation. The language used was colloquial because most of the interviewees are illiterate or can only read and

write a little. They all spoke English, with varying degrees of proficiency and their conversation was frequently punctuated with Hindi terms.

No tape recorder was used, neither were notes taken during the actual interviews, though information was recorded soon after each interview. Some photographs of places, objects and people were taken. All in all, evidence tended to be similar.

The West Indians comprise an important part of the population of the island. They were brought to the island in 1645 to work the estates and to cultivate subsistence crops and also to work for cash on the nearby estates. The planters used the West Indian labour force. The Eastern Caribbean, African, Spanish, French, Dutch, and Chinese were tried but there were inadequate numbers or unsuitable labour. The West Indians which offered reliable, permanent estate labour and arrived in 1645.

In the period under study, Trinidad was divided into parishes, most of which were further subdivided into wards. The wards were the centres of the weekly markets for the area surrounding them, and contained a courthouse, police station, post office and other governmental offices. Within the ward there were small population clusters, each with its own individual name. Some emerged from the barrack ranges of sugar