

ABSTRACT

A Social History of East Indian Women

in Trinidad since 1870

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This thesis aims to discover the ways in which East Indian women in Trinidad adapted to the historical experience of immigration and settlement in a New World society, a topic on which research data are scarce.

In conducting research traditional methods of investigation were used. These included primary sources such as government reports, wardens' reports and newspapers; and secondary sources including books, articles, journals, theses and unpublished papers. Wherever documentary information was lacking oral interviews were conducted.

The research clearly indicates that despite the socio-cultural and economic problems East Indian women faced in Trinidad, they played a significant role in the general life of the community. They have been central to the retention of social institutions including marriage, dowry, divorce, wearing of traditional Indian garments, stability in family life and the perpetuation of life cycle rites. Education has served to accelerate integration and social mobility so that by the 1950s some East Indian women had attained professional status. Cultural tenacity proved instrumental in nurturing the Indian

population and women helped to promote and propagate Indian culture through their songs, dances, music and food.

These findings are significant because they are useful in the self-affirmation of people in the Indian diaspora, they also serve as a platform from which further research can be conducted and they contribute valuable information about the social history of Trinidad by considering its gender dimension. In this way the thesis contributes to the evolving field of women's history as well as to the growing literature about the historical evolution of Caribbean Asian communities.