

ABSTRACT

INDIANNESS IN WEST INDIAN LITERATURE

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This thesis examines the nature and scope of Indianness in the novels of the major West Indian authors of Indian origin, namely, Seepersad Naipaul, Ismith Khan, Samuel Selvon and V.S. Naipaul. It attempts to study the extent to which the East Indian has shed his past, to adapt himself to the multiracial society in Trinidad. The hypothesis states that while it is possible to adapt to or modify one's inherited customs and traditions, it is virtually impossible to give up one's inherent Indianness.

Some of these traditions are conspicuous, some are mere fragments of the originals, some are overlaid with other traditions, and some are intricately interwoven with traditions and beliefs from other cultures. Several aspects of Indian culture such as the joint family, religion and arranged marriage are so distinctive that it is relatively easy to perceive their presence or absence. An examination of these institutions serves to highlight the changes and adaptations made by the transplanted society.

In addition, the major characters in the novels have been considered for an in depth analysis of the Indian psyche. The method of characterization adopted by the novelists has been studied to examine the elements of Indianness in the characters. The time span of the study ranges from the early years of the twentieth century when Seepersad Naipaul portrayed the East Indians against their traditional rural background, to the post-Independence era when education and Western influences had become widespread.

The characters move through a series of choices and actions, from a sense of power over their world, through a crisis of alienation from that world, and finally to an awareness of the changed environment and the need to redefine their roles accordingly. This attempt to come to terms with change implies that the original institutions themselves are undergoing transformation. The dissertation concludes with an analysis of these changes to illustrate on the one hand, the enduring strength of Indian cultural and religious traditions, and on the other, the gradual transformation of the immigrant Indian from a sojourner to a settler.