

ABSTRACT

TRINIDAD SPACE SPEAKING THROUGH INDO-TRINIDADIAN RITUALS & FESTIVALS: 1990-2009

Outside of India, Indian culture plays a significant role in creating and consolidating identities, forging relationships and crossing boundaries. This is more so reflected in societies where there are large pockets of Indian immigrants, or descendants of these immigrants. In the 19th and early 20th centuries (from 1845 to 1917) a total of over 143,000 Indian immigrants arrived in British colonial Trinidad to work on its plantations. By the end of Indentureship, over 80 % had chosen to make Trinidad their home, becoming part of the social, economic, political and religious fabric of the society.

In the year 2000, the descendants of these immigrants, today's Indo-Trinidadians, comprised a total of 40% (504,946), with a significant share of their connections within the mixed population (20% or 252,473) out of a total of 1,262,366 that comprises the Trinidad and Tobago's population. Over 90 % of these people of Indian origin live in Trinidad.

The experiences of the decade of the 1970s resulted in a radical shift in the socio economic and political economy as well as cultural shift in Trinidad. This led to major reorganizations and changes in thoughts, behavioral patterns and attitudes of the entire society. But, instead of the anticipated demise of the Indian culture, as some predicted, there was a consolidation and revitalization within the Indo-Trinidadian community, an extension of their national influence, stimulation of religious pursuits, Islamic, Christianity and Hinduism, especially Hinduism and the homogenization of its concepts and festive practices. There was also the adoption and adaptation of secular responses to some other local festivals, thus facilitating a

leap forward in the development of a syncretic culture. These were reflected in the rituals and festivals.

At the turn of the twenty first century (between the years 1990-2009), what is the nature of these changes which these Indo-Trinidadians have brought to the Trinidad landscape? What has happened in the spatial regions of their antecedents? How are both these 'spaces' and 'places' reflecting these dynamic changes? These issues are traced through the migration and settlement patterns of these early immigrants. Then some of the dynamic changes taking place in selected Hindu, Christian and Muslim rituals and festivals are identified and articulated under broad headings of forms, formats, faiths, festivities, music, dance and gender issues. These changes are examined and analysed in a comparative way both in Trinidad and in selected representative environments in the 'grandmother' country, India. This is the subject matter of this thesis.