

ABSTRACT

SOCIAL MOBILITY IN THE INDO-TRINIDADIAN COMMUNITY:

1870-1917

E.B. ROSABELLE SEESARAN

This thesis examines the rise of the Indo-Trinidadian community from the bottom of the social ladder of 19th century Trinidad to higher status positions at the end of Indian indentureship in 1917. The contention throughout is that the Indo-Trinidadian community, harnessing its intrinsic cultural baggage, was strengthened to withstand the rigours of indentureship, and aided by the Trinidad government's land policies, established a sound economic base. This enabled the successful, especially the sardars and members of the two high castes, the Brahmans and Kshatriyas, who had a headstart in amassing a financial reserve, to be more socially mobile and to advance in society as merchants and landed proprietors.

Another route to upward social mobility was through

education. A minority group of the second generation, having acquired a western style education provided by Christian missionaries, especially the Presbyterian Canadian Mission, being more westernised, entered the wider community, as teachers, church workers, tradesmen, civil servants, and professionals. At the end of indentureship, Indo-Trinidadians were to be found in nearly every facet of society. The caste system of India, having been metamorphosed in a western mould, emerged among Indians as a class system.

I am also indebted to the several persons I interviewed for sharing their and their families' histories with me, and also to the staff of the National Archives, St. Andrews Theological and the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Libraries for their kindness which sometimes went beyond the call of duty.

My sincere thanks are also due to Ms. Chandra Ragoonath who typed the final draft.

Lastly, my deep appreciation must be recorded to my many friends who supported me by their interest and encouragement, and my brother, Dr. Martin Sampath, for his many suggestions and help during the preparation of this thesis.