

ABSTRACT

Festivalisation The Contemporary Performance of 'festival' Within the East Indian Community in Trinidad

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This study explores the ways in which the festival of Ramleela, one of the major means of showcasing a procreant basis of shared values and devotion for the East Indian community in Trinidad, is developing into a way through which an idealised vision of East Indian identity and a political worldview are articulated.

The culture of festivals is imperative to the society in which they exist, for they act as an exhibition ground for tradition and also as a means of human and social development. A reading of this enactment and the very notion of festival performance in Trinidad is crucial; the effects of a changing national tenet are portrayed in all the festivals (both religious and secular) that we celebrate and these festivals are the elements that herald us as a people to the global community.

The collective cultural identity of the Hindu community in Trinidad is mainly constructed through ritualistic behaviour and practices. Ramleela, a festival which is designed to reinforce the image of absolute devotion, purity and self-professed spiritual superiority of the Hindu Community, is a means to project a hyper-real image of devotees, while strengthening their convictions about themselves, their community and destiny. Because of this subscribers chose to give Ramleela a politicised nature utilising the festival as their voice. In consequence of this, the ritual theatre that is Ramleela must be viewed as a political act.

This dissertation explores Ramleela as *ritual theatre* and how the performance itself is shaped into a political construct in Trinidad, and some ways in which it is utilised in building and reinforcing identity and behaviour within the Hindu-Trinidadian community. It is a tangible representation of the determination by this group, which they have harnessed to validate the ideal self identity that forms the basis of their shared system of values.

Keywords: Ramleela; Trinidad & Tobago; Multiculturalism; Identity; Performance; Selfhood; Festival Spaces; East Indians; Indo-Trinidadian; Hinduism; Indianness; Racism; Sita; Rawan; Lanka; Ayodhya; India; Caribbean; Indentureship; Colonialism; Independence; Religion.