TITLE: CULTURAL NATIONALISM AND HINDUISM IN TRINIDAD

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ABSTRACT:

In 1917 the importation of Indian indentured labor to the Caribbean was terminated. The system itself was brought to a complete halt three years later, in 1920, which set the stage for a new dynamic for those Indians who had opted to make the Caribbean their new home; especially since they were now unfettered by the rules, regulations, and restrictions of the system of Indian indenture. Within this new context, Indians would eventually engage, both consciously and unconsciously, the phenomenon of cultural nationalism. This paper argues that the phenomenon of cultural nationalism was anything but one dimensional for those Indians who migrated to Trinidad and their descendants. In the development and transformation of the Indo-Trinidadian community, elements of various assignations of cultural nationalism, including diaspora nationalism, religious nationalism, ethnic nationalism and civic nationalism, were all emergent in a substantially complex and intricately interwoven way. More specifically, the paper seeks to examine the phenomenon of cultural nationalism as it unfolded within and for the Hindu community in Trinidad and to elaborate on how it worked in tandem with and, simultaneously, reflected the multifaceted and checkered journey from the period of Indian indenture to the present time.

INTRODUCTION

Between 1845 and 1917 approximately 144,000 Indians migrated to Trinidad under the system of Indian indenture.[1] Most of these indentured laborers were drawn from the agricultural and laboring classes of the Uttar Pradesh and Bihar provinces of northern India, with a much smaller number recruited from Bengal and various locations in South India. Approximately 85% of the immigrants were Hindus, and 14% Muslims.[2] Despite the harsh conditions experienced under the indenture system, about four of every five Indian immigrants opted, at the end of their contracts, to make Trinidad their home.[3] The predominant age group of the immigrants was 20-30 years.[4] The majority of the laborers came as unmarried individuals, but a small number comprised nuclear family units.[5] By the 1920s, factors such as the acceptance of Trinidad as their homeland by those Indian indentured labourers who had opted to remain in the colony, the balancing of the male-female ratio and the age imbalance, and the noticeable increase in the birth rate of Indians saw the emergence of a "whole" population. This "wholeness" would facilitate the establishment of community. This would, in turn, generate a focus on and acceleration of cultural, religious and social formation. During the following decades, with most of the fundamental, inherently Indian social, religious, and cultural structures in place, the drive towards personal and communal progress saw a dynamic dialogue between "Indian" and "Trinidadian," the traditional and the modern, the religious and the secular, retention and transformation. Therein resided the very complex and multifaceted unfolding of and journey towards realizing the phenomenon of cultural nationalism. This paper involves an examination of the emergence of this phenomenon of cultural nationalism among Indians in Trinidad (later Trinidad and Tobago), with emphasis on Hindus.

Attempting to define, typify or categorize Trinidad and Tobago society, the Indian Diaspora, the element of culture, or the notion of nationalism is, by any measure, no easy task. Each of these designations is characterized by multiple trajectories, experiences, and historical, social and ideological underpinnings, which invite multiplicity in definition and configuration. Added to this is the inherent dynamism of each of the foregoing, conditioned by their constant fluctuation due to their location in the vagaries of human experience. The many definitions of cultural nationalism yield several common threads: the revival of a national community's culture, shared culture, cultivation of a nation and providing a vision of the its identity, and having intellectual and artists as its central agents. However, the seemingly homogenous designation of "nation's identity" immediately problematizes the local Trinidad and Tobago context with its multicultural, multi-ethnic composition. Sociologists such as Homi Bhabha, Lindsay Proudfoot and Michael Roche support the notion of "settler nationalisms," wherein communities in settler societies are faced with the problem of distinguishing themselves from the metropole (in this case India), while not being able to lay claim to the culture rooted in the new territory (Trinidad and Tobago). Thus, the concept of hybridity emerges which involves a mixing of both the settler and "indigenous" cultures. This theory is most applicable to the Indian experience in Trinidad and Tobago; particularly on the issue of cultural nationalism. This paper, then, seeks to draw from several of the main ideas defining the notion of cultural nationalism and to explore how the phenomenon of cultural nationalism developed in Trinidad Hinduism, within the context of Trinidad and Tobago's plural society. It examines the main cultural trends that emerged or were taken to the national level, which all contributed to the formation of a sense of cultural nationalism, while invoking the concept of "hybridity", of peoples, identities, and cultures.

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[1] Bridget Brereton, <u>A History of Modern Trinidad 1783-1962</u> (USA: Heinemann International, 1981) 103.

[2] Steven Vertovec, <u>Hindu Trinidad: Religion, Ethnicity and Socio-Economic Change</u> (London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1992) 33.

[3] See K.O. Laurence, <u>A Question of Labour: Indentured Immigration into Trinidad and British Guiana, 1875-1917</u> (Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 1994) 339-41, and Steven Vertovec, Hindu Trinidad: Religion, Ethnicity and Socio-Economic Change (London: Macmillan Education LTD, 1992) 73.

[4] Laurence 120-22.

[5] See Laurence (1994) and Hugh Tinker, <u>A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour Overseas, 1830-</u>

1920 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).

ELEMENTS OF CULTURAL NATIONALISM

Education

Education in both Hindi and English was a fundamental of cultural nationalism for the Indian community. In 1921, only 12.6% of the Indian population was classified as being able to read. In 1931, this number rose to 22.8%, and in 1946, to 40.2%.[6] Despite the economic and social constraints, suspicions of religious conversion, fears, and taboos, the desire for both individual and communal mobility resulted in the increasing gravitation towards the acquisition of education in both English and Hindi. Until the 1950s, the bulk of the Indian population's ignorance of the English language served both as a hindrance to assimilation into the wider society and imposed the stigma of "illiteracy" on the group. The communication gap proved a nuisance in both personal and official interaction. This issue was brought to the fore in the debate and Indian protests over the inclusion of the Language Test (ability to read and understand the English language) as a deciding factor of Adult Franchise. The removal of the language test in 1945, and the consideration of the validity of the Indian languages in the Trinidad and Tobago context, placing Indians in the same political and legal framework as the rest of the local population, also speaks to the issue of cultural nationalism.

The desire to educate Hindus and Muslims in their respective languages and religious ideologies and cultures led to the rise of numerous Hindi schools and Islamic schools in almost every Indian residential area. In his Annual Report of 1948, the Director of Education identified forty-nine such Hindi evening schools which taught Hindi and religious instruction outside of school hours.[7] Also, from as early as 1928, meetings were held to discuss the inclusion of the Hindi and Urdu languages into the western school curriculum.[8] To sensitize the Indian community on the issue, public lectures on the importance of education were held. This period saw the emergence of the first few formalized Hindu and Muslim schools with curriculums attempting to mirror that of the wider educational system. The forerunner in this development was the much prized Hindu-Muslim school established in the town of Chaguanas in 1930. Formal education in English rose considerably among Indians only from the 1950s, with the advent of Hindu and Muslim denominational primary and secondary schools. The emergence of these schools in itself was a huge avenue of cultural nationalism since facets of Indian religious and cultural life were now being taken to the national level as one dimension of the mainstream education process. From the 1960s there was a noticeable increase in the influx of Hindu and Muslim missionaries from India into Trinidad, all of whom contributed to (and sometimes confused) the scope and depth of religious and cultural knowledge, and some of whom established institutions for religious and cultural knowledge. Some of these organizations took up this cause on a larger, more visible scale, initiating programs in languages, philosophy, textual expositions, and music.

One of the most prominent Hindu concerns was the religious education program in government schools or lack thereof. From as early as 1948, the Director of Education's report acknowledged that:

> "The religious education of the large number of Hindus and Muslims presents considerable difficulty. Qualified pundits and imams are extremely scarce. They would be permitted to enter Government schools and some assisted schools on request but few if any do so. They would not be admitted to Roman Catholic schools."[9]

After substantial discussion, Religious Instruction was included as a compulsory subject in the primary school curriculum in 1951 and in secondary schools in 1965; indicating, yet again, some level of nationalization of culture.[10] This preoccupation with establishing Religious Instructions as an integral part of the formal education system eventually led to the birth of two major school-based programs: the Secondary Schools' *Sanskritic Sangam* (cultural meeting) in 1979 and the *Baal Vikaas* Festival (primary schools' cultural meeting) in 1986. These were structured along the lines of inter-school competitions in several categories. By 1990,

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[6] Marianne D. Soares Ramesar, Survivors of Another Crossing: A History of East Indians in Trinidad, 1880-1946 (St. Augustine: University of the West Indies, School of Continuing Studies, 1994) 114.
[7] Administration Report of the Director of Education for the Year 1948: 23.
[8] East Indian Weekly 13 Oct. 1928.
[9] Administration Report of the Director of Education for the Year 1948: 23.
[10] Administration Report of the Director of Education for the Year 1951: 39.

the Secondary Schools' *Sanskritic Sangam* included activities such as song, dance, art, craft, debate, poetry, play and essay writing, public speaking, drama, fashion, and quizzes on the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata.*[11]

Politics

The transporting of Indian religious and cultural elements into the realm of national politics provided yet another indicator of cultural nationalism. Though highly sporadic in occurrence, this application of religious /cultural elements in politics was evident in a 1939 newspaper article reporting that local Indians "unanimously passed a resolution of loyalty to the British Raj." The political situation in the Hindu religious text, the *Ramayana,* was analogized to the World War, and a *puja* (prayer ritual) was conducted for the welfare of the Empire during the war efforts. According to the article:

> The love of the Mother of Bharata [Kaikeyi] was that of Hitlerism. She was rebuked by her son because it was based on deceit; so the righteous sons of Germany are saying (or will someday say) to Hitler: we do not thank you for the throne of Poland (and other countries). Britain, like unto Latchmana is being told (and will be told) to do their [sic] duty by assisting France, for therein lies the support of righteousness. . . .[12]

Until the 1980s, there was minimal allusion to Indian religious and cultural ideology in the national politics of the country. However, the steadily increasing Indian presence in the political arena since the 1980s saw a gradual overturning of this trend. The entrance of Hindus into the politics of the country, along with the vibrant rejuvenation of Hinduism since the 1980s, paved the way for the working of the political idiom of the *Ramayana* into the country's political dialogue. Sleeping politicians were likened to a slumberous figure in the text; the government was portrayed as analogous to the text's utopian rule, while the Opposition was compared to the villain of the story.

Hindi words made their way into both the political platform and parliamentary sittings. Both national and community figures and leaders began highlighting and reworking religious and cultural elements into their respective election campaigns. Hindu religious forums were increasingly used as political platforms. In 1995 a Hindu puja/prayer was held for the welfare of the country, wherein the altar was shaped in the likeness of a map of Trinidad and Tobago. The Government, possibly patronizing, but aware that the Hindu community could no longer be dealt with as an invisible entity, seemed to reciprocate. This reciprocity was evident in events such as an island-wide Indian singing competition sponsored by the National Council of Indian Music and Drama ". . . as part of the ruling political party, the People's National Movement's tenth-anniversary celebrations."[13] In 1967, a non-Indian, non-Hindu Government senator, the "special guest" at a Hindu religious function, ". . . took off his shoes, entered a Hindu Temple, and participated in a two-and-a-half-hour service."[14]

"Nationalizing"

The late 1960s saw the beginnings of an increasingly deliberate drive toward what can be termed a nationalization of the religion; seemingly invoking the promise inherent in the words of the National Anthem that ". . . every creed and race find an equal place…." Encouraged by the educational prospects provided by the denominational education system which burgeoned during the 1950s, a heightened awareness and distaste of the sense of alienation from the wider society, and the religious ferment of the time, Trinidad Hinduism was empowered with confidence to assert its cultural self on a national level. This empowerment was most evident in the struggle for the declaration of the Hindu festival of

Divali as the first Hindu national holiday. According to a newspaper article entitled "Hindus Ready To March For Their Own Holiday," the Dow Village Hindu Youth Organization petitioned for the granting ". . . of at least one public holiday in honor of the second largest religious group in the country,"[15] and was prepared to hold marches and public meetings throughout Trinidad to agitate for the holiday. Their efforts proved successful when Divali day was declared a public holiday in 1966.

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[11] Trinidad Guardian 27 May 1990.
[12] Port-of-Spain Gazette 1 Oct. 1939.
[13] Trinidad Guardian 4 Jan. 1966.
[14] Trinidad Guardian 17 Feb. 1967.

[15] <u>Trinidad Guardian</u> 8 Jan. 1966.

Efforts at "publicizing" were both fuelled by and evident in the advent of performing artistes from India during the 1960s, including such famous singers as Mohammed Rafi,[16] and Mukesh.[17] These events were hosted at the country's most popular cultural centers such as the Queen's Hall and the Globe Theatre in the capital and the Naparima Bowl in San Fernando. Along with the artistes from India, there was an increasing appearance of singing, dancing and music competitions, and "social evenings" featuring local performers.[18] In commemoration of the country's independence in 1962, an "Indian Singing Exhibition and Dance Display" was staged.[19] In 1966, what was to become the annual national "Indian Ladies Singing Competition" was initiated. Religious observances also transcended individual and communal boundaries to acquire a more structured, large-scale format, with Divali, the most prominent festival among Trinidad Hindus, being the forerunner in this turn of events. By 1965, celebrations were held at several public spaces including the University of the West Indies, which stimulated the press to comment that for "the first time Trinidadians were nationally aware of Divali the Hindu Festival of Lights."[20] Other Hindu festivals were also being observed on comparably larger scales, very much in the public eye.

A most notable facilitator of cultural nationalism was the advent of *Divali Nagar*[21] in 1986. The Divali Nagar was associated with the major Hindu festival, Divali. It also provided the opportunity to showcase various facets of Indian culture (the art forms, food, and dress) in one place. Its location outside the boundaries of any particular village or community augmented its appeal as a national rather than a communal event. Its location along one of the major highways in the country made it very accessible while introducing a much needed dynamism into the presentation and communication of facets of Indian culture."[22] In 1990, a youth oriented socio-religious organization, the *Hindu Prachar Kendra*, inaugurated what was to become its annual *Kendra Phagwa Festival*. In the subsequent decade this event evolved into one of the most visible and controversial forums for the ventilation of issues affecting the Hindu community. Staged during the annual *Phagwa/Holi* festivities, it entailed the singing of social commentary songs (in various combinations of Hindi, Bhojpuri and English) which sometimes sought to refute calypsoes that were deemed offensive to Hindus and Hinduism, to highlight social ills and to air grievances within the Hindu community. This Indian forum for commentary in song form has today evolved into an annual national competition.

Organizations

One of the earliest facilitators of the emergence of any sense of Indian cultural nationalism were Indian socio-cultural organizations such as the East Indian National Congress (E.I.N.C.) or the East Indian National Association (E.I.N.A.). These emerged from as early as the end of the 19th century, and were serving as representatives of the Hindu population from the beginning of the 20th century. This was evident in the rallying of the Hindu pundits throughout the island into a "national *panchayat*"[23] in response to the flogging to death of an Indian during the strikes and labour unrest of November and December 1919.[24] During the 1920s, there emerged a number of organized Hindu and Muslim groups usually labeled as "Hindu Sabhas" and "Muslim Jamaats" throughout Trinidad.

By the 1930s, these organizations, now integrated into larger more united bodies, were taking vital socio-cultural issues to the national level, all of which were in some way related to the desire for public recognition and acceptance as equal citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, with all of their distinctive cultural elements. These included proposals to the government for the allocation of ecclesiastical grants, the legal recognition of Indian marriages, the inheritance issue, and the language issue in relation to adult franchise. Both the efforts and successes enhanced the pride and sense of visibility among the Indian population. In 1937, the East Indian Advisory Board, chaired by the

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[16] <u>Trinidad Guardian</u> 2 Apr. 1966.
[17] <u>Trinidad Guardian</u> 31 Aug. 1967.
[18] <u>The Hindu Times</u> Mar. 1966.
[19] <u>Trinidad Guardian</u> 19 Aug. 1962.
[20] <u>Evening News</u> 14 Nov. 1966.
[21] A *Divali* Village, this is an annual socio-religious event/exhibition that is held in commemoration of the festival of *Divali*, showcasing many elements of Hindu social, religious and cultural life.
[22] <u>Trinidad Guardian</u> 20 Oct. 1986.
[23] A group (usually five) of village elders which, based on a combination of intelligence, and social, economic and religious status, is entrusted with the responsibility of resolving both family and communal disputes.

Protector of Immigrants, and comprising Indian members, was formed for the purpose of advising the government on matters pertaining to East Indians in the colony.

Marriage

The institution of marriage emerged on a national level as possibly the most contentious of issues in the form of the Marriage Bill, highlighting the Indian attempt at being accepted as equally valid members of the Trinidad society. This issue was taken up from as early as 1923, at the seventh meeting of the Ordinary Session of the Legislative Council.[25] Connected to the issue of the legalization of Indian marriages, was the "illegitimacy" of persons born of such unions. Within the boundaries of the Indian community, neither was viewed as an issue since their traditional marriage ceremonies were all the validation needed for both the union and offspring. However, the need to ensure inheritance rights was a key push factor to have Hindu and Muslim marriages formally registered, since, in addition to lengthy and expensive court procedures, there were many cases of property being escheated to the state upon the death of the owner. The legal recognition of Indian marriages proved to be one of the most outstanding examples of concerted Indian efforts at taking elements of culture to a national level. More indirectly, the removal of the stigma of illegitimacy would also serve to enhance the status of the Indian community in the wider society.

Cremation

The debate over the legalization of cremation according to Hindu rights was another facet of the journey toward cultural nationalism. Heightened during the 1950s, the crux of this matter was located in the conflict between the Hindu and Christian/Western modes of disposal of the dead, and the related ideological differences. Arguments made by Hindus on this issue were initially met with indifference, ignorance, and opposition. In 1953, one government official declared that the Government was prepared to ". . . agree to cremation of the dead in accordance with accepted modern methods and in suitable crematoria."[26] They further argued that cremation according to the traditional Hindu method would ". . . offend the sensibilities of the majority of the population and [that] there was also the danger of pollution of rivers by casting the remains in them."[27] In 1955, after much debate, a Cremation Ordinance was passed. But when the regulations were made public in1956, several difficulties emerged. These included the extremely complicated process of acquiring the cremation license, the inability of Hindus to disperse of the ashes in the nearby river, the location of the cremation site at least one mile from the nearest dwelling house, not less than seventy-five yards from any road, and that the site must be ". . . properly fenced and screened from any animals or birds and the public view"[28]. Debate on these fundamental points of contention would continue unresolved for almost two decades. It was only in the 1970s that a resolution acceptable to both parties was reached. According to the 1970 Cremation Regulation Amendments, the disposal of the ashes of the dead into the river was now permitted, the process for the acquisition of the cremation licence was considerably less complicated, the location of the cremation site was reduced from one mile to one-half of a mile from any house or roadway, and the stipulation that the area be screened from birds was removed.[29]

Symbolic Claims

The struggle for the representation of Hinduism "… in the public arena and in the symbols of national life…."[30]was another dimension of the realization of cultural nationalism. For example, during the General Elections of 1986, the absence of the *Bhagvadgita* and the *Quran* at polling stations for oath-taking was viewed as a ". . . gross insult to Hindus and Muslims."[31] In addition, the absence of any Hindu religious texts at the official residence of the President of Trinidad and Tobago, where the formal swearing in of the new Government in 1986 was taking place, resulted in chaos to find a text when a Hindu minister refused to take his oath until one was provided. The Christian

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[24] Anthony De Verteuil, Eight East Indian Immigrants (Port-of-Spain: Paria Publishing Co. LTD., 1989) 138.
[25] Port-of-Spain Gazette 5 May 1923.
[26] Hansard 8 May 1953.
[27] Hansard 8 May 1953.
[28] Hansard 22 Oct. 1965.
[29] Hansard 16 Oct. 1970.
[30] Gurpreet Mahajan, The Multicultural Path (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2002) 103.
[31] Sandesh 23 Jan. 1987.

symbolism evident in the country's top national award, The Trinity Cross, had persistently stung Hindu religious sensibility. This tension was to climax in 1995 when the Hindu *Dharmaacharya* refused to accept the award, while formally stating that his action should be seen as ". . . an opportunity for those in authority to create a national award that recognizes the plurality of religious beliefs in this country."[32] The national education system and curriculum have repeatedly been accused of such majority-oriented symbolism. The use of discernibly Christian-oriented prayers at Government schools, the non-representation of Hinduism in approved school textbooks, and the paltry emphasis on Hindu religious observances evoked immense resentment from the Hindu community. The State-owned media was also accused of ignoring the Hindu community in Trinidad.

However, intensified protests for a more accommodating and inclusive political ethos since the late 1980s have seen varying levels of transformation in several areas. Probably the most monumental development was the changing of the name of the country's highest national award from "The Trinity Cross" to "The Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago" in 2008. Many of the textbooks used in the Government schools and the school curriculum itself were reworked to include facets of, not just Hinduism, but almost all of the other religious traditions in Trinidad and Tobago. During the 1980s, there was a notable rise in the representations of Hinduism in the media. By 2000 licences were granted for the establishment of a number of Indian radio stations in Trinidad and Tobago.

The Media

The number and nature of articles in the press reflected the society's attitudes and perception of Hinduism, and the Hindu community's level of visibility. Until World War II, the only coverage allotted to Indians was a fortnightly page in both the Trinidad Guardian and the Port-of-Spain Gazette. With the discontinuation of the "Indian" pages by both newspapers during the Second World War, press coverage of Hindu affairs, until the 1960s, was restricted to very small, sporadic notices of private events or observances. These events were, more often than not, privately sponsored by wealthier Hindu individuals. During the 1960s, these notices became more frequent and more detailed, though still very much superficial in their exposition of Hindu festivals and observances. Some attempts at capturing the nuances of Hindu events in the language of the press (in other words, comprehensible by the wider society) often resulted in either awkward or erroneous representations. According to a 1961 report on *Phagwa, "...* Hindu choirs added much colour to the merry-making, as they journeyed from house to house, singing songs of merriment for the occasion, and doing oriental dances."[33] Though not inaccurate in a literal sense, the reliance on Western classifications of "choirs," "merry-making," and "oriental dances" overlooked the religious dimension of the festival. This was even more evident in a notice on Divali, also from 1961, which read "Hindus in the territory will celebrate the feast of Divali. . . .Here several parties will be held and messages will be delivered."[34] "Feasts" is the wrong word, and the reference to "parties" totally misconstrued the nature of the events.

By the mid-1960s, entire pages were being dedicated to the recognition of the major religious observances such as *Divali, Shiv Ratri,* and *Ram Naumi*. The mid-1980s, however, can be identified as the time when a genuine, sustained effort was made to present Hinduism on its own terms and as an integral dimension of Trinidad society. Many articles on the nature, tenets, rituals, and observances of the religion were featured, especially around the time of the major religious observances. What was equally noteworthy was the transformation of these articles from just narrative reporting to pieces seeking to promote a deeper understanding of the dynamics of Hinduism and, to a lesser extent, Islam. By 1986, entire supplements dedicated to the major Hindu festivals could be found in the country's leading daily newspapers. Drawing from both the transformation in the attitude of Hindus and the fact that most of these articles were written by Hindus, it can be surmised that there was a significantly higher degree of confidence as Hindus within a multicultural society, an attitude that was barely discernible just one decade ago.

The emergence of a vibrant Indian press gave added impetus to the religious-cultural renaissance of the 1980s and saw a substantial heightening of the issue of cultural nationalism since Indian issues were now being engaged in very public forums. Spearheaded by the "young Hindu intelligentsia," publications such as *Sandesh* (Message)*, Jagriti* (Awakening)*,* and *Jagaran* (Watch)*,* addressing social, political and religious issues, provided a previously-

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[32] Trinidad Guardian 31 Aug. 1995.

[33] _Trinidad Guardian_ 7 Mar. 1961.

[34] _Trinidad Guardian_ 7 Nov. 1961.

lacking avenue for the articulation of Hindu opinions and concerns. This group initially comprised university students who, from the mid-1980s onwards, sought to highlight issues facing the Hindu community and to generate a deeper understanding and awareness of Hinduism both on and off the campus. During this period also, *The Indian Review Committee* produced frequent special publications in observance of the major festivals and Hindu events. This group of young university level Hindus defined itself as ". . . a society of activists dedicated to Indian Research, studies, and causes."[35] The establishment of the Chakra Publishing House saw an increase in the number of publications by both Hindu and non-Hindu authors on various aspects of the Hindu/Indian experience in Trinidad.

New Observances

The establishment of pilgrimage sites throughout the Trinidad landscape has also been a longstanding manifestation of cultural nationalism. This sanctification of local spaces signifies both a claiming of and connection with the nation on a deeper level, as well as the fact that Hindus were comfortable enough to take intimate facets of their religious and cultural practice to a more visible, national level. Locations, including the sites where rocks were alleged to have emitted blood or milk, along with various rivers and beaches, have all been duly consecrated and claimed as pilgrimage sites. The incorporation of the Christian figure of La Divina Pastora into the Hindu pantheon as an aspect of the Mother Goddess is probably the most telling example of this tendency, where Hindus have not only claimed the figure as an aspect of the Mother Goddess, but perform all of their Hindu rites and rituals for the deity in the church itself. A Protector of Immigrants Report confirmed the church of La Divina Pastora as a popular pilgrimage site for Hindus by 1893.[36] The initiation of the "*Divali Nagar*" in 1986 also served as an annual new age pilgrimage of sorts with an immense national appeal that cuts across barriers of religion, race, and cultures. The fact that land was granted by the state-owned Caroni (1975) Limited in 1989 especially for the observance of this event provides a most telling example of the response to attempts by the Hindu community at cultural nationalism. The advent of the first "national" *pradakshina* (ritual circumambulation) of the country in 1987 also served the latter purpose by declaring Trinidad a *janmabhoomi* (sacred motherland).[37]

Trinidad's annual Carnival revelry had, until the 1980s, been viewed as morally and ideologically in opposition to the tenets of Hinduism (as practised in Trinidad), and Hindu participation in Carnival was, therefore, more of the exception than the norm. Against this backdrop emerged vigorous objections to the use of aspects of Hinduism, especially its Gods and Goddesses, in calypsoes and Carnival bands. Given the extremely low level of participation by Hindus in Carnival activities, it can be argued that the inclusion of Hindu religious elements into the portrayals was almost solely the "creative" initiatives of non-Hindu artistes such as band leaders and costume designers. In

1965, the attempt to portray both Hindu deities and practices in two Carnival bands, namely "Gods And Worshippers Of India"[38] and "Vishnu's Kingdom"[39] evoked intense objection from Hindus. Currently, however, the location of Indian and Hindu cultural elements in the yearly Carnival activities has become almost the norm. This transformation has been facilitated by a shift in attitudes on both sides: most Hindus are now more accepting of Carnival, and Carnival related activities and Carnival promoters, producers, and artistes are more sensitive in their representations of Hindu religious and cultural elements. Indians are now present in almost all facets of the Carnival festivities, not merely taking part in the activities but also coloring the events with such Indian elements as Chutney music and Chutney Soca (music) competitions, and Indian based orchestras providing music for the main Carnival day parade of the bands.

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[35] The Indian Review Aug.-Sept. 1981.
[36] I.O.R. Official Series V/27/820/10: Note On Emigration From India To Trinidad by Surgeon Major W.D.Comins, 38.
[37] Kim Johnson, Express 23 Aug. 1996.

[38] <u>Evening News</u> 9 Feb.1965.
[39] <u>Evening News</u> 8 Feb. 1965.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that Hinduism in Trinidad has been engaged in a continuous process of negotiation on several levels; one that entailed, simultaneously, change and continuity. For Hindu religious and social practice and belief to obtain within the larger Trinidad society, the need for omissions and accretions was recognized. However, the simultaneous retention of the most fundamental concepts, systems, and values, though often in varyingly mutated forms, exemplifies the tendency of diasporic communities to cling to their reconstructions, since they seem to provide the primary source of identity and stability in an otherwise often ambiguous and tenuous situation. In the Trinidad context, this diametric pull between change and continuity is situated largely in the tension between "being Hindu" while belonging to a national community. What occurred was the dual drive to establish itself as a "community within a nation," and to insert itself into what has been termed the "national culture" of Trinidad and Tobago; a process which can be safely described as multi-layered, arduous, and by no means uniform.

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