

**Challenging Perspectives on Indian Diaspora
A Global Conference on Diaspora Studies and Politics
October 5 – 7, 2017**

Title of the Paper

Practicing Indian Culture in a Foreign Land: A case of National Identity and Bonding

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Abstract

With the advent of Indian Indentureship in Trinidad and Tobago in 1845, elements of Indian Nationalism found its way to this twin island nation. The earliest bonding among the Indian labourers took place aboard on the first ship, *Fatel Rozack* to the shores of Trinidad. Labourers from all strata (caste, religion, class and ethnicity) found solace in each other's company and established brotherly bond that came to be known as *Jahaji bhai* (Ship brotherhood) (Mohanty, 2014; Demming, 1996; Dabydeen & Samaroo, 1987). This cherished bond sustained them through their treacherous journey over the seas (known as *Kala pani* or dark waters) to the unknown foreign land. The bond of brotherhood extended further as the labourers, both men and women toiled together in sugar plantations under the British colonizers (Mohanty, 2014, Vertovec, 2000). Even after the abolition of Indentureship in 1917, the Indian migrants were not freed from economic, social, political and religious oppression faced under the newly established political power (Singh, 2012). Through the years, Indians in Trinidad have survived all challenges and have emerged as successful businessmen and entrepreneurs, professionals in law, medicine and academia, holding highest government offices and enjoy religious liberty through their major festivals like Diwali and Eid gaining national holidays in the calendar of events. But above all, Indians have maintained their Indian-ness through their cultural practices: upholding family values, religious rituals and festivals, traditional food, art, music, cultural wear, and practicing home and herbal remedies, to name a few. Today, the descendants of Indian Indentured labourers are known as the East Indians.

The present study examines the sustenance of Indian culture spanning over 170 years practiced among the East Indians in Trinidad and Tobago. Two areas are examined: kinship bonds and health beliefs and practices. Kinship is an important family bond where people identify themselves first as family members to the strangers. Kinship is used as a tool to understand social and historical mechanisms through which identities are transmitted, embodied and used to re-affirm one's ethnic and family belongingness. Secondly, factors contributing to the transmission and preservation of health beliefs and practices, particularly through the incorporation of home and herbal remedies in treating common ailments are also investigated.

Phenomenological approach is employed to examine persons' lived experiences focusing on their kinship and the transmission of the health beliefs and practices from one generation to another. Data is derived from personal interviews of the 3rd, 4th and current generations of East Indians and published historical literature on Indian Diaspora in Trinidad and Tobago. The implications of this study is to understand the factors contributing to the sustenance and maintenance of Indian culture despite of historical and geographical separation from the homeland, India for over a century. The findings will also draw comparison with the East Indians of Suriname and Dutch-speaking Caribbean islands.

Introduction

The twin islands of Trinidad and Tobago form the last isles of the Caribbean chain and is located about 14 kilometres from Venezuela in South America. Trinidad and Tobago display an interesting landscape of culturally diverse and mixed population. The current population of Trinidad and Tobago is

1,328,019 comprising mainly of the East Indians (35.4%) and Africans (34.2%). Other ethnic groups exist in small percentages like Caucasian (0.59%), Chinese (0.30%), Indigenous (0.11%), Syrian/Lebanese (0.08%), Portuguese (0.06%) and other ethnic groups (0.17%) (*Trinidad and Tobago 2011 Population and Housing Census Demographic Report*, 2012, p. 2 & 15). The East Indians (as they now called) are the descendants of Indentured labourers that were brought to work in the sugar plantations from India under the British regime during the period 1845 - 1917. Their journey across the oceans to the Caribbean was fraught with physical, emotional, social and spiritual anguish. They were torn between the trauma of separation from their kin and the apprehension of what lay ahead of them in an unknown destination. Their day to day experiences on the sea availed no comfort to their anguished souls.

In the backdrop of the turmoil the Indentured labourers faced on their journey, a warm wave of brotherhood swept over them. The concept of *Jahaji bhai* (or ship brotherhood) was first conceptualized and initiated by the Indian Immigrants while aboard *Fatel Rozack*, the first ship that landed on the shores of Trinidad in 1845. This bond of brotherhood expressed in the spirit of boundedness with all varied categorical groups among the Indian labourers during the Indentureship period, continued after its abolition in, 1917 (Mohanty, 2014, p. 61-62). *Jahaji bhai* alludes to togetherness, oneness among the people of Indian origin based on true love for one another and that is reflection of Indian-ness. In the context of Trinidad and Tobago, the East Indians or also known as Indo-Trinidadians relate their home to India and connect to the thought of homeland and these culminate in the Indian-ness concept (Raghuandan, 2012). Klass (1988) noted the substitution of fictive kinship relations (as demonstrated by the term *Jahaji bhai*) for the biological ones. When Indians came from India they were merged on a ship and on the plantations and they developed new forms of extended family networks devoid of caste hierarchies (as cited in Cornwell & Stoddard, 2001, p.42). Today, to reiterate what has been stated above is that Indian-ness concept is

maintained through the cultural practices of the East Indians in marriage and family life, religious rituals and festivals, traditional food , art, music, cultural wear, and practicing home and herbal remedies.

This paper examines the patterns of kinship bonds and health beliefs and practices among selected East Indian families in Trinidad. Kinship, in this paper is viewed as a marker for ethnic identity. Kinship bonds indicate how marital alliances are sought and established and rules governing the descent and lineage. This paper presents case studies of three East Indian families drawn from the different geographical regions of Trinidad. The information generated from these case studies are depicted in genealogical charts. One person was interviewed from each family who is marked as an ego in the genealogical chart. The areas investigated included types of marital bonds, patterns of lineage and descent and the localities from where the marital partners were sought. This paper also attempted to examine the role of gender in kinship and descent.

Kinship and Ethnic Identity: Some theoretical considerations

Cheung (1993) defines ethnic identification as "the psychological attachment to an ethnic group or heritage" (p. 1216) and thus centers the construct in the domain of self-perception. Sociologist, Saharso (1989), on the other hand, extends the definition to include social processes that involve one's choice of friends, selection of a future partner, perception of their life-chances, and the reactions of others in one's social environment. Both definitions involve boundaries where one makes a distinction between "self" and "other" and are derived from Barth's (1969) exposition on ethnic identity. According to him, it was a means to create boundaries that enabled a group to distance themselves from one another. He strongly maintained that ethnic boundaries define a group and not the cultural components that encloses it. He also stated that ethnic identity is contingent on the acceptance and acknowledgement of "ingroup" and "outgroup" members. Additionally, it is noted that ethnic identity is not a fixed categorization, but rather is fluid and dynamic that changes and varies according to particular social contexts (Phinney 2003, Weinreich 1986).

Oyserman, Elmore and Smith (2012) continue along the same vein to posit that it is a fluid expression based on people's associations and circumstances, and is "dynamically constructed in the moment" (p. 70).

It is constructed and modified as individuals become aware of their ethnicity, within the sociocultural setting. In the course of constructing and maintaining identity, common historical symbols are identified, shared, and passed along to future generations. These historical symbols relate to food, clothing, language and even family names. Moreover, ethnic identity is constructed in the historical context (Strauss 1959).

Furthermore, Premdas (1996) defines ethnic identity as one that "emerges from a collective group consciousness that impart a sense of belonging derived from membership in a community bound putatively by common descent and culture" (p.10).

Ethnic identity is also constructed as kinship bonds are established and maintained down through the generations. Kinship bonds are social and historical mechanisms through which identities are transmitted and embodied and used to re-affirm one's ethnic and family belongingness. It is the basis for group formation and relationships are governed by kinship norms. Kinship relations are social relations predicted upon cultural conceptions that specify the processes by which an individual comes into being and develops into a matured social person. (Kelly 1993 cited in Peletz 1995). Kinship relations include those ascribed through birth (consanguinal bond) and persists throughout life and is initiated by marriage (affinal bond). Kinship is responsible to assigning persons to an "in" group in opposition to persons not assigned, entails inheritance of property and resources and serves as a medium for assigning hereditary social positions (Bernard & Good 1984 cited in Peletz 1995).

In this paper, Levi-Strauss' study on kinship will be used to explain the kinship patterns where the shift was made from the content and functioning of kinship relations to understanding the underlying relationships among their constituent elements. He also examined the structural significance of the ties of marriage and alliance, especially the ways in which they link descent units of various kinds. The move was

from descent to alliance of marriage, in particular. In the Trinidad context, marital alliances among the selected East Indian families are examined as they cut across different religious affiliations, particularly, Hindus, Muslims and Christians. The examination of such patterns will be instrumental in the understanding of the socio-cultural bonding and re-definitions of ethnic identity.

Kinship Studies among East Indians in Trinidad

Klass (1961) studied the kinship and marriage patterns in a rural village of Amity which was re-studied twenty years later by Nevadomsky (1980, 1983). In the late fifties, when Klass carried out his fieldwork, women were not educated; most families were of the extended type and residence was usually patrilocal, that is the married couple resided at the husband's father's place. Social status of a person was determined by the caste and religious merit. Nevadomsky, on the other hand, focused on changes in shared values and in household structure. He found that social rank was now derived from income earning potential and educational attainments; nuclear families were the norm and in many cases the ideal; patrilocal residence was now of insignificant duration; marriage partners were usually chosen by the young people themselves; girls were educated and their education enhanced their value as potential wives (cited in Eriksen 1992).

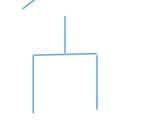
According to Eriksen (1992), this change described by Nevadomsky can be perceived as a transition from an ascription-based to an achievement-based form of organisation, and it fits very neatly with classical sociological theory about the nature of modernisation seen as the transition from *Gemeinschaft* (community) to *Gesellschaft* (society).

Selected Case Studies

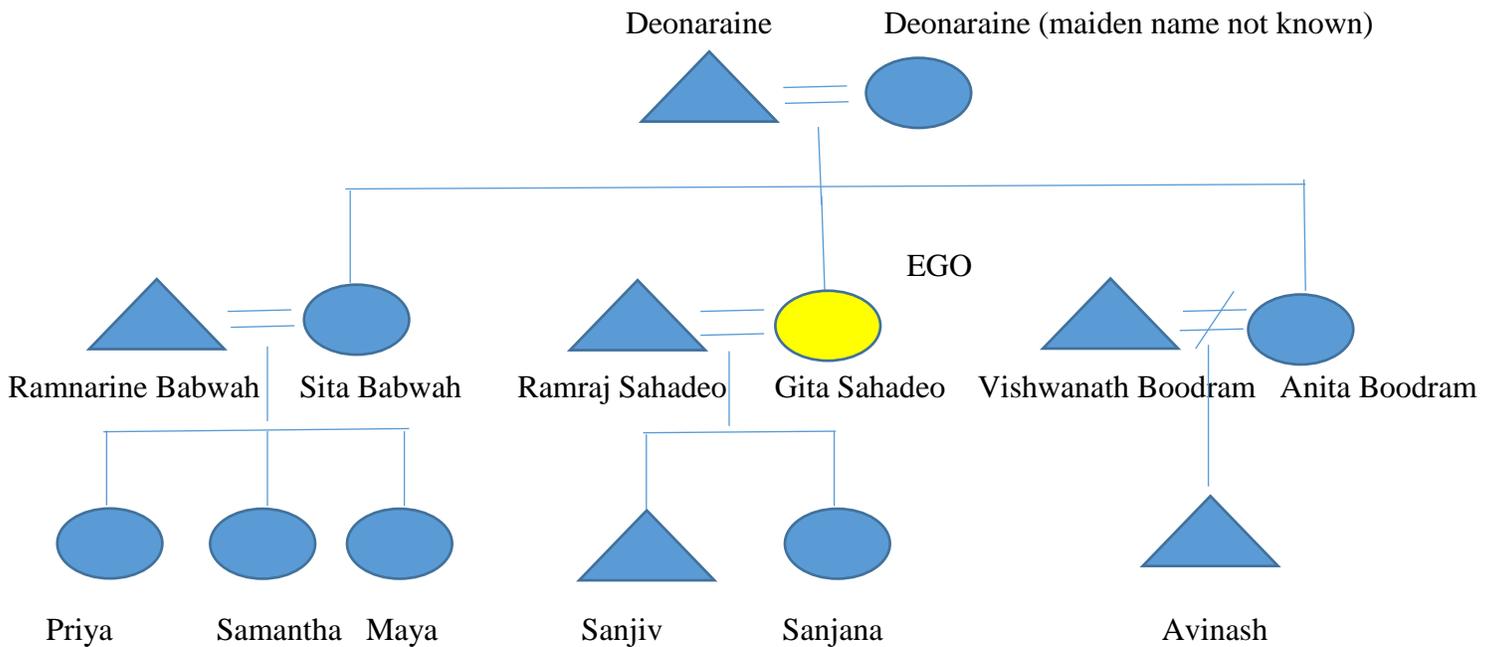
Three individuals were purposively selected as participants in this present study. The interviews covered information from four generations, that is, the ego's (person who was interviewed) generation, two higher generations (parents and grandparents) and one lower generations (offspring). Information was

collected on the type of marital alliance (arranged or free will), towns or villages of the spouses and current residence of the ego's family, religious affiliation of the spouses and children, patterns of inheritance of land and property whether only sons inherited (patrilineal) or both sons and daughters had equal share in the inheritance. The participants gave their consent to use the names and details of their family information for developing this paper. Readers are requested to give due respect to the individuals mentioned in these case studies.

Legend

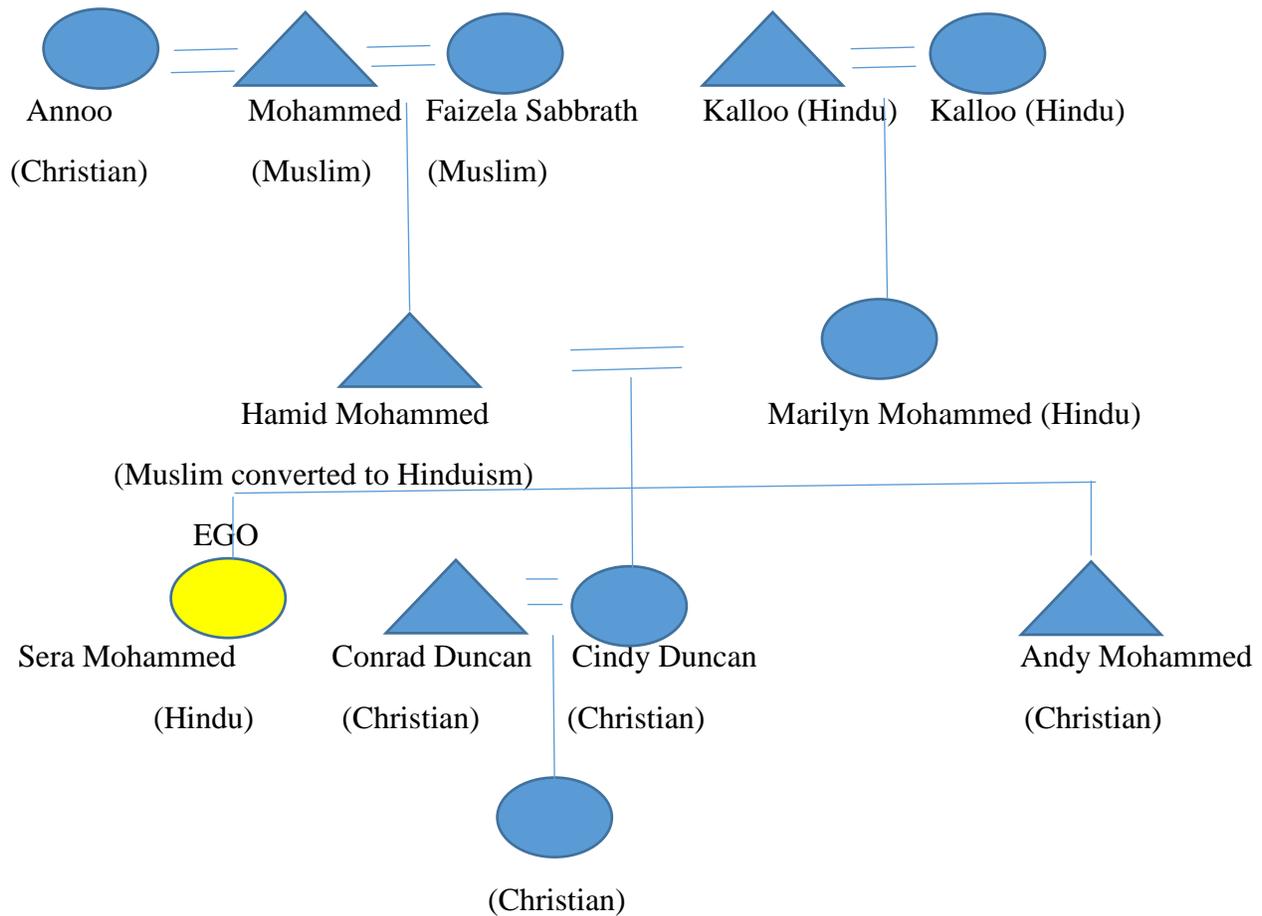
Symbol	Meaning
	Male
	Female
	Marital Bond
	Divorced
	Ego
	Deceased
	Sibling bonds

Case Study # 1: Gita Deonaraine-Sahadeo (Hindu)



Gita Deonaraine-Sahadeo (28 years old) is from the village of Boisbande in Sangre Grande (East Trinidad). She is married to Ramraj Sahadeo from the same village. They have two children, the first born is a son followed by a daughter. Gita has two sisters, Sita who is the first born, and Anita who is the last born. Gita is the second child of her parents. All her sisters are married. Sita is married to Ramnarine Babwah from the Arena village in Chaguanas (Central Trinidad). They have three daughters. Anita was married to Vishwanath Boodram but is divorced now and they have one son who carries his father's surname. Gita, and her sisters got married to persons of their own choice. Parental consent was sought and parents visited the would-be son-in-laws homes to check out if they were following Hindu religion in their respective households and that the family had a good name in the neighbourhood. Similarly, parents from the boys' families visited the girls' home to do the background check on their family before proceeding with the rituals of marriage. All generations in Gita's family are practicing Hindus and celebrate all Hindu festivals.

Case Study # 2: Sera Mohammed



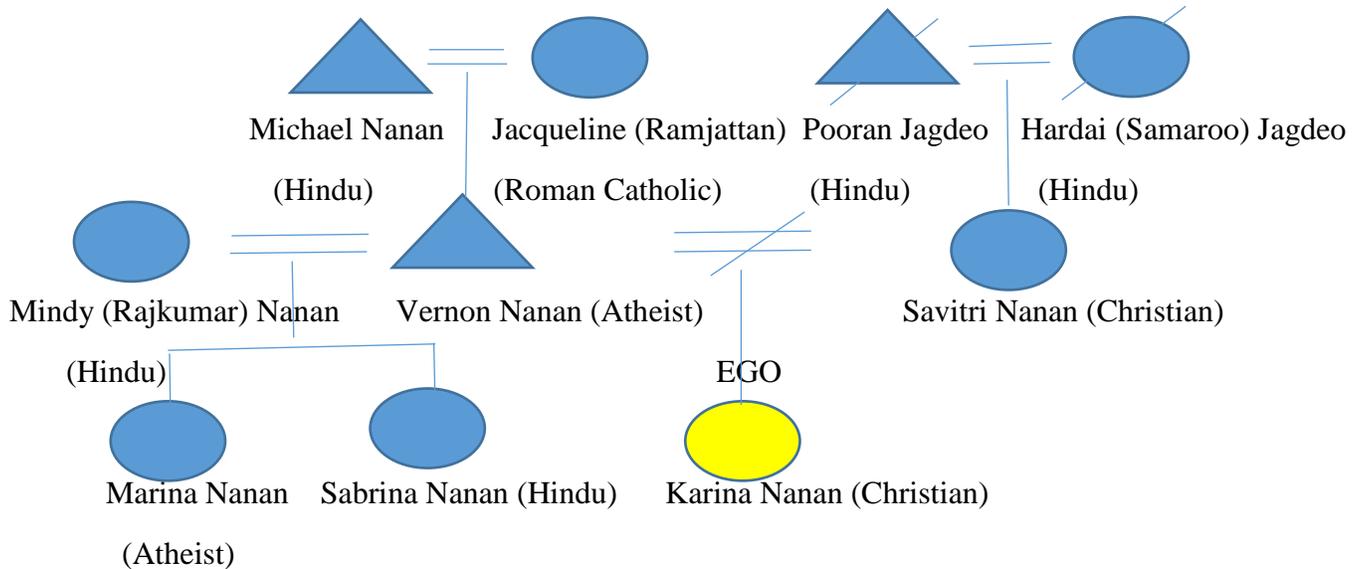
Sera Mohammed (22 years old) is from Arima (East Trinidad). Her maternal grandparents were Hindus with surnames as Kalloo. She does not recall their first names. They both were from Tunapuna (East-West Corridor). Sera's mother, Marilyn Kalloo married her father, Hamid Mohammed from Arima, where they are currently residing. Sera's paternal grandparents were from Curepe (located in the East-West Corridor). Her paternal grandmother's name is Faizela Sabbrath who was a Christian and her paternal grandfather's name is Mohammed (she does not recall his first name) who is a Muslim. Later, he left Faizela and got married to Anoo (her maiden name is not known) who was originally from Couva (South Trinidad). Anoo is a Christian and both of them are currently residing in Curepe. They do not have any offsprings from this union. Sera's father, Hamid is the only child of his father and mother. When Hamid

got married to Sera's mother, Marilyn, he had to convert into a Hindu. This was the condition placed before him by his in-laws when he proposed to get married to Marilyn. He had met Marilyn at the garage where he did his family business. Sera is the first born in her family. She is engaged to get married to a Christian. Sera is followed by a sister, Cindy who is married to Conrad Duncun, who is Christian. Conrad is from Claxton Bay (Central Trinidad). They had met at their work place in a metal industry. They have a seven months old baby girl. Cindy is followed by a brother, Andy who is a student at a university. He is converted into Christianity. He prefers to get married to an East Indian Christian girl in future. Currently, Sera and both her parents practice Hinduism at home.

Sera's mother had inherited money from her parents from the sale of a piece of land they owned. Both she and her sister will inherit the apartments in their parental house. All property will be given to their brother, Andy. Both the parents made a joint decision on how the land and property are to be distributed.

In Sera's family both immediate and extended, family members come together to celebrate all festivals whether Diwali (Hindu), Eid (Muslim) or Christmas (Christian). Sera and her sisters come to their mother's home to prepare "parsad" (Pooja sweet) during Diwali and distribute to their neighbours. Also, help their mother prepare East Indian food like dalpuri (flat bread stuffed with ground seasoned peas), chana (chick peas) and potato, rice and kharhi (kind of gravy with meat balls of peas), and curried mango.

Case Study # 3: Karina Nanan (Christian)



Karina (24 years old) is from San Juan (West Trinidad). Her maternal grandparents were from Guyana. Her maternal grandfather's name was Pooran Jagdeo from Georgetown (Guyana) and was married to Hardai Samaraoo from Essquibo (Guyana). Both of them were Hindus. Their marriage was arranged after Pooran's first wife died during the childbirth. Karina's mother or her siblings did not inherit any land or property as their parents had none of those assets. Karina's maternal grandparents are deceased now.

Karina's paternal grandparents are from San Juan, Trinidad (located in the East-West Corridor). Her paternal grandfather, Michael Nanan is married to Jacqueline Ramjattan. Theirs was a love marriage. Michael is a Hindu and Jacqueline is a Roman Catholic. They have two children, Vernon (Karina's father) and a sister (name was not mentioned). Karina believes that her grandfather would leave his house to his daughter. They do not possess any land or property.

Karina's mother, Savitri was born as a Hindu in Georgetown, Guyana and later was converted to Christianity at 25 years. Karina's father, Vernon is an atheist. Theirs was a love marriage. Karina is not sure if the parental consent were taken for their marriage. Currently, her parents are divorced and she is the

only child of her mother. Her father re-married Mindy Rajkumar, a Hindu from Santa Cruz and have two daughters, Marina and Sabrina. Her father possesses land and has made arrangements to divide it equally among his three daughters. Karina is Christian and would prefer to get married to a Christian East Indian.

Ethnic Identity Re-defined in the Context of Kinship Bonds

The selected case studies of the East Indian families from different geographical regions indicate that ethnic identity is fluid and dynamic. It is constructed and modified as individuals become aware of their own ethnicity and others within the given socio-cultural setting. Fluidity was observed as individuals chose their marital partners outside their religious groups despite the fact that endogamy was a norm.

The first case (Case Study # 1) presents a typical Hindu family following endogamy in terms of religion, family involvement in the marital consent and background check of the family's reputation in the community as well as ascertaining if the families were practicing Hindus. The current population of Hindus in Trinidad and Tobago is 240,100 (18.2%) and is the second largest religion in the country next to Roman Catholic. The Case Study #1 is a prototype of traditional Hindu family that have survived despite increasing inter-ethnic and inter-racial marriages in Trinidad.

Marital alliances are highly preferential in Case # 2 crossing the ethnic boundaries marked by religion. A unique scenario presented here is that of the Ego's father conversion from Islam to Hinduism to fulfil the condition placed by his in-laws. The phenomenon could be explained on the basis of his weak bonding with his father who left his mother for another woman of non-Islam faith (Christian). With regards to festivals and social gatherings, the family members from either side of the alliances come together to celebrate all festivals of their kin's religious affiliation.

Case Study # 3 presents a contemporary scenario of kinship bonds among the East Indians today. Along the Ego's maternal line, marital alliance was an arranged one among her grandparents generation

which gave way to preferential one between her parents. Unfortunately, the alliance did not last and the underlying assumption can be on account of their varied religious persuasion. Even though, the Ego's father continues to be an Atheist, his second wife has been partly instrumental in the preservation of the Hinduism in the family.

Notwithstanding the exogamy observed in the above case studies, racial endogamy was preserved and passed down from one generation to the next. Persons preferred to marry an East Indian irrespective of the religious background. Celebration of festivals of their kin has been a unifying element among the family members. This was clearly expressed by the Ego of Case Study # 2. More than the ritual aspects of these festivals, food had been the gravitating force. Indian food and sweets make the common menu in all three festivals celebrated by the East Indians.

Health Beliefs and Practices in Trinidad and Tobago

Ethnomedical practices refer to the ways people promote health and longevity and prevent disease and illness through traditional systems of medicine. These include magico-religious beliefs and practices as well as medicinal plants and physiotherapy; all of which are rooted in the socio-cultural context. According to Fabrega (1977), "Ethnomedicine deals with information pertaining to social adaptation, deviant behavior, illness, disease, medical taxonomy, folk medical knowledge and systems of medical care" (p.201). In the act of alleviating his/her disease, the sick person may follow prescriptive medicine or adhere to natural remedies (whichever works best for them and which is defined to them by their societal norms). Ethnomedical practices lie at the core of people's culture.

Health beliefs and practices in Trinidad and Tobago have been greatly influenced by multiple migration patterns historically. Knowledge and practices from intergroup borrowing or medical syncretism has contributed to the Caribbean Folk Medicine ("Bush Medicine") (Ballutansky, 1997). Ethnomedical practice

is a marriage between the folk medicine of the Europeans, Amerindians, Africans, Chinese, East Indians and scientific medicine (Lans, 2007a).

In Trinidad and Tobago, the East Indians have succeeded in keeping the folk medicine alive till today. These practices are so influential that their non-East Indian neighbors have been seen practicing these home remedies on regular basis (Laurent & Seaforth, 2009; Mahabir & Guilliford, 1997).

In the present study, twelve households of East Indians were visited and personal interviews were conducted to examine their learned and current Ethnomedical practices. Data was collected over the period of past six years.

Ethnomedical Practices: Unchanged Core Values

Although, changes are seen their external traits mostly dress and language, their core cultural values and norms among the East Indians in Trinidad and Tobago have remained unchanged over the years. These include observing their Hindu festivals, daily or weekly worships and visits to the temple, Hindu marriage and funeral rites, disciplining their children, to name a few. East Indians continue to use home remedies for a wide range of ailments. These traditional practices have been passed down orally from one generation to another. The evidences of these practices are seen when one walks into the compound of their residences and find an array of herbs (tulsi – *Ocimum sanctum*, lemon grass – *Cymbopogon citrates*, ban dania – *Eryngium foetidum*, garlic or onion chives), shrubs (hibiscus – *Hibiscus rosa-sinensis*, marigold – *Tagetes patula*) and trees (neem – *Azadiracta indica*, mango – *Mangifera indica*, saijan – *Moringa oleifera*) of medicinal value growing in their backyards.

Home remedies are practiced by anyone who has the knowledge about the healing aspects of the medicinal plants or foods. However, among the East Indians there are specialists in traditional healing. The types of specialists/healers found are “Vaidyas”, “Ojhas” and “masseurs”. The “Vaidyas” are the physicians

using medicinal plants for treatment. Their medical knowledge is derived from the Ayurvedic system of medicine (dating back to 5000 BC). “Ojhas” (usually Hindu pundits or Muslim Imams), possess special abilities of performing magico-religious forms of healing. Magico-religious practice is a combination of magic and religion in healing ailments that are believed to be caused by supernatural elements like evil spirits, evil eye, and wrath of gods. Ojhas resort to “jharay” or shaking away the illnesses or evil eye spell by waving a cocoyea broom (made from coconut tree leaf) and chanting mantras (string of magical verses). The “masseurs” provide more a physical healing called ‘cracking’, ‘rubbing’ (local term is *mesay*), and ‘vein pulling’. They also have a special ability to massage away pains affecting the muscular and skeletal system (Lans, 2007a; Chand, 2007; personal information, 2012).

Ethnogenesis: Emerging of New Culture

From a macro level perspective, anthropologist and sociologists have argued how individuals of two or more cultures living in close proximity to each other not just learn the new culture but also integrate themselves into different “subcultures” of the majority group based on factors as complex as social class and experiences of discrimination and privilege (Organista, et al, 2010) . This process known as *Ethnogenesis* produces mixed set of values and behaviors that characterizes the specific ethnic group and that are somewhat different from those of the original culture or of those of the dominant group.

For example, a residence of a Hindu East Indian has a small temple and a number of flag poles (each representing a Hindu deity) in their front yard that distinguishes it from the other East Indians in the neighborhood. This is a new form of practice that the East Indians have introduced to mark the sub-cultures within their own ethnic group (Muslims and Christians) as well as the sub-cultures of the other ethnic groups with respect to their religious identity.

Most of the East Indians add curry (ground spices) to all vegetables, fish and meat and sometimes stew, steam or bake them like their non-Indian neighbors. Their 'rotis' (sada- plain or dalpuri-stuffed with ground and spiced split peas) are a different version than those of the original culture and their popular street food "Doubles" (two pieces of deep fried tortillas with curried chickpeas) is an adaptation of the most popular North Indian street food "Chana batura".

Their "Chutney" music (mix of English and Bhojpuri) and "Chutney Soca" (a crossover style of music incorporating Soca elements and Hindi-English lyrics) are bilingual. Both forms of music are good example of how Indo-Trinidadians have created an original, syncretic art form using Indian melodies and non-electrical musical instruments like dholak and dhantal (Indian drums) and African beats (in Chutney Soca).

On the other hand, home remedies are still practiced: like purging the body with bitter herbs (caraile bush- *Momordica charantia*, neem leaves, gooma bhaji – *Solanum americanum*), and the use of local spinach (*Amaranthus dubius*), poi bhaji (*Basella alba*) and saijan leaves (*Moringa oleifera*) for strength and vitality (Mahabir 2001; personal information, 2012, 2014, 2017).

Interestingly, as a part of Ethnogenesis, a religious syncretism has been observed among certain segment of the East Indian Hindus. Every year, on the Holy Thursday (day before Good Friday), large numbers of Hindu worshippers pay their homage to a deity called "Siparia Mai" (a version of Mother Mary with brown skin complexion) located in the courtyard of a Roman Catholic Church. They offer flowers, jewelry or cash, candles and a bottle of olive oil. It is believed that praying to this deity will bring healing from any disease and improves the family's general health, well-being and prosperity. Rubbing of the olive oil blessed by the deity on the foreheads or the affected part of the body is believed to bring healing. The authors had the privilege of observing and documenting this phenomenon in 2012.

Role of Social Context in Preservation of Health Beliefs and Practices

In Trinidad, health beliefs and practices have been retained mainly because the elders in the family practiced and imparted their knowledge to the younger generation. The family ties have been strong among the immigrant parents that have contributed to a great extent to the preserving of the traditional values of age old home remedies in these communities. In a personal interview with one of the East Indian practicing home remedies, stated that the knowledge was passed to her through her parents and some were acquired from her East Indian neighbors. Interestingly, today, some of the knowledge of traditional medicine is being acquired from their African neighbors as a result of prolonged contact with these ethnic groups (personal information, 2014, 2017). Also, a number of inter group marriages have led to the continuation of these practices in the mixed households. For example, many of the African-based medicinal plants are being used by the East Indians in Trinidad like the use of Christmas bush (*Eupatorium odoratum*), Jerry tooth (*Pluchea carolinensis*) for cold and cough; carpenter bush (*Justicia pectoralis*), vervine (*Stachytarpheta jamaicensis*) used as coolant and calming the nerves; stinging nettles (*Urtica dioica*) for cleansing; and seed under leaf (*Phyllanthus amarus*) for diabetes. Traditional practices derived from both the groups have also been observed in treating cold and cough. For example brewing the following ingredients:

East Indian-based: caraili leaves and hibiscus flowers;

African-based: bamboo leaves and bois cano (*Cecropia peltata*).

Common to both the ethnic groups: wonder of the world (*Bryophyllum pinnatum*) and lemon grass.

Moreover, an ethnobotanical survey conducted across Trinidad indicated that “Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) was most popular for treating “diabetes. The leaves of breadfruit (*Artocarpus altilis*) and of tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*) were preferred in treating “pressure”. Saffron (*Curcuma longa*) was preferred in the oral treatment of “afterbirth” (perceived post-natal complaints)” (Laurent & Seaforth, 2009). This supports the view that medicinal plants used by East Indians are also popular among other ethnic groups.

East Indians in Trinidad have maintained the use of medicinal plants and home remedies by passing on the knowledge to the younger generation. Their use of medicinal plants and home remedies have greatly impacted their creole neighbours. Today, one can find saijan (*Moringa oleifera*), and hardi (*Curcuma longa*) or turmeric being grown in almost all households, being sold freshly in the vegetable markets as well as commercially packaged and sold in the supermarket and pharmacies as tea-bags.

Conclusion

National identity is a complex term to be defined explicitly in the context of the East Indians in Trinidad and Tobago. Being migrants to a foreign land, East Indians unlike their African counterparts were privileged to form their own communities and construct their own identity. Thus, most of their cultural practices and value system were retained over the years (Tinker, 1974). Even in the post Indentureship era, where they moved to different parts of the country and resided among the Afro-Trinidadians, the process of acculturation did creolize them to a certain extent but the underlying value system remained fairly unchanged. Kinship bonds continue to prevail among the East Indians irrespective of the religious affiliations. Festivals and food continue to be the unifying factors among the kin groups. Finally, in this discussion, health beliefs and practices have been passed orally from one generation to the next and have even impacted their non-East Indian communities.

As reflected by Bhat and Bhaskar (2007), any diasporic community is uniquely situated according to its multi—polarity, defined by the continuity/discontinuity of the cultural baggage from the place of origin, dynamics of the host society and the influence of the motherland or ancestral land. Also, Williams (1990) alluded to national identity as a form of primary and “placeable” bonding and Renan (1990) referred to the same as common rich legacy of memories. In a nutshell, all these seem to be the elements defining national identity. However, the term “national identity” begs for multi-layered explanation in the attempt to fully

comprehend the meaning and justifying its usage to the East Indians residing in a multi-cultural milieu like that of Trinidad and Tobago.

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