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Invisible migrants: The Indo-Trinidadian in North America and Britain 1960-1980

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Invisible migrants: The Indo-Trinidadian in North America and Britain 1960-1980

Jerome Teelucksingh

Introduction

This research will assess the diasporic experiences and adjustment of Indo-Trinidadian immigrants in the post-Independence era. The displaced Indo-Trinidadians residing in North America and Britain were challenged to define themselves in relation to Afro-Caribbean and Asian Indian immigrants. Migration scholars such as Barry Levine, Mary Chamberlain, Nancy Foner, Frank Birbalsingh, Ransford Palmer and Roy Bryce-Laporte have collated the experiences of the Caribbean diaspora in North America and Europe (Roy Bryce-Laporte, 1976; Levine, 1987; Birbalsingh, 1989 1997; Palmer, 1990; Chamberlain, 1997, Foner, 1978, 1979, 1985, 1998, 2001).

The majority of the Indo-Trinidadian immigrant population had been either directly or indirectly affected by the epoch-making events of the 1960s and 1970s involving decolonization and Black Power. In the Caribbean, this era of change was characterized by social upheavals and cataclysmic political changes. The transfer of economic and political power into the hands of the Afro-Caribbean and this stirred up racial tensions in the former

colonies of Guyana and Trinidad which had relatively large East Indian populations. As a result, thousands of East Indians from Guyana and Trinidad flocked to the United States and Canada to escape racism in their homeland. Many claimed to be political refugees and sought asylum. It is estimated that there are more than 120,000 Indo-Trinidadians in United States; and every year 8,000 to 10,000 East Indians from Trinidad are expected to migrate to this country (Bisram, 2005).

An overwhelming majority of East Indians were absorbed into the still expanding Canadian economy during the late 1960s and 1970s. They were reluctantly welcomed in Canada where there was a need for skilled labor especially electricians, plumbers and carpenters. The mistake of many of these migrants was not realizing that Canada was not color-blind and racism was entrenched in the society. Indeed, the racial bogeyman accompanied the West Indian immigrants to their new homelands.

The Indo-Caribbean immigrants arrived in England during the Caribbean influx into Britain during the 1960s. Unfortunately, there is an absence of statistics on the population size of this ethnic group who left the Caribbean.

In 1981, there was an estimated 22,800 to 30,400 Indo-Caribbean persons residing in Britain (Vertovec, 1994). This figure is relatively insignificant when compared to the 1982 estimate of 1.2 million Asians living in Britain. The Indo-Caribbean sought to construct a unique identity in Britain. This was done in an effort to be differentiated from the Afro-Caribbean population, especially the “Windrush generation” whose major immigration into Britain began on the ship Empire Windrush in 1948.

Race relations had not improved in Trinidad during the 1980s and 1990s as Indo-Trinidadian men and women continued to experience discrimination (Maharaj, 1993; Espinet, 1993). East Indians felt as second-class citizens as they experienced difficulties in obtaining jobs in the security forces, entry into the public service and access to public housing. There was a glaring absence of equity and meritocracy.

The ascension to political office in 1995 by the United National Congress (UNC), comprising predominantly Indians, witnessed the first Indo-Trinidadian Prime Minister- Basdeo Panday. This temporarily stemmed the tide of Indo-Trinidadian emigration. Unfortunately, this achievement had certain repercussions on the racial climate in Trinidad and Tobago. The reign of the UNC was marked by an unprecedented rise in racism and accusations of corruption. Furthermore, the Afro-Trinidadians were deceptively cajoled by racist calypsonians, newspaper

columnists and politicians into believing that they were being discriminated against and ignored by an East Indian-led government.

Subsequently, in 2002, the PNM regained political power and from 2002 to 2007 there has been a spiraling increase in crimes including murders and kidnappings. The majority of the victims of kidnappings and robberies have been Indo-Trinidadians. As a result of this high level of crime, many Indo-Trinidadians have sold their homes/businesses and sought solace in North America and England. The challenges of assimilation and social mobility experienced by East Indians in the Caribbean were also present in the new host societies.

Culture: Music, Diet and Carnival

Cultural forms by Indo-Trinidadians have been used to counter dominant discourses in North America and England. This could be viewed as a type of cultural resistance by the immigrants. During the twentieth century, the Indo-Caribbean has been voiceless and faceless in Britain, their adopted homeland. Primarily due to their population being scattered, small in number and the lack of communication among the members have contributed to them being unable to be an influential voice. This is markedly different from other areas as Soho and Southall in which there is a distinct presence of the Asian immigration. Likewise, in Brixton, there is a heavy and obvious African

and Afro-Caribbean presence.

Among the age-group 45-65 years, there is occasional attendance at theatres. Once every three months, an Indo-Trinidadian from London would attend a play, poetry reading or musical. Those migrants who studied Literature at colleges in the Caribbean were more appreciative of the Shakespeare plays in London. Seven Indo-Caribbean persons claimed to appreciate British plays and music more than the Caribbean counterparts.

There is a weak link between India and the Indo-Trinidadian immigrants. For instance, whilst in the Caribbean, the Indo-Caribbean would patronize Indian films with English subtitles. However, in North America during the last decade there is a declining interest in “Indian movies.” The Indo-Trinidadians are also familiar with such actors/actresses and singers as Amitabh Bachan, the Kapoors, Lata Mangeshkar and Kishore Kumar. Additionally the immigrants are aware of the development of ‘Indipop’ especially the vibrant dance rhythm- Bhangra. Since the late 1990s, young East Indians from Trinidad have also been familiar with bhangra songs (Balliger, 2005). There are regular visiting music and dance groups from India. Forty percent of Indo-Trinidadians in Toronto, thirty percent in Los Angeles and ten percent in London would attend these cultural events. East Indians in Los Angeles and Washington do not attend events featuring artistes from India or Pakistan.

As with other ethnic groups, there is a culinary appreciation of the ethnic diversity in Miami, Toronto and Los Angeles. For instance, Tandoori, Chinese and

Mediterranean dishes are occasionally sampled by East Indian families. Though, there are no specific Indo-Trinidadian restaurants in London and North America, the immigrant is able to purchase imported fruits, vegetables, seasonings and curries from West Indian restaurants and groceries. Furthermore, condiments as pepper, chutney and kuchela are usually brought by visiting friends and relatives. The foods and delicacies associated with festivals, Eid and Divali, including roti, pumpkin, kurma, parsad and sawine remain a prominent feature on the menu of the Indo-Caribbean diaspora.

Not surprisingly, there are some individuals, as Michael Hosein of London, whose tastes have undergone minor modifications. He departed Trinidad in 1998 and admitted that his diet has less of a West Indian or East Indian element but more sausages, potatoes, steak and sandwiches. From the responses it seems that one of the major customs of England, tea-drinking, has not been adopted by the Indo-Caribbean population. In the three selected areas in United States, East Indians between the ages of 23 and 35 years, consume foods as pizza, hot dogs, hamburgers and/or chips at least once a week.

In the United States more than 20 cities would have Carnival celebrations (Hill, 1997). In New York, the Carnival has become a major symbol in the development of a “Trinidadian transnation” (Scher, 2005: 46). Christine Ho examined the Miami Carnival and argued that Trinidadians produced cultural symbols which represented- West Indianness. She felt a social position of uniqueness was created via boundary-defining rituals (Ho, 2005).

Less than half of the respondents from Los Angeles, Miami and Washington have either financially assisted or participated in Carnival celebrations or traveled to another state to witness the spectacle. Public cultural activities among migrant communities are important in their collective self-representation. Percy Hintzern in “Globalisation and Diasporic Identity among West Indians” argued that West Indians in the San Francisco Bay Area in northern California belonged to a high socioeconomic category. He believed West Indians in that area conformed to the racist notions of being “exotic, hypersexual, fun-loving and given to bacchanalian excesses” (Hintzern, 2005:6). Such stereotypes create distorted perceptions among residents of North America and England. As a result, the West Indians suffer from being “cliché citizens” and “Carnival citizens” simply because of their origin. This could explain the low involvement of the Indo-Trinidadians in Carnival which has been viewed as belonging to the Afro-Trinidadian element of the population. It would also explain the tendency, among some East Indians, to avoid mixing with Afro-Trinidadians in West Indian organizations or events in North America.

The well-known Notting Hill Carnival celebrations in Britain began in 1958 when Claudia Jones, an Afro-Trinidadian activist and writer, organized a Trini-style Mardi Gras at St. Pancras Town Hall (Alleyne-Dettmers, 2005). Six of the ten Indo-Trinidadians interviewed tended to avoid participation and attendance but were proud and contented to see their country being represented at international events and allowed a cultural space. Their reasons for non-involvement include being busy at work

and the inconvenient distance between their homes and the venue. The observance of annual Carnivals provides a low degree of intra-diasporic contact between Indo-Trinidadians and the Afro-Caribbean. Thus it is a myth that Carnival amongst the diaspora has bridged a critical cross-cultural divide which existed in the Caribbean and among other immigrants in the host society.

Likewise, the well-known annual Caribana festival in Toronto, which is a version of Trinidad’s annual Carnival, attracts not only Caribbean-born persons but other ethnic groups who enjoy the jovial atmosphere with its music, food and costumed characters. Cecil Foster, a Barbadian novelist residing in Toronto, in *A Place Called Heaven: The Meaning of Being Black in Canada* described Caribana in one of the chapters as the “best spiritual tonic for the social and spiritual alienation so many of us feel in Canada, including so many of us born and raised in this country” (Foster, 1996: 248).

In Toronto, there are frequent events such as calypso shows and dances which reduce the feelings of alienation or marginalization among the Caribbean immigrants. For instance *Calypso Hut 3* on Sheppard Avenue West, in 1998 held a Tassa Dance Party and pre-Carnival shows have been held by Burrokeete Canada. Certain concerts such as the World Music Fest had performers from the Caribbean such as Sparrow, Swallow and Rose (Watson, 2001). Both Sherry Jaggernaut and Hema Motilal attended these events and claimed there was a sizeable East Indian audience.

Carnival celebrations including the calypso shows, have been used by migrants to forge a new cultural space and develop a sense of belonging. The significant presence of non-Caribbean persons as spectators or participants indicates an appreciation and acceptance of this aspect of West Indian culture. These cultural forms by migrants are projected unto host societies who will assess the suitability of this 'foreign' culture and determine its survival.

Social Mobility, Identity and Assimilation

'Who and what are all these people, Galahad?' I ask 'Have they just disembarked from a vessel to try their luck in Brit'n?' 'They're going back home,' he say briefly.... 'Immigrants don't only come old man. They go. But you don't hear about the departures. 'They go back voluntarily?' I ask, amazed (Selvon, 1983: 19).

In the opening of *Moses Migrating*, one of the characters, a Trinidadian residing in London, decides to return to the West Indies. He decides to write a letter to Enoch Powell, a racist British politician. The letter stated, "...I have been living here for more than twenty years and I have more black enemies than white and I have always tried to integrate successfully in spite of discriminations and prejudices according to race" (Selvon, 1983:1). These fictional illustrations captured the return of immigrants to their homeland. It reflects inadequate socialization,

failed social mobility or disillusionment which has led to a desire to return home.

The historiography on Asians Indians and the Caribbean diaspora in Canada is extensive (Kanungo, 1984; O'Connell and Ray, 1984; Adhopia, 1993; Singh, 1994; Israel, 1994; Premdass, 1993; Ballard, 1994; Gosine, 1994). These studies recount the experiences of various immigrant groups from the Asian continent and more importantly provide striking similarities to the adjustment of the Indo-Caribbean population in Toronto. It proves that the challenges faced by any Indo-Trinidadian migrants are not unique but shared by other ethnicities as the Sindhis, Gujaratis, Fijians, Surinamese, Sri Lankans, Paskistanis, Sikhs, Malayalis, Tamils and Hyderbadis.

In assessing the Indo-Trinidadians in London, there is need to consider the close bond between the colonial metropole and colonized periphery. In the post-1962 era, the Indo-Caribbean families in Britain did not challenge the political status quo in which they were marginal. Most of these inhabitants of the former British Empire arrived with a desire to obtain an education and a stable job. Even though they were no longer considered British citizens, they still felt a sense of loyalty to Britain. However, this sentiment waned by the early 1980s.

The Indo-Trinidadian experiences the

‘snowflake phenomenon’ in which they appear similar to other groups but only on closer examination can their differences be detected. The dilemma of the Indo-Trinidadians is that they belong to both the sub-groups of Indo-Caribbean and West Indian, whilst also sharing physical features and ancestral ties with the larger family of Asian Indians. Their physical similarity to the Indo-Guyanese immigrants contributed to a stigma of racialization which led to disappointment but not hatred. As a result some East Indians have sought to formulate an identity among a racially and ethnically diverse population in Canada, United States and Britain. The accent of Indo-Trinidadians is probably the most prominent trait which makes this group unique in public. Thus many East Indians retain this linguistic characteristic rather than modify or adopt a new accent. Interestingly, the Indo-Caribbean in North America felt that the migrants from India were inferior due to their accents and lack of literacy/fluency in English.

In Toronto and London, eighty percent of Indo-Trinidadians acknowledged the daily occurrence of being mistaken for immigrants from Sri Lanka, Pakistan or India. Among the Indo-Caribbean diaspora in London, they have also been identified as “Asians” by Whites and other groups (Vertovec, 1994). There is a stronger disapproval from the Indo-Trinidadians as being classified as “Asians” as they believe this term denotes immigrants from the Asian continent as

Pakistanis, Punjabis, Bengalis, Bangladeshis, Chinese and Japanese. The discontent over this label is stronger in Britain and Los Angeles than in Washington, Miami and Toronto.

In London, the Indo-Caribbean migrants are regarded by Asian Indians as a low-status group and faced exclusion from the cultural and social activities (Vertovec, 1994). An opposing view is offered by Arnold Itwaru, of the University of Toronto, who identified the survival abilities of the Indo-Caribbeans:

We are a people of change. We have discarded the caste system and have developed relations based on mutual respect. In our midst no one is an Untouchable. There is no bitterness between Muslims and Hindus among Indian Caribbean peoples. There is no bride burning, no destructive dowry burden, no routine aborting of the female fetus in our communities. These and much more, distinguish us as Indians of the Caribbean, a remarkable and unique people...we have transcended the desecration of hoe, the agony, the pain, the labouring yoke of indentured servitude (Itwaru, 2000: 10).

Itwaru is not merely attempting to prove that the Indo-Caribbean is unique but stakes a claim that this group cannot be easily mistaken for the diaspora from India.

As a result of physical features similar to immigrants from the Indian sub-continent, the Indo-Trinidadian suffers from a ‘chameleon syndrome’ in which they have little or no control in blending with other Indo-Caribbean minorities or the Asian Indians. The same would be true for other ethnic minorities as Afro-Trinidadians who

would not be easily differentiated from African migrants and Afro-Americans.

In Miami and Los Angeles, the Trinidadian women, whenever dressed in ethnic wear, are mistaken for Asian Indians. Sixty percent of the Indo-Trinidadians in the Toronto sample have been referred to by derogatory terms such as “Paki.” This is mainly due to the high concentration of Sikhs and Pakistanis residing in the outskirts of Toronto-Brampton, Malton and Mississauga.

A crucial juncture in forging a unique Indo-Trinidadian identity was the winning of the Nobel Prize in Literature by V.S. Naipaul in 2001. Also, the political exploits (positive and negative) of Indo-Trinidadian politicians have been instrumental in reinforcing and defining the character of the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora. The latter is particularly true as political speeches are broadcast live via the internet and the formation of functioning party groups in North America and London.

Fifty percent of the sample of East Indians in Washington, Los Angeles and Miami were employed in respectable professions such as nurses, high school teachers, university lecturers and business owners (food and entertainment). Their income coupled with lifestyle including holidays abroad and ownership of at least one car, indicated that they were in the middle and upper middle class categories. These findings contradict Vishnu Bisram in “The Experiences of Indo-Trinidadian Immigrants in the United States”

who argued that Indo-Trinidadian immigrants in the United States accepted low-paying and menial jobs as cashiers and bank tellers. He also contended that these immigrants complained of pay and job discrimination (Bisram, 2005).

There is considerable evidence of successful assimilation in the new societies. As a result of previous experience of racism in the Caribbean, some immigrants decided to become involved in anti-racism efforts in Canada. For instance, Fulton Seunarine, born in Trinidad in 1927, migrated to Canada in the mid-1960s and was employed as a teacher in 1966. He served as a member of the first anti-racism committee in Hamilton. Another Trinidadian, Henry Ramjass, migrated to Canada in 1968 and assisted in formulating Durham’s first ethnocultural equity policy. Additionally, he also supported the claims of Trinidad refugees in Canada in 1968.

The invisible presence of the Indo-Trinidadian in North America and Britain stems from their small numbers and geographical dispersion. The Caribbean population in Toronto in 1982 was estimated at 100,000 and they were geographically dispersed (Ramcharan, 1982). In 2005, the Caribbean population in the city have remained scattered and their population size was estimated at 500,000. The relatively rapid growth is akin to that of the West Indian population in Britain which expanded from 30,000 to 500,000 between 1951 and 1991 (Peach, 1998).

The East Indians in North America and London

remain as isolated groups dispersed throughout the city. As a result there was no emergence of a “Little Jamaica” or “Little Trinidad” as had occurred with “Chinatown” and “Little Italy.” The underlying reason for this settlement pattern was that the Caribbean immigrants chose to settle in areas in close proximity to their employment or with affordable housing and not necessarily where other West Indians resided.

Fortunately, the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora in Los Angeles and Washington did not bear the brunt of residential segregation and difficulties in homeownership endured by other immigrants in the United States (McArdle, 1997; Myers and Lee, 1998). Additionally, studies such as “Residential Differentiation among an Overlooked Black Minority: New Immigrant West Indians in New York” and “Residential Segregation of West Indians in New York/New Jersey Metropolitan Area: The Roles of Race and Ethnicity” highlight blatant discriminatory housing practices among ethnic minorities (Conway and Bigby, 1987; Crowder, 1999). Usually, recent Indo-Trinidadian emigrants to the United States would reside in one dwelling place and share expenses (Bisram, 2005). Their thrifty nature and refusal to buy unnecessary luxury items as designer clothes contributed to savings which allowed relatively quick homeownership. Within five to eight years of emigrating, eighty percent of the Indo-Trinidadians in Miami and Toronto have been able to purchase a home or a townhouse/duplex. This was due to the fact that they migrated with their savings from Trinidad and other factors such as the cost of living, and employment status of spouse or children. The relatively

high cost of living in Los Angeles, Washington and London was a deterrent for homeownership and East Indians who were comfortable with either renting apartments, duplexes or townhouses.

Dwaine Plaza conducted a study involving a sample of twenty men who migrated to Canada from pre-1975 to 1998 and settled in Toronto. He realized that the desired mobility of most of these men had not materialized because of a combination of discrimination, differential incorporation, racism and a lack of networks. Furthermore, Plaza claimed that the men experienced a loss of status which he referred to as “status strain” and believed this “...caused many to build and maintain transnational social and family networks that connected them to the Caribbean” (Plaza, 1998: 262). This certainly seems as a flawed hypothesis because this “status strain” would be experienced by virtually all immigrants, regardless of racial and geographical origins. Immigrants are aware and know it is inevitable that migration to a new country would lead to a lifestyle which is considerably different from the one accustomed to in their homeland. Many West Indian families can attest to the fact that the standard of living and quality of social services easily persuaded them to adopt Canada as home (Teelucksingh, 1999). Undoubtedly, a future in Canada was an indicator of progress, a sign of a more prosperous and stable life for their family.

In Toronto, the primary and secondary Presbyterian education of most of the adult Indo-Caribbean diaspora proved to be a major asset in their acculturation and assimilation in

Canada which increased their chances of social mobility (Teelucksingh, 2007). For instance, Tom Ramautarsingh, a Trinidadian, was educated at the Naparima Teachers' College in South Trinidad. He migrated to Canada and became employed as a teacher in the secondary school system and taught at various schools in Ontario including the Georgetown High School. It certainly seemed that the exposure to this Canadian-based education from the missionary schools in the West Indian prevented a culture shock among many of the Indo-Caribbean migrants. Graduates of secondary schools, from Trinidad, experienced a faster rate of socialization and assimilation into the host society and were more appreciative of the value of quality education for their children and grandchildren.

The Indo-Caribbean population is not a homogeneous group. In addition to the large numbers of Indo-Guyanese and Indo-Trinidadians, which some members of the British public are aware of, there are smaller and scattered groups of East Indian immigrants from Grenada, St. Lucia, Jamaica and Barbados.

The British Indo-Trinidadian is one of the few groups that do not have their newspaper or magazines. Among the larger Asian population there has been a variety of literature: Asian Times, Asian Business, Gujarat Samachar, Asian Trader and Asian Chronicle. African migrants have such publications as Nigerian Link, Nigerian UK, Afriki, Black Perspective and The Trumpet. Likewise,

the Afro-Caribbean community had the Caribbean Times. But there are neither television nor radio programmes catering to the entertainment and social needs of the Indo-Caribbean population in London.

Not surprisingly, there are more Afro-Caribbean groups than their Indo-Caribbean counterparts. For instance, in Scotland there is the Lothian Caribbean Association comprising mostly persons of African descent; likewise, in Wales there is an Afro-Caribbean Association. In Birmingham, there are two such organizations– the West Indian Federation Association and the Afro-Caribbean Teachers Network. In Leeds there is the United Caribbean Association. In London, two relatively small Indo-Caribbean groups exist–the Caribbean Hindu Society and the Indo-Caribbean Cultural Association. In 1995, the observance of the 150th anniversary of the arrival of Indians from India to work in the Caribbean were celebrated with speeches, cultural and social functions by the Indo-Caribbean groups in London.

In Toronto the Indo-Caribbean population sought to conform to the status quo whilst improving their middle-class lifestyles. By the late 1980s, there were appeals for the Indo-Caribbean migrants in Canada to be more assertive, “We can no longer afford to be reticent political nor can we espouse all that is western pretending to be anything other than what we really are, despising ‘coolie culture,’ becoming paranoiac as to our identity” (Persaud, 1988: 9). This was an indication of a need for a personal space for

the Indo-Caribbean population. The Council on Indian Arrival, based in Toronto, declared the month of May as “Indian Arrival Month.”

Other groups catering for this segment of the Caribbean population include the Canadian Indo-Caribbean Alliance (CICA), Coalition of Indo-Caribbean Canadians, (CICC) and Indo-Caribbean Community Development Association (ICDA). Also in existence is the Indo-Caribbean Students Association at the University of Toronto. Such groups are similar to the Federation of Gujarati Associations catering for groups with Gujarati immigrants from India.

During the 1980s, when the Indo-Caribbean population was small, there was some identification with their fellow Afro-Caribbean immigrants. However, with an increase of migration, a larger Indo-Caribbean population meant a greater tendency to identify with persons belonging to the same ethnic group. Furthermore, in Toronto the involvement of the Afro-Caribbean in violence and crime has contributed to the Indo-Trinidadian trying to avoid associating with the lower class Afro-Caribbean.

In the first half of the year 2001, there were incidents of race riots in Britain involving Asian and Whites. The affected areas included Burnley, Leeds, Oldham and the Lancashire town of Burnley. Carl Nobe is of the view that the disturbances were confined to a few areas and not deemed threatening to Britain’s society. The Indo-Caribbean community, to a large extent, share similar physical features as the young, rioting Asian Indians.

Thus the East Indians would have been concerned over the reinforced stereotypes and distorted public image now shouldered by all Asian Indians.

They have tended to ignore isolated acts of racism- subtle or blatant, in an effort to not jeopardize their residence in Canada and jobs. Secondly, the Indo-Caribbean has hesitated to take legal action to address these injustices because of the notion that the British and North American society is biased in favor of the Whites. The majority are courteous, co-operative and optimistic at work and in their neighborhoods. Their outstanding work ethic and contribution to a host of volunteer activities reinforces the argument that the Indo-Caribbean has successfully adapted. In London, East Indians have received local recognition in the various boroughs, some have also achieved the distinction of receiving annual awards, including knighthoods, bestowed upon by the Queen.

Despite being financially stable and successfully adapting to a new culture, twenty percent of the persons interviewed indicated their eagerness, after retirement, of returning to the Caribbean. Scholars focusing on return migration have uncovered a noteworthy percentage of West Indians who have returned to their homelands and made positive contributions (Chevannes and Ricketts 1997; Brown, 1997; Chamberlain, 1997; Henry and Plaza, 2006).

Religion

The Indo-Trinidadian’s celebration of Divali and Eid, observed by Hindus and Muslims, is low-keyed and does not involve the public display as the larger Asian

Indian communities such as in Southall in London. In North America and London, among East Indians worship at home remained a common practice. But on special occasions as pujas or funerals and the celebration of Eid or Divali there will be limited interaction at public places of worship. There are instances of East Indian families paying the airfare for a family pundit or imam from Trinidad to perform a cremation, puja or wedding in Miami and Toronto. This was due to the relatively cheap charter flights from Trinidad to these two areas. However, in Washington, Miami and London, the East Indians have indicated that worship is more based in their homes and usually on special occasions such as birthdays or anniversaries.

Individuals have also sought to replicate the culture of the Caribbean. An illustration is Dev Bansraj Ramkissoon, an Indo-Trinidadian, who founded the Saaz-O-Awaaz Academy of Indian Music which is based in Brampton. The transplanting of Indo-Caribbean culture to Canada is a common trait:

...some Indo-Caribbean Hindu communities in Toronto are reconstructing their traditional Indo-Caribbean religious and cultural identity by aligning strongly with their South Asian counterparts in order to create a new diasporic Indo-Canadian ethnic identity—a syncretism between the West (the Caribbean) and the East (India). Other groups are simply replicating their old Caribbean identity and cultural way of life right here in Canada (Singh, 1998:16).

Such perspectives reinforce the argument that dislocated East Indians have been able to remarkably

adjust to their new homeland. Indeed, cultural and religious preservation have been the hallmarks of some immigrants.

The observances of wake services, as in the Caribbean, with its card-playing and drinking of alcohol is not practiced in London. Among Indo-Trinidadian Hindus, another tradition of the Caribbean which has ceased is the cremation on the banks of rivers. This has been one of the noticeable differences between the Caribbean and English societies.

The Indo-Caribbean migrants in London, England have displayed a tendency in maintaining their culture and religion. They have formed such groups as the Caribbean Hindu Society and the Indo-Caribbean Cultural Association (Vertovec, 1994). Other Toronto-based Asian groups have also sought to form organizations to satisfy their desire for a sense of belonging. These include the Bharitiya Cultural Association of Ontario which promotes Hinduism, the Toronto branch of the Brahma Kumaris, and the Gujarat Samaj of Toronto. Also, the Tamils hold the Murugan Festival, a national celebration to pay homage to the patron god of the Tamils (Israel, 1994).

During the 1970s, the Hindus and Muslims from the Caribbean had little or no opportunity to celebrate their religious festivals and customs. The contacts among Caribbean migrants gradually increased as West Indian organizations played a pivotal role in the regular hosting of religious

events. There were religious structures such as the Gandhi Bhavan at Lansdowne Avenue, the Vishnu Mandir at Richmond Hill and the Madina Masjid at Danforth Avenue. However, some of these families felt uncomfortable with the dominance of other Asian Indians at these religious institutions (Teelucksingh, 2000). An illustration is the events surrounding the Vishnu Mandir located on Yonge Street which was founded by a Guyanese, Dr. Bhupendra Doobay in 1981. The congregation initially comprised Indo-Guyanese and Indo-Trinidadians and boasted of a weekly Sunday attendance of 600 to 700 persons. However, the temple attracted other Indians from India (Punjabis and Gujaratis) and Indo-Africa-born persons. Soon, an overwhelming segment of the Indo-Caribbean population ceased attending the services and the Indo-Guyanese built a separate temple on Jane Street (Israel, 1994).

There is a noteworthy presence of Indo-Caribbean persons belonging to the Devi Mandir on Brock Road in Pickering which was opened in 1998. The continuance of religious customs in Toronto is not merely gratitude to God, but more importantly it constitutes an appreciation of the importance of maintaining morals and ethics. Additionally, it also signified the preservation of an essential component of the Indo-Caribbean identity.

The Christian Indo-Trinidadians who were Presbyterians, Pentecostals, Roman Catholics and

Evangelists have found it easier than their non-Christian compatriots, to adapt to the new religious environment. This is due to the similar doctrines and denominations of churches in the Caribbean and Toronto. However, Afro-Trinidadian immigrants belonging to smaller sects such as the Spiritual Baptists and Orisas have not been able to establish religious institutions due to a lack of financial resources and scattered membership.

Conclusion

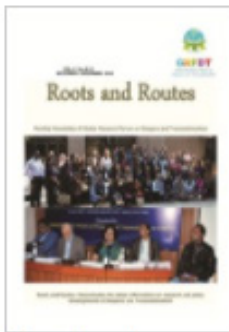
Indeed, the Indo-Trinidadians in North America and Britain lacked political power, experienced subordination and sometimes were treated in a condescending manner by Whites. However, these immigrants enjoyed considerable social and occupational mobility, felt safer and were part of the movement to promote multiculturalism. In post-modernity there is still considerable disjuncture between expectations of the host society and the identity construction and cultural demands of the Indo-Trinidadians. Thus, in their new homelands, benefits seemingly outweighed the disadvantages. The experiences of the Indo-Trinidadian diaspora varied and depended upon such factors as the time of arrival, age, educational level and type of neighborhood.

Endnotes

GRFDT NEWSLETTER

***Roots and Routes* disseminates the latest information on research and policy developments in Diaspora and trans**

Newsletters



September-
December
2016



July-August



May-June 2016



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Roots and Routes is a monthly newsletter of the Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism (GRFDT). It is inclusive of articles, book reviews and news analysis, which help in disseminating latest information on research and policy development in Diaspora and Transnationalism. The newsletter enjoys readership of academicians, policy experts, diaspora think tanks etc.

The regular columns of the newsletter are :

- 1. Article** : consisting of well researched articles of about 3000-4000 words on any aspect of diaspora, migration and transnationalism.
- 2. Short commentaries** : consisting of short write ups of about 1500-2000 words based on opinion, description or explanation of any event or situation related to the above mentioned themes.
- 3. News analysis** : consisting of analyzing current news in about 1000-1500 words
- 4. Book reviews** : 1000-1500 words.

We are pleased to invite your contributions to the above mentioned sections. Please send your contributions to the editors of the newsletter at editor@grfdt.com

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GRFDT

Global Research Forum on
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Global Research Forum on Diaspora and Transnationalism (GRFDT) is a consortium of researchers and policy makers drawn from national and international universities, institutes and organizations. GRFDT is presently based in India and is shaping as the largest such group focusing specifically on the issues related to diaspora and transnationalism.

The GRFDT works as an academic and policy think tank by engaging national and international experts from academics, practitioners and policy makers in a broad range of areas such as migration policies, transnational linkages of development, human rights, culture, gender to mention a few. In the changing global environment of academic research and policy making, the role of GRFDT will be of immense help to the various stakeholders. Many developing countries cannot afford to miss the opportunity to harness the knowledge revolution of the present era. The engagement of diaspora with various platform need to be reassessed in the present context to engage them in the best possible manner for the development human societies by providing policy in-put at the national and global context.