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A

# PURITY, PIETY, AND POWER: CULTURE AND IDENTITY AMONG HINDUS AND MUSLIMS IN TRINIDAD

by

AISHA KHAN

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Anthropology in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

1995

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Shirley Lindenbaum — Chair of Examining Committee

4/24/95 — Date

Shirley Lindenbaum — Executive Officer

Professor Vincent Crapanzano

Professor Leith Mullings

Professor Daniel Segal

Supervisory Committee

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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Abstract

PURITY, PIETY, AND POWER:

CULTURE AND IDENTITY AMONG HINDUS AND MUSLIMS

IN TRINIDAD

by

Aisha Khan

Advisor: Professor Shirley Lindenbaum

This dissertation presents an ethnographic and historical study of the social construction of identity among Hindu and Muslim East Indians in two rural proletarian communities in southern Trinidad. Its objectives are: (1) to demonstrate the mutually constitutive relationships among ethnic, racial, and religious identities in a multicultural, postcolonial context; (2) to explore the nature of interpretive categories and problematize anthropology's use of them; (3) to interrogate the scholarly depiction of overseas South Asians and the study of diasporic processes.

Based on 20 months of fieldwork (1987-1989), the study analyzes the construction of ethnicity and race through the prism of religious idioms. These idioms contain protean and multilayered leitmotifs which are ideological in their authority, reflecting the broader conditions of social inequality experienced by both Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians. Religious idioms thus convey critical

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messages about history, culture, tradition, justice, and morality, which serve as diagnostic emblems of identity among Hindus and Muslims.

The analysis is based on data gathered from oral historiographies and everyday discourse among Indo-Trinidadians, particularly regarding perceptions of diaspora, changes in cultural and religious traditions, and relations with Afro-Trinidadians. Data was also primarily gathered from devotional rituals known as "functions." As pedagogical arenas, functions constitute efforts among Hindus and Muslims to establish cultural authenticity, religious piety, and national legitimacy as they contend with social inequality. The dissertation argues that in determining authenticity, piety, and legitimacy, both oral historiography and functions work in complex ways to maintain conceptual distinctions between the sacred and the profane. These distinctions shape the ways in which boundaries between "religion" and "culture" are made significant, and thus how ethnic identity is forged.

The study further suggests that a trope of purity is salient in Trinidadian identity discourses, which decisively informs sacrality and structures religious idioms among Indo-Trinidadians. An examination of this trope is called for, as it orchestrates the construction of group boundaries, the power of race as an interpretive category, and the negotiation of ethnic and class conflict.

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To awaken to history was to cease to live instinctively. It was to begin to see oneself and one's group the way the outside world saw one; and it was to know a kind of rage (V.S. Naipaul 1990:69).

When there is no other proof, history becomes law (informant interview, Trinidad, 1988)

In the rough-and-tumble of social interaction, groups are known to exploit the ambiguities of inherited forms, to impart new evaluations or valences to them, to borrow forms more expressive of their interests, or to create wholly new forms to answer to changed circumstances. Furthermore, if we think of such interaction not as causative in its own terms but as responsive to larger economic and political forces, the explanation of cultural forms must take account of that larger context, that wider field of force. A 'culture' is thus better seen as a series of processes that construct, reconstruct, and dismantle cultural materials, in response to identifiable determinants (E.R. Wolf 1982:387).

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I have benefitted greatly from the consistent

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There are scholars whose work inspired me as I began to

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explore South Asian diasporas, and who have been supportive of my efforts since. I will always be grateful to Morton Klass, John Kelly, Rhoda Reddock, and Brackette Williams for their encouragement.

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## Preface: A Prodigal Daughter?

> Theory itself is a response to the [ethnographic] encounter and to the burden that encounter imposes on the psyche of the investigator. Theory serves also to formulate the encounter and its burdens or, perhaps more accurately, to valorize the idiom through which the encounter and its burdens are formulated (Crapanzano 1980:xii).
>
> But who you is, <u>really</u>? (various Indo-Trinidadian acquaintances, 1987-89).

It is the premise of this work that social identities are fragmented, plastic, and that people construe the identities of themselves and others to a significant extent as they wish--although the levels of consciousness of these efforts, and their reasons, decidedly vary. Every person, however, must negotiate and validate each diffraction of their public selves against others' varying perceptions of them. In communities, such as the ones in this study, where daily interaction by and large involves the same sets of people, how any individual presents her- or himself ideally should not contradict the varying perceptions others hold. Hence, "fitting in" is not a static or unilateral process, not simply a matter of obtaining others' approval, conciliation, or silence. Each act of one's conformity (or disagreement or equivocation) is simultaneously a statement of negation to someone else, in another context, at another moment. While I learned to negotiate social situations in the field as they arose, I also began to grasp the nature of the presentation of self and its social meanings in a

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society where authenticity, "hypocracy," sincerity, and "intention" are principles through which ethnic and religious identities are managed and the politics of culture played out.

"Self" and "other" are not uniform or one-dimensional constructs. I had multiple selves when I worked with different groups, which I then had to reconcile to myself and to them. People constructed themselves against who they thought I was, and these thoughts changed over time as people came to know me better. Also, different cohorts of people always talked with each other about me. That is, whereas I might have the luxury of a private identity, my personal identity was a matter of public record, speculation, and invention. That various people talked to each other about me also suggested to me two important processes: the formation of networks among particular aggregates of people (i.e., who spoke with, or socialized with, or was kin with whom) and how nuanced identities function in social relations. In other words, I learned early on that I could not neatly compartmentalize ethnic identity for each different situation--e.g., being an "Indian" in Hindu contexts, a "Muslim" in Muslim contexts, sometimes a "big woman" (i.e., an adult, with all the social and sexual knowledge adulthood confers and implies), and a familiar, ideal(ized) daughter at other times.

Without wanting to appear as having a solipsistic view

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of the world (cf. Mintz 1989:794; Abu-Lughod 1986), it was clear that my presence had a critical impact on the patterns of informants' daily lives and on the way I came to understand the situation. The process whereby researcher and informant mutually define or create each other, in turn influences the way the anthropologist interprets things--at the moment and retrospectively (cf. Crapanzano 1980; Rabinow 1977). This is always an issue in fieldwork but is particularly problematic in projects that require affiliation (albeit temporary) and allegiance (if tepid or attenuated) to two or more distinct groups of people. This brought into focus for me the specification and ranking of categories of identity (ethnicity, class, religion, gender) and the preeminence of phenotype as a salient marker of identity. Phenotype consists of visible characteristics, constituted by how others construe and interpret those visible qualities.

Abu-Lughod makes a similar point in observing that the issues she wrote about were "shaped by how others in the community perceived me and what I felt comfortable with in my relations with them"(1986:10). She goes on to say that her informants assumed she shared with them at least a basic Muslim identity (1986:13). However, in the Trinidadian context, "background," I was to quickly learn, is itself a negotiated identity. An oil company official, for example, told me he was not able to determine the ethnicity of his

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employees because of Trinidad's history of "racial mixing," which renders surnames misleading. At the same time he agreed that genealogical backgrounds are an important preoccupation in assessing social identity.

Sometimes cultural roles metaphorically associated with me revealed people's creation of my identity. For example, a middle aged Indo-Trinidadian man, Mr. Ramdath (pseudonym), offhandedly remarked, only partly in jest, that I could be the lokani for his daughter's wedding. Although the role of lokani no longer exists, traditionally this was a single older woman, who accompanied the doolahin (bride) to her new, patrilocal home. As companion and protector for the couple's standard three day "adjustment" period, the lokani had the obligation of attending to the doolahin as well as mediating between her and her in-laws. I was told by some informants that, "long time," one of the lokani's responsibilities was to see that the doolahin and doolaha (groom) did not have conjugal relations during this trial period.

That Mr. Ramdath conceived of me as an appropriate lokani told me that he perceived me as an ethnically recognizable Indian woman, and an aging one at that. He also provided a linguistic term and concept; one living in the domain of the imagination rather than serving an existing social function, yet remaining a resonant ethno-cultural symbol of identity.

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In their reflexive excursions into the experience of fieldwork, Briggs (1970) and Abu-Lughod (1986) have commented on the evolution of their respective roles during the period of study. Often the premise is that 1) there is a linear trajectory, from unknown and obtrusive to known and belonging, and 2) this gradual transformation results in a social role for the ethnographer. But this seems to be as much a reflection of the way one's research population sees one vis-a-vis themselves as it is of general processes of increasing rapport.

For example, my first stint of fieldwork was among the Garifuna (Black Carib) in Honduras in 1980 (Khan 1982, 1987). There, I was an unequivocal "other" to Garifuna identity, and I eventually assumed the status of a jovencita (young girl) among my grandmother-generation informants. But in Trinidad my identity was multi-valenced and ambiguous because I was an equivocal other in relation to my Indo-Trinidadian informants. In the field situation, different people have conflicting feelings about the ethnographer. That is, "daughter" or "female" or "youth" can have a variety of meanings depending on who is doing the interpreting and the stage of your presence in their world. A role is not necessarily a consensually and strictly-defined niche into which we do or do not fit; it is a negotiated category (cf. Crapanzano 1980; Rabinow 1977).

In his discussion of his field experience, Angrosino

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(1986) remarks that he needed to find a middle ground between the West Indian role extremes of "reputation" and "respectability":

> the challenge, then, is to land somewhere in the middle without being so ambiguous in the social clues given out that one does not fit into any meaningful social categories...I made use of [a] dual role of son and lover, a persona that was comfortable (eventually) to me and non-threatening to my hosts (1986:65-66).

But Angrosino is assuming here that "somewhere in the middle" is a singular perspective, is the same for all informants. He is allowing himself a "dual persona" without the possibility that his hosts also had more than one category within which to fit his persona.

In other words, I think that among my Indo-Trinidadian informants, the process of placing me reflected their own multiple identities and the fluidity and the unreliability of ethnic categories or cultural attributes. In short, I was phenotypically and socially recognizable but at the same time an enigma. On the one hand, I was physically indistinguishable from other Indo-Trinidadian women (if one discounts body language and carriage); I have a locally familiar name, one that is culturally encompassing (Indian) but exclusively religious (Muslim); I had had educational, travel, and career opportunities largely only available to the middle and upper classes in Trinidad but valued by everyone; I was allegedly an "expert" Muslim Bangladeshi (wrong on all counts); I was blood-sympathetic to the condition of my brethren (some went so far as to claim, only

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partly in jest, that I was genetically predisposed to empathy). In sum, I was a foreign-educated prodigal daughter. Yet on the other hand, I was spending a very long time in Trinidad in what appeared idle self-edification; my religious piety was debatable if not dubious (cf. Abu-Lughod 1986); I am a douqla, or "mixed"; at best I needed re-education, and at worst had "lost" my Indian cultural and religious roots; I was alone without the comfort, support, and surveillance of kin and therefore potentially disruptive socially through possible moral transgression.

I had to work very hard at proving myself through suitable conduct to allay the suspicions of others. I did this primarily by making my very proper behavior visible, and whereabouts known, at all times. The broader cultural value on moral propriety was brought home to me most forcefully at those times I was privy to others' assessments of me. This was particularly evident when women (friends and neighbors) introduced me to other women. A common, and often initial comment was on my "good behavior," the (moral/sexual) implications of which were to clear to us all. That is to say, I am chaste and have remained indifferent to the myriad opportunities to change that condition.

I realized this was an important signal to the others, as well as a compliment and sign of approbation. A more difficult situation to navigate was when a work group of

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women enjoyed bawdy repartee, laughing heartily at the sexually charged innuendos, puns, and ribald stories. It was a sign of acceptance that I was included, yet I was often unsure as to how to respond, given that my joining in the laughter (not to speak of possibly offering my own jokes) would reveal a body of knowledge that I should not, properly speaking, have as a single, respectable woman evincing "good behavior."

The ambivalence people usually feel toward the ethnographer (I would say it is seldom uniformly positive or negative) was made poignantly clear to me in remarks about my marital status that often took place in conversations when I was in a group of women whom I knew well and who also knew each other well. Trinidadian humor is sardonic and ironic, often expressed through teasing, and sometimes ridicule. In a teasing mode women occasionally said that I had really better learn to cook and do other domestic work (it being assumed that because I was not married I lacked these skills), else my (future) "husband would beat" me. This remark revealed a broader attitude about gender roles: on the one hand, these women were expressing solidarity with each other through mutual affirmation of a common experience; on the other hand, they were not overtly criticizing this prevalent aspect of domestic relations, since they seemed to imply a sense of the inevitable, and perhaps even the deservedness of a wife who would not comply

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with normative expectations.

On one of the first of these occasions I responded in kind, concerning a husband's potential beatings. That is, humorously but adamantly I rebutted with the standard, any-occasion Trinidadian rejoinder, "not me!" The self-conscious and uncomfortable silence that ensued made me feel awkward and caused me to reflect on their reaction. The ability to directly challenge normative gender roles is a luxury that in Trinidad is often a class-derived prerogative. My assertion--suggesting the possibility of resisting other domestic demands--implied an arrogance, an independence (especially economic) from male privilege that generally can only be realized by middle or upper class women. Moreover, my response also emphasized the women's own subordination and lack of "modernity" or "progress" (or "liberation"). Thus, my two word rejoinder, "not me!," was loaded with a larger significance for the listeners that only became apparent to me with some reflection: a status distinction between myself and them, and their ambivalent feelings toward me as both an individual and as a symbol of privilege.

Abu-Lughgod (1986) addresses the sensitive and often difficult fieldwork issue of persona; that is, what a fieldworker chooses to present about herself, how, and why. Abu-Lughod occasionally resorted to "doctoring [her] descriptions and changing the subject" (1986:18) when

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queried by informants, since informants are not necessarily cultural relativists any more than we are. This caused in her a "sense of inauthenticity," which was to subside as she and her informants built relationships out of interactions (1986:18-19). Abu-Lughod's "Arab identity," in the eyes of her Bedouin community, despite her occasional dissembling, created a situation where she eventually "became the person that [she] was with them" (1986:19). Because I, in contrast, was an ambiguous other, without a single identity (e.g., "Arab"), I felt a dilemma of persona that did not subside. I was always to feel inauthentic and remained troubled by the ethical issues these feelings of fraudulence raised in my mind. Indeed, I spent a fair amount of energy to not become the person that I was with them, since it seemed to me unachieveable. My rationale was that this helped me to be honest about who I was not: the protean and multiple (not singular) constructions of my persona/identity continuously crafted by my informants kept me constantly concerned about managing their impressions of me. This is, of course, ultimately impossible because people can, and will, make and act on their own assumptions.

My dilemma about my persona also affected my field methodology as well as my existential angst. I felt that in order to sustain some barriers people must always be reminded that I was among them "on a mission," or "on a research," as some informants put it, and not among them as

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a crucible for their own imaginations and wishes. Unlike Abu-Lughod, who minimized perceptions of her scientific agenda by rarely gathering data during social moments, I did just the opposite. I usually noted down (if not tape-recorded) what was transpiring around me. I did this partly, of course, to record "everyday life" kinds of data, but another important motivation was to keep clear and intact that boundary which defined me as an outsider as opposed to a prodigal "one ah we."

Nevertheless, being "one ah we" was, in my informants eyes, diffracted into many visions. One of my neighbors, an elderly Hindu widow, (mis)took me for "a Spanish" (cf. Khan 1993) before she found out where I was born. Upon hearing it was Bangladesh, she expressed surprise and said, "oh!, then you're a Indian!" She said that she had assumed I was "a Spanish" because of the way I talk and my atypical (for an Indo-Trinidadian woman of those parts) hair style and clothing. After realizing my (alleged) ethnic identity, she apologized for not having invited me to her celebration of Ram's birthday (Ramnowme)--a Hindu observance. When Hindu and Presbyterian informants heard about my birthplace they generally said immediately, "oh, India," or "oh, you're Indian." When one pandit first heard my birthplace, my name, or about my parentage (I am not certain which), he insisted in reassuring tones that "Hindu and Muslim get along fine here" (a subject I had not raised), hastening to

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add that he would be "glad to help [me] out with information," as he gives "information to Chinee, half Indian, Indian, whatever." It was fascinating to see how partial information about my background and assumptions about my appearance triggered an unsolicited and rhetorical affirmation of ethno-religious harmony among Indo-Trinidadians; I was an unwitting catalyst in the discourse of cultural public relations--a discourse so prevalent that it was to become a central focus of my attention.

Some Hindus and Presbyterians jokingly and affectionately called me a "chichigaya Muslim," that is, not whole-hearted, or half-baked--a perhaps gentler version of "Muslim in name only." My presumed questionable desire or ability to measure up culturally and religiously drew from people their own notions and assumptions about ethnic, religious, and cultural standards. I was the gauge against which fantasy and imagination and knowledge about ethnicity were defined and measured.

This also was often the case with respect to phenotype. At one child's birthday party in my neighborhood we played local party games. In one game we all stood in a circle and held hands, singing a song while each person took a turn in the center of the ring, dancing and clowning around. The song is what is interesting here, as it begins with, "there's a [phenotypical description] girl/boy and s/he's doing [action]" The missing adjectives described each

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player by skin color. When I was called into the circle, the singers, without pause, sang, "there's a white girl..." All of us present were of Indian ancestry, and my complexion is no lighter than that of many Indo-Trinidadians/Indians. Clearly, my "white" label referred to an otherness that was not immediately identifiable, the foreignness that prompted my widowed neighbor to "take [me] for a Spanish" and that allowed my landlord to continue to "see" me as "a white," even after we had met, because his first impression of me was over the telephone, which emphasized my American accent and manner of speaking.

Negotiating the point or moments at which the self/other evolves into a hybrid "we" is a key dimension of finding one's place in the field and a continual personal and ethical challenge. Dilemmas of persona are always an issue for ethnographers, but they gain greater salience, as Abu-Lughod suggests, when there is not a clear-cut distinction between Us and Them. The dilemma of persona is located in the ambiguity of No-Man's Land, and is, consequently, never completely resolved.

Yet self/other, us/them, as relations of power, become meaningful on two different levels. First is the macro-level of the historical relationship between the metropolitan society from where the ethnographer probably hails and the post-colonial or "satellite" society in which the field site is predictably located. These localities

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have a political history of ties that bind and an intellectual history of imagined depictions that also bind. Ethnographer and informants necessarily carry the burdens of this macro-level linkage. Second, there is the embedded, micro-level of interpersonal relations between a specific ethnographer and specific sets of informants (cf. Mintz 1989:793,795). The importance of phenotype, background, appearance, history, ethnic roots, cultural authenticity, and social legitimacy became apparent to me in people's reactions to and creations of me, as enigmatic prodigal daughter. Ethnographic focus on the problem of self/other usually construe this distinction in terms of monolithic us/them categories, motivated through a concern with unequal power relations, subjectivity, and authority.

Ironically, as the boundary between Us and Them fades, the distinction between "experiencing" and "appropriating" while conducting fieldwork (Narayan 1989:61) becomes more pronounced, and hence more problematic. Put succinctly, the informants' question for the ethnographer is: are you here with us for love or for gain? This is ethically important since the question underlies the "rapport" we seek with such dogged determination, and hence the amount and kinds of information we extract. While we try to proceed "from stranger to friend" (Powdermaker 1966) in a larger agenda of data gathering, we constantly force informants "to reflect on [their] own activities and objectify them" (Rabinow

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1977:38). This act of objectification is what meets with, at best, skepticism and, at worst, resistance on the part of informants beginning to question the relationship: affinity and all it can imply culturally versus utilitarian motives and what these may insinuate. The latter is particularly resonant among Indo-Trinidadians, where being "genuine" or being a "hypocrite" are concepts that figure importantly in social relations. Surrounding these issues is the question of what the ethnographer's relationship with informants really consists of and is certainly part of what is "burdensome" to the "psyche of the investigator" (Crapanzano 1980:xii).

Paradoxically, asking people to objectify their activities truncates experience rather than expands it, in that the effect is to bracket and almost reify particular cultural or social dimensions of life, thus unintentionally depicting an order and coherence in daily living that is not quite the reality. Nagata observes this paradox, evident in her discovery that,

> [d]irect questions as to ethnicity...can never elicit the complexity of the oscillation of an individual in social interaction, nor the spontaneity of his reactions in ethnic terms. Once asked to reflect consciously and rationally on ethnic affiliation, the dynamic aspect is lost. The fieldworker must therefore constantly be on the alert for verbal and other indications as to which reference group is being invoked in a given context and to work out the apparent inconsistencies independently (Nagata 1974:339).

Reflecting on and objectifying activities also requires a

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degree of self-revelation from informants that throws into relief the burden of their gift: reflections and objectifications are pieces of oneself (as informant), offered in compliance with the ethnographer's wishes, that take on an intimate quality by virtue of their being explained rather than merely recounted. In other words, it is not merely that rapport and niches are built as fieldwork progresses--but that introspection on the part of an informant, about any topic, is an act of self-revelation and an intimate offering that is dubiously paid back by another whose primary intent is to elicit information ("gain") and not to institute some kind of long-term commitment ("love").

In both the concern of past decades with establishing rapport and the current interest in power and representation, often the implicit assumption is that there is a monolithic self and a monolithic other, and the key focus is on the way the ethnographer (self) re-creates the informant (other). But what of the reverse: when the other defines the ethnographer and this guides the nature of the interaction and relationships according to the other's determinations, and hence empathies or antipathies? The us/them dichotomy is not necessarily a duality, and the "middle ground" (Angrosino 1986) or "persona" (Abu-Lughod 1986) need not be assumed as monolithic or eventually fixed.

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## Plan of the Study

I went to Trinidad to examine the reasons and ways in which overseas Indians see themselves as "Indian" in relation to their history in the New World and experiences with peoples of African descent. Throughout the course of my research, however, I discovered that the standard model of "ethnic politics" that characterized the literature on "plural societies" was not sufficiently nuanced to adequately probe the nature of relations both between Afro and Indo populations and among Indo-Trinidadians themselves. With an eye toward the ethnographic complexities of power, ideology, and everyday living--three dimensions that, to my mind, required particular attention--this study at once locates Indo-Trinidadians within their broader historical and social contexts and delves into the micro-contexts of quotidian social relations.

The study is divided into four parts. Part One, comprised of two chapters, sets the ethnographic scene and links to it the theoretical underpinning of my analysis. The first chapter introduces my objectives and provides a glimpse of life in the village communities of south Trinidad. The following chapter signals the key concepts that bind together the various ethnographic and theoretical discussions I undertake in exploring the issues of this study. Mined from both empirical conditions and theoretical contentions, these concepts together form the tropes,

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metaphors, representations, and encompassing discourses on which this research focuses.

Before considering the contemporary forms and patterns of religious and cultural identities among Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians, however, it is important to understand the notion and nature of "diaspora" in the perceptions and experiences of Indo-Caribbean populations. Part Two thus contains three chapters that deal with this question, in roughly chronological order. Chapter Three presents a brief background of Britain's indenture project in India and the complex conditions there that stimulated emigration. This discussion is followed in Chapter Four by examining some of the assumptions that influenced colonial and postcolonial depictions of New World Indians and Africans, and the consequent analyses of Indo and Afro tensions. Chapter Five rounds out this section with a discussion of the post-colonial Afro-Trinidadian dominated state and Indo-Trinidadians' responses to the cultural hegemony variously exercised by this governing apparatus. Existing between the power and inclinations of the state and the patterns of resistance to these among both Indo and Afro populations, "ethnic politics," or, better conceived, ideologies of "racialism" and the "politics of cultural struggle," constitute the final subject of this chapter.

The preceding chapters set the stage for Part Three, which contains three chapters, all of which are situated in

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greater Penal, the locality in which the data gathering predominantly occurred. Chapter Six provides a history of Penal and its adjacent communities, concentrating on patterns of stratification, social mobility, and the cultural and social responses to exigencies generated by neighbors, kin, and friends. The lack of historiographies of south Trinidad motivates this chapter to rely on oral narratives and historical memories of local residents, in order to redress the existing lacunae. The remainder of the chapter concentrates on describing the religious heterogeneity and overlapping of affiliations that constitute a familiar and commonplace aspect of daily social relations. The discussion conveys the multivocality of institutionalized religions as well as the vibrancy of what I call the "extra-natural world" with which people occasionally interact. In its foci, this chapter contextualizes the discussion in Chapters Seven and Eight, which consider the roles, forms, and contents of ritual "functions," among Hindus and Musims, respectively.

Chapter Seven inquires into functions as an idiom of identity construction, concentrating on the discourses among participants and pandits. Parallel to the analysis that follows in Chapter Eight on Muslims, the argument here is that functions are pedagogical arenas that, in providing particular contexts for piety, work to create and maintain homogeneity, coherence, demarcated group boundaries, and

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thus purity (sacrality), in a larger environment of symbolically impure (profane) forces.

In Part Four, the final chapter, Nine, brings the dimensions of purity, piety, and power together, reiterating the articulation of the processes and arguments inaugurated in Part One and portrayed in "thick description" in Parts Two and Three. I do not end on a note of finality, partly because nothing in life ever is. As importantly, however, rather than being a foreclosing claim, I see this study as a point of departure in the development of new directions in the study of New World diasporas.

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# Part One. Ideology and the Social Construction of Identities

## Chapter One. Leitmotifs of Religious Idioms

> Most interpretations of religion in the West Indies concentrate heavily on the origins of particular items of ritual or belief, a procedure which inevitably diverts attention from the creative use to which these items are put in the ongoing processes of social life (R.T. Smith 1976:337-38).

In the spirit of Raymond Smith's observation (above), this study is concerned with the "creative use" of "ritual or belief" in social relations among Hindu and Muslim descendants of Indian indentured laborers in two historically rural proletarian communities in southern Trinidad. I analyze the historical and social constructions of ethnicity and race through the prism of religious ideologies, particularly as they are expressed in the ubiquitous and quotidian devotional rituals known among both Hindus and Muslims as "functions." In a multivocal world of religious ideologies, I argue that functions are efforts to establish purity, authenticity, and legitimacy within the larger structure of social stratification in Trinidadian society. It is these processes, the dialectical relationship between heterogeneity and uniformity, that I am primarily concerned with in the pages that follow.

In inquiring into how religion is used to give power its form (cf. Wuthnow 1987), in this case to particular constructions of ethnic identity, I analyze a cultural paradox, arguing that Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians over time increasingly have distinguished between "cultural"

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and "religious" identities while, simultaneously, increasingly relying on religion as a key idiom of cultural politics in a post-colonial ethnically segmented labor market. In addressing these issues, this paradox also reflects the three principle aims of my study. One is to interrogate the scholarly depiction of overseas South Asians and the study of historical and contemporary diasporic processes. Another is to explore ethnographically the social construction of identities by unpacking certain reified categories and concepts and investigating their relationships. Finally, I do this in service of combining political economy and interpretive approaches in this study, in order to elucidate how people experience the structural constraints that shape their lives, and how they reflect on that experience and give it meaning. Hence, I focus here on the historiographies and everyday discourse of Indo-Trinidadians, particularly concerning their social (cultural, religious, racial, class, gender) identities. My intention is to disentangle the various notions that local practitioners and community residents understand as constituting "religion" and then examine what other factors fuel these ideas in particular directions and imbue them with particular significance. In so doing, I take as inspirational and axiomatic Talal Asad's deceptively simple question, "how does power create religion?" (1983:246).

I conceive of religious ideologies in terms of

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(religious) idioms, or specifically patterned forms of expression, and examine the relationship between religious idioms and processes of identity construction--heretofore a topic enjoying much less attention in New World societies than in other regions of the world. As one observer notes (for Trinidad's Muslim population), in an unintentionally ironic yet appropriate point of departure for exploring the issues raised in this study:

> In my discussion with people, I have been led to the conclusion that what appeals to them here is not a `religion' in the ordinary sense of the word, because there are hundreds of cults, religions and churches around and none of them has given the satisfaction that they need. What they need is an ideology that can help solve the social, economic and political problems that confront them (Kasule 1986:195).

Although I am in basic agreement with Kasule's observation that a self-contained, uni-dimensional notion of religion is not what is most meaningful among Indo-Trinidadians, I do not distinguish between "religion in the ordinary sense of the word" and a social-economic-political "ideology." Indeed, it is precisely because religion is ideological that it has power to orchestrate daily life.

While taking Smith's (1976) twenty year-old comment on the inordinate focus on origins and instances at the expense of quotidian creativity as a point of departure, I have, however, recast the familiar objective of research on Caribbean religions even among those analysts to whom Smith's critique does not apply (e.g., Austin-Broos 1987; Klass 1991; Singh 1988). Rather than looking at religion as

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an objective in itself, my emphasis is on what "creative use" might mean in everyday practices beyond what is strictly delimited as "ritual or [religious] belief." My premise is that the category religion has been employed (more often than not) in Caribbean and other anthropology as a reified analytical device that, to the contrary, is best unpacked into its locally contingent constituent "parts" (cf. Appadurai 1986) in order to be most useful ethnographically.

I see these constitutive elements as ideological. The diverse beliefs, practices, affinities, and assumptions that become defined and interpreted by practitioners as "religion" or "religious" necessarily act in concert with a broader arena of social processes which shape the principles of social distinction that structure people's lives. Not the least significant of these are other, historically, socially, and culturally salient forms of identity: race, class, ethnicity, gender, place. Hence, even what may be labeled in popular wisdom and scholarly inquiry as a single, implicitly one-dimensional designation--for example, "race" or "ethnicity"--actually constitutes multiple dimensions. These dimensions, or clusters of attributes (qualities, images, stereotypes) perform the work of interpretation and negotiation in particular social and historical contexts. They are, therefore, not only the conceptual means by which persons and groups are defined and recognized; they are also

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ideological. That is, they are concepts and beliefs which have a strategic relationship to stratification and unequal power relations, yet mask these inequalities by "naturalizing" them into essentialized phenomena.

In Trinidad these processes inscribe essential identity as "cultural." Hence, social identities are often understood by their adherents (and by some observers) to be culturally rooted and therefore perhaps vulnerable to, but not directed by the character of context: power relations, social structure, degrees of consciousness. Being conceived in popular wisdom as rooted in a conception of culture that is "natural" and essential (as opposed to socially constructed and historically contingent) poses a double work load, so to speak, for social identity among Trinidadians. On the one hand, these identities are composite and involve simultaneously a number of factors that I unpack with respect to Indo-Trinidadians in the following pages. On the other hand, these identities are kept ostensibly coherent and uniform (and therefore viable) through a reinterpretation as a reified "we culture," and secured and bounded by a moral imperative distinguishing sacred and profane, pure and impure domains. In some sense this study, then, is also about finding "culture"; about how the forces of colonialism, the exigencies of assimilation, and the processes of post-colonial identity formation among a Caribbean people fomented a search for "culture" and its

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defining characteristics, as both a basis of social incorporation and a means of resistance to it.

My discussion has four central points that I hope to show as being fundamentally linked in Trinidadian social relations, although their interconnectedness may not be immediately apparent as theoretical formulations. First, religious discourse is multivalent, containing both 1) a rhetorical language of mutually exclusive, strictly single-affiliation religious practice and 2) quotidian belief as mutually inclusive, loosely-affiliated, "is all one God, anyhow" religious practice. Second, a crucial political dimension of Indianness, or <u>being</u> Indian/Indo-Trinidadian, is couching it in terms of a particular religious affiliation (Muslim, Hindu, Christian) as part of the Trinidadian state's system of patron-clientelism. Third, the simultaneity of multiple identities possible, whether religious, ethnic, racial, cultural, national, shapes the relationship between belief and identity to a significant degree as well as posing an ethnographic challenge to the concept and analysis of religious "conversion." Fourth, conceptual domains of "sacred" and "profane," which help to organize particular kinds of cultural and religious activities and practices, inhibit the incursions of a politically dominant and culturally absorbing state (as Indo-Trinidadians perceive it) as well as buttress Indo-Trinidadians' cultural and political struggle against their

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competitors, notably Afro-Trinidadians. Sacred-Pure/Profane-Impure are constituted, in part, by a moral imperative which applies equally to both exclusivity and inclusivity. Respectively, this duality keeps identities distinct among Indo-Trinidadians and between Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians while it resonates with the fraternity of belief in God (which supersedes differences in expression) and the fraternity of "living good with people."

Local Messages and Their Cues

Amid all the "experiential 'noise'" (Fabian 1983:108) that fieldwork presents, particularly the cacophony of local opinions, explanations, hints, problems, issues, and stories that come at the ethnographer during the early period of getting acquainted with one's surroundings, there are usually certain key ideas embedded within this "noise." Clues to broader, socially and culturally meaningful processes are enveloped in what seem at first to be a vast array of mostly confusing or overwhelming images, talk, and events. Yet many times we do not understand these clues to be crucial keys to our questions until much later, frequently after we have long since returned home. Moreover, it often takes dozens of varied informant observations over a long period of time to finally see a pattern, to "hear" a leitmotif (or series of related leitmotifs) underlying, as subtext, the different remarks

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offered to us in dissimilar circumstances.

It was just this sort of pattern, emerging in informants' discourse and rhetoric, that ultimately provided the central key to my attempts to unpack the complexities of Muslim and Hindu Indo-Trinidadian ethnic identities. However, I did not recognize my first clue until after a year or so had passed. In 1987, when I arrived in Trinidad to begin dissertation fieldwork, a recurrent subject in Indo-Trinidadians' conversations with me was the eventual reference to a local controversy about a certain calypso/soca[1] performer and her recent successes in the popular music market. Briefly, the issue was that Doolari's[2] achievement necessarily brought with it some notoriety since she had crossed over from an esteemed career as a singer of bhajans (Hindu devotional songs, sometimes referred to as hymns) to a performer of this-worldly and sometimes racy "fetin'" (partying) socas. It was explained to me repeatedly that the problem was not so much that Doolari was a calypso performer (although some, more conservative persons would indeed take issue with this) as that she had been established within the realm of sacred music, an icon of the transcendence of the mundane and the

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[1]"Soca" is the linguistic and stylistic melding of two forms of African-American diaspora music, soul (U.S.) and calypso (Trinidad). Soca arose around 1975, when Trinidadian calypsonian Ras Shorty I (a.k.a. Lord Shorty) created a new sound in calypso by changing its tempo and bass line.

[2]This name is a pseudonym.

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worldly and the tarnished. More or less (potentially) defiling that domain in which the bhajan belongs, her participation in both sacred and secular/profane domains blurred the boundaries between what are evidently differentiated spaces--with potentially dangerous repercussions. It is these repercussions, and the reasons for them, that I explore in this study.

Throughout my 21-month stay in Trinidad such implications were consistently conveyed; they would take on in retrospect a deeper significance. Often they were phrased in terms of the common local refrain that Carnival feting increasingly has been making inroads into the "spiritual" or religious observances of commemorations of especial importance to Indo-Trinidadians--such as Sipari Mai or Hosay. This leitmotif of an ill-advised or illegitimate crossing of sacred and profane fields was voiced time and again in Indo-Trinidadian discourse, both informal and rhetorical. Discursive contexts vary, and messages and meanings are couched in diverse or even contradictory terms. Yet as belief and practice and talk about each unfolded during my research, to reveal a specific conceptual pattern about the perception of power and cultural struggle, Muslim and Hindu Indo-Trinidadians' concerns about religion, ethnic identity, and position in the national image/agenda became increasingly apparent.

On the one hand, Indo-Trinidadians meld "religion" and

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"culture" as religious practice comes to represent the diagnostic emblems of the ethnic group. On the other hand, they create a distinction between "religion" and "culture" as a form of resistance to the state, within the confines of ethnic group competition for state resources. Commenting on the Hosay observances, Trinidad's version of the Muharram commemoration in Islam, which encompasses religious traditions and practices from both Islam and Hinduism, Rani B.,[3] (a Hindu observer of Hosay) explains,

> Some Muslims don't like the Hosay, building it [tadjah] and all...long ago they [Muslims] come out [participate] much more. They trying to ban it now. But that is culture, that come as culture, the Hosay. You have Carnival, Christmas, all these things is culture, these [have been] in Trinidad a long time. That is why they cannot ban it [Hosay]. The government say it is culture but I say no, because I find it so religious, to know that people worship this thing. They say because it's so old, like Carnival, [it] is culture. But I don't feel so, knowing it's a religious thing. I feel it shouldn't be culture, because it come [exists as] more religious. Is the same thing as...one of our idols, they [non-Hindu critics] done say we worship idol. Do you think we be pleased about putting all of them thing in the museum? I find religious thing shouldn't be there, things that you worship and pray to. In the museum, it comes as a carnival costume.

Ravi-Ji, a nationally recognized spiritual and community leader, mirrors the core of Rani B.'s remark:

> [a]...fundamental area of concern...[is] the lack of basic understanding of things Hindu. There is no objection in portraying anything cultural but there can be no compromise in portrayal of religious things in an environment of Carnival. Of course, one must also understand that there is a thin line of demarcation in

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[3]All names, with the exception only of well-known public figures, are pseudonyms.

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> what is cultural and what is sacred (quoted in Frankson 1990:5).

It was in Rani B.'s remark to me that I first began to recognize what may be the primary trope of Indo-Trinidadian religio-ethnic discourse: a metaphoric division between sacred/pure and profane/impure. Both comments exemplify the tension between definitions of "religion" and "culture." We also see a distinction between the use-value of religious objects and practices exercised by individuals, versus state control, exercised as exchange-value through the objectification (if not commoditization). As Rani B. asserts, through use things religious have life (are "alive"). Meaning and significance come with practice and use; when something is objectified it becomes an artifact, becomes more manipulable by those not actively involved through belief and practice.

The Setting: Heading Toward "The Junction"

The most traversed, and principle highway running along a north-south axis in Trinidad is the Southern Main Road. On the western coast and connecting the capital of Port-of-Spain and its environs with communities all the way to the southwestern edges of the island, the Southern Main Road takes one from the limits of "north," through "central" (a third geographically demarcated region in Trinidad and more or less associated with cane production, labor union organizing, and rusticity), and proceeds toward San Fernando, the "industrial capital" of Trinidad and the

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locality that heralds the beginning of "south." The approximately two to five hours' driving distance (depending on where one is going) between northern and southern communities is sometimes perceived by Trinidadians as being much greater than it actually is. For distance here not only refers to a somewhat prolonged ride in a vehicle, but to changes in demography, differences in style of living, in political representation, in means of production, and thus to some difference in perceptions--on the part of those within and outside "south."

Southward from "south" (i.e., past Victoria and St. Patrick Counties), the oil industry has influenced demographic patterns by attracting many Afro-Trinidadians and Afro-Caribbeans from other places (notably Grenadians and other "small islanders"). From about the 1920s on, southern Trinidad (as distinct from "south" Trinidad) also has been characterized by Afro-Trinidadian-associated areas, such as the oil industry-based town of Point Fortin (known as "Point"), the town of La Brea, and their environs. Some Afro-Trinidadian residents here are also subsistence farmers to one degree or another, as they are gardeners and fisherfolk in the communities along the coasts. Hence, the changes in material conditions and ambience in this part of the country cannot be described strictly as a crude divide into an Afro/Indo pattern; these changes encompass the varied populations of Afro-, Indo-, and "mixed"

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Trinidadians. However, pockets of particular populations do create an ethnic landscape, where "south-rural" is ideologically situated actually north of southern Trinidad and associated with things "authentically" Indian, and where Afro-Trinidadians tend to be associated with "north-urban," even when numbers of them have lived for generations in southern areas or have engaged in agricultural pursuits.

It is along the Southern Main Road that I traveled, back and forth, from south to north, perhaps a hundred times over the course of almost two years. Most often sitting alone and staring out the window of a maxi-taxi,[4] I was able to take this time to sort out my thoughts, write in my field journal, and repeatedly watch the landscape change as I traveled northward, from the familiar agricultural fields of my adopted home in Penal to the urbanized ("creolized") density of San Fernando and beyond. Coming back from "Town," the acknowledged designation for Port-of-Spain, the first symbol of "south" (for myself and others as well) is the looming and grand San Fernando Hill, reportedly much

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[4]Maxi-taxis are vans privately owned and operated, but with legal permits and registration, and are ubiquitous throughout Trinidad, providing the country with an extensive "public transportation" system. Usually a man (but very occasionally a woman) will be the driver and one or more young men, depending on the current availability of other kinds of employment, will act as conductor, notifying the driver when to stop for passengers standing by the road (at designated or undesignated points) and collecting fares (which are regulated). Many maxi-taxi drivers act as both driver and conductor since assistants must be paid, but this makes the travelling and driving more difficult.

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larger in the pre-quarrying last century but still an immense landmark, seen for many miles in any direction. Once beyond the Hill, the beauty of gently rolling land, green gardens, cane fields, and the vastness of open space punctuated by an occasional tree or residence really become apparent.[5] To either side of the highway are small communities, some would say villages, "inside"--that is, away from the main road. Connected by a maze of back roads, marketing arrangements, kinship ties, the organization of sugar production, and/or the oil industry, these communities represent life here in these parts.

Residence patterns and village formation have evolved largely in accordance with the rhythms of cash crop production of cane and cocoa. As two of my friends explained it, three kinds of communities or settlements can be distinguished in "South" (though I would suggest that their description applies to any extra-urban area of the country): "roads," "traces," and "villages." Communities or settlements that develop from "roads" reflect the road's distance (where it is going) and its function (what is it for). If long enough and important enough as a

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[5]My admiration for the silvery seas of cane met an abrupt and sobering reality one day. As I drove with a friend along her cloth vending route, I noted, rather wistfully, how lovely the swaying cane looked in the late afternoon light. She answered, with a noticeable edge to her voice, that people who have to work in it don't always see it that way. I never forgot her message: beauty always has a context, and is therefore always ambivalently perceived.

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thoroughfare, a road can contain a number of villages, for example, Rock Road (Penal)--literally a road and spatially encompassing several communities. This is the case with "traces," as well; however traces tend to be smaller in area since they were footpaths prior to expansion, and roads were always direct routes for vehicle traffic. As a population grows, as a path gets paved, a trace can eventually become a road. How a "village" is defined tends to depend on the number of houses extant and their proximity to each other, as well as the distance the houses go "inside." As Rampaul explained,

> where a road is twisty and windy the village came before the road. Where the road is straight, the village came after. For example, [Gopaul] Trace is not a village because the houses are too sparse and only line the road on either side. But [Baba] Trace is so big, it has several little villages in it since [these] all are separate.

Villages can evolve in a number of ways. One example is that a private, individual land owner subdivides his land and sells individual lots, "sometimes without permission from Town and Country Planning." A second way is when people move onto some unused acreage and build their houses without benefit of proper roads, electricity, water, sewage or solid waste disposal. Another example relates to the latter: when the problems resulting from inadequate infrastructure get to the point that residents go to their local County Council, whose work gangs carry out the repairs. The County Council is local government and is

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responsible for secondary and tertiary roads such as traces or other roads within a village; the Ministry of Works is national, and thus responsible for highways and major roads. The increasing of job opportunities through the expanded efforts of County Council and Ministry of Works road gangs during the oil boom years certainly also played a part in developing local communities.

However, through government priorities being elsewhere, whether colonial or after independence, significant areas only very recently (even up to a year or two before I arrived in 1987) have received electricity, telephone wiring, or pipe-borne water. In fact, one major problem in many parts of "south" is access to water; besides drinking, bathing, and washing, water is used to hand-irrigate gardens (though rice planting relies on mehris, or banks to keep water in). I was told by people that it was only after the 1986 election of the National Alliance for Reconstruction party (1986-1991) that did many areas in "south" get pipe-borne water. While this may be more a statement of condemnation of the previous (and again since 1992) governing party, the Afro-associated People's National Movement (PNM), it is still the case that compared to other parts of the island, water here is often a scarce commodity. Significantly, collecting rain remains a very important source of water for grass roots households, and lined alongside many roads are huge metal drums for catching rain,

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covered when it is dry so as to prevent things from falling inside. Even middle class households have enormous tanks, usually in their side or back yards, that store rain water; one, albeit minor, indication of the economic status of a household is the number and size of water tanks possessed (and displayed). While water tanks can be seen in household yards all over Trinidad, the common sight of storage drums lining the sides of the roads seemed to me more prevalent in "South" than in other parts of the island. A third source of water is truck-born, from the Water and Sewage Authority (WASA). Not always reliable, households with extra funds sometimes arrange to pay an employee for deliveries off-the-record.

In spite of these details of settlement development and infrastructural inequalities, demarcating precisely a particular "community" in Trinidad is not always a self-evident exercise, especially as one leaves the definitively urbanized environs of its bigger towns and two cities (Port-of-Spain and San Fernando). Defining a community's, or even a village's boundaries often depends on vantage point; it was soon apparent that Penal existed in geographic space according to the observer's own residence and/or familiarity with the area in question. Therefore, "Penal" tends to be seen as synonymous with "south" by those in "central" or in "North" or in southernmost Trinidad. As one moves conceptually closer, along concentric circles, "Penal"

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becomes distinguished from Debe (its immediate neighboring community to the north) and Siparia (one of its neighboring communities to the south), encompassing less than a five mile radius. On the "Penal" side of either of these northern or southern borders, it yet again is differentiated into smaller segments: Rock Road (village) is distinct from "Penal," as is San Francique (village), and Lachoos Road (village)--all of which can, under other circumstances, be considered "Penal." In fact, a purist might claim that the real Penal encompasses only The Junction, or central roundabout, and its few side streets.

The Junction, in any case, is the indubitable heart of Penal, where the police station, post office, government health center, central market, and abbatoire (official animal butchering center) are located. It is where one gets taxi and maxi-taxi transportation to eastern, northern, and southern towns and villages as well as home to neighborhoods a mile or two down the road; it is where one can get a family portrait or a photocopy or various kinds of fast foods; it is the convergence of rum shop relaxation, news exchange, and commodity procurement.

Friends told me that The Junction never used to be so crowded. "Long time," perhaps two or three generations, the Penal market was outside, under a huge tree that no longer exists. Very few businesses were yet established, and people rode donkey carts the better part of a day to reach

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San Fernando, now about thirty away minutes by automobile. Today the market is indoors, in an enormous, steaming shed, divided up into individual sellers' stalls. These sellers (individuals or families), who number about two hundred, are on the re-selling end of a complex marketing system, where fruit and vegetable provisions grown all over the gardens of "Penal" and in its vicinity are sold to wholesalers in San Fernando (since I left in 1989, evidently also in Debe as well) and retailed at Penal's market in The Junction.

While daily there are provision vendors along the sidewalks, formal market days are Friday and Saturday in Penal (and on Sunday or Wednesday as the retailers proceed to the communities nearby). It is especially obvious at these times how significant gardening remains to the people of these areas, despite a very real decline in agricultural production in Trinidad, particularly since the 1970s. "Doubles"[6] and sweets vendors abound; cars with the loudspeakers that have traditionally announced weddings or deaths make sure to pass; taxis compete to carry back home those marketers without transportation; children, young people, and many adults "lime" amid all the activity, small

[6]"Doubles" are two fried lentil-flour patties with channa (garbanzo beans, chick peas) and pepper sauce inside, and are eaten as a hot sandwich. They are generally vended in stalls or by mobile bicycles. Costing TT$1.00 (1987-89), they are an affordable meal and a fairly lucrative source of income. Vendors with whom I spoke told me that before the recession began (around 1987) they could count on making $400.00 per weekend, not counting costs of production, which are, they indicated, minimal.

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businesses often do a brisker trade than on other days; and, sweethearts can meet in a morally unassailable (i.e., public) yet still electrically charged atmosphere.

Indeed, the market is one important place where personal grievances can be publicly exacerbated, where paths cross that might otherwise rather not. Trouble, social confusion, disorderly disturbance--comess--is a thing to be avoided. "Showing a bad face" disrupts peaceable, and ultimately cooperative and reciprocal, social relations within and among local communities. A key concept in Trinidadian social relations, comess serves as a linguistic gloss for any consequence or situation that is in disharmony or out of control. The market is one place where comess is teased or tempted into possible appearance, and is therefore in part a microcosm of what is deemed important in "living good with people."

As one approaches "south," another hallmark of the ethnic landscape appears. To the right of the highway, in Debe, strung along the road in permanent if makeshift sheds, are the "Indian delicacies," heralding literally and symbolically the presence of Indian Culture. Although Indo-Trinidadian foods are available throughout Trinidad (pre-packaged as well as homemade), people come from all over the island to buy these delicacies from these "authentic" fast food vendors (mostly women), who make fresh daily sahina, phoulourie, kachowrie and "doubles." Continuing down the

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road, the scenery is predominantly residences and small businesses, sometimes the two being combined into the second and first floors, respectively, of one building. Very often this is the arrangement for groceries and restaurant-bars. Businesses are varied and include the extremely common "parlors" (small sheds set up in front of someone's home, from which pre-packaged snacks and sometimes soft drinks, matches, soap, and other small commodities are sold), somewhat larger groceries, barbershops, newspaper stands, music shops, beauty parlors, butcher stands selling chicken (always designated as halal or not), bakeries, pre-made (often in Venezuela) clothing shops, and the ubiquitous pharmacies, auto shops, and ever-important rumshops. The formality of organization of these enterprises ranges from the easily set up and easily abandoned (e.g., parlors) to permanent, and therefore particularly successful, small and large businesses.

Women, and sometimes men, are also seen vending produce along the side of the road and, as a settlement draws near, on the curbs of street corners and intersections. Occasionally these vendors are Afro-Trinidadian residents of communities "inside," who grow provisions, rice, and sometimes cane. Mostly, however, these vendors are Indo-Trinidadian women, set up with orange crates or collapsible tables and chairs, scales (required by law), and change box, with their wares--aloo (potato), baigan (eggplant), tomato,

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bhagi (spinach), dasheen (greens), ochroe (okra), bodi (string bean), or mango and other seasonal fruits-- spread out for buyer inspection.

Also dotting the landscape are numerous and beautiful masjids and mandirs (and more rarely, churches), all of slightly different design, along with the occasional shop that sells the necessary articles for Hindu rituals. Pervasive, too, are the banners, signs, and decorations on telephone poles, on fences, on walls, announcing for public invitation the hosting of a ritual performance event: for example, a yagya or puja or Ram Lila for Hindus, a maulood or Quran sherif for Muslims, a wedding, a funeral. Sometimes the piling up of bamboo posts (for tents), or masses of folding chairs, or the gigantic metal cooking pots used to feed the sometimes hundreds of participants in any given ritual performance indicate to passers by that some event is imminent. These familiar visual cues are among the most significant clues as to how pervasive and important ritual performance is in daily life. Interspersed with these kinds of signs are the painted or printed notices, also on posts or sides of buildings, announcing dances being held and the "DJ's" (disc jockeys) attending, concerts, political meetings, and other secular activities.

These literal and symbolic signs of social activity (indicating secular or sacred events) speed past the windows of travelling cars, buses, taxis, and maxis. As much as

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anything else, taxis and maxis embody Trinidad, particularly since they represent communal (and often kin-based) forms of entrepreneurial activity, the dominance of the automobile in this part of the world, and the capacity for absorbing surplus labor during times of high unemployment or for allowing an alternative to wage employment. While taxi- and other driving are common sources of income throughout Trinidad irrespective of ethnic group, among Indo-Trinidadians in "south," driving taxis and maxis are a particularly important means of livelihood where formal sector employment has not been entirely dependable. Thanks to oil boom-derived expansion of material opportunities, people began to "travel" more, that is, to visit people and go places by way of public transportation;[7] moreover, virtually every household could afford at least one car or mini van as well as having the sons, brothers, fathers, and uncles to take advantage of this occupational niche in lieu of, while out of, or in addition to wage employment.

Penal residents have experienced massive changes in occupation and standard of living, which have in turn changed the physical appearance of the area. This includes the success of a few large grocery businesses that, at least for those who were able to join the middle class, compete

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[7]People also began to travel more in the usual sense of trips abroad to New York, Toronto, other Caribbean countries, and especially on frequent shopping trips to Venezuela and Miami. This activity has, of course, subsided considerably in the current post-boom "recession."

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somewhat with the market.[6] Tending to be less disposed toward pre-packaged foods (for financial or other reasons), grass roots residents consumption practices underscore the continuing importance of the market, and, indirectly, the association between agriculture and "traditional" lifeways. Fresh provision (what we might call "farmers'") markets abound throughout Trinidad, and serve as an important part of the local economy, particularly in times of economic recession when money is "small" and foreign exchange for imported foods scarce. However, in Penal (and likely elsewhere) it was evident that class distinctions in food preferences and even culinary styles, are partly expressed in buying patterns, and the market may be seen as a place where culture and class converge.

There is always news of ritual performances passing back and forth among community residents, especially among kin and neighbors, but on market days even more people can be assured of hearing about imminent yagyas, pujas, mauloods, hagikas, and the like. Indeed, it was around the market that I received a number of invitations to, or information about planned religious events, or shopped with friends in preparation for them. And it was at the market in particular that the labor of ritual performances was thrown into relief, particularly the arduous effort of

[6]These large groceries are different from the many small, corner shops that everyone occasionally goes to for last minute or casual purchases.

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cooking a large variety of foods for many dozens of people. Whether couched in esoteric or mundane terms, I gradually came to understand how thoroughly piety, in the form of religious ideology and practice, infused the lives of my neighbors.

Another example of important markers indicating the centrality of visible, public statements of piety is the religious paraphernalia hanging from nearly every vehicle's rear view mirror. Almost always there is some combination of images: a Hindu om symbol, a cross or crucifix, pictures of Hindu deities, pictures of Jesus or Mary or Sai Baba, perhaps a rosary. Noticeably missing are Islamic images, which "practical Muslims" (i.e., observant or practicing Muslims often do have in their homes and vehicles. I always made it a point to ask drivers about these items and their typical response was one that echoed a standard Trinidadian refrain, "is all one God, anyhow." And when I asked why they had no star and crescent or other Islamic image, invariably the response was either an unperturbed shrug of the shoulders or a claim to have had one "before, but it got lost." These answers begged the question of mutually exclusive religious affiliations in a world of infinite potential religious resources for health, success, and wealth that ultimately all end up in the same place, anyway: i.e., the one God. These answers also begged the question of the local configuration of Islam and its quotidian

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relationships with other religions among Indo-Trinidadians. Where were the barriers and the continuities and of what were they constituted among community residents with intimately intertwined personal and familial--"pumpkin vine"--histories?

As I stood on the gallery (balcony) of my apartment, looking out over the corrugated iron and uneven green canopy of my neighborhood, to the rooftops, gardens, cane fields, and cocoa estates far beyond, perhaps the most singular sensation I recall is that of sound. Carried by warm breezes, the everyday noises of living permeate the air, and even at the height of activity, perhaps on a Saturday morning of marketing, cooking, cleaning, visiting, and laboring, there is a reassuring quality to the steady drone of bustling, often punctuated by a robust voice or honking horn. And penetrating the stillness during the more peaceful moments of dawn or dusk, one can regularly hear the calls to prayer at the nearby masjid or the conch shell blown at a puja.

One might view the call to prayer or the conch shell notes as metaphors for the perseverance that religious ideology and practice afforded the Indian indentured laborers and their progeny. Becoming in the Caribbean a kind of symbolic capital (Bourdieu 1978), religio-cultural practices and traditions formed a critical part of the heritage the immigrants brought with them, a heritage that

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figured largely in their political and cultural resistance to the oppressive conditions of their servitude and the hegemonic governing apparatus.

The ritual "functions" I attended involved both family and larger neighborhood and kinship networks. These linkages create what I call "ethnic nets," which criss-cross neighborhoods and enable religious and cultural activities through cooperative efforts based on ties between households and families of diverse communities or religious affiliations. These "ethnic nets" have primary significance for maintaining cooperation and reciprocity among religiously, economically, and occasionally ethnically diverse sets of people. Importantly, there are also class disparities evident within ethnic nets, and persons are more or less expected to contribute and cooperate according to means. However, the significant accumulation of economic resources and their dispensing seems to have generational and gendered significance. It is when individuals publicly embrace a code of morality--men stop "behaving bad" (philandering, drinking, domestic violence) and women are "ready for sacrifice" (foregoing "Western" pleasures and self-indulgences such as fashionable dress, make-up, dancing, smoking, or drinking)--that additional resources (time and effort as well as money) are put toward family-centered and/or public community ritual events, actions that encourage networks of reciprocity and strengthen religious

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expression of cultural identity.

Reciprocity networks comprise cooperative labor and "living good with people." Particularly necessary is reciprocity regarding subsistence activities or other organized labor such as that needed to hold ritual performances. Data on the workings and significance of cooperative and reciprocal "ethnic nets" provide a dynamic picture of personal relationships between Hindus, Muslims (and others), who may wish to "stand separately" but need to "stand equal" in an environment that requires some principle of egalitarian cooperation.

While ultimately I chose to concentrate on a comparison between Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians, any exploration or analysis must be informed by the wider context of inter-ethnic within this post-colonial society. However, each religious constituency's[9] relationship to an "Indian" cultural heritage and identity includes the following variables, which I consider in detail in subsequent chapters. First is the significance of class composition within a given religious group, as well as the cultural expressions and interpretations of class positions. Second, each religious constituency's historical relationship with

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[9]I provisionally distinguish between religious group and religious constituency by suggesting that the former indicates the formal and global designations Muslim, Hindu, Presbyterian, Evangelical, Pentecostal, Catholic, and so forth. The latter refers to localized, context-dependent, and interacting communities of practitioners.

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one another is critical. Third, individuals' multiple religious affiliations and/or conversions result in complex family genealogies that contradict assumptions about putatively homogeneous "Hindu" and "Muslim" communities. As my sample of genealogies (Chapter Six) illustrates, actual family and household composition comprise trans-generational and individual life-cycle variation in religious affiliation--even as local religio-cultural bodies attempt to institutionalize uniformity and establish exclusive-inclusive boundaries. Finally, conflict exists among religious authorities or community leaders over flexibility of belief and practice (authenticity, legitimacy, purity). These variables allow us to not treat culture, religion, or class as givens which are then examined as to how they instill or promote certain proclivities for embracing a particular ethnicity. Rather, what is more appropriate is to explore the formation of and relationships among different ethnic identities, classes, and religious groups: how these are perceived and acted upon in combination with each other in diverse situations.

Why Hindus and Muslims?

The official ships's records of indentured passengers from India to Trinidad during the seventy-two years of this labor scheme (1845-1917) reveal a preponderance of Hindus registered compared to those claiming affiliation with Islam. This is largely a reflection of the fact that

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regions from which the majority of indentured servants came to Trinidad were in the north of India, notably Uttar Pradesh, Oudh, and Bihar. Historically in these regions Islam and its Muslim adherents lay within a Hindu majority and sphere of influence. Furthermore, in various generations during or after indenture in Trinidad there have been Hindus who have converted to Islam as well as Muslims who, through marriage or other reasons, engaged in the practices of Hinduism, further causing some traditions to converge. Muslim and Hindu Indo-Trinidadians are acutely aware of their overlapping histories. The definition, interpretation, and deployment of the extent and importance of a shared past is what in significant part fuels intra-community ethnic, cultural, and religious discourse.

Today's census profile of religious affiliations among Indo-Trinidadians begs the question of why a study would focus on Muslims and Hindus (as opposed to one or the other), how one would (or would not) take into consideration the many divisions within the Hindu, Muslim, and Christian communities, and how one might disregard the Indo-Christian bodies in a study of the relationship between religious idioms and ethnic identity in Trinidad. According to Trinidad's 1990 census, approximately 15% of the 40% of Indo-Trinidadians fall into the census category "Muslim," and Muslims comprise approximately 6% of the entire Trinidad/Tobago population. The category Muslim further

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breaks down by religio-cultural association, which represents affiliation with a particular school of thought (e.g., Anjuman Sunnat-ul-Jamaat [ASJA], Ahmadiyya, Tackveeyatul Islamic Association [TIA], and the Trinidad Muslim League [TML], among others). About 59% of Indo-Trinidadians are Hindu, with concomitant (yet unenumerated) divisions into major religious organizations and associated religious belief and practice (e.g., Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha [SDMS], Seunarine, Arya Samaj, and the Divine Life Society, among others). Kabir Panthis comprises a small portion of the population, and Christians are disaggregated into Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Jehovah Witness, Seventh Day Adventist, Methodist, Anglican, Pentecostal, among other Protestant sects.

In the early "mid-Victorian" years of Trinidad's indenture project, the primary differentiation among kinds of Indians was not, as might be assumed, between Muslims and Hindus but between Madrassis and Calcuttans (Wood 1968:139). Interestingly, rather than this distinction being a reflection of language, physiognomy, or caste, it was due to colonial estimations of labor quality; that is, indentured immigrants from Madras were deemed troublesome and less efficient than those from the northern regions (Wood 1968:139). Hence, for economic reasons a dichotomy of Indian "kinds" was identified.

Hindu-Muslim relations in Trinidad, on the other hand,

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have been poorly documented, partly because of the early tendency for colonial observers to overlook the distinctions that seemed irrelevant to production, and partly because of the later tendency to both see "East Indians" and "blacks" as homogeneous entities and to gloss all Indians as "Hindu," since they were the numerical majority. Moreover, while the evolution of stereotypes of Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians is grounded historically in Trinidad's labor process, and is a real phenomenon in local social organization, the emphasis on these relations has contributed to the neglect of inquiry into Indo-Trinidadian Hindus' and Muslims' relations with each other. Had Melville and Frances Herskovits taken the Boasian mission of salvage ethnography to the cane fields, in addition to identifying cultural "survivals" among Afro-Trinidadians, we would now have more ethnography on the early decades of Hindu and Muslim cultural practices, inter-relations, and identity formation.

What we primarily have now are the watershed or public and recorded events that have concerned Indo-Trinidadians and that were expressed in specifically religious or cultural terms. Examples of these would be the "Hosay Riots" of 1884, the creation of Charlieville village after Partition (1947) by Indo-Trinidadian Muslims in northwestern Trinidad, the activities of Indo-Trinidadian religious associations or other lobbying groups pressing for state recognition of Hindu and Muslim rights, and so on. What we

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do not have are the details and intricacies of mundane and routine social and cultural reproduction among Hindus and Muslims, in town or village, except as represented by contemporary recollections and imaginations (e.g., Naipaul 1958).

As present-day informants recall, a Muslim/Hindu distinction was not necessarily meaningful in the daily life of the immigrants and their descendants, but for rather different reasons than the pragmatics of colonial ideology. As the indentured laborers spread out into estate-contiguous villages and formed those further afield, a rural proletariat and peasant farmer culture was beginning to be re-formed and redeveloped in new settings. Certainly part of this cultural reconstitution entailed elaborating cultural observances "brought" from India which may often have been religion-specific (such as certain festivals and ritual observances), but the exact nature of the delineation between Hindu and Muslim village residents and neighbors is at best imprecisely known. It would seem that in these early years, identity and resistance were both being forged in terms of an encompassing "Indian" identity--based as much on their status as a particular kind of worker in Trinidad's social structure as on cultural heritage. One middle-aged man explained,

> now there is more difference [between Hindus and Muslims]...My mother, a Hindu, and her neighbor, a Muslim lady, only differed in who didn't eat beef and [in] religion. Otherwise there was no cultural

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> differences. Dress, curry, orhni, everything the same. Only religion was different.

Implicit in his comment is the suggestion that the salience of religious difference(s) has different implications for Indo-Trinidadian ethnicity in this first half of the century than at present. This suggestion is expressed explicitly by an elderly Hindu man during one of our many conversations about Hosay (Trinidad's traditional observance of Muharram):

> Most of the Muslims...are against Hosay, they are the more purer Muslims. The Hindus' connection with the old Muslims from India is what keeps Hosay going down here. "Jahaji"[10] means the Hindus and Muslims came together in one boat, they live like one family. It had [there were] a maulood [an Indo-Trinidadian Muslim ritual] and Hindus come, it had a kuttha [pandit's sermon during a puja] and Muslims come. Not like today. The loyalty and friendship between both isn't here today. That is why we could benefit from them today. They, the Hindus and the Muslims, built up this country. Throughout Trinidad [today], Hindus and Muslims haven't that unity. Time change and people change. But before, there was no "Hindu" and "Muslim" again. Now the segregation come like Indian and creole [Afro-Trinidadian]. But long time [in the far past] Hindus were invited to noor nama [Indo-Trinidadian Muslim ritual] and maulood, but not now.

Over the decades, particularly with the advent of

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[10] "Jahaji bhai," or "brotherhood of the boat," is a phrase referring to the bonding among indentured immigrants sailing on the same ship to the Caribbean. Often these relationships remained intact after assignment to an estate, and elderly informants spoke to me of marriages arranged, cooperative labor organized, and similar types of relations formed through trust and affinity among their grandparents and parents, on the basis of jahaji bhai bonds. While one might look for an analogy to this in what Jayawardena (1963, 1968) describes for Indo-Guyanese plantation workers as mati, another kind of bond indicating feelings of similarity and cooperation, it seems to me that jahaji bhai now figures largely in Trinidadian social relations as a kind of symbol of Indian unity and commonality, rather than the significant sociological phenomenon that mati is in structuring and interpreting Guyanese social structure.

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universal suffrage in the 1940s and post-War efforts toward independence from Britain (realized in 1962), Indo-Trinidadians began to lobby and organize along communal (i.e., ethno-religious) lines. They did so largely through the development of religio-cultural associations such as the TIA, the TML, the ASJA, and the SDMS, as well as through the rise of race/ethnicity-based, as opposed to class-based, party politics (Hintzen 1989; cf. Phillips 1990). As racial, cultural, or religious distinctiveness increasingly became the vehicle for demanding rights and recognition from the state, the meaning and value of particular cultural, racial, or religious characteristics and affiliations for delineating boundaries and identities came increasingly into play. And contemporary local scholarship tends to interpret these processes in the following terms:

> it is when one deals with the Hindu and Muslim populations that one finds the only real cases of imperfect social mobilisation and assimilation. Of all the immigrant groups, they have proven the most resistant to creolization and Westernization. Despite the detraditionalizing influence of displacement, the Hindus sought to reconstitute as much of their old social system as was feasible in their new environment...(Ryan 1966:12).

Whereas presumably their Indo-Christian counterparts were demonstrating adaptability, cooperation, and fitting in by eschewing traditional patterns, the Muslims and Hindus were evincing recalcitrance, one that was culturally dependent. Hence we have another way of distinguishing among Indo-Trinidadians: Hindus and Muslims, and the others.

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However, what Muslim and Hindu Indo-Trinidadians share and do not share in common is much more complex, and is based on their historical experience on the Indian subcontinent as well as on the subsequent evolution of their communities in the Caribbean. For example, Jayawardena (1984) tells us that in Guyana being demarcated a Muslim within the Indo-Guyanese community is apparent primarily in "ironic repartee," and that "political antagonisms between Hindus and Muslims is virtually non-existent at either the national or local level" (1984:436). Although we might speculate parenthetically that this "ironic repartee" belies a more fundamental tension between these Guyanese Hindus and Muslims, the political picture Jayawardena portrays contrasts with the Trinidadian situation, where Hindus and Muslims--as groups and as individuals--historically have negotiated an often uneasy compromise on supralocal, community, and personal levels. Generally speaking, it is in the domain of party politics that many religio-cultural differences temporarily recede in significance and where a more broadly encompassing ethnicity as "Indian" is foregrounded--though all the while a clear, if muted focus on religio-cultural distinctions is kept, which are in themselves certainly "political" and serve to buttress the various contexts in which political-economic demands for rights and recognition are manifested as mutually exclusive Hindu and Muslim voices.

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While I examine more specifically relations among Muslims and Hindus, particularly at the community level, in subsequent chapters, here it is my intention to introduce the broader context and development of their kinship (both literal and figurative) and history in Trinidad. For what exists is, simultaneously, actual differences between Hinduism and Islam; a similar geographic and social past, and therefore that which Muslims and Hindus actually share; and the gradual evolution in Trinidad toward contemporary differentiations (perceptions and practice); and how all of these factors throw into relief the distinctions of Christianity.

Indo-Trinidadian Christians engage in other issues and debates that they have defined as problematic, but the tension between "religion" and "culture" is much less pronounced for these communities than among Hindus and Muslims. For example, among Presbyterians and evangelical Protestants, the relationship between the religious and the cultural is not a major aspect of their discourse or practice. It was striking to me that Indo-Trinidadian Presbyterians, who have a one hundred and twenty-odd year history of conversion (beginning in 1868), do not seem to pose their religious activity in terms of ethnic identity. I believe this is so because Presbyterian Indo-Trinidadians evince unproblematic-to-strong associations with Hindu (or, infrequently, Muslim) kin, who can be interacted with and

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embraced without censure since their religion is not seen by Presbyterians as contradicting Presbyterian practice. Moreover, both Hindus and Muslims today still express a profound gratitude toward the Canadian Presbyterian Mission and its most important first representatives in Trinidad, John and Sarah Morton, for providing what would be the sole means of formal education available to Indo-Trinidadians for many decades. That conversion to Presbyterianism was for a very long time the only avenue of upward mobility for Indo-Trinidadians--primarily through teaching and administration in Presbyterian schools--was also a factor in shaping Presbyterian, Hindu, and Muslim relations.

The case of evangelical Protestantism is quite different. Gathering momentum around the 1970s, fundamentalist, "small church" Christian proselytizing, especially coming from North America, began to make significant inroads into the Trinidadian Hindu, and to a lesser extent Muslim communities (and throughout the Caribbean). This encouraged non-Christian Indo-Trinidadian religious specialists and leaders (or nascent leaders) to organize and promote more cohesive, codified, and uniform versions of their respective religions, notably Hinduism but Islam as well (e.g., Haraksingh 1986; Vertovec 1990). Partly due to feelings of threat and competition, many non-Protestants harbor strong feelings of antagonism toward these new, small churches. But in addition, and more

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significant for my purposes, evangelical Protestant Indo-Trinidadians seemed to be encouraged to try and eschew as much of their former religious affiliation as possible through a reformulation of their Indian identity, away from (indigenous) cultural customs and beliefs of the religio-cultures of the motherland. I want to state strongly that this whole issue is obviously very complicated and I do not have the data to do it justice. However, in the few households with which I had some familiarity, when a Hindu (or Muslim) ritual would take place, evangelical Protestant family members consistently left the premises for the duration of the event. They did not by any means do so in protest, only to reinforce the cultural as well as religious boundaries between themselves and the others. Moreover, although they, too, tend to be endogamous, evangelical Indo-Trinidadians engage in more heterogeneously mixed social relations through church activities; that is, with Afro-Trinidadians. Hence, they can form a broader group identity through a religion that does not primarily express itself, nor that is mainly associated with "Eastern" heritage, a specific ethnic group, or as part of a particular cultural repertoire.

Therefore, with reference to the organizing question of my study--why religious idioms are so salient a means of expressing and promoting ethnic identity(ies) among Indo-Trinidadians--the fact that Christian Indo-Trinidadians do

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not seem to pose their religious activity principally in ethno-cultural group terms (either through some degree of complementarity or denial) relegated them to being part of the context of my study rather than ethnographically foregrounding them. Hindus and Muslims, however, are engaging in new affirmations of ethnic distinctiveness that are apparently paradoxical: simultaneously marshalling, rejecting, and redefining symbols of "culture"--tradition, authenticity, and piety--and both authorizing and contesting sacred knowledge and those who uphold and transmit it.

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## Chapter Two. The Fluidity of Identities: Constructions and Negotiations

> Things were crazily mixed up in Elvira. Everybody, Hindus, Muslims, and Christians, owned a Bible; the Hindus and Muslims looking on it, if anything, with greater awe. Hindus and Muslims celebrated Christmas and Easter. The Spaniards and some of the Negroes celebrated the Hindu festival of lights [Divali].... Everybody celebrated the Muslim festival of Hosein [Hosay]. In fact, when Elvira was done with religious festivals, there were few straight days left (Naipaul 1958:66).

During the past decade and a half, scholarship, particularly in anthropology and cultural studies, has emphasized that social identities are constructed. Whether racial, ethnic, national, transnational, or gendered, for example, these identifications of group and self are deemed historically contingent. In other words, they do not have "a reality independent of human invention" (Segal 1993:82); "'who we are' is a communicative process that includes many voices and varying degrees of understanding and, importantly, misunderstanding" (Handler 1994:30; cf. Wolf 1994:7; Thomas 1994:1). Moreover, not only are these combined constructions frequently equivocal--dependent to an extent upon individual perception and varying combinations of attributes--they can be activated in different combinations, reflecting the context and contingencies in question (e.g., Khan 1993).

I hope to show that boundary crossings of belief and practice are viewed by Indo-Trinidadians as potentially

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negative when a fundamental moral imperative is threatened. This occurs when what are defined as profane aspects of culture encroach on what are defined as sacred aspects of culture. When actions and behaviors are kept within the general domain of the sacred, multiple identities are socially useful, and pose no problems for the maintenance of moral imperatives. In this context boundary crossings are part of a wider Trinidadian vision of a "callaloo" culture and its management within state-civil society relations.

With anthropology's traditional focus on cultural transformation and social organization among Indo-Caribbean communities, the exploration of the relationship between ethnic group identity and religion has tended to treat religion both as one (albeit major) index of a more encompassing ethnic/cultural configuration and as a complex of particular beliefs and the routinized practices that are associated with them (viz. Saler 1987:395; cf. van der Veer 1994).

In his survey of anthropological work on the Indo-Caribbean, none of Vertovec's (1991) several sub-headings refers to religion specifically, a good illustration of the tendency in Indo-Caribbean research to conflate ethnicity and religion into synonymous processes, where each is assumed to constitute and reflect the other, yet where both speak to more encompassing questions about cultural patterns. This is not solely an issue for Caribbean

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studies. In the research on "ethno-religious" processes in various geographic and historical contexts, "defining or connecting religion and ethnicity as distinct qualities" is not often directly examined (Bratt 1991).

An implicit model is often accepted as given in discussions of Indo-Caribbeans: their religions (usually referring to Hinduism and Islam) are self-contained wholes that have come to represent ethnic groups in their process of acculturation. Even when the articulation of ethnicity and religion among Indo-Caribbeans is directly addressed, they each tend to be treated as a priori entities. Process is dealt with largely in terms of considering the effect that the fluidity which characterizes changing social contexts has on cultural practices. For example, according to a recent work on Caribbean Hinduism by van der Veer and Vertovec (1991), changing historical and social conditions have initiated an "ethnicization of religion" (1991:149), where a "unified Hindu community was constructed by homogenizing a great deal of social and religious practices" (1991:163). In this argument, the "ethnicization of religion" evidently refers to the unification of the Hindu community and homogenization of Hindu belief and practice, as well as self-definition and definition by others as a distinct ethnic group by criteria of name, religious beliefs, language, kinship, values, aspirations, and social status. In short, "ethnic" apparently means increasing

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homogeneity and consolidation of sameness. Aside from the question of the multi-dimensionality of religion in terms of its practice and purpose in everyday living, rather than its "homogenization" of the ideal (theology) or the esoteric (ritual/devotional conduct), there is the question of the development of an "ethnic religion" that fails to address the particular ideologies of "culture," tradition, otherness, and heritage which also constitute any "ethnic religion." Phrased another way, religious or ethnic consolidation is the what, but the how and the why remain; that is, what this consolidation means vis-a-vis other kinds of identities--for example, "Indian" or "Trinidadian." In this regard, to overemphasize the boundedness of "Caribbean Hinduism" is to encourage an intra-group focus; unified in particular ways does not mean bounded and mutually exclusive. In fact, although combinations of belief and practice typified as religious syncretism have not occurred (i.e., the creation of new and distinct forms), historical commonalities and contemporary politics have made for multifaceted and somewhat overlapping affinities and constructions of identity. These are interpreted and distinguished through the rhetoric of purity and piety.

Religion delineates ethnic group distinctions, but also cross-cuts ethnic boundaries to form other sorts of aggregations and loyalties. Indeed, this situation has become familiar, for example, in the satiric comment by

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author V.S. Naipaul about the "crazily mixed up" state of religious identity in his not entirely fictional town of Elvira (Naipaul 1958:66). It is also evident in Daniel Crowley's observation that the "'collection of masks' or personalities" that Trinidadians "don" are contingent on situation and do not result in a loss of identity (Crowley 1957:823-24). Crowley is essentially correct in his description of the simultaneity of multiple identities possible for Trinidadians. He seems also to express frustration at a fluidity that seems chaotic and without internal logic, which challenges traditional anthropological ideas of boundedness and coherence. Yet, as Handler and Segal (1990) neatly put it, "human beings are not...organized into discrete social totalities whose members share a single and distinct culture; communication occurs, after all, across all social boundaries, and boundaries themselves are communicative signs" (1990:8, my emphasis).

Although tackling a rather different set of issues, Linger's (1993) analysis of Brazilian politics evokes my attempt to explore the apparently paradoxical cultural images of Trinidadian society and the multiplicity of "religious beliefs" held by single individuals. Linger posits that among his informants, a "basic conceptual pattern" exists with respect to understanding power relations, where

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> splitting and ambivalence facilitates a conceptual synesthesia, as perceptions and feelings specific to one social domain [e.g., "family"] easily shift into another. In other words, any given domain readily borrows metaphoric representations of generically common elements...from other domains. Such cross-mapping is extremely complicated...In short, all these domains interpenetrate or exchange meanings with one another (1993:7).

My analysis attempts to show that boundaries do exist but that they are moral ones, ultimately separating "pure" from "impure," rather than defining categories of belief by systematic schemes or orderly taxonomies.

Yet by posing the question of <u>how</u> affiliations work, the influence of prevailing paradigms can unduly circumscribe our analyses. For example, Stewart's (1973) reliance on a paradigm of strategy and decision-making gives rise to his explanation of the state of Indo-Trinidadian multiplicity of identities as a propensity to "exploit any cultural situation that offers social and economic advancement" (1973:48). Their practicing a "dual religious affiliation" through baptizing children as both Hindu and Christian is seen as an effort "to improve their socio-economic options" (1973:48). While it is well documented that conversion to Christianity (and especially Presbyterianism) enabled upward social mobility for Indo-Trinidadians (e.g., Premdas and Sitahal 1991; Ramesar 1976), particularly through formal education and formal sector occupations, Stewart's discussion of the phenomenon is primarily in instrumentalist terms. This suggests his belief is that religion is uni-focused and bounded and that

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it can be explained only (or best) as an exploitative stratagem.

Religion cannot be analyzed tautologically; that is, its extra-worldly allusions are not sufficient explanation of the power and effectiveness of religious idioms in the organization of everyday life. The quality of the spiritual, which includes people's basic ideas about their place in the world, is not an end in itself; it is empowered, is made compelling, through other kinds of mechanisms and motivations. We can begin an approach to the ideological constitution of ethnicity and religion by determining some frameworks with which to grasp the context in which Muslim and Hindu Indo-Trinidadians construct their cultural identity and those dimensions that connote it.

Mining Tropes and Metaphors

In order to understand the significance of local context in diasporic processes it is necessary to tease out the themes and idioms in the discourse of diaspora communities. In particular historical periods Indo-Trinidadians have developed methods for both cultural revitalization and pressing the state for rights and opportunities; distinctions emerge in the ways people construe and interpret the meanings and objectives of those methods. Hence, social and cognitive variations of what it means to be "Indian" require an analysis of ethnic identity in terms of the relationships among religious ideologies,

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cultural traditions, and the power inequities that are symbolically addressed in the mundane, as well as esoteric, activities of everyday life.

purity and sacrality, impurity and the profane

What "religion" is depends on the way it articulates with the rest of social life, wherein work and power are critical factors (Asad 1983:251).[1] What constitutes the difference between "sacred" and "secular" depends on historical period, cultural-geographic area, and nature of the particular dominant religious authority present. Any distinction between the two reflects power relations among specific groups of people, where authority and knowledge are contested (Ibid. 1983). In contrast to the reified notion of sacred and secular that derives from E.B. Tylor, Emile Durkheim, and Louis Dumont, among others), anthropologists have proposed that these domains are only apparently dichotomous and are not necessarily mutually exclusive and opposed (e.g., Leach 1954; Goody 1977; Tambiah 1985; Dirks 1989). However, "some of these [dichotomous] categories are emic, actor-based ones that are plainly visible at the observer level" (Goody 1977:25).

Although there is no inherent, universal distinction between these categories of phenomena, empirically, in

[1]Compare Goody's observation: many generalized rubrics in anthropology's lexicon (such as "ritual," "myth," "magic") are so vague that a good deal of analytical effort is spent on "nominalistic criteria"; that is, analyzing the term itself (Goody 1977:25).

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specific cultural-historic terms, separations such as these do become invented and defended by local communities (cf. Asad 1983). Even the separation of what is and what is not "religion" (sacred versus secular) does not necessitate that "the realm of the religious and the realm of the sacred [be] coterminous" (Moore and Myerhoff 1977:3; 20). That is, what may be considered "religious" is not necessarily a part of what is "sacred" (Ibid.).

However, among Indo-Trinidadians, the sacred/secular dichotomy, or what I call a distinction between sacred and profane, is decidedly a matter of equating what is religious with what is sacred. This parallel by definition deflects its opposite, secular/profane, but the quality of sacrality is not entirely defined by the notion of "spiritual." It is my contention that a larger trope of purity contributes to the notion of sacrality, underlying dualities of sacred and profane, and also partly constituting them. Although I do not attribute as much agency to tropes, as they function in discourse, as does White (1978), I do employ the concept of trope to my study as he generally intends it:

> Tropes generate figures of speech or thought by their variation from what is 'normally' expected, and by the associations they establish between concepts normally felt not to be related or to be related in ways different from that suggested in the trope used (White 1978:2).

The character of an individual's religious belief and practice is significantly contingent upon the nature of extant boundaries, upon following the ideal of a religion's

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"purity" or coherence. This resonates with other constructions of purity that together function as an organizing metaphor, or trope, in Trinidad, and which always must contend with the simultaneous claim to callaloo (mixed) constitution. Ideologies of racial and ethnic purity must reconcile with the need for equality and cooperation, and where ideologies of the purity of culture and tradition--although perhaps aiding resistance to colonial and post-colonial hegemony--must reconcile with the pursuit and incorporation of modernity and "progress." Just as historians have underscored a pre-existing class-race-color system of stratification in Trinidad,[2] into which Indian indentured immigrants were analytically incorporated over the decades (in more or less procrustean fashion), there also existed implicit and explicit concerns with purity, particularly racial and religious, that served as the ideological structure against which the immigrants' concerns were juxtaposed and to varying extent integrated. This issue is, by my deduction, usually spoken of in the literature in terms of "race"; much is retrospectively made of the "racialism" (racism) between colonial Afro and Indo populations allegedly predisposed (culturally, historically) to harbor those feelings. However, I believe racism and race consciousness were, and remain, an expression of something more fluid and complex: the shaping forces of a

[2]Gender rarely has figured into these reconstructions.

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segmented labor market working in concert with those of Euro, Afro, and Indo moral precepts about social order and control and quality of person.

Linked most directly with genotype/phenotype and religious belief and practice, the purity/impurity trope among Indo-Trinidadians also signals a concern with boundaries, authenticity, and assimilation/subsumption. The cultural ambivalence that Trinidadians evince about "crossovers" of any kind relates to their social conundrum of a callaloo configuration whose most salient disaggregation down is in terms of an Afro-Indo dualism. For racial considerations, ethnic "mixing" threatens the identity of distinct groups, leaving room for jeopardized political viability, and aesthetic/phenotypical unpredictability. Among Indo-Trinidadians, the latter is, of course, spoken of as if it were important in and of itself. But its equal if not greater importance lies in what it points to: social-cultural boundary transgression. Similarly, if the differences between, say, Islam and Hinduism become too ambiguous, their identity and therefore existence may be threatened and their practice made less meaningful to participants by this process. Intermixing of religions has the potential to challenge the knowledge and execution of correct belief and practice, and therefore jeopardizes piety (reverence and devotion).

Purity is linked with morality in part through piety:

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conscientiously and sincerely upholding the tenets of the din or the sanatan dharm (respectively, the Muslim and Hindu religious way of life), means exercising religious practice correctly, keep one's religion distinct in doing so, and as fully as possible apprehending the significance and importance of one's actions. The notion of purity also is the nexus of ostensibly distinct religious and racial/ethnic domains, a kind of middle-ground convergence between both kinds of group identity. An issue for both Hindus and Muslims that will be explored in later chapters, the multivalent meaning that purity holds in linking religion and race/ethnicity is revealed in the following narratives.

The first is a conversation I had with a Hindu neighbor. Like his Muslim counterpart below, my neighbor links religious, racial/ethnic, and cultural boundaries in his philosophy of social relations.

> There are only two races, white and black. The white man rules throughout. Up to now the white people rules. [If Indo and Afro are both black, then they can marry each other?] No, we the Indians, the West Indians, don't allow it. Because...We just don't like it, we ent like that. But a Muslim could marry a Hindu, [but] we don't like it. And the breed change [with Afro-Indo intermarriage]. Call it a travesao, a dougla. The children wouldn't be pure Indians. [What's good about being pure?] Blessed are the pure in spirit, for they shall...They have it in the Bible, yes? [But why is pure good?] Pure is always good. You like to drink drugsy water, water that have drugs in it? [But people are not water.] But they are made from water. Clean clothes is better than dirty clothes, if you going to San Fernando. [But you said a Muslim could marry a Hindu and be pure?] Yeah. [You said Afro and Indo can't marry because "our religion is Indian." What do you mean?] Creole [Afro-Trinidadian] is creole and Indian is Indian, man. Alright, alright,

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let me tell you. Hindu is a religion, Muslim, that's a religion, Christian is a religion, Kabir Panthi is a religion, Seunarine is a religion. Yeah, all these is religions. But is one point it come to: we is Indians. [Christian is Indian, too?] Yeah, Christian mix up with all religion, such as Hindus and so on. [But then Indian religion is not pure exactly, right?] We the people make it impure, but through God's side we are his children and we are pure people. The wording is just different, but the translation is the same, it come into one God. Is all one God, anyhow. Don't mind what language you pray, what denomination you is, God listen to your prayer. [Why is Indo and Afro marriage impure and the religions mixed up is still pure?] The people have it so, it have a caste system. The Indian must not marry a creole, must not marry a Spanish. They don't like it, the Indians. [Why don't they like it?] They say we have to married we own, we own jat, we own people, man. [What's a jat?] We own religion. [But a Hindu marrying a Christian isn't the same religion.] But they are Indians. [What did you mean, our religion is Indian?] As a Hindu, as I done tell you beforehand. [So it's the religion that makes it not good to marry Negroes?] Yeah. A Negro must married with a Negro. [What about a Hindu man marrying a white woman?] That is possible, because the Indian, you know, is still passable than to married a creole. [What do you mean?] You don't understand? My brother-in-law married his three daughters to Swedish boys, sparkin' white, they had blue eyes. If parents say no to their child's choice for a marriage, they get annoyed and drink gramazone.[3] That is the password I have to use. If my daughter like that boy, and I and my lady [wife] say no, the word is they go and take gramazone and they dead. [What if your daughter wanted to marry a Negro?] That is a burning shame. We don't like the race, man. Let she go and take it. [You wouldn't say yes to a Negro?] No. [Why is Negro and Indian impure, and white and Indian not?] Indian and white will match. Any way they move [behave, interact]. If they moving about; they having good children. Their complexion is fair, they're not as the Negroes. [What if the Negro is fair fair?] No, a Negro is a Negro, man. The Chinee have a society, you now. They must not married a Indian girl or a creole girl. If they do, that put them as outcast. A pure Indian, a pure white man. That mean to say, a Indian

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[3]Gramazone, a common pesticide, is known as "the Indian tonic," due to its alleged frequency in suicide and suicide attempts among Indo-Trinidadians.

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> is a Indian and a white man is a white man. [An Indian is a black?] Yeah. [Then why, when they get married, is it not impure?] Their complexion, their behavior, their love is matching. [The only thing that doesn't match is their complexion?] That don't match because the white man is all the time a ruler, and the Indians all the time called by the white man a coolie.

The second narrative is an Indo-Trinidadian Muslim's commentary on the existence of the Jamaat al Muslimeen, an Afro-Trinidadian dominated mosque and center in the north of Trinidad:

> ...Some of the differences [in this jamaat] are the refusal of the Afro-Muslim to participate in the Islamic Culture, e.g., the singing of Kassidas, the playing of Islamic instruments and the wearing of Muslim dress (shalwar). It is the feeling of the majority of the Indo-Muslims that the Afro-Muslims are using Islam for their own ulterior motives such as infiltrating the mosque as could be seen by their position on polygamy, interracial marriage...It is the most profound feeling that the Indo-Muslims do not want to integrate with Afro-Muslims as that would make [former Prime Minister] Dr. Eric Williams dreams of douglarising the purity of the races come true (sic) (quoted in Ryan 1991:101).

That "polygamy," "interracial marriage," and "douglarising the purity of the races" are included in a critique that otherwise speaks to authenticity and legitimacy, signals the consequences of the impure; that is, defiling or profaning that which is protected (sacred) and pristine (pure). Taking issue with these particular Afro-Trinidadians' alleged reluctance to "participate in the Islamic Culture"--here clearly defined in terms of Indian culture and tradition--elides into concern over cultural consequences, expressed in racial/ethnic (geno/phenotypical) terms, where "douglarization"--the mixing of Indian with other, notably

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African-descent, peoples--spells doom for Indo-Trinidadians as a viable ethno-cultural group. Here, Islam and Indian tradition are synonymous, and an affront to one threatens the other. In a sense, piety safeguards the pure--both religious and racial/ethnic.

The particular conditions of Trinidadian society, historically riven with competing ideologies of racial/cultural identity (which in turn help shape collective values of personhood, class distinctions, and ethnic group worth), also call for a consideration of what is not communicated aloud, what may be contradicted or amended later, and the emergent and repetitive leitmotifs present in rhetorical discourse and daily conversation. The prevalent concern among Trinidadians as they communicate with each other is with interlocutors--unseen as well as seen.[4] In particular, invisible or attenuated interlocutors, as I term them, such as ideas or groups of people (not immediately present), are the entities that people address directly or indirectly in conversation and debate. Moreover, religious aggregates or ethnic groups are constantly in each others' consciousness, shaping the development of other aggregates and groups. Each acts as interlocutor to the rest. It is the underestimation of the significance of this conception of interlocutors that, to my

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[4]Relevant here is Brenneis's (1987) discussion of "indirection" in speech and other forms of communication.

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mind, leads to a focus on Indo-Trinidadians (Hindus, Muslims, or otherwise) that emphasizes formal prescriptions rather than the nuances and complexities of informal modes of expression.

One way to get at the rhetorical purposes and underlying meanings is to pay attention to both the formal and informal contexts of dialogue and discussion. In doing so, I build on my reading of Turner's (1967) analysis of symbolic phenomena, specifically, his notion of "exegetical meaning," or the meanings that are exhibited in what people say about a given symbol or set of symbols. Whether it be the highly structured arena of a ritual performance, the fairly structured arena of a public commemoration, or the loosely structured arena of casual conversation, ideas are expressed in response to stated and unstated (implicit, assumed) catalysts; even the latter reveal over time "basic conceptual patterns" (Linger 1993) and complex associations in people's ways of thinking and constructions of meaning.

The dialectic between religious heterogeneity and homogeneity negotiates creative variations and efficacious borrowing. Yet the very fact of choice, within a central Trinidadian trope of pure/impure (i.e., mixed)--deriving historically from the ethnic-class basis of stratification, presents a puzzle. In a context of idealized ethnic purity (through tradition, history, "roots"), religious orthodoxy (or at least ideally unambiguous affiliation) and authentic

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cultural forms and practices, choice is socially and psychologically problematic. In other words, choices always indicate that purity can be defiled, so to speak, that authenticity can be challenged, that legitimacy is contingent. Negotiating "mixtures" within an trope of purity is an ambivalent process, involving assessment of appropriate forms and justifications in opting for them. But many times a resolution can be reached: with the work of ideology, mixes can be ascribed a purity (i.e., legitimacy) of their own.

A cultural construct, the trope of purity involves notions of essence and authenticity. Rather than negating history (that is, denying or downplaying the historical facts of populations intermingling), quests for and claims of purity call for its reinterpretation. Through being synonymous, "religious" and "sacred" in Trinidad take on another meaning, that of the unassailable; purity through separateness is an important dimension of the religio-cultural practices of Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians.

the challenge of tradition

Tradition, "genuine and spurious" (Handler and Linnekin 1984), gets interpreted, assessed, and debated in ritual performance and in religious and secular festivals among Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians. The multivalence of tradition speaks directly to the "correctness" of religio-cultural practice and thus to its value in establishing or

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maintaining ethnic groups' social legitimacy. It also speaks to the precarious divide between religious/sacred and secular/profane, as particular traditional practices are invoked or avoided as not appropriate to one or the other domain. "Real" Indian tradition can be seen by Indo-Trinidadians as timeless and essential(ized) culture serving as a crucible of heritage against political domination and cultural absorption by the state or potentially by other ethnic groups, notably Afro-Trinidadians. "Real" Indian tradition can also, however, be denigrated as backward, as inhibiting progress, modernization, and achievement. A telling example of this is what one of my neighbors told me one evening as we visited. A Hindu convert to Islam through marriage, she said she had gotten into an argument with another woman, a Hindu, while "making market." Eventually, she intentionally insulted the woman by calling her a chamar. What is interesting about this invective is not so much the contemporary meaning of caste, although certainly, as Hindus, both women would understand the significance of alleged membership in the lowest caste ranks. Instead, I think the real core of the insult was in evoking an at best ambivalent characteristic of Indian cultural heritage: the backward "tradition" of ascribed status, i.e., the caste system. Certainly since the British Raj, if not earlier, an Oriental caste system has been unfavorably compared with an Occidental "free market" of achieved status. As a British

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colony, this has been the case as well in Trinidad. So even though caste has come to be seen as a dubious quality of Hinduism, the insult is not limited to, nor even principally about hierarchical challenges. An ethnic dimension is added, since "caste" in integrally linked with (Indian) ethnicity in Trinidad, through being both central and exclusive to it. Indo-Trinidadians' ambivalence toward their traditions is revealed insofar as chamar means both "lowly individual" and "remnant of an undesirable, non-progressive traditional, strictly Indian practice." In calling up these associations, my neighbor was (unintentionally) underscoring the equivocal nature of nostalgia and a reliance on heritage in identity construction. The question among Indo-Trinidadians is thus: (how) can ethnic group success be achieved on its own cultural terms, and if so, how will those cultural terms of "tradition"--religious, cultural--be modeled?

A language of cultural authenticity helps define the boundaries of ethnic groups, and their social legitimacy helps form the discourse through which political claims are made vis-a-vis that state. Religious interpretation and expression serve as one very important and contested domain of <u>authenticity</u> of identity and <u>legitimacy</u> of social place, where questions about "culture" and "tradition" are framed and spelled out. In this context, however, even among Indo-Trinidadians there exists ambivalence about the quality of

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their culture: too "traditional," "Eastern," and associated images are uncomfortably close to "backward"; too "modern," "Western," and associated images are perilously close to rootless and ultimately fraudulent. We can view authenticity of identity and legitimacy of social place as themes that ultimately refer to processes of attempted empowerment whereby various constituencies of Indo-Trinidadians assert their own (and challenge each other's) claims to being recognized by the state--although at times paradoxically couched as rejection of the state--and hence deserving recipients of fair shares of resources and opportunities.

carnival as moral barometer

A distinction between sacred and profane is synonymous here with a distinction between "religion" and "culture." "Culture" is what is defined and orchestrated by the state. The state sponsors, promotes, and organizes a Trinidadian national identity in the form of public festivals and the development of tourism. Carnival figures largely in Trinidadian conceptualizations of "culture," as both authentic heritage, evinced in an annual historical event and as a metaphor for a particular kind of sensibility and world-view. The "Carnival mentality" (coined by former Prime Minister Eric Williams) is simultaneously celebrated and decried by Trinidadians irrespective of ethnic background. It represents both a positive image of easy-

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going, joyous, spontaneous joi d'vivre allegedly characteristic of the Trinidadian persona and a negative image of a live-for-the-moment, cavalier, irresponsible immorality.

The "Carnival mentality" is, in Indo-Trinidadian discourse, not only a metaphor for the relationship between work and play, but of an essential difference between Indo- and Afro-Trinidadians, one that ultimately speaks to their respective contributions to national life (cf. B. Williams 1990; Hanson 1989). In a fascinating inversion of critiques of capitalist relations of production, Deosaran (1978) points to the "dilemma" of the "apparent conflict between the alleged 'leisure syndrome' of the larger society and the 'work ethic' of the Indians..., [one] enmeshing race, culture, politics, and values' (1978:30-31).

Not only allegedly indicating an essentialized dissonance between Indo and Afro, Carnival also serves as a metaphor for assessing distinctions among Indo-Trinidadians. As one non-Christian Indo-Trinidadian man commented, "Indians who relate to Carnival are essentially urbanized, Christian Indians." While in my experience this is in fact not even often the case, the veracity of his remark is not the issue here. What is at issue is the implicit contrast being made between assimilated, possibly miscegenated, and therefore less authentic (diluted, so to speak) Indo-Trinidadians--who can "relate to" things Afro-Trinidadian

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and secular (and, by extension, profane), such as Carnival--and the more "real" Indo-Trinidadians of the putatively rural and sheltered areas who have not converted to "Western" religions but sustained the purity of their true heritage.

This was brought home to me early on by an informant's comment about the festival of Sipari Mai, a syncretic devotional event associated with blessings and boons granted by a small black statue variously conceived as La Divina Pastora (the Virgin Mary) and Kali (a Hindu goddess). Known as Sipari Mai, or "Mother of Siparia" (a county seat in south Trinidad), she is the central figure of an important festival that reveals the compromise and contest that are hallmarks of Trinidadian callaloo culture and uneasy ethnic stratification. This particular friend, Jagroo, participates regularly in the Sipari Mai festival, and as an "older head" (older person) has a longitudinal perspective colored by his Indian identity. He explained to me that the festival "had singin' and dancin' whole night...we had a lot of unity in those days, the Indian people." A companion added, with passion, "it was a holy festival, with folk dances from India, no Carnival fetin'. Now they [Afro-Trinidadians] start to fete there, and so the faith is loosin' power...Since all this fetin', most of the faith for Sipari Mai gone" (quoted in Khan 1990:40-41). The message of this speaker, one that I would hear over and over

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throughout my fieldwork, was that feting, as opposed to Indian indigenous tradition, is synonymous with secular festivity and is indicative of incursions from non-Indian (and presumed dominant) sectors of the population.

Moral transgression, which defines the domain of the profane, is a notion particularly salient among Indo-Trinidadians as they construct distinctions between themselves and others, particularly Afro-Trinidadians, who are seen to epitomize (among other things) Carnival. Ironically, this association is strengthened by the state's own claims to Carnival as typically Trinidadian (and thus callaloo) yet emblematic of black culture.[5] Hence, although from quite different class, regional, and social environments, Rani B. and Ravi-Ji contrast Carnival with things sacred. Here, ethnic identity (and unity) are associated not with a particular religion but with being religious, period. This equation between religion and ethnicity, indicating the piety of their ethnic identity, distinguishes them from Afro-Trinidadians, who are portrayed as Carnival revelers and less morally bound. Furthermore, this alleged inadequacy implies the conflation of religion, race, and culture into a genetic predisposition (cf. B. Williams 1989).

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[5]"Callaloo" is a Trinidadian term metaphorically referring to an equally represented, ethnically mixed-but-distinguishable society, and literally the name of the national dish--not surprisingly, a multiple ingredient stew.

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A religious idiom of things sacred (in)forms ethnic identity, as a means of resistance to the state's perceived negligence in recognizing and valorizing the distinctive qualities of Indian ethnic identity, and thus in acknowledging Indo-Trinidadian national contribution, rights, and opportunities. A non-profane/cultural domain where the state's hegemony, it is estimated, cannot penetrate to significant degree. Indeed, the sacred is what empowers, not strictly in terms of divine presence, but through acts of worship that give vitality ("alive") and utility (belief and practice) to emblems, objects, icons, and practices that straddle the border of that which is "cultural" and that which is "religious." The profane potentially atrophies, with objectification and with inertness. Empowerment (vitality, utility) is realized through the act of belief, and belief is constituted of authentic piety ("sincerity" versus "hypocracy") and cultural knowledge (tutored understanding versus "superstition").

memories and historiographies: labor and betrayal

Whether addressing broad social processes or the experience of specific segments of a population, the metaphor of fragmentation implicitly or explicitly characterizes representations of the existential condition of these peoples; peoples who are "mimic men" (Naipaul 1967) sustaining an "absence of ruins" (Patterson 1967).

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Reflexivity as an industry here seems an apt metaphor, preoccupied as the writing has been with questions of self, identity, the nature of culture, and the social and cultural repercussions of colonial transplantation of distant populations. Particularly salient is the symbolic significance of history, especially as deployed locally in constructions of cultural distinctiveness and ethnic identity. Yet "history" as metaphor for identity encompasses a number of related metonyms: passage of time, transformation, adaptation, reconstruction, authenticity.

An exemplary case in point is the underlying theme of deception familiar to all indenture-origin Indo-Caribbean communities. As Vincent Crapanzano (pers. comm. 1991) has suggested, the Indo-Caribbean diaspora can be characterized as a "diaspora of betrayal," as compared, for example, to the "diaspora of persecution" of the Jews. This theme is expressed in two related ways, as Indian indentured immigrants tell an allegorical tale that, while not exactly apocryphal, has become larger-than-life and certainly a synecdoche for the existential condition of Indians in the Caribbean.

I hedge on the extent to which their story of sojourn is apocryphal because it has been documented that recruiters in India, at the emigration depots and throughout the territories of recruitment, were indeed unscrupulous and at times treacherous about obtaining their per capita payment.

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According to Mansingh and Mansingh (1976), "a false inflated and misleading picture of contract terms and remunerations was given to the innocent and usually illiterate intending adventurers" (1976:10; my emph.). In an account published in 1914 regarding the abolition of Indian indenture in Fiji, the theme of betrayal is also evident in the statement that "recruiters fooled Kunti and her husband at Lakhuapur district, Gorakhpur, and sent them to Fiji" (quoted in Kelly 1990:22). As Cumpston (1953:31) notes, according to a report on the export of labor migrants from India by the Committee of Inquiry in Calcutta, three of the undersigned Committee members

> concluded that coolies were generally induced to come to Calcutta by fraud and deceit, practised upon them by subordinate agents employed by Europeans and Anglo-Indians, who were mostly aware of the frauds. In many instances, the coolie was incapable of understanding his contract. Kidnapping had prevailed to a very great extent, the coolies while kept in Calcutta itself and its neighbourhood being actually in a state of close imprisonment.

Finally, Tinker (1974) suggests that in all the colonies the newly arrived indentureds were unprepared for the exigencies of estate labor partly due to physical debilitation and partly due to a psychological one, prompted by feeling "lost and betrayed" (1974:180). The descendants of Trinidad's indentured immigrants, for example, "said they had spent their first year in Trinidad 'crying' as they remembered their homes and realized how badly they had been 'tricked'..." (1974:180-81).

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This narrative of betrayal speaks of both "being fooled" into coming to the Caribbean and to rescuing the empire, "saving" the plantation system from ruin at the hands of uncooperative freed slaves and the vissicitudes of metropolitan capitalism. Indo-Trinidadians, especially elderly ones, often told me the story that their forebears were tricked into thinking they were being brought to "Chinidad" (chini being "sugar" in Hindi/Urdu), not Trinidad, where they would "sift sugar," perceived as an easy task, for an inordinate amount of daily wages. The concern over "being fooled" resonates today in Indo-Trinidadians' self-perceptions as an ethno-political body: to wit, backwardness, naivete, and sometimes "tradition" must be transcended (that is, from their predominance in the early immigrant character and experience), through formal education and economic and political opportunity, so that they cannot be "fooled" again into positions of powerlessness or disenfranchisement. Being fooled speaks to a general fear of vulnerability, whether the latter is perpetrated through means that are socially "natural" (i.e., political-economic) or supernatural (i.e., obeah). It also speaks to an interesting negotiation, particularly among Indo-Trinidadian Hindus, of the authority and power of religious specialists--both their esoteric knowledge and their community relations.

If indignantly lamenting their betrayal, it also has

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been hypothesized that indentured Indians resisted the material and ideological domination of the colonial apparatus by their maintenance and elaboration of indigenous cultural practices. A case can be made that cultural resistance, as well, underlies consciousness about the past, and that the efforts at maintenance and elaboration helped to gradually provide a conceptual space wherein a reified notion of culture evolved. Haraksingh (1986) points out that

> cultural resistance and adaptation might indeed be regarded as the most outstanding as well as the most persistent form of resistance among Indian workers. It permitted a definition of otherness which amounted to defiance, both in the insulation and consequent feelings of solidarity which that [sic] engendered, as well as in the divergent concepts of status and rank which were implied. Culture defined an area to which Indians, after the trials of the work place, could retreat to heal and bind the wounds, before sallying forth again...the safety of the cultural boundaries did allow scope for...the infusion of self-esteem (1986:228).

Yet Haraksingh also perceptively observes that beginning around the 1930s, trade union organizers began to work in the villages around the estate barracks, and in Indians' efforts to conceal their activities concerning labor organizing and worker/class consciousness, "the role of religion...seemed both to act as a kind of covering canvas and to lend its own sanction to the workers' attempts to refashion their existence" (1986:230). Therefore, because "in the early Indian villages the concepts of religion and culture were used interchangeably, and many persons

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persisted in seeing the defense of one as mixed up with the preservation of the other...", what was thought of as "religious" was not always delimited within a "narrow theological vein" (1986:230). Haraksingh goes on to note briefly that over time the Indians "became a little more discriminating" (1986:230) in their conceptualizations of religious and cultural distinctions, and it is my premise that not only was this process more than a little, it is of major significance for the nature and workings of identity and stratification among Indo-Trinidadians.

Jayawardena (1984) makes a case for Guyanese and Fijian Indians that I believe applies equally well to Trinidadian Indians. He suggests that the emigration experience among overseas Indians established a "historical lacuna," a hiatus that rendered their recent past an unknown. Whatever knowledge of the recent past Indian immigrants have, he continues, is retained as ideology and is not a "living, continuing historical tradition"; the imagined past for these immigrants is a very distant one, and although indentureship still informs attitudes, what acts as the source of legitimation is either that (imagined) remote past or contemporary times (1984:430-31), since their immediate past "everyone deprecated as 'coolie culture' anyway" (1984:441).

Though contested among Indo-Trinidadians with respect to its substantive aspect, the past as a formal concept is

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fundamental to group identity; it is a touchstone for authenticity and hence a legitimating vehicle of the present. Often vested with the notion of betrayal and always infused with the recognition of toil ("hard work"), the past is intimately linked to a "grass-roots" (laboring class) consciousness that is permeated with memories of estate barracks life or subsistence agriculture or illiteracy.[6] The representation of the past conflates an image of the "coolie" that is at once local rural proletariat (cf. Mintz 1985) and foreign cultural interloper.

In discussions of the meaning of work in social relations, others have invoked a plantation legacy model (e.g., Beckford 1976; Patterson 1967; Goveia 1965). In plantation societies, where status was contingent on

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[6]"Grass-roots" is part of the Trinidadian lexicon referring to social stratification. Its closest analogy is "working class" (which actually includes a number of class segments), although notions of culture are factored in as expressions of class and as means of interpreting class position. For Indo-Trinidadians, "grass-roots" connotes notions of heritage, history, and subjective experience in addition to objective structural position. As Stuempfle (1991) correctly notes, "grass-roots" is more than "working-class" due to the high rates of unemployment and self-employment in Trinidad. Moreover, it does not necessarily connote the negative aspects of "lower class." Stuempfle (1991:fn 1) rightly, to my mind, includes in the category "grass-roots" skilled and unskilled manual workers, small farmers, and street vendors. I also concur with his categorization of the Trinidadian "middle class," which contains professionals, white collar workers, small and middle-sized businessmen; and the "upper class," which consists of large businessmen, who, I would add, have regional and international connections.

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engaging in the least amount of labor and in the coercion of others to labor,

> it is reasonable to say that linkages among these attitudes served as preconditions for contemporary conceptions of what it means to 'be somebody'...Past attitudes continue to inform current views of the relations between different forms of work and such factors as racial or ethnic identity, and the social and moral worth of an individual...(B. Williams 1991:55).

However, reliance on a plantation legacy model is not always a self-evident explanation of contemporary propensities or ideologies. High status gained from not working or managing the work of others is not limited to plantation societies. The plantation legacy instills a notion of morality through formal and informal education, a notion that people then build on, creating or refining emblems of identity, stereotypes, and cultural/biological attributes. A more nuanced grasp of the articulation of grass-roots consciousness with notions of heritage in Hindu and Muslim construction of identities is afforded in Thompson's (1978:151) suggestion that "class" be approached as a "field of force." Allowing for a set of expectations rather than rules, the "class process" necessarily involves consideration of "behavior over time" (1978:147). As I show in the chapters that follow, the experience as well as conditions of class position, and particularly the leitmotifs and practices that express that experience, both constitute and reflect a key dimension of Indo-Trinidadians' ideas about group and self. For a grass-roots heritage is

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felt to be a large part of what enabled Indian forbears to stave off capitulation to colonial hegemony. As I also demonstrate, however, it is in post-colonial times that grass-roots heritage and all it connotes becomes more ambivalently perceived.

"living good with people"

In the Trinidadian context, stratification is experienced both as significant differences in wealth, occupation, and education, and as various kinds of social status or prestige deriving from concomitant styles of living. While there is a hegemonic set of prestige standards to which all social strata subscribe to some degree, ideas about equality, mobility, and social distinction are not expressed uniformly across all ethnic groups and classes. What exists are various sets of moral criteria for alternative ideas. These are loosely associated with and interact among various aggregates of people, on terms that are cultural-/ethnic-, religious-, class-based, and so on. On instance of this is the simultaneous existence among Indo-Trinidadians of hierarchical and egalitarian values that contain contrastive ideas about class position and status mobility. These values are expressed, respectively, as the valorization, assertion, and visible demonstration of upward mobility versus an ideal which says that, at least theoretically, human beings are equal, or equally worthy, and that class

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status in these terms is irrelevant. Both involve an ideal of behavior toward others that is guided either primarily by emphasizing or diffusing social hierarchy. Since the notions of equality and hierarchy refer to both the way individuals and groups valorize each other and the way that differential status among them is interpreted, these notions are charged with a "moral significance" (cf. Durkheim and Mauss 1963:84) akin to what Brenneis describes as "a certain social sensitivity" in the egalitarianism among Indo-Fijians (1987:239ff): "One is concerned to maintain one's standing as 'equal', and perceived affronts by others pose serious threats," and when it comes to maintaining social order the puzzle is how to simultaneously be "publicly recognized as effective and accomplished...while not offending others?"

When I contrast hierarchy against egalitarianism I do not mean a concept of hierarchy in the sense that Dumont intends. He posits that "hierarchy is repressed, made non-conscious," and is "replaced by a manifold network of inequalities (Dumont 1980:265; my emphasis). In other words, hierarchy is "submerged" and inequality is "articulated" (Douglass 1992:269). In concordance with Dumont, hierarchies, according to Durkheim and Mauss (1963:84), make for fixed boundaries in social classification and are located cognitively, whereas social classifications with "moral significance" are more flexible, being "harder to pin down" (Douglass 1992:272). I draw no

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categorical distinction between "hierarchy" and "inequality" as concepts, and see them as synonymous for my purposes here.

Among Indo-Trinidadians, we can think of hierarchies as unevenly ranked social positions reflecting both material and symbolic resources (wages/income, consumption, authority, prestige) that operate within the broader system of social stratification in the island as a whole. Hierarchies in this instance are not as systemic or totalizing as other, deeper structural orders (such as Trinidad's ethnically segmented labor market), but are certainly in concert with the latter. When Muslim and Hindu Indo-Trinidadians grapple with, for example, the relationship between mobility and reciprocity, between demonstrating success and managing maljo (the evil eye, and the prime vector of envy, and therefore discomfort and disharmony), between confirming group bonds through the authenticity of roots and assimilating into the dominant culture, they are negotiating egalitarianism and hierarchy. I argue in this study that hierarchies (like inequality) are permeable and their management is undertaken in part through ritual--as a means of asserting social status and position and as a locus of debate about it.

knowledge, power, and authority

Hindu and Muslim informants repeatedly told me that the times they most enjoyed/profited from a ritual observance

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was when the pandit or imam made an effort to "keep it simple" or "let we understand." Connected to the idea of being "fooled," "understanding" implies, among other things, being able to see through something and not have the wool pulled over ones eyes. Resonant with these concerns is the whole matter of superstition, its place in religious discourse, and the role and nature of ritual in Hindu and Muslim religious practice. "Superstition" has many connotations in the Trinidadian context, but two central notions are backwardness and cunumunu--a local dialect slang term for the idea that someone is a simpleton (usually a cuckold or a country bumpkin). Thus, the importance of knowing, correctly and completely, becomes especially salient in religious practice.

There are interesting historical foundations for this phenomenon. In the emerging Indo-Trinidadian (and Indo-Guyanese) villages of the 1870s and 1880s,

> [n]ot all priests [pandits] were of the same level of learning and understanding, and it seems fairly clear that some of them substituted taboo for teaching. The less learned made much capital of the mystery associated with the Sanskrit mantras, words and phrases which in any case were often incapable of any precise translation and where the sound itself was important. It is to be surmised that priests of this category took refuge in the power of the ritual, and fostered a situation in which something had to be done or left undone simply because the pandit said so. The absence of explanation and the substitution of ritual for enlightenment would fuel 'reformist' charges levelled by the emerging Arya Samajists in the 1930s against priests of the orthodox school (Haraksingh 1986:232; my emph.).

The importance of explanation and ritual versus

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enlightenment have become defined partly in terms of formal religious and secular education rather than specifically in terms of revisionist/reformist movements. Indeed, as I will show in subsequent chapters, concern with the dichotomies of habitual rather than inspired, and fraudulent rather than familiar, punctuate the religious discourse of both Hindus and Muslims, particularly with reference to issues of authenticity, legitimacy, and piety. In any event, a "diaspora of betrayal" has many nuances in the construction of ethnicity and religious ideology among Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians, far beyond memories of the indenture contracts and disingenuousness about the distant past.

Ritual performances are arenas where religious piety and cultural knowledge can fortify an individuals' ethno-religious identity while avoiding any exclusionary behaviors or attitudes toward others (outside a given ethno-religious boundary) that can jeopardize the fragile yet crucial social relations in heterogeneous rural communities. Though I do not want to imply that in everyday social interaction there is a lack of conflict, among all ethnic groups, Trinidadian cultural values put a premium on not "showing a bad face" through maintaining propriety and what is generically referred to as (good) "behavior," in attempting to "live good with people." Religious piety and cultural knowledge of traditions are ways to reinforce conformity to the moral imperatives upon which community co-existence pivot. For

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individuals these include temperance, marital fidelity, personal sacrifice, charitable undertakings, and/or regular involvement in ritual performances, all of which affirm piety and which provide a context for "performing" tradition (cf. Brenneis 1987).

Two key considerations regarding Indo-Trinidadians are that 1) multiple religions exist simultaneously and are overlapping, and 2) different situations or contexts exist for an individual's conversion. Individuals may convert at marriage, or at times of crisis. One embraces various religious ideologies throughout the life-cycle, as individuals reassess and seek meaning in life. Several questions follow from this: what are people's allegiances about? How do people prioritize different religious affiliations in a multiple context? Religious affiliation is not necessarily a decision between X or Y or Z. At the same time, functions are about choice, an ostensibly exclusive commitment that negotiates the parameters of religious expression. This is the domain in which the relationship between religion and ethnicity is salient and problematic.

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## Part Two. A Caribbean Diaspora

### Chapter Three. The Repercussions of Empire: Emigration, Indenture, Assimilation

> In the nineteenth century...principles of government in India, as in other imperial possessions, were based on an increasing awareness and acceptance of the idea that commercial connexion involved obligations for the protection, education and elevation of subject races. The East India Company controlled a dominion where frontiers were continually advancing, and society was politically in a state of disintegration (Cumpston 1953:3).

When inquiring into the social and cultural evolution of Trinidad's ethnic communities, understanding how antecedent forces or events inform both contemporary conditions and their interpretation requires considering two paramount issues in the history of the Caribbean. One is the nature of the various immigrant labor streams that were subject to fluctuating international market conditions and other exigencies of the period; a second one is the nature of the principal sending society of immigrants to be indentured, that is, Indians. Both have informed the characterization, and hence comprehension of contemporary Trinidadian (and, indeed, Caribbean) populations. In order to understand the distinctions that I believe were gradually being made by Indo-Trinidadians between "religion" and "culture," we need to understand something of the conditions that impelled Indian laborers to brave the uncertainties of

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the kala pani (dark water)[1] and of a life among strangers in strange lands.

In this chapter I examine briefly the historical context of indenture and emigration from India and the experience of Indian laborers on West Indian plantations. My intention is twofold. First, I want to give a glimpse of the social tensions and unstable rule of the British Raj in India, the demographic and cultural intricacies of sub-continental population movements, and the heterogeneity of Indian migrants in the New World. The convergence of these processes shaped both the configuration of Britain's indenture project and the experience of "bound coolies" abroad--processes that have only relatively recently been factored into research on New World South Asian diasporas. Second, I underscore that certain contemporary leitmotifs in Indo-Trinidadians' narratives about their past and the affinities they assert as binding them together (as "Indians" or as "Hindus and Muslims") are located in the material conditions of plantation life and the social and cultural forms that evolved in tandem. Specifically, these leitmotifs include the notion of jahaji bhai, "hard work," a proclivity for agriculture, and the maintenance of "we culture" through "religion."

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[1]Scholars have pointed out that this bravery in crossing has been exaggerated to an extent for dramatic effect; long prior to the institution of indenture, various individuals and groups of Indians and other South Asians engaged in long-distance travels.

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India: Vicissitudes of the 19th Century

On the eve of the emancipation of British slaves (1834) and the beginning of the end of the dominance of West Indian sugar production on the world-market, the demand for various successive labor forces for the struggling plantations was influenced by the ideological climate and economic circumstances of mid-19th century Europe and its colonies. In the discussion that follows, my overarching point is that the power relations between the British Imperial Government, the colonial planters, and the abolitionists set in motion not only the machinery of the indentured labor system but also how it would take shape and thus affect the lives of the laborers, to an extent in the home territories and significantly in the lands of destination.

In "a world brittle with political and industrial revolution" (Cumpston 1953:1), the ideological climate within Britain and between Britain and its colonies--especially vast and particularly lucrative ones such as India or those with long-standing economic and geographic utility such as in the West Indies--was highly charged with the competing interests and convictions of different groups. Following Cumpston's (1953:1,35,42-43) disaggregation, among the multiple discourses of the day were those which decried the dependence and financial burden of Britain's colonies, vigorously promoting free trade; others which emphasized the value of "little Englands" strewn throughout the world to

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alleviate over-population in the metropole and under-population in the vast territories abroad; colonial planters, desirous of a cheap and compliant labor force; and, the religious and humanitarian underpinnings of the Abolition Movement which directed "benevolent paternalism" overseas, or the protection of backward peoples of the Empire (Ibid:1).

In concert with the religious ideology of this period were contemporary notions about individual freedom and fundamental human rights (ultimately Enlightenment-derived). As these were interpreted with regard both to India (as a colony) and planters' continuous requests for workers, they were applied to the idea of immigrant labor: for example, according to the (British) Court of Directors in 1838, Indians within the purview of the East India Company had the "unquestionable" legal capacity to participate in work contracts throughout the Empire (ibid:42-43).[2] Yet contrasting with these "fundamental citizen rights" were the concerns voiced by the Indian Government regarding potentially extensive outflow of labor from the sub-continent and the possibility of maltreatment of its people; the colonies' fears of social conflict among workers, and between planters and workers, as well as the potential among

[2]Compare this irony with Holt's (1992) comment that: for 19th century "British policymakers the problem of abolition was, at its root, a labor problem: how safely to transform a dependent laborer into a self-motivated free worker" (1992:33-34).

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resident laborers for future economic competition; and the public outcry that indenture was a thinly disguised slavery (ibid). These three were the only stances that carried any weight, however, in the struggles over the organization of plantation production in the colonies (ibid).

Planters were at odds with the British government insofar as they blamed the post-1838 difficulties in the West Indies on Acts of Parliament: slavery's abolition in 1834; and the duties on sugar from Mauritius being equalized in 1825, as they were on East Indian sugar in 1836 (Cumpston 1953:44). Planters saw their future primarily in terms of labor, demanding metropolitan protection to assure a stable market and considerable margin of profit (Ibid). Hence, despite their resentments, planters hastened to make concessions to the abolitionist lobby as well as to the press and the government, while trying to persuade them to support a government-sponsored immigrant labor project (Ibid:35).

The traditional assumption in the historiography of Caribbean slavery and emancipation has been, with a few exceptions (e.g., Hall 1978), that a dire labor shortage was created by the newly freed population not being willing to stay on the plantations. This is often attributed to a vaguely posited claim that former slaves did not want to be "reminded" of their recent servitude by remaining in its context; in essence, bad memories motivated their relocation to urban centers or hinterlands. As recent scholarship

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(e.g., Holt 1992; Mangru 1987) has shown, however, in actuality the more pervasive problem for planters than availability of labor was tractability and cost of labor. Depressing wages and controlling employment ultimately meant deterring the likely formation of the now free workers into an organized (and thus potentially self-empowering) proletariat. This could be done by looking elsewhere for agricultural labor--laborers who would be docile (if only initially) in an unfamiliar environment and whose wages would take on a magnitude in workers' estimation when compared with their former conditions.

While Trinidad would receive post-Emancipation indentured or immigrant laborers from China, Madeira (Portugal), West Africa, other Caribbean colonies, and the United States (after 1812, when black British soldiers were relocated to Britain's possessions), the majority of indentureds came from India--in fact, over one half million all told, especially from the regions of Uttar Pradesh, Oudh, and Bihar in the north, and Madras in the south. During this period in India there were already entrenched precedents for drastic turmoil, dissolution, and suffering in the lives of the future emigrants, precedents that motivated (compelled?) them to leave and that had established particularly rapid and disruptive change throughout 19th century India. The monumental nature of these changes require that, among other things, the albeit

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very real instability of estate life for indentured workers not be implicitly contrasted with a coherent and constant peasant-villager lifeway on the sub-continent.

Colonial planters considered it efficacious to combine laborers on an estate from a wide variety of regions and linguistic groups (Tinker 1974); indeed, Jayawardena (1979) notes that on one plantation in Fiji, for example, there were laborers hailing from 94 districts in India. Certainly this fostered the disruption of familiar social organization and militated against collective communication among workers, at least initially, much like this method did on Caribbean (and North American) slave plantations. However, the long years of dire economic and political hardships formed a context for labor migration which undoubtedly contributed to ongoing transformations in patterns of behavior and beliefs among eventual emigrants before they ever set sail.

Catalysts of any form of large-scale and protracted emigration are rarely singular or simple. In mid-19th century India there were a number of simultaneous forces at work that motivated masses of people to seek out indenture depots. These can be roughly grouped into three categories: indigenous cultural proclivities; natural disasters; political and economic factors.

While the changes wrought by nature and by imperialism during the 19th century were monumental, population

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mobility, particularly labor-related, was already a familiar pattern throughout India. Both temporary and seasonal migration existed, and people were "drawn from various districts and comprised both upper and lower castes" (Mangru 1987:64). For example, Mangru (1987) suggests that colonial labor recruitment was facilitated in Bhojpuri-speaking districts in Bihar (whence vast numbers of indentureds to Trinidad originated) because of the men's long experience as recruits in Moghul armies (which historically had been enlisting men from myriad regions of the sub-continent) and as migrants to Bengal for employment as "bearers, peons and watchmen...Imbued with a spirit of adventure and quite accustomed to leaving home, the Bhojpuri was always prepared 'to carve his fortune' beyond the 'kala pani' [black/dark water]" (Mangru 1987:66). The point here is to bear in mind that it was not only external forces that served to institutionalize emigration; rather, migration patterns culturally a part of South Asian society had a part to play in the evolution of the system of indentured labor.

Throughout South Asia in the 19th century, small pox, cholera, leprosy, and dysentery were endemic (Mangru 1987:3). In addition, the 1860s were particularly stricken with famines (although there were prior famines of considerable magnitude, such as those in 1804 and 1837). The Demerara (British Guiana) depot, for example, was a busy station, as in 1860 alone an estimated half a million people

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migrated to districts contiguous to the afflicted Northwestern Provinces and the Punjab, in search of food and cash (Mangru 1987:68). Not surprisingly, then, the total number of indentured immigrants during the 1860-1861 period was twice that of the following year (Ibid:69). In 1866, Orissa, Bengal, and Bihar experienced an equally severe famine due to deficient harvests during the preceding two years; again in 1869 the Northwestern Provinces faced food scarcity and inflated prices (ibid). And throughout the 1870s, unpredictable harvests kept the numbers of emigrants steady (ibid).

To this disequilibrium were added the political upheavals that were a consequence of British presence and policy in India. The first half of the 19th century in India saw the disintegration of the Moghul Empire and the rise of the British East India Company and its powerful influence, as it encouraged in-fighting and competition among the individual nawobs and rajahs. By the 1850s the most significant factor in this social and political turmoil was the Indian Mutiny of 1857, when the native Bengal Army revolted, sparking off many empathetic rebellions against the Company (Mangru 1987:4, 71). Although the Mutiny was suppressed in 1858, "colonial emigration from Calcutta reached its apogee following the disturbed state of Northern India in the late 1850s" (Ibid:71).

Changes in landholdings and tenure brought about by

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British rule destabilized the landed classes. Between 1852 and 1857, for example, more than 20,000 estates were confiscated ostensibly on account of improper titles (Mangru 1987:4). And as British officials displaced the traditional aristocracy, landlord-tenant relations were transformed--especially so in the final quarter of the century (Vertovec 1992:7ff; Jayawardena 1966:213ff). Whereas a form of sharecropping had existed--peasants giving a part of their harvest to landlords--British authorities imposed a system of taxation, where zamindars (great landlords) and taluqdars (lesser landlords) were impelled to extract cash rent from peasants, irrespective of production levels. Since indigenous warring between lords had been forbidden after the British Crown replaced the British East India Company's administration, taluqdars no longer had to rely on the support of their tenants, disturbing a balance of somewhat mutually dependant patron-clientelism. The new British administration, moreover, did not acknowledge land occupancy rights of cultivators, whose position, therefore, considerably worsened. Not surprisingly, as peasants increasingly grew cash crops their traditional subsistence patterns were dramatically altered, further jeopardizing potential food supplies (Neale 1962, in Vertovec 1992). Furthermore, land holdings became increasingly subdivided, and as more and more peasants could not pay their rents they were ejected from the land (Vertovec 1992). By 1873,

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eviction notices were being issued 60,000 per year (Metcalf 1964; cited in Vertovec 1992:10).

In the wake of British rule, indigenous Indian textile industries were dismantled (almost literally, as weavers' hands or thumbs were cut off), making India a consumer of British products and no longer a textile supplier for European markets (Cumpston 1953). Without alternatives, weavers and other craftspeople were forced to seek subsistence on the land, which was already overworked (Kondapi 1951; Vertovec 1992). Hence, a pool of landless laborers grew, "on the look-out for a job" (Cumpston 1953:6). As Cumpston (1953) notes, one advantage available to the landless and jobless was emigration to British colonies, where opportunities for work were abundant.

Thus, as these authors have observed, the degree of heterogeneity of indentured immigrants from India to the Caribbean and other British colonies was great indeed. Yet while differing as to region, language, religion, caste, occupation, and cultural history, the factors that compelled this diverse aggregate of people to the depots of Calcutta and Madras were related as to their genesis and perpetuation, that is, the combined forces of political and social disruption, starvation, and, to a lesser extent, disease. Local, low-level recruiters, known as arkati, easily made the initial connections with prospective immigrants, using knowledge of the immediate environment and

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individual contacts. "He knew who was in disgrace, in trouble, in desperate need, or who was credulous enough to be tempted by promises" (Mangru 1987:6).

The quintessential Indian cultural signature, working one's land, was recounted to me by many Indo-Trinidadians as being brought from the sub-continent to the Caribbean untrammeled and undisrupted, a dignified if humble pursuit. What I hope the foregoing has accomplished is to indicate that although the ideology of heritage among Indo-Trinidadians is based on certain kinds of portrayals, ones that lend honor and respectability to an abject beginning, this heritage was far more complex and far less idyllic than later visions would encourage it to seem.

Indenture and its Consequences

> People who are in the path of the world system often must cope with its demands in ways that make it anything but 'background'...It might not be too much to say that the condition of Taso's teeth, for example, can be fairly viewed as the direct consequence of external influences upon local life...[E]xternal forces are not simply counterposed to individual experience, or background for them (Mintz 1989:791).

> In polyethnic societies such as those of the Caribbean, where ethnic sections closely intermingle and where the contents of practiced cultures are very similar, an insistence on outward symbolic indices of differences becomes important. In such circumstances the need to assert a distinct identity may partly be the result of the fear of losing it (Jayawardena 1980:438).

The confluence of patterns of social stratification and religious practice has always characterized the Indo-Trinidadian community; religion among Indo-Trinidadians has

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always been at least partly a matter of politics and economics. This has not been the same for Afro-Trinidadians, who by and large embraced the Christian religions (primarily Catholicism and Protestantism) within which most Afro-Caribbean peoples have long been enculturated. The contentions of Afro-Trinidadians' social battleground primarily have involved class conflict, particularly in the form of labor struggles and political representation, and only secondarily have involved social problems expressly conceived as "cultural," such as religious expression or Afro-Caribbean identity. Exceptions have been the early African Muslims brought to the Caribbean along with the rest of the captured populations and certain, more recently developed religious forms such as Shango or Spiritual Baptists (e.g., Lovelace 1983; Houk 1993). While certainly contentions in the social battleground of Indo-Trinidadians have significantly involved similar manifestations of class conflict, the practice and content of religion has been, and continues to be a cornerstone in the cultural struggles of Muslim and Hindu Indo-Trinidadians. As Williams correctly observes,

> ...East Indians had available to them a literary tradition and forms of ritual enactment that could be used as a social structure in reserve, in part because the content of these mechanisms was not already incorporated into the dominant model. In contrast, the Christian texts Africans used were already incorporated into the dominant model (B. Williams 1984:499).

This section examines the few secondary sources

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available on Indian life and culture after their arrival and settlement in Trinidad, culling for data that specifically addresses religious practice--as resistance or otherwise. Throughout, however, I will include my Indo-Trinidadian friends' and acquaintances' own narratives about estate life and the indenture experience as they either recall or were taught it, in order to flesh out the historiography. Here, again, I underscore the articulation of material conditions and experience in giving rise to contemporary Indo-Trinidadians' constructions of identity, and also suggest some of the foundations for the salience of the trope of purity that underlies much of the local discourse about religion and culture. It is the aim of what follows to indicate that the development of social stratification and cultural hierarchies among Indo-Trinidadian Muslims and Hindus, that form part of the foundation of their ritual, discourse, and cultural politics, must be seen as emanating from important (if sometimes minute) distinctions transsecting the Indian and Indo-Trinidadian population and thus giving rise to various notions and forms of community.

Unfortunately, without recourse to key primary sources (most of which are located in archives in Britain, with some in Trinidad), the information available on any particular aspect of indenture and especially life on the estate is relatively scant. Moreover, due to the British colonial attitude toward both Indian culture and its local practice

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in Trinidad, no detailed records were kept on Indian or Indo-Trinidadian traditions or custom beyond what was necessary to maintain plantation production as smoothly and lucratively as possible. What tends to be in the literature is information about those aspects of estate production and management that were of concern to planters and colonial authorities. Hence domestic violence, labor arrangements and conflict, and health problems, for example, are fairly well covered in both primary and secondary source materials. However, such dimensions of Indians' estate experience as religious practice or leisure activities or life histories were of little or no consequence to contemporary observers and thus remain frustratingly obscure in the historical record. Even among the clergy in mid-19th century Trinidad, "there was none of that anthropological interest in other ways of life which makes the Relations of the Society of Jesus so valuable a source of information..." (Wood 1968:139). Island clergy viewed the Indians as merely eventual converts; there was no impetus learn about indigenous caste or kinship systems, or "the continuance of religion in the first years of an expatriate community far from places with holy associations and the authority of its priesthood..." (Ibid.) And the remaining population was often titillatedly curious rather than genuinely attentive. Not only did events such as the 1857 Mutiny in India and the notorious murders of 27 wives/mistresses among Indian men

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over just four years (1859-63) in Trinidad help foster a stereotype of Indians' alleged scarcely hidden violent tendencies (Wood 1968), but racism in the newspapers was often blatant, such as the Port of Spain Gazette's May 6, 1851 attack on the "universal characteristics" of "Hindoos":

> habitual disregard of truth, pride, tyranny, theft, falsehood, deceit, conjugal infidelity, filial disobedience, ingratitude (the Hindoos have no word expressive of thanks), a litigious spirit, perjury, cruelty, private murder, the destruction of illegitimate children... (quoted in Wood 1968:153-54).

Of course there were those in Trinidadian and British society who evinced varying degrees of compassion and tolerance for the immigrants, and this was significant in shaping colonial policy. Yet so were market motivations and the evolving negative stereotypes, images that were in significant part linked to the growing tensions around free and bound labor--quantity, kind, and how employed.

Coming on the heels of Apprenticeship, indentured emigration did not begin unhindered or proceed at a smooth pace. For example, in both Mauritius and Guyana (after 1834 and 1838, respectively) the flow of laborers was temporarily stopped due to reports of negligence toward the Indians. This traffic in workers was reinstituted, however, due to planter pressure maintained throughout the period of cessation that followed the Imperial parliament's vote for its discontinuance in 1840. In fact, Guyana's participation in the indenture system was stopped twice, through financial

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troubles as well as protests from abroad. Thus, while Guyana's first indentured Indian laborers came in 1838, it was not until 1851 that various objections and problems were solved and concessions made (Mangru 1987).

Trinidad's experience with the indenture system, however, was uninterrupted. From 1845 to 1917 a steady, if uneven stream of immigrants arrived on the estates. Part of the reason for this was Trinidad's coming into the indenture project relatively late, compared to other receiving territories; likely many of the "kinks" in the system had been worked out by the 1850s, when indentureds would begin to come in increasing numbers. During this decade indentured contracts were for three years of service, but by 1862 five year contracts were the norm (Ramesar 1984:57).

Another probable reason for the continuity in indentureships was that, perhaps even more so than some other of the Crown Colonies, Trinidad's agricultural potential was, from the colonial perspective, critically underdeveloped. At the time of Emancipation, only about 209,000 acres of a total 1,400,000 had been appropriated, with less than 44,000 under tillage (Cumpston 1953:49). In 1841 a sub-committee of the Agricultural and Immigration Society of Trinidad reported that in 1838 there were 184 sugar estates; 39,328 residents; 43,265 acres of cultivated land; 208,379 acres privately owned; and, 1,079,301 acres that were property of the Crown (Cumpston 1953:50, fn#5).

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Private owners were selling their land off in small plots, which created a decrease in the amount of labor active in sugar production (Ibid:50).

Other hindrances to obtaining sufficient plantation labor power and controlling it existed to trouble the colonists. These included the development of cocoa farming in Trinidad, which by 1911 would supersede sugar production (its preeminence lasting until about the late 1920s), and which represented in part "the triumph of an Indian and Negro peasantry which the sugar plantocracy had long tried to stifle to maintain hegemony over the labour force..." (Ryan 1966:26). Beginning around 1880, Indians were participating in the cocoa industry, either as indentured workers, as contractors who planted small amounts of cocoa acreage for landowners, or as cocoa farmers themselves, having bought Crown lands. Occasionally the latter could develop fairly large estates (Brereton 1985:27).

Also an important drain on potential labor reserves was another "pillar of the Crown Colony economy," mineral extraction, especially asphalt and, increasingly, petroleum (Ibid:26). As early as 1857 oil was struck in Trinidad and it would pose a "serious threat" to planters, who accused the burgeoning oil industry of raising labor costs and therefore disrupting the economy (Ibid:26).

As sugar production increasingly became a precarious venture, through the fluctuations of an international market

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and local production issues, indentured laborers were given the opportunity of permanent settlement upon completion of their contracts. For example, in 1851 a ten-pound bounty was offered to time-expired indentureds if they would forego return passage to India and stay; in 1869 a grant of land instead of a bounty was given to any Indian ten years in Trinidad; by 1873 this was modified to five pounds and five acres, with an added five pounds if the laborer currently had a wife (Ramesar 1984:57). From 1885-1896, 24 per cent of all Crown land was sold to Indians, and within those 11 years, from 1891 to 1895, it went as high as 34 per cent (Brereton 1985:28).

But these efforts were still insufficient to alleviate the problem of estate labor (and hence production) shortages, and colonists pressed the Colonial Office for immigrant or indentured workers--this lack of maximization of profit being partial justification. The competition among planters was such that they were giving rent free house and grounds as well as other allowances (Cumpston 1953:98). Indeed, the nature of the situation is clearly conveyed in a comment by Sir Henry MacLeod, Governor of Trinidad in the 1840s, that Indian indentureds should be allotted to Trinidad with haste since, "[s]uch is the want of labour that I verily believe that short of a murderer, even if the offense were known, the man would be employed" (quoted in Cumpston 1953:99).

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Colonists clamored for labor not only to expand estate operations but to depress wage rates (which, even by 1845, were still comparatively high) as well as to keep workers manageable. Under the pressure of indentured labor, these objectives were realized: for instance, since the 1850s, one "task" of ordinary field labor had fallen from 40 to 25 cents (Ramesar 1984:60). As Cumpston (1953:118) tells us, in the West Indies,

> the introduction of coolies had arrested the Creoles' capriciousness and irregularity of labour. The latter now had to face competition, and were not only less uncertain in their hours of labour, but eager to get work.

And, in May, 1845, the Port of Spain Gazette wrote of the Fatal Rozak, Trinidad's first shipload of indentured Indian immigrants, that when the local Afro-Trinidadians

> are informed that there are countless thousands of these people inured to tropical labour, and the heat of a tropical climate, starving in their own country, and most willing to immigrate to this, it may be the means of opening their eyes a little to the necessity of working more steadily and giving greater satisfaction to their employers (quoted in Singh 1988:3).

It was not only in the sugar industry that the introduction of indentured immigrants served to lower wages. The cocoa industry primarily relied on free labor, whose basic wage rate in the 1850s was 30 to 40 cents per task. However, after the large cocoa proprietors in the major cocoa-producing district of Montserrat, for example, availed themselves of indentured labor, this wage rate dropped to 25 cents (Ramesar 1984:61). While Lord Harris, Trinidad's

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Governor in the late 1840s, was against continuing Indian immigration primarily because of the strain it put on the colonial treasury, he "acknowledged that the coolies had had a most valuable effect on the Creole, showing him that he could not do quite as he liked" (Cumpston 1953:120).

While the seeds of conflict were being sown through worker competition in a labor structure that was to significant extent ethnically segmented even in its nascent period,[3] and while it was increasingly clear to local Trinidadians (black, colored, and otherwise) why immigrant labor was being relied on (cf. Brereton 1979; Singh 1988), the Indian as "economic threat" was less fear and more reality only as the decades progressed--particularly after the economic depression of the early 1880s. Although by the 1860s the mortality rate for indentured immigrants was about one or two per cent, during the 1850s every eighth immigrant to the West Indies died before reaching there; on a few

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[3]For example, in 1884, de Verteuil writes that "immigrant Asiatics at present form the great body of our available agricultural population, and are almost the sole resident labourers on the sugar and cacao estates" (1884:160; quoted in Cumpston 1953:165). It is also interesting to note that the colonial agenda included ignoring, if not outright encouraging hostilities between resident laboring groups (i.e., Afro and Indo), yet some (like 1830s Trinidad Governors Stephen and Russell) were, at the same time, concerned about the potential social, political, and governing problems potentially resulting from artificially created plural societies of variegated racial-cultural communities. Even abolitionists and those with religious motivations voiced related concerns, if for what we would feel today were the wrong reasons (Cumpston 1953:178-79).

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ships more than twenty-five per cent died (de Verteuil 1989:14). Moreover, even during the first decade or two, disconcerting numbers of time-expired Indians ended up as squatters, beggars, dying in hospitals--the image of lone and destitute Indian vagrants lining Trinidadian roadways taking shape at this time.[4] Some indentureds found their only means of escaping the estate in vagrancy (Wood 1968:114). Wood (1968) reports that

> the Indian beggars were in a worse plight than indigent Europeans...they were far more isolated in their misery than vagrant Africans who found companionship and shelter in the slums of Port of Spain or among the squatters of their own race. The Indians, on the other hand, lay unattended and sick on the roads and pavements...the only tokens that others had ever existed were their skeletons, stumbled across in the canefields and the woods" (Wood 1968:115).

Since vagrancy charges were broad in scope and not infrequently levied, this pattern continued over the decades. From 1898 to 1905, for example, there were 1,600 prosecutions every year for vagrancy, malingering, habitual idleness, desertion, or unauthorized absence, which comprised about 15 per cent of the total indentured population (Brereton 1985:24; Ramesar 1984:69).[5] Reports

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[4]See, for example, Ismith Khan's (1985) The Jumbie Bird.

[5]In compiling data from the 1891 Census Report for Trinidad, Ramesar (1976:208) provides a startling statement regarding the "Percentage of Total Population in Institution" among Indo-Trinidadians, including: 42.74% in hospital; 37.97% in lunatic asylum; 37.88 in jails and convict depots; 14.05% in reformatories and industrial schools.

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about indentured laborers' propensity for rum (usually provided by planters), and consequently public drunkenness, began soon after estate residence commenced. By 1850 a more strict set of regulations was implemented to manage estate workers, and "a few had been converted to Christianity" (Cumpston 1953:164).[6]

Nonetheless, by 1854 the indenture project was considered a successful venture by colonial authorities and planters, even in the absence of a nodal usine (factory).[7] (It wasn't until 1871 that Usine St. Madeleine was established by the Colonial Sugar Company in southern Trinidad--the first central usine in the British Caribbean [Beckford 1976:104, fn#21]).[8] Foreshadowing the future, as

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[6]An intriguing revelation of late 19th century conjunctions of culture and class regarding Indo-Caribbeans that reveal the complexity of the social and cultural hierarchies of the day, is found in Webber's 1917 novel of the indenture system in turn of the century Guyana, Those That Be In Bondage (1988). The colonial ascription of "real," if inferior culture to Indians, based on what Europeans knew of their ancient history and complex civilization, mitigated in fascinating ways the stratification of various divisions of whites. This is evident in the novel, for example, between an English estate overseer and his indentured Indian paramoor-cum-wife: "...there was really not so much disparity in their social positions, if Ursula could take up her rightful place at the court of her [nobleman] grandfather" (1988:42).

[7]Usines, unlike sugar mills, are factories; that is, they are industrialized and capital-intensive, as opposed to labor-intensive sugar mills that use animals for steam energy.

[8]de Verteuil (1989:36) gives the date as 1872, and notes that St. Madeleine was the second largest cane factory in the world.

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early as the 1850s, for example, one half of the sugar produced in Trinidad was from County Victoria and the estates surrounding San Fernando (de Verteuil 1988:29); by the late 1860s sugar estates formed the periphery of the Oropouche Lagoon (Wood 1968:158). Yet the indenture system still left the Indians little improved, remaining "an uneducated, illiterate and heathen labouring class" (Cumpston 1953:165). Considered less judgmentally (if ironically), we can take this assessment to mean that the benefits of Western morality, individuals' free will, and selling one's labor on an "open" market had not bequeathed to Indians many rewards more fulfilling than food, shelter, and payment (cf. Ibid). Indeed, in addition to a 280 days per year work contract, indentureship levied often debilitating restrictions: mandatory estate residence, limited mobility (requiring passes) outside the estate, and "the routine imposition of criminal penalties, including imprisonment, for labour offenses...", such as refusing to finish an assigned task, or to work entirely. After the 1890s, low earnings were common and productivity jeopardized by laborers' poor physical condition (Ramesar 1984:67). Even Christianity was failing in its self-ascribed duty to bring enlightenment (through successful conversions) into Indian immigrants' alleged darkness.

village communities: relations between "bound" and "free"

If a variegated body of Indian immigrant labor had been

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making the voyage to Trinidad throughout the decades, by the eve of the 20th century variations among the resident population of Indians were becoming increasingly entrenched as well as apparent. The most significant factor of the continual development of community heterogeneity was fundamental: the distinction between free (time-expired) and unfree (indentured). In 1871 Trinidad, around 9,000 Indians did not live on estates, being "absorbed in the general population" (Geoghegan 1873; quoted in Vertovec 1992:74); even by the end of 1870, 276 time-expired Indians had taken land in lieu of return passage, 96 of these owning almost 1,000 acres among them (Wood 1968:275ff). At first the households established on Crown lands were situated as isolated homesteads, but soon nucleated villages were established, such as Calcutta and Coolie Town (Montserrat Ward), founded in 1870. By 1890, it was estimated that Indians in Trinidad owned almost 36,000 acres of land and about 2,400 houses, which comprised nearly one-third of the Crown lands sold (Laurence 1985:106). The census of 1891 shows 57% of the enumerated 70,000-plus Indians living outside estates (Ibid:110)--even while the indenture system had over a quarter of a century more to go before it lost its usefulness and practicability.

However, the differences, emergent or established, between indentured and peasant were often subtle, all having to do with the nature of their respective labor

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organization, subsistence patterns, and possibility for development of a sense of community--perceived affinity and similarity. As also became increasingly common on British Caribbean slave plantations, the subsistence activities of indentured estate workers and un-indentured Indians in Trinidad not only complicate the distinctions between free and unfree populations; their social interaction and ensuing relationships as well as their respective legal rights and limitations (in addition to subsistence patterns) call for a more fine-grained consideration of the varied processes that shaped the evolution of Indians' community/Indian communities--particularly with respect to culture and class formation.

The oppressive conditions of estate life and work over the 150-year period of the indenture project in the Caribbean have been amply documented, as I have briefly demonstrated above. Aside from the more general attempts at labor coercion and control, estate authorities and immigration officials designed to "supervise the private lives of the immigrants" by means of instituting meticulous regulations, including those referring to conduct inside the household (Weller 1968:58). Weller (1968) suggests that "[t]he regimentation of life at home, in labor and in leisure undoubtedly had the effect of slowly but surely changing the Indian's way of life" (1968:58). Weller also includes some interesting factors contributing to the

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cultural changes that took place over the first couple of generations of indentured life, beyond the familiar reasons posited by scholars: the erosion of indigenous authority systems or the physical proximity of persons on the estates, along with the grossly unequal ratio of men to women, which served to greatly hinder observance of pollution restrictions and therefore caste distinctions. Weller adds to the scarcity-of-females factor the suggestion that with minimum opportunity for dowries a kind of gender valorization reversal occurred, where "a custom of bride price developed instead" (1968:77). Moreover, "[t]he dietary laws of caste lost much of their meaning, and the eating of the meat of slaughtered bullocks...became a part of the new daily pattern of domestic life," while higher castes' traditional shunning of alcohol gave way to drunkenness (1968:77).[9]

However, we must not envision estate life as a hermetically sealed experience for its residents. Life was not so uniformly ordered or predictable. For one thing, mobility gradually improved so that even while required to

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[9]Indo-Trinidadians' subsequent efforts toward authenticity, legitimacy, and purity, some of which I discuss in this study, were partly a response to the empirically apparent (experienced) changes fostered by the conditions of estate living. However, this response was protracted, varied, and not often, I think, based on precise memory of "original" customs or beliefs; rather, more likely what was noted was the effect of the whole transformation over time, made progressively more evident in life history contrasts among generations.

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carry passes, by the turn of the century, "Saturday afternoons; Sundays, and general holidays were usually spent in shopping and visiting friends in the vicinity of their estates" (Weller 1968:65). Furthermore, diversification of economic activities among Indians began as early as the 1850s (Laurence 1985). Some estates allowed the workers to keep cattle and let them graze them freely; chickens were kept by the barracks, where ponies and donkeys were also housed in sheds at the back; occasionally residents could mind stray sheep, goats, and pigs (Weller 1968:64). Workers who had lived longer on the estates were able to make some extent of profit off newcomers by selling them provisions and alcohol; in fact, as Indians were able to accumulate wealth, a number of them became shop keepers, with fellow Indians as customers (Weller 1968:63,65; cf. de Verteuil 1989). Although he is referring to Guyana, Mangru (1987) gives a vivid picture of the diversity of estate life, one that is certainly comparable with Trinidadian examples:

> Immigrants who were fortunate enough to accumulate money did so through occupations other than plantation labour. Drivers who sometimes owned shops amassed wealth by selling such essential commodities as rice, gram and ghee. Milk sellers, cattle minders and street singers gradually emerged as men of some substance in the immigrant community...Fortune tellers ...also accumulated substantial sums. Some immigrants supplemented inadequate earnings by such subsidiary trades as tailoring and furniture making (Mangru 1987:148).

Importantly, a number of estates permitted laborers to grow rice and other crops on unused estate plots. Similar

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to Mintz's argument that subsistence production among slaves both subsidized the plantation economies and laid the foundations for an experienced Caribbean peasantry, indentured immigrants' provision grounds were increasingly encouraged as time went by, since they helped to release the hold that dependence on imported foodstuffs had over the planters; moreover, time-expired workers who settled Crown lands and areas marginal to the estates practiced patterns of land use on which contemporary ones are based (Richardson 1975:240). But the encouragement of varied agricultural pursuits, not surprisingly, was intimately linked with production and labor organization. This can be seen in an array of instances. Two exemplify clearly the dissembling that could be of service to colonial agendas. One offers as (dubious) explanation the desire to "preserve the natural vegetation"; by 1874 the government restricted the sale of uncultivated forest land located toward the eastern part of the island, thus ensuring that time-expired Indians would congregate into settlements in the west, the region which also constituted Trinidad's sugar belt (Richardson 1975:243). Second, in 1871, a report of the Trinidad Legislative Council concerning Crown lands asserted that,

> the physique of the Indian leads him to prefer the abandoned lands in the neighbourhood of Estates, deserted by squatters as worn-out and not worth purchasing, or thinly-wooded tracts, which, from their comparative sterility, are unsaleable, as lands of both these descriptions are more readily cleared and brought under cultivation, than the rich soils encumbered with heavy timber (TLC, Report No.13: Crown Lands, 1 March,

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1871, quoted in Richardson 1975:243; my emphasis). We can infer doubt as to colonial motives even more confidently with an additional example from Beachey (1957), who states that planters against opening Crown lands instituted by the 1860s a ruling that land lots should be sold coterminously with the estates to guarantee some reserve of labor, since "the desire for independence and cheap Crown land usually proved to be a stronger attraction" (Beachey 1957:103, quoted in Vertovec 1992:75). Fourth, the impact of the depression of the sugar market in late 19th century Trinidad resulted in unemployment, diminishing of public revenues, an increase in the financial burden of importing immigrants, and a lowered standard of living (Weller 1968:114). To bolster the sugar market, colonial policy favored encouraging small peasant proprietors, particularly since these immigrants were amenable to selling their cane crops below estates' production costs: "[c]onsequently, the West Indian Commission of 1897 advocated the transfer of land to develop the peasant proprietor class despite initial disadvantages to the estates" (Ibid). Lastly, by 1916, when the indenture system was clearly moribund, both colonial authorities and planters began to greatly limit extra-estate avenues for Indians' subsistence, which they had not completely done heretofore, since these supplemented poor wages (Singh 1985:42). The sale of Crown lands to Indians was curtailed (and only

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resumed minimally after 1916), and rice production in particular was regulated. An expanding Indian-based rice industry would compete most with the estates for labor, thus the price of swamp lands that were used by Indians for growing rice was raised. What is significant is that the overall policy fluctuated with colonial perceptions: to "restrict rice production when the plantations wanted to press the Indians into their labour force, and to allow rice production to expand when the plantations were faced with a financial crisis,...and needed to retrench labourers" (Singh 1985:43).[10]

For my purposes, a final consideration is that even if free Indians were by definition not indentured, not all workers on the estates at a given moment in time were "bound"; according to season, significant numbers temporarily engaged in plantation work. Estate labor had become "badly paid drudgery" as well as irregular employment (Ramesar 1984:69ff). Quitting estate work in increasing numbers, unindentured labor objected to the organization of

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[10]The problem of guarding the land was not only in reference to managing Indian labor. From Emancipation on, the issue of land use was highly salient in public interest. While local opinion was divided as to the deliberate fostering of an independent peasantry by means of land grants (and how much land to grant), squatting was ever on the rise, "...and not only Creoles but liberated Africans and some Indians had moved into the woods" (Wood 1968:270) -- and to this list I would add immigrants from Venezuela, Trinidad Chinese, and "Spanish." Hence, not only were colonists preoccupied with labor organization among Indians, they were simultaneously concerned to contain the activities of other groups.

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sugar production, whereby unskilled labor performed routinized tasks for low wages. By 1906, on the huge St. Madeleine Estate, for example, the presence of Afro-Trinidadian laborers had decreased by 60 per cent; regular Indian estate workers fell 13 per cent. Planters continued to pressure for increased quotas of indentureds to replace this continuous movement off the estate (Ibid). Again, the underlying issue was one of labor flow and wage control, clearly evident in the literature of the day, which opined frankly on the state of the Trinidadian economy. For example, in 1878 the Trinidad Royal Gazette wrote that

> ...employers, who in haste to extend their cultivation, competed heavily with each other for the floating labour of the free coolie, not only by giving him a much higher renumeration for the same work than was awarded the contract servant, but in exacting from the latter all the least desirable or most fatiguing duties, such as mill work, heading out canes, etc. This shortsighted policy made the time-expired coolie master of the situation, and although the more prudent employers have, of late, tried to retrace their steps and open the vantage ground to the contract servant by equalizing payment, it will be some time before the reaction will be complete and the older coolies resume settled habits (TRG, May 29, 1878, p.412).

Fifteen years later, the renowned Surgeon-Major D.W.D. Comins, Protector of Immigrants in Calcutta, surveyed the conditions of Indians in the West Indies for a (what became well-known) 1893 report to the Government of India, Note on Emigration From India to Trinidad. In it he states that unlike resident estate workers, volunteer labor from villages "may or may not come on their own terms"; that is, they can exercise a significant degree of power in

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determining working conditions. His advice was that

> the presence of a body of labourers under the complete control of the master makes him more or less independent of outside labour and brings down the price of free labour in the neighbourhood (quoted in Ramesar 1984:73).

Even later in the era, a less draconian philosophy was still concerned with managing production through an intact and *in situ* work force. Remarking in 1932 on the recent decrease of available agricultural labor for the cocoa industry, Shephard (1932) cites as reasons, Indians' repatriation to India, the growth of petroleum and other industries that could offer preferable working conditions, the expansion of the sugar industry, and the great increase in labor's mobility and independence resulting from the development of motor transport and the ending of indenture. Shephard recommends that cocoa

> estate owners should give careful consideration to the possibility of introducing one or two of those subsidiary crops which are complementary to cacao [e.g., grapefruit, limes, tonca beans] in their seasonal demands for labour...," since "an estate which can provide regular work throughout the year will experience less difficulty in attracting an adequate and efficient force of labourers than one which can offer only irregular employment (Shephard 1932:83).

Village-dwelling, "free" Indians were, then, necessarily employed periodically on estates by planters, with significant repercussions for intra-community relations among Indians, which I explore below.

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stratification, hierarchies, and other occupational hazards

Although historically the majority of the Indo-Trinidadian population has lived in what have been considered "rural" regions, even long before the turn of the century they lived and/or labored in urban areas. Not only has the degree of interaction between "rural" and urban Indo-Trinidadians been, to my mind, under-appreciated, but the variety of livelihoods available in urban settings has not always been given sufficient attention. By the 1890s unindentured Indians were employed in the Public Works Department doing railway and road work and in the Botanic Gardens in Port of Spain (Brereton 1985:27ff). They contracted with the government to clear bush or to participate in the extraction of asphalt from Pitch Lake. They participated in the informal economy as gardeners, grooms, watchmen, porters, scavengers, and domestics. Another common occupation was also in transport, where they drove or hired out their own carts, carriages, and, later, motor vehicles.[11] Many Indians were jewelry makers and sellers, others sold milk, still others engaged in petty trade of small commodities (such as textiles), some were shop keepers. Those with sufficient capital sometimes engaged in money-lending; usury "at scandalous rates of interest" could make an individual quite wealthy (Ibid:27).

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[11]See, for example, Shiva Naipaul's (1973) The Chip-Chip Gatherers.

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The reason to outline all of this at present is to underscore not only the empirical complexity of the Indo-Trinidadian experience from early on, a heterogeneity that tends to become secondary to arguments for alleged homogeneity and sentimental solidarity (cf. Vertovec 1992; Ehrlich 1971).[12] It is also to argue that even when tremendous occupational diversity exists, class composition may still remain imprecisely defined. The reality for many Trinidadians, particularly Indo-Trinidadians, has been to hold several occupations at the same time--certainly a characteristic of "grass roots" living. In the literature, occupation usually (implicitly or otherwise) stands for class position, with the result that occupational disaggregations often eclipse discussions of class and its formation among Indo-Trinidadians. Yet employment type is not necessarily synonymous with class position, and knowing that a particular household or individual holds a certain set of occupations is not sufficient to understand how these occupations fit into a broader social structure. What we know from Thompson (e.g., 1978) and Wolf (e.g., 1990), among others, is that class should be examined as a diachronic

[12]For even if, as I argue, there has been an increasing conceptual distinction among Indo-Trinidadian Muslims and Hindus between "religion" and "culture" and a more encompassing notion of "Indian" identity than was the case before the mid-20th century, this is different from recognizing the existence of a multiplicity of economic and social niches into which turn-of-the century Indians and Indo-Trinidadians found themselves.

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process rather than synchronic category; that is, "it is derived from the observation of the social process over time" (Thompson 1978:147). The peculiar overlapping of occupational and class categories that is evident with regard to the Caribbean can be associated, it seems to me, with Thompson's (1978) critique of heuristic or sociological conceptualizations of class as a static classification rather than as fundamentally historical. As is reminiscent of various approaches to the Caribbean (though with some important exceptions), "in one very popular (usually positivistic) sociological tradition, class can then be reduced to literal quantitative measurement: so many people in this or that relations to the means of production, or, in more vulgar terms, so many wage-earners, white collar workers, etc" (Thompson 1978:147). Rather, understanding any kind of social groupings based on relation to means of production and the development of attendant institutions and cultural forms requires the "observation of behaviour over time" (Ibid).

Therefore, in addition to thinking in more nuanced ways about the multi-dimensionality of evolving Indo-Trinidadian social organization and cultural patterns--which adumbrating occupational diversity makes possible--these "job lists" are also meant to beg the question of the location of Indians in the fabric of Trinidadian society, as being more than an argument against homogeneity or the rather flat distinction

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between "bound coolies" and "free." For these distinctions served as the precursors of the incipient upward mobility that is a key indication of the development over time of stratification among Indians and Indo-Trinidadians. In particular, systems of land tenure and occupational roles in the labor process are two variables that are most significant throughout the early years of the 20th century. (Other factors become critical toward the latter part of the century: i.e., the rise of a merchant (trading) class; the development of a national system of mandatory formal education; long-distance labor migration and the development of remittance economies; state patronage, especially in the form of the expansion of the civil service; and multinational ownership of the local economy.)

Although retrospective accounts explain time-expired (or never indentured) Indians' concentration in agricultural pursuits as reflecting a "special love for the land" (Brereton 1985:27) or as stemming from a peasant farmer heritage in India, Wood (1968), for example, points out that the "surprising ease with which time-expired East Indians settled down as peasant farmers" once Crown lands were made available to them was in part (I would say a large part) a reflection of the current demand for rice and sugar as cash crops (1968:296).[13] Nonetheless, the economic importance of

[13]In fact, as late as 1897, the West India Royal Commission was divided as to whether there were more Indo or Afro cane farmers (Wood 1968:296).

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and cultural associations (stereotypes) between Indo-Trinidadians as peasant farmers was entrenched by the early 20th century. However, as I stated earlier, there was rarely a neat cleavage between "free" and "unfree" in the agricultural sector. Relative to other areas of inquiry, detailed study of the relationship between these populations is scant. However, what little information was available to me indicates that cooperation and competition existed among them, which must certainly have not only influenced an alleged growing sense of community (ethnic identification), but underscored status (if not class) distinctions.

For example, deserting or long-absent indentureds found shelter and protection in Indo-Trinidadian villages that were continuously forming around the peripheries of the estates. Carefully organized outpost systems that warned of advancing search efforts made finding the refugees a difficult prospect (Weller 1968:51). Moreover, by the 20th century it was not uncommon for newly arrived immigrants to associate into groups whose members bought land jointly, thus enabling even a first year immigrant to become a landowner; this presented a compelling opportunity for indentureds to abandon the estates or to prolong their legitimate time off in order to tend their own, or a fellow group member's lands (Ibid:51). Hence, not only were the relations between indentureds and villagers intricate, involving both cooperative resistance and individual vested

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interests; also evident from this history is that a nascent hierarchy was developing among Indians in Trinidad with regard to access to a key resource--land. In fact, I think we can speculate that colonial vagrancy and desertion charges also were meant to hinder peasant production, and thus their independence.

Not nearly approximating independence, a symbiotic relationship existed between village-resident Indian and estate. The periodic and ad hoc labor of village-dwelling Indians was critical to the estates. Succinctly stated by Richardson (1975ff), "[f]rom an estate's perspective the Indian villages were labor reservoirs costing wage payments only during the first three months of the year" (1975:247). Using Debe as an example[14] (a consummate area of "South" and almost synonymous with Hindus and cane production), Richardson explains that every man there labored part of the year on neighboring cane estates, especially during harvest time (January to March). Men would hire themselves out as part of a labor gang, often headed by village leaders. This pattern of labor was prevalent throughout the island where estates were situated: "<u>none</u> of the villages of Western Trinidad were far from estates" (Ibid:247, my emph.). However, an implicit division existed between estate

[14]I should note that although for my purposes I refer only to Debe when discussing this work by Richardson, he equally employs two examples, Debe and Bejucal (to the north, in County Caroni)--but with the same objectives in mind.

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residents and non-residents. During the nine months of the year that were not for harvesting, indentureds undertook routine tasks such as weeding, fertilizing, and similar kinds of regular maintenance work. Villagers were hired to help with planting new cane and also secured additional cash wages by doing other kinds of jobs, such as construction or digging drainage channels (Ibid:247). But because these jobs constituted additional rather than primary income, there were increased possibilities for capital and/or commodity accumulation. With expanded avenues for garnering cash, "villagers purchased clothing, hats, and shoes for special occasions. By the second decade of this [20th] century plank houses were beginning to replace tapia huts" (Richardson 1975:248).

While in 1888 independent cane farming began among villagers in southwestern Trinidad, and by the early 1890s in Debe (-Penal) (Ibid:248), providing a new basis for class formation and an incipient upward mobility, Indians' villages also engaged in large-scale supplying of fruits and vegetables to the estates. Eventually these crops supplanted the reliance on food from Tobago, Grenada, and St. Vincent that was imported to feed the indentured immigrants (Ibid). While it can be assumed that the prices that villagers received for their goods were probably not competitive with the wider market, the entrenchment of a purchase and supply arrangement between village and estate

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would afford some extent of additional revenue to village residents.

However, lest it be implied that villages were loci of prosperity, it must be borne in mind that dividing time among various economic activities was also a necessity (Richardson 1975:passim). Ironically, village proximity to estates posed stresses on livelihood as well, particularly problems with flooding, such as the serious restriction of drainage caused by building the Oropouche Lagoon Road in the Debe-Penal area, with its consequent damming up of natural water flow channels. Not only did these kinds of floods affect agricultural activity, they acted as barriers to communication and interaction between village and estate as well as among clusters of often dispersed households. Of course the situation of being on swampland would be exacerbated during the rainy season. Moreover, "fish were becoming harder to find, and plantation wages were seasonal...Each household's economic interests were distributed over several miles, and individual mobility was critical" (Richardson 1975:248).

Compounding a set of conditions that necessitated flexibility and freedom of movement was a demographic pattern which reflected the extent to which people traversed the region: the "[e]arly inhabitants of...Debe came from all over western Trinidad" (Ibid:243). Richardson correctly attributes this configuration to jahaji bhai relationships,

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or the fictive kin ties formed among immigrants on the passage to overseas plantations--the "brotherhood of the boat" or "ship (jahaji) brothers (bhai)." These sentimental loyalties acted as conduits of information and opportunity among immigrants.

To the jahaji bhai relationships, however, I would also add the importance of the aguwah in population dispersal and hence village and locality heterogeneity. Charged with the responsibilities of a traditional matchmaker, an aguwah (historically as well as today)[15] is always alert for appropriate partners for prospective marriages with eligible men and women. Aguwahs often travel relatively long distances (probably as much as for other reasons than as for matchmaking, since it is likely that very early on in Trinidad this ceased to be a full-time occupation), and in finding suitable matches in a (typically) patrilocal residence pattern, they tend to regionally disperse women as doolahins (brides). Seeking farther afield for a match would probably be even more necessary in the early part of the century since the indenture system's initial imbalance in the female:male ratio was unlikely to have yet been sufficiently rectified.

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[15]Today the aguwah is not, to my knowledge, a distinct and specially marked role. However, since "fix-ups" (more or less arranged marriages) are common among Indo-Trinidadians in south, and because it is always useful to know about potential marriage partners in any case, any one with contacts (or a lead) can facilitate ad hoc and informally.

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Richardson's depiction of the material conditions and social relations among a diverse Indian population in southwestern Trinidad (and the Debe-Penal area in particular) is especially important in exploring my twin concerns of nascent class formation (systems of land tenure; occupational roles in the labor process) and the existence of community (physical and symbolic). Due to the exigencies discussed above, the "Indian Community" was cross-cut with diverse internal, as it were, communities and interest groups. What Richardson calls "economic and environmental linkages" (Ibid:250) can also be understood as material conditions, conditions that render dubious

> the contention that the early ex-indentured villagers in Trinidad were able to 'nucleate and build ethnic communities based upon the language and customs common to their area of origin in northeastern India'...The typical Indian resident of rural Trinidad has never exploited a single agricultural niche; he has been a mobile human element in an interlinked plantation-village system (Ibid:251).

The argument that "the establishment of homogeneous [Indian] villages in Trinidad required a significant step towards forging Indian social and cultural solidarity" (Vertovec 1992:76)--a position that echoes that which Richardson (above) critiques--rests on two major assumptions. One, that "homogeneity," as a descriptive device, is self-evident and self-explanatory; and two, that homogeneity inexorably leads to (social and cultural) solidarity. But even if we agree on the tenuous concept of a homogeneous culture, it should not be conflated with

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ethnic consolidation (cf. van der Veer and Vertovec 1991; Cudjoe 1985); that is, the post-1860s formation of a "common group identity" and "ethnic consciousness" among Indo-Trinidadians (Cudjoe 1985:29). While Indo-Trinidadians may indeed have been gradually forming a consciousness of themselves as an interest group (based on ethno-cultural designations), the mobility and resourcefulness to which Richardson, among others, refers likely enabled religious and cultural variation as much as possibly homogenizing these into an increasingly uniform or one-dimensional identity. In other words, being "a mobile human element" to secure a livelihood (Richardson 1975:250) accomplished at least two things: 1) spreading religious knowledge and practice through face-to-face contact and communication and 2) revitalizing religious knowledge/practice and cultural patterns through regional and community diversification--i.e., radiating into new and varied niches, to employ a Darwinian metaphor, and therefore adapting according to context. Examples might be the ethnic (Afro-Indo) and religious (Hindu, Christian, Muslim) diversity of social and cultural life in such heterogeneous locales as those in the northern and extreme southern parts of the island, or the more or less concentrated ethnic and religious homogeneity (Indo, Hindu/Muslim) of social and cultural life found in places like Debe-Penal. Furthermore, what is by definition an act of resistance--the surreptitious or obvious traveling

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of Indians from one estate to another, often for purposes of ritual observance or proselytization/revitalization--likely made religio-cultural activities another important part of the "mobile human element."

This possibility is suggested in an Anglican report made in Guyana in 1882 commenting on the activities of Indian religious leaders on the estates. It stated that,

> There is no doubt that our labours are marred by those lazy self-styled Brahmins who assume the garb of a gossain and travel about the country for alms...[F]or the sake of filthy lucre, [they] go about from one estate to another reading and parading their own superstitions (British Guiana Coolie Mission, Report of Committee, 1882, Demerara, p.18; quoted in Jayawardena 1966:226).

It is also suggested by a conversation I had with Mr. Rafiq, an elderly community leader and imam who spoke to me about religious practice and the experience of indenture, as he recalled his father's role in propagating Islamic tradition among fellow immigrants.

> This country was under British rule, people came as immigrants...Our teaching, according to history and by the sunna, says Muslims should be missionaries, one to another, so when they came here as indentured laborers, they were quite satisfied, they got nothing worse here than what they got in India...The problem comes here now how they should go about teaching Islam, preaching Islam to all those who are not that intelligent, not that much educated. So they have to make contact with the various groups of Muslims who got scattered throughout the island...But they had this iman, this faith, and they knew their fundamental duty to teach the religion. They could not do that during their working hours, their masters were on them all the time, and they couldn't go about as they pleased. So they waited til midnight, when the lights of the bosses was off, and they traveled by foot from one district to the other so they can find out where the other people [Muslims] were and get them together in one place, one

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> house, for teaching Islam.
>
> This is a personal experience from my father's life. In this area...there were about four or five estates. My father's indenture was Harmony Hall...The next was Reform, then Gasparillo. These three are the areas my father traveled about in the night. Classes was kept in Gasparillo by my father. He was a maktab teacher in India...The maktab was for ladies and men both, and my father taught Urdu and Arabic; though he knew Hindi, it was not his subject. After indentureship he became imam for the people...The people built a mosque. Around 1905, after his indentureship, my father married. My father tells a story that apparently a person...carried news [gossiped, tattle-taled] to the bosses on the estate that he [father] used to cross his boundary, and they held [caught, captured] him one night. They gave him one night confinement in jail for crossing the boundary without permission. Then after a request from some of the indentured people, they give him a little freedom, so that he can continue doing his religious duties. They let him go and come, but he must report.
>
> I'm telling you these things to give you a contrast to those people who doing religious work today and those before. You see how they sacrificed. There's one thing in building a mosque. A Muslim supposed to build a mosque with their own finances and own person--labor, then [that is]. Though their pay was 25 cents per day in about 1900, in the estate, they built their mosque with their own hands and without the assistance from other religions...The children of today must understand that their fathers were like one, like brothers, and so we, too, the first generation. We had the same respect.

Mr. Rafiq's narrative is similar to many others I heard throughout my stay from both Hindu and Muslim "older heads" about the determination with which the old traditions were promulgated by forebears, consciously against the limitations imposed from above. This theme of surreptitious vigilance is, as I show in subsequent chapters, also related to issues of authenticity, purity, and generational authority. Yet it raises as well the question of a more immediate relationship between class, religion and politics,

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and its historical and ethnographic development among Indo-Trinidadians at the turn of the century and beyond. It is this next stage in the progression of that history that I take up in the discussion that follows.

religious and political cleavages: resistance, accommodation

From the turn of the century to the years approaching World War II, Trinidad, like much of the Caribbean, experienced intense social unrest, culminating in its labor riots of 1937.[16] Largely a response to the Great Depression, particularly affecting the cash crop sector in agricultural economies, workers suffered through price increases for food and commodities while they (and agricultural workers in particular) contended with minuscule raises in wage rates. For example, during the 1930s, when the price of sugar was at its lowest level to date, the wages of sugar workers were decreased, even though "an Indian field-hand in Trinidad would be paid 1s [shilling] 6d [pence] per 'task' in the mid-1930s...," which was only 6d (pennies) more than the wages for this work in the 1840s (Tinker 1976:163). Under conditions of poverty and at times starvation, "discontent erupted into strikes, demonstrations and riots..." (Ibid).

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[16]One of the many important consequences of the 1937 riots was the appointment of a Royal Commission, known as the Moyne Commission, named for its chairman, Lord Moyne (Tinker 1976:168). Out of the Moyne Commission report (1938) would come some fundamental premises of Caribbean family and household instability, some still tenacious today.

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However, the conflicts of the 1930s had their foundation in earlier tensions, also significantly reflecting the fluctuations of both local and international markets. Although the daily wage of Indian agricultural workers in Trinidad was 25 cents in 1871, it was 5 cents less (20 cents) in 1886 (Kondapi 1951:53)--not coincedently in the middle of a decade of major crises in the sugar economy throughout the Caribbean. According to a West India Royal Commission statement in 1938, over a span of 92 years (1845 to 1937), Indian agricultural workers' wages were increased only twice; even after the events of 1937, wages by 1939 were 35 cents a day (Ibid).

To this set of economic concerns was the added influence of Britain's experiments with communal representation in India, which had an impact on other British colonies (Ryan 1966:40). As political objectives and dialogue developed in the early years of the 20th century among the Indo-Trinidadian population, competing strategies emerged as to defining the terms in which Indian rights and representation should be couched. These discourses speak directly to the nature of evolving consciousness of "community" and any distinctions within it. As Campbell (1985) explains, "[i]n developing its power to tap its latent sources of cohesiveness and to assert itself against institutional obstacles, the Indian community seemed to have gone through two broad phases in the early 20th

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century..." (1985:119ff). These consist of a first phase lasting until about 1930 and the post-1930 period. To the former, Campbell assigns the formation of Indian groups and organizations that were primarily "political, social, intellectual, and economic" rather than religiously inclined. Such associations as myriad literary and debating clubs and friendly societies existed along with the politically active East Indian National Association (1897), the Indian League of Tunapuna (c. 1910), the East Indian National Congress (1909), and the Young Indian Party (1920s). While local Muslim and Hindu religious leaders were abundant, and an organization called the Islamic Guardian Association was established as early as 1906, the nature of these groups meant that "they could importantly, [sic] be Hindu/Muslim in orientation, instead of being Hindu or Muslim" (Campbell 1985:119).

It was in the post-1930 phase that the majority of Indo-Trinidadian religious associations came into being, some in their earliest incarnations: the Tackveeyatul Islamic Association (1932), the Sanatan Dharma Board of Control (1932), the Sanatan Dharma Association of Trinidad (1932), the Kabir Panth Association (1932), the Anjuman Sunnat-ul-Jamaat Association of Trinidad (1935), and the Arya Samaj (1930s). What could perhaps have been an unforeseen factor in this florescence of religiously-oriented groups were the efforts of trade union organizers

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who were very active throughout the 1930s. Prevented from contact with residents of estate barracks, they carried their message to village-dwelling Indo-Trinidadians. Haraksingh (1985) suggests that, in this context, religion simultaneously served "as a kind of covering canvas and len[t] its own sanction to the workers' attempts to refashion their existence" (1985:162). Another possible factor in the ramifying of religious organizations during this period could have been a reflection of the initial leadership of the early Indian community, who were more focused on "the shadowy realm of spirituality" than improving material conditions (Singh 1985:51). While I argue below that a strict division between these is unlikely at the ethnographic level, Singh's (1985) point is noted:

> while in the 1930s the mass of the Indians in the sugar belt and elsewhere were experiencing the pangs of poverty and malnutrition, there was the amazing spectacle of one Hindu group denouncing another as false or one Muslim group challenging another to religious disputation (1985:52).

These "fissiparous tendencies" weakened the Indian population, and were exacerbated, if not caused by the emphasis social leaders placed on religion--emphases that, Singh argues, inclined Indians toward social fragmentation (Ibid). In any case, it is agreed in much of the literature that as there was increasing development into manifestly religious bodies, the Indian organizations of the post-1930 period "ushered in an era of heightened splits and factionalism" among both Hindus and Muslims (Campbell

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1985:119).

With the idea of uniting the local Indian population in order to successfully press for political and civil rights, the East Indian National Association (EINA) formed in response to an 1897 Ordinance that blurred the distinction between free and indentured Indians: the former were legally required to produce certificates of exemption from labor when traveling on public thoroughfares, which troubled unindentured Indians, a number of whom were, even at this time, middle-class. Organizing in protest of the Ordinance, the EINA was also active in the struggle for legalization of non-Christian (Hindu and Muslim) marriages and for communal representation in the legislative council (Brereton 1981:109). Later, the East Indian National Congress (EINC) would also press for the same goals, with a similar orientation as the EINA toward unity on the basis of a cultural umbrella of "Indian," encompassing Hindu, Muslim, and Christian, rather than on the basis of categorical religious affiliation.

Interestingly, the leadership of both the EINA and EINC was predominantly Presbyterian and better educated, more westernized, and largely urban. This was accomplished through training in Presbyterian schools, which in turn often led to teaching in them, being principals in them, as well as to bureaucratic skills that afforded work in offices instead of cocoa and canefields. Indeed, J.D. Tyson, a

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representative sent by the Government of India after the events of 1937 to inquire into the condition of Indians in the Caribbean and Spanish Main, submitted a report stating that Indo-Trinidadians were not so badly off as other Caribbean Indians: they were entering the professional and commercial spheres. Yet in so doing were leaving Hinduism and Islam and embracing Christianity (Tinker 1976:169).[17]

This particular configuration of EINA and EINC authority had implications for their political philosophy (which easily translates into ethnic group consciousness) and political method. On one hand, they were concerned with the potential dissolution of an Indian way of life through the domination of Western or creole (Anglo/Afro) culture and with the exclusion of Indo-Trinidadians from the political process (Samaroo 1985:83). On the other hand, while reluctant to establish political ties with the black and colored middle class, they were also not inclined to connect with the Indo-Trinidadian masses settled in rural and semi-rural villages. Not only was this likely a reflection of EINA and EINC class bias (as representing interest groups with different priorities), it was, as well, a failure to create links with village imams and pundits--the leadership

[17]While "Christianity" could certainly include Catholicism and other forms common in Trinidad (such as Anglican), the ascendance of Indo-Trinidadians in the structural hierarchy was historically most commonly a consequence of involvement with the Canadian Mission Presbyterians.

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of local communities (Singh 1985:52).

About a decade later, in the 1920s, the Young Indian Party was formed, which had a rather different approach to group unity. Explicitly embracing a perspective of class struggle, the Young Indian Party called for a unity of all oppressed sectors of the society that was to forge together all races and religions (a point of view that never gained broad appeal among Indo- or other Trinidadians) (Ryan 1966:41). Written about in 1929 in the East Indian Weekly newspaper as "the audacity of youth" against the "particularity of age"--i.e., in their rejecting the stance of established Indo-Trinidadian elders (EIW, April 27, 1929; quoted in Ryan 1966:40), the Party was comprised of Western-educated Indo-Trinidadians whose position was sympathetic to the value and preservation of Indian tradition. They believed that Indian cultural practices and identity needed to be recognized as an integral part of the social fabric of Trinidadian society (today one might call this national identity). At the same time, however, members felt that being "creolized" in appearance and conduct was also not something to be denigrated or avoided, and that the current Indo-Trinidadian leadership was misguided in its effort to "ritualize the 'dead past'" and remain disinterested in acknowledging Indo-Trinidadians' commonalities with other disadvantaged groups, particularly grass-roots Afro-Trinidadians (Ryan 1966:41). Equally radical, if in a

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different way, the Young Indian Party also proposed that Indo-Trinidadians should stop thinking of India as the motherland and accept Trinidad as home (Samaroo 1985:83).

Although the Young Indian Party, the EINA, and the EINC did not continue far past their inception, it is striking how their definition of the problems and issues facing Indo-Trinidadians of the day foreshadow those that would continue to recur to present times. Even at the beginning of the century, concern with creolization versus tradition ("East" versus "West"), class versus cultural struggle, and the nature of unity with Afro-Trinidadians was evident. As yet, however, the subject of "authenticity"--its constitution and its ownership--does not seem to be contested terrain. It would appear that it is when religious distinctions among Hindus and Muslims become increasingly codified locally (i.e., institutionalized and underscored) that discourse on "authenticity," purity, and legitimacy become salient.

The emergence of associations in the post-1930 period, and the distinctions between them and their non-religious predecessors, reveals, therefore, more than the evolution of intra-communal fissioning and competition. The philosophical and pragmatic differences between the EINA, EINC, and Young Indian Party raise important questions about the participants' perceptions of the relationship between class, culture, and religion; about the ways that Indo-Trinidadians sought to define themselves and toward what

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ends. For two rather different, but not necessarily mutually exclusive streams of thought are discernable. On one hand, according to Haraksingh's position, there is an alleged strengthening of religiously based and justified political and cultural resistance which enabled "refashioning" villagers' existence in its function as both shield and template. On the other hand, evident in such agendas as propounded by the Young Indian Party, the East Indian National Association, and the East Indian National Congress, fostering Indo-Trinidadian interests was not seen to necessarily rest on reliance on or marshalling of indigenous traditional forms but often on the power and opportunities afforded by upward mobility and its concomitant process of "creolization"--among Indo-Caribbeans, the shedding of the "traditional" for the "modern" in social stratification systems that are shaped by Western (Anglo, Christian) hegemony (cf. B. Williams 1991).

A curious paradox is evident in Trinidadian historiography. On one hand, there has not been extensive study of the organizational efforts of Indo-Trinidadians during the early years of the 20th century. Yet on the other, the emphasis on formal political culture has not encouraged a deep ethnohistorical exploration of Indo-Trinidadians with regard to their informal or quotidian activities--what can be seen as forms of cultural resistance; activities that still may have been guided by

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some configuration of group consciousness (i.e., "Indian," or "Hindu," etc.) or convictions about being full members of the society (a notable exception has been the work of Haraksingh). This begs the question of how "political" is being defined, which in turn has implications for understanding the historical development on-the-ground of ideologies of ethnicity, cultural identity, and religious affiliation. Assertions that village religious leaders were "apolitical" (Singh 1985:52), that the "aims" of imams and pandits were "rarely secular" (Vertovec 1992:78), that village community leadership was somehow not at least in part about politics, or that secular is synonymous with mundane and that sacred means rarified (Ibid), suggests that everyday practice has little or no significant influence on group consciousness and behavior. Religious aims--i.e., those of pandits and imams--are doubtfully ever able to be divided into "secular" and "sacred." Religious ideologies (explicitly politicized or otherwise) can operate within a framework that postulates this distinction, but rarely are the objectives of religious belief and practice able to be removed from this-worldly concerns. For even in preparation toward the spiritual/pure and away from the corporeal/impure it is the problematic, binding material world that is the focus--whether one is trying to become better within it or to escape its confines (e.g., through ascetisicm). Even if the activities of religious leadership on the estates were

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not overtly formulated in terms of formal political agendas or organization (as the activities of religious leadership would be later), the effort to carry out and promote one's religion, and hence culture, particularly one that flies in the face of Anglo-Christian doctrine, is in itself a political, a "secular" act. Haraksingh puts is well in his observation that throughout the early years of the 20th century,

> what was perceived of or described as a religion could not always be accommodated within a narrow theological vein. In the early Indian villages the concepts of religion and culture were used interchangeably, and many persons persisted in seeing the defence of one as mixed up with the preservation of the other. For Hindus, the notion of dharma was elasticised to suit the new situation; the cry of 'dharma in danger' could inspire men even when religion was not the issue. With the passage of time Indians themselves became a little more discriminating, but the confusion did prove helpful in keeping the outside world--increasingly unwilling to provoke a religious reaction and unwilling to test the dividing line between what was religion and what was not--at bay (1985:162).

Aside from debate over the issue of the meaning or significance of religious belief and practice among Indo-Trinidadians in the early 20th century, the viability of religion among indentured workers tends to be interpreted by scholars (e.g., Tikasingh 1980; Mangru 1987; Jayawardena 1966) as a reflection of the colonial master plan, whereby religion was used as "another control device" on the estates (Mangru 1987:172). Contrasted with Caribbean slave owners' suppression of African religions on the plantations, for fear it would foster group cohesiveness, it is argued that

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post-Emancipation planters felt that an effective means of conciliating their laborers was to approve of and promote their rituals and festivals, the intent being to encourage greater work effort and stability from a work force mobile after meeting their contracts (Mangru 1987:170-72). Therefore, either there was an attitude of laissez-faire on the part of planters, such that as long as the religious activities of the workers did not compete with estate obligations, management did not interpose (Tikasingh 1980:134), or, as Jayawardena (1966) asserts for Guyana,

> [t]he only form of public meetings that was permitted was association for religious worship and discussion. In fact, managements of plantations helped labourers to build and maintain temples [mandirs] and mosques, to form committees to manage these and provided stipends and other facilities for priests chosen by these committees. In return they assumed the right to supervise the activities of these associations and ensured that they confined themselves to religious activities (1966:230).[18]

What Jayawardena states explicitly, his colleagues implicitly concur: that the consequence of this promotion on the part of colonial authorities led to religious "doctrines and ceremonies" (Jayawardena specifically identifies Sanatan Dharm) becoming "the only ideological basis for Indian solidarity in opposition to an oppressive

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[18]But compare Klass (1961:25), who states that on the estates, "Indian customs and religious practices were derided and even forbidden." My argument is somewhere between this continuum between Klass and Tikasingh, Mangru, and Jayawardena: that is, derided does not necessarily mean forbidden and tolerated does not necessarily mean respected. Derision and promotion can even exist simultaneously, if doing so meets some purpose.

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'establishment'..." (1966:230).

However, though estate workers (indentured or otherwise) were permitted their religious practices, this was a concession that is best viewed as a controlling tolerance rather than fosterage in good faith. There remains the problem of who is defining which practices are acceptable and how they ought to be carried out. For example, the Charak puja, a Madrassi- and Bengali-origin ritual where devotees swung from hooks in their backs, was quelled by 1853 in Guyana, primarily due to a Wesleyan missionary's decrying it as "barbarous" and "demoralizing" (Mangru 1987:170-71). One of the official concerns was that this ritual "tended to 'blunt their [devotees] feelings, and strengthen them in vice'" (Ibid). (One can speculate that one of the colonial fears of indentured workers having "blunt feelings" was the possibility that this rite could help to inure them from being weakened or worn down, and thus being more effectively controlled by the indenture system.) In Trinidad, the Madrasi custom of walking on coals was judged by the press in the 1870s as being "degrading" and "vile," whose participants were "gangs of semi-barbarians"; Hosay was "painted devilry" (in Brereton 1985:29). A particularly revealing piece in the Port of Spain Gazette, 1859, on Hosay, captures the implicit model of Christianity serving as the litmus test of legitimate religious and cultural expression and is worth quoting at

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length:

> This turmoil every year is no doubt a great nuisance...It would probably be a far more edifying sight and to the Christian mind far more grateful to see these misguided creatures quietly and unostentatiously manifesting their devotion to the great Ruler of all things. It must always be a grievous sight to see their worship made a show and exhibition of--doubly grievous to see in a christian [sic] country a <u>false</u> and <u>foolish</u> worship, paraded openly and unchecked, and it is a fair dream to look forward with hope to the accomplishment (when these and all similar outrages on decency and common-sense shall be swept away) to give place to that sincere heart worship of the only true God, which, quietly in spirit and in secret, shall someday be paid alone...[But] the spirit of devotion, which can thus hold the Hindu, misdirected thought it be, seems to us far better, more promising, than the apathetic indifference to all religions, which unfortunately, characterizes some of our people (<u>PSG</u>, July 13, 1859; quoted in Singh 1988:42, emphasis original).

While <u>Hosay</u> and <u>Phagwa</u> (<u>Holi</u>) were being observed in the mid-19th century (their celebration was expanded in the 1870s) and <u>Divali</u> and <u>Ram Lila</u> re-emerged in the villages during the later 19th century (Laurence 1985:113), estate laborers did not for the most part have the power themselves to implement their own decisions about how and when to carry out these practices. Thus, religious activities become the stuff of cultural resistance: more than in sustaining actual customs or rites but in determining how and when--not just in pragmatic terms but conceptually/ideologically as well.

Moreover, simultaneously, the centrifugal force of Christianity was pulling indigenous traditions away from the core of Indo-Trinidadian experience in complex ways. The most important and far-reaching of the forms of Christianity

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to do this was the Canadian Presbyterian Mission. For not only did the Presbyterian Mission create the possibility for dramatic mobility among Indo-Trinidadians, it was at times indicative of a more encompassing Western system of values that, in its assessments of "Indian culture," revealed its own cultural dispositions.

religion as the measure of "culture" and class

Unlike those situations where the relationship between church and state is unequivocal--either working in concert or clearly segregated, there was some degree of ambiguity in the attitude of the British government toward Christian proselytization and education in its colonies. In the West Indies, this was a matter of the state maintaining control over the management of educational institutions, as against as against Church-controlled schools, versus the benefits to the plantation system of Christianized/Westernized (Indian) workers (Mount 1977:32). It was believed that Christian Indians were more likely to remain where they were than to return to India, since, through conversion, they had "widened the gap between themselves and their traditional culture" (Ibid:32). In addition, if the immigrants stayed, then funds for return passage were saved, monies that were a much greater expenditure than the usually inferior lands given in lieu of return passage (Ibid). Finally, a reserve army of labor was, as I have discussed above, generally necessary to estate production and profit (also see Mount

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[1977]).

Due, perhaps, to the number of colonial commissions calling for state control of West Indian formal education (Kondapi 1951:159-60), an 1870 Ordinance in Trinidad allowed for "Assisted Schools" at the primary level to receive public funds to cover building and instruction costs (there were also unassisted Christian denominational schools operating as well). One of its provisions, however, was that children could not be coerced to agree to religious instruction against parents' desires (Mount 1977:32ff). By 1890 more provisions regarding educational instruction were added: four hours every day of secular instruction, overseen by the Board of Education and taught in English, and just one hour of religious instruction each day, limited to the beginning or the end of the day and announced in advance; student attendance at religious studies was contingent on their parents' wishes; any use of force on the schools' part could lead to forfeiture of government funding. However, ideals on paper are often rather different from what really transpires: Mount (1977:35) states that "there is no evidence in either Presbyterian or government sources that...any school ever lost funds for proselytizing too vigorously." As noted by Brereton (1985) and Mount (1977), Presbyterian emphasis was ostensibly on education rather than proselytizing, and the strategy was to work through the students to persuade the parents (rather than vice versa).

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Initially very successful, in ten years' time (1868-78) missionaries John and Sarah Morton had seventy adult Indian converts and fifteen Presbyterian schools (Wood 1968:280).

Another important means of combining conversion efforts with educational goals--and one that had important repercussions for literacy and thus subsequent social positioning--was to sell Hindi books, most of which were imported from missionaries in India (Samaroo 1987:96). In 1878 the Trinidad Royal Gazette included a "Report of the Canadian Coolie Mission, Books," which stated that, "[i]n 1877 we imported $200.00 worth of Bibles and other books from India, a large part of which has already been sold" (TRG May 29, 1878, p.414; field notes).

While there was undoubtedly a real interest on the part of Presbyterian missionaries in improving the quality of life for Indo-Trinidadians, missionaries not only cooperated with the planter class in order to carry out their objectives (for it was the planters who gave them access to the estates), but they harbored little or no doubts about the local economic system: they "supported it, depended upon it, and identified closely with it" (Mount 1977:36). Indeed, "coolie" violence against planters was one thing John Morton wanted quelled. For example, Morton noted that in the year before he first arrived in Trinidad, 1867, there were "several instances" where overseers and managers were severely beaten (letter from J. Morton, 1868; quoted in

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Mount 1977:37). This concern of Morton's is important for my purposes since he was of the opinion that "[w]hile they [immigrants] remain heathens they cannot be trusted, especially if their numbers increase (Ibid:37). Revealing a more encompassing Victorian mentality toward (and fantasy about) "Oriental" culture, as John Morton saw it, "Hindu gods were loathsome..., their women wicked, wild and unkempt..., and Hindu temples not worthy of his respect" (Samaroo 1987:98, citing S. Morton [1916]).

Morton was not alone in his equating Indian culture--and particularly what was identified as its religious dimension--with abandon, primitiveness, and immorality. Hinduism in particular was made synonymous with perfidy, vengefulness, avarice (e.g., Brereton 1985:29). I suggest, however, that, in that context, Indians' religions and cultures were so conflated in the British colonial mind that "Indian" was the overarching rubric and Hinduism served as its "sign" (i.e., its signifier (form) and its signified (meaning) [cf. Barthes 1978]). That is to say, even if in some respects Islam was seen as (historically) fraternal to Christianity, it was not sufficiently disassociated from Indians or Hinduism to be exonerated of the stigma of the sinister Orient.

When religion acts as the defining sign representing a culture (i.e., Hindu/Islam : Indian), such designations as "heathen" assign diverse practices to a more or less

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aggregated set, creating a composite image. In the 19th century expression of the Orientalist dichotomy between East and West (with roots long preceding), "heathen" summed up the consummate and essential cultural other, although its referent was religious. This association with the religious was strengthened by the conjugation of "heathen" and "morally inferior" (see Singh 1988:4, below), since in Christianity (as with other world-religions), religious doctrine rests, however precariously or disingenuously, on a moral imperative of right and wrong, good and evil, virtue and sin. Indians' cultural exoticism, according to Anglo-Christian sensibilities was perceived through a religious idiom. Religion (Hinduism/Islam) enveloped the "mysterious East," representing culture, constituting culture, and "rescuing" culture through religious conversion to Christianity. Thus,

> [t]o be 'heathen', of course, meant to be morally inferior, and certain Indian traits appeared in the eyes of both the upper and middle classes [in Trinidad] to be the natural derivatives of a non-Christian culture. An example of this was the Indian practice of wife-execution...[and] almost every other facet of the Indian cultural repertoire...evoked critical comment. The clothing of both Indian males and females often left parts of the body exposed...[which] was offensive to Victorian values...The low bow...was considered obsequious by European standards. The elaborate jewelry worn by Indian women...was deemed 'barbaric' ... (Singh 1988:4).

According to J.A. Froud, a 19th century British observer of West Indian society, "[t]he Hindus, being Pantheists, have no history of their own, but supply objects for commerce and

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for conquest" (Williams 1962:103; quoted in Mahabir 1985:36). More obliquely but as effectively, the Trinidad Mirror newspaper remarked in 1901 that "agricultural labour in Trinidad was not attractive to those people 'who have got beyond the stage of civilisation that is satisfied with a loin cloth and a pot of rice'" (in Singh 1985:36).[19] Being "heathen," then, meant being all of the above --a religious idiom for an entire culture.

When couched in paternalism, even ostensibly benevolent perspectives worked against Indo-Trinidadians. For example, in his history of Trinidad, Eric Williams (1962) quotes 19th century historian William Sewell, who asserts that, "a poor pagan, he is brought in contact with civilization, and soon forgets and abandons the gross superstitions in which he is wont to put his faith" (Williams (1962:122; quoted in Mahabir 1985:37). And, Hamid (1980) comments that "the Canadian Presbyterian ministers were very concerned about the Indian converts acquiring a taste for good living." Viewing them as "easily seduced by luxurious living," one missionary posited that efforts needed to be undertaken to "keep them from taking our own way of living and leaving all the good that there is in their simple oriental way of living" (Hamid 1980; quoted in de Verteuil 1989:68).

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[19]This is a particularly interesting statement, given that the author(s) could be making an indirect contrast between Afro-Trinidadian and Indo-Trinidadian or between grass-roots and middle class Indo-Trinidadians.

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Ironically, this argument served as a justification for paying Canadians higher wages than Indo-Trinidadians, although undertaking similar assignments (Ibid:68).

Undoubtedly, those Indo-Trinidadians who participated in Canadian Mission projects were aware of the multivocal messages embedded within Presbyterian missionaries' efforts. On the one hand, there was a viable and socially acceptable means of extrication from the tyranny of estate labor; on the other, terre was the ambivalence about adopting new cultural forms at the expense of familiar ones. Indo-Trinidadians were compelled in two different directions; that is, remaining within the custody of Hinduism and Islam, which gave them "psychological protection in a society basically hostile to them racially, culturally, economically" (Singh 1985:41), or exploring avenues outside the known, avenues that offered alternative means of legitimation than the celebration of the indigenous--revitalization of (authentic) traditions and "timeless" practices.

Mount (1977) comments that,

> [c]ritics have suggested that those East Indians who became Christians were opportunists, while the men and women who remained Hindu or Moslem were generally more dedicated to principle. There is every reason to believe that they have a point...parents who sent their children [to Mission schools] must have known what they were doing and decided that affluence was more important than their religious heritage (1977:39-41).

Indo-Trinidadians who chose to accept Presbyterianism did so largely because of two key reasons: education, and the

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official registration of marriages (until 1936 and 1945, respectively, Muslim and Hindu marriages were invalid). Of course, a major incentive to have a legal union was property inheritance-- including, not insignificantly, "sub-soil rights such as the interest in oil" (Port of Spain Gazette, June 5, 1924, p.7; quoted in Jha 1982:122). Opportunities for social mobility notwithstanding, however, the position to which Mount (1977, above) refers is more complicated than as outlined. For one thing, "affluence" in this, and most cases is far more nuanced than being merely about money; it is certainly inclusive of "symbolic capital" (Bourdieu 1978) as well, which in turn signifies a variety of "riches" and accomplishments. The symbolic depth of "affluence" speaks directly to the ways that Indo-Trinidadians construct their identities; in other words, how they diffract and connect the experiential categories of "culture" and "class."

As importantly, accepting Presbyterianism was not a cut-and-dried process of rejecting what was not Christian. On the contrary, Presbyterian missionaries "had to incorporate a number of forms of organisation and worship drawn from Hindu practice" (Samaroo 1987:96).[20] Secondly, most of the Indo-Trinidadians who became Presbyterian did

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[20]Hindus have always been far more numerous in Trinidad than Muslims, hence a reason for drawing from Hindu practice. For example, D.W.D. Comins remarked in 1893 that in 1801, 85.90 per cent of non-Christian Indians in Trinidad were Hindu and 13.44 per cent were Muslim (in Jha 1985:4). Compare the census data from 1980: only about 15 per cent of Indo-Trinidadians are Muslim.

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not accept en toto Christian rituals and doctrines (Samaroo 1987:104). In fact, as Samaroo (1987) notes, Indo-Trinidadians "furthered the syncretism initiated by the missionaries" to the extent that the home office required missionaries to receive more training in Trinidad before they proceeded independently (1987:104). Finally, conversion to Presbyterianism (or any form of Christianity in Trinidad) was not overwhelming in the Indo-Trinidadian population. An important contributing factor to this was the efforts of early Hindu and Muslim organizing, especially in the 1920s and 1930s (Ibid:99). By 1959, as a local report observed, "[a]fter 90 years, the Presbyterian Community numbers in the neighborhood of 20,000 out of a total East Indian population of 250,000" (Ibid:100).

However, more telling than numbers, perhaps, and more important for the purposes of this discussion, is the influence and legacy of Presbyterian efforts with respect to social stratification and the relationship of religious practice to it. For example, the Presbyterian movement enabled a cohort of Westernized professionals to emerge by the end of the 19th century, who were to subsequently participate in the Legislative Council (Wood 1968:280). Campbell (1985:117) lists a "catalogue of 'firsts' for the [Presbyterian] Mission trained Indians: first Indians in the civil service's lower ranks; first Indians in municipal and Legislative Council politics; first Indian professionals.

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Furthermore, in 1931, 50.8 per cent of the 23,183 Christian Indo-Trinidadians (Presbyterian and otherwise) were literate to some degree, just 17.2 per cent of the 115,484 non-christian Indo-Trinidadians were; and, 1970 census figures tell us that although Presbyterian Indo-Trinidadians comprised less than one-twelfth of Indo-Trinidadians, they constituted one half of their professionals (Mount 1977:44).

The preceding discussion should help to appreciate an informant's conversation with me about the nature of the relationship between religion, culture, and ethnic identity. Formerly Hindu and for the past decade or so a convert to evangelical Christianity (a phenomenon having its florescence in the 1970s in the Caribbean), he explained that,

> now you have fewer converts to Presbyterian than long ago. And the Muslims did the same thing [as did Hindus] with their schools [i.e., fostered religious education]. This meant that they weren't going to be coerced into another religion because of circumstances. Religion is more like a practical [pragmatic, conscious] part of who we are, our 'identity' like you say, because it has changed with circumstances.

While the processes and problems considered in this section's discussion of religion among Indo-Trinidadians may seem to be issues that are relevant primarily or only to the Indo-Trinidadian population (and, indeed, they have often been treated as such in the literature), they must be more broadly understood as structural. In other words, not merely being a consequence of an abstractly asserted "plantation society" but as both reflecting the invisible

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(or attenuated) interlocutors of Afro-Trinidadian and Anglo-European culture, and Indo-Trinidadians' relationship to these, and reflecting the ethnic segmentation of Trinidad's labor process--an occupational hierarchy of plantation production that has assigned particular ethnic groups to precisely defined classifications of labor (see Bourgois 1988; B. Willliams 1991). As Mintz reminds us, "the Caribbean conjuncture of labor and ethnicity is a product of particular forces at a particular time, and of necessity it raises serious questions about the linkages between class and culture" (1987:56).

For both Afro and Indo, class mobility is usually treated (in popular wisdom as well as scholarly observation) as a modifier of cultural attributes. That is, the assumption is that original or indigenous culture[21] becomes stronger, more pronounced, as one moves downward along the structure of class hierarchy; the higher the class position, the more diluted, so to speak, original or indigenous culture gets and the more it per force emulates the dominant model (i.e., British colonial). An implicit binarism of "high" and "low" culture is evident, if not overtly valorized. For Afro-Trinidadians, and for Indo-Trinidadians

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[21]With "original" being applicable to Afro-Trinidadians and "indigenous" to Indo-Trinidadians, given the discussion in chapter I of perceptions of the nature of their respective cultures. Distinct, in this context, from "original" or "indigenous," "authentic" can be seen as implying an ideal state, a cultural, religious (etc.) condition that ought to be.

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as ethnic category vis-a-vis Afro-Trinidadians, "English" cultural markers are the "high" culture equivalent (cf. Segal 1993). Among Indo-Trinidadians--i.e., Hindu, Muslim, Presbyterian--"high" culture becomes a contested terrain of East/West contrasts: "high" can be the equivalent of greater piety, greater morality, the authenticity/purity of the Great (Eastern) Tradition, or "high" can be represented by the achieved successes of assimilation--Westernization, creolization.

Hence, "creolization" is not just about attaining the trappings of modern culture. It carries with it a class component that implicitly assumes that class and culture are analogous. When "modern" culture is de facto a "higher" culture, a progression toward and an eschewing of, creolization necessarily entails upward class mobility (which is the vehicle of creolization). Thus, what is non-creolized is "traditional," at best a lower stage and at worst inferior. This has implications for the notion of creolization carrying with it a religious component, one that reveals the particular experiences Indo-Trinidadians have had within colonial Trinidadian society. Cross-cutting class interests among Indo-Trinidadians historically have produced, among other things, varying religious identifications. Combined with Christian Indo-Trinidadians' contending with a Westernized assimilation, these competing loyalties create problematic discourses over ethnic identity

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and political behavior. As La Guerre (1974) writes it, middle class Indians publicly profess Christianity, "while maintaining a fugitive relationship with some version of East Indian culture" (1974:100).

Yet in the alternative "high" culture model, upwardly mobile Indo-Trinidadians strive for social mobility not necessarily or completely in terms of colonial "metonyms of civility" (B. Williams 1990); instead, in an idiom of (to one degree or another) anti-Western means and goals. We might look at this as one form of cultural resistance in service of social mobility that does not directly challenge the overarching status quo system of stratification, but that employs religious idioms to move about within it, ones that, importantly, are continuously participant-defined.

Until about the mid-20th century, Indo-Trinidadians' ethnic identity can be conceived as being, in a sense, <u>toward</u> "Culture," an imprecise, not necessarily self-conscious association of religions, Hinduism and Islam, which allowed Indo-Trinidadians to employ religion to define the cultural group. This rendered the confluence of "religion" and "culture" as something enabling, as resistive, and not only the prerogative of colonials' derogatory ideological fusion of Indians' religions and cultures.

In the next chapter I pursue these issues with regard to the second half of the century, and their salience for

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the community of Penal. I will argue that in the contemporary (post-World War II) era, ethnic identity can be conceived as being away from "Culture," a precise, self-conscious separation of "religion" from "culture," as "culture" is seen as jeopardizing the authenticity and legitimacy of, or as obscuring from (political) view the ethno-religious group. Here, "religion" comes to constitute in local discourse the sacred, and "culture" the profane.

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## Chapter Four. A Matter of History and Culture

If we consider from an epistemological perspective the enormous body of work over the past four or five decades on the African and South Asian diasporas to the Caribbean, two significant themes can be discerned: the notion of history is problematic--captured lyrically by Orlando Patterson as an "absence of ruins," (1967) and the notion of culture is problematic--as Gordon Lewis not so lyrically put it, Caribbean societies have been perceived as "culturally naked" (1983:3). Emerging initially with regard to Afro-Caribbean populations, virtually reified concepts of "history" and "culture" were to become almost paradigmatic in Caribbean social and political discourse as well as scholarship and popular wisdom.

In this chapter I consider some of the assumptions coloring colonial and postcolonial depictions of New World Indians and Africans, and the consequent analyses of Indo and Afro relations and group conflict. Divergent sociological discourses about Trinidadian social structure and cultural ethos shaped both the way Indo-Trinidadians have been "invented" and reinterpreted and they way they create and understand themselves. The images and representations that are the mainstay of these discourses do not mechanically link with the trope of purity I argue for in this study. But they do reflect the common leitmotifs of betrayal, land, labor, and authenticity that inform an

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organizing metaphor of purity that exists in Trinidadian society.

"Culture," "Civilization," and other Stereotypes

Tending to equate "culture" with "civilization" and "progress" (among other things), British colonial ideology fomented doubts about the presence and content of Afro-Caribbean culture through the inculcation of racist presumptions that African culture was at best lost and at worst non-existent. For example, in his proposals for political reform in mid-nineteenth century Trinidad, Sir Charles Wood, Secretary of State for India, stated that "the whole history of the African population in the West Indies inevitably drives them towards representative institutions fashioned after the British model. They look for growth to the only source and pattern that they know, and aspire to share in what has been the peculiarly British gift of representative institutions" (quoted in Ryan 1966:42). More than one hundred years later, this ideology of Afro-Caribbean culture is evident in local scholarship, as Ryan (1966) describes Wood as being "sensitive to the peculiar dilemma of the Negro in the West Indies. Having been completely detribalized, his perspectives were entirely dominated by the British super-ordinate system" (1966:42).

In deliberate counter to these paradigms, a significant aspect of the anthropological agenda in the early studies of Afro-America was concerned to find "retentions" (or

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"survivals") and "reinterpretations" of African social organization and culture (e.g., the work of Melville and Frances Herskovits), or to analyze the logic and organization of social structures of Afro-American life (e.g., R.T. Smith).[1] However, pervasive among many Caribbean scholars and intellectuals has been the idea (explicit or otherwise) that what characterizes the region is the presence of uprooted fragments of other societies, themselves allegedly with murky histories or questionable cultures, that were transplanted across the globe and forced the grapple with the loss of heritage through the "plantation legacy" (e.g., Beckford 1976). As Price (1985:24) observes, the problem "has always been at the level of interpretation, both about the nature of Caribbean history and about the meaning of the past to Caribbean peoples." Even such Caribbean thinkers as E.K. Braithwaite (Anglophone) or Jacques Roumaine (Francophone) in some sense address these issues in their assertions of and explorations for indigenous African heritage in the region's peoples. These debates helped lay the foundations for a continuing

[1] A partial reason for this differential emphasis on culture/cultural heritage versus social structure and organization may be due to the respective differences in American and British schools of thought. Not as directly concerned with "culture" or "history" during this period in anthropology (1940s and 50s), British-influenced scholarship would focus on "structure" (questions addressing contemporary sociological problems and issues), and anthropology on Boasian-inspired missions of collecting and documenting cultural traits/practices (if not always "salvage ethnography").

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discussion about the nature of the Caribbean ethos. Hence, Caribbean fiction and non-fiction are rife with reflexive and introspective questions about identity--about how history and culture are formed, persist, and lend both meaning and credibility to experience (see, for example, Walcott 1992; Benitez-Rojo 1992).

In his recent definitive work on ideological currents in the Caribbean, Gordon Lewis (1983) forcefully makes clear these quandaries about the character of Caribbean societies. He asserts that the foremost feature indicative of a Caribbean "collective sociocultural character" is that Caribbean colonies were created by European colonial powers "de novo, practically virgin territories...," peopled by slavery, indenture, and "uprooted and deculturated immigrant groups" (1983:3). He continues that with the exception of aboriginal Indians,

> ...every person in the Caribbean cast of dramatis personae has been a newcomer...they came to be members of overseas communities that were culturally naked and devoid of inherited tradition and accumulated custom (1983:4).

While Lewis ostensibly makes a case partly from the position of objective assessment of actual conditions, Mintz approaches the issue of constituting the Caribbean as object in terms of Caribbean studies and the conceptualization and creation of "Caribbean peoples." Mintz comments that "the reason that anthropology took so long to get to societies like Puerto Rico [and hence other Caribbean localities] was

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because they were not 'primitive' enough" (1989:791)--i.e, not ethnographically recognizable as traditional anthropological subjects. The influence of outsiders' presuppositions about "culture" and cultural development also had important repercussions for the historical arrangement of various ethnic groups within the system of stratification in the evolution of Trinidadian society. In Trinidad, there was scant interest on the part of the educated classes, white or colored, in the social and cultural particulars of the Indian immigrants' experience and lifeways (Wood 1968:138; Haraksingh 1986:231). Although the British were interested in the local cultures of India, and investigated and wrote about them, the customs of Indians in Trinidad were evidently not intriguing: "mid-Victorian Trinidad was too banal, too civilized" to entice scholars' or travellers' attention (Wood 1968:139).

As various constructions of Caribbean identity are posed and explored by local intellectuals, outside analysts, and the region's resident and emigrant populations, tensions develop around notions of "deculturated," "primitive," and degree and kind of culture and history that particular peoples are presumed to possess.[2] These all form a significant part of the ideological foundations of ethnic group relations, aesthetic productions, and political culture in the region. Indeed, since questions about

[2]See, for example, Rosaldo (1988).

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"identity" and "place" in the world historically have predominated among Caribbean populations of African descent, one might envision these concerns as a sort of first order struggle over controlling the definitions, characterizations, and knowledge about a locality and its inhabitants. Ultimately this has played a part in determining social policy and influencing wider political and economic decisions, as well as fueling the ways in which displaced and dispossessed people construct and understand who they are.

In contrast with Trouillot's (1992) position that anthropological gatekeeping concepts "have never been successful in the Caribbean" (1992:22), I believe that one must recognize the study of Indo-Caribbean populations as partly involving conceptual gatekeeping.[3] Haraksingh (1986:223) puts this a bit differently, but with a similar claim. He suggests that two distinct domains are evident in the study of Indo-Caribbeans: 1) Indians as estate labor and their plantation experience and 2) an "ethno-historical" emphasis on social aggregates and cultural practices and transformation. What needs to be noted is that these foci

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[3]In fact, I would venture to suggest that reified concepts and labels for particular kinds of social processes does partly characterize Caribbean studies; for example, such notions as "creolization," "syncretism," "plural society," and so on. Implicitly, these have often been the object of study themselves, or have unduly framed assumptions about the ethnographic realities to which they refer, despite Leach's caution that "a descriptive device can never have an autonomy of its own" (1954:14).

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generally attend minimally to problematizing the articulation of Indians with their wider respective societies. That is, rather than a dialectical approach to the details of these relationships, the colonial authority, the post-colonial state, other ethnic groups, and so on, are by and large posed analytically as stage or background rather than as a part of mutually shaping forces. The ramifications for Indians' experience in Caribbean societies have their historical foundations, however, precisely in the intimate interplay of ideologies of group identity and the organization of social structures.

For example, one of the principal adversaries of Indian immigration to Jamaica in the mid-19th century was the Baptist Union (Shepherd 1986). In addition to being concerned about the economic repercussions of Indian immigration on local Afro-Jamaicans, they contested immigration on "moral grounds" (1986:15):

> the immigration of a number of heathen and pagan foreigners with their religious superstitions, idolatory [sic], and wickedness, will act most injuriously on the morals of the [black] inhabitants of the island and hinder very much the efforts that are now in operation for their moral and religious improvement (Baptist Union 1858; quoted in Shepherd 1986:15).

The implicit juxtaposition of Indians' <u>bad</u> morals with Africans' <u>weak</u> morals suggests an assumption that Africans lack (sufficient) culture and that Indians have the wrong kind.

Indo-Trinidadian constructions of group character can

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derive from romanticized assessments of intrinsic (hence timeless) and ostensibly Indic ethos. Through invocations of ancient philosophy, history, and so on, certain larger than life, even mythic qualities are assembled with other images, in a self-legitimizing bricolage of traits--often to contrast with other groups' allegedly undesirable traits. Thus, after the July 1990 coup attempt in Trinidad, a top official of the largest, and state-recognized Hindu association proclaimed in objection to the event:

> Our republic is under siege, not by enemies abroad but by dangerous elements within. Our people are the most vulnerable ...The Hindu community is by its nature non-violent and peaceful. We regard family life as sacred. We worship Mother Earth. We believe in the free enterprise system and have had parliamentary democracy as part of our culture (quoted in Ryan 1991:214).

And, after an earlier coup and social upheaval, the 1970 February Revolution, a Hindu scholar remarked that

> the established order in this society belongs to a dying era; an era during which Indians were pushed into the background of our social life and were recognized only when it was convenient and advantageous for others to do so...But this never worried the Indian to any great extent. In the meantime he has been working hard and building silently but steadily from the crude earth with his bare hands. He knows overnight solutions will never work, this quality has been imbued in him by his culture. Sacrifice, self-sacrifice, is a cornerstone of Hinduism. And he is still building in spite of the odds deliberately placed in his way (Parmasad 1971:5).

These assumptions have their foundations partly in nineteenth century British colonial policy and in that era's attitudes about "foreign" and "primitive" peoples. Official treatment of Indian indentured laborers "as a singular and

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homogeneous group" (Stewart 1973:38) is evident in the preponderance of ordinances stipulating the governing of their activities and treatment by employers (1973:38). Moreover, during the 1850s and 1860s, when the Indians were becoming the principal sector of Trinidad's immigrants, "ideas about the Indians were freezing into a stereotype" that would set the tone for race relations up to contemporary times (Wood 1968:154). During these early years of indenture, the "real difference" between Indian immigration and the others was cultural, not administrative (Wood 1968:110). That is, the cultural foreignness of these newcomers loomed large in the minds of New World observers--with contradictory associations. On the one hand, it was "the age when a fascinated and horrified public" were reading about British attempts to stop suttee and thuggee in India; "[t]he fear of these sinister aspects of Indian culture was ever present in the middle decades of the [nineteenth] century" (1968:110-111). On the other hand, it was recognized that this was "an alien high culture, satisfied with its own values" (1968:111, my emph.). Ultimately wanting to fashion the Africans according to a Western and Christian form--who were assumed to be pliable according to British assumptions about African culture (as discussed above)--Indians were seen as "more like a stone that could only be worked painfully and with much toil" (1968:110).

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Characterizations of Indo-Caribbean culture rely on the plantation/indenture experience to different degree and in different ways, which has generated varying explanations of cultural identity and inter-group relations. The relationship between institutional and epic, to paraphrase Ghosh (1989) (or the concrete and the imagined), comes into focus in the basic question: (how) does one answer twentieth century questions with nineteenth century historical conditions and (assumed) cultural propensities? Attention to what the indentured laborers brought with them to the New World, and the interplay of this with their insertion into the local Trinidadian context has given rise to some adventurous if questionable theorizing about Indians' place in Trinidadian society and their consequent relations with other ethnic groups.

Some of this theorizing reflects the imposition of European attitudes and assumptions onto the immigrant populations. For example, J.D. Speckmann quotes a remark made in 1883 by a British observer in Trinidad that seems to say more about European attitudes than about the perceptions of the two groups in question:

> No wonder that the two races [Indian and African] do not, and it is to be feared never will, amalgamate; that the Coolie, shocked by the unfortunate awkwardness of gesture and vulgarity of manners of the average Negro, and still more of the Negress, looks on them as savages, while the Negro, in his turn, hates the Coolie as a hard-working interloper, and despises him as a heathen (Bronkhurst 1883:390; quoted in Speckmann 1965:35).

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And Speckmann himself argues that antipathy between nineteenth century Indian indentureds and Afro-Trinidadians is not sufficiently explained by fears of "economic threat" (competition). Rather, "from the very outset," Indians held negative views of Afro-Trinidadians, "mainly based on an aversion to the black colour of their skins, dating to the Vedic times of light-skinned Aryans versus dark-complexioned Dasyus" (Speckmann 1965:36).

Following suit, Wood, in an otherwise valuable work, claims that during indenture, "[s]exual rivalry between Indian and Negro hardly existed" because a "basic inhibition was at work among the Indians. They encountered negroid people for the first time in their lives when they landed in Port of Spain [the capital] and they found them physically unattractive" (Wood 1968:138). A few years later, Stewart (1973) and La Guerre (1974) both assert that Rawan, the demon god from Sri Lanka in the epic tale (later sacred text) of the Ramayan, serves as a powerful symbol in Trinidadian ethnic group relations--i.e., between Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians. Rawan functions as "a barrier to social intercourse between Negroes and East Indians," due to associations between the "blackness" they hold in common (La Guerre 1974:50-51), or Rawan explains "a certain pre-disposition among Indians in respect to the sexual stereotyping of Afro males...," where black Rawan in the Hindu scriptures is a "sexual interloper" (Stewart 1973:55).

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Aside from the problem of assigning a date to a feeling or proclivity (i.e., aversion), and the question of whether an ideology (e.g., regarding color) can be uniform in definition and predictable in meaning for thousands of years (i.e., Vedic times), what is absent is an explanation of the objective basis for defining a "negroid" phenotype; why all "negroids" (apparently) look the same; why no Indians could look "negroid"; and whether the various populations of "Mixed" or Chinese Trinidadians, for example, necessarily looked any better to the Indian immigrants. The suggestion of predispositions deriving from cultural/traditional memory that are used to interpret other groups by stereotypical classifications is again a harking back to a notion of static remnants of culture that exercise inordinate influence through time and space.

The preeminence of a cultural paradigm in Indo-Caribbean studies has also limited the analysis of class and gender (the latter usually couched in terms of domestic organization). Class and culture do to an extent mutually create and define each other, insofar as, among other things, upward mobility heralds changes in life style, and in standards of enculturation, where unequally valued positions in the cultural hierarchy ("high" and "low") allegedly indicate different qualities of socialization. Yet this is distinct from the specific phenomenon among Indo-Caribbeans where class position and class mobility

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tends to be measured against, or equated with a cultural transformation in which the value and assessment of the entire ethnic group hinges on the degree of material progress that both evince, and defines the value of the "culture" the group possesses. The reasons for this, as discussed earlier, are the result of the way "culture" has been conceptualized among Indo-Caribbeans as well as the tendency to equate, at least in Trinidad, "rural" with "traditional," and, per force, with "grass roots" (poor and working classes) since agricultural labor is largely manual, often unskilled, and has relatively low remuneration. Note, for example, Naipaul's description of "the rural workers, picturesque Asiatics..., ever ready to listen to the call of the blood" (1967:206). As Thomas Kuhn (1970) persuasively argued a quarter century ago, particular models and questions necessarily eclipse other, however applicable, models and questions. In the particular equation above, ignored or underplayed were critical inquiry into the precise significance and relevance of so-called "rural-urban" divisions in Trinidad; the presumption of residents' containment within "rural" areas; and the presumption of an impermeability of "rural" boundaries and limited filtering in of things "urban."

There is also a tendency to conflate upward mobility with modernity (interpreted by both scholars and many locals as the opposite of traditional). While it is certainly true

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that a certain amount of creolization--assimilation, Westernization, modernization--accompanies a rise in class position, the concept of creolization is not simply referring to cultural diversity finding a common ground or attaining the trappings of modern culture; it often has a class dimension that implicitly assumes that class and culture are analogous.[4] Jayawardena phrases this eloquently: "[c]reole in the Caribbean is the product of a specific form of economic and political domination and not only a mosaic of historically distinct cultures" (1984:449). When "modern culture" is de facto a "higher" culture, a progression toward and an eschewing of, "creolization" necessarily entails upward class mobility (which is the vehicle of creolization).

Another factor in this culture-class equation is the model of Indo-Caribbean communities as being formed of "little traditions" (e.g., Jain 1986:155) spoken of earlier. It is more or less the consensus in the Trinidadian scholarly community that "what can be found, when Caribbean Hindu [sic] dig into their past, are the remnants of a folk tradition, not the learning or scholarly experience associated, say, with middle class urban Calcutta in the mid-nineteenth century" (Haraksingh 1986:235). By no means

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[4]As I show in subsequent chapters, concepts of "modernization" are also not one-dimensional. Modernity and modernization are not simply contrasted with "tradition" or "traditional" but contain their own internal inconsistencies.

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intentionally suggesting anything denigrating, the logical extension implied is that non-creolized is "traditional" and/or "grass-roots," at best a lower stage and at worst, insufficiently developed.

However, what Indo-Trinidadians maintain as desirably, or usefully, "Indian" and what is eschewed is contingent as well as complex. Indeed, it is not always as predictable as Angrosino's (1972) "Indian Portnoy," who is torn between the "moral value" of family-centered sugar estate labor with the "purely pragmatic" work of the oilfield, where betrayal of heritage is the price of accomplishing the highest goals of that heritage (1972:241-2). Nor is it as predictable as La Guerre's (1974) assertion that middle class Indo-Trinidadians publicly profess Christianity "while maintaining a fugitive relationship with some version of East Indian culture" (1974:100). Hence, as late as 1986 Angrosino can state that in Guyana and Trinidad, Indians

> have remained a rural population for the most part, and until World War II <u>their traditional culture was not noticeably changed</u>. But in the past generation Indians have become quite visible both politically and economically, and currently they are <u>reaching toward some semblance of modernity</u> as they compete with their Creole neighbors (Angrosino 1986:66; my emph.).

Many depictions of Indo-Caribbean women have tended to implicitly (or otherwise) assume docility, obedience, shelteredness, and being ruled with a vengeance by a socially anachronistic patriarchy. Again, the paradigm of an Indian cultural ideal dictating the mundane actions of

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everyday life is evident, even in relatively recent research. Apparently irrespective of class position or the influence of "lower class" creole laxity toward men's marital fidelity, Angrosino (1986) asserts that "Indian women still have nothing remotely approaching the freedom of their Creole sisters, and an unfaithful wife is still the object of scorn and revulsion" (1986:69). One's first reaction is to wonder whether only Indo-Trinidadian men were queried about this, who would in all likelihood give an idealized depiction of "Indian" domestic relations and male power and authority. However, it was an elderly man, and in many ways quite traditional (rural laborer, bi-lingual, grass-roots, meticulously Hindu), who, laughing, repeatedly mused to me his favorite local aphorism, "there's two things in life you can't escape: death and horn." "Horning" is the Trinidadian term for cuckolding, and applies to both men and women.

This folk saying recognizes the frequency with which men and women stray, or are tempted to stray, from the confines of marital obligations. Moreover, in the religiously diverse and class-stratified locality in which I conducted the field research for this dissertation, there were a number of women (and countless men) who had stories of extra-marital affairs, abandoning or being abandoned and taking up with someone else, enticing a man from his wife, having "outside" children (i.e., not from the current

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spouse), and so on. These ethnographic instances made Lieber's (1981:118, fn#11) claim all the more curious:

> [Indo-Trinidadian] men have extensive control over women and their commands are enforceable. Indian women are expected to put on a proper show of servility before men, and men make sure they do, using physical force if they deem it necessary.

With no evidence he has actually spoken to any Indo-Trinidadian women, Lieber asserts an oppressive patriarchy deriving from a culture that is apparently uniformly expressed, one-dimensional in nature, rigidly ensconced, and virtually timeless. While domestic violence (and an attendant alcoholism) is a grievous social problem within the Indo-Trinidadian community (as well as throughout the wider society), culturally-determined patriarchy and female powerlessness form the sub-text that belies even much recent research, concerned as it directly or indirectly is with "traditional" versus "modern," retention-loss models of culture, and idealized images of indigenous (Indian) culture.

Correctly locating the Trinidadian "'coolie' stereotype" in social and economic terms (the indenture project and nineteenth century Trinidadian social structure), Stewart (1973:46) identifies the most significant aspects of this alleged persona, one I found to be still resonant in local ideology almost two decades later: servile, treacherous, acquisitive, extremely ethnocentric and clannish, lacking in physical stamina.

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Yet, as with most stereotypes, there is an internal contradiction:

> Indians are criticized for being underhanded, servile, avaricious, racists, and at the same time admired for their economic, educational, and social accomplishments. Their social and economic history in Trinidad is seldom taken into account as an important contributing factor in the development of the Indian-ness for which they are both damned and admired (Stewart 1973:46-7; cf. Ryan 1966:13-20).

Ironically, while the Indian/Indo-Trinidadian "character" is so minutely dissected and appraised, as recently as 1991 Trotman can state that

> today Indians still remain outsiders...They are still seen as...not fully Trinidadian...an outside club of usurpers who, overnight, have stolen the patrimony of the real Trinidadians -- those of African origins. Moreover, Indians are still pictured as a monolith without religious or class differences (Trotman 1991:398).

Presaging Trotman by a quarter of a century, Ryan's (1966) observation that "the average [Afro-]Trinidadian does not really discriminate between Hindus and Muslims, both of whom are lumped together as 'Indians'" (1966:20) remains as much the case today as it was thirty years ago.

The unfamiliarity of Trinidadian society regarding Indian and Indo-Trinidadian cultural and historical specifics is a sore point that was brought up frequently in my conversations with people. Especially galling, it seemed, was the lack of knowledge, and, from which it was deduced, the lack of interest about the distinctions between Muslims and Hindus. Even if Stewart and Trotman have phrased their observations in slightly exaggerated terms,

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the dilemma for Indo-Trinidadians (and other Indian communities throughout the Caribbean) that remains problematic is negotiating these simultaneous cultural depictions (stereotypes) in such a way as to emphasize and promote what is authentic (ethnically distinctive) yet legitimating (socially integrative) about being "Indians."

Although Indo-Caribbeans have not been envisioned as being "people without history" or culture (Wolf 1982; cf. Rosaldo 1988), among the consequences of being perceived as "little traditions" in "settlement societies" were 1) a conceptualization of history more in terms of specific transformations in traits or traditions than as an encompassing and multidimensional set of political, social, and economic forces, as well as 2) being rendered by and large in idealized terms. Insofar as ideal models of South Asia serve as paradigms for Indo-Caribbean culture and social relations, cultural evolution has tended to be depicted as a linear progression from "traditional" to "modern."

Place, or the Ideology of Geographies

> Indians of today live a higher class life, so you won't see nothing Indianish in them. Real Indians live a kind of low class life. When you have more education and a better life [standard of living] you lose your life style, you live like white people, not like Indians. You have maids, servants, a big house (Afro-Trinidadian friend, 1989).

If history gets invented and reinvented through oral and written historiographies, and is therefore always in

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flux and subject to current agendas and moods, history also inheres, in an apparently more fixed way, in places. These places, or geographic localities, are the locus of specific events and forces that live on in the minds of those who have experienced them. Such places are also pockets of the imaginary, where actual occurrences are embroidered into ideological (or fantasied) landscapes that more or less correspond to the objective conditions realized in historical processes. History is embodied in physical localities, especially land. Spatial geographies overlap with a temporal terrain, where distance is mediated by emotion. The Indo-Trinidadian, and I would suggest Indo-Caribbean, historical memory is intimately associated with the physical experiences of labor-and-the-elements, a sensibility about "outside" (cf. Austin 1984), the external environment of Nature with a capital "N."[5]

In this section I examine how Indo-Trinidadian ethnic identity is constructed through what I call an ideological geography. That is, Indo-Trinidadians' perceptions of the relationships connecting a regional locale to its specific history and associated cultural and religious traditions involves the production of meanings. Based on Indo-

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[5]This is particularly evident in Indo-Caribbean indigenous literature, such as in the fiction of, among others, Edgar Mittleholzer (e.g., Corentyne Thunder), Harold Sonny Ladoo (e.g., No Pain Like This Body), Shiva Naipaul (e.g., The Chip-Chip Gatherers), and Samuel Selvon (e.g., A Brighter Sun and its sequel Turn Again Tiger).

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Trinidadians' interpretation of their historical and contemporary experiences, these meanings are expressed in the form of particular images and representations that are intimately linked to the distribution of power among Trinidadians.[6]

While oral narratives are almost always arabesque in their evocation, a linear trajectory of time can be extrapolated from Indo-Trinidadians' collective memory of diaspora: arrival, indentureship, assimilation. Most "older heads" do not hesitate in recalling a heritage of what they refer to as "bound coolies," forebears who prevailed. However, in my conversations with most adults, irrespective of generation, certain images and associations recurred in people's evocations of their (individual or ethnic group) past--and land, in the terms of a symbolically charged geography, was key.

As I considered an appropriate field site I became particularly interested in the folk wisdom that informed people's characterizations of the life and culture of various communities. Local friends and informants consistently echoed each other's advice to me that if I wanted to experience "real Indian culture" I must go "south," to an alleged rural heartland of authentic tradition and "long time ways." One of the localities

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[6]Here I follow Connerton's (1989) argument that power relations shape the structuring of memories.

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repeatedly suggested was Penal, the epitome of the rural (as opposed to urban), a cradle of "traditional ways" where "progress" and "modernization" have not fully penetrated.

Ironically, Penal historically has been a principle area of subsistence and cash crop production, and thus a major marketing center. Situated only about thirty minutes' drive from Trinidad's "industrial capital," San Fernando, it is in the midst of Trinidad's oil-producing region (St. Patrick County). Moreover, there is certainly significant agricultural production in "north," (on the outskirts of the capital and throughout the East-West Corridor). The contradiction of an ostensibly isolated, timeless trove of authenticity ensconced in such a central (and thus indeed "modern") location intrigued me.

In "south," "agriculture" is an identifiable industry; "rural" is a cultural concept, ideologically loaded since in the Caribbean the rural/urban divide is debatable (cf. Rubin 1966; Cross 1979), since most of the sugar industry has been in "rural" areas and since most of the islands did not have extensive urbanized sectors and had only one "primate" city (Cross 1977). The concept of "rural" depicted in the literature on the Caribbean tends to be made synonymous with "agriculture."[7] That is, a real and conceptual space is

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[7]This is, I believe, partly due to the influence of Latin American models of economic and political development which have been not always correctly superimposed onto (neighboring) Caribbean contexts.

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equated with a means of production (and it is assumed that occupations within the rubric "agricultural" cannot significantly differ). However, while occupation is conceptually distinct from means of production, in Trinidad's ethnically segmented labor market it remains a significant variable in the creation of ethnic identities. The varying descriptions of Penal as a particular kind of locality reveal people's assumptions about the nature of Indo-Trinidadian history and the relationships between class and culture. These descriptions also reflect the ways in which history, class, and culture are constituted in geographical spaces, which, in turn, shape the identities of those persons and communities residing in them.

"Rural" and "urban," though not entirely reliable distinctions in Trinidad, are highly charged symbols in the ethnic identity. Historically predominating in the agricultural (cash crop and subsistence farming) and as manual laborers, Indo-Trinidadians have been characterized by local conceptions of rural and rustic, geographically associated with "south," as opposed to an urban, Afro-Trinidadian "north." Both "south" and "north" are thus metaphoric as well as literal demarcations, a fact brought home in an offhand remark once made to me by a taxi driver. I had been visiting some friends near Icacos, the southernmost area on the western side of the island, and told the driver that I wanted to return to Penal. He

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responded, "oh, you're going south." I found this remarkable, considering that we were easily three hours south of Penal. Moreover, I heard repeated a few times the local aphorism, "Debe, Penal; bodi ke dahl" (stringbeans and lentils), a folk saying that associates Penal/"south," cultural authenticity, and class position. For "south" is evocative of kitchen gardens (and hence food) that are indexical of the Indo-Trinidadian experience. Bodi and dahl are two common, and consummately Indian foods in Trinidad, associated with the gardens and the culture that produces them.

This experience/association with cane fields as well as cocoa farming, also common in parts of southern Trinidad, is, however, multivalent. The characteristics of rurality and rusticity acquire an oppositional quality with reference to Indo-Trinidadians. Rurality, on the one hand, speaks to a quality of life, synonymous with authenticity, and valorized as a touchstone of essentialized culture and traditions. It thus provides a defense against political domination and cultural absorption by the Trinidadian state and potentially by other ethnic groups--notably Afro-Trinidadians. Rusticity, on the other hand, is about personal character, and can be equated with those aspects of grass roots that signify a backwardness and crudity that are embarrassing or shameful. Embedded in these ideologies are ambivalent conceptions of "tradition," which figure in

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ambivalent attitudes toward assimilation into a larger, national arena by a state that is seen as having an ambiguous commitment to Indo-Trinidadians.

While the "north"/"south" distinction is in large part an implicit Afro/Indo distinction, this urban/rural symbolism also signals distinctions among Indo-Trinidadians, distinctions that are fundamentally about class stratification and the ideologies that accompany it. For example, a wealthy and urban young Indo-Trinidadian man explained to me that there is a

> difference between dark Indians from Barrackpore, Penal, and Couva [and town-dwellers]. There's a lot of class status and hierarchy in the Indian community. Some friends of mine say I'm not Indian because I'm living in town. If your father was a professor and your grandfather was a teacher and you have Sindi [from the Sind region of Pakistan] in you...Well, the others, it's like they're only one generation from indenture.

The areas to which this speaker refers, Barrackpore, Penal, Couva, are all localities that have been profoundly associated with servitude, poverty, manual labor, general backwardness--if also authentic tradition. That "dark" and "indenture" are both associated by this speaker with the residents of these rural places is not coincidental.

Yet these class-based distinctions become conflated with religious differences, that, along with geography, (in)form certain stereotypes within the Indo-Trinidadian population. Hence, as the speaker above continues to talk with me about culture, religion, his own identity, and so on, he evokes an imagery that I found fairly common at

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large, and recognized as familiar ideology among a number of my friends and informants.

> I never knew I was Indian, I grew up thinking I was a Muslim and a Trinidadian. Anything Indian--food, music--was like them, that was Caroni [historically the quintessential indenture/cane production region]. We used to laugh at the Presbyterians but we were like them. [Even though] they were Anglicized, [they had] Canadianized pronunciation of their names, we did the same thing, but from a town and a Muslim perspective. Christianity and Islam are very similar. We're Westernized, civilized, not like the backward, rural Indian. That Indianness, that was backwardness. ...The Beverly Hillbillies, those are the nouveau riche Indians running out of Caroni. We are not about flash, we are about education, solid values, and contributions to the community. ...'Town' means that you're accepted into the mainstream, it means leadership, not in a geographic sense. The French Creole[8] can live in the country but they're part of the town because they share the same cultural values. They can move easily, they can mix, you're accepted...

Here a clear message is conveyed, if implicitly. That is, the speaker is identifying grass-roots, rural Hindus as culturally "Indian" and middle- and upper-class, urban Muslims as culturally "Trinidadian." This is an identity that, in its association with "Presbyterians" (historically the most upwardly mobile of Indo-Trinidadians) and being "Westernized" and "civilized" addresses class position and

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[8]French Creoles in Trinidad are both "whites" and those seen as the historical result of combined African and European colonial, particularly French, relations (at times classified as "Trinidad white"). The category is associated in contemporary usage with the nation's economic power brokers, the capitalist class of elites whose own interests are seen by others as not always corresponding with those of the rest, the nation. As such, French Creoles are admired as enviable for their privilege and success, yet they can also be identified by working and middle-class Trinidadians of various ethnic identities as unjustly having more than a fair share of society's resources and rewards.

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the alleged concomitant cultural expressions that accompany it than it does religion per se. However, these distinctions become interpreted as being anchored in religious forms, which can then be used in service of other socio-political commentary. For example, this same young speaker went on to relate that,

> part of [his] strong feelings about Islam are about culture. Something [that] gives me a base to deal with society. ...Culture is a broad word. In Trinidad it means not being creole. Not just Negro, but creolization. Eventually Trinidad will be a melting pot of a creole culture, the basis of state cultural policy, for example, what is portrayed as Trinidad culture. [The state's] types of cultural activities don't support the diversity. Creolization is a cross between African [Afro-Trinidadian] capitalist culture and North American black culture. Culture means Indian [too] but [it means] not being creole more. In North America it means Third World...And [in Trinidad] there's an obliteration of Indianness, or non-Africanness, let me say.

The core of these ideas among Indo-Trinidadians--that is, the potentially detrimental significance of "creolization" and the state's role in managing culture and thus quality of life for various ethnic groups--is a common leitmotif in local discourse, and certainly not specific to Muslims. The point to emphasize here is the plasticity and efficacy of a religious idiom in a narrative that is about making meaning out of one's life, giving some kind of structure to experience that will or can explain it. It would seem that this speaker has a number of distinct claims, or what he perceives as claims on his loyalties and affinities. It also seems, at first glance, that he contradicts himself,

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asserting initially that "Indian culture, food, music" is "Hindu" and "backward" and thus fundamentally unlike the "civilized," "urban" "Muslim perspective" he shares with other "town" folk, and then saying that the culture of "Indianness" is both a "base" for dealing with society and a shield that prevents group "obliteration." But in fact, this is not a contradiction but an example of the kinds of significance attributed to malleable concepts such as "culture" and the multivalent meaning that imbues religious idioms.

Aside from the particular conflation of class and culture[9] that many Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians conveyed to me about the Indo-Trinidadian conceptions of the rustic in "south," there is a methodological problem of overdetermining the Indo-Trinidadian profile. That is, research on Indo-Trinidadians has tended to make very general statements about "Indians in Trinidad" based on data gathered from one specific locale with its particular micro-history and set of social processes. Differences in locality, class position, and family history create significant transsections among the Indo-Trinidadian population. During my stay I had friends as different as Rock, Dolly, and Hilda, who are northern valley cocoa estate workers and recently-observing evangelical Christians;

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[9]Essentially the equation: lower in class = higher in traditional culture.

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Golly, Ma, and their extended household, historically tied to the cane estates of a now-bedroom community of Port of Spain but educationally, religiously, and occupationally diversified; Tanty Polly and Mamu, childless, retired formal sector wage earners and long time residents of the East-West Corridor (from Port-of-Spain to Sangre Grande, and demographically predominantly Afro-Trinidadian); Fatima and her nuclear family, well-to-do, "modern," and secure in what is for others the precarious economic conditions of southern Trinidad; or, Bhagoo Rampal, cocoa-farming patriarch and fishing-village community leader in the distant southwestern Icacos peninsula, far removed from the ostensibly typical Indian "south."

Given the diversity experienced in their various lives, and given that within the same neighborhood or even cluster of residences, households and families can have multiple class affiliations, I had to consider how I might make a statement about Indo-Trinidadians without doing a disservice to this complexity. I think that if we view the local construct of "grass roots" as a unifying metaphor we can see Indo-Trinidadians as possessing a fundamental commonality that does not negate the diversity of their experiences; for "grass roots" constitutes not only a working class position but a multiply-inflected collective memory of that position: the diaspora of betrayal, the experience of indenture, and the eventual moral and material rewards of "hahd wuk" [hard

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work], explicitly spelled out and pronounced as such by a neighbor during one of our conversations, intended as an ironic comment on the condition of being Indian.[10] As another example, occasionally I heard "older heads" (elderly Indo-Trinidadians) use the phrase "jheel mentality. To have a jheel mentality means to be traditional in one's thinking, in the negative sense of backward and retrograde. Not coincedently, jheel means "lagoon" in Hindi/Urdu. As with cane fields, the lagoon is for Indo-Trinidadians a "summarizing symbol" (Ortner 1973) of the demanding, wrenching labor of subsistence agriculture and yet also the means of sustaining life, since access to land is what differentiates a "secure" from a "precarious" working class among all Trinidadians. Rice land in the wet season and vegetable garden in the dry season, the "lagoon" was terrain distinct from the estates' cane fields. it thus represents a significant if ambivalent domain of autonomy familiar to most Indo-Trinidadians today.[11]

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[10]Part of the irony was in pronunciation. He was underscoring the grass roots lack of formal education, which contributes, of course, to the dimension of grass roots that is indicative of working class and "real" Indian (i.e., traditional) culture.

[11]I will not talk much about non-urban Afro-Trinidadians, but there are more Afro-Trinidadians in agricultural regions like Penal and Siparia (southern Trinidad), (not to speak of the underdeveloped northeast [e.g., Toco]), than is usually assumed in writings on "rural" Trinidad--a designation that, with some exceptions, usually means "Indian." Rather than saying that Trinidad's "rural" or "south" are synonymous with "Indian," it is more accurate to say that proportionately, more Indo-Trinidadians live in non-urban areas of Trinidad

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In trying to refine my understanding of social relations, I offer two distinctions in class relations: "precarious" working class and "secure" working class. More descriptive than analytical, they convey the idea that although a vast proportion of Afro- and Indo-Trinidadian populations are working class in terms of their structural position in the system of production, there are finer distinctions that enable us to grasp the more subtle experiences within this class as well as among ethnic groups. These distinctions have to do with degree and means of control, self-determination, and reproduction possible within the caprices of the larger political economy.

In his numerical ranking of Trinidad's "social structure of racial and national groups," Crowley (1957) suggests the importance of a correlation between class, culture, and locality among Indo-Trinidadians. He briefly lists "East Indians" in the following descending order: converted Christian Indians, then Muslims (clearly excluding Afro-Trinidadians), and then Hindus. Muslims, he states, "are sometimes distinguishable by their lighter skin-color

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than do Afro-Trinidadians. This helps us to remember that Afro-Trinidadians have been an important part of Trinidad's peasantry and continue to live in fishing and farming communities, often among Indo-Trinidadians (e.g., Cedros and Morne Diablo), and are not all civil service employees living "in town."

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and Armenoid features.[12] They cluster in the cities and towns as shopkeepers, where they outnumber the Hindus. A few are professional men, and many are small farmers and cane laborers" (1957:818-19). While the degree of "intermarriage" and conversion among Muslim and Hindu Indo-Trinidadians renders dubious any precisely measurable phenotypical distinctions, Crowley is problematizing Indo-Trinidadian class position and status. He implicitly challenges the construct of Indo-Trinidadians as a homogeneous category of people by taking into account salient variables that make for status distinctions, such as locality ("cities and towns"), and acknowledges that different sectors of the Indo-Trinidadian population are differentially placed in these localities (e.g., more Muslims as urban bourgeoisie and petit bourgeoisie). This, in turn, has repercussions for intra-community stratification. We can, however, push this effort much further, in advancing the notion of "precarious" and "secure" working class as applicable to all Trinidadians, but with particular (cultural) significance for Indo-Trinidadians.

By "precarious" working class I mean those with access

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[12]Two teenage Hindu women told me that they felt that Muslims are "better looking" than Hindus, and many Indo-Trinidadians said that Muslims can be distinguished from Hindus by high-bridged noses and lighter skin and low-bridged noses and darker skin, respectively. I was not able to see these distinctions as forming this kind of pattern.

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only to earned income--from wage labor or informal sector activities. The "secure" working class, while also primarily dependent on earned income, have in addition what I refer to as potential (or "quiet") assets like small amounts of land or other property, or access to such resources as highest-quality formal education for their progeny, which allows the possibility for upward class mobility. When exploring class structure in Trinidad, the options for future generations must be considered a key variable. The Canadian Presbyterian Mission, led among Indo-Trinidadians from 1868 by missionaries John and Sarah Morton, provided Indo-Trinidadians' first opportunity for large-scale class mobility. Conversion to Presbyterianism afforded class mobility by expanding one's future possibilities of occupation and lifestyle.

Furthermore, among Indo-Trinidadians, the profound effects of the oil boom (c. 1974-1982) dramatically reveal the importance of rapid shifts in family fortunes. So, as one example, a grass-roots household in "south" that owns or even rents land on which there can be a kitchen garden, is in a firmer position for maintaining a standard of living or even survival than a grass roots household in "north," say, Afro-urban Laventille. Laventille provides commodities that must be bought with wages or with income garnered from the formal and informal sector.

Another example is taken from a conversation I

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overheard (in 1988) while waiting for an appointment at the Ministry offices in Port-of-Spain. Two mid-level, Afro-Trinidadian civil service workers were discussing the rumor that the then-governing party, the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR, 1986-1991), was considering a cut in public service workers to a four-day work week. They claimed that in the past, government work meant job (and financial) security. The woman stated that, "common sense was that if you work with Government your job was secure." Her male companion added, "no matter what, you knew that your check was coming at the end of the month. And it was impossible to be fired, it was a long, drawn-out process to be dismissed."

This expectation of a guaranteed subsistence actually refers primarily to the burgeoning of civil service occupations which began after independence from Britain in 1962, and to the inflation of salaries enabled by Trinidad's boom economy. However, the historical conditions of seasonal under-employment as well as perennial unemployment among Indo-Trinidadians both inverts and affirms the construct "precarious" working class. In other words, "secure" and "south" and Indo-Trinidadian are not synonymous in the construction of class; nor are "precarious" and "north" and Afro-Trinidadian. Class security or precariousness depend on relation to the means of production, but for residents of "south," the majority of

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whom are Indo-Trinidadian, the idea of guaranteed survival through land, figures significantly in their objective position in the social structure as well as in their subjective valorization of land as the safety net. A common refrain among my acquaintances was "at least we have/even if we only have 'salt and roti'," a literal and symbolic reference to sustenance and perpetuation.

"Families" are certainly conceptually and empirically distinct from "classes," and the prevalence in Trinidad of oil boom benefits is evident across a wide spectrum of Trinidadian society. However, changes in the relations of production, such as the rise in self-employment and the expansion of entrepreneurial activities, changes in consumption and investment patterns, wider arenas of opportunity (in North America and the United Kingdom), and the fact that regional kinship ties weave families into ever-larger aggregates of people, all allow one to extrapolate "classes" from "families." Yet local stereotypes and scholarship (e.g., de Verteuil 1989) that give credence to the association between Indo-Trinidadians and financial success (sometimes seen as economic dominance, or even cupidity) do not always make the critical distinction between cash (the power to consume) and capital (the power to control). Therefore, I believe that a fair amount of what has been viewed as change in the Indo-Trinidadian class structure is really heightened consumer

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"power"--mobility within the parameters of a particular social position, rather than the formation of a new class stratum.

Discussion of class among Indo-Trinidadians must also take into consideration 1) capital holdings, e.g., bank accounts; 2) standard of living; and 3) ownership of land. Simply looking at large bank accounts (the alleged, if proverbial ethnic secret, so to speak, of Indo-Trinidadians) does not necessarily indicate absolute wealth. When an Indo-Trinidadian household has TT$50,000 in the bank, let us say, but has a two or three room wooden ("board") house, four people to a room, a few pieces of furniture, one or no cars, a rented (or even owned) small plot of garden land, and eats meat two or less times per week, and only one or two regular wage earners, a raise in their standard of living would rapidly consume their TT$50,000. I met many people in comparable circumstances who reputedly (according to their relatives) have double and triple digits in the bank, from years of austerity, or the absence of conspicuous consumption.[13] My main objective thus far has been to understand how class position, as "grass roots" in "south," plays a part in shaping Indo-Trinidadian ethnic identity rather than to define class or class structure per se. To this end, Sider's (1986) observation on the nature of class

[13]Improperly understood, these kinds of examples further the stereotype of the hidden economic power of allegedly crafty and shrewd Indo-Trinidadians.

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is instructive:

> The composition and internal structure of any particular class are fluid and dynamic due to both changes in material basis and productive activities of the class, but also to changing political and ideological claims, assertions, and practices. It's precisely at this point that culture enters into the dynamic of class, not because culture 'happens' within classes...Culture enters the dynamic of class because it is where class becomes dynamic; where the lines of antagonism and alliance come together and apart. 'Class' must include people's understanding of their situation as well as common position in the social relations of production (1986:7).

In "south," the grass roots metaphor is most salient, since the fields of cultivation and seas of sugarcane (along with the one operative sugar factory remaining on the island) still provide a significant component of employment and subsistence. The recent upward mobility experienced in "south" as well as the rest of Trinidad has not yet sufficiently dimmed the recognition of the indentured immigrants' struggle and its continuing cultural and political significance among Indo-Trinidadians.

In the next chapter I take up another aspect of Indo-Trinidadians' cultural consciousness, this time in terms of their relations, as a particularly configured community, with the Trinidadian state. Inextricably shaping social identities through its activities, the state is a principal entity in Indo-Trinidadians' impetus to (re)form themselves.

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## Chapter Five. State and Nation

This chapter examines the social, political, and ideological bases of cultural disenfranchisement, a key theme in Indo-Trinidadians' formal and informal discourse on the politics of cultural struggle and ethnic identity. This theme manifests itself as the perception that the post-independence Afro-Trinidadian dominated state exercises a cultural hegemony that works in concert with political and economic domination, profoundly disadvantaging Indo-Trinidadians' place in society as well as hindering efforts to realize egalitarian ideals for inter-group relations. This perception exists in an environment Indo-Trinidadians distinguish, with the hindsight of nostalgia, from discrimination experienced under British colonial rule.

Indians have experienced ethnic group self-consciousness either in nationalistic terms as "Indo-Trinidadians" or as members of particular religious groups. Efforts common to all have been the erection of denominational schools; the gradual importation of international religious and cultural missionaries who stressed, through pedagogical tours, the revitalization of religion and culture; and the extensive development of Hindu and Muslim religio-cultural associations (such as the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha and the Anjuman Sunnat-ul-Jamaat). Indeed, by the 1950s a "renaissance" in Indian culture had emerged. Along with burgeoning political organizations,

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politics and cultural pride became identified with each other. Key to these developments was an increasing grass-roots mobilization, yet with selective preservation of and emphasis placed on cultural traditions, religious rituals, and sacred texts. Since World War II, and particularly during the oil boom period (roughly 1973 to 1982), new, previously impossible economic opportunities for many Trinidadians were created. Contrary to the previous situation where informal (sector) economic activities develop under conditions of privation, scarce wage employment, and a general need to "hustle," informal economic activities under Trinidad's oil boom flourished, everyone "doing they little thing" to exploit to one degree or another a vastly expanded market of possibilities. The wealth amassed, combined with the upward mobility of large sectors of the Indian population in the 1950s and 1960s--enabled an increase in civil service, professions, and secondary education (particularly for women). It also contributed to new assertions of ethnic identity. These were, and are, largely expressed as greater demands for acquiring cultural and religious knowledge from visiting missionaries and local specialists; conspicuous consumption through elaborate ritual "functions" orchestrated in both households and temples; and demands for social equality couched in terms of cultural validation and recognition by the state.

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Within the arena of nation-building and questioning both the basis on which resources are distributed as well as their actual distribution (B. Williams 1990, 1991), Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians historically have pressed the state for rights and recognition in an idiom of cultural distinctiveness based partly on attributed qualities and capabilities. These attributes can serve as the basis for legitimating a deservedly recognized and rewarding position in the social hierarchy, authenticating a group's identity, and justifying its claims to various positions of power (B. Williams 1989, 1990; cf. Hanson 1989:894).

Invoked in these processes are self-conscious and at times rhetorical conceptualizations of culture, tradition, heritage, and/or roots. Empowerment by Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians is attempted, in part, through asserting their own, and challenging each other's claims to specific cultural characteristics and traits that demarcate and distinguish them as a group. These characteristics and traits can be envisioned ethno-culturally or with respect to class position in the social structure. The claims involve debates whose subjects range from government sponsorship of African and Indian arts or organizations, to alleged ethnic discrimination in employment or provision of infrastructure, to the quality of a group's particular cultural or religious practices and morality. As B. Williams explains,

> apart from any direct competitive economic benefits derived from ethnic mobilization, ethnicity is

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> part of diverse symbolic conceptions of the nature of the socio-cultural order and ethnic groups 'place' within it. Ethnicity is the vehicle that persons of different racial stock and cultural background use to conceptualize their contribution to the development of a socio-cultural order that is more than the sum of its ethnic parts. On the one hand, meanings attributed to ethnic differentiation allow groups to justify gaining from the society by pointing out what they have given to the society. On the other hand, these meanings encourage a sense of 'ownership' through which the cultural content of Guyanese society and different aspects of its economic structure are claimed by particular groups (1991:176).

Because their social and political voices are expressed in an essentially cultural idiom, Indo-Trinidadians are generally concerned about the potential cultural marginalization (or oblivion) that the state can effect through discriminatory patronage in such areas as job opportunities, social programs, and various sponsorships. Hence, the expression and elaboration of ethnic identity through small- and large-scale visible cultural productions, such as festivals, national holidays, art exhibitions, denominational school projects, and the like, ideally (and often) supported by the state, is the crucial and the broadest context of specific assertions of identity among the various groups of Trinidadians.

Pervading these claims is a discourse of authenticity (of identity) and legitimacy (of social positioning), themes resonant in Trinidadian society as a whole. As B. Williams has theorized, in multi-ethnic nation-states certain cultural forms are validated as "real" or "authentic" culture and are compared unfavorably with devalued,

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"inauthentic" cultural forms that are categorized as "mere adaptive strategies," as superstitions, or as deviant behavior (1990:112; cf. Kligman 1988:259). As reified notions, these attributed cultural qualities and capabilities function in Trinidadian society as diagnostic emblems for establishing ethnic, religious, or class identities, and are descriptive of group identity insofar as the quality and boundaries of a group's identity are assessed: how much culture, what kind of tradition, how grand the heritage, how attenuated the roots.

Pivotal to these issues is how the definitions and interpretations of culture, tradition, heritage, and roots are expressed in religious arenas. As indicators of distinctions, they mark not only religious boundaries but the authenticity of the practices or characteristics they encompass. Religious interpretation and expression serve as important contested domains of authenticity of identity and legitimacy of social place, where questions of culture and tradition are framed and spelled out. Religious expression is subject to the scrutiny of what is real, what is pure, and hence what is effectual guiding people's actions and empowering their lives both spiritually and socially.

Racial and Ethnic Politics

Among the most ethnically complex of Caribbean societies, the island of Trinidad (of the Republic of

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Trinidad and Tobago)[1] is characterized by scholars, politicians, and local popular wisdom as the epitome of co-existing cultural diversity. Indeed, in the mid-19th century the British Secretary of State for India, Sir Charles Wood, claimed that in Trinidad "any homogeneous public opinion" was absent because it was "socially divided into all kinds of groups which have few relations with each other" (Wood Report; quoted in Ryan 1966:43). However, the nature of this ethnically segmented and immigrant-dependent labor market of the colonial plantation economy in Trinidad set the stage for a subsequent pattern of historically competitive antipathies between Indian, African, and other (demographically smaller) ethnic groups. Expressed in large part through "public opinion," diverging and competitive stances and claims among Afro- and Indo-Trinidadians have been precariously managed by both colonial and postcolonial states.

With respect to the contemporary conditions of the post-colonial state, after independence from Britain (1962), control of the political apparatus was assumed by the People's National movement political party (PNM), comprised

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[1] The relationship between the two islands is characterized by Trinidad's unofficial dominance over Tobago in some respects, due in part to the government seat being in Trinidad. I am sensitive to the fact that often only the name "Trinidad" is used when referring to both islands--i.e., the Republic. However, since my study is limited to Trinidad (which has the vast majority of the Indian population), I will also not make reference to Tobago hereafter.

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predominantly of a middle-class Afro-Trinidadian leadership. In a system of patron-clientelism (Stone 1980), the state has been the primary distributor of resources such as civil service positions, sponsorship of the arts (which are often ethnically identified), funding for denominational schools, government contracts, in certain instances access to formal education, and so on. It also continues to be generally imbued with Afro-Trinidadian and middle-class associations on the part of the majority of Indo-Trinidadians and Afro-Trinidadians. As Karch (1985) observes, "perhaps, the PNM's greatest success has been the forging of a Trinidadian identity and culture; but it remains to this day an Afro-Trinidadian culture and identity" (1985:130). As a consequence of its activities and internal composition, the state serves as an interlocutor of ethnic identity construction among Indo-Trinidadians and of class identification among sectors of the Afro-Trinidadian population.

Any discussion of the politics of cultural struggle among Caribbean peoples must take into consideration the particular and troubled discourse of national identity among the various nation-states in the region. As Safa (1987) notes, the pivot of national identity in the Anglophone Caribbean is <u>race</u>. The relatively recent cultivation of Afro-Caribbean cultural forms (such as popular music, dance, hair styles, dress) not only affirms an African heritage but

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challenges the traditional valorization by the bourgeoisie of things European (Safa 1987:119; Brodber 1987). Offering some suggestions in explanation of this re-orientation, Safa points out that political independence from colonizers "forced the creole elite to turn to the black masses as a political constituency rather than sharply differentiating themselves as they did previously" (cf. Hintzen 1989); the political independence of African states after World War II fomented the notion of an international Pan-African identity; and, similar consequences were to result from the influence of the civil rights and Black Power movements in North America (Safa 1987:120). Indeed, as Safa correctly remarks, "[i]n much of the Anglophone Caribbean, 'blackness' itself has come to symbolize nationhood" (1987:120). Importantly, however, she adds that where significant percentages of the population are "of East Indian origin," such as in Guyana and Trinidad, "it proves to be much harder to reach a consensus on the symbols of national identity" (1987:120).

Indeed, shortly after the "February Revolution" of 1971, also known as Trinidad's "Black Power Movement," an Indo-Trinidadian commentator on "black"--i.e., Afro/Indo--unity (a rallying cry of that event) asserted that "[t]o boast of a national identity here, is to live in a world of make-believe" (Parmasad 1971:5). Echoing an argument still resonant today, Parmasad argues that "[t]he entire social

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system was geared, and still is, so as to keep the Indian out, unless of course he was prepared to strip himself of his name, his religion, his culture, his language, his history and become what the system demanded-- that is, Christianized, Westernized, colonized, dehumanized" (1971:5). Parmasad observes that politicians' dependence on mass voting promotes the idea of national identity distinct from a colonial one, but that this claim must be a fiction since "the culture of 40% of our people is denied its rightful place and recognition it deserves; when the vast majority of our people exist on the fringes of society..." (Ibid). Stipulating that "...we will not tolerate any attempt to 'ize' us in any form or fashion not in harmony with our 'native selves'" (Ibid), he continues that through the struggle to resist "self-denial," "[t]hose who think that the Governmental, official and administrative response to the upsurge of black (African) consciousness is the making of a new social order, are sadly and tragically mistaken..." (1971:8). Lamenting that Indo-Trinidadian political resistance is dismissed as racism and self-help labeled separatism (Ibid), as well as his frank critique of the Trinidadian vision of national identity, Parmasad expresses the frustration that Indo-Trinidadians experience under the hegemony of what is perceived as an Afro-centric, if you will, state and nation.

Despite its symbolic constitution as an Afro-

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Trinidadian entity, as well as the PNM's stated and unstated commitment to offer patronage to Afro-Trinidadian communities, the state has over time made an effort to appear ethnically heterogeneous and be egalitarian in its administration of the country's constituent ethnic groups. There have been, and remain, many mottos championing racial/ethnic/cultural diversity. "All ah we is one (family)" is a political slogan at least twenty-five years old; "...where every creed and race finds an equal place" is a phrase in the Trinidadian national anthem; "out of many, one" is a saying deriving from the mid-1970s in the wake of the Black Power uprising in Trinidad; "unity in diversity" also derives from the mid-1970s among those who were seeking alternative, Third World models for political cohesion and cultural harmony; "One Love" was the party slogan for the National Alliance for Reconstruction (NAR) ruling political party, 1986-1991; and, "the rainbow is real" was the slogan in 1988 (and perhaps still) of the Ministry of Tourism's drive to boost tourism in the Republic--the "rainbow" being a metaphor for the diverse "cultures" (ethnic groups) comprising the Trinidadian people.

Moreover, through its various ministries and sponsorships, the state also has functioned as an important arbiter of national identity; the discourse of Trinidadian nationalism partially involves debate as to which specific ethno-cultural groups best represent, and hence comprise,

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the nation (compare B. Williams 1991). Whereas class unity became more faint in the shadow of "racial politics" as Trinidad came into its own politically (viz. Phillips 1990; Hintzen 1989), culture--in the form of ethnic group distinctions--remains the source of national symbols and the arena in which particular symbols are offered and challenged in the debate over who should represent the nation and why (cf. B. Williams 1990; 1991). As Trotman (1991) observes,

> Each step along the way [of political change in Trinidad]--but especially after adult suffrage in 1946--the respective groups waved cultural symbols and hurled stereotypes and racial invectives at each other. In the struggle for political control, racial allegiance became crucial for marshalling forces and recruiting supporters. Cultural institutions and cultural symbols became not only demarcators of group boundaries, but also weapons used in the struggle for political and economic supremacy (1991:386).

The state orchestration of Trinidadian national identity (the "cultural policy" that encourages the "development of indigenous forms of popular culture" [Safa 1987:124]) can be seen in the standard quadripartite definition of "we culture": pan (steel drum), calypso, carnival, and tassa drumming. Only the last is considered unilaterally "Indian" and, while Indo-Trinidadians argue for its inclusion in the national portrait, I hope to show in my discussion that this argument is fraught with the tensions that a trope of pure/impure and the concomitant delineation of sacred/profane impose on ethnic identity and group relations.

Thus, the state serves as an interlocutor for ethnic

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identity among Afro-Trinidadians as well, through its symbolic association with things Afro-Caribbean/Trinidadian. For Indo-Trinidadians, however, this cultural construction of the state is not an affirmation of their ethno-cultural identity, but a challenge to it.

Cultural Hegemony

In unpacking the notion of cultural domination among Indo-Trinidadians, a key concept that is helpful toward this end is that of cultural hegemony, as discussed by Antonio Gramsci, and subsequently by many other theorists. Here I rely primarily on Raymond Willliams's (1977) discussion of the concept, as I apply it to consideration of the consequences of state and civil power in Trinidad.

In the traditional theorizing about hegemonic forces, from Gramsci (1971) on, the assumption is that a hegemonic apparatus (the state, a class, or an institution, for example) is not subordinate in any respect; that while hegemony itself, as Gramsci envisioned it, is never complete, those who wield it are unequivocally its determining force. In Trinidad, however, the situation is more complex, as the Afro-Trinidadians who predominantly comprise the post-colonial state are dominant in the local political arena, yet are not dominant with respect to the bourgeois class who exercise economic control to a significant degree--often in concert with international interests (for example, the International Monetary Fund,

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World Bank, or transnational corporations).

Moreover, this view of hegemony is complicated by Indo-Trinidadians not being subordinate in a clear-cut way. In economic terms, Indo-Trinidadians are not as a group significantly worse off than Afro-Trinidadians as a group (Harewood 1984), and since the 1950s disparities in educational opportunities and civil service employment favoring Afro-Trinidadians have tended to be rectified. Where Indo-Trinidadians feel most subjugated is in the political arena, or, I should say, the political arena is where Indo-Trinidadians' inequality is manifested most starkly. For it is here that the state exercises its ability to differentially mete out resources and opportunities according to the political "map" of an ethnically segmented labor market and the cultural/aesthetic expressions and manifestations of these groups. As Thakur (1989) explains, in Trinidad

> race/culture enters the way ethnic groups have been recruited and distributed as economic agents and thereby inscribe 'class relations as race relations'. Race/culture becomes the modality in which class is lived. It is also the medium in which class relations are experienced (1989:215).

If, as R. Williams (1977) asserts, "the true condition of hegemony is effective <u>self-identification</u> with the hegemonic forms: a specific and internalized socialization..." which is either experienced as positive or deemed unavoidable (1977:118), then the concept of hegemony in the Trinidadian context must be qualified. The hegemony

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of the state, perceived by Indo-Trinidadians in part as cultural domination, is "self-identified" in terms of an ambivalence regarding what precisely constitutes their ethno-cultural and religious identity. One dimension of the Indo-Trinidadian identity is an acceptance (implicit or otherwise) and manipulation of local ethnic stereotypes; another dimension is in their constructing themselves in many instances as the opposite of African/Afro-Trinidadian culture, thereby affirming, as well, local stereotypes of Afro-Trinidadians. These dimensions are the senses in which we might apply to Indo-Trinidadians R. Williams' stipulation that hegemony operates as "self-identification" to particular, socially and historically determined degrees.

Thus, for my purposes, the notion of cultural hegemony has two essential dimensions useful in the Trinidadian context. First, the post-colonial state as the arbiter of "culture," particularly through various government ministries, notably the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs.[2] In this orchestration of national and community identities, and as part of the ever-unresolved process of hegemony, the incorporation of particular groups or communities into a subordinate relationship with the hegemonic apparatus (state, class, or

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[2]Government ministries such as this one play a decisive role in determining the visible presence on a national level of what might be called the culture of ethnicity--the process by which ethnic identities are created and lived.

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otherwise) takes diverse forms. One principal means of incorporation is ideological; this is specifically seen in the concept of tradition, which serves as "the most evident expression of the dominant and hegemonic pressures and limits..." (R. Williams 1977). But in hegemonic relations, cultural traditions are not neutral (cf. Fox 1990), they are "selective": they are

> an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification...Most versions of 'tradition' can be quickly shown to be radically selective. From a whole possible area of past and present, in a particular culture, certain meanings and practices are selected for emphasis and certain other meanings and practices are neglected or excluded. Yet within a particular hegemony, and as one of its decisive processes, this selection is presented and usually successfully passed off as 'the tradition, the significant past'...It is a version of the past which is intended to connect with and ratify the present (R. Williams 1977:115-16).

Williams' notion of selective traditions are informed by, perhaps even synonymous with, the past, and he asserts that the "most accessible and influential work of the counter-hegemony is historical: the recovery of discarded areas," or the rectifying of particular interpretations of cultural traditions (1977:116). However, in the case of Trinidad, "the past" as previous historical moment is not the pivotal component of the work of the state or the work of its constituent ethnic groups in cultural hegemony and cultural resistance. A reified, in some sense almost timeless, "Culture" takes precedence over a reified "History." The

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past is one, albeit salient, aspect of the discourse on cultural and religious authenticity and legitimacy. The second dimension is the use of cultural and religious markers as a means of self-definition and struggle by ethnic groups--with each other and with the state. Haraksingh (1986:234) observes that during the past twenty years or so there have emerged two "apparently contradictory" trends among Indo-Trinidadians: an increasing tendency toward "religious indifference" along with a clear resurgence of "Indian cultural activity, including of course a religious dimension, especially following the Trinidad disturbances of 1970." Since he does not elaborate this remark, I surmise that Haraksingh is referring to a relaxing of ("indifference" to) ethnic boundaries constructed and maintained in strictly religious terms--"religion" as delimited from other aspects of social relations--and the formation of these boundaries and distinctions, though still partly religious in content, in terms of what is being defined as Indian culture. Therefore, rather than engaging in academic debate as to whether certain religio-cultural events, such as Diwali or Holi, are really "rituals" or "festivals" (Vertovec 1990; cf. Kelly 1988), for example, it is more important to inquire into the relationship between community- and household-level religious observance among Muslims and Hindus and the enactment of larger-scale, public performances. Attention to the degree of visibility and

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changing contexts of various devotional rites aids our understanding of the processes of ethnicity and identity construction among Indo-Trinidadians as well as the role of the state in "selecting traditions" (R. Williams 1977). Exploring religious ideology among Muslim and Hindu Indo-Trinidadians requires an examination of the ways that particular conceptualizations of "culture" and "religion" are reified on the local level as diagnostic emblems of Indo-Trinidadian ethnicity and set in contrast with each other in the formation of ethnic divisions and coalitions. By reification I mean the process whereby any social grouping or community seizes upon particular practices or traits which they have defined as "cultural," symbolically extracts them from the quotidian, habitual, or unconscious actions of daily life, and ideologically deploys them as indices or diagnostic emblems in establishing their identity.

Contradictions remain, however, since even when the state ostensibly "accepts" Indo-Trinidadians by recognizing their cultural presence, it is an incorporation that is best seen as a process which can ignore or dispense with different cultural practices in a variety of ways, one of which is to "specialize" them as "aesthetic" (R. Williams 1977:125). As the hegemonic process unfolds, the "dominant social order" may embrace in varying degree the existing practices and experiences of the population, in its efforts

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at incorporation. Some aspects of social and cultural life are disregarded and designated as private, specialized as aesthetic, or generalized as natural (1977:125). Since the politically-derived visibility of "Indian Culture" is to significant extent manifested in aesthetic forms-- the arts of music and dance, and the artistic or dramatic dimension of commemorative festivals and religious rituals--for both Indo-Trinidadians and others, "culture" is largely envisioned in terms of performance.

Life Imitates Art

When ethnic group presence is asserted culturally by the subordinate group and selectively acknowledged by the dominant group in the somewhat neutralized or diffused terms of "aesthetic specializations," the overall effectiveness of these assertions is often lessened through redirection of the intended symbolic function of the ethno-culturally marked tradition or practice. In the very act of accommodation, co-optation by the more powerful state results in not only a transformation in symbolic significance but also in symbolic efficacy.

If the quality and boundaries of a group's ethnic identity are assessed, it is evident, then, that the various cultures, traditions, heritages, or roots are not equally valorized.The process of reification among Trinidadians places "culture"--as abstract concept and concrete traits or customs--not beyond any limitations of its meaning but

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within the confines of group discourse, shaped in debates over the authenticity and legitimacy of each group's religious practices. For each, "religion" both represents "culture" and denies it, in a context where "culture" becomes epitomized in terms of particular performance genres.[3] A fortuitous but clearly illustrative observation about the particular nature of the Trinidadian situation, where life, in a sense, does imitate art, is given by V.S. Naipaul:

> Few words are used more frequently in Trinidad than 'culture'. Culture is spoken of as something quite separate from day-to-day existence, separate from advertisements, films and comic strips. It is like a special native dish, something like a callalloo. Culture is a dance--not the dance that people do when more than three of them get together--but the one put on in native costume on a stage (1962:71)[4]

And uncannily echoing Naipaul's sentiment, one of my informants, an artiste (performer) and instructor in Indian performing arts, commented rather testily, "'culture' can't be a planned thing; it can't be planned for September or October!" Given that Naipaul's comment was made over thirty

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[3]The extent to which reification figures in discourse is, of course, varied. Examples from Trinidad, and Sri Lanka (Kapferer 1988), illustrate that reification is a rhetorical strategy but not a universal given.

[4]Clearly, Leach's dictum that "...a descriptive device can never have an autonomy of its own" (1954:14) must be framed within a broader message to social scientists about methods of analysis rather than related to ideology and cultural reification. For in the ethnographic sense, such as the Trinidadian case here, descriptive devices do attain an autonomy, in terms of the construction of identity and the deployment of ideologies.

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years ago, we can assume that this characteristic of Trinidadian society prefigures Appadurai's (1990) observation that "ethnic politics in today's world" exist in a context where "tradition, ethnicity, kinship and other identity markers" of groups' pasts (1990:15),

> become increasingly parts of museums, exhibits and collections, both in national and transnational spectacles, culture becomes less what Bourdieu would have called a habitus (a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions) and more an arena for conscious choice, justification and representation...(1990:18).

In other words, culture is reified (cf. Kapferer 1988; Khan 1995). Not solely attendant upon the new "global cultural economy" (Appadurai 1990), Trinidad's ethnic politics has necessarily involved the ideological manipulation of "culture" throughout much of its history since 1845.

These processes, however, are not easily explained as a struggle between the "state" and "Indo-Trinidadian masses." For the sponsorship of cultural productions is not only engaged in by various ministries (such as that of the Ministry of Community Development, Culture and Women's Affairs). Also involved, and at times in ways that are tacit or direct political challenges to the state, are the powerful--wealthy and influential--members of the Indo-Trinidadian community who head or assist the formal bodies and organizations who sponsor many cultural events. These bodies are distinct from the religio-cultural associations like the SDMS and ASJA in their self-ascription as

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ecumenical and preeminently "cultural"; examples would include the National Council of Indian Culture (NCIC) or the Hindi Nidhi (Hindi Foundation). These organizations are highly visible in the national arena and promote "Indian Culture" in various kinds of ways, e.g., in the media, in live performances, as lobbyists, and so on. In a moment of frustration an informant voiced the opinion that Indo-Trinidadian artistes (singers, dancers, musicians) can be caught between Afro-focused state ministries and "the [Indo-Trinidadian] ones who see culture only as a great profit-making venture, without allowing that culture isn't just what goes on a stage."

One way of counteracting or resisting this subversion of power is in religious terms: religio-cultural observances and practices are shorn of festival or cultural qualities. Second, as a corollary, enhancing religious distinctiveness entails the accumulation of knowledge of historical traditions and proper ways of evincing religious piety. This kind of knowledge in a sense "purifies" religious practice of unnecessary, irrelevant, or inappropriate aspects. This, of course, has implications for other levels and kinds of organized, essentially political, activity (actual or potential), such as through trade unions or through religious associations (for example the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha [SDMS] or Anjuman Sunnat-ul-Jamaat Association [ASJA]). In other words, the state is both

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visible and invisible interlocutor against which forms of ethnicity are constructed and presented.

Moral Imperatives

As Lears (1986:568) observes, the concept of cultural hegemony addresses the relationship between culture and power; it adds to the question of who exercises power in its cultural dimension, in addition to the economic and political. This cultural power, which includes the political functions of cultural symbols, helps to define the boundaries of common-sense "reality" (1986:572). Since the essence of the concept of hegemony is legitimation, the values, experiences, and ideas of dominant groups are validated in public discourse, and those of subordinate groups are not (1986:574ff)--though clearly these can and do exist "beyond the boundaries of received opinion." At the same time they remain simultaneously distinct through evocations of particular moral barriers, expressed in a religious idiom but articulated as "culture."

In the Indo-Trinidadian case the situation is more one of establishment and emphasis on moral spaces and boundaries, the countering of political, economic, and social incursions with moral "barriers." The effort is not to subvert but to assert (fundamentally cultural) resistance. In linking notions of morality, the erection of barriers based thereon, and the articulation of moral imperatives to authenticity discourses and purity tropes, it

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is instructive to consider the role of "moral panics," as discussed by Cohen (1980). Cohen suggests that a "condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges" in a society that becomes defined as a threat to majority values and interests (quoted in Carby 1992:740). Policed by "experts," notably the media, moral panics are incidents that have moments in the "limelight" and then eventually fade (Carby 1992:740). Modifying Cohen's ideas somewhat, a case can be made that, among Trinidadians, and Indo-Trinidadians in particular, latent moral panics are always present--submerged ideologies that, while not "sudden" (Ibid.), act as sentinels against transgressions of Indo-Trinidadian space by interlopers and interlocutors alike. The latter notably would be Afro-Trinidadians, as it is their culture which Indo-Trinidadians (and, to some extent, they themselves) characterize as "carnival" and lacking in moral fiber. In this way (among others), religious ideologies and moral philosophies are inextricably intertwined in the Indo-Trinidadian weltanschauung.

As an important example of this, in Trinidad, through the "public" domain of large-scale religio-cultural (ritual) performances and festival celebrations, the "privacy" (sacredness) of religion staves off hegemonic encroachments by the state. In her discussion of the plantation system origins of Guyanese hierarchical precepts, Williams (B. Williams 1991) points out that negative comparisons with

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Christian/Anglo-European culture infiltrated even the more protected private domain: "although there was a greater degree of cultural freedom in the private domain, to the extent that private domain practices were based on religious elements of culture, these were also subject to negative evaluations..." (1991:193). While throughout my study a clear distinction between "public" and "private" as regards religion and ethnicity will be challenged, religious identity is claimed by Trinidadians as prerogative and basic right of the individual and an inalienable part of individual liberty, and is hence construed somewhat as "private." When inserted, as it were, into the public domain, this morality of liberty and civil rights, couched as the religious, serves to evoke a particular identity (the religion in question) and assert a political (group) presence. This is accomplished through inhibiting what is symbolically profane--quotidian cultural practices and those cultural practices "selected" (R. Williams 1977) by the Afro-Trinidadian state.

Furthermore, although Trinidad certainly can be characterized as having, if you will, a culture of culture, and as Naipaul (above) makes plain, as deliberately promoting "culture," public, large-scale cultural productions are not neatly distinguished <u>as</u> "religious" or <u>as</u> "cultural" affairs. Some observances have a long tradition of complex discourse about their cultural or

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religious nature and how much of each should or could be evinced, such as Hosay. Others have a more subtle discourse, less emphatic in nature, but still revealing concern with these same issues. Examples of these would be Phagwa, Eid, and Kartik. It is here, at the nexus between things religious and things cultural, that identities are forged and made (socially, politically) pragmatic. Rather than being guided by religious reform per se, the development of more "cultural type[s] of association" (Jayawardena 1966:238) and productions among Indo-Trinidadians is both a matter of intra-community status shifting (see subsequent chapters) and a matter of a dialogue with the state, as Indo-Trinidadians attempt to determine where their spiritual and secular boundaries lie.

Invisible (or Attenuated) Interlocutors

Exhortations about power relations, racial discrimination, and cultural identity are more often than not charged with various messages that contain other, larger, and perhaps submerged agendas--the invisible interlocutors of all discursive modes. By "invisible (or attenuated) interlocutor" I mean the ideologies and discursive traditions that form the cultural matrix within which any one particular ideology, or set of beliefs, or discourse exists, but that are not necessarily articulated outright. That is to say, being invisible/attenuated does not mean the "silences" that are now often referred to in

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recent anthropology and cultural studies dealing with power relations and identity construction. It means, rather, the oblique or implicit beliefs, symbols, and messages that are tacit, ever-present, taken as common sense, and continuously interactive with a set of beliefs, symbols, and messages that are, for a given moment, pronounced and overt. These messages are often expressed in the form of stereotypes; veiled or oblique statements that draw "attention to larger, usually hegemonizing, discourses and the sociocultural contexts of use and understanding that are essential to their production of meaning" (Varenne 1978). While casual statements that people make in everyday conversation initially can suggest themselves to the listener as conveying straightforward, or parsimonious stances, underneath the surface of the rhetorical remarks lie clues to the complex composition of these same positions and beliefs. This became clearer to me, for example, in three very different conversations I had with people during the course of my field work.

While visiting a friend's household, two older Indo-Trinidadian men joined my hosts and me as we sat relaxing on the gallery (porch). The conversation turned to the history of that area, the lives of cane farmers and other agricultural labor so salient in the Indo-Trinidadian experience, and to the challenge of maintaining one's identity (in this particular case, religious) under such

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adverse conditions and the inevitable changes over time that must be undergone. One man posited,

> Some people feel when Pharaoh was drowned, the sea opened up and sun never rose there again. Slaves [in Trinidad] were indentured laborers, they were slaves. They were bondsmen, a programmed robot who couldn't deviate from the life of a hoe, a chattel. They couldn't [get] married. When the Indians started indentureship here, it wasn't too much different from slaves. Today you find Indians like a commodity on a shelf. It have a price. It would be sold to the bidder. We have a high percentage of illiterate Indians in the country even now. If you don't know what you own value is, you could be priceless or have no price.

His companion reflected,

> I think the white man spoil most of the world. Look at their five senses. They only want to make you curious to see and touch what you near [idle curiosity]. We [Indo-Trinidadians] have the sense of average, you can't learn it by a book or by guess. [We have a] sense of weight, to keep yourself from falling through a rotten plank. You could average a plank not to knock the ceiling you passing through. The whites give you the sense they want you to have, to hear the bell ringing and run for it.

Finally, in interviewing a farmer about the nature of agricultural production in my field site, the conversation turned to a very different subject, that of politics and ethnic conflict --as most of my conversations with people seemed eventually to do. He remembered that,

> When John F. Kennedy got shot, in 1963, I was in Atlanta. I was a visitor to that city. Well, I feeling hungry. I look at a cafeteria across the street, and I see a large, conspicuous signboard, read 'Nigger, read and run' [laughs]. I was hungry. I ignore the sign, and, anyway, the country I came from hasn't these things. I walk across and push the glass door. The whole place came to me at the door but I was already inside. They ask me what I doing there. I say, 'well, I hungry and I want to eat'. They ask me if I didn't see a sign outside. I told them, 'no, I see

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> the food inside of here'. They put me way back in a corner, and ask me where I come from. I say I from India and show them my British passport. Nobody in the United States knew Trinidad then. So they serve me the food but ask me why I could come in, seeing that sign. I said my country have all kind of men, African, Indian, Syrian, Chinee, British, European, and I didn't know about it [segregation]. I kept my cool and used my wits very fast. I knew what the sign mean, they want no colored people, but I ignore it because I hungry. After I walk out, I paid for my food and thing, I told them if this is the case here, I was sorry [disapproving] and would not come here again. Later, I came to understand that they had this sign because there was a lot of what you call second generation and third generation mischievous black people there.
>
> [I ask, "why second and third generation"?] "I speaking of Trinidad experience. We have one douqla [Afro-Indo mix] long time. He come like a toy to the people, [they] make fun with him. But when he grow up he leave the district and go to the town, the urban areas and meet up with his own kind. The Indians wouldn't want him [as an adult]. He would have a Negro wife, and so it keep multiply. You understand...There would be a new type of thinking, with the mixing of Indian and Negro. We have it here in Trinidad. If you have a herd of milk cow and you breed it with a beef bull, the first generation would be half milk and half beef, neither one or the other, the second generation would be completely eradicated, four milk and four beef, structure but no development, and the third generation would be runts. So this is genetics as I see it. Do you know what an epidemic it would cause a country when a generation loses its morality, spirituality? Gang war, looting, smashing. A human tragedy.

Another day I went with a friend to lime by her neighbor's household, located near to the other friends' neighborhood. On the way, as we walked down the road, she told me her neighbor is very proud of her green eyes, and therefore I must be sure to compliment them when I meet her. Not certain how to respond, I answered casually that some Afro-Trinidadians have blue eyes. She retorted

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dismissively, "Well, I doesn't look them [people][5] in they eye." When we had been liming for awhile at the house the subject of Afro-Trinidadians came up again. The occasional references were not complimentary. At one point someone said, "I only like my straight-hair people." I asked about whites. No, the response went, "whites only fool you [into thinking they are beautiful] by the white skin, otherwise they ugly." The conversation progressed, and "politics" came up. Soon assertions were made that they were "not racial," how Indo-Trinidadians are "kept down," how Trinidad "is not a racial place" (that is, it does not necessarily have to be). Out of curiosity I posed the question that if they were not "racial," what did they think about what they had been saying about Afro-Trinidadians?, what is being "racial," in their definition? My friends looked momentarily contemplative and then gave a variety of examples, all of which were of Afro-Trinidadians as a group "not liking Indians," that they "call Indians 'coolies'," that they do not allow Indo-Trinidadians "to have equal opportunities."

These kinds of subdued, though powerful musings were not unusual in my conversations with middle-aged and elderly Indo-Trinidadians. A palimpsest of messages, fundamentally these narratives reveal an awareness of white/colonial power and its propensity to make analogous the position and

[5]Pejorative deleted.

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experience of Indo and Afro in Trinidad. Moreover, there is the recognition that the degradation inherent in these processes of (slave and indentured) labor exploitation lead to a dehumanization where a "programmed robot" can become a "commodity on a shelf," alienated from production, enveloped in exchange value, and denied the dignity of the valorization of common sense and practical knowledge. However, when filtered through the lens of the familiar, that is, what constitutes their own experience, this awareness becomes translated into an acknowledgement of subordination by Afro-Trinidadian hegemony and the not unrelated fears of chaos ("gang war," "looting," "smashing"), estrangement (loss of "spirituality"), and, importantly for my purposes, immorality--rather curiously inserted, yet only a non-sequitur to the listener if unaware of the sub-text.

Not only do I argue that chaos (or disorder), erosion of the spiritual, and a breakdown of morals are the typical concerns underlying the voiced fears of the dissolution of boundaries (e.g., douglas) and the disempowerment (through loss of group cohesion) that this dissolution implies. These narratives also lead one to think about the unvoiced experiences of race and racism, and how contradictions can exist in the same person and the same moment. The answer to this is, of course, in part, context specific. For Trinidad, I believe, "racialism" is group-qua-group and not

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consciously located within the domain of "personal feelings." That is, private prejudices can coexist with claims to being non-racial because racialism exists in its perception as a group phenomenon: the power groups have and hence can exercise over other groups. Personal or private biases are not easily implemented (exercised) to significant extent by the very fact of their being individual. The issue here is one of the perceived nature of power. Believing something is one thing, putting it into practice is another. Thus my friend could say quite casually that she "doesn't look them...in they eye" but would not interpret what prompted her to feel this way as "racial." This is not merely a matter of denial. Clearly her feelings derive from her Indo-Trinidadian identity and status vis-a-vis Afro-Trinidadians; however, this identity and status are not seen by her to be personal and therefore potentially arbitrary or capricious, as "showing people a bad face" by not "living good with" them. Rather, this identity and status are imposed upon her as a member of a group, and therefore are inherently "political" and thus racially inflected. My other friend could be "sorry" about and frustrated by Jim Crow laws on his visit to the U.S., yet could come to "understand" them to be a justified response to "mischievous" blacks.

In the "long time" memory of elderly Indo-Trinidadian laborers, the hegemony exercised by the colonial apparatus

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was also felt as a group phenomenon, but the lines of empowerment and disempowerment were drawn most immediately between a class of owners and a class of workers. Many of those today who comprised this work force in their youth draw metaphorical parallels with the conditions of slavery, learned about through popular wisdom or formal education. Thus, a discourse of unity, if not resistance constitutes one dimension of interpretation in the perception of self and other among Indo-Trinidadians. At the same time, perceptions of group boundaries have shifted. Yet the themes of alienation, marginality, and ignorance linked to colonial oppression resonate in the contemporary expression of group tensions.

Party politics mobilized communally along the lines of race characterized Trinidad's universal suffrage and political evolution from the 1950s, even before the advent of formal independence (Hintzen 1989:3,20,39). Moreover, the ostensibly legitimate racial mobilization--i.e., for purposes of post-War universal suffrage and party politics--exceeded the deep foundations set by the colonially instituted ethnically (racially) segmented labor market in Trinidad. Throughout my fieldwork, countless numbers of friends and informants characterized the days of "long time" as a period of racial and cultural harmony and tolerance among Indo and Afro (and occasionally other non-whites)--"living good with people"; their allusions to this appear in

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the pages that follow. That the temporally recent (though recollected as distant) structure of political representation in Trinidad rests on a foundation of racial/ethnic division has created an association between racialism and group interests and boundaries. If tensions are felt on both individual and group levels, somehow these tensions are not translated by Indo-Trinidadians as located in an individual's proclivities. It is as if the latter are not seen as socially significant.

It is in the realm of formally organized and clearly divided groups of "like," as opposed to "unlike," that potential for racial and ethno-cultural conflict reside. So there is a dual dilemma: it is within groups (not individuals) that social empowerment may be realized; it is within groups (not individuals) that empowerment may be abused. Moreover, actual power relations are always complicated on the ground by the varied perceptions of these same power relations that individuals and aggregates of individuals hold. Forms of inequalities and discrimination are thus seen through an experiential lens of ethnocentrism, racism, and the like. In attempting to refine the category "experience," Thompson (1981) divides this concept into "lived experience" and "perceived experience." His is a useful cue when inquiring into the relationships among Afro-Trinidadians and Indo-Trinidadians, and among Muslim and Hindu Indo-Trinidadians, as each interpret and explain their

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respective lived worlds of power and inequality. In order to avoid the analytical cul-de-sac of a simplistic (and absolute) "reality versus false consciousness" dichotomy, we can think about actual power relations in terms of people's "lived experience" in a material world of opportunities, status, mobility, fulfillment, and so on. We can think about their interpreting this lived experience as particular kinds of self-serving or self-justifying explanations in terms of "perceived experience." The conceptual morass of debating who among Trinidadians "really" is deserving and who "really" is not is sidestepped when we can approach racism and ethnic (and other) conflict as particular expressions of lived and perceived experience. In my friends' racially biased comments lies the distinction between their lived experience and their perceived experience. It is the latter that forms the basis of their interpretations and explanations to themselves about their own beliefs and practices or behavior; and these interpretations mirror their lived experience in the form of being members of a given ethno-political group. At first blush appearing to be a contradiction, evincing racially biased discourse while simultaneously asserting neutrality speaks more to this dialectic than to alleged hypocracy or false consciousness.

Having now arrived at the period of time when my field research began, in the subsequent chapters of Part Three I

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turn again to the local communities of "south" and the activities and practices of their Hindu and Muslim residents.

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## Part Three. The Culture of Ethnicity in South Trinidad

### Chapter Six. Nation and Neighborhood: Piety and Practice in the Community

> When we school children hear the American [WWII] troops' landrovers coming, we'd throw ourselves down in the drain [ditch] to hide, since the story went that the Yankees taking Trinidadian children's livers and feeding them to the race horses, to make them run fast to win races (informant, 1988, Penal)

Before I discuss the nature and work of ritual "functions" among Hindus and Muslims, this chapter gives a sense of life in "south" as seen through the perceptions and life stories of a sample of friends, neighbors, and acquaintances who "born and grow there." Going from broad to narrow, from a description of the tenor of local social relations to the role and significance of "functions," this chapter examines the circumstances and conditions necessary to contextualize the construction of identities among Muslims and Hindus and apprehend their respective discourses and ideologies. (The latter are taken up in greater detail in the two subsequent chapters.)

Specifically, this chapter explores the construction of community among residents of "south." I interpret this construction as encompassing several dimensions that, integrally linked, constitute "community" in this area: mundane social relations over time among residents, particularly the significance of hierarchy and "living good with people"; residents' reflections and nostalgia about "long time" (the distant as well as more recent past); and

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the interaction of these with what I call the extra-natural domain, or spirit-world phenomena that are a lively part of people's lives and through which people organize and interpret their notions of "superstition" and legitimate religious belief and practice. I want to evoke the callaloo quality of the religious as well as ethnic and racial environment. Indo-Trinidadians live with and accept religious heterogeneity and inclusivity as a routine aspect of everyday life. Yet they do so in patterned and contested ways that are meant to manage the "purity" of clear boundaries, which, in turn, are negotiated by the projects of ritual "functions."

My intention here is to get at the role of ideology in the construction of meaning rather than view Indo-Trinidadian identity construction as predominantly mechanical efforts, which has characterized much of the literature. For example, Lowenthal (1972) states that religious edifices, such as temples, "have become a visible form of sub-group identity" among Indo-Caribbeans in large part because other emblems of Indian culture were also characteristic of Indo-Caribbean Christians and Muslims, such as sugar and rice agriculture, patrilineal joint families, dress, and food preparation (Lowenthal 1972:115, in Prorock 1988:176). The building of mandirs and masjids on the part of Hindus and Muslims clearly reflects a conscious and instrumental desire to distinguish themselves

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from each other, but, as I will show, this desire has reflexive, ideological, and sometimes contradictory dimensions to it.

Community Life and History

Little has been documented about Penal, Debe, and their immediate environs in St. Patrick and Victoria Counties. It was not until 1946 that Penal, for example, was accounted for in the national census (Anthony 1988:199), and what has been noted over the decades since the turn of the century largely consists of agricultural surveys and economic reports on the area's major estate cash crops: cocoa, sugar cane, coffee, and citrus fruits. As expected, these reports convey little if any of the experiences and day to day living that constitute the memories and stories of those who have made their homes there.

However, these experiences and memories comprise a great deal of what informs and shapes not only the identity of "south" but also the interactions and world views of those who constitute its local communities. They also exemplify some of the ways the larger dramas and transformations of the world beyond "south" and beyond the island have helped to shape local communities' perceptions of power relations and their position in them. In order to fully apprehend local context and history, a record of events must be multidimensional--the unfolding of structural processes in conjunction with the recalled experiences of

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the people living by those structural processes. Narratives of the reminiscences and life stories of the older heads are essential in getting a sense of the history of an area as well as playing a significant role in evoking what was memorable about the past in terms of touchstones against which present and future endeavors are assessed. Within the stories people tell, certain leitmotifs appear with frequency, which serve as symbolic moral guides in intra-group identity construction and inter-group relations. Moral counsel is conveyed as sub-text, as lessons to absorb from the themes that inhere in the narratives. Images of betrayal, suffering, hard work, and achievement, as well as of a former golden age versus present social and cultural deterioration, are passed down through the generations. These images serve to remind progeny about the importance of dignity, humility, and achievement as inalienable aspects of Indo-Caribbean identity. They also remind them of a past not composed of "shreds and patches" but ostensibly of high culture and Great (religious) Tradition, "seeds" of which having been sustained in the New World, thereby being resuscitated in the construction and maintenance of Indo-Trinidadian identity.

> My father was the sole [religious] authority here for a time. That was about 1902. Eighteen ninety-six he came from India, spent five years. Then he came down and established heself down here in the district. Here he started his religious work. He took up with some old people that came together with him in the boat. Well, they were young people at the time, eh? They came together and they discuss, they say, 'look, I

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have some knowledge and let we establish a jamaat'. Through their help and my father's intelligence, they establish a little jamaat, a community. They get together and they say, 'we are going to do so and so'. They discuss it and they start this here, and they start it from below a mango tree. They had no place [no edifice]. They started from under a mango tree, keeping up Friday prayers under a mango tree. That was it, only Friday prayers. They was now trying to get the people [just beginning to amass followers]. When the people start to come in, they make a little place, a masjid, out of carat and local wood and thing. They continue so for a short time, not too long. Then they make a bigger one. That stayed for about a couple good years. After that they make a galvanize one, with concrete, and flat. And [then] they made another one, well, this is the fourth good structure. This is a steel structure. But this one was not made in my father's days, it was made after he dead. Since he dead, that masjid is existing about eighty-four years in one spot, this spot here.

And,

My life was very nice, man. From the time I was a little fellow. You must see a little trouble but I ent seen so much. And up to now Allah have me going good. Allah does push you if you try to see by his straight side, and [then] you don't see so much bad thing...When I come young man, about seventeen, eighteen years, from the time I married I start doing my own work. Me ent work on the outside, I work cocoa land, lagoon land. I from F-- Village. We was four brothers and sisters. My father come from India as bound indenture. My mother was a Trinidadian. She married from here. My father die young fellow, sixty years [old]. My parents did not work for anybody, they work for theyself. Only I work outside. My first work, from small, was agriculture, on my father land. He had twenty-eight acres. When he dead I was the biggest [eldest], so I sell out the twenty-eight acres. And then I buy five acres here. I buy here in 1929. I bring my mother and brother and sisters here with me...I still de [was] doing work for myself, same cocoa work. The land was not forest when I came, it was clean by the fellow who had it, who I buy it from. He was a Hindu from India. I buy it from he children...Long time, [before coming here] I went up to C-- to live by my family. While I there I start going to maktab class. It had a Punjab fellow there...to teach the maktab. He see me and like me, so I went to stay by he. I was about 13 years old then. I stopped there [by the Punjabi imam] for three

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> months, and then I came back right here...but I take private lessons with a school teacher. It was free then. Long time was free. I used to go two or three times for the week, in the evening. I take a little teaching here, a little teaching there. Not just with one fellow, but with anyone.

The name "Penal" originally carried a tilde over the "n"; it was a Spanish place term indicating swamp, or swampy, low-lying area, being situated in the basin of the Oropouche Lagoon. Then, as now, this area was known for its "muddy and swampy condition" (Anthony 1988:197) and for the annual flooding which not infrequently results in temporarily cutting off the rest of the island, as when roads and power lines go out, adding to its ethos of (putative) isolation and backwardness. Although according to the 1980 census, Penal's population is 15,781 (Anthony 1988:200),[1] it emerged as a village only at the turn of the 20th century, as formerly indentured Indian laborers were leaving the sugar cane estates of the neighboring County Victoria (where Debe is located) and migrating south into the pristine or little-used Crown lands of Oropouche (Anthony 1988:196). One example that illustrates this movement is a story one of my neighbors told me. His parents

> came here from India as full grown people, past thirty...My father came from Goa in 1890 to Trinidad as indentured. He worked on several sugar estates, on

[1]The 1990 census to which I had access does not disaggregate Penal, but gives the population for St. Patrick County, in which Penal is located: 114,611 total population (CSO 1990:2).

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> three and five year terms. You know, Usine St. Madeleine and some smaller estates like Cedar Hill, Brontee, Hermitage. He came individually [not married]. In 1914 there was a conscript by the British Government to go to war. People began to scatter, run and hide, take to the bush. People ran away from the estates in groups and build little huts and settled themselves. They met up in different places with the old French Creoles. But there weren't only males running, there was females, and this was exactly how my father find he wife! [laughs uproariously]. By 1918 the war was over so they [the estates] went looking for the runaways, not to punish them but to work. Before the war was over, they [the estates] didn't bother with them. They [Indians] were no longer indentured, but they [estates] wanted them to work. They had to give the people a redress to get them back to work. So an arrangement was made by the British Government to give the people lands, a Crown Grant, though some people took money...The rest settled and built carat [thatch] houses and started cultivating cocoa, citrus, coffee, minding animal. Usine St. Madeleine was the big mother estate. Then there was smaller estates, not so big or far from each other. So you could have Dumfries, Hermitage, Union, Esperance, Cedar Hill, Cooper Grange, Brontee all next to each other, like a block in the United States. One square mile is six hundred and forty acres, so one mile could be taken up with four or five estates. So the people called back worked in these different estates. But they are in a close proximity and socialize. You know about jahaji? [Yes]. Well, so it was.

By 1905 many Indo-Trinidadian laborers had settled in the Penal region, and as early as 1910 it was recognized as an agricultural center, especially known for vegetables like bodi [approximating a stringbean], watermelons, and for being the "rice bowl" of Trinidad (Anthony 1988:197ff). Already in place was the outdoor central market, serving communities for miles around and remembered vividly by older heads--both Indo and Afro:

> It had [there was] a railway line. We had the train at C--Village, where the cane scales are now, at the junction of the main road. You going there to meet

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> you mother, you family. You have you flambeau to guide you. It had no surface road, it was all mud and tracks [footpaths], no lights. But Penal had a market. At the junction there was an almond tree where people would just put their goods, and alongside the road. There was also two primitive gas stations, owned by two Chinee people. One [of them] was called Punjabi, a Chinee from Punjab...Another historical landmark was a pond where the market now is. People comes out on a Saturday and buy they food and clothes from the shop, a shirt or a pants. This was the immediate central area for the surrounding miles...People would come from quite Morne Diablo with a donkey cart, travel overnight with their provisions and buy the things they need.

Beginning in the 1920s Penal's preeminence as rice, vegetable, and watermelon-producing center was challenged somewhat by the predominance there of cocoa estates (along with the attendant citrus/banana/coffee crops that are planted together, as they symbiotically offer each other protection and nutrients). As one middle-aged man said to me, "long time, south was really cocoa, hardly any cane. Cane was just private farmers, not as estate and thing." An older head explained,

> I was roughly eight years old when my father moved into a cocoa estate in Penal, named C-- Estate. He was employed there as an overseer. This was in 1925. He was mostly responsible for pruning, harvesting, drying, and control of the work force, which was labor. There were still the barracks system then, and one room was given to him, maybe twenty feet square. Bachelors lived together in both halves of it, and who had a family had the whole room without a partition. Laborers were then paid 25 cents a day for cutlassing, pruners, drainers in the off season when cocoa not ready to harvest, catching beetles that destroys the cocoa trees, the beetles...destroys the bark. Coffee and figs [bananas] for shade were planted with the cocoa, immortelle [trees] and cedars for shade, so there was coffee and fig work, too. The estate also had animals, mules and donkey, to bring out the wet cocoa bean over long distances. The workers would pack two baskets of cocoa in the forest, sambois is the

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> patois word, our local French language. These baskets were called sambois or pannier in English. The animals would carry the sambois to the sweat houses. The sweat house workers and dryers and dancing the cocoa [polishing with bare feet] was all different jobs in the estate. The cocoa crop begins in October and ends in March. At the end of the cocoa crop the laborers are used for making fire traces to prevent fire on the estate, pruning, draining until June month. Then we have the rainy season again. In June and July they do replanting. The sugar cane was grown nearest to the factories, not by these [cocoa] estates. Even if it [sugar] was there, they [cocoa and sugar] had no relationship.

By the late 1930s the price of cocoa on the world market had dropped considerably; in addition, witchbroom disease ravaged the crops. This was experienced by individuals and families in the form of small and large changes in life chances as well as pursuits. For example, an informant recalled,

> The history of cocoa destruction was the windstorm in 1932 that licked up the estates. This and the witchbroom caused people to scatter and look for work. Who did not own land and had the skill to work cocoa went to people who own land and asked to take out a contract, for three or five years. Well, they build a little carat house and cut down the land, and eat from it [i.e., subsistence gardening]. There was no market because everybody had and didn't need to buy, and they had no money, anyhow. And there was so little contact with the town, and only a few bourgeois had car. After three years, my father handed back the cocoa contract to the owner of the land, a white man, and he was paid 24 cents a cocoa tree and 6 cents per coffee tree...My father give up 2,000 trees of cocoa on 10 acres of land. At 24 cents [this] would give you about $480.00. As you have to include 2,000 coffee trees, make it six hundred and something dollars. For the time being, the owner of the estate let you remain there as a watchman, unpaid, eh? For fire and so on. This compassion was extended by the contractor to the owner, to extend six months without documentation [reporting it]. Now my father have six hundred dollars. He choose to buy land from the Crown, in R-- Road. When I de [did] born my father was in cocoa barracks in S-- Road. He was a

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> overseer and so he had a little bit of privilege. And the estate was going down, anyhow. So he worked the 10-acre contract in R-- Road, then he bought this land where we now sitting. Five acres for nineteen or twenty dollars. He cultivated cocoa here. He dead in 1952, and I am left here...In my young days this was just a mud trace, and there was a spring well inside. There was a few older heads, the jahajis of my father. Two of them was my father's shipmates, from the same boat, and the others, well they all came from India and they formed a community. 'Jahaji bhai, kai san hal? How are you'? They planted rice together...from people who had land, for eating. They also work for rice farmers harvesting rice on a six day basis. Three days for money [cash] and three days for rice. These things was done to sustain life, for survival. In a more cooperative form, a 'hand-to-hand' we call it. In the dry times the people would go back to the estate, working for other people, or farm watermelon for they little cash.

At the same time as the demise of cocoa production, planters began expanding sugar cane in the area, and British and American oil companies (among them, United British Oil Field of Trinidad and, later, Shell Oil), located in the southeast, moved north (to "south") and began to explore drilling and refining possibilities there. One man located the "transformation beginning to take place in Penal in 1924 or 1925 when the British Petroleum Company begin to explore oil in C-- Road, though it was also C-- [cocoa] Estate and B--'s cocoa land going back to the junction." The oil industry diversified the labor and wage possibilities in this area, probably more dramatically than ever before. These processes were enhanced during World War II, when, throughout the period of American "occupation" in Trinidad, skilled and unskilled wage labor opportunities rose exponentially. One man recalled to me that the Trinidad

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government had to ask the Americans to decrease their wages somewhat, since the oil fields were beginning to experience labor shortages.

Along with the growth of local contractors who organized and hired work gangs, the oil companies employed laborers directly. These were both skilled, such as office workers and those involved in oil production, and unskilled, such as custodians. Somewhere in between skilled and unskilled would be the gardeners who worked for the companies growing provisions for the officials and other highly placed non-resident (foreign; European, American) employees. One of my elderly neighbors undertook this work in his youth: as he put it, "making garden for the white man." In many instances, company employees who lived locally in the area did both oil production-related wage and subsistence gardening work. Exploration of the oil, however, taxed agricultural production, too. As another informant, a former employee in one of the oil companies for many years, explained,

> So you have this hundred acres of land, and into that hundred acres of land you can put down maybe 30 or 40 drilling rigs, which you get to drill for oil. So you start up cut[ting] the road this way, and this way, and different ways. To get men to the rigs and so on. And when you do all that you find when rain falls, it flood the area because there is not proper drainage. When that happens, it mean that you cannot produce well. It mean that you are to plant four and five times, sometimes, to have rice, because you can't [get] the water to run [out] anymore because there's obstruction by building the roads. You not getting out the water. You getting too much water. And once you have too much water, it melt your garden out. Right?

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> So, I planting more and not producing more. This is what the oil field did. Now there is mostly only offshore drilling.

Distilled into a chronology, then, informants recalled a succession of stages in the history of the region that could be listed as follows: initially pristine forest (swamp/lagoon), then white (and some Indian) planters-owners of cocoa estates, then the departure of these planters and the florescence of peasant proprietors of cocoa and agricultural products, which is then superseded by the oil industry and the gradual demise of agricultural production--both cash crop and subsistence.

Contrary to what is usually written about estate Indo-Trinidadians--that is, "rural" agriculturalist communities--even nearer the turn of the century there was a kind of emergent class formation occurring. In the words of one 76 year-old man describing for me the village life of his childhood,

> The merchants were better off than most of the rest. A shopkeeper have a little bit more money to buy goods to stock up his shop. People who has land, the coffee land, cocoa land, when they reap the harvest they sell, and they get a bulk of money. With that, the laborers get pay. But the farmers always have money, so they can pay weekly or fortnightly, too. Them who had land and hired others to work for them called farmers. The other called laborers. And then the shopkeepers. It had [there were] three kinds of people in [the village environs]. Laborer, shopkeeper, and farmer. Laborers weren't all the same nation [caste], you could hire anybody who want work. Brahmin worked for people, too. Shopkeepers was all mix up nation, too. Farmers is richer than laborer, but mix up nation [as well]. Big estates of, say, a hundred acres, [were] owned by white farmers [but] who were called the same as Indian farmers. Some Indian farmers

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> owned big estates, some creole [did] too. Some Indian farmers had twenty acres, some forty, some sixty, some a hundred. You must have hired-people to work if you have more than twenty acres. If you have less it depends to your family [having enough family to help out]. Is a kind of mix-up tradition; good character, good behaving people [i.e., if a laborer had a good character he could marry a farmer's daughter]. Shopkeeper families sometimes married other shopkeeper families, [but] not all the time.

The stereotype of "Ram," recorded by Hodge (1975), although quite familiar today, conjures up more the fears of the disenfranchised as they compete with other disenfranchised for a limited good, rather than a reality. As Indo-Trinidadians eked out their livelihoods over the decades in unoccupied, extra-urban territories (probably a more accurate description than "rural"), the ostensible opportunities for success in uncharted spaces gave rise to the following kinds of anxieties:

> Most alarming of all to the African is the Indian's commercial activity. A new character has slipped into our folklore: Ram the barefoot Indian selling penny packets of channa [deep-fried, spiced chick peas] outside the school, and his penny-channa miraculously building up in a few years' time into an island-wide 'empire' of shiny hardware stores. Ram is a most treacherous figure (Hodge 1975:35-36).

This image of a vending, "barefooted" Indian is particularly resonant in "south," where informal sector activities and private enterprise (not uncommonly hardware stores) are the legacy of an early history of civil service discrimination and petit bourgeois private enterprise.

Today, and to a greater extent historically than has been traditionally acknowledged, this "rural," "country,"

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"farming," "agricultural" region can be referred to as a mixed economy. Farming in greater Penal encompasses at least seven kinds of participation, which in turn can come in any number of combinations: (1) those who grow cash crop(s) or garden provisions entirely as their subsistence activities; (2) those who "make garden" and/or grow cash crops in addition to formal or informal sector wage work and sell to wholesalers; (3) those who "make garden" for household use and sell the surplus retail; (4) those who "make garden" only for household consumption; (5) those who sell agricultural products retail which they did not grow themselves but purchased wholesale; (6) those who do not engage in agricultural labor at all and rely completely on wage work; (7) those who hire themselves out to work others' land seasonally, on a regular or ad hoc basis.

The hiring out of one's services for other's crop harvesting, notably cane, cocoa, and sugar is still a common income-generating option. Both men and women engage in this activity, and women who are labeled "housewife" on official records have generally undertaken this kind of work--either in their youth when "money was small" or, if their economic situation has not improved as they get older--i.e., they remain precarious working class throughout the domestic cycle--they will continue to hire themselves out seasonally. Another significant employer today (temporary and permanent) is the state, specifically in the form of the County

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Council, in charge of road and other kinds of maintenance in local communities, and the Ministry of Works, responsible for similar, though island-wide projects. A third common means of earning income is contract labor with organized contractors. Although by definition temporary, it has remained one of the principal means in this region of securing employment, in a number of different occupations.

Another significant pattern of labor in this region is the multiple employment histories of most men and some women within one lifetime. For example, in one friend's job history, beginning when he was 15 years old and ending with his present occupation at age 48, we calculated that he had had 9 different jobs over 33 years, or a new employment roughly every 3.3 years. This pattern was not untypical, as men related their life stories. In fact, these stories tended to revolve equally around rites of passage and "hard work." Women's lives, like men's, differ dramatically according to their generation, although the work of most women over about 45 years of age centers on the domestic sphere, yet with periodic cash-garnering manual labor--either agricultural or occasionally domestic. Younger generation women generally have more formal education and may have pink or white collar work in private or state enterprises. For men, however, what appears to be common is an initial period of several years where many different jobs are undertaken. Then they often find a more or less secure

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formal sector post (this has often been, as stated above, in the Ministry of Works or County Council). Finally, if they are precarious or secure working class they "resign" (retire) and engage in gardening or ad hoc wage work; if they are middle-class (albeit within grass-roots parameters), a life of relative leisure is more likely. During this period, as I will discuss in subsequent chapters, men may initiate self-edification projects, particularly in the religious domain.

Hence, some degree of intra-class stratification was made possible over the century by various formal sector occupations and the temporary contract labor opportunities, as well as an expanded-contracted consumer market for certain agricultural products. These resulted in varying income levels, life styles, and aspirations or values, often within one family or household. However, a distinction between grass-roots and middle class persists, based both on material and symbolic factors. Most germane to this study is this: even though for grass-roots people it is harder to conform to the social expectations of upward mobility, and the middle-class can more readily meet these expectations, class differences--grass-roots and middle class--are interpreted in cultural terms. As I have indicated previously, they are associated with "traditional"/"East" and "modern"/"West," respectively. Not following the tenets of Islam or Hinduism is seen as succumbing to the influences

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of Western and Christian environments.

Moreover, this proliferation and transection of occupations and statuses helped to create a further complication: the lesser or greater prestige of an occupation not necessarily reflecting its wage. Therefore, among Indo-Trinidadians, to earn a substantial salary or generate large amounts of income is certainly a highly valued objective; to be employed in an occupation that requires formal education and specialized training carries with it far greater prestige and, consequently, potential local community authority and influence. This is especially the case with teachers. For example, even "junior sec" (junior secondary school) teachers of non-academic subjects like shop are looked up to in daily neighborhood interactions, consulted for their opinions, and respected. The meaning of formal education and being educated among community residents are considered in subsequent chapters. Here I will only indicate that among a people largely not literate until the 1950s, and who were "betrayed" by being "fooled" into indentureship, the symbolic capital of certain kinds of prestige is more meaningful than straightforward monetary gain. In other words, "success" is measured as powerfully by symbolic capital as by material capital. Yet as I have discussed earlier, any success must be carefully managed, for it may create hierarchies disruptive to an egalitarian world-view and social relations.

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One of the ways these potential fissures are governed in a population imbued with a collective memory of indentured labor, ancestral ties to agricultural production, and an affinity for the land that equates their very selfhood with gardening (albeit both romanticized and ambivalent) is to emphasize the value of the main thing most generations feel they share in common: both women and men frame their discourse about their lives within a theme of manual labor; more specifically, "hard work." In Guyana, as Williams (1991:49) notes, villagers divide income-producing activities into two general categories, "working for self" and "working for others." "Working for self" is preferable to working for others, and non-agricultural work is favored over agricultural labor. Because of the preference for "working for self," agricultural labor takes on an "ambiguous evaluation of prestige" (1991:50) since agriculture is symbolically associated with owning land, "a symbol of independence and of personal worth in colonial Guyana" (ibid.). Although not linguistically marked as in Guyana, many Indo-Trinidadians also pose a negative contrast between working for oneself and working for others; usually it was the older heads who had remained in cash crop production that made it a point, in their life histories, to impress upon me their freedom from bosses, managers, and other forms of labor authority. Hence, the primary symbolic weight is not on self-employment per se, but on making "hard

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work" work for you, conquering the demanding physical labor so that it returns more than it taxes. Land ownership, particularly in significant amounts, was never widespread enough among the mass of grass-roots Indo-Trinidadians to make it the valorizing factor in working for oneself. Rather, it is, I think, the production of use-value in the form of subsistence and the control over the alienation of exchange-value in the form of raising one's own cash crops that imbues such high value to the "hard work" of agricultural labor. Combined, these enable self-sufficiency, resolve, and productivity. For example, an Indo-Trinidadian man I happened to be interviewing about other subjects had this to say:

> Right, what <u>is</u> grass-roots? People who have been maintaining a religious identity, people who were able to maintain a work identity, knowing that not only if I work, if I plant garden, not only I would benefit. I would [be] able to feed my nation with it. He [an Indo-Trinidadian] looks at it in a very broad perspective...The people who belongs to the grass-roots is people who genuinely concerned about theirself, their immediate family, their religion, and their country...That could never be [Indo-Trinidadian] millionaires...Because they go for class, they in the upper class, the elite group. But there's no [organic] elite in Indians, so they have to try to buy their way into the white's elite group!

One of the most poignant narratives I heard while in the field encapsulates several of these issues. Tanty, now deceased, was a community resident, at that time a quite elderly woman. Part of the poignancy for me derived from the contrast between the story and the speaker's matter-of-fact, almost stoic delivery--quite characteristic, I found,

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among older head women and men:

> I always [was] sick, sick, sick. All kind of thing. I ent have nothing else tc talk [about]. When I de [was] young I de [did] work hard, and now all I can do is cook and wash clothes, and I can't hardly do that self. When I de young we have to do a lot of work. When I de [lived] by my nani [mother's mother] I didn't have to cook, only wash a little. My grandmother was from India. But she grow up in BG [British Guiana]. She first child was my father and his twin sister. They grow up in BG. Then when they get big my grandmother come to Trinidad, C-- self. There she come to work, maybe on the estate but she ent tell we. She husband, my grandfather, de [was] dead long time. When he dead, she ent have nobody. She mother and father in India, so she say, 'let we go to Trinidad'. When she came she had she twin children, and twin children in she belly. They born in Trinidad. She never married again. She work and mind she children. The government maybe help she. She ent keep nobody, nobody! [i.e., have a "keeper," an extra-legal union]. God alone know how she live. She went back for she money she have in the bank in BG when my father come big [grew up]. First time people didn't [be] stupid. They were smarter than now people. They had sense...My father ent know about working hard, about cane land, driving cart, working in road [says this with pride]. He know nothing of this. He only know working rice land [i.e., subsistence farming] little bit. And trim people, [a] barber man. Every day he going trimming people, in white man yard and Indian. He took he money from barbering and pay people to work for he in the rice land. [Did this make him higher up than them?] What high that go make him?! How much children he have to mind! He wife had to sell milk to make they little money. At that time the milk so cheap, 6 cents a pint. I is 75 years [old] now, or 72 years, so then I had about, well, 25 years, then. I work hard too bad. I use to sell milk 6 cents a pint. I carrying it down this road to the C-- Village junction. I work harder than my mother. I do plenty work my mother never do. My mother never plant rice. She never mind cattle, never work garden. She only had one small baby, me, so my father say he don't want he child to cry, so my mother should only see about she housework. She not to work for nobody. But my father was a very poor man. My mother make a next baby after me and she and the baby dead. They gone together. My stepmother never work for nobody. She make she garden, planting cassava and corn and thing, and when she children come big we use to help she. [Is that bad, to

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> work for somebody?] Not bad, but when you working for people you can't do what you want, or go when you feel to go. When you work for yourself you can come and go as you feel.

An example of the significance of generational differences, working for others is not necessarily a stigma among younger generations of Indo-Trinidadians in Penal, generations whose bosses and managers are not the colonial authorities, overseers of the lives of older heads. Third and fourth generation Indo-Trinidadians employed in wage-paying work likely have a private sector or civil service position. These hold far greater status for people under, say, forty-five years of age than does agricultural work: they indicate upward mobility and success through formal education qualifications, a better-than-subsistence income, and the ability to negotiate the dominant culture. This distinction in status among the generations is so important that it might be phrased as almost two differing value systems at work. Care is taken to maintain the dignity and honor of the older heads, valorizing their contribution, and hence their place in the ethnohistory of Indo-Caribbean people. As one informant vehemently put it, "long time, you could not make [fun of] nani, nana, mamu, as one man's nani or aji or mother or dada or mousie is all we own."[2] Yet the symbols that abide attain new referents among the younger generations, whose lives have developed in marked

[2]These are Hindi kin terms.

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contrast to their forebears.

Moreover, the symbol of enduring "hard work" is imbued with different meanings among Indo-Trinidadians. For example, Indo-Trinidadians of both genders consider their history of subservient labor on colonial plantations as key to their identity as overseas Indians. In talking with me about the past, several older heads used the phrase, "indentured slavery." The first couple of times I heard this I questioned it, and it became obvious that this phrase was not being used deliberately to make a political point, but a kind of political point was being made, inadvertently, perhaps, nevertheless. Slavery and indenture are not always clearly distinguished in the minds of people who have experienced barracks life--either with indentured parents or as ex-indentureds still tied to an estate. Indo-Trinidadian women, however, are more likely to interpret the meaning of "hard work" in connection with experienced domestic violence as much as physical labor, and to associate improvements in labor conditions as indicative of an overall improvement in the quality of <u>women's</u> lives. Men tend to view their history of "hard work" as based on the strength of surviving religio-cultural beliefs and practices, rather than as specifically related to their lives as <u>men</u>. Among both women and men, however, "hard work" is considered part of the measure of individual character, a moral barometer of a person's worth (cf. B. Williams 1991:54); self-sufficiency,

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resolve, and productivity are indications of how a person "moves" (behaves) with others, and therefore what kind of a person they are. Being associated, though not exclusively, with physical labor and finding its highest esteem in agriculture, promoting both physical and mental health, "hard work" defines Indo-Trinidadian history in the Caribbean and validates them as a people.

Out of 4,590 households in the Ward of Siparia (which encompasses Penal), the Central Statistics Office's "Households by Tenancy" shows a combined total of 905 households renting, squatting, or living rent free, as compared with 3658 owned. And out of 4,590 "Households by Household Size," 653 have nine or more persons living in them (CSO 1980). These figures suggest in numerical terms two factors significant to the broader configuration of social relations among Indo-Trinidadians in this community. First, there is a significant percentage of them who are in what I have called the precarious working-class, defying the stereotype that Indo-Trinidadians "own all the land" and have hoards of money in the banks. Second, the significant generational differences that can exist within one household or one family contribute to both the staggered profile of wage earning and social status within a household or family and the contrasts in identity or social position among members. Therefore, in addition to siblings potentially ranging from age twenty to age forty-five, the gender and

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educational differences may result in one household containing, for example, a formal sector bank teller; an informal sector taxi driver; a housewife (as working in the home is referred to); a permanently employed, unionized, skilled factory worker; a temporarily hired unskilled contract laborer; a full-time subsistence gardener; and, a university student.

The caprices and insecurities of daily living, the acute transformations, both gradual and sudden, of shifting economic conditions throughout the century, and the variegated composition of households and families in terms of members' occupational and educational fortunes have helped create a cultural milieu where egalitarianism, or "living good with people" and "not showing a bad face" are at a premium. In the words of one older head: "Remember, when 10 persons say that you is a good person, God himself say, 'that is me good child'." Here the formation and shifting of social and cultural hierarchies always must be met with challenge or rationalization, or, at times, both. This milieu encompasses and is shaped by a discursive tradition among Indo-Trinidadians that, in part, conflates cooperation, tolerance, and reciprocity, and relates them to a past that is generally contrasted with the present. This contrast is made particularly in terms of cultural identity and religious practices and activities, and is quite often a negative one, where conflict, intolerance, and illiberality

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are explained in relation to contemporary conditions. For example, in explaining to me the greatly heterogeneous participation in the Hosay festival "long time," an older head claimed that there was much more accommodation and togetherness then; "people lived alongside each other as neighbor and friend." One middle-aged man reminisced about his youth,

> Our parents, they planted what they knew. You had different types of crop, okay? And there are so many different [ones], like you see pigeon peas, you see tomatoes, and these people [ex-indentureds] are doing that. That's when they came like Indian, because even though they were on the estate, they were doing that. And in those days you didn't sell for anybody. You are giving to neighbors and they are giving you. You were exchanging these things. I can remember that distinctly when I was a little fellow. You have red fruit in your land and you have cassava. And we had a Negro neighbor who were living next to us. They were such nice people that when they'd come [by] they'd bring yam, and bring breadfruit, that they'd give to you. And when you have your tomato and thing, and you give to them. And you live like that. So, each family go to their garden and they come back, they bring something and give to you. They would get into their big earthen ovens and they'd bake their sweetbreads and their cakes and what not. And they'd give you, they'd send [some] home for you right next door there. And we as Indians, when we around, we made the sweet rice...and you give it to them. It was a type of [pauses]...it was a different love of [than] today. It was so loving to have a Negro person as your neighbor, because you get along so fine.

Although this man's reminiscence of past social relations in the community may be somewhat tinged with a "golden age" patina, it is strikingly like the constant refrain I heard from other Indo-Trinidadians about how, "long time," people--all kinds of people--lived much better, more easily among each other. This theme is significant

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because it informs much of the contemporary discourse about ethnic group ideologies and interaction; because the constituent "parts" of ethnic groups are conceived as religious and cultural, the allegedly harmonious past serves, as well, as a litmus test for gauging the social tensions and boundary configurations of the present. Another informant's narrative retains this theme while drawing the focus of his contrast to the ambivalent feelings among older head and younger generations:

> Long time people had plenty unity. Now if you have $10.00, a fellow want to know how you got it. Long time, even if I de [did] have a penny self, I giving you. Long time you didn't have so much of worse people. No thief. And a little money de [did] come plenty. When you have a hundred dollars you have a million dollars, you know. Long time people had faith, they living nice. They coming to help you, you didn't have to pay anybody. Now, better you starve and dead but I must have more than you. The unity start to finish when all the generations start to come. The old people is one thing and the younger, they is something else, yes? Young people don't want that unity, them like <u>their</u> way. They ent go eat what we eat. They won't go in the garden. They working big [important, formal] work for money. And they ent cooking home. The young girls, they don't want to cook. They go by the bakery.

A similar discussion of "living good with people" was given by another older head, this time with respect to intra-community, Hindu-Muslim relations:

> When I was a little boy, S-- Road just had about four or five houses. Most of the time people [remained] in they own land, and they have they house on the land. Mostly they would meet on market day, or if someone have a prayers in the village they would go and meet them to invite them. They never had cars like now. They would just go and talk to them. Mike [microphone] only come in '48. I married in '49 and mike was a very rare thing, but I had it for my

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wedding. I had to get a fellow from quite San Fernando. He was the only fellow with a mike...Long time, people would take a big bus, thirty passenger bus, and go to wedding. Long time they used to keep wedding three, four days. All in the '40s, even up to the '50s. Though you didn't have so much people as now. The people used to cooperate. For instance, one family in the village have the wedding, everybody from the village would donate something. Some would give rice, some flour, some potato, some dahl, whatever, to help. Whether Muslim or Hindu, everybody make a contribution and came. It don't have that again [anymore], though you still have a few people who does that. People now probably have more money to spend so they could help themself. People are going [to events] but people only need few of the near family to help them. Long ago when you have a wedding, all you have to buy is the clothes for the wedding. You don't have to buy any of the foodstuff, everybody donate...when you ask a friend to build a house with you, he might ask for something different in return. Same way if you have a prayers or a wedding and I give one hundred pounds of flour, when you have your wedding or prayers I may not give you back a hundred pounds of flour but I may give you something to the value, or a little more, too. Each person know the value of what people give them.

And another older head's commentary:

To protect the moral side of the family and the whole environment, a man must marry his daughter [i.e., arrange for her marriage], before she bring disgrace to the family. So this prevented a lot of delinquency, taking care of the girl. Each neighbor for the wedding will sit in a panchayat [committee, court, assembly (Klass 1988:173, 194)], a little get together, then, and put up a little cash from here, a little aloo [potato] from there, dahl [lentils] from here, massala [spices] from there, plus what the parents would have. And this was so for wakes, too. Is only about twenty or twenty-five years ago panchayat disappear in Trinidad. Since this country got into independence, people got into their own way. Politics hang up the whole thing...Eric Williams say 'massa day done, agriculture work is slave work, Canadian Mission must get out, nigger have nothing, Indian have everything'. My gratitude is to Canada, my patriotism is to England, and my allegiance is to Trinidad. The knowledge that I possess was given freely to me from the Canadian Missionaries, England was my serving ruler, and English is my language. Hindi is my home language. I born

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here, I live here, my status is here--as a citizen.

This theme of "living good with people" (or not) has, therefore, various permutations; it also has several associated factors that have helped to shape it. One, over the decades, population density in the region has increased dramatically. Where once carat [thatched] houses were separated by many acres, people now live in concrete and corrugated iron within conversational ear shot of one another. In terms of race/ethnic group relations, as the oil industry focused its enterprise elsewhere in the island, Afro-Trinidadians moved away from the area--many having come there initially for the oil work. Second, post-War communal politics took a tremendous toll on ethnic group formation as well as (conflictual) relations. Third, what was once a fairly uniform standard of living among Indo-Trinidadian families in this and contiguous counties has given way, particularly since the oil boom (1974-1983) and then recession (c.1985-present) to sometimes drastic distinctions in quality of life and social prestige. Finally, throughout Trinidadian society as a whole, and among Indo-Trinidadians, a pervasive valorization of egalitarianism exists (cf. Khan 1994). This was put crisply by an Indo-Trinidadian friend of mine: "if there's one thing we Trinis don't put up with, is high and mighty, you know!" This antipathy for "high and mighty" is seen in the numerous proscriptions against greed--especially referring to food, but also with respect to

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other things; to the emphasis put on not being (or appearing to be) "busy, busy" and therefore possibly "passing somebody straight" (ignoring them); to both generalized and balanced reciprocity among family members and households, particularly with regard to communal labor assistance; to the danger of maljo and obeah and thus a minimizing of anything possibly causing envy in others; to an emphasis on visiting family, neighbors, and friends, which is not solely for socializing purposes but also as a way of showing respect and affection, what a Trinidadian might call "appreciating" a person. In the following section, the significance of "living good with people" becomes clearer as it is placed within the domain of the religious and negotiated accordingly.

Socio-Religious Relations

> I rather eat half belly and wear bust dress and keep my name (older head, Penal).
>
> I afraid comess more than I afraid God, yes? (older head, Penal).

These two statements are examples of the serious consequences that not "living good with people" is taken to have for community life. The first speaker would tolerate being hungry and ragged if it meant keeping her good reputation, her "name," intact; the second speaker says she is more afraid of "comess," or trouble (chaos, confusion, disorganization) than she is, by implication, of anything else. Although they are speaking in hyperbole, the message

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about dignity and order through cooperative and harmonious living is clear. A fundamental aspect of "living good" has to do with order; that is, things remaining in their appropriate and predictable spaces; the unpredictable or unexpected is what is potentially conflictual, and "living good" is, in part, about following mores and norms that ostensibly keep life calm and amicable (e.g., the spoken and unspoken rules of social interaction such as the morally-charged imperatives of fidelity, sobriety, honesty, and so on). Just as the ambiguous is, in a sense, disconcerting, as is evident in the local discourse on "mixed" ethnicities, other kinds of order are resonant with the larger trope of purity. For out(side) of order lies the defilement of disorder.

Real life is, of course, never successfully ordered to the extent that mores and norms would suggest. Because of the nature of the historical experience of Indo-Trinidadians in "south," and the processes of dramatic change that have occurred, fluidity of social relations and identities is pronounced, a fluidity that is in a delicate balance with "living good with people." Ideally, religions (Islam, Hinduism, Christianity) are boundaried wholes representing Trinidadian ethnic groups that have acculturated to local conditions. In real terms, invented or actual commonalities as well as compromises among religious beliefs and practices have made for multifaceted and somewhat overlapping

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constructions of identity. I do not want to suggest that there is a functional correlation between "living good with people" and these multifaceted and somewhat overlapping constructions. I do, however, want to suggest that sometimes "living good" is at odds with the "purity" of (ideally) impermeable boundaries, and that at other times "living good" is at odds with the fluidity of (actual) boundaries. One may be too rigid (pure) and hence exclusive and insufficiently tolerant; the other may be too ambiguous (impure) and hence inclusive and fraught with "comess." Religious ideal and real are negotiated in "living good with people" within a highly charged social context. Understanding religion among Indo-Trinidadians, at least as it serves as an idiom of ethnic and cultural identity construction, requires recognizing the fluidity of religious identifications over an individual's lifetime and of differences across generations through conversions and returns.[3]

Trinidadians face the paradox of acknowledging the heterogeneous, callaloo composition of their society even as the society is also seen in numerous contexts (especially political) as dichotomized into Indo and Afro. Similarly, formalized religious discourses that call for mutually

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[3]As M.K. Vassanji lyrically puts it in The Gunny Sack, his novel about overseas Indians in East Africa, "You can place the names of succeeding generations in a column and visualize the crazy dance of history..." (1989:10).

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exclusive choices exist within a fluidity and multiplicity of possible religious affiliations. This heterogeneous context is formed in part through the particular history of community formation among Indo-Trinidadians, where the long-term proximity of kin and neighbors makes for integration, rather than exclusivity, in residence patterns. As one person put it, "If neighbors is Hindu and Muslim, you can't really tell the difference [between them] except by the name. Because they mix and grow together." One of the consequences of mixing and growing together is what Indo-Trinidadians call "pumpkin vine" family: as the metaphor suggests, an extensive if attenuated affinal and consanguineal kinship exists among families and households in greater Penal that links, if not binds them together in ties of reciprocity and affinity. These reciprocal and sentimental relations often transcend religious affiliation inasmuch as community life depends to a great extent on cooperation and support, when people (family, neighbors) are "living good" and, importantly, those times when they are not. As might be expected, there are numerous stress points in living in close quarters--within households, and among them in relatively small communities--and tensions flare up consistently if not frequently around issues such as infidelity, trespassing on property, inheritance, theft, and debt.

Relations of reciprocity and sentiment are not only

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transcendant, however; they also are embroiled in the crosscutting loyalties towards one's (ideal) religious obligations, such as endogamy or containing one's lifestyle within the confines of orthodoxy. These issues are not necessarily conflictual, yet they are when choices must be made with respect to behavior and interaction, choices which are supposed to be made on the basis of informed assention. One Muslim acquaintance said to me, "I doesn't eat meat on Divali, I cook fish on Fridays, I have a Christmas tree. Only the real Muslims, like from Pakistan, can't do other people's [practices]. The common people like we are more flexible." While perhaps he would not characterize himself as "common people" in this way, the older head Hindu narrator below also portrays a vivid picture of life "long time," and the inclusivity within which people could find solace through their beliefs:

> For we in the [cocoa estate] barracks Penal was the center. Yes. We go to Siparia only for paying land tax or buy a hat. It was a more established place business-wise. You had the Warden Office there, police station, and Sipari Mai. My parents took me to Sipari Mai. They made a wish or a vow or a promise and take their sweet oil and candles. Some people carry perfume, incenses, or a gold offering. They would go and make this offering and go about the market and see so many people they maybe haven't seen for the year. There were different groups of people there, like the gypsies. They were the dancers and the fortune tellers from India. They had the saddhus, all of them [were] there. My parents went every year. A true Hindu is a true Catholic, and a true Catholic is a true Hindu. Now. That is the preamble. Hindu believe in the worship of all the saints but in a different language. In the final analysis all are the same. The Hindus believe in the cross, so the pandits have the white...on their forehead: [three prongs for] Brahma,

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> Vishnu, and Mahase--Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. The Catholic and the Hindu use images for the same reason: as a remembrance and this is why so many Hindus are devout believers in Sipari Mai. That is a true saint. My lady [wife] goes every year.

Another aspect of what forms this heterogeneous context is the early exposure to varied religious teaching that many of my informants recalled from childhood. More related to community residence patterns than "pumpkin vine" kinship, attending religious instruction in addition to one's own religion (for most people receive religious instruction for at least some period of time in their youth, concomitant with the generalized religiosity of Trinidadian culture) is not uncommon. Therefore, many people have some degree of familiarity with the tenets of religions not their own. One of my friends in the community, a Hindu, went as a child to Hindu classes on Sundays ("like a Christian Sunday school," he explained). In addition, he occasionally went to the maktab classes held at the masjid that was located next door to the mandir. He told me that his father did not object to his going because the father of his friend in the maktab class "was a big shot Muslim in the community." Another acquaintance, Fatima (a name she took when she embraced Islam) related to me that as a child in the 1950s, although in a Hindu home, she went for a time to Seventh Day Adventist and Pentecostal Bible classes:

> We knew we religion, we knew we was Hindu, we just went because we friends were that [religion] and we had fun, and we parents never told us anything [i.e., not to go]. Not like these days when they say to not mix.

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> Back then it was more freer. But now it have so much snatching away from the religion to the next one.

She is referring here to the evangelical proselytization missions that have swept the Caribbean region in the past two decades; she is referring, as well, to the specter of mixed marriages, whether religious or ethnic/racial that allegedly threaten the clarity (purity) of boundaries. To be able to mix freely and even have "fun," without jeopardizing religious or other distinctions, one has to "know" oneself, as Fatima said above. I think what has changed in the past couple of decades, say, since the late 1970s-early 1980s, is the definition of, and concern with "knowing"-- with knowledge, that is; what it means to know as well as what needs to be known. Similarly, an acquaintance in her 40s who had been born into a Muslim family and then accepted Hinduism at her Hindu husband's request, said:

> before, I have a prayers, you have a prayers, we live near and we all in it together, we all does go by everyone. I was so used to it [Hinduism]. Although I in a Muslim home and you is [in] a Hindu home, we all mix together good, good. Is only now that people get so particular, you is you, and I is I. But to me is all the same. Is all one God we pray to, anyhow, just in different ways, yes?

The sub-text of her comment is that this alleged commonality (one God, anyhow) is the point at which difference is shown (proven?) to actually be the same. However, focusing on the means to this end (praying in different ways) and the tolerance this implies has as its fulcrum the question of

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knowledge and knowing, as well. For all, reaching the same God is the ultimate consequence; along the way are the pitfalls of blurred boundaries through "mixing" and the possible confusion in information and understanding, in knowledge and thus belief and practice.

A third dimension of what forms this heterogeneous context are the changes in religious identification that occur for reasons other than a primary interest in the religion itself. I give only four examples here, but they are by no means unusual. One man, who works in a civil service position in the capital but lives in "south" told me:

> My parents baptized their first four children, including me, as Catholics, because in those days parents did such things in order to help their children get ahead in life. You needed to be in that religion [to do so]. Like with the Presbyterians, too, I suppose. All four of us got godparents. They were macromays with my parents [similar to compadrazco]. Although my parents stayed Hindu, and I didn't learn anything about Catholicism. I never went inside a church yet.

His wife added,

> My family is Muslim, but not very religious. But still they did not like to see me accept Hinduism whole-heartedly, which I did at his [husband's] request when he got so into the religion.

Another civil servant with whom I spoke related that

> my grandmother told me that her mother was pregnant and bathing in the sea and people [recruiters] came, selling them like profiteering, and influenced her to come to the land with so much riches [Trinidad]. Her husband didn't come with her, she came alone. My grandmother was a Hindu but she would stay with some Muslim people, and she started to eat meat and her mother said she better stay there. They were rich

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> people, these Muslims. Then they married her to a Muslim. So that is how we end up being Muslims.

And,

> I come Presbyterian from Hindu when my grandmother came from India. She came lonely. She mister [husband] die on the ship. She came with two boys [sons]. Her late mister's jahaji was a Muslim, and she became a Muslim and married the jahaji. Their son was raised a Muslim. She biggest [eldest] son from India remain a Hindu. She other boy, my father, became a Presbyterian when he married, when he have twenty years [of age], to a Presbyterian girl, a Indian girl. We have a Hindu, Muslim, Christian on all sides. Religion has no barrier to us.

Especially so in the early days of Indo-Trinidadian assimilation, this kind of ad hoc change in religious identification was experienced and treated as a matter-of-fact adjustment to the exigencies of living. It may have been stigmatized at the time, but not in the same way as in the contemporary period. This is the case because doing so was less "culturally" significant--that is, politically charged--during those years when communal mobilization around suffrage and resource distribution was still far in the future.

A final factor that helps to form a heterogeneous context in greater Penal is the nature of "extra-natural" discourse (see discussion below) that is prevalent with respect to what is perceived as inexplicable occurrences. Here, the possibilities for multiple, non-material (spirit-world) phenomena and multiple interpretations of that phenomena hinder the creation of a singular or uniform meaning to their existence, or to the enigmatic event that

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has occurred. Two different stories are illustrative. The first story was recounted by a Hindu friend. She told me that one night, about nine or ten o'clock, when she was driving home from the weekly lecture given by a visiting swami, she saw "an old Negro lady walking through the cane, along the highway." When she told this later to some of her friends, they suggested that she had seen "some sort of evil spirit or jumbie [ghost]." My friend seemed divided as to whether or not she was inclined to believe this explanation. As was quite common with most everyone I knew in the field, the more I pressed her to clarify, the more she seemed eager to interpret the vision as an actual person wandering about--"maybe somebody senile grandmother." As her experience became more real through verbalizing it, she became self-conscious and reluctant to seem "backward," or "traditional," or "superstitious." Most people in "south," irrespective of religion, seem to feel ambivalent about the variety of explanations possible for perplexing phenomena. They lie, in a sense, in a liminal state between "modern" and "scientific," which people know they <u>ought</u> to believe, and the mysterious workings of the extra-natural, which in many instances they do not completely discount. Here, the irresolution as to <u>how</u> to think something <u>properly</u> is an ever-present issue. Partly this is because class and culture clash at the crossroads of mobility; that is, "traditional" versus "modern" in the social evolution of

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Trinidadian society. Moreover, there is the issue of authenticity, or the purity of belief and correctness of practice through religious and cultural knowledge. As a devout and unusually well-informed Hindu familiar with the sacred texts, the Hindi language, and a strict vegetarian, my friend aspires to the rules of purity and piety. Being persuaded by what could be construed as "superstition" renders these questionable, and therefore knowledge and sincerity, as well. The ideal, and the challenge, is to be pious and progressive at the same time. Being so, however, continues rather than halts discourse about the extra-natural. Since the latter is ubiquitous in everyday life it will be explained in various ways; it will not be denied.

The second story was told to me by an older head during a visit, as she recounted her life. An everyday aspect of extra-natural phenomena, and figuring pivotally in the religious history of this family, is maljo, or the evil eye (unintentional punishment resulting from the envy of another's good fortune, large or small).[4]

> My mother was a pure Chattri [Kshatriya caste], no mix up with a next nation [caste]. Like a pure Muslim, then. My parents was <u>real</u> Hindus. I grow up with me <u>nani</u> [mother's mother]. I had maljo very bad as a baby. Vomit black and green, wide eye, turn white, diahrrea. As I had this maljo, some Spanish people said, 'let we take she and baptize she a Catholic'. Nani send me to Catholic church and then the Presbyterian church. When nani found me a husband she told me he must start going to Presbyterian church.

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[4]Occasionally Indo-Trinidadians will use the Hindi/Urdu term <u>najar</u>.

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> She didn't know him before. Nani said as she was baptized, she would find me a Presbyterian husband. Not a Hindu.

Here, her illness in infancy, interpreted as maljo, encourages her grandmother to follow the advice of "Spanish" people (who, because of the demography of "south" until recent times, were probably her neighbors), having her accept Christianity as a means of relieving the ailment. At some point, the grandmother became a Presbyterian, even though she had been a "pure" and "real" Hindu, which influenced her to find a Presbyterian husband for her granddaughter. During my fieldwork another woman, a Muslim, told me that although she had raised all of her children as Muslim, one son was a practicing Catholic. This was so because during a childhood illness she had had him baptized one, hoping that doing so might alleviate his symptoms. "Making a promise" to God to undertake a particular kind or number of devotions (usually going on pilgrimages or hosting rituals, sometimes embracing a particular religion) in return for divine intervention is a common aspect of people's lives in Trinidadian society. When grass-roots Indo-Trinidadians in "south" turn toward Christian manifestations of divinity, it is also an acknowledgement of the real-world power held by this colonizing religion. This power is sometimes concrete, as in the case of Presbyterian provision of formal education and thus formal sector occupations; sometimes this power is abstract, as in the

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case of individuals' ad hoc searches for succor. While Hinduism and Islam are certainly seen as effectual if one "believes," Christianity can be counterposed not so much as a last resort but as a profoundly distinct alternative to the familiar--and a familiar that is not at that moment "working." This is exemplified in the following narrative of a woman who was explaining to me her membership in an evangelical congregation, after years of exploration.

> My parents followed Islam just because <u>their</u> parents was so. They couldn't explain why we couldn't eat shrimp and crab. And I saw other Muslims eating it. My biggest worry in life as a child was, 'who am I, <u>really</u>'? I start at 18 or 19 years [old] to [age] 36 searching, searching. I try Hinduism first, but I couldn't understand anything there. And they told me you can't be converted as a Hindu, you must be born one. And all these gods. I thought we had one God and not so many. But I try it first, as where I lived, the people around me was Hindus. Then I went to the Christian Science church for some years, maybe from [age] 24 to somewhere in the 30s. I stopped because I found out the church was getting highly political. If they invite one of the big [cabinet] ministers, they would hold back the service to wait for them. I found that was balony. They're just a man and a service to honor God shouldn't be kept back for a man. Then it was Anglican. And I married a Negro man and my parents disowned me. I had a daughter for him. I left it [the Anglican church] off because they had too much status [distinctions]. We are all equal, even the President or the Cabinet Minister. I operate on a 'One Love' [NAR party slogan] basis. For about two years I just searching and not going. Then I began to get a yearning to belong, a sense of emptiness, then a desperation just took over to know myself. I asked a lot of friends if they feel the same way. A friend invited me to this church. I brought my daughter, too. She was a Anglican but now she's spreading the word, too.

Part of what allows this fluidity of religious identifications among Indo-Trinidadians is the way religious

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belief is configured and operative among them. Seen as a necessary requirement of effective religious participation as well as a cornerstone to being a moral individual, belief is the space that makes room for a multiplicity of affiliations. This is so because as a kind of protected (pure) domain, it is where only the "sincere," not "hypocrites" can enter. For example, a neighbor explained to me that although she is a Hindu from birth, being baptized Presbyterian when she converted prevents her from "do[ing] any Hindu prayers. It would come like a mockery to Hinduism." Another informant, a Hindu man who has spent almost a half century involved in the building of tadjahs and other activities for his community's Hosay festival, made a similar comment. He explained to me that his participation stops fully during the ritual conducted by an imam over the tadjah. This spatial and temporal moment is reserved for "them who does believe in the Muslim [religion]. Else it'd come like a mockery, and it might cause something [bad to happen]." This man's comments mirror a Hindu (and dougla) woman's statement to me that, "When Hosay time come I have believe [sic] in Muslim rites. I believe in it. It come like a religious thing." Yet a short while later, she said, "Hosay time ent good to do puja, Muharram time we can't do Hindu prayers. They two different religions." Similarly, a man who is an avid participant in the Hosay commemoration, said, "we Hindus

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keep up the Hosay for the Indian culture, it come like a Indian thing here [in his community]. Building tadjah cross[es] all religious barriers; it is the belief." His neighbor, a Hindu (Indo-Trinidadian) woman explained,

> These [Hosay] prayers [at the chowk (ritual platform)] never do us bad or good, being Hindus. People will say, 'look, they is Hindu and they carrying on the Muslim', but it never do us anything. Most of the people doing the offering are Hindus. They have that belief that if anything happen to them, the Hosay will help them. Is so because they born and grow in it. Just so, they believe. If you doesn't born and grow into something, it harder to believe in it.

Another informant told me that she has gone to see Sipari Mai only twice, even though she "born and grow in Siparia." She felt as a Muslim, she has "no business being there, where they worshipping idol." She did, however, feel that the people who do go to Sipari Mai for granting their prayers (requests) are successful, the reason being, she says, is that if one believes, then one's efforts will be effective.

Finally, in a statement somewhat more complex, a woman explained,

> I go to Sipari Mai every year. If you have a little pain in your stomach, a little trouble, your child sick, you carry you candle, sweet oil, a little money, what you could afford, five or six dollars in change to carry, and you offer it to whosoever is there by Sipari Mai, the priest, in your [own] way. And she [Sipari Mai] keep us happy for the rest of the year. Me children working nice, coming home good, no fighting or trouble and thing. I don't see her in my way

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> [Hindu]. I put her in <u>their</u> way, Presbyterian.[5] I say my prayers in their way, in church that [is the] way you say your prayers. If you is a all-rounder you go all about. You have your way in your house, but if you in someone else's [house] you are listening to <u>them</u> own [prayers]. Just like you [AK] is a all-rounder now, going about the place. [AK:"How did you learn to pray in their way?"] Well, I listen to them. In a Christian house, with their prayer meeting. You listen to they 'Our Father' prayers and you done with that [heard and learned]. If you make a offering in the Hindu way to Sipari Mai, is fair and well. But I follows like that because my son and [wife] is Christian. And I want to keep them happy. But God hear your prayer <u>any</u> way, though I is a born Hindu. In the Hindu way I make my offering home. But not to Sipari Mai. She remain right there [in the church]. Home we does do offering to that there [pictures], Ram, Latchman, Sita. Everything goes to God. If you pray to Sipari Mai for you child and you child get good, ent you going to <u>believe</u> in she? You <u>have to believe</u> inside of you heart that the child will get good by Sipari Mai. If you don't believe in it, the child wouldn't get good, you just going to try something. You must have <u>belief</u> in that for it to work. Is <u>your</u> power, you know. Not Sipari Mai power. That is only a image. You come home and say 'by the help of God I went by Sipari Mai and look, my child came good'. So that <u>work</u>[ed], by you own will. For you <u>own</u> self you <u>try</u>.

Again, in this woman's narrative we see that she perceives God, and God's agents, to hear everyone (as well as everything), irrespective of religion; in turn, what makes this possible, in part, is one's belief. Belief, in her reckoning, is ecumenical and thereby all-inclusive. Made effectual by an individual's own will ("power"), it is carried within the domain of thoughts and feelings, and thus

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[5]Sipari Mai is a syncretism of <u>La Divina Pastora</u>, Catholicism's "Divine Shepardess" (Virgin Mary), and the Hindu deity, <u>Kali</u>. Except perhaps among certain individual participants, like this speaker, her festival and worship are not associated with Presbyterianism.

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is not delimited by context. Yet this speaker's practice, the carrying out of her devotions, is site-specific. Pujas belong in her home; making offerings to Sipari Mai "remains right there" in the church. While anthropologists divide "belief" and "practice" only for heuristic purposes, it is clear from the preceding narratives that in Indo-Trinidadians' conceptualizations, these are not only distinct but figure as significant dimensions of the negotiation of wider social relations.

The distinctions, variously construed, that these people are drawing between belief and practice raises the question of the nature of the relationship of these two phenomena. "Belief" seems to be conceived as thoughts with feelings, whereas ritual and prayer are actions/practices with feelings. To draw out this point, a comparison can be made with the Sipari Mai festival, for example, where the worship of the deity ("La Divina Pastora") exists among Trinidadians of all religions (and ethnicities), while her veneration is ethnically segmented into the "Indian fete" and the "Creole fete," several days apart. Another comparison can be made with the Hosay commemoration. One man who has a lifetime's involvement with Hosay explained, with reference to his participation,

> I does have my limits. The tadjah and the prayers really belong to the Muslims. Hindus does assist in everything. You think only Muslim build Taj Mahal?! A Muslim might help me cook my food, but I don't expect him to take part in a kattha, only to listen. I go to any prayer and listen patiently but I wouldn't take an

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> active part. For the last 10 days [of Muharram] we does listen to the Muslim prayer at the chowk [ritual platform] but we stop participating in building. From the new moon, the imam take over. We [men and boys only] leave camp and go up and listen to the prayer, pass the lobhandani [incense burner] around the house, eat the melida or sirni [sweets] that is prayed on at the chowk and passed out. The tadjah come as nothing to me, is the prayers I want to hear...When you don't know what you doing [in praying] it come like a mockery. so you can't participate in the same ways, but in how you know.

Also comparable in this context is the distinction Indo-Trinidadians make between "practical Muslim" and "Muslim in name only," for designating those who are "real," sincere, practicing Muslims and not just carrying a patronym. Perhaps thoughts, such as "it have only one God, anyhow," can express tolerance, which is locally valued as important and necessary, while actions most overtly challenge this precarious and often implicit stance. As is the case cross-culturally, actions cross boundaries that thoughts (ideas, philosophical orientations) are estimated to do in a differently significant way. Somehow, belief indicates an intimacy with the particular phenomenon in question--ritual, pilgrimage, and the like--that establishes "sincerity"; action or practice may lead to hypocracy and mockery that belief can/does not.

While the term "sincerity" is in the local lexicon, it is also an analog to what I am drawing attention to as "piety"; and one cannot be one without the other. Along with being "sincere" and not being a "hypocrite," making a "mockery" of religion by participating in a superficial way-

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-i.e., not sincerely believing --does not only insult, and therefore jeopardize "living good with people." It also hinders any effective results of belief. In other words, prayers and other ritual practices come to naught without sincere belief. Moreover, irrespective of the intention of the individual, sincerity becomes mockery--in the sense of inadvertent parody--without proper or sufficient knowledge. True piety requires authentic knowledge of doctrine, text, and practice.

A significant part of what is highly charged in this social context is the occurrence, routine or exceptional, of misfortune. Misfortune can be seen as being more or less of two different orders or rubrics of distress, which have to do with both degree of suffering and extent of consequences. One is obeah, magical practices using supernatural powers (and therefore intentional), which often results in grave or profound events, such as marital problems or serious illness. Points of vulnerability can be physical/physiological (as in illness) or psychological/emotional (as in one's will being conquered).

Less weighty or threatening incidents, such as nausea, headache, vomiting, or anxiety come from maljo. Vulnerability here is, as far as I know, only physical/physiological. As one possible indication of the difference in the order of magnitude of these two is their "cure." On the one hand, for maljo, one usually seeks out

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someone who can jharray; that is, who knows recitations from sacred texts (Quran, Gita) and who then silently repeats these "over" the afflicted person. Not necessarily synonymous with praying for someone, to jharay is to take away, nullify the agent(s) of distress. Etymologically, this term (whose spelling is only approximated here) likely derives from the verb "jharna." According to Bhargava's Standard Illustrated Dictionary of the Hindi Language (1977), jharna means "to brush, to sweep, to clean, to remove, to snatch away by force, to repeat spells for exorcising." When someone "gets jharrayed," it always involves scripture; among Muslims and Hindus it may involve two or three straws from a broom, blowing onto the afflicted, or having them drink water; among Hindus alone it may involve implements such as peacock feathers. Anyone who knows the appropriate scriptures may jharray someone else (one person told me an individual can even jharray him/herself if acquainted with the texts); however, for more serious cases a religious specialist, such as a pandit or imam, or knowledgeable older head would probably be sought out. My elderly neighbor explained to me,

> I have the gift from my guru [godfather]. When he christened me he feel I was a good child and he feel he have to learn me something. And so I get to learn all the different prayers. Najar [maljo] is poisonous to the body, as headache, a sore in the body. When they churning the sea...it bring forth thirteen good nectar and one poisonous nectar. Mahadeo [deity] drank the poisonous one, because the people then would've had to drink it and then there wouldn't be no people in the world...Mahadeo take it to save the people. India is

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> the rooting of jharray. But everybody in the world know it in they own way. Madras, Hindus, Muslims, Spanish, all of them know it in they own language, and all refers to the same prayers, just different language. All the books have the same thing. No matter if is Hindu, Christian, Muslim, it amounts to the same thing.

Possibly because maljo is a recognized phenomenon among all ethnic groups in Trinidad, to "get jharrayed" is a practice that benefits everyone. For example, one day, as I interviewed an imam in his mosque, an Afro-Trinidadian woman came over, carrying an infant and holding a toddler by the hand. She asked if she were in "the right place" for someone "who does jharray." The imam casually directed her next door.

Many of my informants, however, were not so matter-of-fact as the woman and imam above, in their recollections of needing to get jharrayed for maljo. One woman remembered,

> when I was little I was drinking paynous [cow's first milk after the calf is born; a thick, yellow, sticky substance]. Like a milk custard, then. My mother boiled <u>so much</u> a man give her. And I waited for that. As the thing come down [was swallowed], I vomit, vomit everything out, and fever. How you explain the fever? Okay, I could get upset from eating too much. But sick, sick diahrrea. And two days later my mother called an old man. He took three broomsticks and they were the same length. He kept jharraying and I saw, this is no joke, the sticks getting shorter and shorter. And by time he was finished, I was good again.

Far more rarely than mundane discomforts, occasionally maljo has serious consequences. Another informant told me that her

> son died, three years old. People said maljo, the doctors said gastro. I think it was the maljo

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> [because] some people have bad eyes. If they watch while you eating, you get very sick, with belly ache. [Husband] went to a wedding one time and a man who serve him [food] was watching him. And [husband] had to go the doctor, then to the imam for jharray. Probably the man [serving] felt so glad to see [husband] after about two years. Or people could see you and say, 'okay, but he could eat so much?!' People does look at you at functions when you eating. Before, in a home, a mother would wrap up the bottle she feeding baby with [in] a rag. She afraid somebody would look at the bottle and the baby drinking all the milk and think, 'what a nice, fat baby who don't cry' and give the child maljo. And don't you see babies with the black tikka [dot on forehead] all now? That age, up to about four or five, does especially get maljo...An imam could tell if it's maljo right away. They could see it on you. They could tell by your eyes, eyebrows, and eyelash. Maljo is some evil thing that you have to fight to get out. It could kill you. Everybody could get maljo, but everybody could not give it. Maljo could give you diahrrea, belly aches, vomiting, so upset. From small we know not to be eating anything in public, especially things like cake..., any food you buy [i.e., a special treat]. People could see you, people who hungry. And you don't know what could come out of that. ["If maljo could kill," I ask her, "why do people bother with obeah?"] Not everybody could give you maljo, but they could get some obeah down on your head. That's a sure thing. That's why in hospitals people always carry [take along] a imam or pandit. Something could [have] follow[ed] you or be on you.

For obeah, then, the consequences are always dire. One must go to a "seer man" or religious specialist (most often reported to be a pandit, very rarely an imam; never a minister or priest, who both has access to esoteric knowledge and who can control the malevolent forces, conjuring or nullifying. These forces, which seemed ubiquitous in their being constantly experienced and discussed among my informants, are an ever-present challenge to "living good with people." The gravity of not "living

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good with people" sometimes makes for interpretations of causes that elide the scriptural and what some might call "superstitious." This can result in grey areas that people must negotiate, as they attempt to ascertain how to think about these things properly. For example, djins are discussed in the Quran and are a legitimate part of Islamic theology. They can, as well, be associated with a larger matrix of extra-natural forces. One of my friends, a devout and "practical" Muslim said,

> Me personally, I believe in it. There are good and bad djins. What I know is hearsay, I never get involved in this djin affairs, thank God. But some people might tend to want to lead a good life, doing the right thing and being religious, [they are] good children and through this they're prospering. Other people might be jealous of that person, so they get into this act of putting a djin on you...They would put this djin to destroy what you have, to make you crazy to commit suicide. I believe, and Hindus believe in this thing. All religions believe in this, but they'll call them different names, like obeah. But what is obeah, really? It is evil, and evil is djin. I believe djin is the proper word. God talk about djin and man...Shitan [Satan] is the evil djin...It have [there are] prayers to prevent djins. You wouldn't know it for yourself [being afflicted]. You family or someone would have to tell you. I've never heard a case where people would want to talk about it. More likely the family would say, 'but how he could fail that exam?, how he could get sick?, how he behaving so bad now?' People affected couldn't know because the djin have them so covered...Sometimes I don't want to believe, though I don't doubt there is good and evil. But when I hear that some evil doing something to someone I don't study it [think about it], I just pray, because then it could make you <u>believe</u> and then worry so much you find yourself going to a obeah man to check <u>yourself</u> out. And I think these obeah men are just out to get your money. And sometimes it could be a natural sickness, you know. I don't like to give it too much thought when something happen because I afraid I get carried away.

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A serious but less frightening consequence of obeah, and not to my knowledge associated with the work of djins, is marital infidelity and the stress and conflicts that can accompany it. For example, in spending the day with a household I commonly visited, the mother, an older head and a Muslim, told me the story of her trials with her former husband. She recounted that in 1964 her husband "went to a seer man" (many of whom are pandits, according to her, but never imams) to ascertain the cause of all the comess they were having with their next door neighbors. "He [husband] went to many seer men" and found out the neighbors "had worked obeah" on them, "put[ting] grave yard dirt and many other things in a buried heap under we step [stairs], and I was the first to step over it." Later, her former husband's present wife "work obeah on him, to make him so neglectful and hostile" to them. Before he married the second wife, he gave "a little ten, twenty dollars" to my friend for expenses, though they were no longer living together. "Now, she [second wife] just wants every, everything." I asked my friend why she had not worked obeah on the second wife or on her troublesome neighbors. She said that she would not do it, "that is evil, God would punish."

Another close friend of mine, a Muslim woman, explained to me that her husband was taken away by another woman [later his wife] through the working of obeah. She had been talking with a neighbor about the problems she was having

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with her husband. The neighbor was a Hindu woman, and took a photograph of my friend's husband to a pandit, who figured out that the "other woman used obeah, or something. The pandit said he couldn't undo it, he hadn't the powers." My friend added that this woman could not harm her because "Allah can undo whatever she does." My friend continued that, "I don't believe in it [obeah] but people say it happen. But it had to have [there has to be] bad [evil], because she took my husband away." Her comment illustrates the different levels of meaning that obeah carries, at least for many persons concerned with being pious, as my friend is. To practice obeah is to engage in evil. To believe in it seems a logical assessment of empirical reality: obeah has the power of efficacy (it causes intended things to happen); it can be offset by the stronger power of God; no one admits to "working it" but most "know" that it has been done.

Troubles from working obeah are not limited to marital infidelity; they are also perceived as being at the heart of other domestic or kinship problems--these kinds of problems comprising the most immediately affecting issues in people's lives. When a Muslim friend's marriageable cousin became interested in a Hindu boy, the parents, so my friend told me, arranged her marriage to an appropriate Muslim boy in North America. "Some people," my friend said, "feel some people jealous she and do she something to make her like

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[desire] Hindu." And when I was speaking with a woman about how her sister had met the Afro-Trinidadian man she had married, this woman answered that "someone, a friend of the man, put something under the house." Interestingly, and completely in keeping with both the older head/younger generational and traditional/modern tensions, this woman's 25 year-old daughter looked at her mother uncomfortably while she gave me this explanation--a combined expression of self-consciousness, uneasiness, and embarrassment.

Other kinds of experiences also call forth explanations that invoke obeah. A Muslim acquaintance of mine told me a story about her next door neighbors, Muslims who had converted to evangelical Christianity. These neighbors saw how well my acquaintance was doing with her parlor, so they opened one, too.[6] "They business wasn't going so well, so they went to a pandit to figure out why they having such little sales. The pandit made them a tabeej. This is a locket you can buy in a puja store. It has a paper with a message in Hindi that the pandit puts inside it. You could put rice in it, too." The pandit charged these neighbors fifty dollars to make it, my acquaintance said, "and told

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[6]A "parlor" is a relatively small shop or storefront carrying all manner of goods (e.g., soft drinks, soap, sweets, canned goods, newspapers). Many people attach them to their homes (usually, of course, to the front, facing the street). In "south," a pedestrian will encounter a parlor about every fifty feet. Otherwise unemployed women, and sometimes men and older children, tend these parlors, which form a significant part of the informal labor sector earnings of the households who run them.

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them to hang it up inside the parlor. It warding off the evil." The tabeej, it turns out, was not very successful. These neighbors were initially very hard sell with my acquaintance, to convert her to Christianity. But she says she remained steadfastly Muslim. They finally stopped pressuring her when they saw how successful she continued to be with her parlor and "how them own was going down hill."

Misfortunes large and small may be couched in affective or sentimental terms and therefore seem detached from or irrelevant to material concerns or conditions. However, while some negative experiences transcend class or status, such as a spouse's betrayal (obeah) or an infant's crankiness (maljo), others are contingent, or at least linked to local stratification. These include being envied for certain possessions or achieving success that can translate into material gain, like formal education or employment.

The ways people conceptualize and think about the phenomena that have immediate and important impacts on their daily existence is a key aspect of their lives; this discourse (concepts, thoughts, communication) is part of what forms "reality." As such, discourses cannot be separated from the contexts in which they occur. Among its constituent themes, the discourse of "living good with people" contains within it an emphasis on what I will call the extra-natural, as opposed to the supernatural. The term

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"supernatural" lacks an association with the spiritual (different from the "spirit world") and the divine; "extra-natural" conveys being beyond the limits of this-worldly constraints, but inherently associated with the positive through connection with things religious. Extra-natural, on account of this association, is not strictly about evil. Therefore, although obeah is certainly about evil (since it is intentional and traumatic), maljo is usually not (since it is unintentional and largely not very traumatic); extra-natural encompasses both.

There are, in addition, other kinds of entities, or ethereal agents that infuse the environment of "south" (and undoubtedly other regions as well). The one most frequently mentioned to me during my fieldwork, but almost always only by older heads, was the soucouyant. I was told that they can be male as well as female; others told me they are only female. Apparently akin to a succubus, soucouyants are responsible for, among other things, the bruises people find on themselves when they cannot remember the injury that produced the bruise. One afternoon an older head showed her young daughter-in-law a bruise on her thigh and asked her what it was. Her daughter-in-law identified it as a bruise, but her mother-in-law suggested it was from a soucouyant, "soucouyant suck me." A more exact description of soucouyants than "a spirit" I was never able to elicit. However, the older head woman above contrasted them with

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djins, who are "spirits of educated people, like a ghost, who make people do wrong thing." Another older head friend of mine told me a troubling story from her youth about soucouyants:

> I already saw the people hold one [a soucouyant] in Waterloo [cane estate]. We de [were] young and small. A lady, she only have blood on she, me ent know if is Indian or creole. All the children and the people saying, 'look, a soucouyant, look, a soucouyant'. Long days now, forty, fifty years aback. They hold she in a truck and de carrying she off to jail. She cover she face with she hands, and only blood, blood everywhere. Soucouyant don't like to eat salt, so they don't suck people with salty blood. Salt does humbug [bother] them because they have no skin. They [soucouyants] have some kind of prayers. Long time, they get sixty cents for every cup of blood. They sell it to the devil. Now must be plenty more money. Around 1912, 1920, they could get sixty cents.

While this is a disquieting story, and one wonders what happened on the estate that day, I see it as an important example of the way that the extra-natural is infused into everyday life. It is true that this speaker was a very elderly individual (now deceased), whose tale surely would be overtly discounted by other, primarily younger persons. However, it must be borne in mind that, first, among many of these same people would be an unspoken stance on the <u>possibility</u> of this event (or others like it) being true, and, second, others of her generation along with their children (among whom would also be older heads) hold similar views and/or have similar stories. What is particularly interesting for my purposes is her concrete historicizing of folk wisdom, which is one way the extra-natural and the

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mundane articulate. She locates an actual estate (Waterloo), periodizes the event (1912, 1920), mentions specifics like vehicles (trucks) and colonial authority (jail), and accepts the crowd's interpretation of the incident without question. A woman covered in blood, taken away by the authorities, can be a consequence of many different things, particularly in this context in the early part of the century (see Chapter Three). Yet the extra-natural dimension is woven quite matter-of-factly into the memories of a childhood spent on a sugar estate.

The necessary presence of the spiritual, the divine (the positive), in extra-natural discourse derives from at least two factors. One is that some disjunctures and fissures in social relations are seen to reflect, in part, social inequalities that have given rise to differences in position and prestige. Getting maljo from eating a piece of cake in front of those who don't have any and are therefore envious, or a three-day headache caused by the admiration of a new piece of clothing are not meaningful events in terms of colloquial critiques of class status. However, they are examples of the myriad minor ways in which hierarchical distinctions within the community are managed. Furthermore, an error allegedly caused on the job due to someone else's envying one's (better) position or a new addition to a home falling down before construction is complete ostensibly because neighbors praised it, thereby inviting

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disappointment, may well be oblique critiques of inequality. These usually are explained or rationalized, however, in a way that (ideally) should not further cause disjunctures and fissures. Therefore, what is considered to be in the realm of "politics" and too highly charged is not usually directly addressed. Moreover, the interpretation of inequality is complicated, because people may value and believe the ideology of achieved status and an "open" system while simultaneously decrying (or resenting) visible evidence of differences in achievement. A neutral (safer) and hence more effective means of explanation or justification is to employ ethereal agents--certainly not the workings of God, but not locked into the perfidious, either. These ethereal agents or forces, whose precise agency remains unspecified as far as I know, inhere in the literal and figurative atmosphere of the community and are responsible for various consequences.

In addition to being one response to the recognition of community-level inequality and hierarchies, extra-natural discourse involving the spiritual or the divine also reflects the pervasiveness of doctrinal, text-based religion in Trinidad. Although nominally separating church and state, the entire fabric of society is imbued with the importance of religion, with the Almighty, with prayer, with faith: it is unthinkable to disdain religion or to eschew it from one's life (it would be far more strange to claim atheism

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than to be affiliated with the most obscure form of worship, even when the latter is deemed "inferior" by someone else's standards). It would be perverse to never, or even rarely participate in some kind of ritual, whether high mass or a puja, depending on one's religious inclination. This is not to say that all religions in Trinidad are treated equally or thought of as uniformly legitimate. A look at Earl Lovelace's (1983) now classic novel about Trinidadian Spiritual Baptists, The Wine of Astonishment, or any study of Rastafarians in the Caribbean will demonstrate the bias here toward the hegemony of world-religions--Christianity, and, more reluctantly, Hinduism and Islam. However, while religious practice can be a highly contested terrain, religious belief is not--it is assumed. Together, acknowledgement of hierarchies, inequality, and the place of religion as an assumed part of existence form a religious idiom, the means of expression within which extra-natural discourse occurs.

It cannot be over-emphasized that the profound influence that religiosity has in influencing the tenor of Trinidadian culture is one based historically on the religion of the colonizers. An invisible interlocutor for both Hindus and Muslims, Christianity has set the terms of ethnic and religious discourse in a number of ways. One, the ideological and cultural context in which immigrant Indians found themselves, and in which Indo-Trinidadians

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continuously had to assess, promulgate, or deny their indigenous traditions, was a Christian one (Catholic and Protestant); and Christianity became the standard against which Hinduism and Islam were interpreted and valorized by the entire society. Two, as I discussed in an earlier chapter, the role of the Canadian Presbyterian Mission is one of the least ambivalently embraced factors in Indo-Trinidadian history. Gratitude for provision of formal education and possibilities for social mobility tend to overshadow any associations the Mission might have with Euro-Christian domination.

Third, in stark contrast to local sentiment toward Presbyterians, the proselytizing evangelical and pentecostal Christian churches (who have arrived en masse more than one hundred years after the Presbyterian Mission) are a profound influence in the discourse of identity among Hindus and Muslims. Feared by some and resented by many, these recent movements are perceived as perhaps the central threat to Hindu and Muslim populations in their often quite overt critique of Hinduism and Islam. The overtness of this critique is seen by Hindus and Muslims as threatening the balance of "living good with people"; in fact, it is the latter that is as troubling as conversion itself. Issues of infringement, of potentially inciting hostility by even appearing to encroach on the rights-of-being (heritage, traditions) of others are decried to a large extent in

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Hindus' and Muslims' discourse such that revitalization (significantly through "functions") is far more common than proselytization. It seemed that Hindus, Muslims, and Presbyterians (who, together, virtually define Indo-Trinidadians) are more concerned with strengthening ranks, as they are presently constructed, than seeking to bring others into the fold. Even though Islam and Presbyterianism are also proselytizing religions, each tends to interpret this to their members as a celebration of their respective perfection (being a satisfying "complete way of life") rather than making formal declarations against other religions or seeking out new affiliates from outside the group. While there exists a less public ideology of superiority on the part of all of these religions, unlike the case of Guyanese Muslims and Hindus noted by Williams (1991:215ff), egalitarian discourse is overt and hierarchical stances are tacit and frowned upon. Indeed, the ubiquitous refrain, "Is all one God, anyhow," speaks to the necessity of avoiding conflict if at all possible, in its being a kind of rhetorical compromise in highly charged arenas of ethnic competition and accommodation. This adage is also as much an assertion that one's religion (which ever it happens to be) is equal to any other as it is a statement about the preeminence of monotheism. In this context monotheism becomes a symbol of ultimate homogenization that contains <u>legitimate</u> diversity, legitimate because diversity

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putatively ends up "the same."

Also important is that the possible ways (beliefs, practices) to reach God are shaped within a Christian paradigm. When Hindu Indo-Trinidadians draw analogies between Ram and Christ; when they emphasize that the deities are only manifestations of one entity, "like the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost" are; or, as Jayawardena (1966:232) observes, when the emphasis in Guyana is on divine creation though it had "marginal importance in the religion in its classical form," an "ecumenical trend" (Ibid.) is forming. Jayawardena observes that a "meeting ground for the three major religions of the society: Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam" is established by this trend (Ibid.). Also applicable to Trinidad's "is all one God, anyhow" philosophy; this meeting ground, however, is clearly conforming to the symbols of Christianity. Muslim Indo-Trinidadians also acknowledge Christianity in both direct and oblique ways. For example, on the day after Christmas (1988), Friday services (jumma) in one of the neighborhood masjids had almost double the number of women attending services.[7] I asked a friend why there were so many more people than usual. She answered, "Christ's birthday. They must be come [there] from influence from the season. It have so much about Christ's birthday and worshipping Christ

[7]Men and women are segregated in worship, hence I could not ascertain the numbers of men attending services.

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now, probably these people came here to worship the Prophet from the influence. Like other people worship Christ, yes?" Another friend commented, "And wasn't Jesus a prophet and shouldn't we honor him on his birthday?" I am not suggesting here that what brings people to worship is not their own, religiously-grounded motivations. I am pointing out, however, that if we think about discourse as expressions of ideologies that have various, and variously empowered interlocutors, as much as Hindus and Muslims accept Presbyterianism and are wary of recent Protestant movements, means for tolerance or rejection are found in both "living good with people" and a common ground of compromise that nonetheless reflects the tenets of Christianity.

A fourth way that Christianity has set the terms of ethnic and religious discourse is its being all the more symbolically powerful in its dual valence of positive and negative associations. Its association with Western modernity and progress is complicated by its simultaneous association with Western hegemony and immorality. As Friedman aptly notes, colonized peoples' history can free itself "from Western dominance by projecting a value system produced in the modern context onto an aboriginal past...Values are projected onto the past as the essence of cultural traditions that can be brought back to life by breaking with the present" (1992:207). Part of the emphasis

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on morality that informs the notions of purity and piety among Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians derives from the contrast made with a corrupt and effete West. While this is explored in subsequent chapters, what can be introduced here is the idea that a knowledgeable return to the pure, the authentic (thus correct), alternative East, whether Hindu or Islamic, will not only cohere the (respective) community but will provide a template for dignity and resistance.

In connoting Western hegemony and potentially conflictive moral tenets, Christianity evokes concerns about another kind of impurity, for Christianity is also enraced, and in the Trinidadian context, this is in terms of "Afro" as much as "Euro." For example, one older head exhorted,

> I believe in all religions. I mean, I believe in all the good things in the religions that I decide is good...We have a big problem here in Trinidad: we ent [are not] studying [thinking about] Muslim, we ent studying Hindu, we ent studying Christian, we studying Indian. So many young girls going and marrying Negro men, but what going to happen to the [Indian] race? We not talking religion, we is all Indian, but we talking race. Now we talking political!

What this person is conveying is the idea that Indo-Trinidadians concentrate so much on race as the issue and Indo-Afro miscegenation as the object of focus, people are losing sight of the loss of children through religion, since religion and race are intertwined. By juxtaposing an ethnic (racial) dichotomy, and not disaggregating "Indian" into salient religious differences, a key vector of defeat is insufficiently acknowledged--and therefore inadequately

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subverted.

"Functions"

> Recently I read a definition that when we speak of culture, that has something to do with religion, with faith. Because where does culture come from? It stems from people's convictions about certain things. And people's faith influences people's behavior and way of life (Indo-Trinidadian informant, 1989).

If the world of the extra-natural is one in which boundaries and categories of religious belief and practice are blurred and overlap, and the efficacy of the efforts of faith and conviction is, to a significant degree, realized contingently and idiosyncratically, then religious rituals--locally known as "functions" or "a prayers"--are what codify and standardize, and in so doing, authorize worship with respect to authenticity and legitimacy, and thus ultimately with respect to group identity. However, the nature of this authorization is contested among both Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians, although it is more highly charged for Muslims than for Hindus, for reasons that will be discussed in the following two chapters.

Two processes, then, are at work. First, in orchestrating practice, functions serve to clarify the ambiguities of both heterogeneity and syncretism by erecting boundaries in the form of particular markers ethno-cultural identity. Functions are sites where diacritic emblems are reproduced. Second, because boundaries are precarious in a social context that is a veritable palimpsest of cultural histories, functions are loci of discourses on

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determinations as to what the appropriate or correct markers of ethno-cultural identity are or should be. An interesting example of these two simultaneous processes was given by a Muslim friend during one of our lengthy conversations. Although we were speaking about other things, this quotation illustrates well my point:

> Long time, cooking done during a prayers. And so much people come <u>after</u> the prayers, for the food. Maybe this is a innovation from Hinduism. In the Hindu structure of religion, certain individuals have to listen to prayers for certain developments in their life, allegiance to their gods at each stage of life's development. So when having prayers, <u>you</u> are the person has to listen to it. Others can flit in and out, or prepare meals, or don't know what going on...Same thing here for Islam. When we have prayers people come to your house. Imam is reading [from the Quran] and the family still cooking, dressing, not ready to participate. But they ask the imam to continue, to carry on. Maybe this is influence from Hinduism. We have this same attitude as Hindus have. Only one individual from family expected to pay full attention...Over the years this has changed for Muslims. All cooking and milling around stops when the imam is ready to begin, and everyone, whole family, comes and sits down and joins the prayers and participates fully.

This speaker, a middle-aged person, exhibits an easy familiarity with Hindu functions that suggests the increasing formality of functions is an effort that is not sanguine about acknowledging the common form and, to a lesser extent, substance of Hindu and Muslim religious activities. These processes not only make functions a key arena in an identity politics where "religion" and "culture" are ideologically bound or rent, which has important consequences for Hindu and Muslim ethnicity. They also

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suggest that while a specific function may seek to exhibit the "stereotyped" characteristics that rituals evince (at least as anthropology defines them), as a whole their discursive characteristic reveals less about what is actually normative than what is, in effect, comess--the tension between ideas and behavior about order and disorder.

While Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians have carried out religious activities in the form of ritual practice to one degree or another throughout their entire history in the island (see Chapter Three), the evolution of functions as larger-scale, more ambitious, and more frequent events can be connected in part to a transformation that seems to have been taking place gradually since mid-century. As one informant recounted,

> My father was a Muslim and he build hosays [tadjahs]. He build the hosays every year. He took a collection up from the area to buy materials for the hosays and it had a lot of people to help him. The year he dead was the last village Hosay in S-- Road, about 35 years ago.

This quote exemplifies the eventual demise of much of the local, community-level religious commemorations in Trinidad and the rise of various kinds of functions and festivals. While functions and festivals are not the same--the latter are grander in scale, require much more financial support (often contributed to by the state), political recognition (e.g., as Trinidadian national holidays), and tend to be concerned with the major, internationally-recognized sacred periods of the calendar (e.g., Hosay/Muharram, Divali,

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Holi/Phagwa, Eid-ul-Fitr)--they represent a similar trend in change of scale and degree of coordination. Village level-orchestrated religious commemorative events, such as rituals and festivals, were early woven into the fabric of community life. As such, I believe they were more easily perceived as "cultural"--a normal part of everyday life--and more easily participated in by all those in the neighborhood and communities nearby. An older head explained,

> In the case of culture, in the old days everybody celebrate Ram Lila, Hosay. But it have no festival now that takes in all Indians. As time moves on, they now realize Ram Lila belongs to Hindus. But in the early days all was together. Long time, all was lonely, all was sad. They wanted any aspect [any religious comfort possible]; and,

> Most of the Muslims in C-- are against Hosay. They are the more purer Muslims. The Hindus' connection with the old Muslims from India is what keep Hosay going down here. 'Jahaji' means the Hindus and Muslims came together in one boat, they live like one family. It had a maulood and Hindus come, it had a kattha and Muslims come. Not like today. The loyalty and relationship between both isn't here today. That is why we could benefit from them today. They, the Hindus and the Muslims, built up this country. Throughout Trinidad [today], Hindus and Muslims haven't that unity again. Time change and people change. But long time, there was no "Hindu" and "Muslim" again. Now the segregation come like Indian and creole [Afro-Trinidadian]. But long time Hindus were invited to maulood, but not now. But when it comes to Muharram, we the Hindus are more clean [pure, pious] than the Muslims self!

Here the speakers point to the tension inherent in increasing the visibility and scope (degree of incorporation) of religious commemorations as these changes imperil ritual purity. In other words, national integration may be a means to offset potential cultural oblivion but it

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also may mean religious defilement through association with the profane. An official of a prominent Muslim religio-cultural association assured me: "We have our own 'national' festivals, Eid and Backra Eid. Only Muslims participate in this. These two observances are not in any sense a national participation."

From about the post-War period, and particularly since the 1970s (Vertovec 1992), local-level observances have greatly diminished, giving way to large-scale, highly concentrated and visible, and complexly orchestrated events, events that, through these changes, have become something of a different kind of religio-cultural symbolic statement. Part of this process of transformation was an encouragement to define these observances in definitively "religious" terms, separating out the "cultural" matrix in which these, as smaller, less formal affairs had been embedded. Other observances began to follow suit from this time period, becoming centered in the masjids and the mandirs and becoming ever more public in design--that is, specifically engaged with an interlocutor "other." This is not at all to say that household- or neighborhood-based observances ceased; only that in addition to these, people began to engage more and more in the large-scale events. Indo-Trinidadians thus added expanded dimensions to their discourse on religious and cultural identity, and increased their time and energy as well as their consciousness about

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religious piety, cultural knowledge, and the ideological distinctions between sacred and profane.

The evolution of functions can also be connected to the rise of what I have called religio-cultural associations. Particularly important historically as well as in contemporary times are the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (SDMS) for Hindus, and the Anjuman Sunnat-al-Jamaat (ASJA) for Muslims. These organized bodies are, as I have stated in earlier chapters, empowered by official state recognition, yet their genesis was in the early politics of cultural struggle engaged in by their predecessor associations against the state since the turn of the century: "it is through these organizations that a particularist process of political socialization and recruitment of leadership continues" (Malik 1971:37).

While there is to my knowledge no study of masjids and their relation to the history of Islam in Trinidad, Prorock (1988) offers a meticulous study of the history of mandir construction in Trinidad and the concomitant development of ethnic identity among Hindus. Dividing the building of mandirs from 1860-1985, Prorock raises three points that are particularly relevant to my argument. First, there is a clear connection between political activity and mandir construction; every construction peak "coincides by only a few years with national political events" (1988:202). Second, 80% of the active mandirs "appeared on the landscape

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in their present form only in the last 25 years" (ibid.:72). Third, although the first audience halls attached to the mandir appears in about 1925, they became politically important in the 1930s, when the two major Hindu religio-cultural associations became incorporated (in turn inspired by the influence of missionaries and the nascent nationalist movement in India), and in the 1940s, when political power on a national level began to be more firmly articulated in terms of racial (Afro/Indo) communalism (ibid.:75ff; cf. Ryan 1972:83, 141-43; Jha 1981:127). Indo-Trinidadian Muslims have, of course, different historical particulars with regard to temple construction and the transformation of its uses. Given the connection between an increasingly public orientation to ritual worship, between political and religious activity, and the increasingly nationally-organized umbrella religio-cultural associations, however, this general profile applies to Islam in Trinidad as well.

Particularly active since the post-War period, the SDMS and ASJA have been largely responsible for the provision of (non-Presbyterian) formal education and have over 50 primary and secondary schools between them (see MacKenzie 1989). Moreover, they have been instrumental in "institutionalizing" certain modes of religious interpretation (cf. Kasule 1986:202) and in orchestrating these in the promotion of more frequent and more highly visible functions. Raising worship practices to being a

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symbol of prestige,[8] these two bodies help to fund and carry out domestic and extra-domestic functions, to a significant extent by training and providing pandits and imams, underwriting missionaries and teachers from abroad and providing venues for them, encouraging community mandirs and masjids to affiliate with (and thereby be directed by) them, and attempting to establish guidelines for the proper ("correct," "authentic") expression of religious belief and practice. These associations do not go uncontested (by rival associations or by individuals and groups); for example, the explanation below by a Muslim Indo-Trinidadian applies as well in principle to the Hindu religio-cultural associations:

> Each of these [Muslim] organizations are separate entities, having their own rules and regulations, beliefs and practices. While they all maintain the fundamentals of the religion there are minor differences in the interpretation of versus of the Quran, as well as practices of the Prophet, which could cause some to organize their own branch.

However, associations wield considerable power and influence, especially those that enjoy sanctioning by the state, and through their financial and political capital.

However, that there is space for contention and

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[8]Compare R.T. Smith's (1962) observation of Guyana: "In certain respects, the decay of Indian culture was arrested because adherence to certain aspects of it became symbolic of the prestige of the more successful Indians who weren't sufficiently educated or acculturated to be assimilated to the creole middle class...Their reaction was to form self-assertive 'Indian' organizations...in which they defensively insisted on the glories of Indian culture" (1962:110).

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discussion within and among the religio-cultural associations is partly because they are not always articulated neatly with their constituencies; they can sometimes be self-appointed representatives. In mild critique of religio-cultural associations that devise boundaries of group identity in highly exclusive terms, one person said to me,

> over here in Trinidad, if something is small, they make it big. They like to exaggerate on something. Where they could mend or patch something up, they like [instead] to say they know so much. They wouldn't say some part is wrong and some part is right. They'd say, 'this is <u>all</u> wrong'! Like they know, eh?!

The principal religio-cultural associations are, for lack of a better analogy, like brokerage houses for political lobbying, social work and fund raising, and implementation of religious education. The latter is necessarily linked to the work of functions. Making something "small" into something "big" does not only refer to the on-going attempts at codification and institutionalization of belief and practice on the part of the dominant religio-cultural associations. It also applies to developing worship and ritual observance into their own particular kind of pedagogical arena--functions.

Functions necessarily take place within the context of the relationship between a site and its participants; in other words, in a household with invited guests or the physical structure that is a mandir or masjid and those who attend. When "a prayers" is held in someone's home, space

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is cleared in the yard and/or open area under the second story (usually built first in grass-roots homes),[9] and parts are portioned off for cooking the requisite food that will be "shared out" (never "served") and eaten after the event, for participants to sit (either on folding chairs or, for some Hindu functions, on spreads on the floor), and for the religious specialist and his attending associates or assistants.

Among Hindus, the connection between a function and its site is fairly loose. There is no puja, yagna, bhagwat, or other kind of prayers required to take place in the mandir. As one of my friends explained to me, holding one's function in a mandir would be "more sacred, more clean [pure]" than in a home, but doing so is entirely up to the individual. Mandirs in "south" tend not to have a coherent and set membership attached to them. There are, of course, devotees who may worship in the same mandir on a regular basis. In fact, in the greater Penal area there are approximately six mandirs, within about a two and a half mile radius, that

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[9]This has to do with the particular use of space among grass-roots Indo-Trinidadians: the bottom part of a house serves as a kind of open-air recreational and living area for household members and visitors, where the literal and symbolic separation between "outside" and "inside" is blurred -- which changes with upward mobility (cf. Austin 1984). Also, this use of space prevents non-residents from necessarily having access to the inner rooms of the house -- notably, where private possessions are located. Finally, as a household expands its members, parts of the bottom area are enclosed, creating additional rooms to accommodate these changes. Architecturally, it is less costly to enclose "first floor" space than it is to build up a second story.

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community residents frequent most often. Monthly, mandir devotees may attend the full moon katha (sermon) there that is officiated by a pandit; or, as my friend stated, "you could go every day for yourself if you could read the texts." The point is that there is no necessary use by devotees of mandirs. Indeed, if a person has the means, she or he may build a "puja room" in the house or, even grander and more conspicuous, a separate structure adjacent to the house (usually to the front so it can be seen) for family use. Generally speaking, however, the more elaborate and large-scale "a prayers" is, it will constitute a function and be held in the hosts' preferred mandir, officiated by the hosts' preferred pandit.

Muslims may also choose among a large number of qualified imams and maulanas to preside over Islamic functions. As with Hindus, these are held both in the home and in the temple (in this case, masjid). However, Islam contains a different relationship between worship and its site. Each masjid has an attendant congregation, or jamaat, that is attached to it. This does not mean that followers are not mobile, for any Muslim may attend the prayer service or function in any jamaat. Yet every masjid in "south," as elsewhere in Trinidad has a (however loosely) delineated jamaat membership associated with it, and an imam who is appointed by the religio-cultural association with which the masjid is affiliated, along with an administrative committee

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comprised of any combination of the following: a President, Vice-President, Secretary, and Treasurer.[10] Muslims in greater Penal use on a regular basis approximately four masjids for holding functions. Since each of these is associated with a particular jamaat, that jamaat will be considered as host to the other jamaats, if the function is a formal affair such as observing major Islamic events like the meeraj of the Prophet Mohammed or the Prophet's birthday, or as a venue for visiting missionaries/lecturers.

Since there is a loose correlation between a particular jamaat, neighborhood, and officiating imam, there is a tacit understanding that an imam will stay within the demarcations of his jamaat when carrying out religious services. Like Hindus, Muslims are free to utilize the services of any imam for whom they feel rapport and confidence. Generally, if an imam is called upon by an individual or household outside of his own jamaat, he will seek the permission of that jamaat's resident imam. However, there is no tenet in Islam that an imam should stay with his own network of followers defined

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[10]In the region of "south" in which greater Penal falls, there are about twenty ASJA-affiliated jamaats. While ASJA is by most accounts the most influential Muslim organization in the country, other schools of thought in Islam have organized historically into their own, distinct (and un-affiliated) jamaats. For example, a Muslim belonging to one of the Ahmadiyya masjids in "south" said, "there are independent mosques [masjids] in Trinidad that are not affiliated with any organization. If some people in a district get together to build a mosque, they might feel the bosses of the mosque should be the people in the district who built it and not people from outside."

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and "contained" by their comprising a particular jamaat. Officially, there is supposed to be no competition, which would be seen as self-serving and worldly. In reality, imams take pains to treat each other with respect partly by recognizing each other's "territory." Among pandits there seems to be greater crossing of each other's domains (that is, networks of followers/devotees), since, one, there are more pandits (more Hindus) in the area of greater Penal and, two, there is no equivalent level of organization for mandirs as have jamaats.

As I have said earlier, rites of worship, whether, for example, in the form of a puja for Hindus or a Quranic reading for Muslims, form an event context that constitutes a "function." Also known as "a prayers," functions are arenas of and for discourse that provide an immediate context for religious expression (ritual) and an attenuated context for the other two salient aspects of functions, reciprocity and pedagogy.

Reciprocity refers to the mutual dependence and cooperation among small, grass-roots communities bound by an axiom of "not showing a bad face" through "living good with people." A key way mutual dependence and cooperation manifest themselves is in the communal labor of family, neighbors, and friends that is required by functions. In turn, functions also serve another purpose in concert with religious worship. This is the communal feeding of all

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participants that is a requisite part of functions. As one informant put it, "is better to have a big prayers. It comes like a charity, feed all the surrounding people. It's a blessing you get from God for that, plus the blessing [gotten] for the prayers."

As I exemplified briefly in one man's narrative in the previous section, much of the reciprocity involves amassing foods; collecting utensils; cooking it for several dozen to sometimes up to a few hundred people; cleaning out the premises; perhaps fetching the pandit or imam and/or the musicians and/or participants who live far away; providing the folding chairs, and all such other related tasks. The successful orchestration of certain aggregates of people in preparing a function depends to a great extent on the nature of reciprocal relations in the community and the way these are able to be realized (or not) at a given moment. While not entirely predictable, a general pattern exists where grass-roots congregations tend to be the invited guests of middle-class congregations when several communities participate together in observing an event. This is not due to middle-class hosts being perceived as able to hold something more elaborate or more satisfying than grass-roots hosts; it is because functions reflect the broader tendency in Indo-Trinidadian social relations for power to be expressed in offering rather than in receiving (see, for example, Khan 1994). Although this class distinction is, in

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this context, more apparent among Muslims, organized as they are by jamaats, it holds for Hindus, too. It does so, however, on a broader, regional basis since mandirs do not have a jamaat equivalent. Since "north" tends to be more economically developed than "south," there is probably a greater concentration of middle-class mandir devotees there. When a function is being held by only one household or one congregation within a particular community, an indication of current factions and loyalties are apparent. For example, these affect who will actually show up for preparations, how much time they will commit to them, and even sometimes who sits with whom in the audience. In other contexts or situations, these usually shifting preferences and affinities would likely be less discernable.

Even more important when considering functions, however, is the relationship between the desire to "live good" with a religiously mixed set of neighbors and family members and the desire to maintain the purity of authentic and correct functions. Since reciprocity encompasses all dimensions of social life, how can revitalization and reassurance of the beauty and superiority of one religion be claimed, without insulting others and implicitly challenging the harmony of "is all one God, anyhow"? For the latter challenge is also to actual participants of other religions, whose support in most aspects of life is relied upon, and not merely to the abstract commitment to egalitarianism.

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One friend of mine felt that most functions should include primarily

> religious people, although you neighbors are the ones who will help you when you are in need. But still, they don't know what we doing [in the function] and will just make mockery. People should know what is going on and understand something of it. Other people [who do not know] only come and chat, make noise, just come to eat, don't wear the proper clothes.

And an imam echoed a similar sentiment when, using an example of a specific kind of Islamic ritual/function, he told me,

> Haqiqa is the birth ceremony of a child. It signifies verily my sacrifice and prayer are for Allah. A parent is dedicating the child to Allah. [A haqiqa] is not calling [inviting] people, feeding them, and then people go home saying there was too much pepper or salt. Haqiqa is a serious duty and responsibility. We must prepare ourselves by preparing our children.

Finally, at another time, some friends commented to me about "Christians wanting you to go to their prayers but they never going to anybody else. They is hypocrites, since if God is for everyone and we only worshipping him in different ways, why they must be so?" The tensions revealed in these comments speak to concerns over having proper and effective functions, through "knowing what is going on" and thus not allowing things to devolve into a "mockery," understanding it as a "serious duty and responsibility," yet not alienating those others who "help when in need," or being "hypocritical" by appearing too exclusive when making the effort of piety--that is, the quality of being devout through adhering to moral precepts for proper attitude and

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conduct derived from religious values. In a conversation worth quoting in its entirety, several people, while waiting one afternoon for the imam to arrive to begin their "thanksgiving prayers" function, discussed these issues inherent in community religious worship:

> [Woman #1]: All of we have religion. All of we have God. Let them who want to turn Christian or worship idol [Hindus], is their business. Everybody praying to the same one God, you know. [We] must not criticize, that is where race coming in, provocation. Do not criticize people's religion. If it in the book self, don't say it [criticism]. We have to live here. Them is our neighbors. The priest does come and leave, but the people, the neighbors you does invite to your function, is not all Muslims. We living between them, and you must invite your neighbor...Long time, they didn't used to talk critical about the other religions. They explained the book, what is in the book. So much prayers I go and I never hear anything [negative]. But I feel too small [unimportant] to tell people that. The fittest person to say is Ma. She needs to say, 'Bhai-o [hey, brother/friend]...' If I say [something], they might think, well, they read more, they more educated, so I can't speak to them.
>
> [Man]: Mamu is a imam. And he does go all about to all functions and speaks for all people. He don't separate the people [does not discriminate].
>
> [Woman #2]: The pandit does not only have the Bhagwat Gita. They does read the Quran, front to back. That is why they can say so-so is on this part of the Quran.
>
> [Woman #3]: God didn't tell us what to eat, only not to eat animals with big teeth, like shark, big eyes, beak. We is a cosmopolitan country. We cannot be so rationalized about the religion. If they worship idol, that is they affair.

Again, what is apparent in their discussion is a concern for negotiating the propriety desired for functions and the propriety required for living. For even if religion "is a total way of life" and guide for living, in the concrete affairs of "living good with people," religious ideology and

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social pragmatism can sometimes collide. Belief(s) can be legitimately heterogeneous in a way that practice(s) cannot.

Prayer, one of Islam's five pillars, is considered best done in the masjid, along with fellow Muslims. In the vast majority of jamaats in Trinidad, this applies to women, too. Jumma, or Friday services, is a particularly important time to worship in the masjid. Hence there is a more regularized connection between site and practice. One very significant consequence of this prescription is that one of the key ways jamaat members can fulfill what is considered an Islamic moral code of showing care and concern for the community of jamaat "brothers" and "sisters" is by keeping track of each other through attending prayer services and hosting or participating in masjid (and jamaat) functions. It is not uncommon to first hear of someone's illness, impending departure for North America, pilgrimage to Mecca, or child's marriage through the communing that takes place after services. While Hindus do not have the same injunctions about worshipping in the mandir as do Muslims in the masjid, functions are for them, as well, opportunities for meeting, socializing, and exchanging news after the ritual component is completed and "sharing out food" is undertaken in earnest (given that there is always the occasional person who eats during the ritual, though this tends to be discouraged).

However, there is the locally understood injunction against "minding people business" by asking or knowing too

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much about them, among all community residents irrespective of religion or class (or ethnicity). This circumspection may include not knowing given or surnames (since out of respect, older heads, for example, are generally referred to by kin terms only, for example, "Mousie, Bauji," "Tanty," "Mamu"). This may also include not knowing a person's exact occupation, the precise number, identity, or whereabouts of grown children, and the like. In two of the funerals I attended while doing fieldwork, no one I asked knew the given names of the deceased; they were simply known affectionately as "Mousie" and "Bighead," respectively--her kinship position vis-a-vis her living relatives and his family nickname. This tacit rule of attempting to maintain privacy in a relatively small community of intimately interconnected, "pumpkin vine" social relationships of varying kinds requires that one's good intentions of being a concerned "brother" or "sister" in the religion be prudently carried out, lest one be accused of "digging people business," being "fast," and possibly interested in "comess," "confusion," or "bachannal." The potential situations these arouse jeopardize, of course, "living good with people."

The third salient aspect of functions I have identified, after worship and reciprocity, is pedagogy. This refers to the role of functions as loci where knowledge is disseminated and debated: knowledge as an alternative

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symbolic capital to the secular instruction of formal education (cf. R.T. Smith 1962:110), and in the form of "correct" practice of rituals, and the "correct" interpretation of those practices (cf. Brenneis 1991:369, 375). Ultimately, the pedagogical objective of knowledge in this context is to correctly learn and master one's culture. If religion is the idiom through which cultural identity is constructed and shored up, then cultural knowledge is the product of pedagogy, too, since to have cultural knowledge is to be familiar with what are construed as "traditional"/authentic customs, mores, and group history. As such, functions, and the rituals they contain, are not simply a pattern of symbols that makes the social structure explicit (e.g., Leach 1954:15), nor that which inverts the social structure as catharsis (e.g., Gluckman 1955), nor primarily what reinforces the normative (e.g., Durkheim 1968 [1915]).

The pedagogical purpose and capacity of functions render their discourses "dispersive," inasmuch as, like Bowen's discussion of religious discourse among the Gayo, these "cannot be resolved into a single set of symbols or ideals" (Bowen 1993:10; cf. Foucault 1969). An aspect of this, for example, is that Hindus and Muslims describe with much admiration their respective religions as being too difficult to easily master, being too "technical," having "too much to remember." Yet, they also say their respective

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religions are "simple," in the sense of being a code for "total life" and not merely relevant to one part of it (the first observation is an implicit reference to ritual, the second to pedagogy). The challenge of functions, and the discourse therein, is to convey both the "technical" and the "simple"; to render sacred knowledge pragmatic, but not secular, and relevant through accessibility (and not mysterious through opacity). Moreover, the discourses manifest in functions are also couched in terms of analogies regarding equality and justice in secular contexts. Often the language and referents employed indicate current "secular"/"profane" events or conditions--notably politics--that are conceptualized as being outside the domain of the "religious." Unlike Bowen's case, however, I am not looking at functions as arenas of discourse focused on speech events, where communication is with God and spirits, and only indirectly with other people (Bowen 1993:9). Instead, functions are discursive fields (Foucault 1969) in that (1) ritual practice, (2) sermons (kattha [Hindu] or khutba [Muslim]), and (3) the interpretation and translation of both of these into other, quotidian aspects of life by participants, all communicate messages--instruction, acquiescence, disagreement--within this structured and more or less bounded event.

Historically, education among Indo-Trinidadians has not been solely about access to the formal (colonial or

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postcolonial) institutional system and the occupational and status opportunities that accompany it. Education, or the condition of being educated, is also about a state of being, an existential developmental progression, where "stupidness," "foolishness," and similar epithets (offered as ridicule or corrective) evince notions of backwardness, gullibility, or susceptibility to being tricked. These are in addition to the external condition of an individual's level of formal education that places her or him in a particular structural position. In other words, knowledge, through education, affords an internal development from within-- a distinct kind of achievement from that of mobility through institutional ranks. This bestows upon an individual a particular quality of personhood as well as social status. With formal education, not only can one abandon one's previous class and status positions, one can also recreate the kind of person one is: from backward, dull, naive, parochial, "cunumunu," or "foolish" and with a "jheel mentality," to sophisticated, wise, capable, shrewd, perceptive, and, as importantly, pious and authentic (symbolically pure). These qualities of personhood mark "progress" on an individual level and, by extension, one a group level, as well. They are also, essentially, indications of ideology about the relationship between culture and class, inasmuch as personhood and class position are seen to define, determine, and reinforce each other.

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The reverent attitude among Indo-Trinidadians, especially grass-roots folks, toward formal education combines with a respect for teachers of all kinds and for the notion that rectifying a lack of educational opportunities with assisted or self-taught religious instruction is commendable. This perspective works to sustain and develop discourse and debate about the correctness, authenticity, and purity of and in functions; functions are important loci of edification, since they are where both moral and social uplift are sought, in alternative or addition to secular means. The importance of religious efficacy, accessibility, mastery, and status serve, then, as forceful encouragement for people to seek out and valorize the pedagogical in functions. A friend's comment to me about a regional function she had recently attended is illustrative:

> I found it inspiring and satisfying because the lectures was simple and understandable. The learning is a main benefit of functions. It's not enough to stay home and read salaat [here means chapters from the Quran]. One must go to functions, get revitalized, inspired, get knowledgeable.

One of the primary agendas of religious revitalization among Hindus and Muslims is to understand the meaning of ritual practices and not be a prisoner of blind faith. Unschooled belief can result in only superficial religious blessings and enlightenment, as well as being one more unpleasant indication of the historical betrayal experienced by Indian indentured immigrants, who were "fooled" by British colonial projects. The concern with correct

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knowledge and its comprehension resonates with local ideas about upward social mobility, achievement, modernity, and progress, but is also significantly about empowerment through clarity of purpose and precision of enactment--both of which indicate the possession of knowledge. This is why, according to the Muslims with whom I spoke, Islamic forms of worship should not be seen strictly as "rituals." Although the anthropological identification of worship practices is most succinctly labeled as "ritual," on the ethnographic level, for many Muslims, rituals are defined as what Hindus or Christians do; rituals are actions that are intentionally bracketed and held distinct from the wider totality of social life, and thus may obfuscate through unfamiliar or incomprehensible simi-dimi (hocus-pocus, mumbo-jumbo). An informant echoes a familiar sentiment: "ritual is when you believe in something because someone else does, and have the priest just do it for you, save you." Islam, Hinduism, and most forms of Christianity in Trinidad all define themselves as "a total way of life" yet the differing perspectives on the place of ritual in daily life, as well as how to view and refer to it, speak to an underlying concern with the meaning, as much as the practice, of religious worship.

Although Hindus are also concerned with the issue of superstition and correctly understanding the meaning and significance of their own worship practices, they do not have similar debates over identifying these as rituals. For

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them, rituals, and the functions that constitute them, are sites with the "intrinsic symbolic richness" (Bowen 1989:615) of heritage and meaning that authenticate the Hindu way--the sanatan dharm--and legitimate as well as territorially map out the Hindu community. Hence, the importance of functions and "keeping up ritual" is emphasized by pandits and other religious or community leadership. Viewed from another perspective, the "intrinsic symbolic richness" of Hindu worship practices implies to some an association with the extra-natural not legitimized by a connection with the divine. This is not at all to say that Hinduism is associated with things evil, only that religious specialists like pandits are thought by some to have perhaps more familiarity with a greater variety of powers and forces, due to the mystery and enigma presumed to inhere in pujas--what some would say their simi-dimi. This is probably why those sought to interpret and counteract obeah seem most often to be pandits, and (to my knowledge) not often imams or ministers, since obeah is also associated with mystery and enigma.

Over thirty years ago Jayawardena (1963) depicted a rather tepid accord between Indo-Guyanese Muslims and Hindus, the result of a set of tacit compromises that allowed non-invasive means of remaining differentially "Indian." In a description probably more complex than he recognized at the time (and more complex in Trinidad today),

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he states,

> There is no tension between Hindus and Muslims. A tacit agreement not to convert each other and to avoid religious controversy makes cooperation between the [religious] associations possible when the situation demands it. Hindus and Muslims attend each other's religious ceremonies freely, and in formal discussions certain precepts believed to be common to both religions are emphasized. For example, it is said that both worship the same God under different names. The basis of this rapproachment is the assertion that both Hindus and Muslims are Indians, in contradistinction to Negroes and whites, and that their religions are Indian, in contradistinction to Christianity. Hinduism and Islam are regarded as alternative ways of being Indian. A close study of their respective customs reveals that a considerable degree of convergence and syncretism has developed (1963:23).

My argument is that the tension between Hindus and Muslims is not based on subcontinental impetuses but primarily is a response to the unequal relations of power in local Trinidadian social and cultural history--mediated among Afro, Euro, and Indo, and between Christian and non-Christian. Hence, this tension is substantively distinct from Old World manifestations, although clearly global processes have not been inconsequential. Thus, for example, "is all one God, anyhow"--what would seem to be Indo-Trinidad's equivalent to worshipping "the same God under different names"--is not so much about being Indian together in opposition to Negro/white/Christian as it is about legitimizing their social and cultural parity in the society as a whole. Furthermore, claims to an encompassing Indian identity is contingent on context and situation; Indian identity may be the desired end in the politics of cultural

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struggle, but as a rhetorical strategy, being "Hindu" or "Muslim" has more immediate and concrete references than the more diffuse and abstract identity category "Indian." Moreover, religious references are shielded from critique (reflexive or external) by being in the domain of the sacred and the (ideally) pure; this discourse is more guarded. "Indian" identity is more vulnerable to critique since it evokes cultural rather than religious references, which, as I have shown in previous chapters, is a concept that is fraught with ambivalence.

As this section and the subsequent two chapters demonstrate, functions both problematize and attempt to come to terms with the "convergence" and "syncretism" of Hinduism and Islam, neither of which are uncontested among Hindus and Muslims. If it had been historically salient in Trinidad that "their religions are Indian in contradistinction to Christianity," the nature of the Christian interlocutor has changed (from ambivalently valorized world-religion to deplored small-church), and the contests of visibility in which "culture" is deployed are no longer sufficiently sustained by cultural (Indo, Afro) comparisons; a religious idiom is the language with which identity assertions and power are negotiated.

Thirty years ago Jayawardena (1966:231-32) stated that among the Indo-Guyanese the puja and the Quranic reading were the principal kinds of "religious ceremony" among

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Hindus and Muslims, respectively. He observed that these were "held in private homes" and all had Hindus, Muslims, and Negroes attending. He also posited that the "development of parallelisms" between Hindus and Muslims minimized the socially relevant differences between them in local community organization:

> Structural similarities in religious ceremonies and organization enable Hindus and Muslims to 'understand' each other's activities even if they know little about the content of beliefs and symbols. It enables Hindus and Muslims to interact without friction in situations which make their differences public and yet, at the same time, oblige them to associate with each other as members of the same local community (1966:232).

Rhetorically, that is, in party politics, the situation Jayawardena describes for Guyana would certainly be the case among Indo-Trinidadian Hindus and Muslims today: the above would consist of the official, formal discourse of most Indo-Trinidadians. However, knowing this does not help us to understand why or how identity, constructed significantly through functions, also forms in religious idioms that challenge the notion of "brothers of the same family" in matters of everyday life and relationships. Moreover, writing during a period of severe tensions among Hindus and Muslims in the "old world" (and relatively shortly after Partition), Jayawardena is interested in and struck by the apparently sanguine nature of intra-group relations among Indians in a "new world."

Among Indo-Trinidadian Hindus and Muslims today, if

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"understanding" rests on knowledge and piety that are only enabled with familiarity with the "content of beliefs and symbols," then "structural similarities" in ceremonies are not enough to tell us about their meaning to participants. In the following two chapters I look first at Hindu functions and then at Muslim functions in greater Penal, to try to tease out the leitmotifs and messages communicated in them (as discourse) that help to explain the gradual bifurcation of things "religious" and things "cultural," the concern with purity and piety, and hence the construction of identities among these two groups of "Indians."

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## Chapter Seven. Functions: Pujas, Yagyas, and Pandits

> Shiva takes the suffering of our sins on himself...We must obey scripture and the word of God to be obedient, [to be] clean (pandit, puja, 1989).

> When you're talking about Indian culture, you talk about things that doesn't necessarily have a Hindu impulse in it. But most things that are Indian had a Hindu origin (informant, 1988).

Separating a discussion of Hindus into its own chapter, and Muslims into another chapter seems, at first glance, counter to the foregoing discussion in Chapter Six of the cultural matrix of religious and extra-natural phenomena through which all Trinidadians interact. As I stated there, an array of referents and images are held in common, and form the basis upon which people compare and contrast commentary on, and explanation of mysterious occurrences (positive and negative) or invoke divine intervention. It is this shared context, however, that is the site for what is perceived as a homogenizing influence, one that is a consequence of social familiarity and/or residential proximity. Thus, as I have mentioned previously, counter-discourses are elaborated that work to make religion and religious affiliation uniform and putatively homogeneous.[1]

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[1]My analysis differs from van der Veer's and Vertovec's (1991) discussion of the "homogenization" of Hinduism's beliefs and practices in the Caribbean, the consequent "ethnicization of religion," there, and the development of Hindus "as a distinct ethnic group" (1991:149). These authors are interested in the role played by Brahman leadership and religious organizations in the "standardization and institutionalization" (Ibid.:163) of Hinduism. However, I think this homogenization process and formation of Hindus as a delineated ethnic group is more fluid and complex than they

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A key means to do this is to hold functions, whose primary service is to a religiously delineated community of practitioners and to the divine entity(ies) whose identity is defined by these practitioners (e.g., Hanuman, Saraswati, Allah, and so on). Since part of the work of functions is to both encourage and reflect religious boundaries and ostensibly religion-specific doctrine, it is in keeping with the ethnographic reality of "south" to write about functions as they are thought of: as distinct arenas of mutually exclusive religious practice. In this chapter I undertake this task.

Pujas, Yagyas, and Sat Sanghs

In Trinidad today, the most common Hindu "functions" or "a prayers" are pujas, yagyas, and sat sanghs. Puja is the name given to the devotional ritual held by a pandit in worship of one or more deities. It involves some sacred text exegesis by the pandit and host family participation in the rites. A yagya is a devotional ritual much like a puja, only with a duration of three, five, seven, or nine nights and almost entirely centered around the reading and explication of portions of a sacred text--usually the Ramayan, often the Gita or the Puranas. It also involves

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seem to think. Moreover, I am more concerned with quotidian practices, tensions, and contradictions in social relations, and how these make for shifting definitions and categories. While a progression toward homogenization is evident, the larger, and changing conditions under which this has occurred always and continuously makes for circuitous transformations, not linear ones.

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the participation of the host family, and occasionally more than one officiating pandit. Both pujas and yagyas include a kattha, the sermon, or "lecture," given by the pandit. A sat sangh, a group of truthful people or those in search of truth, as one informant explained,[2] is also a devotional ritual and involves small groups of neighbors, families, and friends in local districts reading the Ramayan. Its other emphases are on singing (bhajans, or Hindu hymns), accompanied by (often hired) musicians. Significantly, although welcome as equal participants, pandits are not a necessary part of the sat sangh experience among Indo-Trinidadians.

Rather than concentrate on the details of ritual content in pujas and yagyas, I want to think about these three forms as together comprising a complex of religiously and sociologically significant practices, a complex that is meaningful in a more encompassing way than each of them--puja, yagya, sat sangh--is by itself. Even though pujas, yagyas, and sat sanghs are held as distinct events, they have a broader symbolic significance because as codified events with "authentic" heritage rooted in ancient Indian culture, they constitute the principle means by which certain religious phenomena and expression are valorized and legitimated. In so doing, functions both shape and mirror

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[2]"Sat means "truth" and "sangh" means company, group, gathering.

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the wider social relations and tremors in which they are engulfed.

While I argue that it is crucial to explore the contextual significance of ritual functions, and although it is not my intention to investigate the micro-symbolic intricacies of a particular rite, the content of a function is the key to unpacking its relationship with other social phenomena. As an idiom of identity construction, in this case religious, among a particular ethno-cultural population, functions are not one-dimensional or neutral (apolitical) events; they are sites of the convergence of the tensions of the profane (mundane) and the aspirations of the sacred (rarified).

The specific procedures undertaken in the rites, along with their meanings, are usually the focus of scholars and outside observers, and are always the concern of the pandit himself. The concern of function participants, however, is more often with the pedagogical--that is, the "lecture" or "lesson" conveyed in the pandit's kuttha (sermon) and in any other speakers' oratories that might be a part of the event. Therefore, while functions are a key symbolic statement about Indo-Trinidadians' social legitimacy and political visibility, an equally significant function of functions has to do with pedagogy, that is, concerning the dissemination and acquisition of knowledge. Here "knowledge" consists of two dimensions: the concrete information that function

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participants can take away with them, which may be imparted as historical narrative, allegorical tale, or contemporary social commentary, and an abstract concept of edification, the tutelage of devotees by those considered to be a more knowledgeable or better formally educated leadership. Interpreted as cultural authenticity, this ritual function-associated knowledge ultimately enables greater purity through piety and engagement with the sacred (via functions).

The pedagogical importance of functions requires an examination of the kuttha as a particular kind of discourse attuned to both religious expectations and the current ethno-political climate. This importance also requires consideration of the position of the pandit in terms of the way he views his role and how he is viewed among his constituency as well as in the wider community of devotees. I would like to inaugurate this discussion with the following narrative by an older head pandit. I quote it at length because the speaker not only makes references to subjects that also have been raised by other informants in different contexts (underscoring the leitmotifs and patterns of rhetoric significant in Trinidad), but in so doing also foreshadows the issue of the pedagogical role of functions and the related issue of the position and perception of pandits as religious leadership.

> We were a poor family, I born in C--[Trinidad]. My father plant rice, mind cow, make garden. And we do

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a part of the same thing. We are seven, three brothers and four sisters. I do labor work from a very young age, working in the Tate and Lyle Estate [now Caroni, Ltd.]. From then on, around seventeen, I get married. My wife was fourteen. Then same laboring work. But I also work a little time in the [American] base, in Chagaramas, [and in] Cumuto [and] Edinburgh [Trinidad]. I was in the laboring work. I work here since I married in '43. I leave C-- in 1947 to come here for work. Work get a kind of scarce on that side. That area is a very hard area. And the Americans started to lay off very fast. And the people had to go back into the cane, which is a very hard life. So all these people laid off, flooded back into the cane field, the poorer class. I came here when I had family [in-laws].

My father give me the teachings I have. He was raised from India and was highly versed in Sanskrit and Hindi, so these made him a scholar. Though he wasn't to do panditi [pandit work], the Brahmins in India long time was to go as high as they could in the teachings. He had age of eighteen years when he come in Trinidad and he married a [Indo-] Trinidadian. He was from G-- ...I got coaching up from my father. But I also used to go about reading Ramayan in groups, especially down here...Though people ask me [to do pandit work], I turn them down. But finally I couldn't back out from it, I had to come out to teach the people. People need it and it is benefit to the community to depart the knowledge to the people.

I am now sixty-two and I began panditi eighteen years a back. All my children were grown, and I was working on the road for County Council. Just a laborer. Use fork, cutlass, shovel, whatever the needs is to do on the road...But I import for myself many books from India. I always wondered, 'what is the reason for this and that'. I want to know facts, research to find the proper answer, not just follow the 'old talk'[3] of the older generations, older heads...But I do not push myself, to say that in the depth of my heart I must be in it [panditi]. If you want me, is alright. If not, is alright, too. I don't envy [compete with] any pandit. Some pandits vex if the people they working for don't call them at some point. But me, I say you call who you want. You find young people more educated today, and they know English plenty better than me. But nobody understand nothing in Hindi. Some pandits look for the jajman [jajmani?],

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[3]"Old talk" is a local expression meaning, loosely, gossip or idle conversation for the sake of entertainment and passing the time. Any age person can engage in old talk.

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> their customers, then, to get seedha[4]. But I tell my jajman that after one day as I teach them they don't need to call me again. If you can do it as I do it, you can do your own prayers. But the others [pandits] don't teach that. Probably the young people want more grammatical English. I doesn't know that amount of English. They [devotees] needs English translation to understand the puja or the kattha. Otherwise, is of no use to them. When the jajman know Hindi you would explain in Hindi. But the majority of Trinidadians don't know Hindi so they can be fooled more easily by the pandits. They don't get the right explanation. To read Sanskrit, pandits can do [it]. It have books now written in Sanskrit but with English translation below. The pandits use Sanskrit by the medium of translation. But to understand it and explain it, well, Trinidadians is out of that.

We hear again the themes of a life of "hard work," of the risk of being "fooled," of beginning religious work relatively late in life and its corollaries, generational and educational distinctions that are interpreted hierarchically, and of the ambivalently confirmed authority of pandits. The chapter will proceed first with a description of functions, using pujas and yagyas in composite as illustration, and continue with an overview of pandits and their work. I then proceed with an analysis of the importance of authentic tradition and the meaning of pedagogy for function participants, the significance of generational differences (specifically, between older head and younger pandits, and throughout the life-cycle of the individual), and the symbolism of "superstition" in

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[4]Seedha, like dakshina, is given to the pandit after he has performed the ritual and other services of a puja or yagya. In Trinidad, it is usually a combination of "provisions" (agricultural products), cash, and personal or household goods (towels, dhoti, shirt, and the like).

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religious belief and practice. These foci will also structure the discussion in the chapter on Indo-Trinidadian Muslims that follows.

The difference in size and duration of pujas and yagyas reflects the particular reason it is being held, which can be devotional worship for personal reasons (such as celebrating a success at school or asking for divine intervention in an illness) or in commemoration of a broader event (such as the rites associated with Divali or Ram's birthday). On occasion, the financial condition of the host household at the time of the event also may be an influence in determining the magnitude of the function. As sketched out by Vertovec (1992:178), the general sequence of pujas comprises:

> (1) the pundit invoking the presence of a deity, represented on the vedi [altar] by a murti [physical representation of the deity]..., (2) the shrota [participants who make the offerings while the pandit directs and chants the mantras] making a series of, ideally, sixteen offerings to the deity at hand..., and (3)...the anointing of a bamboo pole...followed by volunteers raising it outside the home, topped with a jhandi...[small triangular flag indicating the deity just honored]. Each puja must honor a standard set of deities before beginning ritual worship of the main god or goddess...[5]

Single day or evening pujas are usually held at home, involving the household residents, other kin who may wish to participate in the rites, and the pandit. Participants in

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[5]For a basic description of the specific ritual (as opposed to the larger ethnographic significance of pujas and yagyas) see Vertovec 1992.

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the rites are not necessarily limited to family members, but, generally speaking, pujas are organized by household, in service of those members who wish to undertake this form of devotional worship; household members by and large are kin, even if "pumpkin vine." When a puja is undertaken on behalf of an individual, or individuals, it is often referred to as a "thanksgiving" (a term used for Muslim and Presbyterian functions as well). The objective is to give thanks to God to show appreciation or gratitude for an achievement, for the ability to have successfully withstood some hardship, or for demonstrating religious devotion and sincerity. Imbued with an unequivocally religious (sacred) aura, thanksgiving pujas are often explicitly held in lieu of other forms of celebration, for example, parties for birthdays, anniversaries, retirements, and the like. The idea that is meant to be conveyed is that a higher plane is being sought; that the alternative, more broadly "cultural" (and thus profane), means of commemoration--merrymaking, likely with music, dancing, perhaps drinking--is being eschewed. As such, thanksgiving pujas are an important symbolic statement about piety, on the part of the person as well as the family with whom she or he is associated. The message is that an often difficult choice has been consciously made, one away from immediately more tempting but ultimately less satisfying means of celebration. In a sense, it is acknowledged that a sacrifice of sorts is being

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made, as "choosing the right path" takes determination and self-control, but the rewards are assumed to be incomparable. It is a statement about quality of person when someone consistently holds thanksgiving pujas over other kinds of observance.

Pujas held at home can be for a large attendance of extra-household persons, such as neighbors, friends, and other guests, in addition to those who reside there. Whether or not participation is limited to the immediate household or is meant to extend over an entire series of neighborhoods, of major importance is the "sharing out" (never "serving") of food at a function's requisite communal meal and the "sharing out" of prasad to the wider community. Made primarily of flour, milk, ghee (clarified butter), and sugar, prasad is offered to the deity(ies), along with fruit and other items, by the pandit during a puja through his placing it into a ritual fire while reciting sacred prayers. The portion of prasad that is not placed in the fire but kept to one side during this activity is reintegrated into larger vessels of the same contents, conveying the "blessing" of the deity(ies) to the entire mixture. From these vessels, parcels are made up, to be consumed along with the food that is eaten after the ritual is completed as well as to be distributed throughout a neighborhood or among a cluster of households. Eating prasad is a blessing, and the act of distributing it is thus one important means of

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symbolically affirming bonds of camaraderie and reciprocity among kin, neighbors, and friends. Through sharing out this confection, "blessings" are distributed among the greatest number of people possible, irrespective of whether they are Hindu or even attended the particular puja. The general idea is that divine blessing benefits everyone, and portioning out prasad is a practical means toward enabling people to take advantage of this opportunity.

A blessing in a perhaps more circuitous manner, sharing out food is the end result of a labor intensive reciprocity. Often starting the night or even day before (and never later than the early morning hours of the day of the function), many women and often several men begin preparation by gathering provisions (such as the vegetables that will be consumed or the sohari leaves on which food is served to participants) and dry goods (like flour, sugar, and oil). Depending on the financial ability of the sponsors of the function (and the impression they would like to make) or the importance of the particular occasion, more than twenty different (strictly vegetarian) dishes might be prepared. Certainly, no less than a dozen different dishes would be offered, except in the poorest of households. But even there, the communal meal would likely consist of three or four dishes, rice, and roti. This is the case because, as indicated in Chapter 5, although less pervasive currently than "long time," foods are also cooperatively contributed

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to function feasts.

As cooking commences, in enormous iron pots hoisted onto gas flame burners, with large metal and wooden utensils for stirring, the area where the function will take place must be cleaned and set up for the pandit and the participants. Also, the entire house will be thoroughly cleaned prior to the event, as a requisite "purified" space for this kind of activity. Roughly, a gender-specific division of labor exists, where men engage in the work that is culturally defined as requiring more strength, such as securing large quantities of folding chairs or kneading and "busting up" the huge mounds of dough cooked into "bus up shut," or paratha.[6] All the while, small children must be minded, meals cooked for those who are working, and the regular chores and responsibilities of daily subsistence must be attended to--from minding cattle to driving taxis. Quite clearly, in order to carry out this magnitude of task, cooperation of neighbors, friends, and kin must be secured and orchestrated. As I have said earlier, not "living good with people" severely jeopardizes the likelihood that this labor will be carried out.

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[6]"Bus up shut" is "broken" English for "bust up shirt," a common name for paratha among Indo-Trinidadians because it looks like ragged cloth when ready to eat. I found that among grass-roots people, this phrase was unproblematic for the most part; yet among middle-class people, the term usually was disdained in favor of "paratha," because of the negative associations that "broken" English has regarding Indo-Trinidadians' social mobility.

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Yagyas have their origins in the bhagwat, or "week long series of pujas and readings from the Bhagavata Purana..." (Vertovec 1992:164), that has been an important aspect of religious observance among Indo-Trinidadian Hindus since before the turn of the century. In these early years, this event was in stark contrast to its contemporary transformation. Then it was sponsored by groups rather than individuals or single families or households, little planning or preparation was involved, and prasad was for the most part the only edible offered (Vertovec 1992:165). As Vertovec notes,

> [n]ow, the basic structure of Bhagwat-like institutions (week-long series of pujas, scripture readings, music, prasad) has been maintained under a general rubric of yagna [yagya], while the nature of sponsorship, organization, texts, setting, and scale of these practices have all changed dramatically (ibid.).

Gradually added to the ritual were reading from the Ramayan and Bhagavad Gita, along with (subtly) competitive employment of differently ranked pandits, musical groups, foods, guest speakers, and numbers of people attending (cf. Vertovec 1992:166).

In addition, I argue that it was during this protracted period of change, and particularly during the economic boom years that the discourse on tradition, authenticity, and legitimacy evolved in the Indo-Trinidadian Hindu (and Muslim) community. As changes were taking place with respect to the form and substance of devotional worship--due partly to the various kinds of influences always emanating

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from the sub-continent and partly to the increasingly contrastive circumstances and experiences among subsequent generations of Indo-Trinidadians--definitions and assessments of these transformations developed accordingly. As interpretations altered, some practices or values were deemed anachronistic (or "innovations" among Muslims [see Chapter 7]); others became the litmus tests for authenticity and the "correct" way of doing things. Familiar examples would be, respectively, the caste system and large-scale, high-visibility ritual functions.

A somewhat more complex example of ambivalence toward changing forms of worship is the sat sangh. One informant avocationally interested in forms of Hinduism in Trinidad explained, in general terms, the distinction between pujas and sat sanghs. In the former, a pandit officiates, a sequence of rites is enacted, these rites can only be carried out with esoteric knowledge such as is possessed by religious specialists, and participation in pujas is equal among the grass-roots and middle-class populations, though "older heads does prefer it." In contrast, however, the sat sangh has no rites comparable to the puja and needs only (male) individuals who can read from the Hindi text and lead the prayers and bhajans. This knowledge is accessible to interested parties through books from India, which are no longer difficult for Trinidadians to obtain. Finally, the participation in sat sanghs (the "demand" for them, as my

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informant put it) is comprised of "mostly rich Sai Babas, and the younger people."

In a conversation I had with a pandit one afternoon, he assured me that "we had it [sat sanghs] all the years in Trinidad." However, probably because pandits are not required in undertaking a sat sangh, not everyone is sanguine about them. The pandit with whom I was speaking feels that with the influences of the Sai Baba movement (see, for example, Klass 1991) and Presbyterian and evangelical conversions, which all pose varying alternatives to Hinduism, holding sat sanghs are a way of being Hindu without being Hindu--a modified form that does not reject fundamentals (cf. Klass [1991] on this conundrum). He continued: "They don't want to associate with Hindus, they want to be an internal order of aristocrats... They are people who want to associate with Indians but not with real, die-hard Hindus and Muslims." This pandit is rendering synonymous the sat sangh and the ritual activities of the middle class majority membership of Presbyterians and Sai Baba devotees. In addition to his oblique critique of class hierarchy, however, he is also decrying what he perceives as an attitude of exclusivity and disdain for the Indo-Trinidadian masses that is allegedly signified by engaging in sat sanghs. Thus, while it is highly unlikely that any Indo-Trinidadian would find fault per se with the sat sangh as a legitimate and authentic part of Hinduism, its presence

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in Trinidad is not taken for granted or found unremarkable; thus it is part of the larger, fluctuating discourse and debate on anachronism, authenticity, and illegitimacy in religious belief and practice among Indo-Trinidadians.

Contrary to Vertovec's claim that "[y]agnas in Trinidad are of at least seven days' duration" (1992:166), it is not unheard of for people to have a yagya for five days--although "a seven nights" or "a nine nights" were most common during my fieldwork. However, Vertovec correctly outlines in chronological order the "essential structure" of yagyas: a puja must be executed each of the nights, a text is recited and interpreted, a hawan is conducted (offering of ghee and fire), arti performed (veneration of deities, honored guests, and/or Hindu religious leaders, by rotating in the air a brass taria (tray) with a small flame three times clockwise in front of the individual or the deity's image), prasad is parceled out, and a feast is offered. "Bhajan singing by a group of musicians occurs before, intermittently during, and after the recitation and hawan..." (1992:166).[7]

The most significant aspects of the yagya, however, are not limited to formal enactments of specific rites. Also locally meaningful are the blessings gained from hosting or attending a yagya (or puja) that are associated with the

[7]For an outline sketch of (ideal) yagya preparation, see Vertovec 1992.

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interactions among persons rather than interactions between person and divine. These include the dispensing of small dakshina parcels to invited brahmins, who can be men or women but are generally community elders. On the opposite end of the social hierarchy, "vagrants" (as they are locally called) are sometimes invited to a yagya, whose duration of several days gives these men a secure place to sleep, predictable meals, and perhaps some work to assist with. One of my neighbors felt that having "a prayers," or

> functions is important for feeding people and thanking God. It is better to give to those who don't have than to give to a pandit alone, who eat and drink he belly full everyday.

Another told me that,

> in 1986 I had a seven nights, and some Indian and Negro vagrants stayed there the whole time, sleeping in a place we make for they. It's considered a blessing to do this. The vagrants lime [hang out] during the day, helping out a little here and there, and they eat in the night.

Also quite common among the reasons people gave for hosting functions is that they "made a promise" to have "a prayers," usually on a regular basis, as a show of gratitude and devotion to God. This is similar to what I have raised in the previous chapter regarding the significance of the concept of "making a promise" to divine agents. One woman explained that she "made a promise" to have annual Divali prayers when she was first married because they were "poor and wanted to get nice things from God," which they would get if they fulfilled their promise to have "a prayers" each

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year. A couple who lived in my neighborhood have "a Hanuman prayers" every year:

> it's a sort of customary thing, for the mister [husband], for guidance, to guide him through, at work, at home, protection, [for keeping] on the right path. It have Shiva, too [in their function], because when I was sick I made a promise to have a puja for him. I had very serious major surgery, and I say if I come through I will make a prayers for he.

Functions can be ad hoc, as well, as exemplified in two instances. First, a couple in a neighboring village I was visiting told me that they had decided to do "a Lakshmi prayers because the pandit said to do it when he checked [wife's] patra [astrological calendar] to see if she had any grah [problems, difficulties]." They had gone to see the pandit several months ago,

> just to see how the life going, to see if you going to encounter difficulties. Sometimes you check two or three different pandits and they tell you different things. You pick the puja that will offset the difficulty coming up first. The pandit will tell you the number of grah pujas to do. You must do each as the difficulty comes up. People will check their patras and the pandits every so often.

Second, a friend's puja at home, where she "had a prayers just for the family, just a small affair, my husband, me, my two sons, and two family [relatives]. I had it because [son] just came home from his first year away in medical school and the family was all together." She expressed mild discomfort when I asked her if this puja was for Saraswati, the goddess of knowledge, as a means of bolstering her son's success in school--a reason several other people had given me regarding having functions near school exam periods. She

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confirmed that the puja was indeed for Saraswati (and also for Lakshmi, the goddess of light and the home/hearth), but added quickly that "the prayers were more like a thanksgiving." Her manner suggested that she was drawing a distinction between a conception of legitimate devotion to a clearly defined Divine (a "thanksgiving") and an ill-advised (superstitious?) invocation of nebulously defined extra-natural forces.

I take up in greater detail below the concern among Hindus with the way functions are conducted and interpreted, especially as this relates to discourse about tradition, authenticity, and superstition. At present the above example is meant to show that in contrast to prayers of an expressly public orientation, pujas and yagyas can also commemorate personal events or experiences that may not be intended to be as socially significant as they are meaningful to the individuals for whom they are held. However, even if it seems intuitively correct to impose a public sphere/private sphere dichotomy here, this is not the case. That these communities interact intimately with each other on a daily basis, as well as having extensive "pumpkin vine" kin ties makes much of what might be considered "private" an unremarkable part of "public" life, discouraging any abstract division between the two spheres. The preparation, the arrival of the pandit, and the eventual distribution of prasad all signal to the neighborhood what

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is taking place.

Small and intimate prayers may not even be justified in being called "functions." Far more common is the puja or yagya that is meant to involve as many numbers of people as the hosting household can afford and/or encourage to come. For seen in sociological terms, functions are, not unimportantly, opportunities for people, and particularly women, who are more geographically and socially constrained, to be festive, escaping from the certainties of everyday life in "south" and the routines of "hard work." Pujas and yagyas are, among other things, morally appropriate parties of eating, visiting, and, for the unmarried, opportunities for cautious flirting and assessing future doolahins (brides) and doolahas (grooms). And not least, functions are a way of demonstrating to the world the possession of two different attributes, a combination that is generally otherwise considered an oxymoron: piety and affluence, worldliness and a concern for the spiritual.

Pedagogy and Practice

Most important for this study, however, pujas and yagyas--functions--are also pedagogical arenas, where formal and informal imparting of knowledge has a critical role in the articulation of religious and ethnic ideologies. Vertovec (1992) states that during these functions, it is largely only older women and children who watch the proceedings, that "many individuals present pay little

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attention," that "people go in and out of the house and talk amongst themselves as they please," which is not considered "disrespectful or irreligious," and that what is important is that members of a household are having a ritual there (1992:179). While this description is true to an extent--there are always people milling about, and the persons for whom the function is most important are the shrotas--in my own experience at these kinds of Hindu functions, the emphasis was on listening and learning. It was regarded as being inconsiderate to be in any way distracting for those who wanted to pay attention to the kuttha (considerably more than older women and children); indeed, the pandits were often emphatic in exhorting people to "gain a little something from the lecture." This is not to claim that everyone grasps what is being conveyed, certainly, nor that there is not indifference or merely casual attentiveness among some. It is to underscore that if we go beyond the execution of the rites toward an interpretive analysis of the meaning of these events in their entirety to those who host and attend them, toward the significance of functions as a particular kind of discourse, then we can get at their ideological and phenomenological dimensions--and hence obtain a richer understanding of why they are important, beyond descriptive reports of what Hindus overseas do.

As just one example, I attended a yagya in 1989 hosted by a "secure" grass-roots family in a village near to where

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I lived. The family was large and the household multi-generational. The occasion was the fiftieth wedding anniversary of the household heads, and they spared no expense in making this an impressive affair. One of the most prestigious pandits in all of Trinidad and Tobago was invited to officiate, out-of-season foods were provided, more than one musical group was hired, high-status individuals in the Hindu community were invited, and elaborate packages of prasad were disseminated. Often the first night or two has the smallest attendance, with participation gradually increasing as the function progresses; on the final night I counted approximately six hundred people. Every evening, regardless of numbers of participants, however, the principal pandit or his assisting pandit (in this case, the pandit's brother) couched the kuttha--the lengthiest part of the function that is in English--in terms of an opportunity for edification. Of course, the kuttha, and the entire function for that matter, is meant to enlighten and inspire, but the idea is that the latter cannot satisfactorily occur without proper preparation.

The first evening the pandit began his kuttha with the assurance that, "Hinduism is a very scientific way of life. Darwin, in his theory of evolution, combined matter with spirit. So you can combine science and Hinduism." That night he addressed the questions, "What is bhakti

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[devotion]? What is gyan [knowledge]? Today the topic is on how we can develop bhakti." The following nights we heard a "lecture on parental responsibility to children," explication of certain terms such as "mantra," "karma," "fate, and "some of the things evangelists like Jimmy Swaggert criticize," such as multiple forms of deities and murtis. On the final night the pandit began,

> Tonight is regarding the quest for knowledge related to your religion. We are going to spend the time answering questions, some related to Lord Shiva and some to Hinduism in general. Then we'll answer criticisms made to Hinduism...Everything in the pictures [of the deities] has a meaning, it makes sense...See how highly scientific Hinduism is? Everything has a meaning...The Bible preaches the law of karma: 'he shall sow as he reaps'. We Hindus don't believe that anybody died for our sins. Lord Shiva lives on, who continues to take away sinful tendencies and elevate you. Lord Shiva...didn't die, we believe in a living god. He is birthless and deathless. Not that we don't believe in the divine manifestation of Christ. We just have a different way of believing. Hindu philosophy is the way, the truth, and the light. Religion is a way of life with an ultimate goal, not the worship of a personality.

What is striking here, in addition to the direct reference to a "quest for knowledge," is the engagement with images and premises from Christianity. Christianity as interlocutor becomes both agent of legitimacy and foil.

This is evident in the address of another participant at this function, a nationally known Hindu community leader. He attended the last three nights of this function, and on his arrival was asked to say a few words to the gathering:

> We hope to answer the critics of Hinduism and preserve the cultures that we have [had] for 143 years. The only qualification our first pandits had was that

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> they worked hard in the cane fields. They weren't permitted to walk with the scriptures from Calcutta where they were recruited. They had to hide them in tattered bits. Even around 1950, fifty per cent of Hindus couldn't read and write, but Hindu women were about a hundred per cent not able. Now the girls are smarter than the boys, [they have] more qualifications. We transformed Hinduism in one generation. The sweat and blood of your fathers and mothers built these schools and mandirs. The only ones without external help [state patronage] are the Hindus...Many of our pandits [now] are university educated. We have doctors and lawyers. We are not fools, we understand. We are Western oriented, we know what is going on there.

Some listeners would doubtless object to the overt mixing of "politics" (profane) and "religion" (pure), particularly in such sacred space as a yagya function. Yet these convictions carry over into individuals' interpretations of the meaning of religious activity in their lives. For example, travelling back home one night after a yagya, my friend made reference to the pandit's material as being a part of the Ramayan. I responded that the pandit had taken this material from the Puranas (which I thought I heard him say at one point during the function). My friend became very annoyed, insisting that

> all yag[ya] business is a part of the Ramayan! The pandits make it as simple as possible so that everyone could understand. I know about Hinduism! We know we bit. We can't be fooled.

The confluence in functions of the "quest" for knowledge, the affirmation of not being "fools" and being savvy as to "what is going on," and the need to be able to address Hinduism's critics with informed understanding are as much what make functions ideologically critical to assertions of

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power and identity as are the rites themselves.

The importance and endurance of a discourse in which these concerns recur continually draws attention to the relationship between pandit and devotee(s). As religious specialist and leader, the pandit is indeed present to ensure the ritual is carried out correctly (and thus efficaciously) as well as to guide and inspire the participants present. But the pandit operates within a social environment that, as was described in Chapter Five, does not "put up with high and mighty," and that values "living good with people." This egalitarian stance shapes, in part, the religious discourse and activities of the pandit with respect to the people he serves. A common rhetorical device is used that tempers with humility the hierarchy with which a pandit's authority is vested.

At one Ganesh puja I attended, I noted the familiar statement by the pandit that I had learned to anticipate, where he echoed a message made constantly by Indo-Trinidadian religious leaders--pandits and imams alike. Ending his kuttha, he said, "with my shallow knowledge I have tried to pass on a few words of advice to you." By making this declaration the pandit was not confessing an actual belief that his knowledge is superficial, nor is it likely that anyone listening to him thought so. What he was conveying, quite consciously, were his hopes that his efforts at learning his craft, and any sagacity that is a

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consequence of this effort, would be helpful and enlightening to those present. Expertise is certainly sought in a pandit, but, as I will discuss further below, the way it is conveyed by the pandit, both in terms of substance and style, is crucial to the way religious identity is constructed and related to other dimensions of social relations.

Whether pujas or yagyas, all the functions I attended had both Sanskrit, Hindi, and English components to them. Usually, the pandit recites and chants from a text in Sanskrit and Hindi, following this up with an explanatory "lecture" or "lesson" in English, drawing from the inspirations of the sacred text(s). Although I take the following quote from a particular Ramnowmi puja [celebrating Sri Ram's birth], these words were said, in one form or another, in virtually every function I went to:

> We will get the kattha simple and in English. I will try to explain as simple as I could. Regardless of color, creed, race, religion is one. God we serve. None of us [should] try to criticize or condemn others' religion because there's one God. Let us love one another, show peace and harmony to one. The spark of Ram is in all of us, and that cannot be destroyed. It lives on and on and on.

Here, the pandit reminds devotees that what is to follow is a lesson. Then he admonishes people to carry through the credo of Hinduism into daily life in Trinidad: Hinduism's much touted flexibility, tolerance, and universalism. But the final statement, if guarded, is a message of resistance and resilience, meant to be as much about the political and

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cultural state of Indo-Trinidadian Hindus as about Ram. Sometimes these messages are quite direct, though so only to a knowing ear. For example, an especially socially turbulent period during my fieldwork was when, in 1989, the current Prime Minister of the then-ruling NAR party fired three key people from his cabinet, members who are Indo-Trinidadian Hindus. Shortly thereafter I went to a function at the time of Holi (Phagwa). Two honored guests invited to speak included as a significant part of their address references to Hindu mythology--particularly as concerned the evil characters in the Holi as well as other stories. These characters were presented in such a way that their analogy with actual political leaders in the current ethnic conflict was quite clear to those familiar with the mythology, although to the few people present who were not so apprised (including myself), these would appear merely "religious" homilies, not "political" exhortations.

Pandits can also be more oblique in the terms they are couching their kutthas. But generally speaking, based on the content, or the couching of the kuttha, it is discernable whether a pandit is focused on worldly affairs or current events (voiced through a discourse of resistance or tolerance), is concerned to show piety and spirituality with much Sanskrit/Hindi and little English, or is "jokey," as locals term it, with references to life abroad or the familiar banalities of daily life--occasionally including

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dialect shifts (code switching) from standard to creole Trinidad English. For example, on one night of a yagya (1988), the pandit said that night's lesson was going to be on devotion. He continued, "on Divali, boys and girls meet and all they think about is pleasure. They don't think about prayer and devotions. They show other devotions." On another occasion, at a different function, the pandit commented that young Indo-Trinidadian Hindus today "don't know about lotah [the brass vessel used in rituals, usually along with a taria, or brass plate], only lota" (a very common and minor skin fungus). These puns were much appreciated by the respective audiences, and did not convey to them that the pandits were not serious or sincere in their message.

Sometimes, however, despite the pandit's efforts at solemnity and formality, devotees themselves can find humor in the proceedings. For example, at a Hanuman puja prayers held by an older head neighbor, the pandit admonished participants that,

> We can attain nothing without bhakti--sacrifice--and gyan [knowledge]. Bhakti isn't going about listening to yag[yas]. That is not bhakti, that is sat sangh. You must sacrifice yourself to gain bhakti.

In the meantime, while the pandit was speaking, two older head women were quietly but intently discussing the theft of my landlord's tires from his car one night while it was parked in the carport of his house. They joked about how the "thiefs have no bhakti, only gyan!" This time, the

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pandit was not entirely pleased with this chatter and it is likely that the "ageable verge" of these women afforded them some latitude. However, his displeasure would be more about their inattention than any suspicion of deliberately disrespectful irreverence or insult.

Equal to their purpose of linking mortals with deities and conveying blessings and oblation, respectively, "a prayers," or functions are meant to be arenas of pedagogy. It is in their pedagogical constitution that the line between sacred/profane, "political"/"religious," institutionalized/personalized becomes most blurred, as pandits use this forum to impart knowledge and inculcate comprehension of moral principles and theological axioms that clearly have mundane referents and application. One evening of "a nine nights" (yagya) I attended (1988), the pandit introduced the proceedings by informing us that

> tonight's devotional service is taken from the Holy Gita. There is a difference between hearing and listening. Listening is completed when you put into practice what you've heard.

As he read in Hindi from the text, the pandit painstakingly explained the words in English, literally and idiomatically. Then he summed up,

> The lesson of tonight was on devotion. A hunter became a transformed man, a devotee. We are hunters, and what are we seeing in life? The symbolism of meat is satisfaction of [worldly] pleasures. if you use prayer and devotion to Lord Shiva, you can overcome temptation. This is the glaring lesson before our eyes. Devotion will transform us. Devotion will also benefit us in our future lives...The basic principle of Hinduism is we mustn't be selfish, the world is too

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> individualistic. We must think of the happiness of others and lend a helping hand to others...The older heads must also do work so that others may benefit. Don't just lie in a hammock playing with you grands [grandchildren] or calling out to the doolahin [bride] for 'a tablet, nuh, girl' [audience laughs]...Does a river drink its own water? Does a tree eat its own fruit? They're there for the benefit of others. And we, like Mother Earth, must follow this example.

At the close of the evening he said,

> tomorrow night we do Chapter Nine, the practice of bhakti. Read it before and bring your questions.

Afterward, a friend reflected, "Pandit -- makes everything so simple so that even the littlest person could understand." And a second person added,

> I prefer this pandit. He's very knowledgeable in the scriptures and has a university education, which makes his lectures more clearer, more informative to the devotees than [that of] uneducated pandits. They go into the scriptures but they can't talk about the meaning of the symbolic stories. Everything with philosophy is symbolic, everything conveys a meaning, and this is covered better by a educated pandit.

To gain authority and a community of devotees, a pandit must both "make it simple" and yet convey the idea that the material is complex. He also must negotiate a fine line between accommodating simplicity and not insulting participants by implying they are "chupidee"--ignorant, stupid. The latter is managed, in part, by being approachable, humble, and, at appropriate times, "jokey." The general idea seems to be: difficult, esoteric material (sacred texts) is made accessible by the pandit's superior knowledge and formal education--as opposed to merely "practical" (applied) training--but that is diffused with

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self-effacing caveats.

The pandit's mission is, then, in a sense, dual: as a conduit of devotions to the deities and blessings to the devotees; as a source of wisdom and tutelage to both his chelas (godchildren) and community of devotees. One man said,

> the people are mostly interested in the text being read and the pandit can provide it for the people. And also, the pandit always comes to the family for things like wedding, funeral, puja, and then people can get to know him on a personal basis.

This "personal basis" ideally encompasses a wide spectrum of assistance that a pandit can offer if asked. One pandit explained that in addition to ritual services, he also attends to services "off the record." I asked him what he meant by this:

> Well, solving their problems. Problems not 'on the record'. Private problems, domestic problems, job problems, health problems, you name it. Religion is only like the cover. Religion is your basic rule, right? But you divert from religion into the personal aspect of the people themselves. Because there's a need for it. When they come with their domestic problems, most of the times you becomes a counselor. Right? And you advise them. There are maybe some things religiously you could do to [for] them, solve the problem, and it [method] works. So you become more than the priest. You become an intimate part of the family...You know their personal problems. And yet you mix with everybody in the family. And the problems of the daughter [for example] should not be known by anyone, right? And this builds a relationship up.

However, the transition from "on the record" to "off the record" matters is not always smooth. This relates to the issue of the distinction between sacred and profane, pure and impure, where functions are domains of the sacred where

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"politics" has an uneasy and ambiguous relationship with "religion." One man, "a Chamar caste" by his own reckoning, symbolically rose above this low caste identity, as well as above his "secure working class" grass-roots position, by achieving an Island Scholarship and going to medical school, returning to enter the ranks of the (grass-roots) educated, middle-class in "south." He felt,

> They [pandits] are not taught theology well, they are not teaching from the scriptures, they talk their own opinion, start to talk politics--the Christians, this, [former Prime Ministers] Chambers and Robinson, that. They are supposed to show the beauty of it [sacred texts] and analyze it a little. They just get a platform to air their beliefs on certain things...Long time, people used to cry at yags [yagyas]. Now you don't see that.

Whereas this speaker is factually mistaken as to the depth of emotion that devotees feel at yagyas (it was consistently my impression that most people do indeed become moved, at times to tears), the relevant point is that as a first-generation formally educated person, he sees pandits as expressing idiosyncratic opinion over universal fact and, furthermore, opinions that reflect inappropriate reference to current social issues. The latter, according to the speaker, not only take time away from the more important, hermeneutical matters at hand but also inject a tenor of conflict.

Significantly, I think potential injections of conflict are feared as veering too close to "being racial"; that is, the meta-narrative of racial purity-racial/ethnic group

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tension that underlies the politics of identity in Trinidadidan is assumed to also infuse any reference to group (however constituted) conflict with racially-based divisiveness. Even if the apparently self-evident and commonsensical structure of ranked social and cultural attributes (the color-class-ethnic hierarchy) are to one degree or another accepted, these create a divisiveness that flies in the face of the democratic and universalistic ideals espoused by both Hinduism and Trinidad's inherited philosophy of representative politics. Hence, it is yet another jeopardy to "living good with people," whose acknowledgement should be avoided if at all possible.

"Off the record" responsibilities, to whatever degree they may be met by individual pandits, takes the pandit out of the ostensible confines of the spiritual domain of bedi (altar) and sacred text, and into the quotidian business of social relations among people--even as he endeavors to inculcate lessons and injunctions from ritual and text into people's actions and perceptions. In the application of religious doctrine and his own idiosyncratic methods, pandits come under a different kind of scrutiny from devotees and chelas, one that reveals an ambivalent relationship between them, and which, in turn, reflects the importance that consciousness of history and social hierarchy has among Indo-Trinidadians.

In addition to the concern over a pandit's presentation

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of his material and the degree of a pandit's mastery over his subject is the quality of the pandit's association with devotees while he attends to "a prayers" (puja or yagya) in their home. These visits are usually far more personalized and intimate interactions than when a prayers takes place in a mandir, or even in the home if the function is on a grand scale. Explanation of subject and duration of stay are perceived as linked. One person told me they

> use Pandit -- all the time. We know him about 18 years...My husband lived originally near to this pandit...he knows my husband from birth. [Pandit] is prompt and explains very good what the puja is all about and doesn't just rattle off and run off. Also, you can go and speak your problems at any time.

In other words, the way a pandit shows sincerity and is effective is not merely to be learned and conduct his duties properly, but to enlarge on the ritual responsibilities of his vocation. This is more significant than merely shedding light on the role of pandits in Trinidad. The emphasis on style of interaction speaks to the issue of authority and the tension between "practical" and formal training. In the words of a pandit with only the former,

> ...There are pandits who are in it for money, there are pandits who are in it for the love of it...But people know the difference. A man [pandit] come in to do your prayers, knocks off your prayers in a half hour, and in 45 minutes time he leaves. As compared to the man who comes by you, sits and chats with you for an hour before the prayers start, takes an hour to do his prayers, very casually, comfortably, sits down another hour and chat with you, wait til you done prepare a meal, and 2:00 sits down to have a healthy meal with you, chat with you, and then leave you. He's a man who <u>always</u> have time. He is different from the man who comes and slam, bang, thank you,

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> ma'am, and go his way. I do one prayer a day. Never more than one. The difference is how you carry about yourself with them [devotees].

The kind of dedication described here contains a sub-text: it cannot be had with mere access to higher formal education, which is more often a prerogative of a middle class position than grass-roots status; moreover, dedication does not connote sincerity, since zealousness can be attributed to acquisitiveness. In making a point of claiming that he never does more than one puja per day, this pandit wants to underscore both his selflessness and his expertise--an expertise based equally on scriptural knowledge and on understanding the psycho-social dimensions of domestic and other personal affairs.

A tangible symbol of the tension involved in being "in it for money" or "for the love of it" is the dakshina or seedha that the pandit receives as nominal compensation for his services. Technically they refer to the "provisions," or agricultural products and other edibles, but in a general sense all that is given to the pandit "comes like a seedha." Although a pandit ideally does not anticipate remuneration, it would be unthinkable among Indo-Trinidadian Hindus not to offer him something as he is ready to depart. It is easier for people to talk about their expenditures for the ritual items they must provide the pandit than it is for them to divulge what they give to him directly. As one person explained, to think about it would be to show an

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inappropriate attention to material, worldly concerns and imply a reluctance to place piety above all else: "God didn't ask you to do prayers. You do it as a willing mind You have to do it free[ly], so you don't check on it [calculate what you have spent]." (She did, however, allow that most people give between $50 and $100.) Nonetheless, while people are not comfortable with specifying contributions to individual pandits, a common theme in discourse among Hindus is that pandits are shrewd and amass riches from seedha and other gifts.

Two break-downs of the costs to household members for hosting small, home-based functions (pujas) give an idea of what a pandit might receive for his work. On the one occasion the wife listed to me that they gave the pandit two five-yard pieces of "good sari material, one for each goddess"; one pound each of lentils, rice, potatoes, garlic, and onions; and TT$40.00 in cash. She estimated that the pandit received in total about TT$200.00 from her that day, adding that the sari material "was sixteen dollars for the yard." She mentioned that "he had a next prayers for the day, in the evening," and felt that this was entirely appropriate and deserved. On the other occasion a couple gave the pandit one dhoti (linen, like pants) costing TT$25.00; one large towel costing TT$60.00; two pounds of rice; two pounds of potatoes; one can of condensed milk (a very scarce commodity at that time); one pound of channa

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(dried chick peas); TT$65.00 in cash ("we usually give a blue note [TT$100 bill] but this is a recession year"). The ritual items they bought included one 26-ounce bottle of "cattle butter" (ghee) and a ready-made jhandi (triangular flag put up after a puja). They estimated that their total cash outlay was approximately TT$286.00, plus about $160.00 to the pandit, not including his meal.

Each individual pandit will have various personal responsibilities of his own to meet; thus, making any assumptions about how "rich" a pandit may become is pointless. Instead, what is significant is to what lengths households and families are willing to go to overcome the limitations of "a recession year" (which has been increasing every year in Trinidad since the boom ended in 1983) and have a respectable function. Part of their compensation comes in the form of the pandit's time as well as his demonstrated expertise. And as I have shown, as a symbol, his time means much more than number of hours expended.

Not only is material accumulation contrary to the notion of spiritual enlightenment, but on a more pragmatic level, attending to too many pujas (more than the one per day suggested by the pandit quoted above) allegedly makes for hasty, and more superficial interactions with devotees. Pandits often do perform more than one ritual prayers in one day, therefore suspicions as to degrees and kinds of piety among them form part of the fertile ground of ambivalent

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perceptions of pandits held by many Indo-Trinidadian Hindus. These perceptions are significant because they reveal more profound tensions and transformations in the Hindu community, particularly with respect to the construction of identity.

More specifically, identity construction is shaped by ambivalent perceptions of pandits because what the latter really speaks to is the ambiguous and thus precarious nature of authority in the community, one dimension of which is the influence to define and defend certain religious and cultural--and hence ethnic--boundary markers. Generally speaking, religious leadership is more clearly defined in symbolic terms in Hinduism than it is in Islam; pandits are recognized as having greater esoteric knowledge and, through the caste system, greater purity and social status as brahmins. The principle of hierarchy within the Hindu community is not highly charged, as it is among Indo-Trinidadian Muslims. Yet the authority vested in pandits as brahmin and as master of the sacred domain has undergone dramatic transformations in the Caribbean, according to the vicissitudes of diaspora and indenture. Therefore, the status distinction ideally enjoyed by pandits as a matter of course is challenged by local conditions and the ideologies and perceptions that both express and shape them (as well as by international influences from Hindu reform movements, such as the Arya Samaj).

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In a lengthy set of interviews I had with a prominent, nationally-known pandit and community leader, I was told that "Hindus remain Hindus" in spite of pandits not "realizing their full potential." This individual was concerned to point out that the role of pandits must be understood historically in Trinidad, functioning as they are,

> on terrible disadvantages...We all came from a folk tradition, the [Indian] villages and so on. When many of the pandits came [to the Caribbean], they were not very much entrenched in Hindu philosophy. The folk styling that they had, it had religious sustenance in it and it stimulated the folk mind, and put them on the spiritual pilgrimage. Today we are no more folk people, and the mind has to be stimulated by different things. By and large, what we see operative today in Hinduism is still that folk tradition. So the pandits, when they came, spent all their days in the fields, working in the sun with everybody else...And the government of the day looked upon the pandit as a potential trouble maker...He was the person targeted out as a potential opinion leader...One could very well see, knowing our colonialism as what it was, a white atmosphere, how hard it would have been on pandits. Then there was no institution. Even today there is no institution...The tradition was being broken down, [as were] the old ways of disseminating it... And the tradition contained information. The pandit has to learn in a kind of free-lance way.

This narrative urges a historical perspective in order to understand the contemporary condition of Hinduism in Trinidad. The speaker locates the exigencies experienced by pandits in a broader history as a defense of their unavoidable shortcomings. While he attempts to be thoughtful and fair-minded in his analysis, he does not veer from the assumption of foible. At the heart of contested terrains of authority, this assumption informs popular

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wisdom among Hindus about their pandit leadership and helps to shape the discourse that assesses--praises and decries--them.

On the one hand, panditi (the work of a pandit) must be esoteric enough to convincingly demonstrate authenticity and command over arcane and profound knowledge. Moreover, his craft must be rendered apprehendable to masses of unevenly formally educated devotees, who want to feel educable yet need some sense of mystery. Finally, a pandit must suggest his own piety through the frequency of his ritual services and his style of interaction with participants. On the other hand, being overly or inappropriately attentive to these requirements can provoke critique in the form of accusations as to a pandit's practice becoming so accessible that cupidity is revealed ("pandits are now only a technical skill, a business to make a living"); that in this accessibility the material loses its mystery and becomes profaned; or, that it is so incomprehensible and opaque that it borders on simi-dimi (superstition--hocus pocus, mumbo jumbo).

This conundrum essentially can be categorized as having to do with a pandit's craft (how he executes his knowledge) and his gain (how he does or does not profit) and is encapsulated in one informant's exclamation: "The pandit don't know Hindi. He just baboolal [fool] you! That's a short-cut. He scampish, he fooling you. He just run off

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from the puja to the next one, get he $100 and go." The speaker is saying that he does not believe (many) pandits actually possess recondite knowledge, that they conceal their commonness by evoking that which it is certain others will not know, that he is only in it for the money. What is significant in this statement is that the issue of being fooled is again paramount, and it is not a surprise that the speaker is a grass-roots ("precarious working class") and not formally educated individual. There is a resentment expressed about economic disparities but, as importantly, also about the use of an equally valuable commodity, knowledge, to dupe and deceive those who do not (cannot) have comparable amounts of it.[8]

Ambivalence not taken to the above extreme can be expressed in terms of asserting autonomy from the pandit's expertise and worshipping on one's own. For example, one couple commented,

> We only call the pandit for a deota's [deity's] prayer we don't know. If you christened you can do it yourself, if you know the prayer. It have a book, the Chalisa, that have English and Hindi prayers for different deotas, but not all of them. The book might not have the prayer you need. Or you might not be able to read and understand the book. So you get a pandit. He is only a guide. Pandits over complicate unnecessarily.

Here, pandits and panditi are not challenged--disrespected--outright, yet the pandit's hierarchical position in the community is gently disputed, as his craft is encroached

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[8]Compare Helms (1988:13-14)

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upon by the self-taught.[9] Counteracting any potential move toward dispensing with pandits altogether is the centrality of ritual functions in Hindus' lives. Concomitant with this is the pride and gratitude Indo-Trinidadians feel toward their forebears, who, against the odds of diaspora and indenture, prevailed in the "new world." Encapsulating these themes is a segment of a kuttha given one on of the nights of a yagya:

> Friends, we as Hindus must be able to understand what scriptures preach and what others preach. Rites and rituals have their place in religion. Who is responsible for the survival of Hinduism? The old pandits. What did they preach? The scriptures and the rites and rituals. So haven't rites and rituals kept Hinduism surviving here in Trinidad? When they [old pandits] sat down [to a ritual], you couldn't understand what they were saying. They were talking in Hindi and Sanskrit. But because of them we can sit and discuss today...Any time we break from rites and rituals, Hinduism crumbles.

What this pandit, a middle-aged person, was underscoring is that a great debt is owed to the early religious leaders, who did their best under adverse conditions. Gratitude and appreciation mitigate to a great extent the debates about

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[9]While I do not have sufficient evidence to make a convincing case for this, my hunch is that the discourse of critique regarding pandits is also a "hidden transcript" (Scott 1990) of objection to the fading but still tenacious claims to brahmin superiority--on the part of those who claim brahmin lineage. For along with brahmin pedigree often comes a concomitant middle-class status (or claims to it) and some degree of higher prestige in village communities. However, it is important to realize that an ideology of egalitarianism coexists uneasily with an ideology of hierarchy, and even those few people I heard claiming a special position as brahmin did so equivocally and carefully, attentive to being thought of as going against the grain of "living good with people" (living equally as well as peaceably).

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pedagogy and authority.

Generational Tensions

The discourse of critique regarding pandits can point, obliquely or otherwise, to unfavorable comparisons between generations--or, really, between a symbolic dichotomy between older head and younger. In addition to celebratory acknowledgement of the prevailing of "Indian ways" symbolized by the older heads, a more general cultural valorization of "ageable" persons among Indo-Trinidadians--at least ideally--also influences the way generation figures into ideas about knowledge and those who purvey it. The following observation by an older head sums it up nicely: "Young people think the best, but old people think careful." While generational conflicts expressed in a variety of ways are characteristic of both Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians, two broad categories of generational tension can be discerned: that between older head and younger religious leaders (pandits and imams), and that referring to an individual's life-cycle.

As I will discuss in the following chapter, among Muslims the life-cycle transformations with respect to religio-cultural identity construction are pronounced; they seem, in fact, more salient than among Hindus. This is probably the case because the issue of practice is far more codified in Islam, where "practical Muslims" must submit to the will of Allah as equally through demonstration (domain

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of practice) as intention (domain of belief). This is not to imply, however, that demonstrating piety through proper attention to ritual activities and applying religious principles to daily living among Hindus is not encouraged or valued. For example, a man remarked in an aside during one function where I was present, "putting up a jhandi three times a year doesn't mean you're a Hindu. A Hindu is one who practices." In the sense conveyed here, practice refers to a generalized advisement both to be pious and to be visibly so, rather than the specific injunctions that Islam calls for with respect to the laws and traditions of the Prophet. Generational tensions among imams are an aspect of Indo-Trinidadian Islam; among Indo-Trinidadian Hindus, generational conflict among pandits is also empirically conspicuous.

One aspect of the tension between older head and younger pandits has to do with the upward class mobility experienced by many younger generation pandits. In the following pandit's narrative, ideology about both class and region are brought to bear on a generational comparison that is clearly speaking to much broader concerns:

> I am looked up to in my community because I deal with people basically around my age and younger. When I took over the community from my father, he was dealing with a 50, 60, 70 year old crowd. It doesn't mean he didn't have a full house, but he could have only reached out to them. ["Why?"] Because of his education and background. Ten years from now, people won't listen to me. They'll go for the younger pandits who come out of UWI [University of the West Indies] with a Master's degree. Although he have a Master's

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> degree in planting cassava or yam, it has no bearing on anything. The man have a degree! But the people who have [a formal] degree will sit down and listen to the man who have the [formal] degree, although he may be a damn fool. ...And some of the pandits from 'north' are suspicious of us from 'south'. We are more broad-minded. Some of them fear us. ["Why?"] We know more than them. 'South' pandits might be stupid academically, but religiously, they're super. They devote their time to you. 'North' pandits can't, because they hold two jobs. He's a school teacher by day and a pandit by night. Whereas the average pandit from 'south', although he will have an academic education, he either takes up an academic job or he takes up his religious job. And whichever one he takes, he sticks by that.

While in actuality pandits from "north" and "south" in all likelihood hold one or more jobs as frequently as their regional counterparts, what is of note here is the conflation of generation, region, formal educational accomplishments, and the quality of interaction with devotees in this man's estimation--and critique--of distinctions among pandits. What began as an observation about generational differences in clients gradually becomes explained in increasingly material terms.

The significance of class position is also revealed as it articulates with quantity and quality of knowledge and associated notions of what constitutes--and who has--"traditional" culture. In the words of a pandit,

> God is knowledge. The average class of people believe in the physical, what they can see and touch. But those who are advanced in spiritual knowledge, they see God here, there, and everywhere, in everything, internal and external...Some customs is traditional. When we start from the word 'culture' we see people with their own ways of life, and this hand down from one generation to another. These people know it as a story or maybe a history, and they keep onto that. The

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> advanced, educated ones of nowadays, are able to think, believe in logical, scientific explanation and are spiritual, too. Through research, pandits can come to this kind of understanding that is not tradition.

Another aspect of the conflict among generations is about the concession of power in the form of authority from old to young. As I have stated earlier, this religious authority can be ethnically decisive since it orchestrates what I will call cultural authority, through which various traditions are determined most historically authentic and religiously accurate, and which therefore may comprise group boundary markers that, in turn, serve to both delineate and legitimize the group. Older head and younger generation pandits each symbolically represent different kinds of religious authority as well as attempt to determine which will prevail. In contradistinction to the Muslim case (see Chapter Eight), religious authority among Hindus does not refer so much to tangible scriptural axioms as to the management of inference; that is, the attributes and qualities that each generation has associated with it which are presumed to be or touted as more compelling.

As Breckenridge and Appadurai (1989) observe,

> more and more diasporic groups have memories whose archaeology is fractured. These collective recollections, ...sometimes correspond to generational politics. Even for apparently well-settled diasporic groups, the macro-politics of reproduction translates into the micro-politics of memory, among friends, relatives, and generations (1989:ii).

If we replace "memory" with "knowledge" in this quotation, it could be read as a specific reference to Hindu (and

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Muslim) Indo-Trinidadians. For it is in generational critiques that the issue of pedagogy is most fraught: "It have some young priests [pandits] now who explain to the people exactly what they are doing [in a ritual]. Most of the older ones just talk in Hindi and they gone"; and, "Young people these days think differently. The younger pandits are more likely to give money away to charitable causes." In a conversation I had with a teenage boy about the yagya that his household had recently sponsored, he opined that older head pandits are often unapprised of a wide enough breadth of scriptural knowledge, and that they keep what knowledge they do have to themselves to preserve their power and authority in the community. However, statements tend to be made in general terms and are rarely levied against a specific individual. On the contrary, individual pandits, particularly older heads, I noticed, are praised by the devotees who employ them as having long-standing and personal investments in the household members which affords them greater insight and sensitivity, as having wisdom in addition to knowledge, and (implicitly) as being ostensibly more pure given their attenuation from worldly-oriented phenomena--notably, desire (carnal as well as with respect to other things, such as material comforts or rich food).

The juxtaposing of wisdom and knowledge in generational contrasts is not contained within an intra-Hindu discourse.

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One man, a Hindu who has had a long-standing involvement in the Hosay commemoration in southern Trinidad spoke of a local older head Muslim religious leader, a mujawar, in the community and his greater efficacy as an elderly person in conducting the Muharram rituals. Among other things, what is interesting in this narrative is the idea that the Muslim leader's piety is applicable to others who are not Muslims:

> Mr. -- is the last of the old people who have the capability and the faith to perform the rituals. Everyone feels especially at ease and comforted when he is doing the prayers because we believe that if for some reason we as the younger people should err, he understands the prayers, that he can pray from a certain part of the Quran to make sure no harm comes to us. I am not a Muslim and I don't know the Quran. I just learn from handed down. If for some reason I doing some mistake in the whole ceremony...I wouldn't come to harm. Say, for instance, one of the younger guys [involved in tadjah-building] slept with his wife, had some alcohol [defiling his pure state],...the mujawar must have the capability to say the various kinds of prayers to protect us...The older heads have more faith, they know the language, they can read the book [Quran], the younger ones just follow. Because of their [older heads'] guidance, we just develop the belief...You don't need to be able to read the books or understand to have faith, just you need the belief. The belief develop over the years from teachings...

Because the speaker is not a Muslim he does not have the expectation of or opportunity for specialized knowledge as a means of unlocking the meaning of ritual observances. Therefore, his perspective is not one from the formally educated, upwardly mobile younger grass-roots generation or the precarious or secure working class grass-roots generation of Muslims, among whom faith is more often discussed as in opposition to training. In a sense, the

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mutual exclusivity between belief and practice is relaxed a bit here, where the authoritative power (faith, belief) of the old mujawar protects young, unsure (non-Muslim) participants without expertise (practice) in what is considered an extra-naturally (see Chapter Six) dangerous endeavor if undertaken improperly or carelessly. Even though the two belief systems are distinct in this speaker's way of thinking, one--as belief--mediates the other--as practice. And the potency of the belief (faith) is in large part attributed the older head generation of the mujawar.

In addition to the complex applications that generational concerns have with respect to pandits as religious specialists and leaders, pandits also function ideologically as a kind of oxymoronic icon. That is to say, where real and ideal are in a conflictual relationship insofar as pandits are supposed to be striving toward asceticism (which is different than being an ascetic), or toward moksha (liberation) or maya (detachment) and yet are human and may succumb to the temptations of desire--all in a context where, as an informant above explained, history and the local environment are working against them. Two familiar examples of this oxymoronic quality form part of the local everyday discourse about pandits. They are likely many decades old and possess a dual tone of disapproval and humor. One is the common punning word play on the similar sounds of "pandit" and "bandit." Expressed in conversation,

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this commentary refers to the tension between material gain and austerity (and, by implication, between profane and sacred, impure and pure, respectively), as well as the implications each of these domains has for the quality of knowledge possessed by a pandit, and to what extent, if any, he will "baboolal you." The other is the proverbial inappropriate attention pandits may pay to matters of the flesh--other than, of course, their own marital relations (which are considered a natural aspect of life, whether perceived in terms of the influences of Trinidadian society or in terms of the stage of life of a "householder," Hindu theology's designation for a mature and socially responsible adult). Hence, while allegorical, and rarely accused of a particular man, the following statements are indicative of other, similar ones I heard: "There was a pandit who, instead of giving a girl she sacred mantra at her christening [goormook], told her in Hindi, 'let's run away to P--'. They always looking at women"; and, "They watching the dress but they want to see the panty, too!" The last remark, in particular, was said with a chuckle and a wink; the speakers, both practicing Hindus, absolutely did not intend any disrespect to Hinduism or its religious structure. Instead, they were, I think, implicitly making a much larger observation about the expectations and contradictions of everyday life, using the familiar symbol of the pandit as the idiom of this message.

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This is not to say that pandits, or anyone else, for that matter, do not exceed the boundaries of their mission. We can surmise that they, like other people, sometimes do. The significant point for my purposes, however, is that it must be understood that these critiques of pandits are not necessarily accepted in full by people, and that they are not even necessarily strictly about pandits per se. Rather, people are expressing a kind of consciousness about who they have become through implicit reference to a "lost" past. While a "nostalgia without memory" (Appadurai 1990:3) for most, this commemorative commentary on Indo-Trinidadians' historical experience reveals frustration about contemporary conditions and if not resistance to them, then dissatisfaction with them. As icon, contested authority, and pedagogue, pandits serve as a focal point in this discourse.

Whether or not a pandit is concerned to make the ritual apprehendable to the participants, whether or not he spends enough time with the participants before and after the actual rites are carried out, and whether or not he is too concerned with accumulating material rewards are all an integral part of a local discourse that is religious in its focus. However, this discourse informs, and is informed by other, more encompassing issues that are filtered through an idiom of religious concerns.

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Tradition and Meaning

One afternoon at Quinam Beach, during the purifying rites of the holy days of kaartik,[10] I spoke with a man who identified himself as a Christian (evangelical), being a Hindu "before." He was there "just to visit with family for a day at the beach," indicating that his presence was secular and could not therefore be interpreted as relevant to (and hence supportive of) the shoreline pujas and ritual sea bathing taking place. He attributed his embracing of Christianity as partly due to his feeling that "Hindus here [are] just following tradition. They don't really know, they just do the rituals and don't ask questions."

As I have shown above, Hindus who adhere to this man's claim but who choose to remain practicing Hindus tend to levy the burden of responsibility for these issues on the pandits. However, "former" Hindus who are currently involved with other religions often levy the burden of responsibility on the Hindu religion. This gives rise to a discourse among Hindus on cultural tradition, authenticity, and knowledge that can properly be considered a meta-narrative among Indo-Trinidadians as a whole, as these themes are prevalent in Muslim discourse as well (see Chapter Eight).

When Indo-Trinidadian Hindus speak about a heritage of

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[10]In lieu of the Ganges River, any large body of moving water is appropriate.

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"tradition," it is in a variety of contexts and often with a number of different referents. However, as an intrinsically political reification, the concept of tradition becomes ideologically charged, informed by two core (and occasionally contradictory) associations that ultimately point to a sub-continental past as against a New World present. One is a Great Tradition of sanatan dharam, which, even if at one level of interpretation transcends time and space, is indubitably located in India; the other is an ancient lifeway and world-view so deeply rooted as to provide an antidote of authenticity to the allegedly spurious and shallow "de novo" cultures of the diasporic Caribbean. Particularly with respect to functions, or "a prayers," however, the concept of tradition is meaningful in the lessons and rhetoric of kutthas and in people's reflections on these lessons and on their own participation in functions. Here, where functions are pedagogical arenas, the notion of tradition subsumes two other, related concepts: knowledge and practice. Knowledge has both religious and cultural dimensions, in that the possession of it allows grasping the meaning of rites (an important dimension of identity construction); grasping the meaning of rites, in turn, increases cultural knowledge, where being informed about the lifeway patterns and history of the motherland forms a significant part of the foundation of contemporary discourse on ethnic group competition--making

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oneself or one's group, in a sense, "real," palpable. As one informant put it,

> you must know where you coming from [through participation in rituals]. To know how the religions were formed and how the people were living in India while English people were taking over. All we really know since we know ourselves here is how the English carrying on. Except for the Indian scholars coming here from India and giving lectures.

Practice also has two broad associations. One, generally living a life tempered by religious principles--which are interpreted as evincing a personal state of piety; the other, regular participation in "a prayers" (function), preferably as host/sponsor.

Yet tradition as practice is not a simple issue of carrying out cultural forms within neat "ethnic" boundaries. As explained in previous chapters, the structure of state patronage and ethnic group clientelism in Trinidad means that various populations, notably Afro and Indo, vie for various kinds of resources and opportunities in large part through contests of visibility, where certain cultural attributes or qualities are isolated and reified as "true," "real" (authentic) representations of that ethnic/ racial population, which, in turn, legitimize that population's (group's) claims. In these contests of visibility, I have argued, the ideological distinction made by Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians between sacred and profane domains is blurred, as are the distinctions claimed for what constitutes "culture" and "religion," jeopardizing the

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sanctity of the protected space demarcated by Indo-Trinidadians as religious, and thus potentially threatening the ostensible core of the ethnic group as political entity.

Due to the different configurations and histories of Hinduism and Islam, both in the Caribbean and in South Asia, the relationship between "religion" and "culture" is evinced somewhat differently among Hindus and Muslims in Trinidad. However, in its form as a kind of discourse, tradition as practice has a similar foundation among Hindus and Muslims with respect to the ideological domains of sacred and profane.

A very common invocation among Hindus is that "Hinduism is man made, sanatan dharam is universal," that sanatan dharam is not for any particular group but is all-encompassing--"like nature, the sun, etcetera," as one pandit put it during his kuttha. This is a complex statement, as distinctions are being drawn between the pitfalls of human interpretation and practice; an ethereal and detached (and hence in some sense unattainable) spiritual state of being that is universally applicable, in a sense naturalizing sanatan dharam by making it as encompassing and inevitable as "nature," while distinguishing it from Hinduism through detachment from human action. This resonates with the local truism, "it's not the religion, it's the people who practice it." (As far as purity and piety are concerned it also resonates somewhat

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with the distinction some Indo-Trinidadian Muslims make between "Muslims" and those who practice "Islam").

So, even though practice makes spiritually and pragmatically perfect, and one ideally must have as much correct knowledge as possible about what one is doing and why in order to enhance meaningfulness, what is apprehendable by humans is what can be corrupted, misused, or misinterpreted. The all-encompassing, naturalized, unattainable force of sanatan dharam is what is transformed into the demarcated practices that constitute "Hinduism." Hinduism is concretized as belonging to a specific context of practice/practitioners, in contrast to an always elusive sanatan dharam. As practice, Hinduism can be identified as having a problematic history in Trinidadian society or as having undesirable components such as caste ideology, the contradictions that are the basis of "pandit-bandit" punning and other ambivalent constructions of pandits as experts and leaders, or the potential obfuscation of inadequately explained ritual which can make ritual appear as "simi-dimi."

In the public sphere, as "highly visible projects," to quote one pandit I spoke with, Hinduism as practice becomes foregrounded and this exposure transforms practice such that "culture" becomes what is acted out rather than "religion." While ritual is certainly seen as practicing the religion, as rites get carried out in particular arenas they become

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secularized. One Indo-Trinidadian Hindu explained,

> Everything that's Hindu culture, you'll find something religious in it. You know,it come like the rope is there [and] at one end is religion, at one end there is culture, and everything is tied in between this, you know? So that everything that is religious would have promoted Hindu culture. And everything that became Hindu culture, you find there is something religious...In the sanctity of the home, the religious presence is a stronger thing, but out there in the national stage, because it has invited itself into the a greater vision, the eyes of the public, it speaks now in different mediums and softens the religious tone so that it will get greater acceptability. In Trinidad we promote only one aspect of culture, what can be staged, and deny other aspects of culture, which are the more abstract, more living out of principle. The living ability [quotidian aspect] of culture has been denied into the stageability of culture. It has given a knock out to the living ability of culture.

Another person, a pandit, proposed that, "culture could never be religion...Religion is any form of scripture that could be used by a human being, which he could understand, and apply to his everyday life." And at a multi-community Phagwa (Holi) celebration I attended, one of the several MC's admonished the mostly juvenile and adolescent participants,

> While we engage ourselves in the pomp and gaiety and merriment of Phagwa, we must be careful not to carnivalize Phagwa. We must resist temptations to let emerge in our religious celebration a carnival merriment...We have no fear of our rich culture or very great religion diminishing. This is a very religious occasion.

Ideally grounded in scripture and contained as they are in the intimate space of mandir or home, theoretically functions are not as subject to the potential incursions of "carnivalization." However, in local debates on the content

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of functions, and on the pedagogical style and technical expertise of pandits, concerns about "carnivalization" (or the overlapping of sacred and profane domains), are in fact being voiced. The intimate space of mandir and home can be influenced by the misinterpretation of traditions and transformations in pedagogy.

To misinterpret traditions is, in part, to be improperly informed about both religious and cultural knowledge. A guest lecturer at one function admonished, "Hindus here and in India who are uninformed have superstition, not knowledge." As some of the preceding quotations have shown, improperly informed refers less to quantity of information than to the ability to apprehend the meaning in performing the rites of a ritual and the message of a given kuttha. When meaning appears enigmatic, or when an explanation appears mysterious, or when pedagogy is insufficiently text-based and codified, what can result is not legitimate knowledge but illegitimate perception. In other words, superstition.[11]

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[11]A different, but related example of the resonance that the notion of supersititon has in identity construction and group relations, the following accusations by a pandit against a particular group of Hindus demonstrates how the concern with superstition can jeopardize positions of social (ethnic group) legitimacy: "...the Hindus who go to worship the Catholic saint [Sipari Mai] do so out of superstition" (Trinidad Express 1988; quoted in Khan 1990:41). By levying charges of superstitiousness against annual visitors to the church of La Divina Pastora, the pandit is indicating that these pilgrims are betraying (a pure) Hinduism and are thus unacceptable claimants of group membership.

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Upon returning from a friend's mother's funeral cremation, and before passing across the (symbolic) boundary that marks the beginning of the open, downstairs part of the house (and the end of "outside"), each of us had to carry out a series of ritual actions to cleanse ourselves after being at the cremation site with the deceased. We had to rinse our hands with water poured from a lotah by one of the women who had stayed behind to cook the meal, touch once a cutlass (machete) stuck into the ground, pass our palms over a small fire burning on the ground in front of the doorway, and drink a sip of sugar water from a juthaa cup (defiled, polluted by others [see Khan 1994]). Only after completion of all these in proper sequence could we pass into the area of the house and move about freely. As the eldest grandson (about 22 years old) of the deceased took his turn to do this, he sang out rather self-consciously, "I ain't superstitious," to the tune of American song writer Stevie Wonder's 1970s song, "Very Superstitious," as well as to the great amusement of the young children present.[12] A bit more to the point (and more pointedly), on a different occasion a pandit told me, "This entire Hindu society is so prostrate, but it can be powerful. We lost intellectual virility. We need to move off from superstition and follow

[12]Undoubtedly not missed by this young man, the refrain of the song happens to be "If you believe in things that you don't understand, then you suffer. Superstition ain't the way."

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our scriptures."

Contained in these comments is a sub-text that speaks to four basic issues regarding pedagogy and practice and the shadow of "superstition" that looms large. First is the contrast between the literal interpretation of text and the recognition of metaphor and allegory. Examples people gave of this were that Rawan does not really have ten heads; this description must be understood as figurative moral lesson that even with ten times the brains and ten times the monstrosity evil is overcome by good. Another example was given to me by a pandit:

> The Gita is not a scripture, like the Ramayan. It is a philosophy, it goes to a higher level. Philosophy is not religion. Religion tells you how you should live in your religion. The Gita tells you there is a god. But that god is not outside of you. That god is within you. And that god could be anything. It's a philosophy. People don't understand that. For we have come from a grass-root background. So when you sit down and you read the Gita, that God has a thousand arms and a thousand eyes...they [devotees] say you crazy! But now you interpret it. It mean that god can see everything. It doesn't literally mean something.

A final example consists of a reference made to the Mahabarata, which, as my informant observed, speaks of Arjuna and Krishna in a chariot with five horses. However, he took pains to explain that what is being communicated is "really" allegorical: the chariot is the human mind and the horses are our five senses.

Expressing a familiar sentiment, the three individuals above were adamant about the difference (and unfavorable comparison) between a putatively simplistic, uninformed, and

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superficial apprehension of texts as words and a profound grasp of the messages extrapolated from symbolic allusions. There is a concern that a story is being heard while its more abstract edification and moral injunctions are missed. The latter is avoided only with a pandit's proper pedagogical technique and, implicitly, the formal education that prepares one's intellect for such exercises. Furthermore, a key invisible interlocutor in this discourse is the West and its modernity,[13] whose gaze from the supposedly superior stance of rationality and dispassion renders "exotic" and "bizarre" the imagery depicted in Hindu epics and texts. Yet as one Hindu young man said, "We, as Hindus, are confronted with the dilemma as to what position to take in Western society without compromising ourselves." The challenge is to maintain the authentic while rejecting what are not merely negative associations but implicit ideological comparisons with a putative opposite--and ostensibly more evolved--conqueror.

What is intriguing with respect to the Hindu approach to scriptural interpretation is that among many of the Indo-

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[13]Marshall Berman (1988:15-17) defines modernity as a historical period, modernism as an ideology of the period, and modernization as the primarily political and economic consequences of the ideology. I use the term modernity to characterize ideology among Indo-Trinidadian Muslims and Hindus in a manner similar to Berman. That is, in local wisdom, "modern" connotes two dimensions, space and time, with time further being distinguished implicitly as static and fluid: respectively, "the West," and a new era or moment in history as well as a sense of progress toward, an evolving forward.

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Trinidadian Muslims with whom I spoke the inverse is true. As I show in Chapter Eight, a significant part of what is debated in religious discourse is placing a higher value on the literal and the text-bound, which is considered more a reflection of erudition and progress (if not modernity) rather than what is allegedly intuited. Of course, ultimately this has to do in part with the nature of Islam and its emphasis on a written as opposed to oral tradition. But precisely what "literal" means and how text is to be interpreted, however, are contingent and a matter of energetic (and unresolved) discussion.

A second opposition is a contraposition between definitions and valuations of formal education and its absence, being uneducated. By definition, education here refers to an institutionalization of Western, colonial definitions and valorization of knowledge. As I have shown, critique of pandits generally includes a call for their mastering Sanskrit and Hindi as well as more "philosophy." This is generally thought of as possible primarily through being self-taught, since the formal educational system in Trinidad does not offer consistent instruction in South Asian languages or literature (occasionally visiting lecturers may be employed at the university level). Being self-taught is possible only after a certain competence is achieved in basic education. Hence, a common equation might read: literal = ritual = backward = uneducated; and,

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figurative = modernized forms of practice = progressive = educated. Due to the nature of the relatively recent upward class mobility among Indo-Trinidadians, this dichotomy generally mirrors the generational dichotomy between younger and older heads. Moreover, because an inescapable part of formal education is assimilation to the hegemonic culture and its values and priorities, "progress" is not unequivocal.

A third opposition in the discourse among Hindus is the configuration and place of ritual in religious identity and practice. Here the issue is not so much whether or not to perform rituals, as these (pujas, yagyas) are at the core of religious life--both personal and public--but how to couch them. Paraphrasing the way another informant put it, Hindu rituals are too easily characterized by critics as "simi-dimi thing"; as discussed in Chapter Six, the association is with hocus-pocus or mumbo-jumbo. When a pandit seems to hurry through the rites he is less connected with his audience and is perceived as merely going through the motions. Pedagogy (instruction, explanation), particularly through functions, counteracts the kinship among simi-dimi, superstition, blind faith, and gullibility (being "fooled")--all felt to be indicative of subordinate status, disenfranchised history, and ultimately contemporary socio-political vulnerability.

In the following chapter I examine these leitmotifs in

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religious discourse among Muslims, particularly as regards the work of functions. I explore what these leitmotifs suggest in local debates about cultural authenticity, social legitimacy, and the significance of pedagogies in delineating pure/sacred and impure/profane boundaries in the construction of group identities.

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## Chapter Eight. "Functions": Maulood Sherifs, Quranic Readings, and Imams

> Our religion is not merely based on rituals, but on inner cleansing (speaker, Meeraj function, 1989).
>
> Every man and woman needs to acquire knowledge. And when you do, you will improve your personality as Muslims in this society (host, Ladies' Group meeting, 1988).

Indo-Trinidadian Muslim "functions" (or "a prayers") are as varied and ubiquitous in Trinidad as they are among Hindus.[1] Like among Hindus, too, they serve as pedagogical arenas and loci of discussion and debate about "correct" religious knowledge, "authentic" cultural heritage, and the negotiation of the tensions of the profane (mundane) and the aspirations of the sacred (rarified). Authentic implies originating from a source--untampered, untainted, and unabated. Also implicit is a sense of timelessness: what served then does so now. While Hinduism, or, more specifically, the sanatan dharm, is removed from time and space en toto, Islam is historically and empirically linked to a concrete moment. However, Islam is textually-based, the content of the texts (particularly the Quran and Hadith)

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[1]While I limit myself in this chapter to a discussion of Indo-Trinidadian Muslims, the relatively small population of Afro-Trinidadian Muslims comprises an important dimension of the configuration of Islam in Trinidad as well as in other Caribbean nations. Vocal in their religious ideologies and moral principles, Afro-Trinidadian Muslims are politically visible and pose a significant interlocutor to Indo-Trinidadians' constructions and interpretations of their own religious doctrines and traditions (see, for example, Khan 1995).

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can be removed from the vissicitudes of time and space. In addition, authenticity suggests conscientiousness, which in Trinidad is read as correct and sincere practice and belief. These qualities must be managed, however, because overzealous correctness has the danger of conveying intolerance or exclusivity, which are contrary to social ideals of acceptance and "living good with people." Similarly, seemingly effusive sincerity has the danger of appearing what is locally decried as "hypocritical" (a false, excessive protesting that is presumed to mask self-serving and hence unreligious motives) and/or irrationally "fanatical" (not discerning the appropriate degrees, expressions, and arenas of religious practice). For example, during one Muslim function I attended, a man came into the masjid hall wearing a burnoos. He was secretly ridiculed for "breaking style" (showing off), which raised suspicions about his piety as well as causing him to be perceived as possibly "fanatical."

Functions are, among Muslims as well as Hindus, events woven into the daily routine of the community. Functions are situations where time, planning, preparation, and orchestration involve several people, generally jamaat stalwarts, who help to facilitate a setting in which people are able to publicly proclaim their religious devotion and obedience, and hence their identity, permitting a visibility that meshes with the broader contests of visibility in which

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Trinidadian ethnic groups engage. Functions, among Muslims, are also a way to create the context for an observance or commemoration when there is otherwise little or no historically authentic, and thus legitimating precedent for doing so. As a local maulana saw it, "these celebrations and occasions [functions] serve to keep the people together. It was a way to get the people in the canefields to get together and it has been maintained."

Unlike among Hindus, however, this maintenance of extra-household devotional worship, and its attendant public visibility through intra-jamaat and inter-jamaat participation, leads to complex debate about functions' form as well as content. In other words, as differing methods of worship strive for preeminence among participants, facilitated to a great degree by the religio-cultural associations, thrown into relief is the concern over "innovations." A tradition characteristic in Islam in most of its historical and regional incarnations is a concern with identifying and eschewing certain practices deemed inappropriate to the basic tenets of Islam. Potentially inappropriate practices and beliefs characterized as "cultural," "traditional," or "innovations" are those that have accreted through social and cultural influence rather than through demonstration by or dictum of the Prophet Muhammad. These concerns are certainly not unprecedented or unique to Trinidad. The effort to define and forbear

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customs deemed inappropriate to the basic tenets of Islam, and the identification of such practices as cultural or innovative, characterize diverse islamic reforms throughout history in a variety of Muslim societies and communities. Yet, while religious discourse is in itself interesting, it generally also points to other forces or currents in daily life not always considered by practitioners as being directly within the purview of "things religious."

Further complicating is the historical development of Islam in Trinidad; that is, the course of its "Indianization." Indian indentured laborers' Muslim heritage, brought with them to the estates of Trinidad, was one influenced significantly by Hinduism and the Indian cultural patterns of the subcontinent, as opposed to those, say, of the Middle East. As Samaroo (1987:7) remarks, "in modern-day Trinidad and Guyana, where there are substantial Muslim populations, there is much confusion, often conflict, between these two types of Islam."

As an example of what Eickelman (1984) refers to as "dispersed, transregional, 'minority' Islamic groups" (1984:11), Indo-Trinidadian Muslims' concern with depth of belief and correctness of practice gains salience through their perception that they lack a deep cultural history of Islam such as exists in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Functions, and the schools of thought (or traditions) they represent, serve, in part, as didactic illustrations to

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local communities of the complex debate about the "correct" and authentic (non-innovative) practice of contemporary Islam. These concerns fuel a good deal of religious discourse among various Muslim groups on the island, both Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian.

As I have shown in previous chapters, there is in Trinidad a fine line separating an egalitarian from a hierarchical ethos; religious purity that emphasizes distinctions must reconcile with the social imperative of "living good with people." The tensions obtaining in debate as to progress, against the litmus test of purity may have precursors and parallels in South Asian or Arabian Islam, but this icon of purity is viable, and complete, only insofar as it articulates with local, Trinidadian concepts of purity--peculiar to colonial origins, which give it meaning and significance.

For these reasons, in the discussion of "functions"/"a prayers" that follows, although my intention is to make the case that a significant feature of functions is the management of purity through pedagogy and the negotiation of knowledge, tradition, and piety, these processes are not about an Islam (or Hinduism) that is essentialized and "whole" (cf. Appadurai 1986) and then manifested globally, but that purity, tradition, knowledge, and piety have meaning only insofar as they are locally contextualized.

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Maulood Sherifs, Quranic Readings, and other "Functions"

Locally glossed as Quranic readings or maulood sherifs, virtually all functions include either reading and interpreting suras (chapters) from the Quran and/or the singing of qaseedas.[2] These constituent elements are the basis of what make functions conventional, and thus familiar in communal perception. The basic structure and chronology of Quranic readings and maulood sherifs is as follows: opening dua (prayer), some minutes of older head males reading from the Quran (often 15 or 20, sometimes 30 minutes), then all those present reading (aloud or silently) certain suras from the Quran (usually the last ten chapters), the singing of qaseedas, lecture(s), the tazeem, then closing dua. Variation comes with the particular purpose of the function, the amount of time spent on each of the constituent activities, the qaseedas chosen to be sung, the content of the khutbas or lectures, and the nature of other activities. Other activities can be, for example, practices such as animal sacrifice, or presentations such as children's performances or the addresses of honored guests.

Functions that are held in the masjid, or, more

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[2]According to the Shorter Encyclopedia of Islam (1953:365-67): mawlid "...or mawlud..., time, place and celebration of the birth of anyone, particularly of the Prophet Muhammad (mawlid al-nabi)...One element in particular is very prominent, and that is the most characteristic one of the later celebrations, namely the recital of mawlids, i.e., pynegyrical poems..., which start with the birth of Muhammed and praise his life and virtues in the most laudatory fashion."

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properly speaking, the masjid hall, tend to be of a grander, more ambitious character than those held in the home. Whereas the latter context is where personal observances tend to occur (unless the event is particularly important or the family capable of sustaining considerable cost), halls built as structures attached to masjids (cf. Prorock 1988) are the sites of calendrically-based Islamic events, which virtually always have some sort of commemoration.

The variety of occasions for which "a prayers," or functions might be held further distinguishes them into identifiable types. For heuristic purposes, I group the most common rituals in which Indo-Trinidadian Muslims engage into two general categories. There are those officially based on the Islamic calendar; others are locally or individually determined worship rites. Examples of the former are Eid-ul-Fitr (the feast breaking the fast of Ramadan), Eid-ul-Adha or Bukra Eid (the feast of sacrifice on the 10th day of the month of Zil Hajj, milad-un-nabi (the Prophet Muhammad's birthday), qurbani (sacrificial rite of goat or cattle as an act of piety during the month of Zil Hajj),[3] meeraj (the Prophet Muhammad's ascension to Heaven). Examples of the latter include the haqiqa (in

[3]Also done in Arabia while on pilgrimage, as it is a compulsory part of making Hajj. It is not compulsory for those who do not make the journey. The Concise Encyclopedia of Islam (1989:327) states that it is "any practice that brings one closer to God. In particular it means sacrifice, and especially the animals sacrificed in the Id-al-Adha ('Feast of Sacrifice')."

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Trinidad, pledging oneself, through a ritual sacrifice, to Allah and to living according to Islamic teachings) and life-cycle celebrations such as birthdays or anniversaries that are observed as religious occasions. Not functions per se but also important vectors of identity construction, maktab classes (tutored instruction in the principles of Islam, in reading Arabic, sometimes in learning gaseedas [devotional songs or hymns, usually in Urdu]) and ad hoc organized prayer group meetings, such as those of the local jamaats' Ladies' Groups, are also sites of pedagogy and discussion.

An early ethnographic description by the Niehoffs (1960) suggests that non-calendrical functions have retained some consistency over the past thirty-five years:

> At irregular intervals, devout Moslems give prayer meetings, popularly called 'kitabs', at their homes. The word kitab means book in Urdu and the reference is to the Koran. These ceremonies serve about the same function as the Hindu puja and are similar to them except that instead of the elaborate Hindu ritual, the reading of the Koran is the essence of the function. The ceremony is conducted at the home of the sponsor who offers it to bless the house, to honor the dead, or simply as a periodic thanksgiving ceremony. When the guests assemble, the imam gives a reading and interpretation of a part of the Koran, gifts are given to the poor, the blessed food, sherni, is distributed to each person, and then all the guests are served a meal. In the middle of this ceremony, as in most Hindu rituals, a small bottle of perfume is brought around and a dab is put on each guest. This custom is explained as 'making everybody clean' (1960:141, emph. orig.).

With the minor exceptions of purifying with perfume (which, while common at Hindu functions, was in my experience more

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the exception among Muslims) and gifts being given to the poor (undertaken now as zakat in a more or less formally orchestrated manner), the structure of the ceremony described above would be familiar to anyone today.[4] Although the term "kitab" was not to my knowledge in use in the late 1980s-early 1990s, its description parallels what I refer to as household-based functions, also known as "a thanksgiving." I make the distinction between household- and masjid-based functions not because there are differences in form and content between the two, but because, as I indicate below, the difference in their magnitude reflects differences in the formality and self-consciousness of their presentation--which speaks to their role in boundary marking and identity construction.

Viewed through a Western lens, Muslim functions often do not appear to have the "intrinsic symbolic richness" (Bowen 1989:615) that tend to be seen as characteristic of Hindu devotional rites. A more relativist stance, however, (such as Bowen's own [e.g., 1993]) perceives that the profundity and complexity of Islamic ritual lie not in intricate and apparently arcane procedures that Hinduism, for example, is assumed by observers to possess. Rather, they are perceived to lie to a great extent in the layers

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[4]Perhaps the routine use of perfume in Muslim functions has diminished through the gradual effort to further demarcate what is uniquely "Muslim" from what is perceived as "belonging to Hindu."

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meaning interpreted in the text-based recitations and khutbas (sermons) that form, for example, the principal aspect of Indo-Trinidadian Islamic rituals, and in the debates over certain ritual practices. Among the most common practices that foment ideological divisions among Indo-Trinidadian Muslims are saying prayers over food (e.g., "making niaj over sirni"), celebrating the Prophet Muhammad's birthday and meeraj, singing qaseedas during functions, and standing (as opposed to remaining seated) for the tazeem--praise sung for the Prophet.

The definition and interpretation of the content of Muslim functions is critical to understanding the larger social contexts in which they occur. Yet as I stated with respect to Hindu rituals (Chapter Seven), here I am not as interested in the micro-symbolic intricacies of a particular ritual event as I am in what Muslim rituals symbolize in their constitution as a complex of religiously and sociologically significant practices--again, where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts in terms of significance to broader issues of group consciousness and identity construction. Among function participants, as well as within the wider Muslim community, the central importance of suras from the Quran and khutbas by the imam make it possible to argue that, as with Hindu rituals, the pedagogical dimension of Indo-Trinidadian Muslim functions is key in seeking and interrogating the substantive meaning

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of religious practice and not merely its form. In other words, it is not sufficient to see functions among Muslims merely as the viability of heritage through time and space, nor to analyze functions solely through minute deconstructions of rites. Rather, my approach is to treat functions as a complex of symbols, forming an idiom that conveys a larger and locally resonant set of issues having to do with social legitimacy and political visibility.

Again as among Hindus, the pedagogical role of functions concerns the acquisition and dissemination of knowledge--knowledge construed in terms of both information and edification Complicating this among Muslims, however, is a tradition of orthodoxy (cf. Asad 1986) that renders variations in doctrine and practice a matter for discussion and debate among scholars, clerics, and lay persons. Much of what follows in this chapter reflects the pervasive concern among Indo-Trinidadian Muslims over "correct" interpretation of knowledge and the execution of practice, over the appropriateness of various expressions of modernity for Islam in a modern (read "Western") world, and over what these mean for "living good with people."

I will first discuss Indo-Trinidadian Muslim functions and the role of imams as they emerged in the larger community of Muslims and Hindus in "south," according to the historiography of Indo-Trinidadian Muslim informants. Then I will describe functions in detail and discuss their

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significance among Indo-Trinidadian Muslims. Finally, I analyze, through a focus primarily on the formal discourse of khutbas and the informal discourse of community residents, the leitmotifs of tradition, authenticity, and generational conflict that form the religious ideologies of Muslims and that inform a larger logic of power and struggle in Trinidadian society.

Recollections and Forebears

Indo-Trinidadian historiography is replete with, one could argue rests on, memories of the estate--whether in terms of parables of indenture or in terms of lived (and variously recollected) experience. As younger generations narratively deploy the past fortunes of older heads, and as older heads relate their lives, a picture emerges where the vissicitudes of barracks life, maktab instruction, and the importance of visiting international religious specialists "from away" gave rise to a setting in which the importance of local imams, "functions," and other religious leitmotifs in contemporary Indo-Trinidadian Muslim communities gained significance.

Under conditions whose depiction by my informants evokes a frontier ethos (in both the sense of periphery that Bowen [1989] intends and the sense of pristine-yet-promising space [cf. Wrobel 1993]), a good intentioned, if roughly hewn set of Islamic practices arise through the persistent convictions of reputedly pious and sincere forebears.

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Critical to this factor, however, was the gradually accumulating wealth among an initial handful of urban, and some rural proletarian Indo-Trinidadians--Muslim and Hindu alike. For the most part through the religio-cultural associations, acting in this instance as clearing houses, this capital was used in part to underwrite the visits of "authentic" tutors from India and, later, Pakistan, who were felt to be correctly knowledgeable and more closely linked, spiritually as well as in terms of information, to the homeland. While Hindu religio-cultural associations certainly have sponsored missionaries or other religious specialists (Hindu, Arya Samaj, Sai Baba, among others) over the generations, in interviews Muslim Indo-Trinidadians more often made specific reference to the Islamic counterparts of these missionaries and specialists that have come over time. This reflects, I think, the relatively early institutionalization of Islamic practice in Trinidad into distinct and powerful religio-cultural associations, principally the Tackveeyatul Islamic Association (TIA), the Trinidad Muslim League (TML), the Anjuman Sunnat-ul-Jamaat Association (ASJA), and, later, the Islamic Missionaries Guild (IMG) (cf. Kasule 1986). Within this early period of 20th century Indo-Trinidadian history, two processes simultaneously were at work. First, Muslim religio-cultural associations were becoming increasingly institutionalized, orchestrating the building of masjids, the contributions of

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overseas visitors, the authorizing of imams, and the discourse of religious authenticity and correctness. Second, a more formalized role for imams vis-a-vis their local communities was (re)evolving. By the first third of the 20th century, these organizations were formalizing and codifying Islamic injunctions, through often divergent traditions or pedagogies (as I discuss below), and explicitly in the spirit of learning and teaching and knowing.[5] The arrival and work of missionaries from India and Pakistan, the development of maktab instruction, the evolution of masjid administrative apparatus, and the changing role of the imam and his relations with jamaat members were all shaped by a number of factors. These include, importantly, pre-War intermarriages among the elite (predominantly urban) Muslim leadership and occasionally between the latter and religious visitors from overseas, a profoundly grass roots everyday life, and by the efforts of a community self-consciously bent on self-improvement by "keeping on the right path [spiritually, religiously]" while "living good with people."

Similarly among Hindus, a pragmatism characterizes the explanations and stories people tell about the foundations

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[5]This emphasis on pedagogy is different from the formal injunctions to teach about and proselytize Islam, such as daw'ah. The pedagogical leitmotif emanates from the particular configuration of Indo-Trinidadian social and cultural histories as much as it may rest on the fulcrum of doctrine.

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of Islam, in "south" and in the island as a whole. As the 20th century progressed, the "north"/"south" duality became more marked in distinguishing urban and rural, as well as their attendant differing class associations--where urban and middle class are connected and rural and grass roots were linked. (These correlations are more or less accurate until the influence of the oil boom and its class and status repercussions throughout the island.) With respect to the "long time" of the early 20th century, however, local historiography tends to speak in island-wide (and hence often allegorical) terms. For example:

> Long time in Trinidad there was no program to get Islam off the ground because there was no priesthood as such. [Although] the imam is only a leader, and everyone should know how to do prayers, there was a [specialization] into imams at indenture time. The man who knew Islam a bit better assumed leadership due to his inclination to be a leader. People gave him a following because they needed prayers, etcetera. He maybe was not necessarily a imam in India. [On reaching Trinidad,] <u>then</u> he starts living the life and seeking more knowledge. People need [an intermediary] to talk to God who is spiritually purer as well as knows more knowledge, since people aren't pure enough.

Of these early days, referring to what I estimate as being pre-World War II, older heads tend to portray an environment that might be characterized as "out-of-awareness 'Muslim'" as opposed to a "reified 'Islamic'." The setting people speak of is one where the atmosphere was charged by a still-vibrant Urdu language, and where cultural traditions and customs from the sub-continent, though clearly transformed, still retained an Old World inflection. In

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other words, the older heads' memories are not, for example, of elaborately orchestrated ritual functions (indeed, they often made it a point to use these to distinguish between long time and the present), but of quotidian practices not clearly distinguished as "religious" or "cultural," and evocative of a former time. One older head reminisced:

> When I de [was] 10 years old [1932], it had an old man from India who live next door, in the same yard, named Amal Exchange, because he was bought by a white man from Exchange Estate, from the ship. He used to all the time come and tell stories. 'Kisa' in Urdu, 'bayan' in Arabic. One of his stories was 'Yusufa and Zaleka'. He would come to the house and they would ask, 'Miah [honorific], bhol na kisa', 'tell us a story'. He said, 'acha, Laila Majnun ke bayan', 'okay, I'll give you the Laila and Majnun story'. He would go all about with his stories and we de [did] learn a lot from them. And sometimes I went to maktab class with my uncle.

Infused into the mundane routine of living, what constituted "Muslim" seems to have rested to a significant extent on associations with the Urdu language and the oral traditions in which it was couched. Such associations inspire among Indo-Trinidadians retrospective interpretations of a community-based Islam that was culturally-grounded and not strictly religiously distinguished from that lived experience; the Muslim cultural matrix of "long time" contained and conveyed the myriad influences of a heterogeneous northern India that were initially expressed (and remembered) in Trinidad as far more inclusive of the diversity of indentured immigrants (who were not a

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homogeneous population).[6] My point is that the profile of Muslim belief and practice in contemporary times necessarily grew out of a not only different but contrasting context. One informant, one of the relatively small number of Ahmadiyyas in Trinidad,[7] conveys this well when he explains,

> Long ago, most of the customs observed by most of the Muslims were also partly that of Hindus, as well as some of the Hindu customs were taken from the Muslims. That is because of the social way of life in Trinidad. They had no alternative, they came to this country as slaves, more or less. They came indentured to different estates and they lived in a humble way, barracks, and they kept their religion alive in some way. They came from India together and lived together in Trinidad, so their customs and habits were vicey versa. They associated with each other in their different religious functions. And so it went on, the life the Muslims lived. Today some Muslims still practice some of the things of their ancestors, like this 40 days business [ritual observance on 40th day after the death of the deceased]. This is one the Hindus observe very much.

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[6]I believe this applies to sub-continental intra-group social rules, such as caste, as well as to inter-group (communal) relations.

[7]In contrast with the Ahmadiyyas' political importance in Pakistan after partition and their publicity after being barred from making hajj, Trinidadian Ahmaddiyas are not prominent on the island. As far as I was able to ascertain, instead of sharing center stage with the Sunni (Hanafi) Muslim majority, they seem to be peripheral in the eyes of other Trinidadian Muslims (however, when Ahmadiyyas from other localities visit Trinidad, there may be overt friction). One reason for this distinction is, I believe, generational. The older head Ahmadiyya and Sunni Indo-Trinidadian Muslims may have close kin ties with each other. These bonds can in some respects override doctrinal differences, at least in terms of everyday life and relations. It is likely that less tolerance of Ahmadiyyas would be on the part of those Muslims who are most concerned with the traditional and the authentic in Trinidadian Islam and/or who do not have a lifetime's experience of these emotional bonds of kinship.

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Not surprisingly, perhaps, for many Indo-Trinidadian Muslims with whom I spoke, Islam in Trinidad today addresses issues of constructing and asserting a distinct identity in the face of a cultural minority's concern not only with absorption or overshadowing by Afro-Trinidadians, but with the genealogical and historical proximity of Hindu brethren.

The tenor of the narratives offered by informants as they recount these histories is matter-of-fact, unaffected, and even tacitly celebratory of a projected humble simplicity on the part of their forbears. As with most other genres of Indo-Trinidadian oral histories, what are deemed humble origins are imbued with a dignity that complicates their denigration. Interestingly, while alleged naivete and ignorance connote the least desirable interpretations of "tradition"--backwardness and a propensity to be "fooled"--and thus must be rectified, humility, sincerity, and simplicity are categorically distinguished and have a distinctly positive valence.[8] The latter is carried forward in time to imbue particular attributes of Islam, a Muslim weltanschauung, and various competing interpretations of both of these with authority or illegitimacy. The following narratives of older head Muslims clearly convey this thematic dimension of local

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[8]This tension among differing interpretations of "tradition" is a large part of why the Indo-Trinidadian dialogue with modernity is complex; modernity itself is equivocal.

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historiography:

> Ever since I know myself [very young], for as long as I could remember, we had a mosque, away from the road. About 50 years ago now, I was born in '38. We had a little mud track to go to the mosque, right? We go there to read namaaz [pray], go and make wuzu [ablutions]. We have to go upstairs for namaaz. Now, underneath, when you're passing there, people used to have their cow and goat, and everything tied under the place, and it was in a state! And you just go upstairs and read namaaz. All I could remember is that the people used to go there maybe twice for the year, for Eid and maybe Eid-ul-Adha. Then, after that, the older heads who had a little Islamic knowledge in them, right?, they find the place was not fitting for them to worship. Because of animal, tying underneath, and then you know you have a smell and whatnot. So one of the brothers, he gave his place to the Muslim community. He fix it up to read namaaz there. He well bar it up and fix it up nice. And at that time we hardly had transportation to go to mosque, there was no cars. It was about 4 miles from where I was living. Some of the nights walking we'd shelter from the wet under a tree. But we never used to mind that because we always remained with this, that we serving the Almighty God. With our parents doing this, we grow up doing the same thing, too.

From out of these fairly infrequent, if consistent, gatherings of untutored but observant Muslims emerged a religious leadership and their gradually ever more formally organized services. In the narrative of another older head Muslim below we can also see the importance of the confluence of inchoate maktab instruction, the consolidation of religio-cultural associations, the formation of jamaats, and individuals' initiative.

> My father was a Muslim priest, ever since [as long as can be remembered]. He was one of the early ones in town. He was from U.P., India. We had maktab classes [at] home. We begin with home training. [At] about 10, 12 years we would begin maktab in the masjid. There was two masjids in town then. My father had one...Around [age] 21 I went for training by a

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> missionary. You had to go out of town, you had to go far then. He was from Lahore. He came through the ASJA. With him you get Quranic teaching, recitation, translating Arabic into English, and interpretation--why a verse came down, the time, what purpose it was. And he used to have a weekly paper that goes to the various mosques, which he prepared, and I typed it up. A newsletter with a sermon, different topics for the khutbah. We had all the time with him, we wasn't working. I didn't have to go out, like in the garden to help my father [as I did] before.

The two individuals spoken of above were, from the information imparted, probably among the nascent elite class forming within the Indo-Trinidadian community, particularly in the first half of the 20th century. Indo-Trinidadian capital and the power accruing from it were not nearly competitive with that of the white ruling or "colored" middle class until at least the second generation, and even then it would have been to a minimal degree. As is evident from the oral histories presented here (and in earlier chapters), however, status differences significant among Indo-Trinidadians, based on both symbolic and material criteria, were emerging throughout the course of settlement. It was evidently often men who had access to some kind of formal education or wealth that translated into the local authority that combined with religious works--either undertaken by themselves or in support of others--that were intended to maintain a community of believers. A more clear cut example of the link between affluent individuals or families and philanthropic religious work was given to me by an older head who had been one of the original founders of

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the TIA:

> My grandfather sent my father at age 8 or 9 to study for 6 months in P--, to learn Islam and Arabic from a learned man from India. My father developed a flair for education and started a maktab in C--. There was not one there at the time. My grandfather paid maktab teachers and made sure it was free for anyone. I went to this same maktab.

Yet other informants told stories of harder fought accomplishments:

> My husband was a cane farmer. That is all. He was like a substitute imam, going about the different jamaats around the place [around here] to fill in for the imams when they couldn't do the service. He would also do Quran sherifs and other functions. And so he learned, and he learned his Islamic knowledge in a maktab from small, and [also] from a man. It have this Punjabi fellow in D-- and he taught him.

And,

> I was born in 1913...My father was imam, but when he die I did not take over as imam at that time. I had plenty responsibilities, a good bit of children, my wife to see about. I didn't have <u>that</u> amount of time to devote in the masjid. But I used to be assisting all the imams that come here. Every imam come, I assisted them. I was assistant for 24 long years. And 20 years on my own [as imam]...I took over the jamaat full time at about 55 years [of age]. I didn't have so much work to do. Children grow up, and I didn't have to work so hard again because I work hard [before] and I going alright [financially secure].

Within all of these narratives is a sub-text of credibility--practice and intention--that is embedded in what are ultimately assertions of piety: against the odds of grass-roots hardship and disadvantage, a (pure) core of Muslim essence (belief/practice) remains steadfast. As among Indo-Trinidadian Hindus, this leitmotif is seen perhaps most clearly in the person/icon of the imam, a figure who

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represents both the continuity of tradition and a potential source of (correctly) informed knowledge.

The role of imam is not subject to the same kinds of scrutiny as pandits tend to have among Indo-Trinidadian Hindus, nor, to my knowledge, is there a historically patterned discourse about imams akin to that discussed with regard to Hindus in the preceding chapter. However, oral historiography reveals that the gradual changes in the work of the imam--as purveyor of knowledge and as centripetal force for jamaats--mirror other, more encompassing transformations that are significant for understanding the constitution of Indo-Trinidadian Muslim identity. These changes in the imam's role include a concretization of duties, a formalization of division of labor in masjid administration, an increasing salience of the concern with edification among individuals and within communities, and the attendant changes in class mobility that tend to be associated with opportunities for, and the valorization of formal education. For example, according to one informant,

> Twenty years ago, a sprinkling of people only fasted and kept to the general principles of Islam. Islam was not observed in the strictest form. But the imam had a lot to say and went to homes to do religious activities. People didn't frequent the mosque. Twenty years ago the people were kind of illiterate, you know, and anything to do with religion they put it squarely on the shoulder of the imam. Now there is more mosque attendance and more observing [of] religious principles. In the old days, you only find people in the mosque for Eid [Eid ul-Fitr] and Baccra Eid [Eid ul-Adha]. Now there is more exposure to the religion through a lot of publications, books, teachers, the availability of the highest standard of religious

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leaders, like a maulana.

I believe that these changes always have been circuitous processes and presently continue to be ambiguous at times, and at times to overlap in terms of differing messages being conveyed about the significance of religious belief and practice in daily life.[9] While not wanting to posit a unilineal trajectory from past to present, however, there is a direction to these transformations, evident because they are differentially empowered (not because there is some kind of inexorable, natural "progressive" force at work). A coalescence of particular positions can be seen insofar as they gain salience and eclipse or elide other positions. For example, in contrasting the two statements made about imams and comparing past to present, the younger person and the older head, respectively, both point to what today has become pivotal in Muslims' creation and interpretations of the symbol of imam.

> A more educated imam has more right to decide right from wrong. A ordinary imam don't know the details, just the facts. And,

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[9]Cf., for example, the Niehoffs' (1960:147) observation of burials among Indo-Trinidadian Muslims: "[n]owadays women sometimes go to the cemetery although this is a recent innovation." As I discussed in Chapter 5, presently Indo-Trinidadian Muslim women do not go to the cemetery; this was interpreted in hindsight by one informant as a transformation of the authentic tradition with which she had been familiar as a youngster. In other words, both of these observations interpreted the respective current situation as a modernization of sorts, even though the Niehoffs and my informant were both looking back in their assessment. Thus my argument for the circuitous rather than the linear.

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> G-- Miah, the old imam use to go by everybody house, and correct nobody. He was nice too bad [really nice]. When [today] some of the miah saheb [honorific] have to say, 'this ent right, that ent right', well, G-- Miah had nothing to say. If you has [only] a cow pen, he used to sit down.

Whereas the younger speaker makes an obvious, and quite important distinction between "more educated" and "ordinary" imams, the older head speaker panegyrizes the long time individual who was non-hierarchical in his relations with his jamaat--he visited everybody, in any setting, and was humble and unassuming, presuming ignorance on the part of no one.

The problem then becomes, how to translate this egalitarian spirit into authoritative command, as other people's modernity (Euro, Afro) seems to demand. The older head above makes a distinction between the style, and by extension, practice of traditional, long time imams, in terms of the nature and use of their authority and their relations with jamaat members. As a traditional imam in a smaller and more widely dispersed Muslim community, he had opportunities to visit at people's homes and more or less as a class (education, wealth) equal. However, a new, more recent generation imam might perhaps counter that the older head did not correct anyone because he had insufficient knowledge to know when and how to do so. This has more significance than merely the difference in the way religious leadership can be expressed in the community. Rather, power and change are revealed in three factors. First, the jamaat

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community itself undergoes change, in terms of population density, kinds and frequency of religious practice, and class mobility. Second, the leadership tradition in local Muslim practice develops different criteria, viz more formalized acquisition of religious and secular knowledge, for different kinds of authenticity and authorization. Third, what can be termed a rhetoric of humility is sustained. Strikingly similar among Indo-Trinidadian pandits, imams take pains to appear unpretentious and sincere. Ending his speech, for example, one assistant imam said, not quite apologetic, "I am not a university person, just a student, and not a good one, of Islam. But these words are true." And, at another function, the maulana, in a self-effacing manner, closed his khutba with, "my dear brothers and sisters, I feel very humble and insignificant to tell you some things of life which I have not yet realized. But we are all in a process of learning and striving."

As I alluded to earlier, however, interpretations of the authority of the imam has not only been contingent on formal education and class mobility. Also significant has been the development of particular divisions of labor within the administrative apparatus of jamaat organization, overseen more or less in concert by religio-cultural association, imam, and community members. One person told me, "[even] in the 1930s and '40s it had [there were] no

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jamaat president, vice president, secretary. You had the imam as a single figurehead and what he says, goes." And an older head imam reminisced,

> My father [an imam] was no university man, but he did well. He was a religious scholar. Preach and teach Islam, and convert people. He had Hindi, Tamil, Sanskrit [in addition to Urdu]. You can't fool he! You can't tie him up [confuse] him no how. You come with this, he'll pick it up and read it and say, 'no, it's not so and so, is so and so'. And keep his jamaat going good-good, everybody in harmony. What they [imams] say used to be carried in those days. They had no committees to run no jamaat. If he [imam] say, 'do so and so', it must be done so and so. Executive committees is really a English [Western] business. In Islam, what the imam say is carried, but it does not be so now. People want a new system, the English way. [Yet] having a committee, ten brains is better than one. You sit down and discuss and come to one conclusion ...So, now a <u>religious</u> business will be for the imam's decision, his verdict. But <u>otherwise</u>, a common thing pertaining to the jamaat, that is the committee.

This division of labor is certainly not codified for every jamaat, and is exercised variously among imams. For what comprises "religious business" is, as among pandits and their devotees, complex and heavily charged with generations of intimate neighborhood relations and "pumpkin vine" kinship. Several people told me that an imam is not <u>needed</u> to do "a prayers" for a family, once someone in the family can read Arabic from the Quran. Hence, smaller household functions may not always call upon the services of an imam. However, it is felt that what is preferable is to invite the imam into the home to undertake the necessary tasks, for several reasons. First, a more intimate relationship is created between household members and the jamaat leader.

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"It's just stronger, getting to know each other personally, in a personal environment. In a mosque you just get to know the basic things. I want my imam to know me and be able to give to other people his opinion of me." Second, the children of the household will be encouraged, through example, to work on their piety--partly by being made more aware that the imam is an active, not nominal figure, and partly by being encouraged to engage in "a prayers" themselves at the appropriate times. Third, it was emphasized to me that it is "good for the imam himself, as he can get to know families without having to ask them [questions] outside, at a function or at mosque. Going to the mosque come like just being polite to each other." Getting to know a family "inside" the home encourages intimacy, but not in a way that invites comess--"passing news," (gossiping), being "makocious" (busybody, nosy), being "fast," (inquisitive, interfering). It is an intimacy that both has the benefit of emanating apparently naturally out of interpersonal relations, and those imbued with the sacred--i.e., "a prayers." While these qualities of familiarity and a specified (rather than generalized) concern for a family, presumably tailored to their individual needs are decidedly of great virtue when exercised by imams, their status and credibility is, perhaps less and less, based on these criteria alone.

Part of the shift in authority of the imam comes from

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the dictum in Islam that all men should be imams--"one who leads so that there can always be someone to lead prayer if needed," as one informant put it. The difference between the imam and the rest of the jamaat "is nothing necessary," he continued, but there are two kinds of religious education in Islam, an elemental one that all Muslims must have, and a specialized one that at least one person in the community must have; "the imam for the mosque might not have it," it will not necessarily be the imam who possesses this specialized knowledge. As importantly, however, have been the forces of institutionalizing of selected religious traditions (cf. Kasule 1986) and the vicissitudes of local history. As I will discuss in further detail momentarily, many older head imams feel the pressure of changing times, with respect to their craft. One imam explained that "before," status was unambiguous:

> In your community, people respect you. They say, 'he is a imam'. You get a good seat, you get honored by that. You get a good place, they don't keep you in the back, you get in the front. They give you a honor, to put you in the front all the time, because you are a leader. You get honor for your knowledge, for living the din [life according to Islamic criteria], and for true service towards Islam and the community.

Generational tensions among younger and older head imams, as among pandits, expose a confluence of factors that have stimulated the iconic dimension of religious leadership among Indo-Trinidadians. Discourse about the expectations for optimum religious belief and practice, as well as altered views of what optimum might be, serve to obfuscate

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and clarify, and obfuscate again the boundaries defining purity, authenticity, and legitimacy.

Because of the central place that congregational worship holds in Islam, in contradistinction to Hinduism (even in its diasporic, "homogenized" form in the Caribbean [van der Veer and Vertovec 1991; Prorock 1988]), the relationship between imams/maulanas and their jamaats tends to be couched in terms of function activities as much as in terms of "a prayers" held within an single household. Similar to Hindus, however, religious and social services that the imam (or maulana) may provide are negotiated with regard to territory and, consequently, rewards--as material gain and renown, and, as a consequence, influence. As one imam stated,

> We have a rule: ASJA imam could operate anywhere in Trinidad and Tobago. But we don't do it so. We stick to our own district. But if you invite me in a next [another] jamaat, I will come. But you must ask your imam permission and invite he [too].

Theoretically, an imam or other religious specialist does not require compensation for their services to individuals and households; no imam with whom I spoke stated that he expected any--except, if they are ASJA-affiliated, for marriage certification at weddings. Not having a comparable recompense like dakshina or seedha, as a gesture of appreciation and support, after "a prayers" Muslims tend to give the presiding imam(s) cash, "howsoever you could afford," as virtually everyone whom I asked explained. No

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different from Hindus, however, jamaat members are in general sanguine about offering up honoraria, and it is my impression that imams probably garner not less than TT$50.00, and perhaps as much as three or four times that amount, for an individual function, depending on its importance, duration, and an imam's particular role in it, as well as the financial ability of the hosts and amount contributed by family and neighbors.

Aside from material gain, however, the more abstract dimension of reward conveyed by an imam's popularity reflects the degree of his demand within and across jamaats. Demand, in turn, is interpreted in terms of the esteem assumed to be felt for a given imam by the wider community and, implicitly, it authorizes its deservedness on the part of the imam. This symbolic capital is potentially powerful, as it may translate into an enhanced leadership role in the jamaats of the region, and perhaps ascension through the local or national offices of the religio-cultural association with whom the imam is affiliated (most often ASJA). Yet even if amplified authority in the form of leadership is not sought (and, indeed, most, if not all, imams would be reticent to claim that goal, as I showed above in my discussion of the rhetoric of humility among imams [as among pandits]), intensified authority in the form of reputed erudition, ethics, and moral fortitude is a highly desirable possession--never, however (as might be

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expected), explicitly strived for as an end in itself, but as a means ultimately toward the promulgation of Islam. While there is concern among imams, maulanas and other religious leaders to not be competitive with each other in terms of the degree of their demand in the various localities, or the imposition of one's influence to the detriment of peers, this Islamic canon of egalitarianism, as it would be understood by community Muslims, is an ideal. Reaching the goals of religious axioms is complicated by the nature of daily, mundane interaction--the quotidian in this case having five generations of historical variation with which to contend. At odds with the ideal is the reality of an on-going tension between egalitarian maxims and the quiescent florescence of various hierarchies: for example, among competing interpretations of certain Islamic practices, between hajjis (men)/hajjins (women) and those who have not made the pilgrimage to Mecca, and between middle-class and grass-roots Muslims, as well as among the religious leadership.

Furthermore, another dimension to the issue of an imam's potential degree of authority is in the subtle and sometimes conspicuous influence exercised over jamaat members vis-a-vis individual piety; that is, its public demonstration through masjid attendance. The simplest equation would be: the larger the attendance at prayer time, and especially jumma (Friday mid-day prayers), the greater

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the implication that the imam is successful and effective. As one person put it, "a imam go have more influence if he stay with he own jamaat." However, the mechanics of this are more intricate than merely exerting the force of one's presence among one's constituency. What is also at stake is the reputation of each community resident (and therefore, by definition, jamaat member), and their assessment by their peers. As I will demonstrate momentarily (and particularly with respect to my discussion of generational tensions), peer review regarding judgements about a person's character, how they "move [behave] with people," avoidance of comess, and "living good with people" play a significant role in the ways that individuals express piety and the sincerity of their intentions, as these get evaluated in juxtaposition to those other aspects of character. Representing in composite the similar comments of a group discussion I heard, the following quote is apt illustration of these processes.

> It shouldn't have imams going to different jamaats to serve the people. For instance, a person could never go to masjid, but then have a once for the year prayers. The imam from they own jamaat would know [about this] and they [person] going to feel <u>shame</u>. And especially so if he [imam] say no. But if they get a imam from a next jamaat, well, they not encouraged to be more careful about going to masjid.

While it is highly unlikely that any imam would deny a request of this nature, it is possible that he might admonish the person about sporadic masjid attendance and, hence, dereliction of religious duty and its negative repercussions. Shame is a culturally pervasive sentiment in

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Trinidadian culture, irrespective of ethnic or class group, and while perhaps familiar, it is something to be negotiated, when not avoided. A peripatetic imam, the quotation points out, would not be in a position to manage the consciences of jamaat members. Interestingly, this stands in contrast to the first quarter of the 20th century, when this same effort was enabled largely through an imam's (or pandit's) successful mobility around the sugar estates.

If an etiquette exists that negotiates carefully the activities of imams within and across jamaats, and their relationships with their constituencies as well as with each other, lay Muslims may traverse a locality frequently as they attend various ritual functions and hear different officiating imams--and thereby demonstrating while they do so their sincerity and piety. As one person put it,

> Now people go by everybody [imams, maulanas]. People know how they need more education. The more you learn, the more you understand. You learn better when you hear something more than once. And these people [religious leaders], I believe, say the same thing, just only in a different way. To learn, you must get out and move around to different jamaats. You can't stay in one place. You must go to different functions, and so people does learn from each other.

Functions are windows into analysis of the organizing metaphors (tropes) of purity and piety, through the definition and significance of "correct" religious knowledge, "authentic" cultural heritage, and the diffraction of sacred and profane that comprise the most obviously discursive aspect of functions: khutbas and other

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formal addresses of a similar pedagogical and advisory nature. As it was articulated during one function I attended, the jamaat president assured us that, "in a gathering like this, with educated people, we learn a lot." Following him, the imam exhorted, as part of his khutba,

> ...Recitation of the Holy Quran must be read sincerely...When you offer salaat, it must be sincere and you must concentrate...Islam means submission to Allah. And namaaz is the symbol of submission. When we go right down [in prayer], it means we completely surrender. When we don't, it is tom-foolery, a hypocracy....The Prophet tells us to seek knowledge from the cradle to the grave. Nobody finishes learning.

an illustration: the haqiqa

Functions refer simultaneously to universal sacred events or periods according to the Islamic calendar and to the particular personal commemorations of individuals. In the field I attended many occasions of both genres; below I give a description of one kind of function that was fairly common during my fieldwork, the haqiqa. I will describe two instances of the haqiqa. My descriptions are not intended to suggest the totality of religious practices among Indo-Trinidadian Muslims, but they do represent a general portrait of Muslim functions as these are organized among Indo-Trinidadians; they are also an example of a specific type of Islamic observance. Both kinds of representation, iconic and distinctive, are useful in contextualizing the religious discourse and debate that encompass functions.

Over thirty years ago, when the most recent detailed

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ethnographic study of Indo-Trinidadian Muslims was undertaken, R.J. Smith (1963) observed that the haqiqa "...rarely takes place in modern Trinidad" (1963:84). More specifically, he states that "no Hakika ceremony took place in [fieldsite] during one year, 1957-58, nor was [he] able to learn of such Muslim observances in other areas in the island" (Ibid:84, fn.2). However, during the period of my own fieldwork, if a function were being sponsored by a household in "south," it would not be surprising to find a haqiqa as one of its purposes. A possible reason for this was suggested by one informant, who speculated that,

> Some of the people having a function who are holding [killing] a couple of goats anyway, say, 'why not do a haqiqa one time [simultaneously]'? So you get a dual function. Your function is a thanksgiving, and a haqiqa for a couple of your kids. A lot of people have been doing it like this over the past couple of years.

Another possible reason for the increasing frequency of this function is economic: as upward mobility, and especially the oil boom, allowed for greater cash accumulation, expenditures on ritual and other kinds of conspicuous consumption expanded.[10] Proliferation of ritual and other kinds of religious activity, however, is not mechanically stimulated by a greater availability of funds. What also must be considered are the religio-cultural associations (particularly ASJA) and their gradually augmented authority, particularly by the second quarter of the century, as

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[10]For a similar point about Hindus, see Vertovec 1992.

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arbiters and sponsors of religious practice. Equally influential is the mutually reinforcing relationship between (1) the valorization of particular kinds of knowledge and the search for authenticity among Muslims and (2) the means by which these are expressed: ritual functions. In other words, it seems likely that as new searches for religious meaning and information took hold over the decades among the "practical" (practicing) community of Muslims, functions, as loci of these concerns, would burgeon. A friend of mine explained, "people are hearing more about it [haqiqa] through lectures." "People get smarter now," her sister added.

> According to an imam I spoke with, a haqiqa is a
>
> > form of assurance that a child will be blessed with God and live a life in consonance with God's teachings, like insurance for a vehicle. Like a life, you can't drive any old which way, but you can insure for the better.

The metaphor he used is apt, as it conveys the symbol of commitment that a haqiqa is meant to represent. Often occurring as part of the life-cycle changes that people undergo as they decide to become more demonstrably pious in their lifestyle (see below), haqiqas are sponsored by adults for themselves as much as, or moreso than, the ideal of undertaking them for infants. However, one informant felt that "nowadays" most haqiqas in Trinidad are not done in infancy because most parents cannot afford the goat (and multiple times, for each child): "it's done when the child

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gets on his own, he has his own done."

The two haqiqas I use as illustration here were sponsored, respectively, by the families of a twenty-three year old woman, Parveen, and Jasmine, a woman in her late forties.[11] Both said they had simply decided it was time. I have chosen these examples because although they were both household-based functions, they were of different magnitude, one being small, private, and brief; the other being ambitious, inter-jamaat, and the better part of the afternoon. This difference is significant in that the latter function went beyond its immediate purpose and assumed the role of pedagogical forum--as virtually all large-scale, inter-jamaat functions ultimately do.

Present at Parveen's haqiqa were her mother, her mother's sister, the imam (her mother's sister's husband), her mother-in-law (the imam's sister), her father-in-law, one grandson of the imam, her friend (a neighbor), and myself. In the outside area behind the house, all of us remained to one side as Parveen stood by the goat and symbolically held the sacrificial knife to its throat while the imam uttered the requisite prayers in Arabic. Then she moved away, handing the knife to two men who were present to carry out the act, and as the imam continued to pray audibly, the animal was sacrificed. Throughout, the imam's wife splashed buckets of water over the area to keep it

[11]These names are pseudonyms.

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clean. The goat's blood was drained into a shallow channel cut through the concrete of the enclosed space; then it was cut up into equal thirds to be distributed to the household, the extended family, and the poor ("only for the really needy, who you know!," one of the participants reproved). During the carving the imam again took Parveen to one side and she repeated after him in English a prayer of self-dedication and submission to the Almighty. The goat's liver was cooked for the niaz and everyone present ate a piece of it. Except for a few participants continuing to divide the portion of meat designated for the needy into one pound heaps and putting these into small plastic bags for immediate distribution by Parveen, the function was complete.

Invited to "a prayers" for Jasmine, I did not learn that a large part of its objective was a haqiqa for her until after I arrived. Jamila's husband explained that they were combining their usual annual prayer function with her personal, "once-in-a-lifetime" dedication. There were approximately 150 people in attendance; most were women, and among these, several were Hindu, many of whom were neighbors (rather than family).[12] Interestingly, in this "secure"

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[12]That they were Hindu was evident in the way that it usually is: from their holding back from engaging in the function's specific rites, such as prayer, singing qaseedas, and the like (though remaining attentive, and, not surprisingly, particularly to the lesson of the khutba). Their being Hindu is also evident among women over about age fifty, since these women almost always have at least one

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grass-roots household, most of the women were attired in fancier versions of Western dress, though with orhnis. Even as the central (lay) figure of the ritual, Jamila wore a rather plain, standard Western-style dress--though again with orhni. My point here is that had this been a masjid-based function, or an inter-jamaat function, the vast majority of women would have attended in shalwar, and many with hijab rather than orhni (full head covering, associated with "correct," non-Indian Islamic traditions).[13] What this indicates is the more self-conscious nature of large-scale functions and the extra effort participants may make to demonstrate piety and sincerity.

A more ambitious production than Parveen's, the organization of this household-based function followed closely the large-scale, masjid-based affairs in its program and organization.[14] Around a table at the front of the area sat six men, including the imam and Jasmine's husband (as one of the hosts of the function). On the table are

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goadna, or purifying tatoo, on their arm(s) or hand(s). To my knowledge, no Muslim women of any age ever have goadnas--unless, of course, they later "married in Muslim," being formerly Hindu.

[13]In the functions sponsored by elite (upper class) jamaats in the "north," some women wear saris. Saris are, however, not the rule, and were very unusual in Muslim functions in "south." The very few saris I saw tended to be at Hindu functions, worn by Hindu women.

[14]If the event is large enough, printed programs are passed out among the assembly. Hindus may also do this if their function is intended to be grand.

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flowers, a pitcher of water and glasses, and incense sticks (lobhan) burning in a small vase.

First on the program, the imam prayed aloud in Arabic, then offered an English translation. This consisted of a formal greeting to the gathering, an explanation for the occasion, and "calling the name of the Lord before proceeding." Next was the opening dua; following this, the assembly engaged in a collective reading of suras, in booklet form, from the Quran (often the last ten chapters) for fifteen minutes. Before initiating this, the imam alerted us that after the group reading was complete, "we will go to a second part of the program. With the limited knowledge that I have I will try to discuss with you the present day living." During this exercise, the imam read his passages into a microphone; some at the table read silently, though with the requisite moving of the lips; others sat with hands on their laps and eyes downcast, contemplative.

Next commenced the singing of qaseedas. Each one is led by a different volunteer, male or female, in the gathering, who, subsequent to the rendition, reads out the standardized "meaning" from the qaseeda booklet. During the first qaseeda, Jasmine's adolescent daughter brought out a bowl of sirni and placed it on the table. In all, four qaseedas were sung. At this point, the imam stood and began to address the gathering:

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> All praise is due to God. My beloved brothers, sisters, friends [non-Muslims?], children. May the blessings of the Almighty be showered on us all. We have been granted permission by the Lord to gather here with [Jasmine and her husband] to celebrate the Lord and shower blessings on his Prophet, peace be upon him.

The imam proceeded with his sermon on "present day living," focusing on maintaining faith and vigilance in a crime- and comess-ridden world. As a narrative strategy familiar in these kinds of addresses, the imam then introduced a parable to illustrate his message: "I will now go into a short story, not the details, but the main part of Joseph [Joseph and His Brothers]." After giving the basics of the tale, the imam emphasized that Joseph did not punish

> his brothers and that, that is the type of love and strength he had, and that we need in order to live...We need to have love and respect for the other religious organizations in the world. Instead of love today, we have ministers preaching hate. I listened to a [evangelical] crusade the other day...I heard in this crusade that the people shouldn't go to any <u>other</u> religious function, and if they do, they shouldn't eat the <u>food</u>! What kind of religion is this?...

The imam ended by entreating the assembly to "just put one per cent into practice and the 99 per cent will come. Then you will be on the ship to a righteous path."

Last on the program, we stood for the tazeem, then performed the closing dua. Finally, the imam reminded us to partake of the food that "God had blessed this family with." Apparently not necessary for public viewing, the haqiqa for Jamila took place at some point during this function, unbeknownst to me or to those whom I asked.

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Quotidian Dimensions of Piety and Practice

In the effort to encourage jamaat members and wider community residents to consistently attend and sponsor functions, hosts as well as imams and maulanas often remind participants of the reasons it is imperative to frequent functions. This is not because participants are unaware of why they have come; it is, rather, a rhetorical device that serves to strengthen the gemeinschaft, the sense of community, among local Muslims, both at that particular moment and, it is hoped, into the future. What makes these reminders interesting is that this development of bonds of community is acknowledged to be embedded in the social relations of daily interaction as much as in the inspiration of piety. Two examples from functions I attended are illustrative: the order in which the reasons to be present at these functions was given suggests the recognition that, as ritual, functions are not symbolically removed from the mundane but intimately a part of, and even dependent on it. First, at one annual household prayers (1991), the jamaat/masjid president gave the opening address, which included the statement, "we have all attended today in order to honor a dear neighbor's invitation, to honor Allah, and to gain knowledge." Second, at a meeraj commemoration (1989), an honored guest invited to give an address, asked rhetorically, "what is the purpose of this function today? To socialize in Islamic society and atmosphere (Carnival is

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not for us at all!), to get education, and to be spiritual."

Certainly, if asked directly, most Muslims here would state that honoring Allah and the Prophet Muhammad are the principle purpose of functions. But it is precisely this accepted wisdom that allows the invocation of the quotidian as an additional, integral dimension of functions. Why this dimension is significant is because it points to the ways Islam and "being Muslim," through ritual, is woven into the fabric of everyday life. This is apparent in several, related ways among jamaats. First, a valued aspect of functions, honoring neighbors' invitations and socializing in Islamic society--"living good with people"--are seen to be vital. Thus, the concept of edification is broadened to include more than just competence in terms of familiarity with laws or scripture, Arabic script, undertaking correctly various ritual practices (such as "making wuzu," or ablutions), or related textually-based knowledge. It also encompasses being informed about "brothers and sisters in Islam." Being informed about persons--neighbors, acquaintances, friends, extended family--among jamaats is being able to <u>apply</u> one's religious ideals to actual situations, inasmuch as a pious person may demonstrate sincerity by being concerned for the spiritual as well as social welfare of jamaat brethren--where spiritual and social are ambiguously distinguished.

For example, waiting for all of the women to arrive at

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one of my neighborhood's ladies group meetings one evening, a friend asked me why I had not "come to look for" (visit) her, as she had missed two jummas in a row, having had "the virus." I told her that I had not known of her absence because I had also not been there. Her comment reminded me of what the wife of an imam had told me some time before, that a woman would be able to hear about the distress of another woman in the mosque and be able to help her. Remaining at home, she indicated, isolates people from each other such that cooperation and assistance can be hindered. Congregational worship, such as that which occurs during jumma and other ritual functions, is a setting where women and men see others they might not see regularly in the relatively circumscribed area of their own neighborhoods; if they do not see each other, this is a time to inquire as to why and, if the reason merits, offer assistance--at the least in the form of a visit. Frequent social calls are not a usual part of neighborhood interaction. This is because some household members (women as well as men) are away at work, and those remaining are also preoccupied with their daily labors. While visiting constitutes a large part of recreation among communities in "south," it is usually done after routine chores are finished or at times when there is not much to be done (e.g., on Sundays). Moreover, while men may travel some distance, women tend to confine casual visiting to the radius of a few "traces" (paths) contiguous

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with their own. Applicable to both Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians, moral imperatives require that women not appear to be aimless, idle, or out of the range of scrutiny, lest they imply they are "fast," in this context, not virtuous--in terms of both sexuality and the domestic preoccupations that help define femininity (such as child care).

However, this application of piety, in the form of function attendance, to social responsibility for one's peers is problematic. Concern for the welfare of jamaat members must not be interpreted by them as motivated by a desire to "dig people business" (inappropriately inquisitive) or being "makocious." Protecting privacy is a vigorous endeavor made by residents of these small, intimately intertwined communities; not unexpectedly, "spreading news" (gossiping) is as spirited an activity. Inquiring into someone's personal, and perhaps private affairs--in the effort to keep apprised of fluctuating fortunes--may jeopardize "living good with people," as too much knowledge, or that of the wrong kind, can lead to "comess and confusion" and attempting to be "sincere" ultimately may be read as "a hypocracy." For this reason one of my jamaat friends confided to me her feelings of concern about not "knowing the jamaat ladies better" and thus perhaps not being able to be as good a "Muslim sister."

Another important quotidian dimension of functions is

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that knowledge that comes with function (and masjid) attendance is conveyed through the shared ideas and observed actions of peers. There is the feeling among "practical" (practicing) Muslims that an important part of the revitalizing and advisory dimension of functions comes through exposure to other people and their knowledge in addition to the formal messages of khutbas and lectures. Indirectly acknowledging the post-War transformations in household organization among Indo-Trinidadians, one person's comment to me counseling against blindly following religious traditions linked the proliferation of nuclear family households to religious practice.[15] She said,

> Just because you see your parents doing it, maybe you don't know why or what it is...You can't just stay home again [anymore]. You have to go out and look for it [knowledge about correct practices]. Who going to teach you [at] home? Long time, everyone in the family would stay as one, under one roof or yard. But now, as soon as the children married, they gone. So how they going to learn? My children will only know what they see me doing, not nobody else [therefore, they need to supplement what they learn at home].

Here, the reduction of household members seems to logically necessitate "going all about and see what to do," as another woman put it. Nuclear family households in "south" are, I believe, more common among the middle class, and, to some extent, among the secure working class, than among the precarious working class. However, the dispersal of children as they marry, due in part to patrilocality,

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[15]See Nevadomsky (1983, 1985) for a discussion of changes in family and household forms among Indo-Trinidadians.

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partible inheritance, and past oil boom opportunities for upward mobility, can create the diffusion of residents from one household to other residences. When multiple generations no longer "stay as one," sources of family instruction seem to diminish, or at least be less consistently interacted with, and thus knowledge, in the form of correct religious instruction, becomes something to be sought from extra-domestic agents.

However, who and what constitutes appropriate agents of tutelage can become problematic when the correctness of religious knowledge is in question. For example, at a ladies' group meeting one evening, a conversation between two women addresses this:

> Woman #1: Even at my age we can still learn, as people will laugh at us in the masjid and say, 'she is so old and hasn't learned the right thing'?!
>
> Woman #2: Sometimes you have to draw a reference to clear things [up]. Say you come and meet me at the mosque and you follow me [in a certain practice], but I doing the wrong thing. But since there are so many books to tell us the right thing, is time we find out the right way and do it, and not just follow each other since we don't know who of us knows right...Nowadays, it have sheiks, maulanas, and all, to learn from.

Within their comments are leitmotifs that have become all but rhetorical in the religious discourse of Indo-Trinidadian Muslims (as among Indo-Trinidadian Hindus). Preoccupation with sources of authority (historical and contemporary, textual and oral), with the attendant tension among generations seen to represent different foundations of knowledge, and with the potential indignity of being

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incorrect are all distilled in this brief exchange. As I have attempted to show in the foregoing, among jamaats these issues are dealt with in two mutually constituting ways. As Muslims strive toward piety, knowledge, and a demarcated sacred space in their involvement with functions, the spiritual fulfillments of devotional worship articulate with the routine in "living good with people."

Hierarchy and Stratification

Essentially, the stimulus giving rise to the salience of "living good with people"--sincerity, hypocracy, and minimal comess--is the daily negotiation of egalitarian and hierarchical social relations. Functions are subject as well to these principles as they are expressed in the way a function is conducted. On the one hand, it is highly preferable for a function to be as effective as possible, in terms of teaching and inspiring, and this is in part accomplished ideally through being accessible to large numbers of people across jamaats and featuring more than one speaker or presentation. But piety takes on a dual valence when elaboration can be interpreted as "breaking style," or showing off in a boastful and self-serving manner. Humility and zeal both shape the way piety, in functions, is expressed; not necessarily complementary, both also have the potential to be most pronounced.

Whereas fervor can be perceived as overzealousness that reveals an inappropriate "fanaticism" (which I discuss

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below), fervor also has the capacity to be understood as possibly jeopardizing a pure piety by being too public and, in turn, too much like a performance--thus crossing the symbolic boundary from sacred to profane. What could be seen as an exhibition is felt to be more about breaking style than about devotional worship; and elaborate performances are thought by some Muslims to reflect cultural, and thus not religiously legitimate, "innovations" from non-Islamic cultural heritages and historical contexts.

However, the reality of community status differentials can be commented on without necessary allusion to functions: two examples come from a function I attended. In the first, the imam repeated twice during his khutba the admonishment that, "no prestige person will be able to help us on Judgement Day." In the second, the maulana urged,

> Unless we are educated and taught how to educated others, we are lost in a dark world. We must save ourselves from corrupted doctrines coming into our religion and unnecessary arguments among ourselves. As the Prophet says, 'knowledge isn't compulsory, but to <u>seek</u> knowledge is compulsory'...[However,] Shaitan [Satan] would not bow to Adam because he feel he too knowledgeable and too pious. So we must not let our knowledge make us feel too big and too proud.

The issues of innovation and fanaticism in religious discourse among Muslims tend to be relegated to a rarified realm of religious matters that are distinguished from commonplace cultural affairs. Yet the problem of negotiating hierarchical tendencies that may surface in the process of undertaking large-scale functions (whether household-

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or masjid-based) is firmly embedded in the day to day interactions among community residents. One aspect of this problem became apparent after a haqiqa given by neighbors in their home. Somewhat anxious, the wife asserted, "I wanted a prayers that would be really nice. This is why I invite [two religious leaders] to lecture, to spread the message of Islam. But if you look at how we [family] did it, it came [seemed] like a show. So I asked [maulana] if I was doing the right thing, and he say, yes, it's the intention that is important." This woman's trepidation, not uncommon, about the family's function appearing like "a show" reflects two related issues: that she and her household would seem to be breaking style--particularly objectionable in a religious context, and that their function could forfeit some of its spiritual quality (and hence benefit) through becoming akin to an exhibition.[16] Indeed, not only lay persons are sensitive to this issue. At the end of a different function, the imam indicated that he had made a sufficient

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[16]In the retrospective accounts of older heads, a common sub-text emerges regarding the interpretation of changes in the form and content of functions. The elderly mother of a local religious leader echoes the equivocal way in which the size of functions is perceived: "Long time, things only done the Muslim [the one correct] way...The heads [elder men] gathered, exchanged ideas, [they were] more together. Now melad un-nabi is in a big way, different, a <u>big</u> function, a big lecture. But long time there was only a few people. But they keep their religion close." What is evinced here is that "big" events are symbolic of other processes of change that are themselves viewed not entirely sanguinely: expanded possibilities for upward mobility, altered criteria for prestige, new emphases on intellectual expertise.

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contribution to the event in his statement, "what I give you was like a big function, and sometimes people want the big things without always knowing the little things."

The concern to sponsor functions with "pure"--i.e., unselfish--intentions for an impressive and successful event helps to counter any improper methods or desires on the part of hosts (unconscious or otherwise), as well as any impressions on the part of participants that might construe the outcome of the function as "a hypocracy," and thus contrary to sincere piety. As I have indicated in previous chapters, the notion of hypocracy is a resonant one among Indo-Trinidadians, particularly as it applies to being sincere, or not, about religious piety. Therefore, reflecting Islam's emphasis on the nature of intentions as well as locally "living good with people," individuals also negotiate "hypocracy" outside of function contexts, with respect to relations of hierarchy and egalitarianism and the inter-personal assessments people make of each other's behavior and hence character.

One of the situations in which this is most apparent is in the demonstration of piety through attire. Most germane to women--because men's apparel signaling religious conviction applies primarily to the topi (skull cap)--clothing, notably shalwar and hijab, serves as visible demonstration to the world that a woman is especially

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observant.[17] An important reason "correct" attire (even if meaning only very demure Westernized dress) is considered especially a sacrifice is because it makes it somewhat more difficult to be attractive and fashionable--goals that have great value in Trinidadian society, even though it is also more or less acknowledged that fashion and attractiveness can be a reflection of Western corruptions (impurity, defilement). When a friend was explaining to me about the precautions women must take against being "interfered with" by djins, I asked her why she herself does not "dress properly" or on a regular basis "cover [her] head outside." She explained,

> I guess I am not ready in life to take that on. You just reach a point in your life when you feel ready. You know it is wrong [to not dress properly] but you just figure, 'maybe they [djins] would not catch me'. Though they are around, you does feel they might not get you sometimes. Sometimes you does fear more what you can <u>see</u>.

Although the context of this remark was a conversation about the power of the extra-natural world, my friend indicated here that other priorities in her life, even if regretfully, prevented her <u>at this time</u> from readiness "to take that on." Since I knew her well, I was aware that a significant part of this reticence had to do with appearance. Women often

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[17]This also can apply to Hindus. One Hindu informant told me that while he was growing up in the 1960s "south," his mother "always wore a sari. When she was at home she wore a duster [shift], but outside she only preferred saris. For that, people always say she was very religious, and give her more respect for that."

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vacillate for years with various degrees of experimenting with presentation of self, usually attaining consistency later in the life cycle (see below) or after they return as hajjins from pilgrimage to Mecca.

Often more important than fashion challenges, however, are the potential critical assessments from the community that bring demonstrations of pious intention into suspicion. One may be charged with "breakin' style" with particular garments, clearly contrary to Islamic axioms. Or one's behavior, the way one "moves," may be seen as not warranting such claims to religious legitimacy. I once asked one of my acquaintances why she did not wear a hijab. She said that wearing the hijab would, for her, be "hypocritical" because she could not pray the requisite five times a day called for in Islam, because of her job. "People might ridicule" her, "say[ing] that [she] is pretending." When she "makes hajj," she said, she "will change [her] whole wardrobe, so [she] won't be a hypocrite." She felt that she could change her lifestyle after hajj because at that point she "would not be working" outside the home. The idea is that lacking credibility and attempting to express it in spite of inauthentic claims gives undesirable weight to hierarchical distinctions among individuals.

In addition to the reflexive dimensions of hierarchy, there is an empirical, if rough correlation between class configuration and jamaat. Although jamaats are by no means

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homogeneous, the better off economically each family and household is within a particular jamaat, the higher the status, generally speaking, that jamaat will be. One person once made a passing comment to me that the San Fernando jamaat is one with people "who have two, three cars, who have sons in big jobs...," while "it [also] have poor jamaats like we own." These distinctions are partially offset by the egalitarian precept in Islam regarding congregational assembly, such as when one imam's wife remarked, "and in the masjid, nobody can tell the difference. If a rich one comes in late, he can take a back seat." Yet, during functions where Quranic reading is central, for example, the head table seats the imam, maulana (if present), older head men, and any male honored guests (sometimes local hajjis, occasionally imams from other jamaats). Often the older heads and honored guests have higher community status <u>partly</u> through wealth. Moreover, jamaats with greater resources are able to deploy them in more, and diverse ways, such as in sponsoring functions with varying degrees of visibility and pomp.

If not a categorical rule, household functions in grass-roots (precarious and some secure working class) jamaats tend to be additionally identifiable through participants' behavior that can be said to be outside the realm of strictly "ritual" activity. For example, household members and guests are in many instances less inclined to be

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concerned with prompt attendance; people may take a seat anywhere from thirty minutes after the service begins to a few minutes before it finishes. Mostly people are on time, or they try to be; yet other factors are also suggestive. In these functions, for instance, there is often a greater number of women who do not wear shalwar to the function, but wear (nice) street clothes with their orhnis.[18] Fewer men wear topis (skull caps) and rarely don the loose pants and long tunics that Pakistani men wear, and that can be more frequently (though not often) seen among men at functions in middle-class jamaats. Furthermore, the program will likely be less formalized and lengthy--often only the imam provides his services, without the additional presentations of others. In middle-class jamaat/ household functions there is usually more strict regard for these kinds of unspoken as well as spoken rules.

This is due, in part, to the more common presence at these functions of religious and community leaders or other higher status guests--many of whom represent one of the religio-cultural associations (generally ASJA), which in itself is a formalizing factor. Also, it is possible that the hierarchical distinction is underscored symbolically

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[18]Shalwar are what Trinidadians call the loose pants and long tunic worn by women in India and Pakistan (among other places), who call them shalwar chemise. The veil, or orhni, is also worn by Indo-Trinidadian Hindu and Muslim women, though currently more as a ritual garment than daily dress. The important exception to this pattern is that older head women virtually always wear orhnis when in public.

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because grass-roots functions tend to have local (neighborhood) older head imams officiating (at least for routine devotional events), who are associated both in real and metaphorical terms with the original, jheel ("lagoon") populations, tied as they are by a series of pumpkin vine or cooperative relationships to other residents and representing a pedagogy that pivots on life experience rather than on tutoring. Conversely, the formally educated younger imams, along with the small but growing number of local maulanas, often officiate or make appearances as honored guests at middle-class or upwardly mobile households or jamaats, insinuating a higher status.

One person observed that these more affluent jamaats (of which there are not many in "south") "hardly come" to the functions of other jamaats. This resonates with the broader cultural pattern among Indo-Trinidadians (and in some cases Afro-Trinidadians, as well) where there is often an implicit asymmetry between hosts and guests: those who visit tend to be in a subordinate position vis-a-vis who gets visited (though the significance of this asymmetry is not equal in every situation). So while the proclivity toward hierarchy in this particular form is far from condoned, it is, nevertheless, tacitly acknowledged as an inclination that may affect the presentation and perception of functions.

The generally unspoken power of everyday hierarchical

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relations to influence the way functions are presented and perceived can become more overtly pronounced when joined with distinct, but related concerns among Muslims about tradition, authenticity, and innovation. This was brought home to me in a critique made by a person often referred to as "Wahabi" by other Muslims (though not openly). A "Wahabi" is a proponent of the view among some Trinidadian Muslims (Afro as well as Indo) that certain aspects of Islam are inappropriately influenced by traditions not emanating from sacred texts or the practices and edicts of the Prophet Mohammed, and thus transform in an illegitimate way "correct" method and, by extension, meaning.[19] This person explained,

> Islam got away from the slaves in Africa. But the indentured slaves [Indians] tried to keep it, with these little functions. But people today keep up the functions and leave off the rest...People believe in too much functions. The Quran tells us, 'Do not forget the needy', and in functions you only see the strong and wealthy ones. They are the people that are the most invited in functions. Some sort of recognition of high, big personalities.

Regardless of whatever other renovations they might claim as being needed, most Indo-Trinidadian Muslims are not of the opinion that there are "too much functions." What is

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[19]According to Lansine (1974), "The Wahhabiyya,...derives from the name of Muhammad Ibn Abd-al-Wahab, a religious leader born in AD 1703 in Ayaina in the Najd Province, Central Arabia" (1974:3). He and his associates were concerned with the "religious and moral laxity of the Central Arabian people" (Ibid:3), and circa 1744 they engaged in a "revivalist campaign" to return to the "purity of Islam" (Ibid: 4-5; cf. Al-Azmeh 1993:104ff; Hodgson 1974:152).

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important here, however, is that this stance is not an idiosyncracy on the part of the speaker, but a critique of status thought to be inimical to authentic Islam: the decrying of preferential treatment for the "strong," "wealthy," "high," and "big" in ritual events.

But the alleged "Wahabi" narrative above also contains other common critiques; for example, the idea that people "keep up the functions and leave off the rest" suggests that they sacrifice meaning for display, interpretation for rote. The latter concern takes on a variety of expressions in local religious discourse (which I address below).

The meanings that I have suggested these functions possess, however, reflect the grass-roots ("secure" and "precarious" working class) ethos of the communities of "south" and the ways that local residents interpret their experience. The importance of class histories also can be conveyed from a different sector, that of the urban elite of "north." A well educated, young Indo-Trinidadian Muslim man from an upper class family in an exclusive ("posh") neighborhood of Port of Spain, gave his explanation for observing "Islamic rituals"--for him, a necessary part of being a Muslim in Trinidad.

> It's a question of the assumption that Western scientism and rationalism and secularism is the only valid form of human organization and ideas and ways to run things. I've started to question why I accept this mode of behavior, Western capitalist ideas, as better than others. I'm not <u>sure</u> <u>which</u> basic value system is good. We shouldn't necessarily accept one hegemonic value system. I feel the ritual is good. One searches

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> for a cosmology, something bigger than science, and pondering life. This combination of ritual, religion, values, and community is important for that.

In his narrative, this speaker appears to be contemplating from afar, a philosophical disquisition more than, perhaps, a stance reflecting a personal history of rituals as conventional events enmeshed with other aspects of reciprocal and social relations. The necessary reciprocity of grass-roots living, past and present, imbues, I think, a distinct meaning to the significance of functions since grass-roots communities have fewer symbolic means of attaining "purity"--keeping out various forms of defilement--by virtue of the vicissitudes of their life constraints.

Tradition and Meaning

The issues of correctness, authenticity, and heritage are manifest within functions when Muslims show concern about the type and method of ritual practices and theie meaning. As with Hindus (Chapter Seven), even when there is consensus as to the appropriate rites or activities, Muslims also state that these not be conducted by rote or in a mechanical fashion. At a wedding I attended, two friends commented approvingly,

> You must talk proper, make the sermon meaningful. You have so many educated people here. You must take time to explain it all. And make it solemn. You shouldn't do it just as a ritual. You should make it meaningful.

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In another conversation, an influential hajji's comments first suggested the centrality and multivocality that "meaning"--by way of functions--possesses for Indo-Trinidadian Muslims:

> Islam is a complete way of life, not of rituals, like Christianity and Hinduism. Going to church just on a Sunday, or the pandit putting all these little things together here and there [on the bedi, or altar], these are just done by the people without thinking. Where is the meaning? Where is the practice? Haqiqa, qurbani, these are not rituals. They are part of the complete way of life of Islam.

As community residents invoke the concept of "meaning" in reflecting on the nature of religious practice and an individual's attitude in undertaking rituals, the concept of "meaning" is reified and it becomes a multidimensional symbol. In other words, in local usage "meaning" encompasses distinct referents; in doing so, it links these referents together into what is familiar discourse on religion, and its construction within and relationship to other domains of experience. For example, the following two quotations are good illustrations. At the household-based function for a youngster's birthday (a birthday party in lieu of the secular alternative), the jamaat president (the child's father's brother) addressed the small group gathered in the living room:

> Today's khutba was a very opportune one, touching on many aspects of our religion. When he quoted so extensively [from the Quran] and explained the Arabic words, he put so much meaning into our din, the way we should follow, I felt [realized] I knew so little about our religion. It was a real treat today, and instilled in us some sort of commitment. I think that's why we

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> have all come out today to show our sincerity. And that is my topic that I will talk about now: to be sincere.

After this inspirational address, the imam spoke again:

> Is only when we get together like this we can get the message. Our weakness is knowledge, knowledge of Islam, and how to run our lives. Today a person talks [in order] to use you with iklas--in Arabic, ulterior motives. Trying to trick you. And it is only by practice you can perfect your salaat.

In the first speaker's comment, "meaning" is treated as a desirable consequence of explication, but textual recitation and interpretation not only aid in knowing better one's religion, they are also instrumental in encouraging piety--"commitment," "sincerity." In the second comment, "meaning" addresses the leitmotif of being "fooled"; here, worldly knowledge (not succumbing to being tricked) and religious knowledge (perfecting salaat) enhance each other. Through group edification--"get together like this"--such as that which occurs during functions, meaning ameliorates gaps, slippages that are threatening in both sacred and secular terms.

The quest for meaning may be heightened for individuals as they comprehend particularly religiously charged moments in the Islamic calendar. For example, in explaining what Ramadan month is about, my friend Rasheeda said that it is a time when she "always learn something new, whether it is a sura, a lesson, or whatsoever." She "soaks up the lectures" given during this period's numerous functions and tries to take time out everyday to read; her bed is always "covered

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with books the whole month." This is a time, she says, of much better concentration for her; at other times "her head is so distracted with so much a this and that." During these weeks, however, she can "really learn something for the month." Note the importance of acquiring knowledge as pious action in addition to the requisite acts of fasting and prayer. Piety involves searching for additional knowledge, which provides greater command over the meaning of practice.

I have argued that functions are one means for communities to control perceived transgressions of the sacred. However, the grass-roots communities of "south" are not homogeneous. Thus, there is presently no unanimity regarding the nature of that control: what constitutes "correct," what importance "tradition" has, and, therefore, how "Islamic" boundaries should be drawn.

Discourses of Authenticity

As local, regional, and international forces influence social and ideological changes, Muslim organizations and leadership in Trinidad have recently turned their attention to religious discourse and its "correct" interpretation. Debates have arisen over authenticity of practice, the purification of Islam from "cultural" customs or expressions, and the location and significance of origin lands--India, Pakistan, or Arabia. Although these debates gain greatest intensity within the Indo-Trinidadian Muslim

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community (revealing its internal variations), the activities of Afro-Trinidadian Muslims emphasize on-going tensions about the interpretation of textual and other injunctions (e.g., Khan 1995).

There are among Indo-Trinidadian Muslims, therefore, two axes upon which religious discourse rests: maintaining authenticity and purity against potential absorption from Afro-Trinidadian cultural hegemony, and maintaining authenticity and purity against potential absorption from competitive Islamic traditions. These inter-group and intra-group negotiations may overlap with each other; for example, when all Muslim groups are uniformly opposed to certain forms of creolization such as participation in carnival and other forms of unseemly (immoral) behavior. But as dissimilar religious schools of thought have proliferated or become more firmly fortified among Muslims in Trinidad, Indo-Afro cultural struggle and Indo-Indo religio-cultural struggle have become increasingly distinct discourses. This was presented clearly by an acquaintance, who explained,

> What we call acculturation, if it means acculturation into what passes for the majority culture of Trinidad and Tobago will be equally or more offensive to Muslims than to Hindus. By acculturation I am meaning that someone would see nothing wrong in scantily dressing on a Carnival day and performing like anybody else in any of the bands. Actually, strict Hindus wouldn't like this [either]. That's what I mean by acculturation. Now that kind of development, I don't think any segment of Muslims will say this is the direction we will want to go.
> But yet there is this relatively new development where

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> some people want a break with some of the things that had been practiced in the community that they feel give it a tinge of Indianness. Some of the practices which came down through our forefathers, which have nothing un-Islamic about them, some people are objecting to now. The allegations made about people [Muslims] of Indian origin...Some people are now criticizing ...and a lot of it comes from Middle Eastern influence...The areas that we came from in India, clearly our foreparents must [be] of the Hanafi interpretation. But that doesn't mean that the other interpretations have no validity...Even now [for example] you see an old man, about eighty-something, and you look at how he comports himself and you can see that was the upbringing. I have a suspicion that part of the Indian is the primitive, the backward. But how can you prove that?

Aside from the obvious contrast this speaker makes between Indo-Afro and Indo-Indo tensions, he also reveals a common local assumption about the connection between traditional and modern cultural forms and the problematic valorization of the past.

Offering an older head, "about eighty-something," as a metaphor for what is "primitive" and "backward" in Indian/Indo-Trinidadian culture, the speaker links the past and the present in this hypothetical figure. Indeed, older heads are, in a sense, living history since they both evoke and resemble the days of "long time," having lived in and through them. But what has been repeatedly reiterated in people's narratives throughout these chapters is the gratitude owed to staunch forebears who "kept up the religion and we culture." This sentiment of indebtedness joins apprehensions about contemporary identity, particularly with reference to the assessment of "correct"

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belief and practice. Ambivalence about the definition and place of culture in religious expression, and, ultimately, in ideas about the "nation," is at the heart of conflicting ideas about "traditional" and "modern," or acceptable past and present. As a friend of mine explained,

> tradition is what is handed down by you parents, which might not all be true. Older people can tell you the wrong thing; they saw and follow[ed] their parents. Or maybe not even Muslim people [that they followed]. Tradition is different from true sayings, true teachings from the Quran, the Hadith, true facts. People follow and not know the reason why they doing it.

But the enhancement of religious practice through modernization is a double-edged sword: paradoxically, being "modern" is that which keeps people "backward," in the sense of inhibiting knowledge, and thus control of heritage and roots, yet it also is seen to bring communities forward, in the sense of securing "Western" identities through creolization.

While the concept of, and criteria for correctness are plastic and prone to debate, notions of authenticity are not subject to the same kinds of critique. All heritage, past and present, is authentic, inasmuch as the forefathers' practices accorded with what they knew from India and helped to perpetuate group identity among progeny. Authenticity is never really challenged, as that would be too threatening to the viability of the respective religio-cultural communities--raising the question of ethnic group legitimacy. Correctness, on the other hand, can be amended

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with new criteria for accuracy of what ostensibly reflects what "really is" in sacred texts and tales. Correctness can be challenged, through amendation, because it is essentially speaking to religious interpretation, whose variations can be more or less accurate, yet whose variations do not really undermine the mode of cultural heritage that significantly defines the group. Culture and Religion differ as categories of practice: keeping things "cultural" is done partly through affirming things "religious--through practice and affirmation of faith. Yet keeping things religiously coherent by means of accuracy (which creates meaningfulness) is not accomplished through an unproblematic affirmation of things cultural. What is "cultural" is seen in hindsight as a "traditional" past fraught with "innovation" or enhanced by custom and a "modern" present fraught with ambivalence toward modernity. Religion can perpetuate or affirm culture (as the "stuff" of ethnic identity) in being one of its representatives, whose differences in interpretation, traditional or modern, point to differences in cultural forms but not their fundamental authenticity. Whether or not it is religiously legitimate, culture remains "authentic." Whether or not it is culturally legitimate is what determines religion's authenticity.

Therefore, indigenous (Trinidadian or South Asian) culture as a measure of Islamic authenticity creates for Indo-Trinidadians a three-pronged complication in the

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construction of identity boundaries. Culture is (1) an authenticating vehicle for Indo-Trinidadians in historic terms as the cultural heritage of India. As a place of pilgrimages, a holiday destination, or the "motherland," India is a vivid, if partly Hindu, image. In these terms, culture (2) can threaten the perpetuation of Islam through the incursions of non-Islamic cultural practices and traditions, and "innovations" that render practice incorrect or ineffectual. As an informant saw it,

> [Prior generations] were illiterate...they weren't scholars, so a lot of innovations, traditional Islam, is what they knew. They brought innovations from India that was a part of their cultural traditions and not the purity of Islam.

Finally, culture, construed as "Indian" and therefore "belonging" exclusively to Indo-Trinidadians, forms the symbolic foundation throughout the history of their political and cultural struggles with Afro-Trinidadians. Here, culture, for Muslims, is (3) the agent of enracement of an otherwise (ideally) universal, supra-local "religion of the world," as one person put it. In other words, an Islam purified of its innovations is also purified of its racial connotations. As one Indo-Trinidadian Muslim said,

> they [Afro-Trinidadian Muslims] have brought in their African culture into their way of life, as distinct from the Islamic faith. Just as the Indian brought in their culture. This demonstrates, in my view, not an Islamic but a racial identity.

Orthodoxy, Fundamentalism, and Superstition

In addition to the possible cultural innovations above,

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influence from Hinduism is also conceived broadly in terms of religious enervation. These ideas are related, however, insofar as a weakening of vigilance in living a life according to Islamic doctrine may be a consequence of cultural permissiveness (in addition to moral laxity) that does not demand sufficient (or appropriate) compliance with religious axioms. For example, one person explained,

> When something is in existence for a long time,...you lose the ideas because you get complacent ...[But] people want a more relaxed cultural tradition. The people aren't strictly Islamic because of our Indo-Islamic tradition...We are orthodox but not really fundamentalists. 'Fundamentalist' I'd interpret as a rigid adherence to the rules; 'orthodox' gives leeway, not as much insistence.

As it is described by the speaker, "orthodox" can be seen as (implicitly) more culturally embedded practice, "fundamentalist" as more closely following universal (supralocal) rules. What is also evident is the mutually shaping streams of thought that are subsumed under the notion of "tradition." Clearly linked are contrasts between pure and impure, authentic and inauthentic, and correct and illegitimate. Embedded in these dual constructions are boundaries distinguishing among Indo-Trinidadians and between Indo-Trinidadian and Afro-Trinidadian (Muslims); in the latter case, "culture" is interpreted as "race"; in the former instance, "culture" is interpreted as "tradition."

Among Indo-Trinidadian Muslims who call for a purified reforming of Islam and among those who adhere to customary practice of Islam--respectively, the "fundamentalist" and

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"orthodox" designations by the speaker above--there is a diverging orientation to Indian/Indo-Trinidadian "culture" and "tradition." Common to both, however, is an emphasis on pedagogy and knowledge. For example, an informant of a purifying reformist persuasion said that,

> Way back in the 50s and 60s I just thought I was a Muslim, because I was born in a Muslim family, and that made me a Muslim. The practices in my environment, though, were different from what I later read...I hadn't any idea of Islam then except to go to mosque on Fridays or prayer once in a while...people are not trying to learn more. They are just listening to what is said [at functions]. They go to functions and sit but they do not educate themselves.

A neighbor of this speaker, a Muslim of locally conventional practice, echoed,

> a traditional Muslim [is] one who has followed the practice of religion which he has found in his home and in his family and who has not...managed to study the religion...He is merely a member of the crowd...and does not have any personal, deep conviction on the principles of faith, which you get through being educated.

By now familiar, two discursive streams converge in these narratives (as among Hindus): habituated life-style versus formal study, and enculturated traditions versus purified practice. Basic to the distinction between the legitimacy of customary religious practice (acceptably "traditional" only in particular ways) and tutored religious practice guided by religious authority is the high value placed on self-conscious, achieved knowledge--again, doing something correctly and understanding its significance heightens its personal meaning and therefore its effectiveness.

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There is no neat empirical or analytical cleavage, however, between allegedly "fundamentalist" (purist) and allegedly "orthodox" (cultural traditionalist) positions. In the debate over diagnostic emblems of Islamic practice and Muslim identity, diverse and often cross-cutting religious and other ideological agendas are formulated. Thus, for example, "tradition" itself is held up to scrutiny:

> traditional practices are different from the handed down practices of the prophet...Traditional means practices of old... But the reforms were found through research, like [in] the Hadith [traditions--recorded words and deeds--of the Prophet]...We don't make niaj over sirni. We question putting food for the dead, the dead cannot eat...And this was never done in the days of the Prophet. This was brought in as a innovation from India, influence from Hindu practice, a Hindu relic.

This speaker may advocate an eschewing of things Indian as cultural innovations (and, implicitly, a mark of backwardness through ignorance). Yet "traditional" modes, as "practices of old," are not all clearly linked to Indian--read Hindu--and thus illegitimate conventions. Counter to those Muslims who espouse that the incursion of sub-continental innovations (at best) dilutes or (at worst) derails a true and authentic acultural "Islamic," toward an Indianized "Muslim," identity are those who pose a range of alternative views. For example, one of the members the oldest Muslim organization in Trinidad (TIA), in a critique of the dominant, state-sanctioned Muslim organization (ASJA), said of them,

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> [They] go in a lot for tradition., in their garb and in certain religious practices, in the mood and manner of life generally...This is very narrow...In this day and age, searching for the moon before you start your fast, this is very retrograde, very backward. When it's overcast you have to go to your watch to see when it's time for namaaz...But these mullahs still adhere to these traditional practices...We don't like to subjugate people so that life is [merely] working, eating, and reading. Why limit things like music and song?

And an older head imam posited that,

> the qaseedas are invitations to us to be better Muslims, if we understand them... We all must try to get the lessons from the qaseedas. Let us try to come to more of these functions, but not only to sing qaseedas and make speeches. Make yourself a better Muslim when you go home.

Here, traditions such as music and song are explicitly within the domain of the cultural (Indian) but legitimately so, rather than being that which is antithetical to the sustenance of proper religious practice.

A primary agenda of religious revitalization among Muslims (and Hindus, for that matter) is to ensure against being a prisoner of blind faith by apprehending meaning through familiarity with the form and substance of knowledge that is gained at functions. Unschooled belief can not only result in only superficial religious blessings and enlightenment. It is also one more unpleasant indication of the historical betrayal experienced by Indian indentured immigrants, who were "fooled" by British colonial projects. In this way, the reification of "knowledge" (as a thing to possess) and its significance intersects with competing discourses of (religious) authenticity. To paraphrase

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various informants, the argument goes that when certain ways of doing things have lasted for a long time, we lose connection to the ideas that fuel them because we become complacent; the old days were an age of faith where beliefs were blind and filled with superstitious ideas which must be distinguished from more appropriate ways of thinking.

The concern with correct knowledge and its comprehension resonates with ideas about upward social mobility, achievement, modernity, and progress, but is also significantly about empowerment through clarity of purpose and precision of enactment--both of which indicate the possession of knowledge. This is why, according to many of the Indo-Trinidadian Muslims with whom I spoke, Islamic forms of worship, in functions or otherwise, should not be seen strictly as "rituals." Although the anthropological classification of worship practices is most succinctly labeled as "ritual," on the ethnographic level, for many Trinidadian Muslims, rituals are defined as what Hindus or Christians do. Rituals are seen as activities that are intentionally bracketed and held distinct from the wider totality of social life, and thus may obfuscate through unfamiliar or incomprehensible simi-dimi. An informant echoes a familiar sentiment: "ritual is when you just believe in something because someone else does, and [you] have the priest [or pandit] just do it for you..." Islam, Hinduism, and most forms of Christianity in Trinidad all

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define themselves as a "total way of life," yet the differing perspectives on the place of ritual in daily life, as well as how to view and refer to it, speak to an underlying concern with the meaning, as much as the practice, of religious worship.

In fact, as I discussed in Chapter Six, the concept of "belief" is multivalent, as the speaker above implies in his comment that belief can constitute mechanically being led by someone through the motions of a ritual as much as it can indicate piety and sincerity. And, of course, mechanically following a "belief" or custom can signify backwardness and blind faith, which veers uncomfortably close to superstition. An older head imam explained,

> Long time imams tried to keep the population in a mystical way, in a darkness kind of way. For instance, when a imam was going to have a Quranic reading by a Muslim home, long time, they [imam] will give instructions to the people to buy a white cock [rooster] only, making it hard for the people, making it difficult for the people. They [imam] want to make it something too important, to get the people to feel that they [imam] is so knowledgeable in these things. Attaching self-importance to themselves. But of recent times, after people went to study Islam abroad, imams [are] getting to know this is not necessary. The white cock rule wasn't from a book. Now 'self-important' means learning it from right books, from the right source, getting a better knowledge. Long time imams attaching self-importance by being mystical. Presently, imams [have] concern with how it should be done, no mystical aspects attached...When somebody studied abroad, they study the laws and the traditions of Islam. The traditions is the practice of the Prophet, upon him be peace, and the law is the jurisprudence of Islam. So now there are learned scholars in the country who can give their verdicts according to the law and tradition of Islam [rather than verdicts based on] ancient practice of long time. When people does not know something by law, they use

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their common knowledge (my emphasis).

As evident in his narrative, mysticism and "darkness" are allayed with correct knowledge that derives from sacred texts (whose benefits are, significantly, attained outside the local purview). Local extra-natural phenomena, such as soucouyants, are viewed as folk-level superstitions, while text-based entities, such as djins, are seen as legitimate co-inhabitors on earth. While one person said to me that "all is djins, just Hindus call them different, 'spirits'," I think this would be the minority opinion, at least among tutored Muslims, and, further, possibly reflects that this speaker was a relatively recently converted-through-marriage adherent of Islam, having been raised a Hindu.

Certain phenomena and beliefs are relegated to the illegitimate domain of superstition because what is on the folk level (and not textually-based) signifies grass-roots, jheel, cunumunu, backwardness, being fooled. One young man affirmed, "Muslims are not supposed to believe in superstition." The "seerman" (diviner and healer) in D-- is "not superstition because it's all in the Hadith, and you can't doubt that." Texts in general symbolize formal education and its parallel associations of social mobility, sophistication, and power over one's circumstances. What makes one notion or entity acceptable to believe (in) and another unacceptable "superstition" is not, then, necessarily their specific content but what, in their

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totality, they represent. In this instance, they are largely indexical of class level, but not merely as evinced through relation to the means of production or socio-economic status. As important are the metaphoric connotations of class that convey particular kinds of "cultured" persons and hence groups. And as "culture" is defined and interpreted according to class, so religion is mediated by particular definitions and interpretations of "culture" which, in turn, locate religion in terms of class position or status.

Generational tensions

Also evident in the imam's narrative above is that new hierarchies of authority take shape as criteria for "knowing" (grasping meaning and mastering information) change. I focus here on the significance of these hierarchies in generational terms, both collective and individual. Yet these transformations must be understood as embedded within a larger trope among Indo-Trinidadians of "traditional" and "modern," "East" and "West," and the tensions that inhere in this conceptual dichotomy. Remarks like the following among older heads are common:

> When I de come [came] here after I done married, I live in a carat [thatch] house, ajoupa. Long time people live too different. Them ent accustom with big house. But people get modern now. They accustom with chulha [clay wood-burning stove], but say, 'I can't blow fire'. When you come back in this world, you don't know what you go meet again [you cannot anticipate what you will encounter].

That this woman, a Muslim, refers to coming "back in this

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world" aside, she also gently critiques the modernity associated with upward mobility and the pretentious airs that can accompany such changes in social status. These themes remain when the discourse of religious authenticity and legitimacy is considered, formed, as it is, within the parameters of generational contrasts.

When religious discourse enters the realm of personal experience and reflection, piety, sincerity, and purity are often interpreted by individuals in terms of life-cycle trajectories. These are constituted by rite of passage stages that announce status changes (such as marriage, child-bearing, and menopause, retirement, or other evidence of advancement into the older head category). They are also constituted by the assessments of others (kin, neighbors) regarding the person's degree of appropriate accommodation to the expectations of a particular life-cycle stage. As I have indicated above, these assessments are couched as moral tenets and are what fuel potential charges of hypocracy, inadequate knowledge, and breaking style, to which people are so sensitive.

Generational changes in conforming to Islamic precepts are gender-neutral, inasmuch as these requirements transcend gender distinctions in their particular injunctions for proper living. Where these differences are germane, however, are in the gendered forms of cultural and social expression in the daily routine of social interaction, such

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as in the domains of family and household, public behavior, and "living good with people." Both women and men are expected to abandon inappropriate behavior such as alcohol consumption or marital infidelity (sooner rather than later), but the consequences of compliance or recalcitrance are not the same. Disapprobation has a moral valence when directed at men, who, if profligate in their habits, are not respected by their community peers. For example, my older head neighbor once dismissively referred to another man (out of earshot) as a "rum caste," meaning he was a drunk and therefore merited no regard from my neighbor. Another example was at the funeral of a friend's mother. My friend's estranged husband arrived, much to the annoyance of the others; as a formerly pious man, he had "let down the religion" by abandoning his wife and children for another woman. Women, however, face far stronger pressures of disapproval at their, real or imagined, moral transgressions. Potential community sanctions, in the form of gossip and ostracization, have greater consequences for women because these are exerted in a more vehement way. In short, I think that shame is a more resonant force of social control among women. Hence, women seemed to me to be generally more concerned with the assessments and criticism of others.

Men who experience a personal revitalization of faith often do at a time in their lives concurrent with declining

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capacity for corporeal pleasures (drinking and general carousing). A few men told me that a dissolute youth had prompted them to rethink the meaning of their life; others said that near-death experiences from the results of alcohol abuse inspired these thoughts. For example, an acquaintance explained to me that although he was sent to maktab classes throughout his youth, he "fell away from it" when he "come a big man" [an adult]. Some years ago he "got sick with the rum," and after he was discharged from the hospital he became a fervent, teetotaling Muslim, conscientiously attending masjid functions and volunteering his services for the jamaat.

Many men, however, make a decision to turn to "the right path" not through life crises but through self-reflection motivated by other factors. One example involves "taking the bay'ah." As an acquaintance defined it, the bay'ah is

> tak[ing] an oath of allegiance to a spiritual leader who shows you the good, straight path toward high spiritual upliftment...We are the students and he is like the teacher.

One of my neighbors explained his pledge:

> It was really Y-- [who] encourage me [to take the bay'ah]. I wasn't intending to take it. But when I went to the meetings in R-- Village I saw a lot of them taking the bay'ah...And I listened to the lectures he [the leader] gave, telling us about it [the bay'ah], and why we should take it. I wasn't going to take it because I felt I was too young yet. I was fifty-eight then, too young to change my life. when you take the bay'ah, you does have to change your life, behave different, and this is more hard for a younger man, to stop doing all those worldly things than for a older

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> man. But it must have been for me to take it [pre-ordained, the right moment].

Another example is from a newly appointed imam, who commented to me that, "as imam, now I can't go see carnival anymore." He was conveying that although he felt this change to be good and proper (and something he had worked very hard for), he would initially miss this dimension of social life with which he had grown up, and which, importantly, was metonymic of (his) youth.

Women's interpretation of turning toward "the right path" is similarly framed by the life-cycle, although usually more in consonance with domestic responsibilities. Many women whom I asked whether they would soon be making the hajj pilgrimage, for example, gave analogous responses: they are presently too young, what with raising children and being young they were not sure they could "live the life" that is expected of people claiming amplified knowledge and piety. A leader of one of the Ladies' Groups thoughtfully reflected on the relationship between various means of religious practice and other kinds of responsibilities as they articulate in a woman's life:

> the [Ladies'] Group is about unity, religious things, though we discuss worldly affairs. I am more exposed to the religion now by being the leader of the group. I have to have answers [for participants]...Every Thursday in my [parents'] home we would read, pray, sing, and make shirni...I never questioned why or how, I just as a child looked forward [to it]. When I married I never follow that here [patrilocal household]. They weren't doing that. My home was a religious home. My father is a imam. No slack talk [was permitted]. Marriage is a different

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> life, you so taken up with you husband. You take a walk on evenings instead of pray. And then children start to come. But now I over that strong love-love business. Now I have to think like a mother and be more religious for my children to follow. When I get married I take another life, but it is always in you. You have to <u>feel</u> it to really know it. It is there in books to preach but in our hearts we have to accept it.

The transition to piety and knowledge was interpreted by these men within the larger context of the progression of their lives; the expectations for religious leaders such as imams and others who ascribe to enhanced piety and knowledge (such as hajj pilgrims or bay'ah pledgers) are far higher than for others. Leaving off the pleasures and distractions that are not solely, but are especially the prerogatives of youth symbolizes the next "stage" toward older head status.

Becoming religiously revitalized as a personal moment in the progression of one's life-cycle is, I think, one way for "ageable" people (of both genders), to gain a (new) kind of authority, a level of knowledge where previous formal education was lacking. Redemption in this instance comes in at least two forms: spiritual, as an individual seeks divine forgiveness and "the right path" of piety and sincerity; and self-worth, in the form of concrete knowledge--facts, texts, number of passages or suras, "correct" interpretations. Yet forms of knowledge are always valorized, claimed, and rejected through the lens of generation.

The reverence for older heads and their religious and cultural tenacity over time may also be seen as anachronistic and a hindrance to progress. In the words of

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one local observer, "there is some conflict between the new and old generation among the Indian Muslims." This tension is particularly animated among younger and older head imams. Here, "young" often denotes chronological age relative to "older head," but it also tends to connote a divergent way of thinking about Islam. This divergence mirrors the religious discourse on authenticity, "innovation," purity, tradition, and "fanaticism" that is at issue among Indo-Trinidadian (and Afro-Trinidadian) Muslims. The Indian Review (1990) outlined it plainly:

> The majority traditional-conservative Indian Muslim community in Trinidad exists with two apparently contradictory pulls on his [sic] consciousness and identity: that of being Indian, his race and that of Islam, his religion...The Indian Muslim ambivalence has had its logical conclusion among the younger generation of Indian Muslim organizations. There is now a repudiation of their Indianness, of Indian identity, of self and hence a rejection of their conservative-traditional elders and organizations...who are now viewed as being 'too Indian', meaning 'Hindu'. They submerge themselves with a new Islamic personality, one which rejects...his historical experience as Indian, Indian cultural survivals. These are now viewed as 'un-Islamic' (IR (August) 1990; quoted in Ryan 1991:113-114).

The two positions spoken of are in fact not neatly mutually exclusive, and, as I have shown in previous chapters (and elsewhere [Khan 1995]), several cross-cutting currents of thought on these matters exist among Muslims in Trinidad. It is fair to posit, however, that a general pattern in these stances is one distinguishing between younger and older head. One person, veering toward non-traditional sympathies, correctly evaluated that although there are

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indeed, "elders involved in this new, well, the true Islam the Quran speaks about, [i]t is divided up. The young people are picking up the true Islam [more]."

At issue, of course, is a claim to the expertise and authority of older head imams, who, as I have stated previously, are metaphors for a specifically configured past. Older heads (imams and laypersons) expressed their conviction in varying but basically congruent ways. For example,

> when the bound indentureds came who knew a little English or learned a little bit of English, they [later] became the presidents and the imams. The community who appointed them was influenced by their knowledge. The imam must be the most knowledgeable in religion and have tekwah, piety. He must have a mature age, since only a ageable person can control themselves, act like a gentleman.

And,

> people have less regard for elders now...The majority, from the time they see a grey hair on your face they say you're outdated, you're a old man, you're a retired man...They don't realize that the age that pass on a man bring experience to him. It bring experience! It is different now. Money make you proud!

Finally, similar to what we heard from pandits in Chapter Seven, this imam felt that,

> we humble weself to learn. That is how we learn...If you feel you know too much, you will not come by me. I can't speak English well. What you going by me for?! I haven't got education. And you is a university graduate. What you want by me? If you want some information, it's simple! You want to get the gist of something...I can't learn you English. But that don't mean he [sic] can't give you some facts! I have some facts that you mightn't get [elsewhere].

The last speaker relies on the advantage of experience (as

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opposed to formal pedagogy) to make his case; the second speaker makes an oblique reference to the transformation of hierarchies through changes in class and mobility; and the first speaker persuades with a modification of the conceptual dichotomy between traditional/modern by stating that even the first religious leaders emerging among the Indo-Muslim population in Trinidad had some grasp of English--a key metaphor for knowledge and authority, if also a "Western" vector for potential defilement (corruption) and loss.

One older head hajji with very high status in the community (deriving from an extensive family history of wealth and religious philanthropy) said that he felt that the authority of imams should not be questioned, the deference for imams has waned somewhat, compared to "long time." He added, however, that imams are also not needed "to keep us all on the straight path, only we can do that for ourselves," and that imams are "mostly to lead us at jumma." This comment does not only reflect the changes in community relations undergone by residents with respect to the role of religious leadership (imams and pandits) among them (see previous chapters). In his position, he suggests two simultaneous processes, which pose a contradiction. On the one hand, the leadership role of the imam is primarily in the domain of prayer, which is text-based, "technical," as some older heads would describe, and potentially highly

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authoritative through the expertise it implies. On the other hand, he conceded that his impression is that imams are not respected today in the way they were long time. The contradiction, perhaps unresolvable, lies in the feeling among some people that imams are needed in fewer situations requiring authority yet their diminished authority is lamented. I think the larger significance is that a division of labor is continuing to unfold, where new (or at least recent) estimations of religious knowledge, and attendant comportment, are shaping the boundaries of what constitutes "Muslim." Older head imams are, it seems, symbolically reminiscent of a time when Indo-Trinidadian Muslim communities were configured differently--less self-consciously, perhaps, and certainly with different criteria for the diagnostic emblems of group boundaries.

"Long time Islam in Trinidad was more pure," was the declaration of one older head imam. But that he was an older head speaks volumes about what is being conveyed in the notion of "purity" here. Revealing are the words of another older head:

> this new generation has started around...1970 or so. Many of them are people who had had no interest in religious work...And then you saw them begin to take a greater interest in religion, in Islam. And they have developed knowledge about the religion, they are practicing the religion. But they are...self-righteous, militant...Anything they alone say is right.

Stimulating this putative militancy, however, is the desire among the "new generation" to assert the universal nature of

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Islam, as opposed to constituting a localized referent. As one writer phrased it, "there is a denial of race in this new Islamic theology" (Indian Review 1990; quoted in Ryan 1991:113-114). Part of this mission is to de-racialize a culturally exclusive "Muslim-Indian" identity toward an inclusive "Islamic identity, thereby forging stronger linkages with the Afro-Trinidadian Muslim population, among others. Here again we see "culture" as hostage in these debates, as "race" and "culture" are conflated or equated.

In this chapter I have suggested that defining Islam as "a complete way of life" and distinct from merely a spiritual meditation or habituated gesture creates an ambiguity with respect to the difference between sacred and profane, extraordinary and ordinary. That is, viewing religious belief and practice (e.g., functions) as integrated with daily living must be balanced with demarcating belief and practice so that they transcend the mundane. To be empowering, Muslim functions must be both specialized and naturalized. I believe that this nexus is the site where contested constructions of identity are produced, and a major arena where the concepts of "tradition," "innovation," and related concerns with authenticity and legitimacy are ideologically animated.

As "sanatan dharm" supersedes specific "Hindu" identities, so certain configurations of "Islam" or "the din" supersede other "Muslim" (and perhaps "Indian")

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identities. Each accomplishes a similar goal: an "authentic" Hindu way legitimates and territorially maps out the Hindu community (Chapter Seven); discourse about an "authentic" Muslim/Islamic way undertakes the same tasks. Yet these ideologies are not isomorphic (nor could they be), significantly due to the operation of the trope of purity. While guiding their form, purity is substantiated ideologically in myriad ways, as I have attempted to show throughout this study. Ultimately, however, these expressions are linked, and are highly charged "particles" in the social construction of identities among Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians.

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# Part Four. Cultural Politics and Ideologies of Identity

## Chapter Nine. Purity, Piety, and Power

### The Currency of Diaspora Studies

In his essay, "The Genius of Blues," Luc Sante's (1994) description of the origin of this musical form poses, as I see it, one way we might characterize the Indo-Caribbean. Sante says that blues origins

> occurred...within a historical corridor that makes it possible to place it among the early manifestations of modernism...but also in an inaccessible back street of history...

Decidedly a product of a "modern" and Western project, yet remaining enigmatic, the Indo-Caribbean colonial and post-colonial experience linger on history's "back street." As I have argued elsewhere (Khan 1994), this is due largely to the tyranny of scholarship's emphasis on "ideal" cultural forms over "real" cultural substance, and to the relative paucity, until fairly recently, of research among Caribbean peoples of Asian descent.

Although in this study I focus on everyday forms of belief and practice deemed "religious" among Indo-Trinidadians, my aim in doing so is to proceed in a fresh direction in inquiring into population diasporas from "old" world to "new." In this purpose I have not been primarily concerned with the replication of "Great Traditions" in "settlement societies" (cf. Jain 1986), nor have I been content to frame my research as an examination of Hinduism

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and Islam overseas. Indeed, my choice of emphasizing practitioners (Hindus and Muslims), problematizing heritage and historiography, and arguing for the analytical primacy of local conditions all underscore my premise that diaspora studies must embrace as paradigmatic the dialectical relationship between contingent and socially constructed group identities and a global context that has always been a world of collisions, usurpations, and other trans-continental linkages (e.g., Wolf 1982; J. Abu-Lughod 1989; Helms 1989). My point is that the concept "diaspora" is necessarily descriptive of many connected and disjunctive referents, not a universal, totalizing conceptual tool.[1]

While my interest is in ethnic groups and identity construction, and in religion only as it constitutes an idiom of these, the question remains as to why religion seems to serve as a bastion of symbolic shelter among Indo-Trinidadian Hindus and Muslims. To locate the reasons that religion is assumed to be the "sacred," unassailable domain of preservation and resistance, one must go beyond the category "religion" as self-evident given. That is, the equation that religion is profoundly affective and is concerned with the divine or other-worldly, therefore it

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[1]The premise of coherent group identities has troubled the study of Hindus and Muslims even within South Asia. As Benson (1983) observes, "discussions of Hindu and Muslim culture in South Asia have often tended to treat the issue of boundary definition as unproblematic, and to place undue emphasis on formal ideology" (1983:57).

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functions "naturally" as a core component of identity, of consciousness, is an insufficient conclusion. More useful is taking this assumption as a point of departure.

As I stated at the outset of this study, treating "religion" as fluid, protean (contingent), ideological in its authority--and thus reflecting broader social tensions or dissonance--rather than as a reified, timeless category with assumed characteristics, allows teasing out the constituent ideological dimensions that, in tandem, create an empowered force that is vital--living as opposed to ossified, as Rani B. (Chapter One) expressed it. In order to address Asad's (1983:246) question, "how does power create religion?," we must ask how particular dimensions of religious ideologies, as identified in specific contexts, are charged by local historical and social circumstance. One way to approach this is to look for clues to these dimensions in the stories people tell about their own and their groups' historical trajectories--where they have come from and how they have reached their present. Another is to seek out the leitmotifs and interlocutors ("invisible" or otherwise) that recur in everyday discourse. Making good on our calls for acknowledging contingency, nuance, and unintended consequences, then, requires consideration of the micro and macro, the rarefied and routine, as inextricably intertwined.

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Trinidad Revisited

> In constructing boundaries between groups based on categorical identities and their links between these boundaries to cultural systems in nation-states, humans create purity out of impurity" (B. Williams 1989:429).

In introducing this study (Chapter One), I posed what I called a cultural paradox: in inquiring how religion is used to give power its form, in this case to particular constructions of ethnic identity, I argued that over time, Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians increasingly have distinguished between "cultural" and "religious" identity while, simultaneously, increasingly having relied on religion as a key idiom of cultural politics. This paradox speaks to the logic of the structure of social inequality in Trinidadian society and to how certain moral conventions combine with class distinctions to form the cultural hierarchies that buttress material inequalities.

For Indo-Trinidadians, in what remains an ethnically segmented labor market (e.g., Ryan 1994) and ambivalent nationalist agenda, the relationship between religion and culture lies in a dual sense of culture: religious expression is a key way to be "cultured"--in the sense of "high" culture, authenticity, legitimacy; it is also a key way to be "cultural"--in the sense of a vehicle for ethnic politics. Cultural authenticity refers to notions of purity of essence, precision and traceability of origins; legitimacy refers to putting that authenticity to work, so to speak, making authenticity socially meaningful in a

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particular context or discourse.

The way I have undertaken the task of exploring the relationship between authenticity and legitimacy is to focus on "functions." Functions constitute a domain that must be seen as "pure," although empirically any particular ritual performance among Indo-Caribbeans evinces "syncretic compromises" (B. Williams 1991:246). Functions serve as a buffer of what are deemed profane (e.g., state, civil) encroachments, hence they cannot overtly or unproblematically "fashion [themselves to] accommodate competing religious identities" (Ibid.:236). Doing so leaves room for slippages in purity and authenticity, and hence jeopardizes legitimacy, since different religions have different criteria and expectations for them.

In his critique of traditional approaches to studying ritual, Goody (1977:29) argues that we must move beyond seeing rituals as subdivided subcategories "doing" something.[2] Goody is correctly taking issue with the reification of ritual and its analytical segregation from other forms of social activity. Yet implicit in his objections is an outside observer's query. It seems to me that these kinds of questions can be productive if seen not solely as anthropological probes but as reflecting

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[2]Compare Rosaldo's important point that we link ritual with the larger processes that encompass them by viewing ritual as a "busy intersection" where many "distinct social processes intersect" (1988:16-17).

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informant-generated concerns. The meaning(s) and function(s), and even definition of rituals are important, if slippery questions among Indo-Trinidadian Muslims and Hindus. In the Caribbean, we cannot assume an isomorphism between the "cultural system" and the "content of the ritual." Unlike, for example, Valeri's (1985:344) observation for Hawaii, that "'understanding'...ritual creates an understanding of the premises of the cultural system," the heterogeneity of the Caribbean/Trinidad begs the question of what the "cultural system" is, and how, then, ritual activities promote understanding the encompassing "culture." I accept Goody's suggestion that "as an opening gambit, we [should] attempt to translate the term ritual each time it is used" (1977:33). But in order to do so, this translation requires the myriad voices that speak to what both "ritual" and "religion" are (not simply determining what each consists of), and what they are good (or bad) for.

In their pedagogical role, functions ultimately negotiate the contradictions between modernity and tradition. However, with regard to interests, whereas people feel these contradictions, they do not necessarily see functions as ameliorating them. Rhetorical contrasts between "Western" and "Eastern" implicitly pose another contrast between an ultimately superior traditional/eastern orientation and a (morally) corrupt and effete, albeit

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powerful, modern/western orientation (cf. Kalka 1990). The latter is exemplified particularly by Afro-Trinidadians, who are seen by Indo-Trinidadians as having a (British) colonially-constituted culture. Yet in posing such a contrast, Muslim and Hindu Indo-Trinidadians reinforce and create their own forms of Orientalist ideology, in addition to creating particular identity boundaries and their consequent social relations that accompany these.

Among Indo-Trinidadians the power of the sacred is inherently political and intimately tied to interests, since it provides a legitimate space for discourse on identity and ultimately cultural resistance. I do not, however, see this agency as necessarily in the realm of the conscious, deliberate, or instrumental. Individuals' and groups' contentions with power always involve significant dimensions of the unconscious or unrecognized, which, for example, help propel hegemonic processes. Linger (1993) argues that

> because a religious meaning system distills a set of beliefs into imperious bodily sensations of devotion, bliss, piety, or conviction it bypasses the inner critical voice. The immediacy of the experience...inhibits the splitting of consciousness that would enable one to assume a critical perspective (1993:5).

This implies that religious belief renders an individual entirely acquiescent to the religious system. Rather, people rationalize or conceal their doubts and blasphemies, even while simultaneously embracing the bodily sensations (or cognitive processes) of religious meaning systems.

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As upward class mobility allegedly strips away "traditional" Indian culture and blurs or multiplies social identities, religiosity is the idiom, and ritual functions the vehicle through which "tradition" is restored. But it is so in ways that both preserve and facilitate "living good" and "improving yourself"--respectively, egalitarian social relations, especially on the community level, and de facto hierarchization of social life.

The trope of purity and the theme of piety articulate with one another, in that purity both derives from and defines pious observance of orthodoxy. Each is intertwined with Indo-Trinidadians' ideology of social hierarchy that derives from caste-based proscriptions against pollution as well as from wider, nationally-based notions of cultural and racial purity that resonate in an extensive and complex ideology of "mixed" and "pure" categories of person. These reflect the colonially-instituted labor segmentation (the objective conditions of class stratification) as well as the conceptual hierarchies of status and privilege, which reveal different ideological influences--religious, cultural, and political.

With regard to Hindus' and Muslims' discourses of cultural and religious identities, I have termed these ideological influences invisible (or attenuated) interlocutors. Their salience is evident in their potency even outside the Caribbean arena. For example, in New York

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(after I had returned from the field) a Guyanese student of Indian descent spoke to me about the ontology of Indo-Caribbean culture. He asserted:

> Indians in the Caribbean are more, like, free, like, from [due to] Carnival...free, you know what I mean? They have less scruples that keep them back, like women and that, well, that keep them like the Indian way.

Feeling both lost from and a part of (an unknown) India, this young man reveals his ambivalence about accepted wisdom regarding tradition and morality ("scruples," "the Indian way"), progress and getting ahead ("free," "women," "keep back [from]"), and subsumption within another, dominant culture ("Carnival," which connotes "African"/"Western"). As is the case in Trinidad, the foregoing representations are highly charged, multivocal symbols that recur in people's customary reflections on the character (nature) of their groups and their selves.

Tensions of Ethnicity and Race

> We are not interested in receiving this [Indian] folk culture in its long time form, how it came down to us from our ancestors, the indentured servants. We are no longer concerned with what is pure in India regarding form, but [with] purity of essence. We want a pure essence with a Caribbean form, a shell" (informant, 1988).

Within the context of ritual performances, religious piety and knowledge of cultural traditions are touchstones used by a population who see themselves as an oppressed minority, to evaluate, explain, and challenge power relations in Trinidad's highly stratified and racially tense

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society. Against what is defined as a "Western" social environment as opposed to "Eastern," and oppressive due to perceived discrimination by an Afro-Trinidadian-dominated state, Hindus and Muslims employ piety and knowledge of traditions to comment on the barriers that state-sanctioned "racialism" pose for their achieving social equality. They decry the "temptations" available in a Western, and hence morally ambivalent society.

Within religious idioms (for example, the "extra-natural" environment, functions, and the concepts of tradition, piety, and purity) these issues may be debated or ambivalently perceived in "religious" terms, yet they comprise the most encompassing category of identity: "Indo-Trinidadian." In a context where Culture is reified into a political force, religious discourse is the means to a cultural end; religion is an effective idiom in making an "ethnic" (group) case. The general climate of religiosity in wider Trinidadian society is one factor in these processes. More important is that here religion is the route to roots, purity, and morality (cf. Kelly 1988).

The significance of morality in the ethnic politics of Indo-Trinidadians is a critical area of inquiry in seeking explanations of the workings of religious idioms and their relation to identity construction. There are two levels at which the generation of an ethic of morality are in need of further exploration. One is that the trope of purity is

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contested terrain. In both a modern, Western, ostensibly achieved-status, "civilized" democracy and small, reciprocity-dependent communities, distinguishing impure from pure (whether racial, cultural, religious, and so on) implies exclusivity and tempts potential divisiveness, which flies in the face of the notion of "callaloo culture" and such nationalist axioms as "all ah we is one" and "the rainbow is real." As one means of resisting the state's "selection" of traditions (Chapter Five) and tempering latent conflictual possibilities, the trope of purity is seen as what I refer to as a moral imperative. The sacrality of the moral imperative is couched in terms of egalitarianism (rather than hierarchy) and cooperation (cf. Billig 1988). Religious idioms are a form of discourse that reflect tropes and other dimensions of local ideology about culture, nation, and identity in a "just and moral society" (Cudjoe 1984).

A second way to think about the way a moral imperative is generated is also related to Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians' relations with the state. As Tikasingh (1987:17) suggests, since the early 20th century the "Indian psyche" has contained a belief that Indo-Trinidadians were unfairly and unequally treated, despite their performing the hard work indispensable to developing the colony. Moreover, they saw their efforts as (naturally?) enhanced by a cultural proclivity for frugality allegedly not evident

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among other ethnic groups in Trinidad (especially Afro-Trinidadians). This premise of moral deservedness also permeates definitions of cultural attributes of Indo-Trinidadians and thus contributes to the moral imperative that "manages" the trope of purity and the religious idioms therein. In both these possibilities, a value system that was produced in the modern era is shifted onto an indigenous past, thereby disassociating a colonial, and therefore defiled history (Friedman 1992:207). At the same time, Western (Enlightenment-derived) philosophies of universalism are invoked.

In an effort to eschew traditional approaches to Indo-Caribbean culture and history, I take counsel from L. Abu-Lughod's (1990) caution that power relations take many forms; assuming a pre-ordained hierarchy of significance for them may distort our view of how power actually functions. What is also obscured are the specific and concrete forms that power assumes on-the-ground. However, this is not to lose sight of the fact that structural processes influence how power is expressed: certain loci of power are more highly charged than others. What is required is ethnographic substantiation of these variable loci and the context-contingent, stratified structures of authority and coersion that both reflect and constitute them.

The arena of religion traditionally has been a locus of power struggles between colonizer and colonized and among

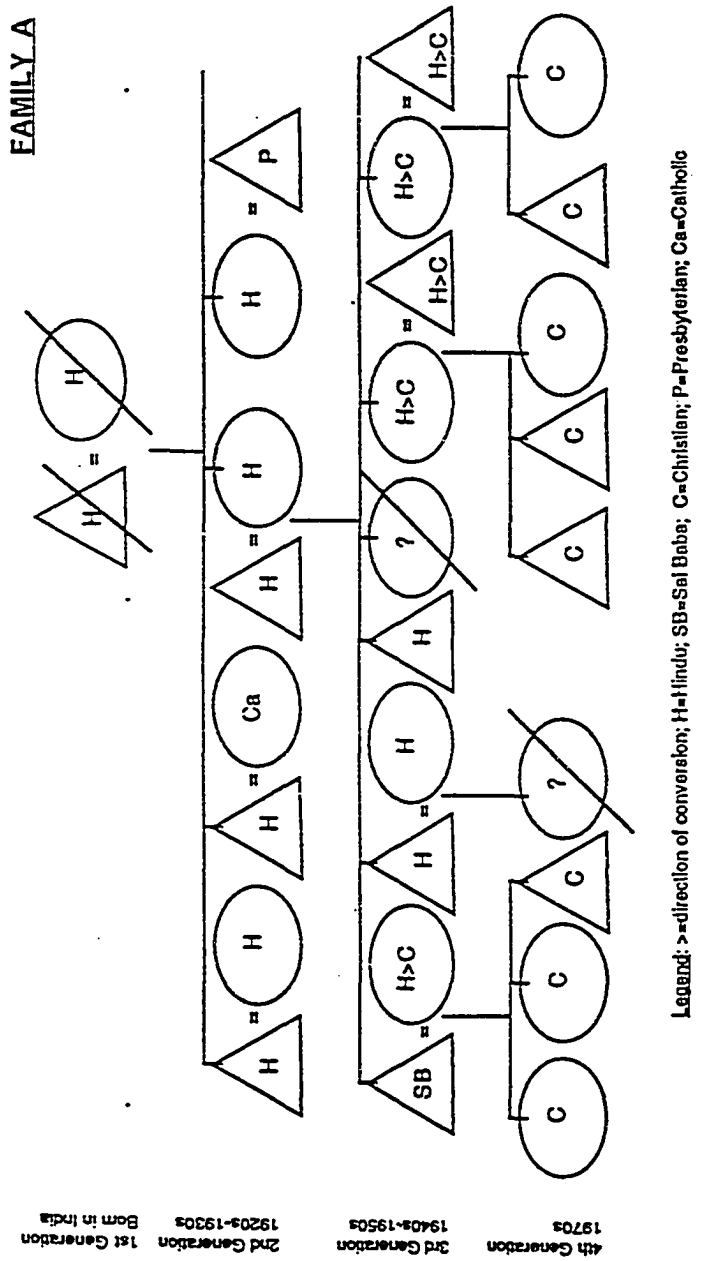
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colonized populations in the Caribbean (Trotman 1986:227; Ryan 1991:6-7). It is this intimacy among social identities--religious, racial, class, cultural--that I have been concerned to explore here. Although the following comment is by an Indo-Trinidadian Muslim, the sentiments expressed represent a significant dimension of the Indo-Trinidadian experience:

> I studied British history and the exploitation of other races and the oppression of Islam and the fights by Gandhi, Jinnah, and Nehru. After they've taken all the riches out of a land, then they give you independence, a nominal independence, since you're more dependent now. In reading at the beginning I began to hate the white man, but with your Islamic background you cannot hate anybody...But you've seen the plunder, the exploitation. What sense does it make to cherish a hatred against people?...If you continue hating, you're still looking in the past...As bitter as the past may be, you have to build on it.

In this study I have teased out the circuitous, ambivalent, and sometimes contradictory ways that Hindu and Muslim Indo-Trinidadians build on their past, with regard to their present, and an eye toward their future. Through this lens we can better grasp some of the reasons that religion--religious ideology--is simultaneously a profoundly cherished and contentious dimension of identity and survival, as Indo-Trinidadians create, deny, and recreate webs of affinity and mutual dependence with Afro-Trinidadians as well as with each other.

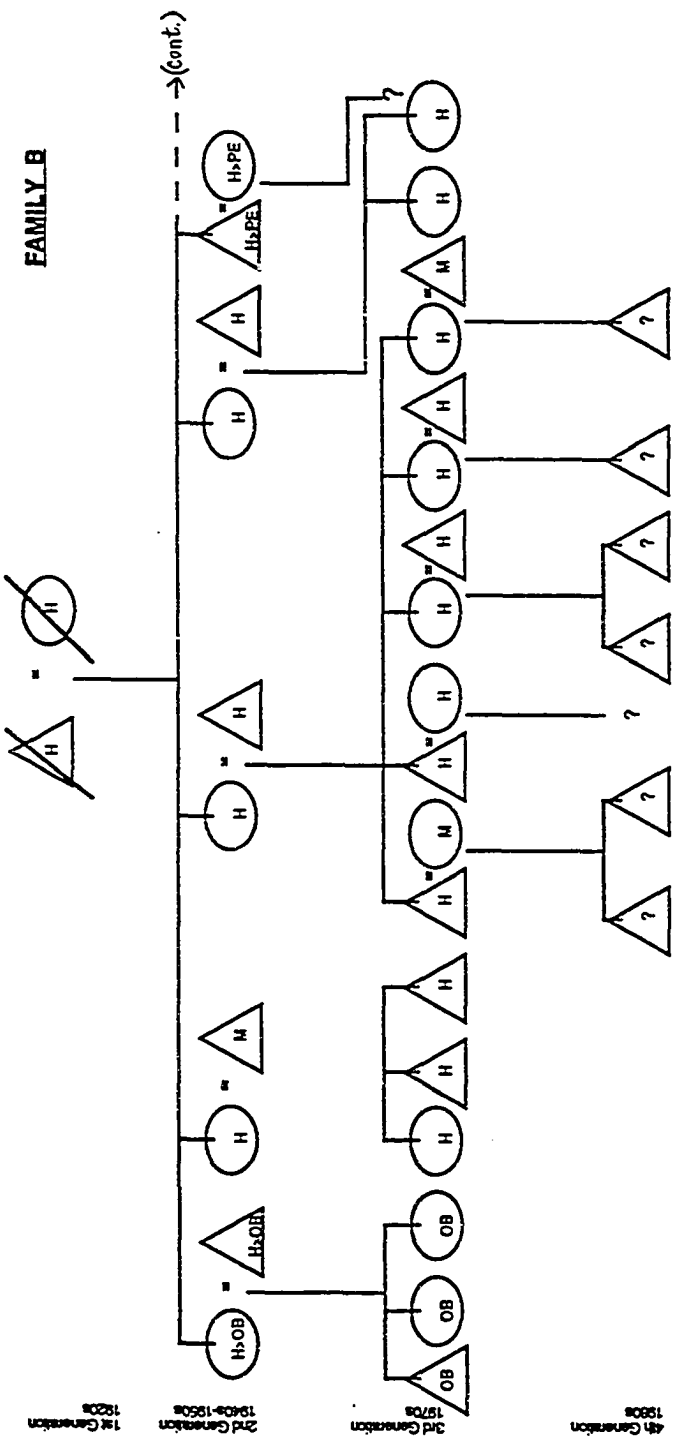
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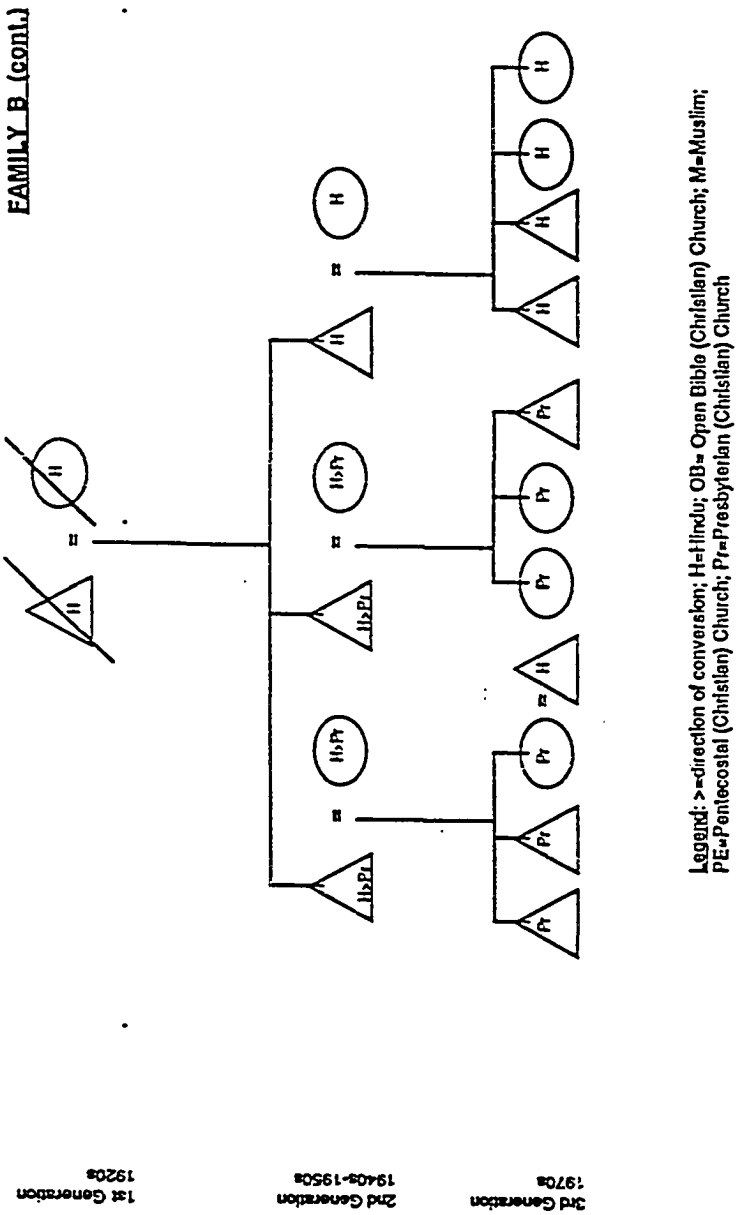



Legend: >=direction of conversion; H=Hindu; SB=Sai Baba; C=Christian; P=Presbyterian; Ca=Catholic

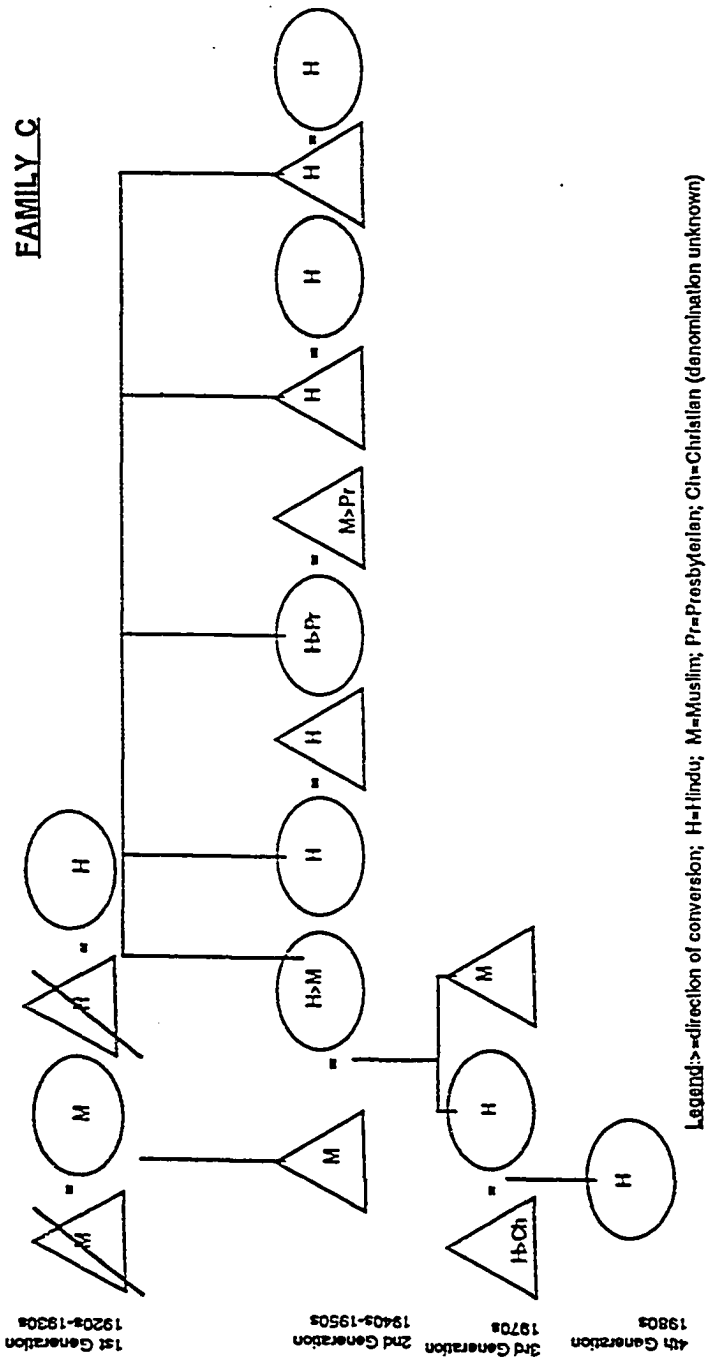
Appendix I: Genealogies

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FAMILY B
→(cont.)
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H>PE
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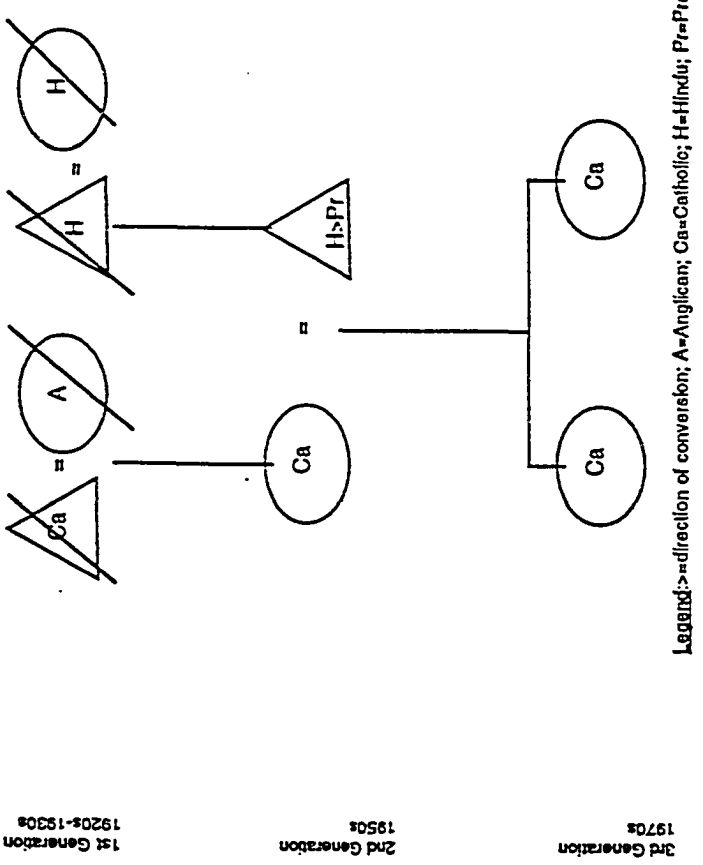



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## FAMILY D




Legend:>=direction of conversion; A=Anglican; Ca=Catholic; H=Hindu; Pr=Presbyterian

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