CHAPTER II

INDIAN DIASPORA IN THE WEST INDIES: AN OVERVIEW AND AN INSIGHT
In 1912 Jaipal Chamar, then 25 years of age was indentured from his hometown in Basti District, then called United Provinces (UP) for five years’ service in the Caribbean and after his indentureship, he worked in various parts of Jamaica as a paid labourer, finally settling down in Kingston. In 1954 at the age of 66, Jaipal who had lost touch with his family in India was able to re-establish his Indian connection: he was able to trace and write to a son, Ayodha Dass in Calcutta, who was born some months after Jaipal’s departure and from Calcutta, Ayodha Dass was equally happy to renew his connection with his father. His letters to his father and his father’s letters to him cast many of the informative as well as poignant light on the kind of ‘emotional loss’ felt by the indentured labour, who were contemplating their lost ties with their homeland and of the kind of ‘brooding’ for them in the home country at least for the first and second generation Indian diaspora in the West Indies:

Respected father,
You will be surprised to know that a son whom you might not have seen is replying from this side. I was about to born when you left this place. We were two brothers. Our mother looked after us anyhow and we came to Calcutta for service. Fifteen years ago my brother Dwarika passed away and left me alone, unlucky in this world.

As the correspondence developed, Jaipal’s eagerness to find out about his wife and his village friends increased: ‘write me about your mother’s welfare and rest of the village. Respectful greetings to all those who know me.’ Ayodha had a fervent wish to see his father and he begged him to return:

Whenever your letter comes I wish I had wings
And could fly away to see you.
Your destitute sister has no one end
I am looking after her
She has gone blind crying for you.
She now lives only with the hope of
Seeing her brother’s face.
And my mother after receiving your first letter
Cried for ten days and died.¹

This search for his heritage by Jaipal Chamar has been endorsed and re-endorsed over again and again by indentured Indians who were regarded and did regard themselves

¹ This information and communication between the father and son has been taken from Samaroo, Brinsley, (1987) “The Indian Connection The Influence of Indian Thought and Ideas on East Indians in the Caribbean”, in David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo (eds) Inda in the Caribbean, Hertfordshire: Hansib Publishing Limited.
as transients, who were to return home after their indentureship. The form of this quest has not always been in direct touch with the ancestral place: during indentureship, the major means of contact was the new immigrants who could tell them of developments at home. The quest of the Indian West Indian to seek his roots and his relationship with India, which may not necessarily imply the physical land mass but, a whole complex of attitudes, thought-processes and beliefs, exhibits a dilemma of the Indian West Indian in a land where the Creole value system, the Indian West Indian feels, carrying the major elements of African-Caribbean cultural norms and colonial white socio-cultural glimmer, stands at the apex of the ‘national’ praxis.

For an Indian West Indian like Jaipal Chamar, India is physically and culturally very real and exists in his body and mind, hence he does not have any hesitance in identifying with it, but for second and third generation Indian West Indians, torn between East and West, this attempt at identification and illumination can be torturous, even traumatic. V.S. Naipaul for whom India in 1964 was an area of darkness, returns to it in 1977 but with a chastened perspective; India is now a wounded civilization:

India is for me a difficult country. It is not my home; and yet I cannot reject it or be indifferent to it; I cannot travel only for the sights. I am at once too close and too far. ... An enquiry about India – even an enquiry about the Emergency – has quickly to go beyond the political. It has to be an enquiry about the Indian attitudes; it has to be an enquiry about the civilization itself (Naipaul 1977).

The dilemma of the Indian West Indian of being either West Indian or Indian or neither nor or both will always haunt him until he first of all comes to terms with himself and pierces into his ‘self’; and this process certainly involves an understanding of his Indian connection and West Indian bonding. This chapter basically focuses on the pattern of Indian indentured labour migration to the West Indies and the harsh and struggling lives of the Indians at the distant plantation barracks and their prime organisational patterns like, language, caste and religion, and it also tries to point out how these aspects have germinated an identity for the Indians. Other aspects like, food, clothing, family life etc. also have some significance in the Indian diasporic study, but this chapter is confined to the analysis of indentureship, language, caste and religion as these aspects provide broader frameworks in studying
and analysing the Indian West Indians and they have been quite formative in sprouting a socio-cultural and political niche for Indian West Indians.

Migration is an inseparable part of history and has been one of the abiding travel sagas of all times and India never stands as an exception to this. Despite the taboo of crossing the black waters of the oceans for high caste Hindus, Indians have travelled far and wide from time immemorial to the present day globalisation era as pilgrims, monks, religious preachers, artisans, religious teachers, indentured labour and professionals to almost all the parts of the globe. But the major Indian migration and the waves of Asian migration took place in the later half of the 19th century when the need for plantation labour arose; when Europe’s imperial powers established colonies in the New World to meet the demand for tropical commodities like rubber, sugarcane, tea and coffee in Europe. The colonies’ initial need for labour at the plantations, the tin and gold mines was met through slaves, but with the abolition of slavery throughout the British Empire in 1833, the plantation owners urgently needed replacements for the African slave labour and they discovered a substitute work force in Indian and Chinese emigrant workers. There are estimates that over one and a half million Indians went overseas to earn a living in the 19th and early part of the 20th century – Burma, Malaya, Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific islands (Singh 2005: 2). In 1938 T.S. Rajgopal described the overseas Indians as “spread over a belt which runs around the Equator from the North Atlantic over the Indian Ocean to the South Pacific. For every hundred Indians who live in India one lives abroad” (Singh 2005: 2). The Indian diaspora is not a monolithic group, but is formed of numerous layers and segments that correspond to the time of migration, the place of origin in India and the country of settlement. Educational levels, class background, age and gender go to make the other differences.

Just as the Indian attitude towards the overseas Indian has changed, overseas Indians have changed in the way in which they perceive India. In the post-independence era, Indians living abroad were cut off from the homeland, and the main part of information about India came from the western press and its coverage of events and developments in India. The western newspapers carried images of drought, floods, earthquakes, and communal riots, all types of natural and man-made disasters and scarcity of resources. Newspaper columnists wondered how long India would hold
together as a nation. “After Nehru who?” were frequent subjects for deliberation fueling the belief that India would disintegrate without strong leaders. Overseas Indians picked up their impressions of India from these images. While the cultural and religious affinity remained, people of Indian descent were not willing to emphasise the ties of Indian ethnicity. To second and third generation overseas Indians, India became a faded picture that existed in the memories and tales of elderly relatives. There was a time when even those overseas Indians who lived in poor circumstances in the colonies, exhibited a sense of disdain for India. But the development in the present day India and as an emerging power India has captured the attraction of the Indian diaspora.

Indian Indentured Labour Migration to the West Indies

“Our own past was, like our idea of India, a dream,” says Naipaul in Finding the Centre. This is true not only of the descendants of indentured workers in Trinidad and other parts of the West Indies but also in all the major colonies of Great Britain where they had gone towards the end of the nineteenth century and early years of the twentieth century to work on the plantations. European imperialist expansion in the nineteenth century with its new industrial and commercial ventures, especially in plantations, created the initial milieu for large scale migration which generated expanding demands for labour. In most cases, the colonial governments and planters working in tandem did not consider it economically or politically correct to recruit the indigenous people who, with a life of gratis and freedom and never accustomed to hard work as required by the plantation estate and basically carrying out subsistence farming for their livelihood, were itinerant in their approach towards their life and settlement, hence making the colonial government look not forward to the aborigines as a source for mitigating the demand of the plantation. With the progressive prohibition of African slavery in the first half of the nineteenth century, India became the main alternative source of labour. India had a huge population, millions living close to destitution; most of the sub-continent was under British control, which facilitated negotiations with foreign governments; India’s climate was not unlike that of the Caribbean, and most of her people were accustomed to agricultural work. This
was the main 'pull' factor. The officers or labour recruiters or *arkathis* went to remote villages in the interiors of the country stricken by drought and famine (often artificially created, as the colonisers shipped out food grains from India to their own armies fighting in different parts of the globe) or during a season when those working as tenant farmers or agricultural labourers were unemployed. On the other end of the spectrum, the administrative reorganisation that the British colonisers introduced were greatly responsible for impoverishment in India and this induced many to leave the country despite the traditional aversion to crossing the dark seas or *kala pani*. This was the 'push' factor. The migration from India, mainly as unskilled labourers to provide a stable and manageable labour force on plantations in Mauritius, the Caribbean and Fiji, began in the 1830s.

**System of Indenture**

Indenture was basically a contract by which the emigrant agreed to work for a given employer for a period of five years for a specified wage and at the end of five years, the emigrant was free to reindenture or to work elsewhere in the same colony; and at the end of ten years he was entitled to a subsidised return passage. The fulfillment of the contract was governed by an immigration ordinance enacted in the country of destination. Prospective emigrants were testified before a magistrate in India that they understood the terms of the contract. The only qualification required was physical fitness and experience of agricultural work. Initially almost all these recruits were male, later a quota of forty per cent females per each ship-load was imposed by the colonial government. Once the emigration officer was satisfied with the emigrant he used to issue an emigration certificate making him or her eligible to immigrate to the country of destination. A typical emigration certificate for Ahladee, a woman migrant to Trinidad in 1866 is given below.² The emigration certificates are in one significant manner, the document that interpellates them as 'modern' or 'Enlightenment' subjects, but the knowledge through which this subjectivity is created (the information of this certificate) is not known to them. The migrants can't use these certificates and

² This information has been taken from Mishra, Vijay (2007), *The Literature of the Indian Diaspora: Theorising the diasporic imaginary*, New York: Routledge.
even they do not know their contents. Removed from their immediate use value as documents of self-identity, they nevertheless function as erstwhile documents through which a certain (retrospective) humanity may be given to a people without ‘history’ (Mishra 2007: 83).

**EMIGRATION CERTIFICATE**

*Ship No. 97 Trinidad Emigration Agency Depot No. 1271*

Calcutta, the 1st November 1866

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Ship’ Name, .............................................................. Salisbury
Name,................................................................................. Ahladee
Father’s Name, .............................................................. Sagoon
Age, ................................................................................. 24
Sex, ................................................................................. Female
Caste, ................................................................................. Bagdee
Occupation, ........................................................................

Name of next of Kin, ......................................................... Rodoy Brother
If married to whom, ........................................................... 
Zillah, ........................................................................... Burdwan
Pergunnah, ................................................................. Panaghur (?)
Village, ......................................................................... ?
Marks, ..............................................................................

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Certified that I have examined and passed the above-named as a fit Subject of Emigration, and that she is free from bodily and mental disease. Having been vaccinated.

Surgeon Superintendent (Sgd) 
Depot Surgeon (Sgd)
I hereby certify that the woman above as described (whom I have engaged as a labourer on the part of the Government of Trinidad where she has expressed a willingness to proceed to work for Hire) has appeared before me and that I have explained to her all matters concerning her duties as an Emigrant, according to clause 43 of Act XIII of 1864.

Protector of Emigrants at Calcutta (Sgd)

Emigration Agent for Trinidad (Sgd)

Migration to the West Indies was organised by the indenture system introduced in the nineteenth century but discontinued in 1917, when the Government of India placed an embargo on indentured emigration. Between 1845 and 1917, with a short break in 1845-51, Indians arrived steadily each year, the great majority being channeled through Calcutta; perhaps ninety per cent of the immigrants came from the Ganges plains, United Provinces, Bihar, and Central Provinces; a minority came from Bengal, Orissa, the North West Provinces, and South India via Madras. Emigration to Guyana and Trinidad started in 1838 and 1845 respectively. By 1869 a total of 37,440 Indians had arrived in Trinidad (Brereton 1979: 176). The free return passage after ten years in the colony, which was insisted by both the colonial office and the Government of India, made the Indians seem like transient labourers, not a permanent addition to the population, and the indentureship system, by which the new arrivals were contracted to the plantations for a five-year term of unfree labour, kept most of the Indians on the estates as resident indentured labourers, severely restricting their freedom of movement and their contacts with the wider society. Further their languages, physical appearances, religions and culture were so strikingly different that the Indians were regarded as an exotic group, marginal to the Trinidad society, insufficiently integrated to be considered a part of it. So, these adopted children of a foster mother and posthumous father, in the absence of any real kinship or family bonds, instituted a bond of brotherhood known as Jahaji or Jahaji Bhai (ship brotherhood) among individuals who had befriended each other during the long voyages. The Jahajis often got themselves assigned to the same plantation and the same barracks, regarded each other as real brothers, and treated each other's children as close kin. Marriage
between the children of the Jahaji Bhais was considered incestuous. In Naipaul’s *Finding the Centre*, there is a mention of Bogart (a character in the mentioned work) whose ancestors from Punjab travelled with Naipaul’s grandfather in the same ship and developed the Jahaji Bhai kinship.

**Life at the Plantation Estate**

Life in the colonies was very hard. The indentured immigrants lived an isolated and insulated life and any contact with the outside world was mediated by the plantation manager, the magistrate, the police and the immigration department. Desertion laws, limiting their freedom, made them little better than slaves. The manager or his deputy herded the emigrants together each morning, assigned tasks, judged performances, gave a little permission to report sick, and chastised others for feigning sickness and those found guilty of indiscipline were sent to the magistrate’s courts to be punished for breach of ordinance. In the barracks, also known as ‘coolie lines’, both because the labourers lived in them and there were lines of thirty or forty rooms constructed back to back, each family was allotted a room with no place for cooking, no bathrooms or toilets. To quote from ‘Tota’s Tale’, a poem by Satendra Nandan, a Fijian Indian poet and critic:

An empty line of twenty-four rooms:
Eight feet by twelve feet.
Once it housed native workers
Eight died: Others fled
Who would live among the dead?
Homeless I had come in search of paradise
This house of hell was now all mine.

(Nandan, *Lines Across Black Waters*, 11-12)

Another Fijian Indian writer Totaram Sanadhya, referred to those dark, monotonous and menacing lines/barracks as bhut len (lines of ghosts/devils) and titled his book of poems, *Bhut len ki Katha* (The Story of Devil Lanes).

When they reached their port of destination, the indentured workers were kept in quarantine for sometime, before being allotted to the planter. The planter or his overseer would march off the group of recruits to the plantation where they would live
and work for five years. In countries like Mauritius and Caribbean too the paraphernalia of slavery still survived and the Indian workers went to live in the barracks that were used for the slaves. Plantation life was a world of its own, with its own rules and customs, many of which were derived from the days of slavery. In Fiji, the barracks were pretty wretched habitations; each barrack had wooden partitions to create rooms with mud floors that measured 10 ft by 7 ft. Each cabin was allotted to three single men or a married couple and their children. The rooms had doors but no windows; each had three bunks and a fireplace for cooking. There was no privacy for the occupants as the partitions did not extend to the tin roof, but were topped by wire meshing. The fields behind the coolie lines were to be used as toilets.

Ill-treatment was rife on the plantations, and complaints by the workers only resulted in even more harsh penalties for the complaints. The Europeans firmly believed that the coolies deserved harsh treatment because, they argued, the coolies were used to that kind of handling and responded only to harsh treatment. Indian workers survived through the period of indenture through their own determination and resilience. They were bonded to a master, who had virtually a free hand in extracting the kind of work he wanted from the servant. The worker was confined to the estate and was let out only with special permission under stringent rules.

The death rate was highest in the first two years when the indentured workers adjusted to the cruel conditions on the plantations. A system of harsh penalties and punishments were used to make the indentured labourers work. The pattern of operations left the workers open to exploitation in various forms; for the women it also included sexual exploitation. The indentured labourers were given their task for the day and failure to complete the day’s task meant that he was not paid for the day. In Mauritius the ‘double cut’ prevailed, under which one day’s absence from work for whatever reason meant a two-day wage cut. In the other colonies a day’s absence meant the loss of a day’s wage and a day added to the total indenture period. In Mauritius, Guyana and Reunion Island planters deferred payment; the workers’ wages were held back for two to three months. Penalties were liberally handed down to keep
the wage bill down by the planters. The workers had no rights as the Lambasa episode showed in Fiji.³

The lives of the women indentured labourers were particularly hard. They worked in the cane fields, looked after the housework, and also protected themselves from the sexual advances of the powerful, predatory men around them, and the more attractive women were at the mercy of the *sardars* (leader of a gang of workmen) and the overseers. Many widows and abandoned women took the difficult decision to accept new husbands and start a new life. The unmarried, unattached women frequently changed partners and fights over women were common and a major cause of murders and suicides among the indentured community. There was no concept of maternity leave, and women were back on the fields with their nursing babies as soon as they were able to move about after giving birth.

Even in the difficult working and living conditions in the plantations where normal life was disrupted, the Indians tried to recreate and maintain some customs. During their free time, the workers organized wrestling matches, put together groups for singing *bhajans* or *alhas* (a narrative) and listened to reading from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The Indians spoke in a variety of languages and dialects when they first arrived and could not understand each other. A kind of Hindustani mixed with some words from several dialects came into use on the plantations as a common language among the Indian workers.

**Imbalance in Sex-Ratio and its Impact on Indentured Life**

The disproportion in the sex ratio, non-recognition and non-acceptance of Indian customary marriages, corrosion of conventional manacles, matrimonial mores, and Indian civilisational value system gave rise to very grave and somber social

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³ A group of about 60 Pathans and Sikhs protested that they had been recruited for the police, but were sent to Lambasa to work on the plantations. When they complained to the Stipendiary Magistrate, they were ordered back to the estate and the leaders, arrested. They were fired up on by a police party, when they refused to work and then taken away to the capital Suva under armed guard. Later they were sent off to different plantations. The administration took a serious view of organised defiance as a bad precedent, and their original complaint of deception was quietly ignored. Colonial administrations did not allow any Indian to acquire a reputation or a following as a leader. Ringleaders in any protest were swiftly isolated and sent off to a different island or region.
consequences and tribulations in the indentured Indian community in the West Indies as well as in several of the recipient colonies; these facilitated disconcerted habits and practices, lowered the standard moral and ethical values, fashioned unwholesome antagonism and competition, made seduction more likely and fostered a feeling of jealousy and hatred which made the lives of immigrants very disturbed and unsettled, preparing the breeding ground for a life of resentment and anomaly. On the other end of the spectrum, this yielded some of the positive (initially confusing) gains; the purities of the candid caste and religious identities were crumbling down, paving a way towards an ‘Indian’ identity and the shortage of women also made the Indian men look towards other immigrant communities for matrimonial ties; though in the beginning the number was very low, the number seems to have grown in the gradual period of time, thus preparing the West Indian society for syncretism, pluralism and hybridity, which the young generation (Indian) West Indian feels proud of being.

Given the restraints on family emigration imposed by caste, custom, the protective joint family system and the socio-cultural pull of the Indian village combined with the indenture migration not being a spontaneous movement, dictated largely by socio-economic conditions and the demands of the different seasons, it was hardly surprising that Indian women emigrants were so scarce. Not only were there few families disposed to leave their janmabhumi (motherland) and sever traditional family ties but there were few unattached women because of the Indian custom of child betrothal and marriage at puberty. Respectable women of both high and low castes seemed reluctant to emigrate unless accompanied by their husbands or close relatives. Indian men, too, seemed averse to expose their wives and daughters to unknown lands (Warner 1866: 46). Indian women who regularly boarded emigrant vessels comprised principally ‘young widow and married and single women who have already gone astray, and are therefore not only most anxious to avoid their homes and conceal their antecedents, but were also at the same time the least likely to be received back into their families’ (Reporter of Protector (of Emigrants) 1879-80). Prostitutes from Calcutta and other large Indian cities were shipped largely to augment the numerical shortage and minimise demurrage. During famines which occurred with increasing frequency in the latter half of the nineteenth century women of higher social status, emaciated from hunger, often opted to emigrate with their families rather face starvation. Low caste families emigrated freely during these periods of economic

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distress but usually it was among those re-emigrating, or induced to leave, that families predominated (Pitcher 1882). In spite of all these the shortage of Indian women remained a feature in most recipient colonies throughout indenture and it was prolonged for spurious reasons and with disastrous consequences in the immigrant camp. As emigration progressed specific quotas were fixed. In 1857 the ratio was 35 women to 100 men, rising progressively to the high level of 50 to 100 in 1860 (Mangru 1987: 211).

The shortage of Indian women on the estates produced considerable tension and provided the key to an understanding of the problems Indian immigrants faced in establishing a stable family life. The Guyanese authorities exacerbated the problem by consistently refusing throughout indenture to grant both Hindus and Muslims the same marriage rights as Christians. Consequently, the immigrants' customary marriages were considered invalid as only a few were registered. Between 1860 and 1871 an average of 12 marriages were registered annually under the 1860 ordinance and 7 between 1904 and 1914, which meant that the majority of Indian children were registered as born out of wedlock and therefore illegitimate. As such they experienced considerable difficulties over succession to estate properties. Several marriages went unregistered because one or both of the contracting parties were below the prescribed legal age limit, 13 years for girls and 15 for boys. Before 1891 the high registration fees and the inconvenience and expense incurred in traveling to Georgetown proved an additional deterrent (C.O. 114/29. Immigration Agent-General Report for 1880). The refusal to recognise the validity of Indian marriages solemnised in accordance with custom and religion tended to weaken the marriage ties and facilitate the desertion of unfaithful wives to form new matrimonial connections.

4 Under the Heathen Marriage Ordinance 10 of 1860, before a marriage was contracted the parties were required to sign a declaration that no impediment existed against the proposed union either by previous or existing marriage, consanguinity or parental dissent. If no objections were raised the district magistrate gave each a certificate to produce to the Immigration Agent-General in Georgetown who validated the marriage and issued a marriage registration certificate at a fee of two dollars. Indians considered such formalism and officialism as contrary to their religious rites. The 'no objection' certificate and other needless obstacles tended in their view to deter registration and promote the contracting of invalid marriages. Largely illiterate and custom ridden, Indians regarded a marriage celebrated with due publicity and performed according to established rights and customs legal whether registered or not.
The immoral and unethical attitudes of European overseers and estate managers to form illicit relationship with Indian women not only aggravated the shortage but created substantial apprehension and anxiety in the immigrant camp. Such liaison, apart from constituting a serious breach of estate discipline, tended to produce conflict and undermine the employer-employee relationships. The illicit sexual relations between Gerard Van Nooten, Deputy Manager of Plantation Non Pareli, West Coast Demerara, and an Indian woman Jamni, seemed the principal cause of the riots there in 1897 when five Indians were killed, including the woman’s husband Jungli, and fifty-nine seriously wounded (Mangru 1987: 215-216). More importantly, they produced an alarming incidence of wife murders which plagued the indentured system until its demise and prompted intense criticisms in India. The official statistics showed 23 murders of Indian women by their husbands in the period 1859-1864, 11 between 1865-1870, 36 between 1884-1895 and 17 between 1901-1907. There were also 35 cases of cutting and wounding of Indian wives with the hoe and cutlass between 1886-1890 (Mangru 1987: 217).

The scarcity of women was exploited by some parents who exacted the ‘best price obtainable’ for their young daughters’ hand in marriage. In September 1869 the Royal Gazette reported the prevalence of a system whereby parents sold their young daughters to men old enough to be their fathers or grandfathers (The Royal Gazette, 23 Oct. 1869). According to Haynes Smith they then ‘laboriously enlarge the private parts of the poor child by mechanical means until she is ready for the aged purchaser’ (C.O. 384/165. Minute of Hynes Smith, 3 Feb. 1887). The absence of love and affection in such marriages tended to result not infrequently in adultery and eventually murder. The refusal to recognise Indian marriages performed under traditional rites and customs meant that a girl thus sold hardly enjoyed the security of a legal status. She could be re-sold subsequently to another purchaser prepared to offer a more attractive ‘bride price’, very often with disastrous consequences. Additionally the paucity of women made polyandry almost an acknowledged system. Scott commented on the loose domestic relations among the indentured population: ‘it is not uncommon for a woman of this class to leave the man with whom she has cohabited for another, and then for third, perhaps for a fourth, and sometimes to return to one of those she had previously deserted; and this she does in most cases with impunity’ (C.O. 111/376. Scott to Kimberley, no. 100, 15 Aug. 1870; Duff, p.320).
Such an imbalance in the sex ratio during this period of indentureship could have been alleviated through inter-racial marriages but very few evidence of interracial marriages were traced during this period, though in the passage of time the number rose. Governor John Scott observed in 1871 that although Indian-Creole relationships seemed cordial there was ‘no general social intercourse between them, such as would tend to bring about more intimate relations’ (C.O. 111/386. Gov. J. Scott to Earl of Kimberley, no. 106. 18 July 1871). The Creole, organ of the black population, found Indian immigrants ‘intensely clannish, they keep to themselves, and mix with no other race’ (The Creole, 10 Nov. 1873). In James Crosby’s somewhat exaggerated view ‘the Indian immigrants never, and the Chinese but seldom intermarry with any other race than their own’ (C.O. 114/26. Immigration Agent-General, Report for 1874).

Although caste distinction and religious prejudices were undermined somewhat, the continuous influx of new arrivals and batches of immigrants with their language and traditions provided the link between village India and estate residents and acted as a stimulus to their religio-cultural awareness; tended to strengthen Hinduism as well as Islam. Most Indians were thus reluctant to risk chastisement from fellow immigrants by marrying women of another race and sometimes for a Hindu by marrying in a different caste as they regarded themselves as exiles and were not disinclined to claim a return passage, hoping to be readmitted into caste by performing certain expiatory rites; hence, marrying a woman of a different race, or for that matter a low caste Indian woman, and taking her to his village was unthinkable as it would most likely involve the severing of family ties and connections and certainly caste expulsion.

On the other end, the colonial authorities felt that the disturbances in the estates have been primarily due to the shipping of the brothel houses of the main cities of India, so they emphasised time and again the advantages of enlisting a respectable class of women even if additional expenses were incurred. Only by recognising their traits of character and initiating measures to develop them, Young, the Acting Governor contended, that ‘civilisation and morality’ could be substantially improved among the Indian population. The Indian woman was not physically capable of strenuous plantation exertion but, claimed Young, she was industrious and by devoting herself to domestic duties she could exercise ‘a civilising and humanising influence on those
around her'. (C.O. 384/123. Young to M. Hicks Beach, no. 133, 24 May 1879). In June 1877 the planters passed a resolution calling for the importation, free of indenture, of Indian widows and betrothed women who, they claimed, having lost their husbands or intended husbands were less disposed to remarry, despite the legalisation of widow- remarriage, and 'by religion and custom are condemned to live apart' (Mangru 1987: 224). Another scheme to obviate the shortage produced equally disappointing results. Under it single men under contract would be encouraged to contact relatives and friends in India to select prospective brides who on arrival would be indentured to the same plantation. Proprietors were instructed to publicise the plan but only six applications were reportedly made of which three were rejected on the grounds that the men already had wives and families (Mangru 1987: 225). The unenthusiastic response and reaction by the Indian Government as well as the Indian people, who thought that these were attempts by the European colonials to christen their cultures and traditions and on the other, the hypocritical nature of the colonial masters yielded no good results in this regard. There was no genuine concern of the colonials of the problem; in clamouring persistently for indentured immigration, the plantocracy, preoccupied with profits and labour control, hardly ever considered the Indian character or studied conditions in India. This seemingly nonchalant attitude was reflected in the conduct of some estate personnel who not only studiously ignored official directives but actually contributed to the immorality on estates. The knowledge that Indian women were leading immoral lives in the recipient colonies deeply offended an Indian public that set great store by the chastity of its women folk. Their plight became the most explosive feature of the indenture system and provided the articulate Indian nationalists with a powerful weapon against its continuation.

Other aspects of the socio-cultural and religious life in the Indian community of the West Indies got affected due to such an imbalance in the sex ratio; it accelerated the weakening and modification of caste consciousness (the breaking down of caste distinctions had actually commenced during depot residence in India and continued on the voyage where the cramped conditions made it difficult to observe untouchability or practice certain rites) by facilitating inter-caste marriages; people of different castes and religions not only shared common facilities but were allocated duties indiscriminately; and on the sugar plantations employers disregarded the nuances of Indian culture and made no distinction in job allocation. It was not
uncommon to find men of higher castes being supervised by low caste sirdars (headman). Andrews’ description of the ‘coolie’ lines in Fiji seemed to mirror that in British Guiana: ‘Castes, creeds, races, and religions were joined and jumbled together in chaotic confusion. Mohammedans cohabited with Hindus, and Sweepers with Brahmins’ (Andrews 1918: 74). Caste modification, on the other hand, tended to facilitate occupational mobility and create new avenues of employment for those whose occupation in India was circumscribed by caste. Gradually Indians looked at other ethnic groups for matrimonial alliances and ties, which were certainly going to drive the West Indian society in a different mould.

**Prohibition of Indentured Labour Migration**

By 1912 the demand for abolition of indenture had become a part of the national struggle in India and the most important event in the battle against indenture was the debate on the resolution moved by the great Indian nationalist, Gopal Krishna Gokhale on 4 March 1912 to prohibit all forms of indentured recruitment in India. While introducing his resolution Gokhale called the indentured system “a monstrous system, iniquitous in itself, based on fraud and maintained by force” (Singh 2005: 43). It was degrading to the people of India, he said, for whatever it existed, all Indians were known as coolies. The debate divided the Council between the non-official Indian members and the British official members; all the Indian members strongly opposed all forms of indenture. Though the resolution was defeated in the Council by the larger number of official members, the debate showed the strong feelings that prevailed among the Indian members.

Gandhi returned to India on January 9, 1915 and by the middle of the year he had taken up the movement against the indenture recruitment as his first big political campaign in India. Earlier in South Africa, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi had taken up the cause of Indian workers using non-violent means to highlight their conditions; his agitation in Natal had its impacts in India, bringing to notice the abuse in the system. He attacked it in speeches and in newspaper articles; calling it a “national stigma”, which has systematised racial inferiority and superiority between Indians and Europeans. He announced that he would launch a satyagraha to begin picketing all
emigrant ships unless the indenture practice was stopped. Another pioneer in raising the concerns over the diabolic treatment and callousness in the harsh life of the Indian indentured labour was Reverend Charles Freer Andrews\(^5\), who began his own personal campaign against indenture and greatly helped Mahatma Gandhi and others in this struggle.

The Indian Coolie Protection Society and the Anti-Indentured Emigration League of Bengal were set up to fight emigration. Pamphlets were distributed in Bihar and Eastern Uttar Pradesh about the evils of the indenture system and the hostility to the recruitment became intense. In Trinidad the Working Men’s Association protested against Indian immigration as a threat and standard of living in the country. In British Guiana, the People’s Association opposed taxes that were meant to provide for short indenture periods.

Indenture recruitment was falling for several reasons, including the strong opposition in India. In 1917 government declared that indenture recruitment had ended, but Indians remained indentured in the colonies. When Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya moved a resolution in the Legislative Council, the government in India, the India Office in London and the colonies had to take notice of Indian demands. The debate

\(^5\) Andrews was an English missionary who devoted his life to the Indian cause. He had been asked to visit South Africa by Gokhale, where he met and became a close associate of Gandhi. He had spent time with Gandhiji at Tolstoy Farm in South Africa and had seen how the indenture system worked in practice. Andrews described how he learnt to talk to the Indian workers, who were like “dumb’ driven cattle, too panic stricken to speak out”. He was shocked by the terms in which the Europeans spoke of the coolies. Gandhi sent Andrews to Fiji to investigate the conditions of the indentured workers. The Indian government was getting concerned about the rising Indian sentiment against indenture but was still looking to continue limited emigration for some more time. Andrews was accompanied by William Pearson during his tour of Fiji. On their return they published a damning report, called ‘Indian Labour in Fiji: An Independent Inquiry’, that was based on interviews with indentured workers and planters.

Andrews’ speeches and writings that focused on the moral evils of indenture struck a chord with many prominent British men and women in India. His reports on the condition of indentured women had the widest impact. The wide publicity in India and in Britain had an effect on the Fiji administration. In 1915 the laws providing for prison sentences for labour offences were abolished and the colonial administration directed that the term ‘indentured Indian immigrants’ should replace the odious word ‘coolie’ in all official communications. The Governor of Fiji acknowledged in the Legislative Council in Suva that “amid much that exaggerated, Mr. Andrews has made certain criticisms which unfortunately cannot be refuted”. Andrews made a second visit to Fiji in 1917, and this time he was treated with hostility by the planters and even by some officials. It is said in Fiji that Gandhi named Andrews ‘Deenbandhu’ (friend of the poor) while he was on his second trip to Fiji. It became the title by which he was referred to by the Indians.
on the motion was held on 11 September 1918; Malaviya concentrated on the situation in Fiji. Indians who had completed their indenture and wanted to return could not do so, as there were no ships to bring them back. But there was no dearth of shipping for sugar and other commodities, he said. Finally on January 1, 1920 the government cancelled all indentures in Fiji and the indenture system officially came to an end.

Thus an indentured labourer lured by the promises of a life more comfortable than what he had led in his village plus a reasonably high pay, was for all practical purposes a slave, imprisoned in his master’s estate with considerable limits set upon freedom. Possibly a racial memory of this prompted Naipaul to write: “Growing up in Trinidad, I had never wanted to be employed. I had always wanted to be a free man. This was partly the effect of my peasant Indian background and the colonial agricultural society of Trinidad” (Naipaul 1989: 261). Here, Naipaul does not mention the unequal power relations in the plantations and the politics of the desire for independence on the part of the descendants of indentured immigrants. By essentialising this desire and presenting this as an act of pure will, people in the space of the plantation are erased and the experience becomes part of the diasporan aesthetics.

During this period of hardship religion was used as a means to organise and orient their lives. Organisation of yagnas, the sponsoring of pujas and satsangs were the forms of religious activities which became more and more frequent. Festivals like Diwali, Eid etc. were celebrated with great pomp and show and participation extended to Hindus as well as Muslims. In this ambience, Tulsi Das’s Ramcharitmanas acquired a new significance as the indentured immigrants visualised themselves banished from their familiar surroundings like Rama and undergoing great hardship. Along with this, bhajans, kirtans and readings from the Bhagvad Gita was the part of the immigrant’s socio-cultural life apart from giving them a spiritual sustenance.

A germination of socialisation in the lives and styles of Indian immigrants was to be marked in the gradual process. In this connection, reference can be made to Paul Gilroy, who in his most famous book on diasporic history, The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness, juxtaposes the metaphors of ‘root’ and ‘route’
in his study of diasporic literature. The 'root' metaphor reconstructs memoriably a pristine, pure, uncontaminated homeland to which the first generation immigrant dreamt of returning. In *A House For Mr. Biswas*, one reads about pundit Tulsi's dream of returning to India, a dream that became meaningless after his death. In *Finding the Centre*, Naipaul talks about his grandfather who died on his way back to his native village near Gorakhpur. The 'route' metaphor suggests the journey and the historical interactions between masters and indentured immigrants little better than slaves, which have forever 'contaminated' the diasporic ethos and memory. Vijay Mishra in his *Ordering Naipaul: Indenture History and Diasporic Poetics*, locates the 'route' metaphor in two geographical spaces: the ship and the plantation barracks. Of the first, Mishra says: “The ship...is the first of the cultural units in which social relations are resisted and renegotiated. For the old, exclusivist Indian diaspora, the ship produced a site in which caste purities were largely lost (after all the crossing of the dark ocean, the kalapani, signified the loss of caste) as well as a new form of socialisation that went by the name of Jahaji-Bhai (ship brotherhood). Social interactions during these long sea voyages created a process that led to the remaking of cultural and ethnic identities, to a critical self-reflexivity of the kind missing from the stratified and less mobile institutions of the homeland.”

On the other end, to reduce the financial liability of the colonial government for return passages to India; and to settle the free Indians in orderly communities within easy distance of the sugar estates so as to provide the planters with a convenient source of non-resident but seasoned labourers during crop, the colonial government offered Indians land. In Trinidad, in 1869, Governor Gordon agreed to grant the request of twenty-five free Indians for grants of crown land in exchange for forfeiting their claim to a return passage to India. Between 1869 and 1880, a total of 2,643 adult male immigrants were settled on 9,055 acres of crown land under the commutation scheme (Brereton 1979: 181).

Once Gordon had opened up the crown land to small purchasers in 1869, the way was open for free Indians to become landowners in the normal way. Between 1885 and 1886, twenty-four per cent of all crown land sales were to Indians; from 1891 to 1895 it was thirty-four per cent. At least 37,256 acres of crown land were sold to Indians between 1885 and 1900; by the later date, at least 56,311 acres of crown land were in
Indian ownership (Brereton 1979: 181). In addition, Indians rented land from landowners of their own ways or, abandoned plantation land might be offered for rent in small holdings and taken up by free Indians. This led to the formation of the establishment of small ‘Indian villages’ and the transformation of the Indians into peasant proprietors. This established Indian peasantry cultivated a variety of crops and vegetables, but probably their most important contribution to the island’s economy was in the production of a local food supply. They took enthusiastically to rice-growing, especially in the swamp land of the Caroni Savannah and Oropouche Lagoon; by 1896, 6,000 acres were in padi rice, providing one-sixth of local consumption (Brereton 1979: 181). Cocoa became popular with Indian peasants and the Indians too entered cane-farming; by 1906, they outnumbered Creoles in this field. The establishment of an Indian peasantry provided solid economic foundations for the development of an Indian community with roots in colony and it gave the Indians in the new peasant settlements a degree of economic stability and independence, which would allow the development of autonomous social institutions. So, free from the constraints of the plantation discipline, the Indian villagers found it possible, and necessary to recreate some of the social institutions of village India.

This was the story of the early immigrant life. The indentured immigrant had little or no contact with the world outside his plantation. But, gradually one finds his world enlarging as he attempted to find an identity for himself in the opportunities available outside the plantation. Thus, the changes in their lives are both sweeping and subtle. From being mainly agricultural at the beginning the society evolved into a more complex web. Priority changed in the course and values became money-based and slowly individuals came into their own, shedding their group-based identity. The society was definitely a forerunner to post-colonial society though its postcoloniality had yet to acquire a definite shape.

**Organisational Patterns of the ‘Indian’ West Indians**

One may assume that the immigrants had no intention, consciously or otherwise, of changing their way of life, that they expected to continue to live in the new land in
accordance with the institutions to which they were accustomed and it is, therefore, likely that they attempted to maintain in the new setting, the cultural patterns they had learnt at home, and presumably valued. On the other hand, a complete and comprehensive recreation of the culture of the homeland was impossible in such a distant land; with the presence of various other cultural segments in the West Indies it was not possible for the Indians to retain their wholesome cultural peculiarity. So the question that needs examination then is what extent the emigrant succeeded in approximating to the norms and institutions of their home villages? This can be discussed by pointing out some of the traits of the Indian institutional pattern in the Caribbean by studying organizational dynamics in reference to language, caste, and religion, which stand at the apex of identity formation of the Caribbean Indians.

Language

The Indian communities in diaspora with a multifarious and an assortment of heterogeneous phenomenon in terms of the history of their emigration; their regional, religious, socio-economic, political, cultural and educational backgrounds; the political and economic context in which they have developed over time; and the socio-cultural experiences they have undergone, vary considerably. So as a matter of fact the form of the languages which the different diasporic communities carried as a part of their socio-cultural baggage has varied considerably. They have experienced attrition and disappeared altogether, or they have survived in extremely limited spheres of life, or they have been modified and retained, or they continue to exist and are in contact with their ancestral roots, or they have been sought to be revived and revitalised with varying degrees of success. Another interesting dimension to this study of language retention or language change or language attrition on the part of the Indian diaspora is that whereas a particular standard language is used for a particular purpose, the dialect of the same language is used for some other different purposes; in Mauritius, Fiji and Surinam, a local dialect of Bhojpuri is used in all informal spheres and standard Hindi in religious and cultural domains; and in Guyana and Trinidad, Bhojpuri is used in folk songs and standard Hindi in religious services and ceremonies.
Though in the adopted countries to which Indians set out and settled down, the dominant lingua franca was the widely prevalent local languages, yet Indians were able to retain their ‘carried’ linguistic tradition in the early years of their indentureship. But in the gradual process of the wave of change and primarily in a domain of race for economic empowerment and supremacy as well as Indian’s exposure and contamination with other sections and communities of the society, the ‘pure’ language of Indians no longer remained the same and their tongues tried to learn to chant English or the variant of Creole English, exhibiting especially the new younger generation of Indians’ new-fangled promise and identity. It is really a magnificent and vigorous endeavour to study and explain the differential dynamics of language in Indian diaspora; the formulation, no doubt, can only come out of extant comparative studies of the history and status of Indian languages among different diasporic communities. But in the brief canvass of this chapter it won’t be possible to draw all the dynamism and variation in the language of Indian diaspora, so this section of the study is primarily confined to the rim of analyzing and tracing out the linguistic element brought by the ancestors of diasporic Indians of the West Indies during the indenture era; it examines the metamorphosis and attrition that this element experienced in the course of over 150 years of their presence in these island countries; and it documents the efforts at reviving and rejuvenating the linguistic element of their cultural heritage.

Between 1845 and 1917, 143,939 Indians were brought into Trinidad under the scheme of indentured labour, of which only 33,294 (or 23.1 per cent) eventually returned to India (Laurence 1971: 26; 57). It is of course true that there is no authentic official record of the languages and dialects which they brought with them but considering the region from which an overwhelming majority of the Indians were recruited – namely, the western part of Bihar, the eastern part of the then United Provinces and the southern plateau of Chota Nagpur – it is justifiably presumed by linguists that most of these immigrants ‘must have been native speakers of the various dialects of Bhojpuri (Mohan 1978: 8). This is further confirmed by ‘the striking similarities between the Bhojpuri widely spoken in Trinidad (in comparison with other Indic languages) and the different varieties of Bhojpuri spoken in India (Mohan 1978: 11). Besides Bhojpuri, the immigrants hailing from different parts of India
brought with them their own mother tongues, hence pouring the plantation barracks with varieties of Indian languages and dialects like, Avadhi, Magadhi, Maithili, Bengali, Nepali, and Telugu etc. The immigrants hailing from the Madras Presidency (forming about 10 per cent) (Jayaram 2004: 149) brought with them south Indian languages, most notably, Tamil. The linguistic confusion resulting from multiplicity of languages and dialects among the immigrant Indians was remarked by Reverend W.H. Gamble, a British missionary:

The Bengalis speak Hindustani and Bengali, while the inhabitants of the Madras Presidency speak Tamil, a totally different language. When these people meet in Trinidad, it strikes me as somewhat strange that they have to point to water and rice, and ask each other what they call it in their language. So totally different are the languages, the Hindustani and the Tamil that English has to become the medium of communication (Gamble 1866: 33).

Initially, Indians were able to preserve the languages carried by them to the distant land, as Tinker feels; this was due to the persistence of the Indians speaking their mother tongue among themselves (Tinker 1993: 211). The lack of educational facilities for their children, which would have forced them to learn an alien language in school, also assisted them in preserving their carried linguistic heritage in the initial years of their indentureship. Even when educational facilities became available, most Indian parents kept their children away from school for various reasons, not excluding the fear of conversion to Christianity (Singh 1974). At the outset, the exigencies of plantation life made two linguistic demands on the Indian immigrants: first they were required to develop a language for communication among themselves, a lingua franca as it were. And second, they had to develop the ability to communicate with the authorities and in the market, which meant acquiring a more or less intelligible English patois and adopting Creole English as their link-language (Jayaram 2004: 150).

Despite the fact that the Bhojpuri-speaking immigrants from various parts of north India forming the numerical core of the Indian community it was very difficult to develop a lingua franca for internal communication among the Indian indentured labour community because of the different languages carried from various parts of India and even the Bhojpuri brought to Trinidad was not homogenous, and it reflected the dialectal variations of the parts from which the speakers came. But in due course,
however, through a process of koineisation\(^6\) (that is leveling) of different dialects, a new variant of Bhojpuri was evolved as a reasonably homogeneous lingua franca on the sugar plantations. This variant is called by linguists like Mohan and Zador as ‘Trinidad Bhojpuri’ and historians like Tinker call it ‘Plantation Hindustani’ (Tinker 1993: 208). In the last decades of the 19th century, by the time Indians had improved themselves from indentured labour to as an agricultural community; Trinidad Bhojpuri had become their ethnic language. Thus in his 1914 report on Trinidad, J. McNeill observed that ‘soon after arrival all immigrants learn Plantation Hindustani’ (Tinker 1993: 211).

**Standard Hindi as a Tool for Religious Conversion**

The exigencies of plantation life and the large number of Indian immigrants hailing from Bhojpuri speaking areas of northern India made spontaneous emergence of Trinidad Bhojpuri or Plantation Hindustani as a lingua franca among the Indian communities. And this was supplemented by the cognizant endeavours of the Canadian Presbyterian Mission at initiating Standard Hindi in Trinidad for the fulfillment of its religious designs and Reverend John Morton of that mission was the pioneer of this. With a missionary zeal to propagate Christianity among Indians Reverend Morton came to Trinidad in 1868 and established a Mission and for his purpose he realized and appreciated the need to use the native language of Indians and the native language which he found best suited for his work was the Hindi dialect.

\(^6\) In linguistics, koineisation is a contact-induced process through which new varieties of a language are brought about as a result of contact between speakers of mutually intelligible varieties (dialects) of the same language. Since the speakers understand one another from before the advent of the koiné, the koineisation process is not as rapid as pidginisation and creolisation. Normal influence between neighbouring dialects is not regarded as koineisation. A koiné variety emerges as a new spoken variety in addition to the originating dialects; it does not change any existing dialect. This separates koineisation from normal evolution of dialects. Kerswill identifies two types of koinés: regional and immigrant. A regional koiné is formed when a strong regional dialect comes into contact with dialects of speakers who move into the region. An immigrant koiné is a new dialect that forms in a community settled by immigrants speaking two or more mutually intelligible dialects of the same language. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century speakers of a variety of Hindi dialects were conscripted to serve as indentured laborers in Fiji, Guyana, Mauritius, South Africa, Suriname, and Trinidad & Tobago and other parts of the European colonial globe. Speakers of these dialects came together in varying proportions under different conditions and developed distinctive Hindi koinés.
Under the guidance of Reverend John Morton, the Canadian Presbyterian Mission, with a missionary zeal to conversion and propagation of Christianity among Indians, played a pivotal part in introducing and propagating Standard Hindi in Trinidad. Though the Mission continued to use Hindi for its activities right through the first half of the 20th century, gradually the initiative was lost and Standard Hindi experienced attrition even among the Presbyterians. In the late 1950s, the Mission gave up the emphasis on Hindi, as Arthur Niehoff and Juanita Niehoff observed, its administrators found that ‘the young Indians no longer have any interest in it’ and ‘except for the very old, they [the Presbyterians] show very little interest in maintaining Hindi as a spoken language and it is very rarely heard in Christian homes’ (Niehoff and Juanita 1960: 149, 151).

Attempts of Hindu Religious Organisations and Indian Government for the Spread and Sustenance of Hindi

In the multi-ethnic political canvass of the Caribbean characterised by cultural contentions, language became a crucial ingredient of ethnic identity for the Indians. Thus, the efforts at revival of Hindi and its propagation, which began in the 1950s, could be viewed as a conscious reaction by sections of the Indo-Trinidadians against the loss of their distinctive cultural heritage through linguistic attrition. Several

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7 In the early days of the Canadian Presbyterian Mission, its members had to learn Hindi so that they could communicate with the newly arriving immigrants from India. The first regular Church of the Canadian Presbyterian Mission was the ‘Susamachar Church’ in San Fernando. In this Church, religious service was given in Hindi. In the beginning there were very few copies of the Bibles in Hindi and gradually by 1872, there arrived from Calcutta boxes of books containing Bibles, and tracts and catechisms in Hindi. In 1872, Reverend Morton began translating and preparing hymns, assisted by Reverend Andrew Gayadeen. Considerations of economy of time and money soon made the Mission think of starting a Hindi press of its own. First, Morton purchased ‘all the East Indian’s type’ and got press work done in Port of Spain. Then he bought a hand press and moved the plant to Tunapuna and started his own press. At this first Hindi press in Trinidad were printed, in 1903, thousands of copies of Prarthna Mala (The Garland of Prayers), the Hindi hymn book, which came to be used at all Hindi services not only in Trinidad but in far away Jamaica too. Morton also brought out the ‘International Sabbath School Lessons’ in Hindi with a simple commentary in English. This publication went on a long way in systematising the teaching of Hindi in the Sunday School, allying it closely to the religious instruction in the day schools.
organisations and Individuals, religious and/or cultural in orientation, played a role in this.  

8 The Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha (established in 1952), the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha (incorporated in 1943) and other Hindu religious bodies took an interest in Hindi as a liturgical language of the Hindus. Pandits went to India to study Hindi and learn scriptures like Bhagvat Gita, Ramayan, Srimad Bhagavata, Shiva Purana, Vishnu Purana, etc. Hindi has now become a religious requisite of the pandit class. Many leading pandits of Trinidad, both in the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha and the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha are Hindi graduates. Hindi is taught in mandirs (temples) under the jurisdiction of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha, and as part of the radio programme 'Dharm Shiksha' (religious education) for school children sponsored by it.

In 1952 the Hindi Education Board was established under the sponsorship of the then High Commissioner of India, Anand Mohan Sahay. The Board had as its objective the teaching of Hindi and elements of Indian culture in villages. It offered Hindi courses at three levels – Prarambhik (beginner), Junior and Senior (equivalent to India’s lower secondary). Books published by the Dakshin Bharath Hindi Prachar Sabha, Madras (now Chennai), were used as approved text books. Till 1957 the Board functioned under the directorship of Edward Joseph Pillai. He was replaced by Induthai Kelar, who was deputed by the Government of India. After her departure from Trinidad, the Board slackened in its activities and the number of students began dwindling steadily. The propagation of Hindi was resumed after the arrival, in 1966, of Hari Shankar Adesh as a Secretary at the High Commission of India at Port of Spain. Because of his efforts several classes were restarted, seminars were held and a cultural camp was organised.

Adesh had founded the Bharatiya Vidya Sansthaan in November 1966. This organisation sought the all round development of Indian culture, including the teaching of Indian languages (Hindi, Sanskrit and Urdu), music (both vocal and instrumental) and performing arts (like dance and drama). The Sansthaan has made considerable contribution to the revival and propagation of Hindi in Trinidad. Starting with a few students, the Sansthaan has established more than 30 schools spread all over the country. It prepares students for the Hindi examinations conducted by the University of London, the Rashtra Bhasha Prachar Samithi (Wardha) and the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (Mumbai). Starting from March 1968, the Sansthaan has been publishing a monthly magazine called Jyothi. One of the former pupils and a notable activist of the Sansthaan, Kamla Ramlakhan, has written a two-part Hindi language text book – Hindi Prabhat (Dawn of Hindi) – keeping in mind the socio-cultural background of the Trinidad learners. Incidentally, it is the Sansthaan which has sought to popularise Namaste as a form of greeting among Hindus, whose culturally rooted mode of greeting has been Sitaram.

Contrasted with this is the pronouncedly less religious orientation of the Hindi Nidhi (Hindi Foundation of Trinidad and Tobago), established in 1986 to propagate Hindi in Trinidad. The Nidhi has brought out a few Hindi textbooks for beginners, and it sponsors the teaching of Hindi in schools and the Hindi Sikhen (let us learn Hindi) programme on the radio.

The Government of India has evinced keen interest in the revival and propagation of Hindi in Trinidad, as also in some other countries with a substantial proportion of population of Indian origin. The Commission had started free evening classes in Hindi in 1985 which, after being suspended for some years, were restarted in 1992. It also observes Hindi Divas on January 14 every year. The Government of India has been providing scholarships to Trinidadians for studying Hindi in India. The Indian Council for Cultural Relations has been offering the services of two Hindi professors – one at the St. Augustine campus of The University of the West Indies (since 1989) and the other at the National Institute of Higher Education and Research in Science and Technology in Port of Spain (since 1987).

Before 1993, Indian cultural programmes hardly got a few hours of broadcast time on the radio. Now there are three radio stations broadcasting Indo-Trinidadian and Hindi programmes, and two exclusively so. They also carry a few advertisements in Hindi. In 1995, two of them offered Hindi lessons – Hindi Sikhen (let us learn Hindi) and Hindi Mein Bath Chith (conversation in Hindi). Hindi films and film-based programmes, and cultural programmes using Hindi in varying degrees are regularly telecast by the local television stations. Cinema halls regularly screen Hindi movies, whose
Abrasion of Hindi and Bhojpuri in the West Indies

With the growing expansion of education, the younger generation, especially those in urban areas, gradually adopted Creole English and/or Standard English as the native language and this stood as an obstacle in the way of Plantation Hindustani or Trinidad Bhojpuri becoming a 'native language,' though it had evolved as a language different from the ancestral languages. According to a socio-linguistic profile prepared by Sealey on the basis of 1970 census data, currently the Indo-Trinidadians 'share with the rest of the population...varieties of Trinidadian Creole English as the major L1 and language of daily communication'(Jayaram 2004). This community-wide language shift over the decades has meant that Trinidad Bhojpuri is a dying language (Mahabir and Mahabir 1990: 3). The Trinidad Bhojpuri or plantation Hindustani has been confined to few native speakers who use it among their restricted friends or kin circle and it is sometimes used by the elders in the presence of strangers or children when something confidential is discussed or when they wish to exclude them from conversation. The same is said to be true of the very few elderly persons in the ‘Madrasi’ settlements in rural areas, who still speak Tamil, and the elderly Muslims who speak Urdu.

Trinidad Bhojpuri and Standard Hindi did not survive for more than a century in Trinidad and other parts of the West Indies and it is almost spoken exclusively by the very elderly in rural areas; it is survived mostly in their folk songs, in their lexicon of kitchen and food, to some extent in their kinship terminology and in the religious realm among the Hindus. The linguistic attrition of native languages among diasporic Indians in Trinidad, and the attrition of lingua franca which was spontaneously evolved (Trinidad Bhojpuri) and deliberately developed (Standard Hindi) was primarily due to the reason that throughout the period of indenture, and later too, the ancestral culture of immigrant Indians was being ignored, ridiculed and suppressed by audience has reportedly grown over the years. Also, the innumerable cultural organisations and associations often use Hindi in varying doses.
the dominant culture of the colony; pressurising them to creolise. But under such trying situations Indians did not allow the total obliteration of their 'Indianness,' as Tinker feels, though with some loss (including their language), the Indians still retain more of their own cultural identity than their African counterpart (Tinker 1993: 208).

There is no doubt that Trinidad Bhojpuri or plantation Hindustani as a lingua franca was evolved through a process of koineisation, but very few Indians did recognise it as a distinct language and most of them considered it as a derivative of Standard Hindi. The native speakers of Trinidad Bhojpuri themselves had feelings of inferiority about that language. Standard Hindi was viewed as 'good Hindi' or 'proper Hindi' (Mahabir and Mahabir 1990: 3). They heard this Hindi spoken in Hindi films, which have a wide audience in Trinidad. This feeling of inferiority about the language, as Mohan claims, is 'partly responsible for the failure of its speakers to transmit this language to younger generations of Trinidad Indians' (Mohan 1978: 2).

There were conscious efforts by various religious organisations and missionaries to make an intrinsic linkage between language and religion and to use language (primarily Hindi) for their religious propagation designs and aspirations. One may recall here that the Canadian Presbyterian Mission carefully chose Standard Hindi as its liturgical language and this move kept many a Hindu away from Standard Hindi in the colonial era; the use of Standard Hindi by the Mission was suspected by many Hindus and Muslims as a stratagem for their conversion to Christianity. In Seepersad Naipaul's (father of V.S. Naipaul) perceptive work of fiction, The Adventures of Gurudeva and other Stories, depicting the life of Indians in rural Trinidad in the 1940s, Sohun (the school teacher) tells Gurudeva (the protagonist): 'In school you never were keen on Hindi. Your father felt that teaching you Hindi was only a ruse on my part to teach you the Bible. He preferred his own sons to grow up as ignorant Hindu rather than as intelligent Christians' (Naipaul 1976: 91-92). It was in a way ironical that when the Christian Missionaries were getting their scriptural materials translated into Hindi, the Hindu religious leaders were using English translations of their scriptures.
In the gradual process, the Mission did not find it fruitful to use Hindi as a medium of religious propagation and almost entirely switched over to English even before a century after its establishment. Hindu religious bodies or organisations leaning towards Hinduism in one form or other made successful efforts at propagating Hindi and these organizations are the ones making efforts to promulgate Hindi and make this language alive in the Caribbean. Whereas for the Hindu pandits Hindi is a sacral language, for the Presbyterian ministers it has long since been replaced by English, and for the Muslim mullahs Arabic rather than Hindi or Urdu is the sacral language. Any effort at propagating Hindi is expected to be articulated by groups which have an element of religious agenda, with its own consequences. The excessive emphasis on the sacral nature of Hindi and its identification with Hinduism is, therefore, likely to alienate non-Hindus from learning it, let alone adopting it as an ethnic language.

Another impediment to the revival of Hindi in the West Indies was the emphasis on Shudh (pure or standard) variety on the part of most propagators of Hindi, including the Indian and India-trained teachers. As Sperl has observed, 'language loyalty movements among Indians in Trinidad attempt to counter the language shift towards Creole/English by promoting not Trinidad Hindi, the ordinary local vernacular, but Standard Hindi as spoken in India' (Sperl 1980: 9). For Indo-Trinidadians learning Standard Hindi is as good as learning an alien language. Hindi movies and Hindi film music have always been popular among Indo-Trinidadians and Hindi movies portray what Indo-Trinidadians perceive as the society of their ancestral land. The impact of Hindi film music, both songs and dance, on what Indo-Trinidadians call ‘the Indian culture’ in Trinidad is pronounced (Jayaram 2004: 163). Here it’s to be noted that the average Indo-Trinididian is interested in Hindi movies, and not in Hindi per se. Hindi movies screened in Trinidad invariably carry English subtitles and a few popular Hindi movies have even been dubbed into English. Similarly, most Indo-Trinidadians listen to Hindi songs without understanding them. These songs may be characterised by soothing melodies, lilting tunes or fast beats. Their appeal may be in the emotions or sentiments they seem to convey or in their easy adaptability to dance. Reviewing Mani Ratnam’s film ‘Bombay’, Joannah Bharose wrote in Trinidad Guardian: ‘I could not understand a word of Hindi or Arabic but the music sounded great’ (Bharose 1995). Similarly, columnist Omatie Lyder declared in Daily Express: “For years I have listened to Indian singers and sung along with them. It never mattered to me that
I couldn’t translate a verse of Kishore Kumar’s or Lata Mangeshkar’s songs. Not understanding them didn’t take away the joy of listening. The same can be said of my fascination with Latin music” (Lyder 1995).

In the ethnic politics of Trinidad, the Hindi question has often acquired a political colour. According to John La Guerra, in the post-colonial suffrage situation, ‘Hindi and the institutions associated with Hindi...were seen as centres of resistance against the newly independent government and also as centres for opposition resistance’. Viewed in this light, the first International Hindi Conference held in Trinidad in April 1992 appeared to him to be a celebration, of ‘not really a language, but the presence of the Indians on the social and political stage of Trinidad and Tobago’ (Daily Express 1992). In view of the ethnic tag attached to Hindi, anybody explicitly advocating its introduction in schools during the early decades of independence would have been accused of advancing an ethnic cause. Campbell’s following commentary is indicative of this:

...the biggest surprise in terms of Indian demands for something which would benefit Indians alone came from Hans Hanoomansingh in December 1970, when he called for a full debate on the teaching of Hindi and Urdu in Indian schools. Nothing had been heard in parliament about this since the PNM first came to power. Hanooman Singh never got his debate; and there is no indication that the majority of the Indian parliamentarians would have supported him (Campbell 1992: 84).

Everybody seems to be apologetic, even in the present day scenario, while raising the cause of Hindi; in his speech at the flag raising ceremony to officially signal the launching of the Fifth World Hindi Conference, Foreign Affairs Minister Ralph Maraj was constrained to assure that there was nothing to fear from sections of the national community seeking to rediscover their roots, since Trinidad and Tobago is a cosmopolitan country. He even expressed a desire to see the Afro-Trinidadians teach their ancestral languages (Daily Express 1996).

To conclude, one may say that in the light of general domination of Trinidad Creole English and Standard English in the wider society, and in the absence of economic motivation or the administrative necessity for learning Hindi, Indo-Trinidadians did not find their ethnic language prospectful. No gainsaying, when educational advancement was unthinkable for the indentured immigrants, the doors of English education were opened for the children of those Indians who converted to
Christianity, more so to Presbyterianism and along with this came the prospects of employment in the emerging modern sector, including the cherished professions of medicine and law. English and literacy in English carried high prestige in the colonial period and as a language of education, English became a ladder of upward mobility in the colonial social order. Young generation Indians did not mind to scarify one element of their culture, that is, their ethnic language, as part of the process of modernisation.

Among the Indian West Indians there has been a shift towards Creole English as the first language, and even as the mother tongue, and there has also been a pronounced strain towards monolingualism in that language. Most of the young generation Indian West Indians feel that their native language has no use whatsoever in commerce and administration; Creole English is the first language of most West Indians and Standard English is the official language of most of the West Indian islands. Trinidad Creole English (at primary level) and Standard English (at secondary level and beyond) are used in education. From the utilitarian point of view, those who study an additional language, invariably choose Spanish or French (Jayaram 2004: 157). This, however, does not mean that Hindi has been wiped out totally from the West Indies; it exists as a sacral language of the Hindus and is used in the cultural domain.

Caste

At the outset, considering the physical isolation of the Hindu community in Trinidad from its ancestral homeland, the lapse of time since its original emigration, the nature of barrack life and the extent of western influence to which its social institutions and cultural practices were subjected, it should be remembered that castes don’t form important units, nor are inter-caste relations significant in the community structure of overseas Indians. Clarke opines: “There is no caste organisation, no caste council, and no set of rules to regulate inter-caste relationships and obligations at either a personal or group level. Children are not initiated into caste, and castes do not discipline their members for breaking caste rules; indeed, there are no rules” (Clarke 1967: 168). Arthur Niehoff (1967: 162) found caste to be ‘functionally a matter of little concern in the Hindu community’ (Niehoff 1967: 162). For the Indian West Indian Hindus the
survival of Hinduism is much more important than the persistence of the caste system. As Vertovec (1992) has observed, ‘the breadth of Hindu ideas and practices’ have been transformed into a ‘unitary system.’

_Brahmans_ in the Caribbean comprised only two per cent (British Guyana) to five per cent (Surinam) compared with eleven per cent in the United Provinces of India; and _Brahmana_ and _Kshatriya_ together were only fifteen per cent to twenty per cent of the Caribbean Hindus. Low caste Hindus ranged from an estimated twenty three per cent of the Hindu total in British Guiana and thirty three per cent in Surinam to forty per cent or fifty per cent in Trinidad. Most numerous and degraded among these were the _Chamaras_, traditionally leather workers. Untouchables were rare among the Calcutta emigrants, but, with _Sudra_ castes, were a substantial proportion among those who shipped from Madras (Lowenthal 1972: 147-148). Between 1876 and 1917, of the 91,691 emigrants to Trinidad, 78,772 (85.9 per cent) were Hindus; 12,851 (14 per cent) were Muslims, and 68 (0.1 per cent) were Christians. Of the 78,772 Hindu emigrants, 13,242 (16.8 per cent) were of ‘Brahman castes’; 5,988 (7.6 per cent) were of ‘artisan castes’; 27,680 (35.1 per cent) were of ‘Agricultural castes’; and 31,862 (40.5 per cent) were of ‘Low castes’ (Jayaram 2006). The first recruits to the Caribbean were hill-country peasants and agricultural castes as they were presumed to be apt and superior than others at physical and manual agricultural works but the failure to fill the quota (due to people’s aversion to cross the dark sea for a long distant land) made the recruiters enlist any one from _Brahmans_ to untouchables and the manifest of a ship-load bound for the Caribbean witnessed several different caste affiliations. So it is very difficult to estimate caste proportions among Caribbean migrants; widely separated areas and eras were involved, and many Indians altered their affiliation _en route_ and the stereotype that all Indian migrants were low caste was baseless; there were _Brahmans_ on almost every ship, but though, those of high caste were a smaller minority than in India. The immigrants came from many different localities in India and were unable to reconstruct the small-scale organisation on which caste group and sub-caste group behaviour had been based and because the hierarchical position and customs of the groups within named sub-caste or caste populations often differed from locality to locality in India, there was often no agreement on single standard of behaviour or status in the new country. There could be no agreement on who had the authority to control behaviour, since caste and sub-caste leaders and councils in India had been recognised only by those in the same locality. Thus caste disintegrated in the Caribbean.
low among the ‘Brahmans’ (1: 0.37) as compared to the ‘Low castes’ (1.0.56), with ‘Artisan’ and ‘Agricultural’ castes having identical ratios (1:0.40) (Jain 2006: 151). Such a serious imbalance in the sex ratio and the Indian men’s reluctance to accept African wives made the upper caste males to accept wives from lower caste, though upper caste girls were reluctant to marry lower caste Hindu males. Along with this imbalance in the sex ratio, the age composition of the emigrants: ‘Throughout the period of indentured migration, two-thirds of the Indians shipped to foreign plantations were between the ages of 20 and 30’ (Vertovec 1992: 12), had far reaching implications; without elderly persons to guide them, the younger people could not reorganize caste with authority under plantation conditions.

It was not only the cramped conditions that constrained the emigrants to mix with people belonging to different caste groups, forcing them to disregard caste taboos, but also the colonial masters or owners made all efforts to crumble down the caste structure as they did not have any vested interest in maintaining the caste structure. Caste as ethnographic categories was crude and artificially created by colonial officials in their effort to ‘order’ the society they were administering and these were reflective of more the ideas of the colonial administrators than those of the people themselves. For the colonial masters caste was never a mark of social status because they identified and treated all the indentured labour as ‘coolies’ despite their upper or lower caste backgrounds. Estate planters largely ignored caste hierarchy in allocating authority and sometimes even reversed ascribed rank; managers and overseers tended to regard low caste Hindus as better workers than the more assertive Brahmans; hence they appointed the lower caste labour as sirdars (head of a group) to spite and control the upper caste workers. The upper caste workers especially the Brahmans were not only perceived as worthless agricultural labour but also they were seen as trouble makers on the estates, making pernicious use of their influences over other immigrants. Life in the barracks or work on the field or in the factory hardly permitted the observance of caste segregation and untouchability or the notions of purity or holiness. Furthermore, some caste related rites could not be practiced; cremation was prohibited until the 1930s and Hindu marriages were not recognized until 1946. So, the colonial masters made all attempts on their part to keep the caste out of the estates and barracks as they were only concerned about extracting the flesh out of the bone.
- thus in Trinidad, “man, you’re jackass and from the lowest ‘nation’ on earth, the “Chamaras”, or in Guyana, “you dirty Chamar bitch.” But this has no reference to the caste of the person abused, who may be...of any caste, or, indeed, a Creole (Niehoff and Juanita 1960: 91).

To conclude, one may say that caste as a functional form has dissolved but endured as an aspect of prejudice, a matter of style, and as an ingredient of personality. ‘In Trinidad caste had no meaning in our day to day life; the caste we occasionally played at was no more than an acknowledgement of latent qualities; the assurance it offered was such as might have been offered by a palmist or a reader of handwriting.’ Yet when it was rumoured that Naipaul’s distant relative had married a chamar, nonetheless, the notion appalled him, and the thought still occurs whenever we meet and that initial sniffing for difference is now involuntary (Naipaul 1964: 36). So caste in the Caribbean Indian community only reflects rather than governs a person’s social status and this status is derived from elements such as education, occupation, wealth, and political power, which have no necessary connection with caste in immigrant communities. The only manifestation of caste for Indians in the Caribbean is that it provides an idiom for differences of power and status (which are actually based on other things) between Indians, so can it also provide an idiom for such differences when they extend outside the community.

Religious Beliefs and Practices

During the period of indentureship, the ‘India’ existed in the carried memory of the Indian indentured labour but after the end of the indentureship several developments took place in the socio-cultural, religious and political orientations of their lives; many Hindu and Muslim missionaries made regular visits to the Caribbean founding new sects and schools of thought in the region; the Indian National Movement for independence garnered huge active support and strength from the Indian West Indians and Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru became their heroes, even overseas Indian West Indians exhibited immense support, the Indo-Trinidadian Adrian Cola Reinzi campaigned in Britain for Indian independence; in 1935 the introduction of Indian movies by Ranjit Kumar, Bala Jaban followed by others such as Afzal,
Chabukwali, jungle ka Chavan, Andaz and Midnight Mail, which were shown to
packed houses in Trinidad and British Guiana and invitation of Indian artists by
Indian communities in the region particularly in Trinidad and British Guiana to
perform and showcase Indian cultural and artistic traits brought about a cultural
reawakening in the West Indies among Indians. With these kinds of developments the
Indian West Indians renewed their ties with India and an increasing number of them
visited ancestral and pilgrim places in India and some of them looked for business
opportunities with India. The arrival of Indian Muslim and Hindu missionaries and
their preaching of their religious values and ethos made the Indian West Indians and
some people of other races to search for solace and some philosophical basis of life in
Indian spiritual civilisation and religious traditions. And they tried to find out how
these societies coped with their dilemmas and this led to the study, interpretation,
reinterpretation and contemplation on essences inspired by Indian thought.

With a life of loneliness and anomaly, being estranged from their families and social
acquaintances back in India, religion served as a bond with their homeland and gave
their lives direction, orientation and a sense of completeness during their supposedly
temporary sojourn in this strange land. With few books in their possession and not
many educated persons among them, they tried to reconstruct their religious forms
from their memories as closely as possible to the way they used to practice in India.
But the rigours of plantation life, the uncertainties of an alien environment and the
competition from Christian missionaries changed the very complexion of religious
activities among Indian immigrants. Among the Indians in Trinidad, the Hindus form
sixty-five per cent of the population, the Muslims fifteen per cent and the Christians
twenty per cent. Seventy per cent of the Indians in Guyana adhere to Hinduism, 18.3
per cent to Islam and about 10.6 per cent are the followers of Christianity. The
Surinamese Indians comprise seventy six per cent Hindus, twenty per cent Muslims
and four per cent Christians (Jain 1993: 23). If one compares the religious
classification of these Indians to that of the immigrants who first came to the
Caribbean, it would be evident that there has been a decline in the percentage of
Hindus and a comparable increase in the percentage of Christians. This phenomenon
was especially relevant in the context of Guyana and Trinidad where in the year 1890
about eighty-five per cent of Indians were Hindus, fifteen per cent were Muslims and
Christians accounted for only 0.1 per cent. Thus, the proportion of Muslims over the
years has remained steady while Hindus have converted to Christianity (Jain 1993: 23). One reason that could account for this is that the Monotheism of Islam, its organisation into Jamaats, its corporate acts of worship and its hostility towards Christianity gave its adherents a strong sense of identity, in contrast to Hinduism which was polytheistic, diffused and a household religion (Clarke 1986: 99).

Since the Caribbean visits of Bhai Permanand, an Indian mystic in 1910, there has been a constant flow of religious leaders to the Caribbean and the movement has not been one-way; over the years a number of Hindus and Muslims have gone back to the subcontinent for training and inspiration. More significantly, both the Hindus and Muslim Indian West Indians perceived the movements and acts of Christian missionaries as a threat and danger to the crumbling down of their religious ethics and ethos and some of their common Indian values. On the other end, the Canadian Presbyterians relied heavily on India for the accomplishment of their missionary exertions in the Caribbean; the Presbyterians paid close attention to the activities of the Indians, the better to understand them; in 1854 the Canadians had sent a missionary to India to study its philosophy; before Canadians were sent to work in the Caribbean they had to undergo training in Indian thought; and there was the constant importation of Christian Indian literature by the Presbyterians in the Caribbean, and the transfer of missionaries who had experience in India, to stations in the Caribbean. Indeed, Indian religious philosophy appears to have permeated so deeply into Caribbean Presbyterianism that when Trinidad’s premier church was being built during the 1870s – Susamachar or Church of Glad Tidings – a sacred papal tree brought from India was planted next to the Church. When, finally, the Presbyterians were finding difficulty in meeting the challenge of a reviving Hindu and Muslim consciousness from the late twenties, they invited a Christian Indian from India to seek to restrain Trinidad Indians from returning to their native faiths. Attempts were

9 The papal or asvattha is often mentioned in Indian scriptures as a plant to be venerated; it has its roots in heaven and its branches on earth. To stand in its shade is to receive blessings; its leaves have a curative effect and these are often given in offerings at pujas. This reference is taken from Samaroo, Brinsley (1987), “The Indian Connection The Influence of Indian Thought and Ideas on East Indians in the Caribbean”, in David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo (eds.) India in the Caribbean, Hertfordshire: Hansib Publishing Limited.

10 The visitor was Rev. J.W. Netram, son of one of the early Presbyterian converts Balaram who had returned to India after his indentureship. This reference is taken from Samaroo, Brinsley (1987), “The Indian Connection The Influence of Indian Thought and Ideas on East Indians in the Caribbean”, in
made to indigenise the church for the Indians by adopting Hindi and Bhojpuri as the media for preaching and refining the singing of *bhajans* (devotional songs) and *Kirtans* (musical offerings to the deity) (Jain 1986: 160).

**Hindu Religious Missions and the Spread of Hinduism**

The first Hindu missionary to the Caribbean appears to have been Bhai Permanand, one of the pioneers of the Arya Samaj Movement in India and after him his disciples went to different parts of the Caribbean extending the teaching and social work programme of the Arya Samaj; in 1929 local Samajists invited Ayodha Persad, Satya Charan Shastri in 1935 and Pandit Bhaskaranand in 1936. In Surinam from 1912 the Arya Samaj movement started its missionary activities and made rapid headway among people in the period between 1920 and 1930 (Speckman 1965: 47). This movement advocated a return to the pristine period of the Vedas and condemned the caste system, the purdah, widow burning, child marriage and the idol worship of orthodox Hinduism. The Arya Samaj strengthened ethnic self-assurance among the Hindus. By January 1935 the Trinidad branch was able to erect its own temple in Chaguanas.

Apart from these Arya Samajists there were the visits of various religious as well as social personas from India to the region; in 1914 Pandit Dimanath Tiwary came from British Guiana to Trinidad; he was followed shortly thereafter by Pandit Hari Persad; and in 1928 Jaimini Mehta, a Vedic missionary and scholar, spent a few months in Trinidad and under his patronage a Vedic mission was begun in Trinidad and a Vedic school opened (East Indian Weekly 1929). In 1929 C.F. Andrews, a close associate of Mahatma Gandhi, who was popularly known by the Indians as 'Deenabandhu' (friend of the poor), was deputed to visit the Caribbean and report on the conditions of Indians. He spoke on questions such as repatriation of Indians to India, re-settlement of labourers from the Indian sub-continent in British Guiana, race problems,

David Dabydeen and Brinsley Samaroo (eds.) *India in the Caribbean*, Hertfordshire: Hansib Publishing Limited.
alcoholism, Hindu ideals, and the development of Islam and a host of other matters (Samaroo 1987: 53). In Trinidad the Sanatan Dharma Association was founded as early as 1881 (Kriplani 1945: 61). In 1930 local Sanatanists invited Pandit N.K. Banerji, a Sanatanist Hindu who advocated the establishment of Hindu and Muslim school, the teaching of Hindi in schools and spoke generally of religious developments in India (Samaroo 1987: 54). Dr. Parashuram Sharma arrived in the colony in 1938 and advocated for the formation of a Sanatan Dharma Federation of the West Indies. He fought for seeking legal permission to enable Hindus to cremate their dead by the pyre system, advocating the teaching of Hindi in schools and the legalisation of Hindu marriages (Samaroo 1987: 54). Dr. Sharma tried his utmost to unite the Hindus under the umbrella of one organisation, in which he was not successful.

Though these religious missionaries confused the Hindu indentured labour through their baggage of variety of interpretations, patterns of worship and rituals of the same religion, yet they to some extent succeeded in curbing the movements of the Presbyterian Missionaries in christening them. The tenacity of Indians regarding their religion has been well stated by Bronkhurst: “Experience has taught me that it is almost impossible to make only impression for the good in the mind of adult coolies, they look upon the Christian missionaries with suspicion and merely as paid agents of the Government. Morally and spiritually they are as hard as stones and as cold as icicle. They say we have a religion as well as you and cannot forsake it for a new one” (Jayawardena 1966). Christian converts were ridiculed as “rice Christians” or “belly Christians”, that is those who embraced the faith for economic benefits. All the Hindu religious missionaries spoke against the ‘caste’ which was so peculiar and intrinsic to Hinduism practiced at home and the disappearance of caste boundaries implied the integration of a group with a common Hindu identity. A process of syncretism was to be marked in the religious practices of the north Indian Hindus as well as South Indian Hindus. Again, the role of the Indian priest was extremely important in giving the Indians a psychological protection in a society basically hostile to them racially, socially, culturally and economically. The pundits would be the face of social and cultural resistance and they would propagate the traditional Indian values (Singh 1974: 49-50). They visited homes of the sick, gave spiritual advice, performed ceremonies for all castes, accepted food and water from the lowest of castes and made
people vigilant to counteract proselytisation by the Christian missionaries. The majority of the Indian West Indians came from the Gangetic plain which stands sacred for bringing into being the Indian Hindu religious icons such as, Lord Rama, Krishna, Buddha and Mahavira and this very area was the scene for the enactment of great Indian epics like, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Despite their illiteracy in English, they were able to memorise and recite with great pride verses from these epics and were trying to model their children with the qualities of these gods and making them stand as ideals for their children. Indeed, it was devoutness for Indians to choose their children’s names from among the characters in these epics.

**Islamic Religious Missions and the Spread of Islam**

The Indian Muslims who landed in the Caribbean tried to preserve their religion and religious nuances and rituals as they used to practice back in India, and they were trying their best to conserve them under the new and challenging circumstances. The value system implanted by the wider Creole society, evolving from African and European elements, were looked upon with suspicion by the Indian Muslims and they thought it better to resist its influence by holding tenaciously to their Indian Islamic heritage. For the perseverance of their Islamic religious heritage and cultural norms simple mosques were constructed with limited resources, which served as places of worship, community centres and maktabs (religious schools); Friday congregational prayers and the Urdu sermon used to be delivered in the masjids; and community centres and maktabs became the focal points of festivities for the community. Turbulent and diabolic relationship with the wider society, pressure from the Christian religious missionaries to christen, similar kind of experiences of hardship in the plantation estates and common ancestral ties led to a cordial relationship and mutual respect for each other between Hindus and Muslims despite differences in religious beliefs and occasional disagreements. In such a New World, for both the Hindus and Muslims, religion was crucial for their identity and the relationship between the two communities in the New World was even closer than in the motherland. According to Clarke, Muslims were more cohesive and less tolerant of Christianity than the Hindus (Clarke 1986: 42).
There have been close contacts and interactions between Muslims of the Caribbean and India up to 1947 and with Pakistan and India since that time. In fact it would be no exaggeration to say that leadership of the local community up to the forties came largely from India-born Muslims or from Trinidadians who had studied there (Samaroo 1987: 49). Hafiz Yacooob Ali was one of the pioneering figures. Another illustrious figure was Sayyad Abdul Aziz Meah. The other well known personality was Haji Rukeendeen Sahib. After these leaders there came a succession of missionaries from India: Moulvie Haji Sufi Shah Mohammed Hassan Hanafi Quadri, Moulir Fazal Karim Khan Durrani, Ameer Ali and several others.

Though the influence of the Middle East has been growing in the Caribbean, Indian interpretations of Islam continue to exert a significant influence upon the Muslims. Close and continuous contact of Indian Muslims has contributed to the growing diversity of religious practices and interpretations in Islam. Furthermore, the attempts and conflicts in the interpretations of Islam in India have also been carried over to the Caribbean. The visits of a number of missionaries from India and Pakistan have contributed significantly to the emergence of numerous groups in the interpretation of Islam and schisms and fissions among the local Muslim groups; one can identify these major interpretations of Islam among the Indian Muslims of Trinidad and Tobago and the same pattern can also be marked in other parts of the Caribbean: the

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11 Sayyad Abdul Aziz Meah came from Afghanistan in 1833 and worked out his indentureship in the Princes Town area. Aziz was very learned in Islamic theology and his ability to see himself not merely as a Muslim but also as part of a larger East Indian community endeared him to a wide cross section of Indians to whom he provided leadership. In 1898 he joined with a number of Hindus and Presbyterian to form the first organised Indian pressure group in the colony - the East India National Association with headquarters in Princes Town. Around the same time he took a leading role in creating the Islamic Guardian Association, and by 1907 he was appointed the first Kazi (or chief religious leader) of Muslims in Trinidad. By 1926 he was able to see the fruition of his other long cherished dream by uniting most of the colony’s Muslims in the Tackveeyatul Islamic Association (Society for the strength of Islam).

12 Whilst Aziz laboured in the South, Haji Rukeendeen Sahib, another former indentured labourer organised the early Muslim community in north Trinidad. Haji Rukeendeen Sahib came to Trinidad from Punjab in 1893 at the age of 18; he was learned in Arabic, Urdu and Hindi. After the completion of his indentureship he settled in Tunapuna. Under his leadership a number of jamaats were established in north Trinidad and small schools set up in villages. In 1927 Haji Ruknudeen was appointed Kazi in succession to Aziz Meah.
Traditionalists, the Tabligh Jamaat, the Wahhabi Sunnis, the Modernists and the Shias.\(^\text{13}\)

In this quest for identification with a larger and more recognised centre of Indian resurgence, particularly in the twentieth century, Caribbean Indians have accepted ideas and institutions which have given them a sense of pride and dignity. On the other hand, the encouragement of religious leaders from the sub-continent denied Caribbean Indians the necessary opportunity of struggling to find solutions to their problems in the new and very different environment. Instead, these religious leaders brought with them many of the prejudices and irrational conflicts which had divided India over the centuries. Similarly, Hindu and Muslim missionaries by their constant and intense debate divided their own faiths and fed conflict between Hinduism and Islam. This religious conflict has at times manifested itself in political form. Various interpretations and versions of Hinduism and Islam spread by different Hindu and Islamic religious organizations ‘confused’ as well as divided the Indians, who were absolutely unaware of these kinds of aspects in the village India.

\(^{13}\) Traditionalists: Claiming to be Hanafi Sunnis the Traditionalists subscribe to practices and observances such as mawlwood, tazeem, three-day, forty day and neyaz. Death anniversaries of saints are observed and are given importance. They look down upon Muslims who do not observe theses traditions and call them Wahhabis or Deobandis. They are suspicious of interpretations of Islam which differ from their own, and censure foreign missionaries.

Tabligh Jamaat: Mosques are the focal point of their programmes. They also claim to be Hanafi Sunnis, but are in practice opposed to most of the traditions mentioned above, describing them as innovations. They have adopted a literal approach to the understanding of the sacred texts, giving great importance to emulating the model of the Prophet’s life in minute detail. They isolate themselves, adopt a passive approach to social and political issue and avoid conflict with established authority. Their efforts at spreading the message of their faith are confined to the Muslim community.

Wahhabi Sunnis: They generally show high levels of religious commitment. Originally inspired by movements in the subcontinent and more recently by Middle Eastern and North American contact, they are often at odds with the Traditionalists over their apparent overemphasis on ancestor traditions as opposed to the farasid (obligation) acts of worship. Many of the groups in this category actively engage in propagating their faith both among Muslims and non-Muslims.

Modernists: They are the ones who claim to be Sunnis and many among these give modern interpretations of the texts. They come largely from the middle classes and wear western style clothes. The men avoid beards and the women seldom wear the hijab (veil). They place a high value on western education mainly because of the prestige it brings.

Shias: They were reported among the early immigrants from India. The group is very small (less than one per cent of the community), has a foreign missionary and attempts, often unsuccessfully, to persuade other Muslims to join their fold.
Syncretism

There is a world around, to which everyone is part to it. So the Hindus, Muslims, and Christians could not resist themselves from their socio-cultural interaction for a long and a kind of syncretic norm germinated in their religious as well as social practices. At the first level this syncretic norm is marked in the influence of Hinduism and Islam on each other and at the second level the adoption of Christian ethos in Hindu practices. Interpretation and reinterpretation of Islam under Hindu influence not only occurred in India but also in the New World. In the beginning they tried to create, reactivate and even modify various social events known in India and these provided opportunities for interaction and relationship development among members of the community and served as significant avenues for the social communication. Despite minor theological differences the Indian Muslims were largely united and maintained good relationship with their fellow Indians in order to successfully resist the assimilation with the wider society, which they considered as attempts to christen them.

It is very difficult to trace out the contact or introduction of Islam into India due to the nature of wandering religious preachers in spreading the religion and the kind of secluded and wandering life people used to lead during that period of time. However, Titus indicates that Indian religious thought influenced Muslims before Islam became established in India (Titus 1930: 12). In fact, Buddhist thought and ‘wandering Indian monks’ too, could have significantly influenced the development of tasawwuf (Islamic mysticism) which occurred mainly in Persia (Titus 1930: 13). The Sufi (the name derives from the word tasawwaf) sub-variant of Islam found a fertile ground in India where asceticism and mystical activities already had widespread acceptance. The spread of Islam along the lines of the indigenous culture and social practices led to the emergence of several syncretic forms among Muslims in India. In South India magical practices were combined with Muslim rituals and Quranic verses, assumed to possess special powers of healing and warding off evil, were written on pieces of article and struck above doors and windows. Thurston reports that in Madras tribal rituals were incorporated into Muslim marriages (Thurston 1909: 231). Herklots
observed that in North India the Rajputs and Jats 'often supplement the orthodox ritual of Islam by Hindu marriage and death rites, follow Hindu rules of succession to real and personal property and particularly in times of trouble revere the local village deities' (Herklots 1921: 7). A system of saint and tomb worship evolved both among Hindus and Muslims with the belief that God can be better reached through some physical medium. Trinidad Muslim rituals like 'three day' and 'forty day' mourning functions (mawlood functions) and neyaz (an offering for the dead) seem to have been influenced by Hindu contact.

Indian syncretism of Islam with magical practices was also transported to the Caribbean; in several communities, individuals performed 'medicine man' role; the tabeej (taweez) usually comprising verses from the Quran, was worn as an armlet for warding off evil spirits; services such as fortune telling, healing of ailments, solving problems and detection of theft were also provided; and during some life crises some Muslims sought the services of a Hindu pundit (priest). Sufism, known locally as the Halqa (the Sufi group), another Indian Muslim survival, exists up to this day in Trinidad (Mustapha 2004: 134).

Syncretism was also marked in the Christian as well as Hindu religious practices and norms, between the pantheon of Hindu gods and Catholic saints. Christ was equated to Krishna by Hindus and Hanuman was seen at par with St. Michael, the warrior and Ogun, the Shango god of war. The most outstanding example of syncretism in San Fernando, Trinidad, is Siparu Mai. The black Madonna, La Divine Pastora of the Catholic church of Siparia was worshipped by Creoles and Venezuelans as well as by Hindus, who identified her with the Hindu goddess Kali. Further, in the Hindu Puja (worship) ceremonies, offerings of ghee (clarified butter) were made from a half pint rum bottle, which had come to replace the traditional brass 'lotah' (Clarke 1986: 110-111). The rapprochement between Hinduism and Christianity and an attempt at standardisation was further noticed in the naming of the Hindu place of worship as "Church" and the publishing of booklets by Sanatan Dharma Mahasabha. The ceremony whereby a special relationship was created between the believer and his spiritual mentor (guru) was referred to as “Christening” (Jayawardenal 966: 232). The Christian pattern of sitting in congregations on wooden benches, the notion of a pulpit, a pundit almost like a parish priest, God fatherhood and a Sunday Service in
Hindu temples” were the visible marks of Christianisation of Hinduism (Jain 1986: 160). The interest in establishing a set of correspondences with Christianity might also be seen as an attempt to make Hinduism understandable and acceptable to the religion of the wider society, as well as to accord Hinduism a status comparable to Christianity which was the dominant and the more prestigious religion there. The festivals of Diwali, Holi, Ramlila, Kartik Puja, Id-ul-Fitr and Christmas were celebrated with a lot of pomp and fanfare in Trinidad. Significant in this regard is a joint celebration of the festival of Hossey (Muharram) by the Hindus and Muslims and participated by the Creoles. The Indians were also involved in the Creole festivals of Carnival and All Saints Night. The inter-cultural solidarity between the Indians and the Creoles constituted a strong threat to the supremacy of the white rulers.

Religion has helped the Indians to carve out a niche for themselves in the multi-racial society of the Caribbean and more importantly, the vertical ties of ethnicity were strengthened through the instruments of religion; the rich and the poor, the office goers and the factory workers, the peasants and the labourers all were mobilised together on the basis of ethnicity and through religion. Religious organisations were used as platforms for the formation of political parties, such as the Hindustani Political Party of Surinam, The Democratic Labour Party of Trinidad, which had its origin in the Sanatan Dharma Mahasabha and the Hindu based Peoples Democratic Party, a creation of Bhadase Maraj. Religion also served as a treasury of political rhetoric for the political leaders. Hence, religion not only gave an orientation and direction in the lives of the Indians and provided solace during the period of hardship but also it stood as a tool of political empowerment.

In conclusion, one may refer to what Henri Lefèbvre (1995: 164) feels, ‘No space ever vanishes utterly, leaving no trace’. And no space – mental, physical, and social – is simply real or ideal. Space is always both: ideal in the sense of being positive, mathematical, and logical, and real in the sense of being social and psychological (Lefèbvre 1995). For the Indian West Indians the space of the indenture ships in which Indians were sent to the sugar colonies of the West Indies and other parts of the world, and the experiences of the passage are important elements in the social imaginary of these diasporic people; the production and reproduction of diaspora culture begins with the ship’s passage. The idea of a homogenous homeland was
filtered through the experience in the space of the ship, where different castes and religions came together in spite of the rigid socio-cultural strictures of the Indian society. Where 'real' India continued to be divided along strict caste and communal lines, the construction of an imaginary India got mediated through the social configurations of the new space in the hull of the ships. The space of the ship marked a radical break from their familiar surroundings and it greatly affected the psychic imaginary of the Indian West Indians. With the crumbling down of the caste purities that grew out of the passage, a new form of socialisation and socio-cultural interaction germinated in the form of jahaji-bhai (ship brotherhood). On the plantations these bonds led to social configurations that were not unlike those of village networks in India, but much more intimate, because jahaji-bhais came into being through modes of socialising that transcended the strictures of caste. Apart from the sea it was in the barracks and within the confines of the plantation that other kinds of inter-communal and inter-personal relationships developed. In the plantation estates and barracks, for the first time in their lives, Indians found people who were not only different in colour but also in language, culture and religion, and in the latter time Indians never thought that their interaction with these 'strangers' will bring about a syncretic norm in their socio-cultural lives and orientations.

In the beginning the Indian indentured immigrants were very much confined to themselves having little or no contact with the world outside the plantation and they had no intention, consciously or otherwise, of changing their way of life to which they were accustomed in the homeland. On the one end, Indians' apprehension of the colonial masters' tactics of subjugating their cultural notions, the preeminence of the Creole value system and the powerful black macho and on the other end, with the wearing out of caste, the development of a lingua franca through a process of koineisation (that is leveling) of different dialects and a germination of a kind of socio-religious syncretic norm led the Indians to develop a kind of a pan-Indian identity; and they never felt it necessary to 'contact' the outside world which was perceived as a 'threat' to them. So, they continued to live in the new land in accordance with the institutions they had carried with them and they attempted to maintain in the new setting, the cultural patterns they had learnt at home, and presumably valued. But, gradually the world of the indentured Indians enlarged once they stepped out of the plantation barracks after the completion of their contracts and
made attempts to discover an identity for themselves in the opportunities available outside the plantation. Thus, the changes in their lives are both sweeping and subtle; from being mainly indentured labourers they progress to agriculturalists and then they step into the complex web of the socio-cultural, political and economic stratification of the West Indian society. Priority changed in the course and values became money-based and slowly Indian West Indians came into their own, shedding their group-based identity. The society was definitely a forerunner to postcolonial society though its postcoloniality had yet to acquire a definite shape.