CHAPTER III

SOCIAL STRATIFICATION IN THE WEST INDIES
The socio-cultural structure of the West Indian societies lies in a paradox, sometimes making the social scientists, researchers and cultural critics pierce into the mind and soul of the West Indian and say, West Indians are similar; and at the other time, to their surprise West Indians look so detached with their differences. Detachment and Insularity portray the ‘West Indian’ life in spite of the close geographical approximation of the islands. This may be due to the experience of colonialism of different European colonial powers; their islandic insulation and isolation during the era of plantation economy, diverse socio-cultural norms imparted by the colonial masters; and the nature of ethnic segregation of the West Indian societies. However, these kinds of insular feelings, jealousies and rivalries seldom erupt into open conflict; to quote the Prime Minister of Barbados: ‘We live together very well, but we don’t like to live together’ (Barrow 1964: 181). West Indians differ from each other in terms of speech, character, and mannerisms and some West Indians persist on these differences as a matter of local pride and also to express solidarity against outsiders. Though, sparks of differences are to be marked in the West Indian social structure and ways of life that vary from place to place, but their basic forms persist throughout the Caribbean and distinguish the West Indies from Latin America and Anglo-America. However distant or superficially unalike they may be, West Indians value these broad similarities: ‘The West Indian walks differently, laughs differently, dresses differently, and uses different gestures. …Despite the differences between islands…there is such a thing as a “West Indian personality” (Mordecai 1968).

The socio-cultural history of the West Indies sets its edifice with the arrival of Columbus and the European colonials, whatever exists before this, subsists only in mystery. With their landing in the beautiful and enchanting land mass of the West Indies, the European colonials found the Amerindians inhabiting these places and they spared no time in annihilating and enslaving them to work for their mines and plantation estates. Under the venomous wheels of European colonial masters the cultural traits and ethos of the Amerindians was crushed and bulldosed leaving no imprints or traces. Then came the turn of the slaves and with their arrival was enacted one of the dark episodes of human civilisation. By stretching their physiques, dragging their minds and snatching their souls, the European colonials shaped and taught the slaves only to mimic. By 1830s the West
experience of European colonialism and socio-cultural patterns. Keeping the Indian diaspora in the background, in this chapter an attempt has been made to study the socio-cultural evolution of the West Indian society and it also tries to point out the diverse constituents that have formed the edifice of the West Indian socio-cultural structure.

**Contextualising Slavery**

Representing the Spanish monarchy Columbus discovered the New World in 1492 and with this he not only unlocked a great reassurance of wealth for the Europeans but also set the edifice of rivalry among the European colonial powers and subsequently the institution of slavery in different forms. Neither the papal arbitration, giving East to Portugal and the West to Spain nor the formal Treaty of Tordesillas, rectifying the papal judgment to permit Portuguese ownership of Brazil, was binding on other powers, and both were in fact repudiated. It was a dispute as to “whether the King of England or of France shall be the monarch of the West Indies, for the King of Spain cannot hold it long. . .” (Crouse 1943). England, France and even Holland, began to challenge the Iberian Axis and claim their place in the sun. The Negro, too, was to have his place though he did not ask for it: it was the broiling sun of the sugar, tobacco and cotton plantations of the New World (Williams, Eric 1964: 4).

Once Columbus opened the gates to the New World, the Europeans like, England, France, Spain, Portugal, Denmark and Holland were in a mad pursuit to take charge and colonise the New World. The struggle was fought out in the Caribbean, Africa, India, and Canada and on the banks of the Mississippi, for the privilege of looting India and for the control of certain vital and strategic commodities – Negroes; sugar and tobacco; fish; furs and naval stores (Andrews 1915: 546). For the European colonials Caribbean and Africa caught their imagination the most because Caribbean was unpopulated with huge land mass suitable for the cultivation of sugar, tea, coffee and rubber and Africa was the place with inexhaustible slave labour to work on the plantation estates. England’s victory in the War of Spanish Succession, followed by the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 gave England the dominating hand to the control of the Asiento and on the other; England’s war with
France had given England almost the entire control of the African coast and of the slave trade.

Eric Williams (1964) divides British colonial possessions up to 1776 broadly into two types: the first is the self-sufficient and diversified economy of small farmers and the second is the colony which has facilities for the production of staple articles on a large scale for an export market. Northern colonies of the American mainland falls in the first category; and in the second, falls the mainland tobacco colonies and the sugar islands of the Caribbean. The production of staple articles on a large scale to mitigate the demands of an export market, as Merivale pointed out, land and capital were both useless unless labour could be commanded (Merivale 1928). Labour must be constant and must work, or made to work in co-operation.

To mitigate the large scale cultivation and production of the staple crops of sugar, tobacco and cotton in the New World as to gratify the huge consumption and demands of these commodities in Europe, slavery was necessary because with the limited population of Europe in the sixteenth century, the kind of European labour available and the free labour necessary for this huge production it was not possible for the planters to do without the slaves. And to get slaves the Europeans turned first to the aborigines and then Africa and when slavery ended they looked towards Asia, especially China and India for indentured labour. It was felt that in the cultivation of crops like sugar, cotton and tobacco, where the cost of production is appreciably reduced on larger units, the slave owner, with his large-scale production and his organized slave gang, can make more profitable use of the land than the small farmer or peasant proprietor. So the colonial masters were in a search of a constant and productive labour force for their plantation estates in different parts of the globe and like other plantations, for the Caribbean colonies the solution for this constant and workable labour force was found in slavery and in the slaves, to whom they considered as creatures with a macho, but without a mind. So, they can extract the flesh out of their bone as per their demands. From the historical times slavery had provided the basis of Greek economy and had built up the Roman Empire and in the modern time it not only provided the sugar for the tea and coffee cups of the
western world and cotton for their bodies but also filled up the treasures of the Europeans. Seen in historical perspective, it forms a part of that general picture of the harsh treatment of the underprivileged classes, the unsympathetic poor laws and severe feudal laws, and the indifference with which the rising capitalist class was “beginning to reckon prosperity in terms of pound sterling, and...becoming used to the idea of scarifying human life to the deity of increased production” (James 1930).

**Enslavement of the Aborigines**

It was the Amerindian, not the Negro, who was the first to be enslaved as a slave labour and he was the first to fall prey to be auctioned in the slave trading developed in the New World. Derived from northern South America and having cultural affinities with Amazonian forest tribes; both practicing agriculture supplemented by fishing and hunting, Arawaks and Caribs were the two Amerindian groups who peopled the West Indies when Columbus reached the place. The Arawaks, more populous, sedentary, and technologically advanced, inhabited the Greater Antilles; the Caribs, more mobile, aggressive, and relative newcomers, dominated the Lesser Antilles. In their first entrance into the New World Europeans annihilated native Indians, whom they considered as a resistance force and in the later stage they enslaved and shaped these indigenous people to work the mines and to grow food for the miners. The Amerindians with a life of gratis and freedom and never accustomed to hard work as required by the mine reservoirs and the plantation estates, and itinerant in their approach towards their life and settlement rapidly succumbed to the excessive labour demanded of them, the insufficient diet, the white man’s diseases, and their inability to adjust themselves to the new way of life. As Fernando Ortiz writes: “to subject the Indian to the mines, to their monotonous, insane and severe labour, without tribal sense, without religious ritual, ...was like taking away from him the meaning of his life. ... It was to enslave not only his muscles but also his collective spirit” (Quoted in Williams 1964: 8).

Gradually, the Europeans found Amerindian slavery unprofitable because they were physically inefficient and unsuited to the diversified agriculture of these colonies. The
satiation of the consumerist demands of sugar and cotton at home and the mitigation of these demands through cultivation and export of these commodities from the New World required the robust macho of the African slave or “cotton nigger” or “sugar mules” as the slaves were called, which the Amerindian lacked. The Spaniards discovered that one Negro was worth four Indians. A prominent official in Hispaniola insisted in 1518 that “permission be given to bring Negroes, a race robust for labour, instead of natives, so weak that they can only be employed in tasks requiring little endurance, such as taking care of maize fields or farms” (Quoted in Williams 1964: 9). According to Lauber, “When compared with sums paid for Negroes at the same time and place the prices of Indian slaves are found to have been considerably lower” (Lauber 1913). The Europeans also felt that they were wasting much more time in tracing out these mobile and runaway indigenous Indians, whose reservoir was limited, on the other end, the Africans were inexhaustible.

All thanks to the mad pursuit of the European colonials to fill their national treasures and to make their people live in luxury, by the end of the eighteenth century, the Arawaks of the larger islands were extinct, and the small island Caribs were reduced to a few hundred intermixed with runaway African slaves in mountain fastness. In the present day West Indies a few score Caribs remain in the islands, but beyond appearance little about them is distinctively Amerindian. In Guyana a small remnant of the pre-Columbian population retains a recognizable Amerindian culture, but one increasingly attenuated by wage labour, Christian missions, and nationalist missions, and nationalist assimilation. The Amerindian canoe and hammock, cassava and other foods, poisons and medicaments, and a few place names and folk tales, are integral to the West Indian scene but hardly constitute an indigenous cultural tradition. As the Amerindians have been made to leave no trace of their impress or essence, the only remembered West Indian past is that of the ‘newcomers.’ No less aboriginal, West Indians after three centuries still identify themselves, if not as strangers, at best as ‘Creoles’ – an expression of condition rather than of nationality (Lowenthal 1972: 32).
Servitude of White Labour

It was not the Negro but the poor white who was the immediate successor of the Amerindian slave. This white servitude included a variety of types: indentured servants, so called because, before departure from the homeland, they had signed a contract, indented by law, binding them to service for a stipulated time in return for their passage; others, known as redemptions, arranged with the captain of the ship to pay for their passage on arrival or within a specified time thereafter and if they failed to do so, they used to be sold by the captain to the highest bidder; and others were convicts, sent out by the deliberate policy of the home government, to serve for a specified period. The mercantilist views and theories of that period strongly advocated putting the poor to industrious and useful labour and favoured emigration, voluntary or involuntary. Relieving the poor rates and finding more profitable occupations abroad for idlers and vagrants at home were clearly the main ideas and thinking in tuning this kind of emigration.

Indentured Servitude: C.M. Haar feels that “Indentured servitude was called into existence by two different though complementary forces: there was both a positive attraction from the New World and a negative repulsion from the old” (Haar 1940: 371). Bacon, in a state paper emphasised that by emigration England would gain “a double commodity, in the avoidance of people here, and in making use of them there” (Holland et al. 1929). These servants were basically comprised of manorial tenants fleeing from the exasperating constraints of feudalism, Germans trying to flee away from the desolation and devastation of the Thirty Year’s War and Irishmen moving in quest of independence from the cruelty and repression of landlords and bishops. In the gradual process a regular trafficking developed in these indentured servants: between 1654 and 1685 ten thousand sailed from Bristol alone, chiefly for the West Indies and Virginia (MacInnes 1939: 158-159). The commercial interests of this kind of trafficking led to various immoral acts: kidnapping was encouraged to a great degree and became a regular business in London and Bristol and the stealing of children became frequent for the purpose of transporting them to the distant lands as prospect labour. The temptations held
out to the unwary and the credulous were so attractive that, as the mayor of Bristol complained, husbands were induced to forsake their wives, wives their husbands, and apprentices their masters, while wanted criminals found on the transport ships a refuge from the arms of the law (Quoted in Williams 1964: 11).

**Convicts:** The other steady source of white labour was provided by the convicts. The harsh feudal laws of England recognized three hundred capital crimes. Typical hanging offences included: picking a pocket for more than a shilling; shoplifting to the value of five shillings; stealing a horse or a sheep; poaching rabbits on a gentleman's estate. Offences for which the punishment prescribed by law was transportation comprised the stealing of cloth, burning stacks of corn, the maiming and killing of cattle, hindering custom officers in the execution of their duty, and corrupt legal practices. Proposals made in 1664 would have banished to the colonies all vagrants, rogues and idlers, petty thieves, gypsies, and loose persons frequenting unlicensed brothels. A piteous petition in 1667 prayed for transportation instead of the death sentence for a wife convicted of stealing goods valued at three shillings and four pence. In 1745 transportation was the penalty for the theft of a silver spoon and a gold watch. One year after the emancipation of the Negro slaves, transportation was the penalty for trade union activity. So it becomes well understood that the law makers of England were well aware of the labour needs of the plantation colonies and they prepared laws keeping this aspect in mind, which led to the transportation of many English petty offenders land in the distant dark overseas colonial plantations. The political and civil disturbances in England between 1640 and 1740 augmented the supply of white servants; political and religious nonconformists paid for their unorthodoxy by transportation, mostly to the sugar islands. Many of Cromwell's Irish prisoners were sent to the West Indies. Religious intolerance sent more workers to the plantations; in 1661 Quakers refusing to take the oath for the third time were to be transported. Many of Monmouth's adherents were sent to Barbados, with orders to be detained as servants for ten years. A similar policy was restored to after the Jacobite risings of the eighteenth century. This immoral act was practiced with the involvement of

---

1 This information has been gathered from Williams, Eric (1964), *Capitalism and Slavery*, London: Andre Deutsch.
the leading merchants and public officials. The law used to be strained by the merchants and justices to the augment of the figures of felons who could be transported to the sugar plantations they owned in the West Indies and Petty offenders were terrified with the prospect of hanging and then induced them to plead for transportation to get rid off death.

How brutal and inhuman the human nature could be towards the fellow human beings can be marked in the transportation of these white servants and in its true light it was no less of the horrors of the Middle Passage. The boats were small, the voyage was long, emigrants were packed like herrings, the beds provided to the immigrants did not cover the whole parts of their bodies and the food, in the absence of refrigeration was worse and disease inevitable. A petition to parliament in 1659 describes how seventy two servants had been locked up below deck during the whole voyage of five and a half weeks, “amongst horses, that their souls, through heat and steam under the tropic, fainted in them” (Stock 1924-1941: 249). The comment of a lady of Quality describing a voyage from Scotland to the West Indies on a ship full of indentured servants speaks many volumes of the horrors in the transportation: “it is hardly possible,” she writes, “to believe that human nature could be so depraved, as to treat fellow creatures in such a manner for so little gain” (Andrews 1923: 33).

Servitude, originally a free personal relation based on voluntary contract for a definite period of service, in lieu of transportation and maintenance, tended to pass into a property relation which asserted a control of varying extent over the bodies and liberties of the person during service as if he were a thing (Ballagh 1902: 42). On the sugar plantations of Barbados the servants spent their time “grinding at the mills and attending the furnaces, or digging in this scorching island; having nothing to feed on (notwithstanding their hard labour) but potato roots, nor to drink, but water with such roots washed in it, besides the bread and tears of their own afflictions; being bought and sold still from one planter to another, or attached as horses and beasts for the debts of their masters, being whit at the whipping posts (as rogues) for their masters’ pleasure, and sleeping in sties worse than hogs in England...” (Stock 1924-1941: 249). As professor Harlow concludes, the weight of evidence proves incontestably that the conditions under which white labour
was procured and utilised in Barbados were "persistently severe, occasionally dishonourable, and generally a disgrace to the English name" (Harlow 1969).

The conditions of these servants became increasingly worse to worse in the plantation colonies. However, the English administration took the view that servitude was not too bad, and the servant in Jamaica was better off than the husbandman in England. Comfort and good fortune, which the English officialdom was spreading at home, were distant dreams for these indentured servants. Since they were bound for a limited period, the planter had less interest in their welfare than in that of the Negroes who were perpetual servants. In the then European society in which subordination and inferiority were considered essential, in such a society it was superfluous to pine for the condition of the white servant in the colonies.

Negro Slavery in the West Indies

To mitigate the enormous demands of sugar in order to fill the tea and coffee bowls of the Europeans, the European planters and monarchs were in search of lands which will yield them huge production and they discovered the West Indian soils and climate well suited to this, and sugar capital and technology were newly available to West Indian planters through Dutch merchants who had pioneered large-scale sugar estates in north-eastern Brazil in the 1620s. The Dutch extended their operations to Barbados, then throughout the Caribbean in the 1640s with a view of maximizing their profits. Due to Caribbean's geographical closeness to Europe, transport costs were far lower than Brazil's, Barbados planters bought slaves for half the Pernambuco price, and the fertile soil of the West Indies made sugar production a bonanza for local planters, slave traders, and Amsterdam refiners and financiers. Sugar brought a social as well as an agricultural revolution. Intensive cultivation with only small outlays for processing and labour was required for tobacco and other previous crops; a family could economically run a farm with a few indentured servants. Sugar, by contrast, could be grown extensively with little expertise but a sugar factory required a heavy investment in buildings, machinery, and labour and
continuous substantial supplies of raw cane; thus sugar estates were much larger than the earlier farms.

Mercantile houses in Amsterdam, London, and Paris started engaging themselves in the control and possession of West Indian sugar properties and they advanced loans to build the factories and to operate the estates, monopolised traffic in slaves and supplies, and gleaned most of the profits. Sugar brought with it the most immoral and brutal act of humanity, that is, slavery. It was not the first instance that slaves were introduced to the domain of West Indies: there had been slaves in the West Indies since the Discovery; Columbus himself and other Europeans annihilated and enslaved Amerindians, which have been discussed in the previous section of this chapter and Africans were sold in Cuba and Hispaniola before 1500. But slavery was on a very small level in the Spanish islands until sugar production was modernised there in the seventeenth century. Initially for the tobacco plantations and other tasks the English, French, and Dutch colonial planters used the labour of indentured servants, deported criminals, political prisoners, religious refugees, and a few Amerindians; but for sugar these did not suffice as sugar demanded massive number of labour and hard labour, and these labour were fulfilling nothing in the eyes of the colonials. So, Africa got the attention and attraction of the capitalists and planters; African slaves were not only cheaper than indentured servants, but they and their offsprings were bound for life and were presumably already habituated to hard tropical labour and slaves were needed in immense quantity and Africa was the inexhaustible source of this. Sugar plantations with large-scale African slavery had spread to every Caribbean land by the end of the eighteenth century.

The national economic policies of England and other European colonial powers, by the end of the seventeenth century, were shifting their focus from the accumulation of the precious metals to the development of industry within the country, the promotion of employment and the encouragement of exports. In the beginning of the seventeenth century the national policy makers and planners were advocating the immigration of the national population to different parts of the colonial plantations to serve as labour for the fear of overpopulation in the home country, which has been discussed in the previous...
section of this chapter, but in the middle of the same century they apprehended about the under-population in the home country. The growing Industrial development, progresses in other domains of the English society and a sense of perseverance of 'national interest' demanded a large population at home. So, the Britishers turned to Africa and by 1680 they already had positive evidence, in Barbados, that the African was satisfying the necessities of production better than the European.

The best way to reduce costs, and thereby compete with other countries, the Mercantilists argued, was to pay low wages. The Britishers found that the Negro slave was cheaper and they have to pay only once to purchase an African slave and use his and his family's service till eternity. The money which procured a white man's services for ten years could buy a Negro for life (Harlow 1969). As the governor of Barbados stated, the Barbadian planters found by experience that "three blacks work better and cheaper than one white man" (Quoted in Williams 1964). The institution of white servitude had grave disadvantages. Moreover, the supply of the white servants was becoming increasingly difficult and white indentured servants were not forthcoming in sufficient quantities to replace those who had served their term. On the plantations, escape was easy for the white servant; less easy for the Negro who, if freed, tended, in self-defense, to stay in his locality where he was well known and less likely to be apprehended as a vagrant or runaway slave. At the end of his contract the white servant expected land; the Negro, in a strange environment, conspicuous by his colour and features, and ignorant of the white man's language and ways, could be kept permanently divorced from the island. Racial differences made it easier to justify and rationalise Negro slavery, to exact the mechanical obedience of a plough-ox or a cart-horse, to demand that registration and that complete moral and intellectual subjection which alone make slave labour possible (Williams 1964: 19). The European notion of the Africans as people with primitive and minimal wants, content to live at a level far below the European, the myth of their tropical exuberance and the free rein of the master to extract the flesh from the bone led to the origin of Negro slavery. The features of the man, his hair, colour and dentifrice, his "subhuman" characteristics so widely pleaded, were only the later rationalisations to justify a simple economic fact that the colonies needed labour and resorted to Negro
labour because it was cheapest and best. The planter would have gone to the moon, if necessary, for labour but Africa was nearer than the moon, nearer too than the more populous countries of India and China (Williams 1964: 20). Physical fitness was the only thing the slave master was looking for in the slave and since the slaves were required for arduous field work, women and children were less valuable than robust males, the former because they were liable to interruptions from work through pregnancies, the latter because they required some attention until able to care for themselves.

So, Negro slavery solved the huge problem of labour as required for the plantation estates of the Caribbean and without it the great development of the Caribbean sugar plantations, between 1650 and 1850, would have been impossible. Though Negro slavery sweetened the tea and coffee bowls of Europe yet it marked the darkest pages of the world history. It sustained life but sweetened the blood and led to diabetes: ‘sugar sweet blood’ is the plantation word for this debilitating condition. Samuel Selvon’s ‘Cane Is Bitter’ and David Dabydeen’s fantasies of the cane cutter (Dabydeen 1988) speak volumes of the bitterness exerted to sweeten the ‘sugar.’ Negro slavery was not only used in the plantation estates but also it was turned into a profitable trade and it came to be famously known as Negro slave trade.² Britishers garnered huge profits by trading slaves to Spanish and French colonies.³

² The first English slave-trading expedition was that of Sir John Hawkins in 1562. The slaves obtained were sold to the Spaniards in the West Indies. The English slave trade remained desultory and per-functionary in character until the establishment of British colonies in the Caribbean and the introduction of the sugar industry. When by 1660 the political and social upheavals of the Civil War period came to an end, England was ready to embark wholeheartedly on a branch of commerce whose importance to her sugar and her tobacco colonies in the New World was beginning to be fully appreciated. In accordance with the economic policies of the Stuart Monarchy, the slave trade was entrusted to a monopolistic company, the Company of Royal Adventurers trading to Africa, incorporated in 1663 for a period of one thousand years.

³ One of the most important consequences of the Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the expulsion of the Stuarts was the impetus it gave to the principle of free trade. In 1698 the Royal African Company lost its monopoly and the right of a free trade in slaves was recognised as a fundamental and natural right of Englishmen. In 1750 a new organisation was established, called the Company of Merchants trading to Africa, with a board of nine directors, three each from London, Bristol and Liverpool. With free trade and the increasing demands of the sugar plantations, the volume of the British slave trade rose enormously. The Royal African Company, between 1680 and 1686, transported an annual average of 5,000 slaves. In the first nine years of free trade Bristol alone shipped 160,950 Negroes to the sugar plantations. In 1760, 146 ships sailed from British ports for Africa, with a capacity for 36,000 slaves; in 1771, the number of ships had increased to 190 and the number of slaves to 47,000. The importation into Jamaica from 1700 to 1786 was 610,000, and it has been estimated that the total import of slaves into all the British colonies between
Support for Negro Slavery

The support for slave trade came from many quarters of the British society. Parliament appreciated the importance of slavery and the slave trade to Britain and its plantations. The Church also supported the slave trade. The Spaniards saw it an opportunity of converting the heathens, and the Jesuits, Dominicans and Franciscans were heavily involved in sugar cultivation which meant slave-holding. Quaker nonconformity did not extend to the slave trade. The Navy was impressed with the value of the West Indian colonies and refused to hazard or jeopardise their security. The West Indian station was the "station for honour," and many an admiral had been feted by the slave owners. Even the branded humanitarians supported the slave trade. The slave trade has even been justified as a great education. "Think of the effect, the result of a slave voyage on a youngster starting in his teens. ...What an education was such a voyage for the farming lad. What an enlargement of experience for a country boy. If he returned to the farm his whole outlook on life would be changed. He went out a boy; he returned a man" (Preston 1932: 70, 73). The legislature, men of judiciary put their supportive hand on this trade

1680 and 1786 was over two million. This information has been gathered from Williams, Eric (1964), *Capitalism and Slavery*, London: Andre Deutsch.

3 The British slave traders provided the necessary labourers not only for their own plantations but for those of their rivals. Spain was always, up to the nineteenth century, dependent on foreigners for her slaves, either because it adhered to the papal arbitration which excluded it from Africa, or because of a lack of capital and the necessary goods for the slave trade. The privilege of supplying these slaves to the Spanish colonies, called the Asiento, became one of the most highly coveted and bitterly contested plums of international diplomacy. British mercantilists defended the trade, legal or illegal, with the Spanish colonies, in Negroes and manufactured goods, as of distinct value in that the Spaniards paid in coin, and thus the supply of bullion in England was increased.

About 1730 in Bristol it was estimated that on a fortunate voyage the profit on a cargo of about 270 slaves reached 7,000 pound or 8,000 pound, exclusive of the returns from ivory. In the same year the net return from an "indifferent" cargo which arrived in poor condition was over 5,700 pound. Profits of 100 per cent were not uncommon in Liverpool, and one voyage netted a clear profit of at least 300 per cent. The *Lively*, fitted out in 1737 with a cargo worth 1,307 pound, returned to Liverpool with colonial produce and bills of exchange totaling 3,080 pound, in addition to cotton and sugar remitted later. The *Ann*, another Liverpool ship, sailed in 1751 with an outfit and a cargo costing 1,604 pound; altogether the voyage produced 3,287 pound net. A second voyage in 1753 produced 8,000 pound on a cargo and outfit amounting 3,153 pound. An eighteenth century writer has estimated the sterling value of the 303,737 slaves carried in 878 Liverpool ships between 1783 and 1793 at over fifteen million pounds. Deducting commissions and other charges and the cost of the outfit of the ships and maintenance of the slaves, he concluded that the average annual profit was over thirty per cent.
and it also got green signal from the English monarchy as it was filling the English treasure. The Board of Trade ruled in 1708 that it was “absolutely necessary that a trade so beneficial to the kingdom should be carried on to the greatest advantage. The well supplying of the plantations and colonies with a sufficient number of Negroes at reasonable prices in our opinion is the chief point to be considered” (Donnan 1930-1935).

The known intellectuals of that period and some of them pioneering the liberal ideas like, Coleridge, Disraeli, and many others in Britain and the United States, opposed the idea of freeing the slaves and condemned emancipation as the greatest blunder ever committed by the English people. But the reaction at its blackest and cheapest was personified by Carlyle. He wrote an essay on “The Nigger Question,” sneering at the “Exeter-Hallery and other tragic Tomfoolery” which, proceeding on the false principle that all men were equal, had made of the West Indies a Black Ireland. Would horses be the next to be emancipated? He asked. He contrasted the “beautiful Blacks sitting there up to the ears in pumpkins, and doleful Whites sitting here without potatoes to eat.” It was only the white man who had given value to the West Indies, and the “indolent two legged cattle” should be forced to work (Quoted in Williams 1964). Statesmen saw the great national emoluments which accrued from the slave trade. Slavery existed under the very eyes of eighteenth century Englishmen. The insignia and equipment of the slave traders were boldly exhibited for sale in the shops and advertised in the press. Slaves were sold openly at auction. Slaves being valuable property, with title recognised by law, the postmaster was the agent employed on occasions to recapture runaway slaves and advertisements were published in the official organ of the government. Negro servants were common. Little black boys were the appendages of slave captains, fashionable ladies or women of easy virtue.

Some protests were voiced by a few eighteenth century intellectuals and prelates like, Defoe, Thomson, Cowper, Southey and others who in their respective critical essays and poems condemned the slave trade, but in much of their writings they concentrated on the “noble Negro,” the prince unjustly made captive, superior even in bondage to his captors and the slavery of the ignoble Negro was justified. In 1823 the British government
adopted a new policy of reform towards West Indian slavery. The reforms included:
abolition of the whip; abolition of the Negro Sunday market, by giving the slaves another
day off, to permit them time for religious instruction; prohibition of the flogging of
female slaves; compulsory manumission of field and domestic slaves; freedom of female
children born after 1823; admissibility of evidence of slaves in courts of law;
establishment of savings banks for slaves; a nine hour day; and the appointment of a
Protector of Slaves whose duty it was, among other things, to keep an official record of
the punishments inflicted on the slaves. It was not emancipation but amelioration, not
revolution but evolution. These reformist policies were confined to the papers only, no
planters were ready to accept these policies, which they considered as a mere catalogue
of indulgencies to the Blacks. Not only did the West Indian planters question the specific
proposals of the British Government, they also challenged the right of the imperial
parliament to legislature on their internal affairs and issue arbitrary mandates.

Mobility of the Slaves and the Planters’ Class

The physical landscapes, social structures, and ways of life of the West Indies are in large
measure plantation by-products. Sugar not only caused Caribbean territories to resemble
one another, it substantially unified them. The European Planters often changed islands in
search of richer soils or cheaper labour or if they failed in one island they moved to other
islands to claiming and exercising their privileges and along with them they carried their
pack of slave labour. Not only the planters and slave labour but also the technicians,
overseers, merchants and money lenders, moved from island to island in search of better
opportunities. Slaves moved between territories in voluntarily as chattels or to elude
capture as runaways; there were continual escapes from one island to another. Traffic in
rum and molasses, fruit and vegetables, timber and rice, involved merchants and mariners
of many races. Communication among various local folk languages gave rise to a
Caribbean wide linguistic community, and some sense of regional familiarity penetrated
the remotest country districts. Colonial administrations, schools, and churches also
shunted personnel from territory to territory. Also in look for emigration opportunities
white West Indians turned to other Caribbean territories: British West Indian settlements in Aruba and Curacao, Dominicans and St. Lucians in French Guiana, St. Barthois in St. Thomas, are living testimony to intermingling throughout the region. Along with the continuous influx of people went a general community of culture, ideas, and institutions and this nature of things was going to affect the edifice of the West Indian social structure.

Treatment of the Slaves

The slave masters had only one concern of garnering and dragging as much profit as possible from the slaves and apart from this they had no other concern of any sort for the slaves. So, the conditions of the slaves in any part of the world was quite appalling and conditions of work, nourishment, confinement, and punishment were probably the worst in the West Indies. The quite high mortality rate among Negro slaves and Negro infants had no impact on the planter as the fresh arrivals were ready. Death was no deterrent; ‘though I have killed 30 or 40 Negroes per year more’, one explained, ‘I have made my employer 20, 30, 40 more hogsheads per year than any of my predecessors ever did’ (Quoted in Lowenthal 1972: 42). From the Middle Passage to infrequent old age, slave mortality in the West Indies was daunting. Almost four million Africans were sold into the British, French, and Dutch Caribbean; yet when slavery ended in these territories, the West Indian population of African descent was no more than a million and a half. When the slaves were emancipated, the Caribbean contained scarcely one-third the number imported; the United States had eleven times the number brought in (Lowenthal 1972: 43).

High mortality encouraged West Indian planters to treat slaves callously. Absenteeism promoted harsh treatment; managers and overseers thinking of short run returns were apt to be more demanding – and more penurious – than resident owners. Slave rations were most meagre. Mercantilism, planter absenteeism, the predominance of sugar, and the high ratio of slave to free created environments favourable to cruelty and inhumanity, attracted
planters and officials who could enjoy or endure them. Since the slave trade was the most profitable business of the day, the sole aim of the slave merchants was to have their decks “well covered with black ones” (Quoted in Williams 1964: 35). The space allotted to each slave on the Atlantic crossing measured five and a half feet in length by sixteen inches in breadth. Packed like “rows of books on shelves,” as Clarkson said, chained two by two, right leg and left leg, right hand and left hand, each slave had less room than a man in a coffin. It was like the transportation of black cattle, and where sufficient Negroes were not available cattle were taken on (Quoted in Williams 1964: 35).

Abolition of Slavery

The bleak history of human civilisation, that is, slavery came to an end in 1833 and the humanitarians, abolitionists and the slaves themselves were the spearheads of the onslaught which destroyed the West Indian slave system and freed the Negro. With several stalwarts the British humanitarians were quite pioneering in raising the diabolic magnitude of slavery and fought for the emancipation of slaves. The abolitionists were not radicals and they were reactionary in their attitude to domestic problems. The abolitionists for a long time eschewed and repeatedly disowned any idea of emancipation and their interest was solely in the slave trade, whose abolition, they thought, would eventually lead, without legislative interference, into freedom. It was not until 1823 that emancipation became the avowed aim of the abolitionists. Even then emancipation was to be gradual. One of the earliest, ablest and most diligent of the abolitionists was James

---

4 British humanitarians were a brilliant band and the name of Clarkson comes at the top. Clarkson was an indefatigable worker, who conducted endless researches into the conditions and consequences of the slave trade. He pointed out, “I should not choose to permit anyone to become a purchaser, who would not be better pleased with the good resulting to Africa than from great commercial profits to himself; not that the latter may not be expected, but in case of a disappointment, I should wish his mind to be made easy by the assurance that he has been instrumental in introducing light and happiness into a country, where the mind was kept in darkness and the body nourished only for European chains.” Then there were James Stephen, the father, and James Stephen, the son. The father had been a lawyer in the West Indies and knew conditions at first hand. The son became the first outstanding permanent under secretary of the colonial office. Stephen drafted the Emancipation Bill, which included concessions he was loath to make to the planters.
Ramsay, who, as a rector in the West Indies, had some twenty years experience of slavery. Besides him, Wilberforce was another prominent abolitionist.

The abolitionists frustrated with the cool attitude of the government urged the common people and their sympathisers to boycott slave-grown produce in favour of the free grown produce of India. They again urged to boycott not only sugar but also cotton. The abolitionists put the pressure on the government by sending petitions with millions of signatures of the people and the issue of Negro slavery became an issue of election debate. The ideas spread by Adam Smith through his masterpiece *Wealth of Nations* that the work done by freemen comes cheaper in the end than that performed by slaves and his claim that a person who can acquire no property can have no other interest than to eat as much, and to labour as little as possible, immeasurably strengthened the abolitionist cause. Again slave labour was given reluctantly and it lacked versatility. European reformers generally attended to economic common sense. 'Slavery costs more to maintain than it would cost to destroy', claimed Schoelcher (Quoted in Lowenthal 1972: 51).

Emancipation could not have come to the slaves unless they would themselves not have fought for it in spite of the struggle of many noble humanities against this monstrous act of humanity. Not nearly as stupid as his master thought of him, the slave was quite observant of his surroundings and was very keen in discussions and talks about his fate. They argued that God had made them of the same flesh and blood as the whites, that they were tired of being slaves to them, that they should be free and they would not work any more. In the beginning as mute cattle the slaves were ready to exert anything and everything from their body and soul for the service of their masters, but there is a limit to humanity. The insatiable desires of the slave masters sucked every drop of Negro blood and dragged the flesh from the Negro bone, but that did not satisfy him. When cruelty crossed the human limit the slaves started rebellion in most parts of the West Indian plantation estates. The arrogant behaviour and intemperate language of the planters, however, served only to inflame the minds of the already restless slaves. The consensus of opinion among the slaves, whenever each new discussion arose or each new policy
was announced, was that emancipation had been passed in England but was withheld by their masters. Every change of governor was interpreted by them as emancipation. The slaves, however, were not prepared to wait for freedom to come to them as a dispensation from above. The slaves demanded unconditional emancipation. The governors assured them to wait patiently for Emancipation which will come gradually but the slaves gave a deaf ear to these flattering sounds. Rebellion passed to almost all the parts of the plantation estates. In 1833 the alternatives were clear: emancipation from above, or emancipation from below, but Emancipation. Economic change, the decline of the monopolists, the development of capitalism, the humanitarian agitation in British churches, contending perorations in the halls of parliament, had now reached their completion in the determination of the slaves themselves to be free. Finally, in 1833 the slaves got their emancipation and it was not only the greatest turning points in their lives, but also it greatly attributed to the social stratification of the West Indian society, which will be discussed in the following sections of the chapter.

**Emancipation and the West Indian Social Structure**

Though the Negro slaves were emancipated yet it was proved partial and incomplete; the emancipated found their rights curtailed, equality an empty term, prejudice and discrimination as the order of the day. The injustices of slavery concerned humanitarians more than the welfare of the freed slaves. The freed slaves remained in economic bondage, political subservience, and social limbo. Planters and governments throughout the Caribbean curtailed the freedom of labourers and bound them to estate work. They were denounced as ‘vagrants’ and ‘idlers’ those who preferred such alternatives as small farming, urban trades, or immigration. This bias long dominated the West Indian agricultural scene. The whites were in no mood to passing the plantation estates to others as white self-interest was understood to require white estate monopoly; even those ruined by their plantations resisted Negro acquisition. Only in British Guyana did ex-slaves acquire substantial plantation land, by grouping together to buy estates from bankrupt owners. Whites considered non-whites incapable of agricultural enterprise and planters
thought punitive force essential to regular work. But the most important thing for the slaves was that they were free of bondage and were no longer forced to work on the plantations. On the islands, land was available only in the hills or on poor soil outside the plantation belts and these lands were best suited for the cultivation of cotton, coconuts, coffee, cocoa, and bananas. The freed slaves purchased or acquired these lands and transformed themselves into agriculturalists and they were feeling great about their new found identity.

Emancipation and liberation of the slaves brought about a radical change in the whole basis of social organisation and structure of the West Indian society; it made the slave a free man, with the power to remain on the estate or to move away from the estate, and to sell or withhold his labour and for this labour the planter had to pay him the return. After the abolition of slavery the sugar planters were dwindling and were in a search, outside the Caribbean, of a source of an ensured steady labour supply with a low down wage. The immediate required labour for the sugar plantations was meted by the Chinese and Madeiran immigrants, but they suffered heavy mortality, and the survivors soon left agriculture to take up peddling and retail shop keeping. After getting frustrated with these Chinese and Madeiran immigrants the planters looked towards India, which was at that time quite known for its huge underfed population.

At that time, as a colony of Britain, India was basically an agrarian country with millions of hungry bellies and the planters were licking to use this depraved condition of Indians into their favour. With the negotiations of planters with the colonial government, Indians started pouring the West Indian land mass through a system of indenture and generally got demeaned as ‘coolies’ by every section of the West Indian society including the freed Negro slaves. By this time several Javanese also landed in the West Indian domain to put their hands in the toil of the land and employ their physique in dragging profit for filling the treasure of the European planters. Most of the Indians and Javanese who came to the West Indies on plantation contracts remained on the land, either as estate workers or subsequently as small farmers. Condition of the Indian indentured labourers was reminiscent of slavery. Estate managers sought simply to extract maximum returns from
Indians during the indenture period as they thought that they are transients and after the completion of their indentureship, they are going to leave this place; but in case of the slaves they were showing some mercy as they were permanent and had to serve them till death. Some planters were purposely cruel to the Indian ‘coolies’: those who malingered, left estates without written permission, or otherwise broke their contracts had to undergo additional years of indenture and might be kept in indefinite servitude. The planters viewed them, like the slaves, simply as sugar-producing machines. Criticised for the woeful condition of his Indian barracks, a Trinidad sugar planter replied in 1889: ‘The people ought to be in the field all day. I do not build cottages for idlers.’ The care of children and pregnant women did not concern him either: ‘I want two years of good crops and good prices, and then I will sell my estates and go to live in Europe’ (Williams 1962). The cruelties exerted to the indentured Indians have been discussed in the previous chapter. The planters were not the only people to despise the Indians, even the Indians got little sympathy from black and coloured West Indians, who resented them for keeping wages down or spurned them as drudges. Negroes were moving off the sugar estates into the towns or on to smallholdings, shunning plantation work as fit only for slaves. So, Indians were eschewed by the Negroes who claimed that Indians have been enslaved by working in the sugar plantations and they regarded themselves as free and Indians as chained.

Though the slaves had their freedom from the bondage and Emancipation removed civil barriers of race, but they were marginalised in their participation in the local affairs and in every West Indian territory political equality was a legal fiction. Everywhere whites controlled local legislatures together with a handful of ‘qualified’ (rich, educated, or accommodating) men of colour; only a few subordinate government posts went to non-whites. For the freed slaves, voting was not an instrument of political power; it just symbolised social participation. But lack of property kept the vast majority of freed slaves from voting, let alone office holding. In a quarter century, fewer than two thousand new names were added to the Jamaican electoral roll, and by 1865 only ten of the forty seven members of the Assembly were coloured. In Barbados before 1884 only 1,300 exercised the franchise in a population of 180,000; in Trinidad, as recently as 1938,
income qualifications allowed fewer than seven per cent of the population to vote. The hierarchical habit was so ingrained that few West Indians thought of a broad suffrage; they viewed the ballot as a special privilege, not a natural right as in the United States (Quoted in Lowenthal 1972: 63). However, the smallest sanctions to the ex-slaves were taken with great apprehension by the West Indian white population; as their own numbers diminished, every new coloured elector became a harbinger of ultimate white eclipse. The white man had the notion that the black man is incapable of the art of government and of anything, and if he is entrusted with making laws for the islands he will surely wreck the islands.

Gradually the voting right was extended to include more people in the electorate and more non-whites sat in local legislatures, but votes and seats were meaningless as appointed officials were all powerful. The elected representative was powerless to impel substantive change and his legislative function was strictly ceremonial and emblematic. The basic human needs like, health, education, and welfare allocations remained rudimentary for a century after Emancipation; few West Indians received either schooling or medical care. Whites, in the West Indies, were the only people to afford the very costly medical attention provided by the private doctors with high costs, which was not possible for others to provide. The same was with schooling and governments seldom exerted themselves on behalf of non-whites. Medical negligence was a real hardship for the blacks, who often lacked access to elementary precautions and remedies, were unused to coping with illness, and were ill-equipped to manage community health and sanitation. For the blacks education was also a day dream as it was under the dispense of the whites. Schooling was thought, by the West Indian whites, to be suitable only for the elites; in the West Indies that elite went ‘home’ to be educated, and the territories were left with scarcely the rudiments of a school system. The very few schools established through the grants of metropolitan governments, churches and local legislatures catered to whites alone; however, at a latter stage middle class coloured children gained entrance into these schools. Rather than complying with the local conditions and based on European models higher education remained an elite process, and intended to prepare gentlemen and administrators. Primary schooling spread slowly and touched most folks superficially.
Even after basic education was in theory compulsory it was far from universal; as late as the 1940s one West Indian in three could not read or write, one child in four never went to school, half the remainder attended only irregularly, and most received fewer than four years of schooling (Quoted in Lowenthal 1972: 67). So, Colour criterion played vital importance in the West Indian society. White Creoles undercut black freedom with vagrancy laws, contracts tying tenancy to plantation duties, and state subsidised indentured immigration that kept down estate wages. And coloured West Indians occupied an uneasy middle position, emphasising the conflicts as much as the continuities of the structure. Social, political and economic positions of the Negroes were subordinated. By this time the Indian indentured and other ethnic labour communities did not enter into the social scene of the West Indies as they were still busy in sweetening the coffee and tea bowls of the Europeans and enriching the treasures of the European planters.

This was the story in the early periods of Emancipation from the slavery, although hierarchical in structure and European in focus, West Indian society gradually became ameliorative and encouraged some social mobility. Ex-slaves acquired land and a peasantry emerged; immigrant labour from Asia profoundly affected many territories; black and coloured numbers increased everywhere, whereas whites diminished; sugar ceased to be the economic touchstone and in some areas vanished entirely; local autonomy gave way to stronger metropolitan control; and coloured middle class and black working class began to enter some institutional realms hitherto exclusively white. However, fundamentally these changes did not bring about a substantial alteration in the structure of society nor most relationships between ruler and ruled, white and black, and landowner and labourer found a new mould. But gradually with the departure of whites, broadening of suffrage to non-whites, expansion of local education and the relaxation in discriminatory barriers, coloured and later black West Indians gradually moved into positions of power and prestige, in the process adopting and emulating white outlooks and attitudes to gain success.
Though the West Indian society was in the process of becoming a progressive one, its colour composition engendered new values. Since all slaves were black or coloured and all whites were free, racial distinctions were taken for granted and required that free black and coloured people are set apart from both free white and black slave. The pragmatic justification for colour distinctions remained in spite of legal obliteraton through Emancipation and the distances and grievances between white, brown, and black widened. Asian contract labourers were deliberately segregated in the West Indies. During the period of indentureship Indians and Javanese were housed in estate barracks and were kept apart from the Creoles, and those who renounced the estates, after the completion of their contracts, to cultivate their own lands, which they purchased from their contract labour money were basically confined to their closed ethnic communities. Many villages in Guyana were almost entirely East Indian, and in Surinam the Government lent formal support to homogenous rural communities of Javanese, Hindustanis, and Negroes. But Asian exclusiveness was more cultural than racial.

For the West Indian scholars and stalwarts integration and racial mixing gradually became the general West Indian ideal. But for the coloured, black, and white integration carried different connotations; to the free coloured it meant the emulation of European standards and social acceptance by white Creoles; to the emancipated blacks it meant self esteem and a fair share of material and social goods; and the exemplar for both was the white West Indian, hospitable and tyrannical, greedy and improvident, extravagant and overbearing, energetic but disliking manual labour. For most non white West Indians, achievement in terms of European standards was still a prime goal. Whites wanted the black or coloured West Indian to pattern himself after a docile, tractable, hard working European peasant – to be ‘an English rustic in a black skin’, as popularly it was labelled. But gradually the Asian indentured labour was to enter into this social fabric of the West Indies, and with the accelerated change in the socio-cultural, economic and political orientation and the value system of the West Indian society it moved into a modern and pluralistic society in the later years.
Creolisation of the West Indian Society

The term ‘Creole’ in the West Indian context emphasises the essentially alien quality that characterises much of the West Indian life. A word of Spanish origin, it originally denoted Negro slaves born in the New World, as distinct from the African-born and soon it came to refer to anyone, black or white, born in the West Indies. Then everything habits, values, essences, ideas, plants grown, goods manufactured, and opinions expressed were all looked at and interpreted in terms of ‘Creole’ in the West Indies. In some areas ‘Creole’ became a euphemism for coloured or black. But the connotation and orientation of this essence, ‘Creole’ varied and varies from place to place; in Jamaica ‘Creole’ designates anyone of Jamaican parentage except East Indians, Chinese, and Maroons (Black Country descendents of runaway slaves, who are considered ‘African’); in Trinidad and Guyana it excludes Amerindians and East Indians; in Surinam it denotes the ‘civilised’ coloured population, as apart from tribes of rebel-slave descent called Bush Negroes; in the French Antilles ‘Creole’ refers more to local born whites than to coloured or black persons; in French Guiana, by contrast, it is used exclusively for non-whites.5

The West Indian social structure failed to develop any kind of indigenous tradition not only for lack of Amerindians, who were massacred by the white colonial planters but also because most settlers came not to live but merely to make a living – or to enrich themselves and others. The European planters were here for making money, but the money that they made from the blood of the labour was streaming to London, Paris, and Amsterdam, where they spent lavishly. They had no concern for the West Indies nor did they spend any single penny for the development of the West Indies. The masters felt almost as alien as their slaves; ‘Europeans have always been doubly “European” in the West Indies, not only out of nostalgia, but in order to preserve their identity in an alien land’ (James 1968: 23). Again some of the plantation estates were maintained by absentee masters who were controlling that staying in the metropolis of London, Paris or Amsterdam. Many affluent estate owners never set foot in the Caribbean; those who

5 This information has been gathered from, Lowenthal, David (1972), West Indian Societies, London: Oxford University Press.
succeeded there lost no time returning to Europe. Even in the heyday of sugar prosperity, absentee proprietors owned most of the property and slaves in Jamaica; a century later, with slavery ended sugar prices down, and mortgages foreclosed, two-thirds of Grenada’s sugar estates, four-fifths of those in St. Vincent and Tobago, and nine-tenths of the cultivated land in Jamaica were held by absentee (Quoted in Lowenthal 1972: 34). So, for the White planters, West Indies was just a temporary lodging place and they were waiting for the day when they will fill their treasure and settle in the metropolis of Europe. So, it was the Creole who had no place to go and he began to feel himself as the true West Indian.

In stead of building schools and colleges in the West Indies the white colonial planters sent their sons and daughters across the Atlantic for schooling and marriage; many Whites from the West Indies went to Oxford and Cambridge. But most of them neither were willing nor returned to the West Indies and those who returned reluctantly were quite regretful of the loss of the cheerful and amusing life they used to have in the other side of the Atlantic, but their more grievances being the dull and tedious routine life of the West Indies. At that time it was basically presumed that western education brings about a reformist zeal, but in case of the West Indies, education abroad made most of the young white colonial breeds alien to the land where they were born, and their aversion towards their birth place and the rejection of the essences of the West Indian values made them perceive themselves only as transients in a country where, they felt, they are forced to stay. They were in fact in look for opportunities to leave the island and settle in Europe.

So, with the lack of teachers, students, any good hearted reformists, absence of literary and scientific intercourse, and dearth of liberal recreations and discussions the West Indies became socially truncated and lacked a general sense of culture. In fact true elites build up the socio-cultural, economic and political edifice of any society and that may get transformed in the gradual progressive development of the society, but as men of substance and taste found the Caribbean unfit to live in, the territories failed to develop a true elite. Their natural leaders were either in Europe or proscribed by colour; educated
non-whites were barred from the elite, at first by law, later by prejudice. White rule was, increasingly, rule by poor whites, fearful, embattled, and intransigent. Since the number of the whites was very meagre and the blacks were all around, the white found himself dependent on his slaves at every point – for livelihood, for safety, for comfort, even for companionship. Though the planter was thinking of his status as something like a mini monarch yet the galling recognition of dependency on a despised inferior helps to explain why whites often described their own lives in terms of slavery.

Forcibly brought to the West Indies and compelled to live there under chains, the Negro slaves felt it as a prison and Africa remained their homeland, however little they recalled. Succeeding generations of slaves remembered less of Africa, and Creoles learned to scorn slaves born there, but they gained no local attachments to replace the ancestral one. ‘How strange is the race of Creole Negroes – of Negroes, that is, born out of Africa’, exclaimed Trollope, who visited the West Indies in 1860: ‘they have no country of their own, yet they have not hitherto any country of their adoption. ... They have no idea of country, and no pride of race’ (Trollope 1860). They lacked racial pride; for their race had been denied even personality. Whites considered themselves the only West Indian inhabitants. Even those who baptised, punished, or slept with their slaves viewed them more as property than as persons.

**West Indian Free Coloured**

Among the millions of slaves and the thousands of whites, the intermediate group of ‘free coloured’ – manumitted slaves and their descendants - occupied an increasingly prominent position in the West Indies. Around five to twenty five per cent of the West Indian populations were free coloured or black in the late eighteenth century; but by the time of Emancipation they outnumbered whites. It was not only emancipation and liberty but also colour that distinguished the free coloured people from slaves. Many of them had in fact been freed by white fathers or grandfathers. Some free persons were black and some slaves were coloured – indeed, half or more of all coloured persons were slaves.
But preponderance of mixed ancestry (mulatto, quadroon, octoroon) among free non-whites, and of unmixed African descent among slaves, shaped a tendency to designate free persons as 'coloured' and slaves as 'black'. The free coloureds were accorded superiority both to slaves and free blacks by the West Indian whites, and they were provided with special privileges; in Surinam, free men of colour and free-born blacks could vote, but freed blacks could not (Lier 1955: 129). Status and fortune among the free coloureds depended on their closeness to European features and white ancestors. The free coloured men were encouraged to take up skilled occupations due to the absence of white artisans in the West Indies. The scarceness in the white population made them inclined to accept a wide range of intimate associations with free coloured people. Moreover, as Europeans, white West Indians took a socially stratified order for granted and viewed the separate identity and special privileges of the free coloured as a means of consolidating their own hegemony.

Interracial sexual liaisons were openly countenanced in the West Indies, especially where white women were few. It became a customary practice for the whites to possess coloured mistresses, and white fathers regularly placed coloured daughters as concubines. Many luminaries heavily criticized this immoral practice and deplored its evil consequences, ranging from personal defilement to extinction of the white race, but the vehement inveighed criticisms went in vain as it had already become a well-nigh universal custom and again in such a communitarian set up like this it was not possible to expect people to lead moral and pure lives. In most cases the well-to-do West Indian whites not only identified and recognised their coloured offsprings but often educated them in Europe and left them large properties. Even some coloured families garnered significant treasures to stand rivals to elite whites in wealth and style of life. In Trinidad, they outnumbered whites more than two to one as early as 1802. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries the Jamaican legislature passed hundreds of bills granting well educated and well-to-do coloured individuals the perquisites of whites. The future was clearly theirs; for unlike most whites the free coloured were not mere sojourners but permanent residents. 'They were in their time the true West Indians', one historian has said, 'and they knew it' (Wesley 1934).
However, this is one side of the story. From this we should not deduce that the free coloureds were having a life of equality and the whites had granted them egalitarian rights at par with them. More than three-fourths of the free coloured of Jamaica in the 1820s were reputed ‘absolutely poor’ (Hall 1954: 157). The whites had debarred them from many types of employment; their residence, travel, dress, and diet were sharply restricted; and they suffered indignities from whites of all classes. In the militia and some other organisations coloured men were always subordinate to the whites. Moreover, free black and coloured people were constantly at the risk of re-enslavement. The growing number of free coloureds and their affluence often strained free-coloured relations with whites and in some places white planters resented free-coloured privileges and wealth and imposed restrictions on their modes of life and work. In 1830 France abolished legal distinctions of colour among free persons, but white Creole planters continued to exclude coloured people from the suffrage through high property requirements.

Even, for some, life was equally dreadful and in some respects even worse than that they used to have during the period of slavery. They were insulted and plundered and they were living with the constant fear of losing their liberty; and for them freedom appeared to be a mockery only. Barriers between the white and coloured remained high in the British and Dutch territories; for the whites believed that colour distinctions among the free were essential to maintain control over slaves and it was crucial to the stability of the social hierarchy. The whites were always feeling that the dominance that they were clutching over the blacks stemmed from the acknowledged superiority of the whites and a degrading association with an inferior class and sanction of equality to these besmirched creatures would obliterate the ascendancy of the white population over the blacks. So, law as well as custom discriminated against the free coloureds, who were precluded from participation in government. And the free coloureds remained, like the slaves, an inferior social order and the small white minority exercised absolute power over social institutions that everywhere discriminated against non-whites, slaves and free.
Race Relations in the West Indies

In the West Indian social scenario race relations are projected as free and pleasant and West Indians feel proud of being in a pluralistic socio-cultural set up. ‘However black and dispossessed’ West Indians may have been, explains a Barbadian, they never ‘felt the experience of being in a minority.’ They suffer neither the ghettoisation nor the sense of isolation and anomic, helplessness and powerlessness that afflicts many black Americans. Yet small as it is, the West Indian white minority is omnipresent, and ‘the West Indian has learnt, by sheer habit, to take that white presence for granted’ (Lamming 1960: 40).

However, the rosy image of multi-racial harmony and cultural pluralism grossly distorts the kind of ethnic distinctiveness, colour prejudice and racial feelings that characterises the West Indian social premises. If prejudice is less blatant it is still visible. Colour distinctions continue to correlate with class differences and dominate most personal associations. In most realms of life black and white are far from equal and there are still upper class whites who talk and think very derogatively about damned niggers, and they never hesitate to fling their children out of the house if they find their children engage in matrimonial alliances with people with a touch of colour.

In many places discrimination extends to business also; employment announcements sometimes advocate ethnic origin or complexion as the yardstick for appointment. Even the cricket ground, renowned for inter-racial companionship, shares an elongated account of prejudice and discrimination. Nonwhites always occupied inferior positions on colony teams; the working principle was that ‘the white man batted and the black man bowled’ (Sobers and Barker 1967). The more brilliantly the black men played, the more [the audience would think]...“funny, isn’t it, they cannot be responsible for themselves – they must always have a white man to lead them” (James 1963). Spectators at cricket matches get segregated sharply on the basis of race and class (white and light in the pavilion, black in the bleachers), and sentiments and sensations run so elevated that fear of losing to England has precipitated several riots. Cricket ‘is the game we love for it is the only game we can play well’, writes a Jamaican sociologist. ‘But it is the game, deep down, which we must hate – the game of the master’ (Patterson 1969). That is why victory is so
important. It is hard to gainsay C.L.R. James’s conclusion that ‘there was racialism in cricket, there is racialism in cricket, there will always be racialism in cricket’ (James 1963).

A Prime Minister who had once termed Jamaica’s social structure ‘very simple’ later admitted that ‘I was wrong. Jamaica has a very complex, intimate social structure which very few people understand. ...We are only beginning to unify it.’ A decade later, Trinidad’s Prime Minister doubted that much progress had been made: ‘We are not a nation but a bunch of transients’ (Quoted in Lowenthal 1972: 22). Trinidad projects itself as society with a happy blend of African, Chinese, East Indian, Spanish, and French. But as Dennis Mahabir feels, ‘Trinidadians live in a world of make believe’ (Mahabir 1970: 9).

Relations between Indians and Blacks

The blacks and the Indians in the West Indies, from the very beginning, have always implanted a hostile attitude to each other and this can be related to the colonial pattern of the Caribbean society where the slave masters set the kiths against the kins so as to fulfill their ends. In one of his historical works, Naipaul retorts:

“So in Trinidad, the English colonists were at first distinguished... by their intellectual liveliness... a carryover from the metropolis. In the slave society, where self-fulfillment came so easily, this liveliness began to be perverted and then to fade and the English saw their pre-eminence, more simply, as a type of racial magic.... the emigration of the ambitious was a further intellectual depletion.... The quality of controversy declined, and the stature of men what remained was a colony” (Naipaul 1969: 316).

In order to rest their colonial fulfillments, the English colonialists found the stone like Negro macho and clay like Negro brain as a safe anchor and set the Indians in Negro speculation as the thorn in the Negro soft petal walk to success. On the other end of the spectrum, Indians’ craziness to define everything in ‘Indian’ terms and Indians’ belief that they can’t climb the success ladder as it has already been occupied by the Negroes, made them to gaze Negroes as mere nightmares for them. Indians believed that Negroes
don’t have personalities of their own and they only work for others, the colonial white masters. A small islander in a novel of Naipaul remarks:

“It never cross my mind that I could open a shop of my own. Is how it is with black people. They get so used to working for other people that they get to believe that because they black they can’t do nothing else but work for other people” (Naipaul 1967: 140).

What created and creates the most Negro hostility towards the Indians is the Negro thought of Indians as ‘bonding’ together to define everything in the traditional Indian standards and values. Negro farmers in Guyana attribute Indian success to “coolie deviousness’ and fear being deprived of the little they have. An anthropologist records a villager’s suspicion that:

“De-coolieman talking over de whole country. Dey bond themselves together to get all we own... Dey rent we land and take it away. Dey loan black people money and take all dey own. Dey smart people, you know. Cunning. Dey work cheap, eat cheap, and save and save. Black people can’t punish themselves so. If we punish ourselves like coolie man, we slaves again” (Despres 1967: 93).

Indians, on the other end, feel ‘Contempt for the Negro. ...Who allows his womenfolk complete sexual freedom, and does not even exhibit shame when his sister becomes an unmarried mother. ...The Negro is too interested in “feting”: dancing, carnival, and expensive clothes...(to) know how to save money” (Klass 1961: 244). Indian attachment to property fuelled their mistrust of black power demonstrations in Trinidad in 1970. “We want no part of your struggle because you talk nothing but destruction”, one Indian explained. “We have toiled too long and too hard to give up what we have (and what we have a hell of a lot)” (Maharaj 1970: 9). Again Negro villagers are convinced that their Indian neighbours camouflage their wealth: “Indians have plenty of money, but they don’t show it.” Indians believe that “the Niggers sleep during the day and at night they walk around and steal. Stealing and killing - that’s their work.” This behaviour is ascribed to racial history: “They are the last people God made. They’re an evil race” (Ehrlich 1969).

With several other reasons Indian attachment to endogamy stems from their stereotype of Negroes as lascivious, ugly, and evil. Blacks who advocate Creolisation, Indians charge, are “interested more in sexual union between Indians and Negroes than in unity of minds
between the two races” (Singh 1965: 14). Liaisons with Negroes are considered polluting; parental disinheritance is a common, though perhaps often an empty threat. “If me dawta take up with black-man, Indian villagers in Guyana ask, “Who will take she of wife” (Despres 1967: 93).

The race for riding political ascendancy is the other cause of their hostility. The Negroes apprehend that they, under Indian political leadership will be slave to the Indians and on the other end, Indians court the apprehension just the vice-versa. The Indian political leaders charge that the Negroes have drunk the goblet of power and now see no necessity to share anything with the Indians. In Trinidad Indians in the mid-1960s claimed that Negroes would rather have a dishonest Negro than an honest East Indian as Prime Minister.

So it can be construed that the usual response of the majority of Negroes towards Indian ethos and mores, and of Indians’ towards Negro traits is based less on ‘intermingling’ than on ‘negative indifference’, frequently accompanied by ridicule or sarcastic expressions of antipathy, mistrust and hostility. Overt ethnic conflict is rare in Trinidad owing not to acculturation but rather to dissociation, a live and let live propensity to mind one’s own affairs. This, however, does not mean that the blacks and Indians always show the trigger to each other, but their inter-ethnic participation is marked in certain occasions. Obeah exerts an influence over the lives of blacks, Creoles and Indians alike. An orthodox Brahmin who has never eaten meat may be the organiser of this festival and play Guitar on this occasion. Similarly, the black participation immensely brings charm and joy to the Indian celebrations of Hoseah, Eid and Diwali. In his novel, A House For Mr. Biswas, Mr. Biswas’s friendship with Mrs. Loggie (a black lady) giving him consolation during his turbulent period can be read as a renewed relationship between the blacks and the Indians.

Much of the hostility and antagonism that the Indians and blacks were showing in the beginning faded away with the gradual progression of the socio-cultural, political and
Creoles for national power and status. But the Indians of Jamaica, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and the Windward Islands, by contrast, are only small minorities - two to four per cent of the population. Far from challenging Creole hegemony, they hardly constitute viable separate entities and are in large measure subsets of the rural lower class. Although they are, with few exceptions, culturally similar to Creoles and physically dispersed among them, they are by no means totally integrated within Creole society.

It can’t be denied that Indians have no longer remained the same as they left more than one and half century back. In this long process, some of their carried values have been contaminated and they have no longer remained pure; on the other end, in India itself some changes have taken place in the socio-cultural and religious paradigms, but some West Indians are not going to accept the changes and they argue that the kind of practices they are observing is pure and what the Indians do practice is impure. The Trinidadian Naipaul, otherwise no traditionalist, records his sense of outrage:

“When I heard that in Bombay they used candles and electric bulbs for the Diwali festival, and not the rustic clay lamps, of immemorial design, which in Trinidad we still used” (Naipaul 1964: 38).

Indians themselves are often unaware that they have adopted Creole norms. Even when they are conscious that their culture is changing, they seldom recognise change as an adaptation to the wider West Indian world. “We were steadily adopting the food styles of others: the Portuguese stew...the Negro way with yams, plantains, breadfruit and bananas”; but, adds Naipaul, “Everything we adopted became our own; the outside was still to be dreaded” (Naipaul 1964: 35). Indians remain more ‘Indian’ in some ways than in others. But trait-by-trait generalisations grossly oversimplify; degrees and types of “Indianness” vary from place to place, from city to countryside, from old to young depending upon the kind and magnitude of influence exerted by Creolisation. How ‘Indian’ the Indians remain, and how Creole they have become, are two quite different, though related, questions. Some Indians exhibit no problem in adapting Creole behaviour and practices, but some other Indians derogate Creole-like behaviour. This attitude can even be marked in the same household. Some “Creolised” Indian women, charges an opponent of assimilation, “not only disclaim... any knowledge of Indian (ways) of life,
but actually scoff at it” (Singh 1965: 7). In a Selvon story, a Negro overhears Indians and says to a friend, “Listen to them two Indian how they arguing about we Creole Calypso.” An Indian retorts, “Man I is a Creolise Trinidadian, Oui” (Selvon 1966: 79).

Thus the purely ancestral Indian culture and social institutions survive as ideals rather than as realities or endure in name but are Creolised in character and function. Many insistent aspects of Indianness are either syncretised adaptations to Creole life or deliberate rescuscitations of all but forgotten folkways. An East Indian who visited Calcutta a century ago came back to Trinidad warning that “there was no use in those who were accustomed to the ways of this country returning to India”, because “the manners of the East were different and utterly opposed to the freedom of life that they were accustomed to here” (Lowenthal 1972: 156). Low-caste Hindus especially found it hard to “reassume their traditionally subordinate positions in a village in India after life and work in an island where the chance to better themselves was more easily attainable” (Lowenthal 1972: 156).

So, two kinds of attitudes are being marked among the Indians; some wish to be Creolised and some others oppose it and this makes one to study the Indian-Creole relationship and differences in manifold perspectives. Another interesting aspect is that Indian practices have become Creolised subconsciously. Although there has been a wave of Creolisation, little traditional remains and Creolisation is pervasive, Indian culture and social organisation, personality traits and values, are markedly unlike those of other West Indians. In the opinion of the Creoles and Blacks the average Indian knows little of his past, would be unable to argue well for his way of life or his religion, but he believes in it nonetheless. Indians, one of them contends, “remain separate because they have little in common with the urban Negro people” (Jagessar 1969: 7). So, these differences heightened by isolation, ignorance, and fear, have engendered negative, persistent, and inclusive group stereotypes. The English preconceptions of Indians as intractable Orientals and the common observations about Africans as clay which could be easily molded into a Christian and western shape, and the Hindus and Muslims of India as stone
that could only be worked painfully and with much toil, fuelled this indifference between Indians and Creoles.

The occupational patterns and specialisations played prominent role in dividing the rural Indians and Creoles. Initially Indians were seen as transients or temporary labour, who had to leave the plantation estate once their indentureship was over, so the planters saw no point in training them to operate highly skilled factory operations, which thus became exclusively Creole. After the completion of indentureship when Indians were entering the agricultural sector, more and more Creoles abandoned agriculture for the mines of Guyana, the oil fields of Trinidad, and government and other white collar jobs in Port of Spain, Georgetown, and Paramaribo. The successful Indian turned miller and bought more land for his sons; the Creole who made good left for the city. Creoles looked upon agriculture as a demeaning work, work of the slaves and Indians as degraded persons meant to till the land.

Along these economic differences, ethnic patterns of community organisation, family ties, religious life, and education reinforced the discrepancies between Indians and Creoles. While Creoles tend to act as individuals, Indians operate as nuclear family units, with clusters of families often forming village factions. Creoles gain status through schooling in European - that is, Christian language, culture, and manners; Indians both desire education as the highway to success and fear its anti-Indian bias. Indians long avoided sending children to school lest they be converted to Christianity and thereby lost to the family and community. The typical Indian felt, as a future chief justice of Guyana wrote in 1919, that to “send his boy to denomic national school to be taught English is to denationalise him and jeopardise his religious faith” (Luckhoo 1919: 61). “An Indian will not send his child to a Creole school, he is afraid of injustice being done to his children by the Creole teachers, and of ill usage from Creole pupils” (Lowenthal 1972: 159). Along with these, lurid stories of Indian ‘customs’ such as infanticide, _suttee_, and _thuggee_ caused West Indian planters, the Creole estate owners and officials generally to characterise Indians as stubborn, untrustworthy, and deceitful, with perjury a universal
failing. The Indian behaviour with money and property, a striking contrast to that of Creole West Indians, Indian women wearing golden chains and jewellery - a walking repository of their husband's wealth, and the melting down of coins for gold bangles severely depleting currency supplies, brought Creole accusation of Indians depressing internal trade.

Ethnically, Indians and Creoles are segregated and the main components of Indian-Creole ethnic isolation are endogamy and residential separation. Indians generally disapprove of ethnic inter-marriage. For Guyanese Hindus a prospective spouse may be Muslim or Christian but should be Indian in any case. In Paramaribo one household in twenty-five is inter-racial, in San Fernando one household in nineteen, but in rural areas inter-marriage is rare. A study of Guyana in 1965 found "little evidence of any coalescing process between the Indian and African components of the population" (Smith and Jayawardhena 1959: 356). Indian-Creole offspring, commonly called 'Douglas' are said to suffer no special disability in Guyana and in urban Surinam, but mixed families seldom belong to Indian communities in rural Surinam and are more acceptable among Creoles than among Indians in Trinidad. The name is more widely applied, however, to the mixed offspring of dark Creoles than of light, let alone of white. As in one Creole colloquy, 'What else you could call her if she's Indian Creole? It ain't no insult.' 'You don't mean Indian-Creole you mean Indian-Negro' (Anthony 1967: 10). Similar attitudes towards ethnic mixing entail quite different consequences where Indians are a small minority. In the French Antilles and in rural Jamaica formal inter-marriage is rare, but casual unions are common, despite parental antipathy. "Older people", reports a young Jamaican Indian, "are prejudiced against the Negroes...With us things are different. We don't know about the old Indian ways. We're all mixed up" (Lowenthal 1972: 163). Indian Creole mixtures, 'Rials' in Jamaica, 'Chappe Coolies' in Martinique and Guadeloupe, are in fact almost as numerous as pure Indians. In Jamaica, unlike Trinidad and the Guyanas, they usually, adhere to the Indian community, especially if the father is Indian; but in Guadeloupe they seek to merge with Creoles.
The face-to-face contact between Caribbean Indians and Creoles is also limited by residential segregation. Geographical locations and difficulties play a spoil spot in making people contact each other. Moreover, each ethnic element clusters in certain regions. Residential mixing is no guarantee of ethnic amity: mixture generates stress, however, when large numbers of both groups live together in the same villages the community is usually driven by hostile factionalism. In most cases one major ethnic group heavily preponderates and endeavours to maintain its dominance. Mixed villages today are less common than before. Creole and East Indian neighbours in Chaguanas, Trinidad, are on good speaking terms, yet ethnic neighbourliness is usually confined to casual encounters in street and yard. Indians occasionally attend Creole Fetes: Creoles are onlookers rather than invited guests at Indian weddings and festivals. Conflict may be acute when disparate ethnic groups are in proximity. Both Indians and Creoles in Jamaica cite near neighbours of the other ethnic stock as frequent sources of stress.

Most ethnic complaints concern supposed inequities in employment, education and welfare, recognition of specifically ‘Indian’ cultural features, and Creole fears of Indian dominance. Having lost their mutual imperial adversary, Creoles and Indians now compete for the power and status formerly held by expatriates and local whites. Indians in the Caribbean long remained unassertive, as a consequence, in part, of planters’ aim to keep them ‘backward’, agricultural and uneducated so as to ensure a supply of agricultural labour for the sugar and rice industries. Only after the turn of the century did Indians begin to take an active part in Caribbean affairs. The termination of indentured immigration during the First World War ended the most invidious distinction between Indian and Creoles, and the whole corpus of ethnic law gradually passed away. The 1930s and early 1940s saw the repeal of all discriminatory legislation, legitimising Hindu and Muslim marriages and enabling Indian children to be schooled without risking enforced conversion. New employment opportunities during the Second World War and adult suffrage soon afterward further stimulated Indian participation in West Indian life. The first Prime Minister of India Jawaharlal Nehru’s 1950 declaration that overseas Indians should no longer look to India as their homeland also spurred Caribbean Indian Creolisation. In the beginning this statement of Nehru garnered much resentment among
the Indian communities, but gradually they began to feel that the country for whom they are feeling proud of being, that same country was in no way willing to maintain any linkage with them. This made them to inculcate West Indian values because in the large run, they felt they were going to be West Indians.

Earlier ethnicity and occupation were linked and particular types of jobs were basically meant for particular ethnicities. But Indians today aspire to civil service and white collar jobs once exclusively held by Creoles, and some Creoles venture into occupations, like taxi-driving once customarily Indian. And in all territories tension accompanies increased Indian participation in many walks of life. Creoles resent Indian incursions, Indians claim Creoles still hold them back. Thus endogamy greatly, and residential segregation moderately, the unequal distribution of jobs and the negligence of Indian culture, constrain the numbers, frequency and intensity of Indian-Creole contacts. But the chief cause of ethnic conflict today is not the paucity of contact but its increasing frequency. In its origins, ethnic stress arises from group isolation and differences in its dynamics, it reflects a growing realisation that the two groups must coexist, sharing power, rewards and status.

Creoles too readily assume that Indian culture is of trivial importance to Indians, whereas, to themselves: “Indians are another people with a defined traditional way of life, of religion, of behaviour, of thought. ...They do not have to argue, to shout aloud that Indians are beautiful. They do have to justify their existence and claim equality. To them Indians are a superior people, and no question about it. ... The lotus blooms in the west, but it is still a lotus” (Lowenthal 1972: 174). But the Creoles who believe themselves the only true West Indians fail to recognise Indian traits in Creole culture. That carnival drumming has roots in Muslim Hosein and in Hindu drummer’s skills, Creoles have forgotten. That rice in its present form is an Indian contribution to the basic Creole diet, they seldom acknowledge. Curried goat is such a universal favourite that most Jamaicans are unaware of its Indian provenance. Creoles characteristically see even roti as simply Trinidadian, not Indian. Despite of all these evidences of syncretism, Creoles are
essentially unaware that they have borrowed Indian traits. They take for granted that Indians should become West Indian by adopting Creole ways, never the reverse.

Indians bitterly resent the “Creole habit of looking at Trinidadians of Indian descent as Indians and not as Trinidadians. ...When a Negro says or does something, he is a Trinidadian, or a West Indian. When an Indian does or says something, he is an Indian.” Integration, Indians feel, should be recognised as a two way street: “Bread is no more West Indian than Roti is. Cricket is no more West Indian than Hockey is. And (C.L.R.) James is no more West Indian than Bhadase Maraj is” (Singh 1965). Caribbean integration, Indians insist, must involve Indian as well as Euro-African culture and values; Creolisation by itself is unacceptable because it requires only Indians, but not Creoles, to forgo their identity. So, what the Indians demand is pluralism, the acceptance and respect of his cultural traits and values in the national praxis.

West Indian Social Structure

Though most West Indian societies exhibit threads of commonalities and share their analogous and interrelated histories, yet the West Indies are not one but many; and even if the geographical and some other semblances are apparent, ways of life and some other socio-cultural and political configurations are not identical. Each and every society demonstrates traits distinctive to itself. In his critical and analytical study of the social structures of the West Indian societies David Lowenthal⁶, in his book, The West Indian Societies has categorised the social structure of the West Indian societies into five types:

---

⁶ These divisions and analyses of the social structures of the West Indian societies have been taken from Lowenthal, David (1972), West Indian Societies, London: Oxford University Press. David Lowenthal’s study extends till to the period of late 1960s. Since that period significant changes have taken place in the lives and socio-cultural orientations of the West Indians, but the basic social structure and stratification of the West Indian societies as analysed by David Lowenthal remain the same with minor changing stratifications. So, one can use these parameters to analyse the changes, developments and transformations in the West Indian lives. The examples cited are also taken from David Lowenthal. Since my study tries to analyse the evolution of the West Indian societies and the position of various ethnic groups, race and colour identities this explanation of David Lowenthal greatly helps in this regard.
Homogeneous Societies without distinctions of colour or class: Several small Caribbean islands are populated by folks of a single colour, class, and way of life, in all cases but one by descendants of Africans. Carriacou, Barbuda and Caicos islanders include no whites and few coloured people as distinct from blacks. Occupation and wealth hardly differ among them. Each island stands as a relic of slavery. Employment opportunity is very scarce in all of them and emigration for jobs has become a normal way of life. These islands demonstrate remarkable social stability, most inhabitants belonging to families native there for centuries. French St. Barthèlemey likewise, exhibits extreme homogeneity of class and race. Their mode of life is robustly patriarchal and family centred, and they are strictly endogamous not only by race but by locality. But like the predominantly black peasants of other islands, the rural St. Barthois are mostly poor and unlettered, living together on equal terms as farmers, traders, and smugglers.

Societies differentiated by colour but not stratified by class: In several small islands where white and black, or coloured and black, coexist without much commingling, hierarchy carries very little importance. Though their occupations, fortunes, and aspirations hardly differ, groups differentiated by colour, tend to dwell apart in the islands like, Saba, Bequia, Anguilla, the Saintes, and Desirade. Colour divisions vary: thus in Bequia and Anguilla coloured are distinct from black, in Saba and Desirade white from nonwhite; but endogamy is nowhere as strict as in St. Barthelemy. Desirade exemplifies several types of racial convergence. Desiradean family organisation is correlated with economic status, not with race. Endogamy is minimal, but in establishing mixed unions coloured men normally marry, white men take concubines. White and coloured (there are few unmixed blacks) both make a meagre living from farming and fishing and are fond of alcohol, cock fighting, and gambling. Whites and nonwhites are more differentiated in tiny, mountainous Saba than in Desirade. Families of European origin, the men are traditionally seafarers, and the women remain busy with drawn thread work. Each Saban community was racially exclusive or segregated by colour, though white and black levels of income and education differed little. The Cayman Islands are less segregated than Saba and more stratified than Desirade. The populations of the Cayman Islands constitute European, mixed and African. Cayman whites seldom marry
metropolitan power as well as with their own Creole society. However, the black mass find it difficult, if not impossible, to cross the class-colour barrier, particularly...where the class and colour lines have remained virtually frozen' (Quoted in Lowenthal 1972: 84). Elite, middle class, and folk are severely differentiated in Haiti. In the British Windward Islands of Grenada, St. Lucia, and Dominica virtually no Creole whites remain. More intimately involved in the local scene than Europeans in Haiti, they play no determinative role. Coloured Creoles, not whites comprise the Windward elite. The British Leeward island of Montserrat has lost its resident white elite, but unlike the Windwards, has little tradition of intermixture between free and slave, and white and nonwhite. Lacking a sizeable free coloured group, Montserrat failed to develop a middle class of its own and instead has regularly imported coloured shopkeepers and professionals from nearby Antigua and St. Kitts. Resident expatriate whites are much more influential in other territories, sharing power with Creole whites in Curacao and Aruba, with coloured elite in the United States Virgin Islands, and with both in the Bahamas. The dynamics of class rivalry depend on the divergent island histories.

**Stratified Societies containing additional ethnic groups:** The presence of a substantial East Indian and Javanese population in Trinidad and Guyana adds another dimension to the colour-class hierarchy to these societies. In Guyana endemic conflict between East Indians and Creoles overshadows, without eliminating, friction between black proletariat and white or light elite. East Indians and Javanese dominate most rural districts in Surinam and black villagers and country folk increasingly migrate to the city, but economic development and the multiplicity of ethnic groups attenuate social stress. In Trinidad, East Indians and Creoles coexist in uneasy peace: Indians emphasising their separateness, Creoles ignoring Indian subculture or reprobing it as divisive. American Indians, Mestizos, and Black Caribs – African in ancestry, Indian in language, Creole in culture – complicate a basic Creole social structure in British Honduras. Indians and Mestizos, earlier excluded from the local power system, have combined with other non-Creole elements that lean more towards Central America than the West Indies. These groups are generally Roman Catholic, Spanish speaking, and anti-British, unlike the West
Indian Creoles. All value whiteness, but colour lines are less significant in British Honduras than are divisions based on religion, language, and cultural tradition.

**West Indian Cultural Norms**

The term culture, as Sir Edward Taylor identifies, denotes “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Taylor 1958). Culture in a sense can be defined as a social product, that includes ideas, molds, ethos and values, that is historical, discerning, perceptive and erudite, that is based on signs and symbols, and that stems from behaviour. As is well known, culture is a universal human phenomenon and every community has a culture of its own and if that cultural community is part to the larger cultural and social unit, its distinctiveness must be revered and accepted. The nature of the West Indian society makes its people to land in the conflicting assertions, and their socio-cultural, political and other adherences are very much based on the approaches they espouse to the deliberations like, the distinctiveness in their cultural norms and patterns, ethnicities and national feelings and sentiments. Sometimes, West Indians intuitively and instinctively contemplate on something distinguishing about their cultural traits and themselves, but they hardly become able to define these distinctive attributes satisfactorily. The cultural diversity within their own and neighbouring territories are also very much recognised by the West Indians, but they don’t have an apparent idea about these differences and how they fit into the larger schemes of national or cultural unity and distinctiveness. The minds of the people in the West Indies are grappled with these kinds of deliberations and questions. So, for the West Indies to surface and sustain as a ‘nation’, the West Indians should celebrate a common culture and that culture must not be carrying the essences of a particular domain; that should contain the pluralistic elements of the West Indian societies.

As M.G. Smith claims, being learned, culture is derivative as well as transmissible; being transmitted, it is liable to change, even if this is selective rather than random. Being
transmissible, it is not bound to particular society, although intimacy involved in social life. Being an abstraction from behaviour, it has an elastic reference according to problem and interest. Thus, one may speak of West Indian or Trinidadian culture with equal relevance; the greater does not preclude the less, but rather assumes it (Smith 1974: 4).

The nature of the colonial history and the magnitude of colonialism have played a fundamental and significant part in shaping the structure of the social and cultural sphere of the West Indian societies. The growth, spread and extension of educational opportunities, economic development, and rise of plural identities contributed immensely in augmenting the shape and structure of these societies. Though the magnitude and dimension of European colonialism was different in different West Indian islands, yet their essences were same to some extent. The intimate relations between culture as a way life, and society as the people who live that way, indicate that West Indian culture at any moment is the sum of patterns, behaviours, ideas, and customs characteristic of West Indian societies (Smith 1974: 4).

Sociologists, cultural critics and the West Indians themselves find it very difficult to define the ‘West Indianness’; is it a geographical contour delineating the nationalities or it carries cultural essences and ethos of the West Indian people. In order to seek answer to these questions one has to make an analysis of the sociological and cultural history of the West Indies. As has been discussed in the previous sections of this chapter the landing of Columbus in the West Indies and then the arrival of the European white colonial masters saw the decimation of the aborigine tribes like, Caribs and Arawaks. The colonial masters not only annihilated and enslaved these people for their mines and plantation works, but also their folk cultural traditions and practices were crushed and bulldosed, leaving no traces and sparks, under the diabolic helms of the European colonialism. Then, came the turn of the white labour, which comprised the white indentured servants and convicts. The incompetence of the white servants for the stiff labour required for the ruthless plantation led the white European colonial masters to transport slaves from Africa through the Middle Passage, hence was written one of the dark pages of human history. Throughout the periods of slavery the slave was obliterated of his inner ‘self’ and he was made to imitate the values of the white master, which he considered as the only
quintessence of his being. However, it should be remembered that during the period of slavery though the whites made the slaves to mimic them, yet the folk traditions and practices of the Africans were not absolutely wiped out, may be due to the fact that whites were considering the slaves as savages and their cultural norms and observations as wild and hence some good and kind hearted masters were allowing their creatures to perform their savage acts casually. Some masters were only concerned in dragging the flesh out of the Negro bone and once the Negro was satisfying the master through his hard and harsh plantation work, they were not much concerned about their cultural practices. Then there were some run away slaves, fleeing the estates of their masters and leaving independently in the jungles. So, in this way some of their African cultural heritage was preserved and when there was the abolition of slavery and gradually the slaves were transformed into free black labour, then black peasants and then entering into other walks of the West Indian life, this African cultural heritage sprout up. But the most important aspect to be focused here is that the African culture never remained pure, as has been discussed, the harsh magnitude of slavery led the African slaves to think their African memory in terms of superior white cultural norms. Gradually the existence of black, white, and mixed led to Creolisation, which had in fact started earlier to the arrival of indentured labour from Asia, which has been discussed in the previous sections of this chapter. Another important phase and aspect in the West Indian socio-cultural structure is the arrival of indentured immigrant labour from Asia after the abolition of slavery, this will be discussed in later section. Then progressively the West Indian society became plural in structure and people now feel proud of their plurality.

West Indian Creole Culture

One can say that predominantly the West Indian culture is one form of Creole culture. Several Variations can be marked in Creole cultures, but they stand different from the Mestizo cultures of Spanish-Amerindian derivation which dominate Middle America. Slavery, plantation systems, and colonialism provide the historical base of the Creole complex. Racial mixture of European and African elements predominate its cultural
composition. The ideal forms of institutional life, such as government, religion, family and kinship, law, property, education, economy, and language are of European derivation; in consequence, differing metropolitan affiliations produce differing versions of Creole culture. But in their Creole contexts, these institutional forms diverge from their metropolitan models in greater or less degree to fit local conditions. This local adaptation produces a Creole institutional complex which differs from the metropolitan model. In consequence, despite their shared traditions, Creoles and metropolitanians differ culturally in orientations, values, habits and modes of activity. The immigrant who adopts West Indian culture as a way of life 'creolises' in doing so (Smith 1974). The Creole culture, however, also contains many elements of African and slave derivation which are absent from metropolitan models.

The most important feature of Creole life is perhaps this combination of European and African traditions. The initial fabric of this cultural accommodation was put forth by slavery and then it got preponderated by European motifs and institutional norms and mannerisms, as the slave society did not have basic foundations of its social edifice and its practical tribulations required adaptations, which propped up a distinguishing Creole version of the European parent culture. The African slaves made their own adaptations also, often in contraposition to those slaves born and reared as Creoles. The Creole society and culture emerged together within this structural complex and the cultural norms of the white masters stood at the top of the cultural praxis and enjoyed the supreme prestige and white rulers were revered the esteem position. Then African traits and values, including their racial features were correspondingly degraded. In the West Indian society the white prejudice is cultural in nature, which carries in itself the racial ingredients.

The West Indian socio-cultural structure got intricate through the process of miscegenation, breeding hybrids, some of whom were free and predominantly European in culture, while others were slaves, acculturated to the Creole 'African' complex. With the Emancipation the legal basis for racial supremacy was confiscated, but it failed to set up the social and cultural homogeneity. The Creole ruling class and ex-slaves had little
problem in their adaptation to the varying socio-cultural situations. The traits and essences of African plantation slavery became quite formative in the Creole culture. Professor Herskovits has shown the importance of African contributions to the Creole cultural complex (Herskovits 1941). In language, diet, folklore, family and kinship, property, marketing, medicine, magic and religion, music, dress, dancing, and domestic life, economic organisations and even in choosing partners African elements and contributions were observable. However, these African traits were not to be found in a pure form; more generally they got overlaid with Creole influences and situations and they got linked with rudiments of European origin. Within this New World context, Old World cultural forms assumed new features and functions.

For the proper understanding and analysis of the distinctive features of the West Indian life and culture and to study, how other ethnic groups and traditions fit into it, an explicit identification of this basic Negro-White combination within the Creole complex is highly essential. This Negro-white complex which has been formative for the West Indies diverges sharply in its racial and cultural components. The West Indian bred white is not culturally European, nor is the West Indian bred black culturally African. Naturally, in view of its predominance, the European component in Creole culture has undergone less obvious modification than its African counterpart; but that it has been modified, there can be no doubt (Smith 1974: 7).

**Creole Culture and Indentured Immigrants**

Emancipation brought about another dimension to the socio-cultural paradigm of the West Indian domain. After the abolition of slavery the white West Indian planters were in great dearth of labour to run and maintain the plantation estates, which was requiring very stiff labour. So, the Asian continent with its huge population especially India and China attracted the attention and imagination of the white plantation owners and through false promises, fond hopes, phony attractions and delicate negotiations, the plantation owners shipped the Chinese and Indian labour to the West Indian plantations. Along with them also landed labour from Germany, Portugal, Britain and also Javanese and Syrians
entered into the labour pyramid of the West Indies. But the arduous and gruelling plantation work led many to abscond the plantation estates and step into other walks of the West Indian life, leaving only the Indians, who were accustomed to very harsh agricultural labour work in the home country, to run the plantation estates. The Chinese entered and swiftly got hold of the grocery trade; the white immigrant labourers withdrew into rural enclaves, closed endogamous units, and white Portuguese stepped into commercial urban activities. Indian immigrants who had a substantial number in Trinidad and Guyana were concentrated on plantation estates as indentured labour, then after indentureship moved into agriculture and lived in closed social and ethnic boundaries.

On the socio-cultural scale the accommodation of these immigrant groups were greatly governed by the cultural framework of the Creole society. The hierarchy of European and African components, crudely visualised in a white-black colour scale, greatly manifested the Creole social and cultural parameters and the ample participation of immigrants in this system required their learning of the different rudiments and fundamentals of Creole life. The indentured labour were marginal to the Creole society in the beginning of their arrival and being marginal, it was not binding on them to follow the Creole patterns of life, indeed they had a liberated dispense to refrain from Creole behavioural patterns or to take part in them. If they so wished to participate in the Creole social structure, in their participation they were also absolutely open to step into the Creole hierarchy at points of their own choice, providing only that they maneuvered the essential cultural dexterities and had the needed financial support. The degree of their adoption to the European cultural structure was the determining factor in laying down the higher limits of their position in the societal hierarchy.

The colour of both the Indians and the Chinese, which was neither white nor black, made them escape away from the Creole colour scale which crudely equated race and culture. And the Indians and the Chinese were feeling proud of their great civilisation and for the Indians, their civilisational and socio-cultural values, which were so dear as life, made them stand away from the Creole social structure. The adoption of Creole culture and assimilation to Creole society was perceived by the Indians as the probable loss of their
Indian heritage and group solidarity and the same was endorsed by the Chinese. So, their keeping away from the Creole social configuration earned them a marginal position in the Creole society. However, in the gradual course a Creolisation process started involving the Indians; the countries which had lowest Indian population, the process was faster and in the countries like, Trinidad and Guyana, which had larger Indian population the process was very slow and in the process erupted several ethnic tensions in many forms. But Creolisation was an inevitable process in the West Indies; for the Chinese and Indians the degree of Creolisation was varying and these variable degrees of acculturation and assimilation into Creolisation among Chinese and Indian immigrants illustrate their opportunities and attendant problems. But the real difficult situation was for the white European indentured labourers; being white they were with white planter class in race and culture; and economically and socially they were equated with Negro peasants. So, this might have made them to depart from this contradictory socio-cultural structure and to lead segregated lives in the closed communities. They also gradually became accommodated to the process of Creolisation, becoming more prone to the white affiliation, though their degrees and magnitudes were varying. So, this Creolisation, carrying the basic white and Negro racial and cultural elements and to which important elements from other traditions are selectively accommodated, provides some basic frameworks in understanding the West Indian society and through this multiracial Creole complex that West Indians can discover themselves as West Indians. In this Creole structure some cultural elements and ethos of other ethnicities were accommodated selectively, but then gradually in the countries with substantial ethnic population, their ethnic, socio-cultural practices and norms were recognised, accepted and respected, leading the West Indian society towards pluralism.

**Societal Pluralism in the West Indies**

As M.G. Smith claims, by cultural plurality one understands a condition in which two or more different cultural traditions characterise the population of a given society. Where cultural plurality obtains, different sections of the total population practice different forms of these common institutions; and, because institutions involve patterned activities,
social relations, and idea systems, in a condition of cultural plurality, the culturally
differentiated sections will differ in their internal social organisation, their institutional
activities, and their system of belief and value. Where this condition of cultural plurality
is found, the societies are plural societies (Smith 1974). The West Indian social and
cultural structure can be studied with a pluralistic framework. The West Indies have been
subjected to many kinds of historical and socio-cultural interventions, from the arrival of
European colonial masters and slaves from Africa to the indentured labour from the
Asian Continent and traders in the latter phase, making the nature and structure of the
West Indian societies plural. Though in unequal measure, every ethnic and racial group
has contributed to the social pyramid of the West Indian societies, making certain
common values permeating the entire social order. It can not be denied that class and to
some extent race remain sharply divided in the West Indies, but divergent social
institutions and modes of culture underscore class and racial divisions, making the West
Indies ‘plural’.

The West Indian islands share much of the commonalities in spite of their geographical
differences and distances; these societies are all multiracial and demographically they
host populations descended from immigrants from the Old World: Europeans, Africans,
Chinese, Indians, Lebanese, and others. The unions of many races have produced mixed
population, Creoles and Douglas, complicating the West Indian social structure. The
approximate racial compositions of the various colonial populations in 1946 are given in
the following table. 

---

7 This table is taken from Smith, M.G. (1974), *The Plural society in the British West Indies*, California:
University of California Press. These percentages are based on the West Indian census of 1946. M.G.
Smith studies the racial composition of the West Indian societies till the period of 1946. Though there has
been a rise or subtraction in the racial populations, yet the racial structure remains more or less the same.
### Approximate Racial Composition of Various Colonial Population, 1946

(Unit = per cent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Territory</th>
<th>White</th>
<th>Black</th>
<th>Colored</th>
<th>East Indian</th>
<th>Amerindian</th>
<th>Chinese</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br. Guiana</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>38.1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Br. Honduras</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>7*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antigua</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Montserrat</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Kitts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>86.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virgin Island</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td>12.3</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>35.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominica</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>24.9</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grenada</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Lucia</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>58.1</td>
<td>37.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St. Vincent</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>73.1</td>
<td>20.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Black Caribs

The numbers of population of different races or colours or ethnicities determine the structure of the societies of the different West Indian islands. The presences of large numbers of Indian population in Trinidad and Guyana have made them preserve much of the Indian values, which have been discussed in the second chapter of this study. The low Indian populations in some other islands have not allowed them to carry out their ethnic practices, and they have been assimilated and adapted to Creole ways of life, and very little Indian essences can be marked in their socio-cultural practices. Similarly, the large presences of blacks in different islands have given rise to a socio-cultural structure predominantly of Creole values, transmitting predominant white epitomes with African sparks. In these islands the whites, Negroes, and coloured form a standard combination and this association of white, Negro and coloured groups is the historically primary and structurally dominant grouping in the West Indies. Miscegenation, acculturation, and
and development of constitutional democracies. The abolition of slavery discovered a peasantry class among the ex-slaves. In order to fill the plantation estates and barracks left vacated by the slaves arrived the indentured labour from Asia, largely from India and once the indentureship was over some Indians returned to India and most of them stayed back and stepped into the agricultural sector, which the blacks departed considering it a demeaning work. By this time the blacks with their adoption of white values and conversion to Christianity were having the opportunities of schooling. The educational amenities available to the blacks made them enter into some skillful professions and other walks of professional life. The other immigrants from Asia, especially the Chinese had already entered into the retail shopping in most of the parts. Then through many difficulties and hurdles educational opportunities were made available to the Indians and Indians considered education as the only asset which can make them come over their destitute situation. So they were very keen on educating their children and in most parts Indians walked over the blacks in education. With the rise of small scale industries in West Indian islands and the interest and investment of Europeans and Americans in the Caribbean oil sector created many economic and employment opportunities and many educated West Indians from all sections got employed in these sectors, hence a new professional class emerged among the West Indians and in the later run their value system changed. Then in the 1950s and 60s with the arrival of independence and practice of constitutional democratic ideals, governments of various West Indian countries acted hard to limit the chances of conflict among different ethnic groups, and to limit, maintain, or increase the opportunities for acculturation; and the economic system tried to embrace the entire population, although in different degrees and ways. Gradually with the progression in all aspects of the West Indian society a sense of common West Indian feeling germinated, along with the respect for and celebration of the comunitarian and ethnic values and essences, leading to the carnival of pluralism in the West Indies. Here, one may refer to the pleasure of a Trinidadian Prime Minister in seeing “a Negro Singer singing and dancing the East Indian Music, and all the East Indian children dancing African folklore at a Community Centre opening” (Lowenthal 1972: 172).