# From Pariah to Prime Minister: Transformation in the Images of the Indian Community in the Caribbean

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Between 1838 and 1917, close to half a million Indians arrived in the Caribbean as labourers under the British scheme of Indian indenture. Upon completion of their respective periods of indenture, most of these immigrants did not return to India, opting instead to make the Caribbean their home. Due to a range of very provocative social, economic, and political factors all indubitably tied to British colonial agenda, Indians were unceremoniously implanted into the various colonies where they continued to exist in a pariah like state for the duration of the system of Indian indenture. Upon termination of the system by 1920, Indians had begun a very checkered journey towards integration in the wider Caribbean societies. For three Caribbean countries, these journeys culminated in the election of Indian prime ministers and presidents; for many others, they were often marked by the emergence of profoundly eminent Indians who carved out niches for themselves in the social, political, economic, and cultural landscapes of the Caribbean community. As communities within nations, the experiences of Indians were marked by varying facets and degrees of growth and development in the locations with substantially large numbers of Indians. In those locations with substantially smaller numbers, the Indian communities were either assimilated as a cultural/ethnic group into the wider social fabrics or, have been struggling to retain their Indian identity as a minority group. The objective of this paper is to chart the many trajectories that have emerged with and for Indians in the Caribbean, and to explore the many images and imaginings of Indians in the Caribbean that have been framed along these trajectories; both of and among themselves and from the larger Caribbean framework.

*Keywords:* Hinduism, Indian, Caribbean, Trinidad, Transformation, Social, Religion

## Introduction

Between 1838 and 1920, more than half million Indians migrated to the Caribbean as Indian indentured labourers, from which 143,939 were assigned to various plantations in the British colony of Trinidad. Most of these indentured labourers were drawn from the agricultural and laboring classes of the Uttar Pradesh and Bihar regions of north India, with smaller numbers being recruited from Bengal and various regions of South India. Approximately 85% of the immigrants were Hindus and 14% Muslims (Vertovec, 1992). During the 82-year tenure of the system, Indians had an indelible impact on the Caribbean landscape, not just by fulfilling their ascribed economic role as the proverbial "saviours" of the sugar, but also in terms of their social, cultural, and emotional presence. The system was terminated in 1920, which set the stage for a new dynamic for those Indians who had opted to make Trinidad, and by extension, the Caribbean their home; especially since they

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were now unfettered by the rules, regulations, and restrictions of the system of Indian indenture.

By 1921, Indians comprised 33% of the entire Trinidad population, with a rise to 35% in 1946.[1] In the immediate post-indenture period, there was an increasingly marked focus on and acceleration of social change and further integration into the wider society towards the goal of being recognized as a part of Trinidad society, rather than as a semi-alien entity grudgingly hosted on its margins. With most of the fundamental, inherently Indian social, religious, economic, and political structures in place, the drive towards personal and communal advancement saw a dynamic interplay between "Indian" and "Trinidadian", the traditional and the modern, the religious and the secular, retention and transformation, and the theory of being "free" and the reality of restrictions.

The period 1945-1990 was characterized by tremendous economic and political change which, in turn, served to shape the extent and nature of transformation within the Indian community in Trinidad. The first half of the period (1945-1962) saw an overall growth in the country's economy, facilitated largely by an upswing in the oil industry (Brereton, 1981). Some Indians were also to profit from this economic windfall, achieving a substantial degree of economic prosperity and social mobility. However, the sugar industry also contributed substantially to the country's economy and employment. Nevertheless, a combination of factors simultaneously hastened the collapse of agriculture, and hence, worsened conditions for other Indians. The over reliance on oil revenues was cruelly exposed when a steep drop in international oil prices, together with a decline in Trinidad's oil production in the 1980s, ushered in harsh economic conditions. The advent of universal Adult Suffrage in 1945 heightened the organization of political groups, and simultaneously paved the way for the dominance of middle class politics. In addition, constitutional change in 1950 for the first time gave elected members a clear majority in the Legislative Council and further transformed the face of politics in Trinidad and Tobago. Further constitutional change in 1956 opened up the possibility of party government, if a single party gained a clear majority of the elected seats. Against this backdrop, the People's National Movement led by Dr. Eric Williams, emerged to dominate Trinidad and Tobago politics until the 1980s. Williams, however, refused to be party to any deal with the leading Hindu politicians. Yet, he won the support from some Indian Muslims and Indian Christians. The PNM's anti-Hindu tactics "...helped to heighten racial fears and to institutionalize patterns of voting and political mobilization along racial lines" (Brereton, 1981, p. 237). Thus, while the PNM was victorious, it was a country deeply divided along ethnic lines which acquired Independence in 1962.

Within this context, the Indian community proceeded on its efforts at transforming and establishing itself in terms of both its internal operations and its relation with the national community. This entailed substantial navigation, assimilation, excision, and accretion, often seasoned with a diametric pull between the community's intrinsically Indian systems and values and the sometimes dissonant systems and values of the wider Trinidad society. The crux of the challenge of transformation resided in the establishment of a balance between retaining the essence of Indianness in the more private settings, while simultaneously yielding to the often contradictory requirements of integration into the wider Trinidad society. Within this framework, the paper examines some of the major issues, institutions, and developments that, in varying ways, served to shape and transform images of the Indian community in Trinidad. Many of these issues, though operating within the Indian community, were in some way related to the desire for public recognition and acceptance as both equal citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, and as Indians. Towards this end, there were deliberately engineered efforts for the purpose of

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[1] Colony of Trinidad and Tobago Census Album, 1948.

enhancing the visibility and acceptance of the Indian community as a valid aspect of Trinidad society. There were also movements that can be read as the natural result of the location of Indians in the dynamic and multicultural context of Trinidad and Tobago. It should be noted that the paper focuses on the experience of Indians in Trinidad as a microcosm of the larger Indo-Caribbean experience, since Trinidad receives the second largest number of Indian indentured immigrants to the Caribbean and currently boasts the largest Indian population in the Caribbean. Emphasis is placed on the period 1945-1990 since it was a period marked by substantial transformation in almost all facets of life for the Indian population.

## Leadership

The debate on Indian leadership in the period 1945-1990 revealed a great deal in terms of the changing demands and focus of the Indian community. Leadership in the socio-political arena remained quite reminiscent of the Indian patron-client relationship, where loyalties were anchored to a socially and economically distinguished persona who provided some form of assistance or amenity to either an individual or group. Morton Klass (1961) confirmed such sentiments in his examination of the village of "Amity" during the late 1950s. The distinguishing characteristic of Indian socio-political leadership was, however, its inextricable connection to religion. Among Hindus, this relationship between religion and politics in Trinidad was enhanced by the fact that a substantial section of the socially and economically elevated individuals either belonged to or were descendants of the Brahmin caste,[2] who capitalized on their "ritually superior" status. A survey conducted in 1965 showed that Brahmins dominated the political life of Indians until the 1990s, with 11 out of 14 political leaders claiming Brahmin origin (Malik, 1971). The first and second Hindu Prime Ministers of Trinidad and Tobago were both of Brahmin stock. However, the large scale social transformation initiated in the 1970s led to an eventual subordination of religion-based considerations by more such universal prerequisites as dedication to a cause, education, charisma, proficiency, and good articulation.

## Organizational Function

Since the 1940s, Indian organizational function has proven to be most dynamic and multi-layered, simultaneously engendering and reflecting various facets of change in Trinidad. The most prominent issues emerging from this ferment included inter-organization conflict followed by attempts at unity, the formation of a number of new sects, the role of such sects in the national politics of the country, and the revitalization of many public socio-religious and cultural events. Amidst the high level of conflict and diversity, by 1945, the larger more formally structured Indian organizations had been recognized as representatives of the Hindu and Muslim populations on a national level. This was reflected in the decisive roles of such organizations in the formulation of the Muslim Marriage Bill of 1935 and the Hindu Marriage Bill of 1945, and in taking positions on such issues as divorce, education, and adult franchise. Before the 1950s, the institution of marriage emerged on a national level as possibly the most contentious of Indian issues in the form of the Hindu Marriage Bill and the Muslim Marriage Bill, an issue taken up from as early as 1923, at the seventh meeting of the Ordinary Session of the Legislative Council.[3] Several concerns variously related to religion were raised within the Indian community. The registration of marriages, a civil ceremony, was far removed from the sacred nature of the Hindu and Islamic ceremonies and rituals, and many aspects of their ceremonies were being undermined by

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[2]  The highest rank of the Hindu caste system.
[3]  Port-of-Spain Gazette 5 May 1923.

the conditions of the proposed Marriage Bills.

Connected to the issue of the legalization of Hindu and Muslim marriages was the "illegitimacy" of persons born of such unions. Within the boundaries of the Indian community, neither was viewed as an issue since their traditional marriage ceremonies was all the validation needed for both the union and offspring. However, the need to ensure inheritance rights was a key push factor in that direction; since in addition to lengthy and expensive court procedures, there were many cases of property being escheated to the state upon the death of the owner.[4] The removal of the stigma of illegitimacy would also serve to enhance the status of the Indian community in the wider society. In the end, there was a practical yet reluctant and gradual acceptance of both the Marriage Bills. Yet, while the Indian population saw the move as necessary in their upward social mobility, they did not hold it as in any way more "legitimizing" than their own ceremonies. By the late 1980s, it was evident from the nature and focus of the emerging organizations that the emphasis was on procuring for the Indian community recognition as the second largest ethnic group in the country and on aspiring for large scale "national" Indian observances and events. Such a change can be viewed as natural and necessary within the context of an increasingly dynamic and thriving community and society.

## Publication

The nature and degree of organizational activity was most evident in the socio-religious and cultural ferment of the time. Encouraged by the educational prospects provided by the growing body of denominational schools, a heightened awareness and distaste of the sense of alienation from the wider society and the religious ferment, the Indian community in Trinidad was empowered with confidence to assert itself on a national level. The growing appetite for transporting elements of its religion and culture out of the communal and into the national sphere heightened considerably during the 1960s. This was most evident in the struggle for the declaration of the Hindu festival of Divali as a national holiday. A Member of Parliament received a petition from a Hindu Youth Organization pressing for the granting "...of at least one public holiday in honour of the second largest religious group in the country".[5] If not, they would be prepared to hold marches and public meetings throughout Trinidad to agitate for the holiday. Their efforts proved successful when Divali Day was declared a public holiday in 1966. The following year, the Muslim festival of Eid-ul-Fitr was also declared a public holiday.

In the 1970s and 1980s, Indians began demanding more than just what resembled periodic attempts at pacifying Indian concerns. This was even reflected at the University of the West Indies, the major tertiary education in the country, where three international conferences entitled "East Indians in the Caribbean" were convened. Instead of being restricted to religious issues, the Indian community began participating in debates on issues of national concern. Indians aired their opinion on the government's proposed programme of "national service". Efforts at "publication" were both fuelled by and evident in the advent of performing artistes from India during that decade.[6] These song, music, dance, and drama performances were hosted, not within the confines of the community, but at the country's most popular cultural centers in the two main cities in Trinidad.[7] Along with the artistes from India, there was an increasing appearance of singing, dancing and

[4]  Trinidad and Tobago Debates of the House of Representatives Official Report 1941, p. 117.
[5]  Trinidad Guardian 8 Jan. 1966.
[6]  Trinidad Guardian 31 Aug. 1967.
[7]  Trinidad Guardian 1 Sept. 1960.

music competitions, and "social evenings" featuring local performers.[8] In commemoration of the country's independence in 1962, an "Indian Singing Exhibition and Dance Display" was staged.[9]

Religious observances also transcended individual and communal boundaries to acquire a more structured, large-scale format, with Divali, the most prominent festival among Trinidad Hindus, being the forerunner in this turn of events. In 1965, large-scale celebrations were observed in many locations throughout the country and even at The University of the West Indies, which stimulated the press to comment that for "the first time Trinidadians were nationally aware of Divali the Hindu Festival of Lights".[10] By the 1970s, there was an intensification of this "publication" in the religious sphere. A most notable aspect of this endeavour was the advent of Divali Nagar in 1986 what was to become an annual event associated with the Hindu festival of Divali. It also provided the opportunity for both Indian and non-Indian individuals to enjoy various facets of Indian culture (the art forms, food, and dress) in one place. Its location outside the boundaries of any particular village or community augmented its appeal as a national rather than a communal event.

## The Media

The number and nature of articles in the press reflected the society's attitudes and perceptions of Indians, and enhanced the Indian community's level of visibility. Since the discontinuation of the "Indian" pages by both the Trinidad Guardian and the Port-of-Spain Gazette during the Second World War, press coverage of Indian affairs, until the 1960s, was restricted to very small and sporadic privately sponsored notices. During the 1960s, these notices became more frequent and more detailed, though still very much superficial in their exposition of Indian festivals and observances. Some attempts at capturing the nuances of Indian events in the language of the press (in other words, comprehensible by the wider society) often resulted in either awkward or erroneous representations. Yet, by the mid-1960s, entire pages were being dedicated to the recognition of the major religious observances. The mid-1980s, however, can be identified as the time when genuine sustained effort was made to present Indian religions on their own terms and as an integral dimension of Trinidad society. Many articles on the nature, tenets, rituals, and observances of the religions were featured, especially around the time of the major religious observances. What was equally noteworthy was the transformation of these articles from just narrative reporting to pieces seeking to promote a deeper understanding of the dynamics of Hinduism and Islam. It can be surmised that this development was largely a result of the upsurge in education among Indians in the 1950s.

The emergence of a vibrant Indian press gave added impetus to the religio-cultural renaissance of the 1980s. These publications addressing social, political, and religious issues provided a previously lacking avenue for the articulation of Indian opinion and concerns. Also, from the mid-1980s, the Society for the Preservation of Indian Culture, a group initially comprising university students, sought to highlight issues facing the Indian community and to generate a deeper understanding and awareness of Indian religions and culture both on and off the campus.

## Education

The acquisition of education in English was a major agent of social mobility within the Indian community

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[8]  The Hindu Times Mar. 1966.
[9]  Trinidad Guardian 19 Aug. 1962.
[10]  Evening News 14 Nov. 1966.

and on a wider level. In 1921, only 12.6% of the Indian population was classified as being able to read. In 1931, this number rose to 22.8%, and in 1946, to 40.2% (Ramesar, 1994). The 1946 census classified as illiterate (either able to read only or unable to read and write English) 50.6% of Indians. Despite the economic and social constraints, suspicions, fears, and taboos, the desire for both individual and communal mobility resulted in a steady rise in the education of Indians between 1952 and 1990, which resulted in transformations in all spheres of life. Large-scale formal education among Indians was realized only during the 1950s in the form of denominational primary schools established by various Hindu and Muslim religious organisations. These institutions performed the dual function of disseminating both English and Hindu and Muslim religious and cultural education. That these were essentially Hindu and Muslim institutions dispelled most of the suspicion and fear that had surrounded the earlier Indian encounter with education through the efforts of the Canadian Presbyterian Mission and the colonial Christian oriented education system. By the 1950s, other such developments as the debates surrounding the granting of Adult Franchise to Indians, the Hindu and Muslim Marriage Bills and the (non) granting of capitation grants to Indians educational institutions further sensitized Indians to the need for schooling in English.

## Cremation

The issue of cremation was, between 1950 and 1980, a major preoccupation of the Hindu community, with the crux of the matter lying essentially in the conflict between the Hindu and western methods of disposal of the dead, and the associated ideological differences. The Hindu population's growing awareness of and discontent with not being able to perform the last rites of their loved ones in accordance with Hindu religious prescriptions was the most powerful impetus in this issue. Failure to perform these death rituals was more than just a contravention of religious prescription; it carried with it deep-seated moral, emotional, and social ramifications. These concerns, however, were initially met with indifference, ignorance, and opposition at the administrative and official levels. The Government refuted the requirements of the Hindu method of disposal of the dead with the argument that it would "...offend the sensibilities of the majority of the population and [that] there was also the danger of pollution of rivers by casting the remains in them".[11]

Yet, Hindus refused to relent on the issue since cremation, unaccompanied by the necessary Hindu rites and rituals performed in the prescribed manner, would be absolutely meaningless and unacceptable. The process was a very protracted one.

Thus, until the disparities were resolved, the Hindu community had no choice but to continue to bury their dead. So, disenchanted were some Hindus with the countless fruitless committees looking into the matter that they eventually took it upon themselves to start "...setting up areas like the Caroni Savannah Extension Road, and the Caroni bank, on the Highway" to cremate their dead.[12]  The fact that they were essentially breaking the law in a very public manner and were risking punishment demonstrated just how strongly they felt. Such illegal cremations continued at several sites until the 1980s under the most deplorable physical conditions. It was only in 1976 that the issue was resolved with the passing of the Cremation Amendment Act of 1976.[13]

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[11]  Trinidad and Tobago Debates of the Legislative Council 8 May 1953.
[12]  Cremation Ordinance 1953, p. 136.
[13]  Trinidad and Tobago Debates of the Legislative Council 30 Apr. 1976.

## Religious Conversion

By the 1960s, the previous decade's spurt in socio-religious enthusiasm had ebbed considerably. This generated an overall languor in Hindu and Islamic socio-religious activity, and created an ideal situation for the emergence of the second phase of Christian proselytizing among Indians, this time by newer evangelical churches. This phase was characterized by a more aggressive and overt approach that relied heavily on charismatic appeal and the public, indiscriminate condemnation of Indian religious practices and beliefs as essentially heathen. While these would continue to be the major underlying factors of conversion right up until the 1990s, other more personal factors came into play. One of the most recurrent reasons given for conversion was the relief from illnesses, physical disabilities, or "supernatural" ailments where both medicine and Hinduism or Islam had failed. Social problems including poverty, unemployment, alcohol and marijuana abuse, domestic violence, or more so, the apparent nonchalance and ineptitude with which these problems were met by the various Indian socio-religious bodies also seemed to push the victims into the waiting arms of proselytizing agents. In fact, according to oral sources, the success of such proselytizing efforts resided in their readiness always to provide, if not direct solutions, then at least an avenue through which troubled individuals could vent their frustration and gain some sort of comfort and confidence to deal with their conditions.

By the 1970s, the perceived overemphasis on the myriad of rites and rituals often incomprehensible to Hindus themselves in terms of the language (Hindi), the inherent intricacies and contradictions, along with the diversity in practice and interpretation of rituals and religious scripture were all prominent push factors into the less complicated English-medium domain of the evangelists. The presence of local agents and Hindu and Islamic missionaries within Indian communities did, however, diversify the degree of conversion among the various communities. Such agents included the level of communal socio-religious activity, temples, Hindu and Muslim primary schools, communal relations among fellow villagers, and resident pundits and imams. The efforts of Hindu and Muslim missionaries and certain organisations at reworking, explaining, and energizing Hinduism and Islam also helped to curb the level of conversion in some areas.

## New Observances

In both Trinidad and the wider world, Hinduism constantly acquired new dimensions and elements. Before the 1970s, this was primarily on account of the innate Hindu tendency to sanctify and deify almost anything associated with religion. For example, the *lota* and *thali* used in *pujas*, though essentially just brass vessels and performing the practical function of vessels in *pujas*, were, in Trinidad, treated as "religious" items to be used exclusively for religious purposes. There would be a similar reluctance to use the sohari leaf (upon which food at Hindu socio-religious events is served) when consuming any kind of meat. This deifying tendency was most evident in the consecration of sites where rocks were claimed to have emitted blood or milk, most popular of which was the Patiram Trace Hindu Temple in Penal in the late nineteenth century.[14] The incorporation of the Christian figure of La Divina Pastora into the Hindu pantheon as an aspect of the Mother Goddess was another prominent example of this tendency. Both subsequently provided the earliest Hindu pilgrimage sites in Trinidad. A Protector of Immigrants Report confirmed the church of La Divina Pastora as a popular pilgrimage site for Hindus by 1893.[15] This pilgrimaging tendency was evident in yet another practice initiated during the late

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[14]  Rampersad Seeloch, personal interview, 6 June 2002.

[15]  IOR Official Series V/27/820/10: Note on Emigration from India to Trinidad by Surgeon Major W. D. Comins, p. 38.

nineteenth century—visiting the most prominent Hindu temple during that time, the Green Street Hindu Temple in Tunapuna, especially for the observance of Shiv Ratri (night of worship dedicated to the God Shiva).[16]

Brockington explained the Hindu preoccupation with pilgrimages as:

> ...a popular way to remove sins and accumulate merit; the merit acquired in visiting them was commonly reckoned in terms of the performance of so many Vedic rituals, but unlike the sacrifices that they thereby replace, the sacred sites were open to all. (Brockington,1981, p. 196)

Brockington (1981) added that in as much as many pilgrimage sites are associated with water and its purifying function, they invoke the universal Hindu concern with purity and pollution, the latter of which is held to be washed away by bathing in such places. This can partially account for the post-1990 consecration of many local rivers and beaches as Hindu pilgrimage sites. After the 1970s, however, the appearance of such pilgrimage sites and new observances could be classified as more contrived, deliberate phenomena, almost always the work of some socio-religious organization. Notwithstanding the possible motives of reworking religion to more tangibly situate it in the Trinidad context and to generate contemporary appeal, such developments had a mobilizing, revitalizing, and cohesive effect on both the Hindu community as a whole and within the various socio-religious sects.

## The Sacred and the Secular

In multicultural societies, conflict among different religious denominations or with elements of the secular sphere is, for the most part, inevitable. The pervasive nature of Hinduism, together with its lack of any categorical definition between the sacred and secular renders it more prone to such religio-ideological conflicts than the other Semitic religions with relatively clear-cut distinctions between the sacred and the secular. The perception widely held by the Christian population until as late as the 1980s of Hinduism and Islam as subordinate, essentially heathen religions substantially accentuated such conflicts. The heart of the conflict was situated largely in the wider society's failure to comprehend the nature and nuances of Hindu and Islamic practices and belief systems.

Trinidad's annual Carnival revelry had, until the 1980s, been viewed as morally and ideologically in opposition with the tenets of Hinduism and Islam (as practised in Trinidad), and Indian participation in Carnival was therefore more of the exception than the norm. The major points of contention resided in the free interaction of semi-nude male and female bodies, and the sexually provocative public dancing and behaviour. Against this backdrop, vigorous objections emerged to the use of aspects of Hinduism, especially its Gods and Goddesses, in calypsoes and Carnival bands. In 1965, the attempt to portray both Hindu deities and practices in two Carnival bands, namely "Gods and Worshippers of India"[17] and "Vishnu's Kingdom"[18] evoked intense objection from Hindus. In addition to individual protests, the issue was taken to Parliament in 1965, where a Hindu Member of Parliament explained that:

> These adherents of the Hindu religion, like myself, believe that this is going to be a mockery of a living religion…which is going to offend the Hindu people if it is allowed to continue. . .the religious susceptibilities of 200,000 Hindus would be deeply affected if the Carnival revellers, drinking, singing rude songs, parading the streets in half dress,

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[16]  Port-of-Spain Gazette 18 Feb. 1920.
[17]  Evening News 9 Feb.1965.
[18]  Evening News 8 Feb. 1965.

should be allowed to portray the living god and goddess of a religion which has continued in the unchallenged tradition from the earliest time until today.[19]

The leader of the major Hindu religious organisation subsequently formally asked the bandleader to shelve the band,[20] a move which proved successful, but only after much vacillation on the part of the bandleader.

In addition to these sustained carnival-related conflicts, isolated events further revealed this religio-ideological conflict between Hinduism and Islam and the wider society. During the general elections of 1986, the absence of the Bhagvadgita and the Quran at polling stations for required oath-taking was interpreted as a "...gross insult to Hindus and Muslims".[21] The absence of any Hindu religious texts at the official residence of the President of the Republic, where the formal swearing in of the new Government in 1986 was taking place, added injury to this insult: it resulted in a mad rush to find a text when a Hindu minister refused to take his oath until one was provided.

## From Pariah to Prime Minister

Although Indians had firsthand experience with power relations since the period of indenture, and a steadily increasing political presence from the last decade of the 19th century, sustained foray into national politics came in the 1950s with the positioning of the Indian-based People's Democratic Party as the formally recognized Opposition party, which provided a voice for Indians at the governmental level. During the 1970s and 1980s, another Indian based party, the United Labour Front (ULF) emerged, but which saw benefit from aligning itself with parties having wider ethnic support; a reflection of the processes of integration and assimilation that were becoming increasingly operative in almost all facets of Indian life since the 1970s. It was the leader of the ULF, Basdeo Panday, who would become Trinidad and Tobago's first Prime Minister of Indian descent in 1995. Fifteen years later, in 2010, the country saw the appointment of its first female Prime Minister, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, also of Indian descent. Although racial undercurrents continued to define the political ethos of the country, it was clear that by the 1990s, Indians were fully engaging the political life of the country; a far cry from the political reticence evident just half a decade ago.

## Conclusion

It is evident that during the period 1945-1990, images of Indians in both the private and public spheres were influenced by a number of factors, stimulating transformations in all facets of life. Feeding on the overriding desire and need for visibility and acceptance as both a valid ethnic grouping and as individual citizens of Trinidad and Tobago, modernization and secularization could be identified as the most prominent of such factors. Given the intensity of the foregoing, the deconstruction of many of the traditional practices and ideology was not a remote impossibility. This, however, was especially intercepted by Hinduism's flexibility and dynamism.

Both secularization and its antithesis, deification, were ongoing, simultaneous processes which, operating within Hinduism and Islam, would not demand any complete break with the traditional. That is not to say that these traditional elements were left in an undiluted condition. In fact, within the persistent interplay of change and continuity, it was almost impossible to identify such a condition. There was, rather, a simultaneous

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[19]  Trinidad and Tobago Debates of the Legislative Council 5 Feb. 1965.
[20]  Evening News. 9 Feb. 1965.
[21]  Sandesh 23 Jan. 1987.

reworking of traditional ideas, attitudes, and practices, which were largely determined by the nature and extent of the Indians community's interaction with the "other", and also by the dictates of time, space, and circumstance. Conflict was primarily evident in deliberate efforts at contesting and controlling the natural flow of Indian socio-religious change.

By the 1970s, Indians were being forced to recognize the need to transgress the boundaries of community, and to assert themselves as an integral part of Trinidad society. This was collectively instigated by the economic and educational amelioration during that period, the remnants of only ancestral (rather than patriotic) ties to India, the threat of both conversion, and the persistent ascription as "second-class citizens". A full-fledged integration, however, demanded the renunciation of those fundamental aspects of religion and culture that were not in accordance with those of the wider society. What occurred, rather, was the drive to establish itself as a "community within a nation", a process which can be safely described as multi-layered, arduous, oftentimes misinterpreted, or disregarded, and by no means uniform. Thus, the success of this venture, on both a personal and communal level, resided in the ability to strike a balance between "being and belonging", that is to say, being Indian but also belonging to the Trinidad society.

By 1990, Indians in Trinidad were at another important juncture. The political ethos was more cognizant of and sensitive to the religious diversity of the country. Indians had economically, politically, socially, and psychologically entrenched themselves as equal citizens into the workings of the country. Hinduism and Islam were experiencing fundamental changes in terms of its interpretation, presentation, and applicability. However, this was now infused with a discernibly less defensive, more progressive, practical, and confident outlook. Given the level of transformation that characterized the 173-year experience of Indians in Trinidad, one is assured of the unremitting capacity of the Indian community, and by extension, images of the Indian community, to further evolve in accordance with the exigencies of time, place, and circumstance.

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