

INDO CARIBBEAN

News Views and Information

March 2003



My Indian Heritage

By Chandani Persaud

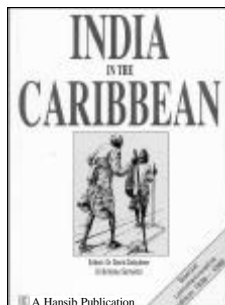
Age 16

I read a book which is Historical as it is compelling and evokes a sense of belonging and above all satisfaction.

My name is Chandani which in Hindi means moonlight, yet I was born in the Caribbean following suit of my ancestors of many generations before me. I belong there, no explanations needed, no verifications justified and no confusion, yet in the western world we Indian Caribbean's come under scrutiny from all angles.

Many times we have learnt about the Slave Trade, West Africans, scolded, beaten and punished. But my concerns have always been what about the East Indian Indentured Labourers? My ancestors?

I found a book called *India In The Caribbean*. In these four words my heart felt restored. I was unsure of what lay ahead in the following pages.



India In The Caribbean is a careful documentation on the journey of trials and tribulations the East Indians embarked upon. Dating back from 1838 when two boats of 'coolies' (*the Whitby and Hesperus*) arrived in British Guiana, crossing the Black-Seas (*Kala-Pani*) reaching an unknown.

Personally I feel that the majority of Indian

Caribbean's have lost our *Indian Cultural Identity*, but have undoubtedly contributed to achieving the West Indian or Caribbean Culture famously known to the world. *India In The Caribbean* takes us through the transformation from East Indians and the Abolition of the Hindu Caste System to, Trinidadians, then eventually to us as West Indians.

It is also useful as a resource book because



“Coolie” Immigrants—British Guiana

on top of the sentimental values it shows the percentages and numbers of people who were migrated to the Caribbean. Reading in detail about the poor treatment of the East Indian labourers and the Riots, it is reinforced how proud and grateful I should be of my Indian Caribbean Heritage.

There has always been the perception that the West Indian population are of African descent. This is not true and the book although does not solve this, has a beautiful

INDO CARIBBEAN promotes the culture and heritage of people of Indian origin from the Caribbean

My Indian Heritage from page 1 and enlightening chapter for young people on *'The Influence of Indian Thoughts and East Indians on the Caribbean'*. This chapter as many gives me courage and spiritual guidance and teaches me not to take what we have been handed down for granted.

India In The Caribbean presents a case from 1979, in which a song caused great disturbance. It was called

'The Caribbean Man'. In a scenario known all too well, the song seemed to portray the *Caribbean Man* of African descent only, excluding other ethnic groups in Trinidad.

India In The Caribbean goes on to describe the reasons for racial tension between ethnic groups, and shows the representation and distribution of races across different areas. I have learnt of how the depression of 1930 affected Europe and the United States of America, but now I learnt how it affected Indians in the Caribbean. Their working and living conditions and wages. During this time it was the East Indian women who suffered most. 'Coolie-Labour' enabled the Europeans to save the decline of their plantations; they were a form of cheaper labour and ensured frequent - constant labour when the African Slaves became disinterested.

Finally, my favourite chapter, East Indian Women. We learn of their resilience, constant hard work, caring for the young and the men, of whom initially out numbered them by 100 men to 25 women.

In conclusion, this book is like my saving grace, it taught me a great deal, pointed out auspicious points in my heritage and I love it. It gave me satisfaction and fulfilment when reading it and I would read it again. □



Reaping Rice *"Coolie Labour enabled the Europeans to save the decline of their plantations....."*

On the 5 May 1838 (one hundred and sixty five years ago) two boats arrived in British Guiana (Guyana) with 429 'coolies' from Calcutta (Kalkuta). The SS Whitby left Calcutta on the 13 January 1838 and the SS Hesperus left Calcutta on the 29 January 1938 - coincidentally both arrived in British Guiana on the same day. The Fatel Razak arrived in Trinidad in 1845

"I should be unwilling to adopt any measure to favour the transfer of labourers from British India to Guiana..... I am not prepared to encounter the responsibility of a measure which may lead to a dreadful loss of life on the one hand, or on the other, to "a new system of slavery".

Lord John Russell 15 February 1840

WHY INDO CARIBBEAN?

Indo Caribbean should have been launched many years ago to fulfil the needs of a growing Indo Caribbean community in Britain. When we published over twelve titles pertaining to the presence of Indians in the Caribbean (to mark the 150th Anniversary of 'Coolies' arrival 1838-1988) we were only touching the surface of an area that was too long neglected by writers and especially publishers.

This news, views and information bulletin will we hope help the 80,000 plus Indo Caribbean people and their descendants in the UK to network a little easier socially and culturally we hope it will give a much needed Caribbean identity, that it will educate non-Caribbean people to understand that 25% of Caribbean people are of Indian Caribbean background.

Indo Caribbean was planned after the death of a friend Umar Ramkissoon in December 2002 who hails from Trinidad and lived in Thornton Heath. Raj his wife told Fidel Persaud of the 'Caribbean Indian Dance Troupe' her frustration in getting the information of her husband's death and funeral arrangements to family and friends, this is where we came to it.

Today we have a healthy minority press in Britain, sadly there are areas of neglect, one of which is the lack of reporting on the Indo Caribbean community's achievements and problems and we like others have many.

There has always been criticism of our community not supporting one another which, I may remind you is not foreign to other similar communities

Maybe we are a little laid back in promoting ourselves, and should all make an effort to correct this shortcoming.

It is an old adage which is worth repeating here,

'If you do away with your traditional way of living and give up your good customs you had better first make certain, that you have something of value to replace them'.

Caribbean Hindu Society

16 Ostade Road, Brixton Hill, London SW2, will be celebrating Holi on 18th March 2003 at 7.30pm Puja, Bhajans and Chautal singing. Come and enjoy this joyous celebration – entry free. Burning of Holika is on 17th March 2003 at 7.30pm.

Phagwah

Holi is the most colourful of Hindu festivals. It is a spring festival celebrated on the full moon day of the month of Phalguna (February-March). It falls when the season is neither hot nor cold and the trees bloom with different kinds of flowers.

There are a few mythological stories associated with Holi. One of the stories according to legend - a mighty king called Hiranya Kashipu once ruled on the earth. He once declared himself to be a God and demanded that his people worship him. His only son Prahlad, refused to accept him as a God as he had firm belief only in Rama. The king took steps to punish his son, he even tried to kill him but all the time Prahlad was saved as he uttered the name of Vishnu.

To celebrate Holi people irrespective of caste and creed amuse themselves by throwing handful of coloured powder on their friends and relatives and spray coloured water (Abeer) on each other using sprayers (Pitchkari).

The damage on clothes is taken in good spirit. The Hindu community will be celebrating Phagwah / Holi on the 18 March 2003. There will be celebrations held at the Dharma Centre and the Caribbean Hindu Society.

Eid ul Adha

The Indo Caribbean Muslim community last month celebrated one of the most popular festivals in the Islamic calendar. Eid ul Adha otherwise known as Bakra Eid.

The Dharma Centre

442/446 Hertford road will be celebrating Holi (Phagwa) on Saturday 22nd March 2003. Cultural show with Bhajans and Chawal singing and dances.

The Caribbean Indian Dance Troupe will be performing a selection of dances.

Entry free.

For More Information

Bick Prasad – 020 8372 0699

Rita Singh – 0208292 9909

Mrs Sukky – 020 8556 0109

INDO CARIBBEAN

News Views and Information



Coolie Mother

Jasmattie live in bruk-
Down hut big like Bata shoe-box,
Beat Clothes, weed yard, chop wood, feed fowl
For this body and that body and every blasted
body,
Fetch water, all day fetch water like if the whole-
Whole slow-flowing Canje river God create
Just for *she* one own bucket.

Till she foot-bottom crack and she hand cut-up
And curse swarm from she mouth like red-ants
And she cough blood on the ground but mash it in:
because Jasmattie heart hard, she mind set hard

To hustle save she one-one slow penny,
Because one-one dutty make dam cross the Canje
And she son Harilall *got* to go school in
Georgetown,
Must wear clean starch pants, or they go laugh at
he,
Strap leather on he foot, and he *must* read book,
Learn talk proper, take exam, go to England
university,
Not turn out like he rum-sucker chamar dadee.

David Dabydeen

*dutty: Piece of earth

*chamar: low-caste

Do You Know.....?

Over 51% of the population in Guyana are Indo Caribbean?

Indo Trinidadians make up over 41% of the Trinidadian Population, making them the largest group.

Pakistan was declared a Dominion on 14th August 1947.

India became an independent country on 15th August 1947

Promote your culture, introduce 'Indo Caribbean' to your family and friends.

Useful Information

Indo Caribbean Organisation (ICO)

Contact : Anjani Narayn – 0973 960 870

Caribbean Indian Social & Cultural Association (CISCA)

Contact: Mr Tajj Ramnarace – 020 8442 0977

Trinidad and Guyana Music Connection

Contact: Suresh Tel / Fax 020 8671 6806

The Dharma Centre

Mrs Rita Singh Tel : 020 8292 9909

Caribbean Hindu Society (CHS)

Tel : 020 8674 0755

London Islamic Cultural Society Mosque & Cultural Centre.

Quran Teaching, Legal and Social Advice,
Wedding Receptions and Funeral Services.
389 Wightman Road Hornsey N8 ONA
Tel : 020 8348 0353

United Islamic Association

JUMMA every Friday 12 : 45pm
31 Crawley Road, Wood Green, N22 6AG
Tel : 020 8372 3023

Al Muzzamil Mosque and Community Centre of Tooting

8 Gatton Road, Tooting London, SW17 0EX
Tel : 020 7767 7477

Jamaican Indian Society (JIS)

Promoting awareness of Indo Jamaican culture in the UK

Contact Mark: 07956 111273

Next Issue.....

- Feature on Rohan Kanhai
Leading West Indian Cricketer.
- Caribbean Indian Dance Troupe (CIDT)
- The Fatel Razak, the first 'Coolie Boat' to arrive in Trinidad.

Articles, Events and comments are welcome for future issues.