

# MultiCultural Faiths

Social Cohesion and Inclusion

Engaging with Faith, Identity & Integration



*Presented by*

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Diasporas in the Commonwealth  
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Monash University, Malaysia**

**Sopari Mai**  
to Hindus, others

**La Divina Pastora**  
to Catholics/Christians

Statue brought by priest  
from Venezuela in mid 18<sup>th</sup>  
century, claimed it had  
saved his life – beginning  
of process of mythmaking...

Worshipped by all,  
Multi-religious procession  
on Good Friday



**copper-skinned, dark-haired image**

# Faith vs Religion



## Soparee Mai La Divina Pastora

E.g. of cross-fertilisation of religious practices – different from ways same religions are practiced elsewhere, even ‘motherland’.

Not uncommon for one religion to utilise modes of another in services and rituals which make for the level of religious tolerance veritably exemplary, if not unique to Trinidad and Tobago.

# **Migrant Society: Multiple Diasporas**



Processes of diaspora formation: displacement, adaptation, and integration affect not only cultural, political, economic and social practices also impacted how religions are practiced and expounded.

Soparee Mai/La Divina Pastora one example of assimilation/ integration of faith and beliefs of different religions, through cultural practice. This contributes to strengthening the fabric of nationalism, diffuse tensions and promote tolerance in this multicultural place.

# MultiCultural Faiths

Transfer of faith from motherland to diaspora; creation of new diasporas rooted in new world

**Historical** neutralising of religious animosities in new place in struggle to establish identity

**Socialisation** “systems’ strengthened respect and understanding: schools

**Cultural** ‘systems’ provided cohesiveness towards respect and understanding

**Political** ‘neutrality’ facilitated respect/understanding

Role of religious leaders & Inter-Religious Organisation

Potential divisiveness of media and new media to upset delicate balance

(Rampersad, Finding a Place (2002))

MultipleChoice – *Religion, Culture, Community and Education In a Multicultural Place*

# Engaging with Faiths: Contexts

That faith and religion are not analogous: An aside in CF report, but should be central to define the inherent challenges, ambiguities and contradictions noted in Sen Report, **Civil Paths to Peace (07)**.

Faith looks for common ground.

Religion thrives on difference.

Faith is inclusive, religion is exclusive

Faith is syncretic; religion is divisive

“Engagement must also be with communities and not just faith leaders”

(Foreword, Commonwealth Foundation, *Engaging With Faith* report,07)

“Faiths are complex and anything but monolithic, an understanding of subtleties and diversities needs to be shared and strengthened.

Concept of multiple, overlapping, sometimes competing identities needs to be popularised and promoted to key decision-makers and other actors (eg media)

Interplay between faiths and cultures needs to be better understood.”

*Engaging With Faith* report,07

# Multicultural society

## Religious Mix

- 26% Roman Catholic
- 22.5% Hindu
- 7.8% Anglican
- 7.2% Baptist
- 6.8% Pentecostal,
- 5.8% Muslim
- 4% 7th Day Adventist
- 5.8% other Christian
- 10.8% other
- 1.4% unspecified
- 1.9% none

**Population 1.305 m**  
**on 5,128 sq km**  
(Census, 2000)



## Ethnic Mix

- 40% of Indian descent
- 37.5% of African origin
- 20.5% Mixed,
- 0.8% unspecified
- 1.2% Other: Chinese, Syrian Lebanese, British, French Spanish Portuguese Venezuelans

# **Migrant Society: Multiple Diasporas**

All migrants. “New” society”. First People group descended from Taino Indians who survived Spanish British colonial genocide absorbed within ‘Mixed, Other and Unspecified’. Broadly categorised African, Indian, Chinese from various regions in India, Africa, China, with strong, sometimes militant, regional and tribal or sectoral identities of their own, but in Trinidad, distinctions disappeared, become irrelevant.

**Narace Samlal says a mantra as he gives Anil Binda first haircut at La Divina Pastora shrine: ‘Good Friday is auspicious for all citizens regardless of their faith. We are in a holy place, in a church, and today is full moon and Good Friday.’**



# National Identity and Diasporic Identity

Nationally, the broad categorisations are largely uncontested, widely accepted.

Within national borders are several distinctive groups each with own cultural baggage, though each participate in, contribute to creation of national culture.

(Rampersad, *Finding a Place*, 2003)



Challenge of creating the nation-state of Trinidad and Tobago from a polyglot of different migrant streams, of different motherlands, with different cultures and beliefs brought them the groups together for political/social rights.

# Syncretic religions

Caribbean Hindus/Trinidad Hindus Hindu/Indian diaspora. Hindus were majority of those brought from India as bonded labourers – the main immigration stream from India between 1845 and 1917, lesser numbers of Muslims, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists.

Met Christians.

African religions underground.

**It complicates & simplifies relations – with shared Common motherland, many animosities at origin neutralized in new place.**



# Complexity of Diaspora



At same time, they are seeding Caribbean diasporas in North America, Canada, Europe and elsewhere – as part of Hindu diasporas, Indian diasporas, Caribbean Diasporas.

This adds considerable complexity and depth to discourse on diaspora, which often tends to describe diasporas in homogeneous terms.

# Trinidad and Tobago

## The rhetoric that became real

**Myth of hybridisation internalized into belief**

**Images of integration pervasively present the nation as many strands in a tight weave**

Rainbow country, rainbow people (Mandela),  
A Rainbow that is real (tourist brochure).

Tolerance - a national watchword, one of three  
(discipline, production)

National motto: 'Together We Aspire, Together  
We Achieve'.

# Real Unity:

## Machel Montano and Drupatee Ramgoonai

### *Machel:*

Well this one is called unite de nation

Why can't we all get along?

Why we fuss and fight?

Tonight we come to unite

This is Machel and Drupatee

Whey yuh say?

### *Drupatee:*

Aap jaisa koi meri zindagi me aaye

To baat ban jaaye

Ah ha baat ban jaaye

Aap jaisa koi---

### *Machel:*

Say every creed and race,

We jumpin' as one

Every creed could jump in ah band

Love one another united nation

Prime Minister all politician

President, police, and all civilian

Unite de nation, unite de nation

Repeat Verse 1 (nothing wrong with wining..)

Real unity, real unity

Show me, show me

# Historical Processes

*Of First Peoples in T&T*

‘Churches and cathedrals were built on the sites of old native worshipping grounds. Native deities were replaced by Christian saints. *Rituals and dances associated with previously existing gods were reapplied to Christian saints.* (Assing, 2006)

## Multicultural modes of practicing religion



“For the (East) Indians the Black Virgin is ‘Suparee’, the name of a seed which is used for religious ceremonies, and also the name of a powerful saint in India.”

-- Priest entry in parish records, 1871



**YOU**  
can help  
spread  
the faith  
in schools.

# Historical Processes

## Multicultural modes of practicing religion

- ❖ Religious conversion and education efforts strengthened/preserved Indian/Hindu languages/culture (hymns in Hindi, translations of religious texts into Indian languages; strengthened resistance by Africans to reclaim)
- ❖ ‘Converts’ straddle ancestral and new religion – attend churches, pray in schools as converts; practice ancestral religion in home and community, maintained religious practices/beliefs, even when ‘converted’ into others
- ❖ Jahaji Bhai (brothers of the boat) ‘Christian Hindus’, Presbhindhus

# Jahaji Bhai: Brother Marvin

I am the seed of meh father  
He is the seed of meh grandfather  
Who is the seed of Bahut Ajah [great  
grandfather]  
He came from Calcutta  
Ah stick and ah bag on he shoulder

He turban and he kapra  
So I am part seed of India

*[Chorus]*

The indentureship and the  
slavery  
Bind together two races in unity  
Achcha dosti [good friend]  
There was no more Mother Africa  
No more Mother India, just  
Mother Trini  
Jananbhoomi.  
My Bahut Ajah planted  
sugarcane  
Down in the Caroni plain  
So Ramlogan, Basdeo, Prakash  
and I  
Is Jahaji Bhai  
Jahaji Bhai  
Jahaji Bhai



# Community Building Processes

## Multicultural modes of religious tolerance

Process of community building saw groups coming together against official domination and to help and support each other – build houses, schools, and churches.

Non-Hindu/AfroTrinidadian landowner offers land as seva (service) for school;

Mosque accommodates Hindu students while school being refurbished;

Mandir makes room for students of Presbyterian school when congested;

AfroTrinidadian drummer boy excels at tabla-playing at Caroni Hindu school;

Muslim school teacher emulates Hindu teacher's decorative drawings of

Christmas story on blackboard in Hindu School ;

Hindu Principal with school of mainly non-Hindus, non-Indians expands cultural curriculum to include African drumming, limbo dancing, Christian hymns

**MultipleChoice – Religion, Culture, Community & Education**  
*In a Multicultural Place*

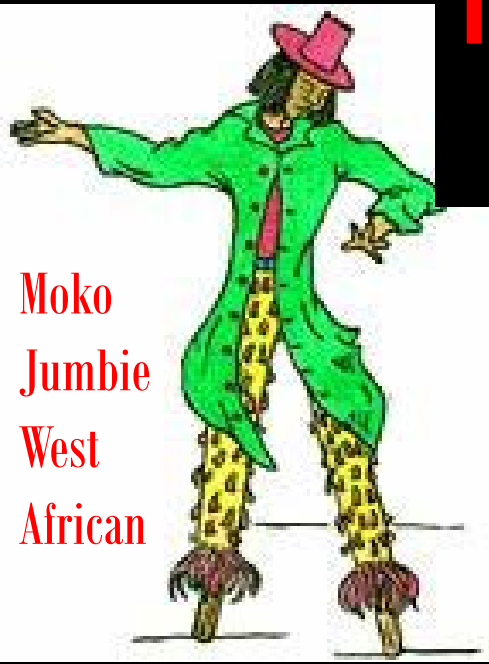
# Carnival - Agent of synthesis

Tension  
diffusing  
power  
replicated  
in  
sharing  
of  
**social  
spaces**



# Traditional Carnival Characters

## Roots in other lands



Moko  
Jumbie  
West  
African



Jab Malassie like  
Bulgarian  
Kukueri American  
Cowboy



Burrokeets Indian



Dame  
Lorraine  
French



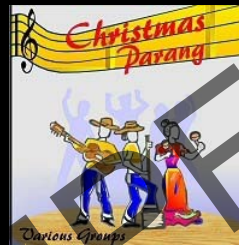
American Native Indian



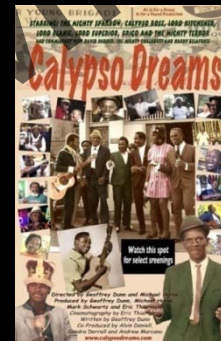
Cow Bands  
Venezuela/Spain  
Bullfighters Origin

# (Multi) Cultural Expressions

**Music:** Steelband and hybridised song forms: Chutney, Calypso, Soca, Parang, Rapso, and further hybridised: Parang Soca, Chutkaipang, Soca-Chutney, Gospelypso, Chutney Dancehall



Asian, African & Trini rhythms



# Shared Religious Spaces



**Religious = Cultural**

**Christmas, Easter**

**Hosay - Muslim**

**Festival**

**Holi - Hindu Spring**

**festival**

**Diwali - Hindu festival  
of lights**

**Eid - Muslim prayer  
and fasting**



# (Multi) National Holidays



**Baptist Liberation Day, Eid  
Chinese Arrival Day, Diwali  
Indian Arrival Day, Easter  
Emancipation, Christmas**

# Shared Cultural Spaces



## Syncretic cuisine

Callaloo and Pelau (single dish, many ingredients) as metaphors of society as 'potpourri', 'melting pot'

## Language

Trinidad English -amalgam of lexicon, speech styles of all who have peopled it.

# ROLE of the STATE

Constitution provides for freedom of religion, Government generally respects.

Law -removal of (colonial) criminal offenses relating to some religious practices.

Amicable relationship among religions contribute to religious freedom.

Government officials speak out against religious intolerance  
Do not favor any one religion publicly.

Public holidays for every religion with significant followings.

Government supports the activities of the Inter-Religious Organization (IRO)



Two Former Heads, IRO, TT  
with former Govt Minister

Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor:  
*International Religious Freedom Report for T&T*



# **Institutionalisation: IRO**

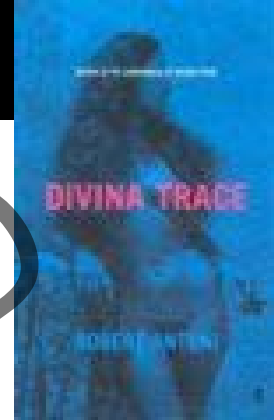
**Inter-Religious Organisation (IRO), formed about 40 years ago brings together reps from most religions, provide prayer leader for official events, eg. opening of parliament and annual court term.**

**Tenuous role in balancing tensions and advocating religious tolerance when most required. Eg. Supported largely Hindu/Muslim position for revising name of highest National award from Trinity Cross (Christian symbol in a multicultural place) to The Order of Trinidad and Tobago.**

**Now asking for Order of Protocol /Table of Precedence be revised to be representative of population demographics.**

**Schools run by religious organisations attended, open to all. Preside over religious tensions that may arise.**

# MultiCultural Faiths



...this fete with which you have come to identify yourself, did not originate as any kind of Catholic carnival a-tall. Quite to the contrary. Because it was not taken over by the Catholics of Corpus Christi until much later, as initially it was a Hindu and Shango fete: a festival of East Indian and African origin. [. . .] Furthermore: the original Corpus Christi Day did not take place on Corpus Christi Day a-tall. That is to say, it did not occur on Holy Thursday, but on Good Friday: the day of Christ's death. The day when all the East Indians and Creoles and Warahoons went into the Catholic church to take up Magdalena, parading her joyous through the streets, resurrecting her up to take He place. It was a day known not as Corpus Christi, but as the Day of Suparee K Mai: the Day of Mother Kali, Black Hindu Goddess of Death and Destruction. (fictionalalised **Antoni, Robert, *Divina Trace*, 349**)