



“BROADCAST”
Newsletter of the Toronto Unit

Naparima Teachers' Training
St. Andrew's Theological
St. Augustine Girls'
Naparima Girls'
Naparima
Hillview
Iere

Naparima Alumni Association of Canada

Vol. XXXVII No. 2

Spring 2014

Thank You for Thirty Five Years!



**NAAC NEEDS YOU TO VOLUNTEER
AS WE LOOK AHEAD TO THE FUTURE**



OUMARALLY, BABOOLAL

LAWYERS



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Selwyn R. Baboolal, B.A., (Hons.) LL.B.

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The Naparima Alumni Association of Canada (NAAC) was founded in Toronto in 1978 and includes graduates of Naparima College, Naparima Girls' High School, St. Augustine Girls' High School, Hillview College, Iere High School, Naparima Teachers' Training College and St. Andrew's Theological College. Among other things, it supports programmes at alma mater schools as well as a steelband programme in schools in the Toronto area.

All graduates coming to Ontario are invited to join the Association.

2013-14 NAAC Executive

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CREDITS

“Broadcast” is the newsletter of the Naparima Alumni Association of Canada, Toronto Unit and is published twice a year. The views expressed in articles published are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Executive or of the Association unless specifically stated as such.

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President's Message

Our cover tells the story and I have every good reason to be optimistic about our organization's near future. Although our 35th anniversary slipped by with a simple toast at our annual Christmas Dinner & Dance, the work of the Association never stops. To my knowledge, we have never failed to meet our commitments to the schools and communities. Thanks to past and

present Executive members, who worked with me over the years that I've served as President, for upholding our stated goals.

Although my particular role will end this May at our Association's Annual General Meeting, I look forward to serving on the board as past-President.

See you all at the AGM.

Merle Ramdial

From the Editor's Desk...

According to *Research News and Science Facts*, "Toronto is normally free of snow every year from June to September", so cheer up folks, we have just over one month to go!

Many of us gave up and hibernated while some lucky ones escaped to southern climes, but this particular "wintspring" (editor's word) lent itself to reading and more reading. I hope that you found time to do something that you love while the winds howled and the furnace worked overtime.

In this issue, Frank Birbalsingh's *Indian-Trinidadian Women Writers: An Overview* is reproduced in its entirety. Although it is a long piece, I felt that keeping a part for the Fall issue just would not do.

On page 17, Shirley Lobin's travel piece made me think about the things that I have overlooked within the cities that I have visited; the families that she

somehow gets to know really well.

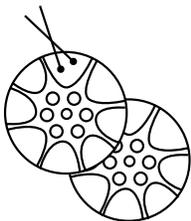
Clarence Madhosingh wrote the eulogy on page 12 for his friend and classmate, Ralph Baney. Ralph, was a Life member of NAAC and always sent me pictures of his most recent work. He visited friends and family in Toronto late last year.

The article, "Beyond the missionary mile" on page 10 submitted by Angela Jutlah suggests that serendipity was at play in a meeting that turned into a long term friendship with George Grant.

And yet again, I thank G. Desmond Teelucksingh for volunteering to take photographs at the Christmas Dinner & Dance. I know that those lenses weigh a ton.

I look forward to hearing from you with submissions and/or suggestions for improving *Broadcast*.

Merle Ramdial



NOTICE:

Steelband Classes 2013/2014 Season

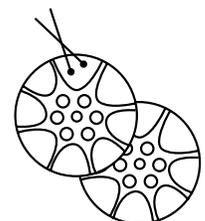
West Humber Collegiate Institute • Time: 6:30 p.m. – 7:30 p.m.

Instructor: Al Foster

Contact: Larry Large: 905-813-6015 • email: llarge@rogers.com

Cedarbrae Collegiate Institute • Time: 5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m.

*Instructor: Randolph Karamath Tel: 416-283-4152
email: ramachez@hotmail.com*



Finance Report

This report reflects the Association's financial information as at February, 2014. Annual Financial Statements for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2014 will be presented at the Annual General Meeting.

Bingo Account

Bank of Nova Scotia \$12,657.00

General Account

Bank Of Nova Scotia \$18,382.00

TOTAL BANK ACCOUNTS \$31,039.00

NAAC INVESTMENTS

Bank of Nova Scotia – Term Deposit

-Balance at December 31, 2013 \$ 1,211.00

Investment Planning Counsel – Inter Pipeline Fund

*1600 Units – B.V. per unit \$10.00 \$16,000.00

(M.V. \$47,920.00)

*Dividends earned – Apr/13 – Feb/14 \$ 1,720.00

**Riocan Real Estate Inv T/U

(M.V. \$21,533.00) \$22,516.00

TOTAL INVESTMENTS \$41,447.00

*Market value of the Inter Pipeline Fund as at February, 2014 was \$29.95 per unit. This reflects an increase of 199.5% over book value. The fund continues to earn dividends at the rate of \$172 per month which translates to a return of 12.9% per annum.

**Market value of Riocan REIT as at February, 2014 was \$26.26 per unit, a decrease of 4.4% over book value. Dividends from Riocan REIT are \$96.35 per month which shows a return of 5.2% per annum.

The Association financed its commitments to the schools in Trinidad in the amount of \$6,260.00 in September, 2013. This is the sum of the following amounts to each of the five schools : NGHS, Iere, & SAGHS in the amount of \$1320 each, Naparima College in the amount of \$1120 and Hillview College in the amount of \$1180.

Our biggest fundraiser for this fiscal year was our Christmas dinner and dance which was held on November 30, 2013. The net profit from this event was \$3,671.86 which will be used to help fund the bursaries for the schools in Trinidad.

Respectfully submitted

Merle Ramdial for Norma Ramsahai, Treasurer

Notices

*Get Well ... We extend our good wishes to **Rustin Oree** who underwent a knee replacement in January. Keep on walking in the mall Rustin until your next surgery in August.*

Congratulations... To First-Time Grandparents

Prem & Norma Ramsahai

and to

Roy & Hazifa Bhopalsingh

It's Your Turn To Spoil And Indulge And Then Return To Parents

Membership Report

MEMBERS As of April 2014

TOTAL MEMBERSHIP now stands at 292

HONORARY MEMBERS	27
LIFE – REGULAR	154
LIFE – ASSOCIATE	39
ANNUAL – REGULAR	8
ANNUAL – ASSOCIATE	21
ANNUAL – STUDENT	3
TOTAL	292

Quite some enthusiasm to learn more about NAAC was shown by some of the younger patrons who attended our Christmas Dinner and Dance 2013. A follow-up shows that they are interested in becoming active members. They were encouraged to read all the information given on our website. We now look forward to their response.

Annual members are reminded that their fees for the current year January to December 2014 are due.

In an effort to increase the youth membership, the Executive agreed to a plan for a “paint nite” during the dreary winter months. However, the weather was not very encouraging to travel about, so we are currently looking at plans for the month of May. For those interested, please look at the website paintnite.com. A date and the venue will be set to accommodate those who respond early.

Members are reminded to attend our Annual General Meeting on Saturday, May 17, 2014.

Let us hope that the weather will make it a fine day for us to all meet again!

Respectfully submitted

Cynthia Ramdeen

Chair, Membership Committee

Communications Report

A news report stating that Canada Post intends to increase postage rates significantly this year, brought on a bout of the jitters.

The Feds agreed to a series of changes that are intended to keep Canada Post afloat, so receiving hard copies of Broadcast in the near future may not be possible unless members are prepared to pay a bit more for a subscription.

Looking ahead then, if you have an email address, please send me a message at merle.ramdiel@gmail.com, so that I can update the NAAC list. If the cost of mailing the print copies becomes prohibitive, you will still be able to read the current issue of Broadcast using a link sent to you by email.

We have been keeping track of the costs, so our Treasurer will be able compare this year’s costs with the last few years, before any decision is made.

Although we have advertisements in each issue, the revenue derived from those do not cover the major cost of production. So far, the Executive has discussed finding a sponsor for one or both Fall and Spring issues, so as to maintain the standard that we’ve set without having to include more ads than articles.

If you, our members, have any other suggestions, please send them to me by email.

I hope you enjoy reading this Spring 2014 issue of Broadcast.

Respectfully submitted

Merle Ramdiel

Chair, Communications

— REMINDER —

NAAC MEMBERSHIP

*Please remember to renew your
NAAC Membership.*

*The membership year runs from
January to December.*

Social Report

If you attended NAAC's Annual Christmas Dinner and Dance in November 2013, we hope you had a great time and enjoyed the new venue, which we were using for the first time. The Banquet Hall at the Markham Convention Centre in Scarborough easily accommodated the 300 plus guests who attended, about 60 more than the previous year. As an Executive, we were especially pleased to see the increased number of younger members and friends of NAAC in attendance, obviously enjoying interacting as well as dancing to the 'enchanted' music, as one guest put it, of Panache Steelband and DJ InVINCEable.

During the evening, with Selwyn Baboolal as Master of Ceremonies, President Merle Ramdial welcomed everyone and the Consul-General, Dr. Vidhya Gyan Tota-Maharaj brought Greetings from the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

On the education front, Ms Marjorie David, a Life member of our Association, was given the opportunity to tell us about her years at NGHS and NC and her strong desire to "give back" to these institutions. Two lucky 2014 graduates, one from Naparima College and one from Naparima Girls' High School who are entering university this year and in financial need, will receive \$500 each. The NC bursary will be named for Montgomery Crawford, a former student and friend of Ms David. The NGHS bursary will bear Marjorie's name.

This year's NAAC Bursary (\$500) for academic excellence was awarded to Ms Sydney George. Our Best Wishes go out to Sydney as she pursues higher education.

The raffle at the Dinner/Dance made a profit of \$1300. Funds raised at this event go to supporting the Alumni Schools in Trinidad. We wish to thank all our prize donors, as well as you, our members for your continued support especially at a time when so many other organizations are knocking at the door. Thank you!

We promised and we're delivering. NAAC's next event is a 3-hour Toronto Harbour Fall Cruise on Saturday September 13th, 2014. Please see back page for details.

We'll have the boat, OBSESSION 111, Great Lakes Schooner Company to ourselves.

It's a great opportunity to enjoy the Fall colours of Toronto, to relax, chat, dance, listen -as you wish- over lunch with family and friends, renew friendships and make new ones. Please contact any of the Executive members if you need more information

We encourage you to reserve early.

Members continue to share ideas and we always appreciate hearing from you.

We look forward to seeing you on September 13th.

Angela Jutlah

Chair, Social Committee

MAIL BAG...

Dear Naparima Alumni Association,

I am the recipient of the West Humber Collegiate Institute Naparima Alumni Steel Band Award 2013. I am writing to thank you for your generosity and support that you have given to West Humber, it is truly amazing the effect you have had on our music program. Being a part of West Humber's steel band was a very big part of my life I was very happy and appreciative to have received this award.

I am currently in the 3 year Business Administration



program at Humber College majoring in Accounting. When I complete my program I plan on furthering my education and eventually obtaining my CPA designation. I'm not in any music program at the moment but I do plan on joining a steel band after my first year is over.

I always thought that I would lose music when I left West Humber, but by receiving this award I've realized that music will always be a part of me. The effort I put into the course and the memories I have from the four amazing years in the steel band program have been great. Thank you again so much for everything you do. It is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely, *Tempest Hope*

Steelband Report

After-School Community

Teaching Program:

Steelpan classes continue at both the West Humber C.I. and Cedarbrae C.I. venues.

Most participants in the class at WHCI have continued from the previous year.

School Partnership Program:

NAAC plans to continue its support for the day school steelband programs at both Cedarbrae C.I. and West Humber C.I. by providing bursaries and awards to students and sharing in the cost of pan-tuning. See pages 8 & 9 for more on the schools' activities.

Panache: The band has 30 active members. Since the general meeting of November 2013, Panache performed at the NAAC Christmas Dinner/Dance and for the Etobicoke-Lakeshore Santa Claus Parade. This winter has been a pretty quiet time for the band ... must be the snow! The band has 4 gigs scheduled for the coming months.

Larry Large

Steelband Liaison



NOTICE OF NAAC ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Saturday, May 17, 2014

12:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.

Knox Presbyterian Church

4156 Sheppard Avenue East

Scarborough, ON

Refreshments will be served at Noon

Bingo Report

Bingo sessions are currently run at Ultimate Bingo Charity Association, at the new location 5601 Steeles Ave. W. in Toronto, Ontario.

For the current fiscal period April 1st 2013 to March 31st 2014, NAAC was responsible for 30 bingo sessions. There was nil revenue earned for this period since the hall operated at a loss. It is difficult to project our earnings for the remainder of the year given the current situation.

The hall administration has implemented strategies to increase attendance. One such initiative is to announce in advance "monster bingos" where patrons can pre-purchase packages plus an assigned seat of their choice for games that are to be played on particular dates when the payouts will be \$25,000 or \$50,000.

The charities administrator is aware that NAAC and the other charities are working for no return, but has asked us to continue working at the hall until at least June 2014 as there is an expectation of a

turnaround in revenue.

We need revenue from bingo funds of approximately \$12K annually to financially manage our steelband and bursary programs at West Humber Collegiate Institute and Cedarbrae Collegiate. For this fiscal year, bingo revenue was used to pay honoraria to steelband instructors at West Humber Collegiate and Cedarbrae Collegiate, bursaries at WHCI and Cedarbrae Collegiate, plus covering 50% of the cost of steelpan tuning at WHCI and at Cedarbrae Collegiate.

Special thanks to all our volunteers and our team leaders, Ian/Merle Ramdial, and Norma Ramsahai for their help and commitment in running the bingo sessions. We look forward to your continued contribution and support. Currently we need another team leader at the helm and would appreciate volunteers.

Merle Ramdial for Norma Ramsahai
Bingo Manager

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Cedarbrae's Steel Band Program

The Grades 10, 11 and 12 Music Program Steel Band classes had a very successful and hectic semester with performances in and out of school. Some students performed at a few feeder schools, along with other students from the Music Dept, and were well received, from all reports. Then at the Winter Arts Night concert, the steel band students gave another entertaining performance and received encores. They also had the traditional foyer concert the last week in December, to the delight of many. The band also performed at Golf Club Road PPS. Finally, some students performed at TDSB Trustee David Smith's Christmas brunch where the Minister of Training, Mr. Brad Duguid, MP Mitzie Hunter, Principals, Superintendents and Mr. Audley Salmon, CCI Principal, were present. DVDs of students' performances will be out soon.

The NAAC community steel band class continues



CCI Steel Band students pose with Trustee David Smith, Minister Brad Duguid and Mr. Karamath, teacher, at the Trustee's Christmas Brunch.

from 5:30- 7:00 pm on Mondays at Cedarbrae CI with new players joining ever so often.

Also, on behalf of Cedarbrae CI staff and students, a big Thank You to Naparima Alumni Association of Canada for their continued support of the steel band program and their financial assistance in the form of bursaries, pan tuning and steel band awards. CCI steel band hopes to participate in this year's TDSB's 25th Panfest.

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Music Notes: West Humber Collegiate

It's been an exciting year at West Humber for the music department! With over 20 performances between the Steel bands, Motown bands and Drumline, there have been many opportunities for the students to travel and be heard. Some music events included the Commencement and Awards Ceremonies, Remembrance Day, the Holiday Assembly, and two Black History Assemblies. We also played for the Black History services at **Applewood United Church** and **Grace Anglican church**.

"**PanMan Pat**" McNeilly came in as well to do an informative presentation on the history of steel band, and shared many great stories about starting up the program at West Humber back in 1992. Our steel band has been going strong for over 22 years! WHCI played several of his arrangements for him to enjoy and play along with.

The main focus right now is gearing up for the five-day **New York City Music Trip in May 2014!** We will be going back to NYC for our third time, and this time we are visiting **Crossfire Steel Band** in Brooklyn in addition to our many other events. We will be playing at **James Madison School in NYC**, where we played back in 2006.

Spring Music Night is Thursday May 15 at 6:30pm, and will feature the **N.A.A.C. Panache steel band** as special guests, under the direction of Al Foster! WHCI steel band will be playing Al's amazing version of Superblue's "Fantastic Friday" along with Panache! Please come out and see the show!

The winner of the **NAAC Steel Band Award** for 2013 was Tempest Hope, a very dedicated and talented double guitar (double tenor) player. Her thank you letter appears elsewhere in this issue. The winner of the **NAAC Steel Band Bursary** was Sheneil Rochester, who played Double Tenor (double soprano) pan, and auditioned and was accepted to York University in Music! She is following in

Al Foster's footsteps! Many thanks again to the Naparima Alumni Association for their generous support of the WHCI program.

Our pan tuning and music awards would not be possible without the support we get from the NAAC. Our wonderful long-term partnership is vital to the success of our program. Several of our pan graduates perform regularly with Panache, allowing them to enjoy steel band for years after finishing at WHCI.

For more information, videos and pictures, check out www.whcimusic.com on the web, and also on Facebook at whcimusic.com.

Joe Cullen



Sheneil Rochester playing at Music Monday (with Astronaut Commander Chris Hadfield, Music Monday, May 2013) Recipient of NAAC Steel Band Bursary 2013

Beyond the Missionary Mile

Submitted by Angela Jutlah

I was reflecting on missionary life.

What triggered it was a request from NAAC Executive members following a rare coincidence this past Fall!

First, Ken Rajkumar Maharaj, in the 2013 Fall Broadcast, recounted the exceptional activities of Rev. Kenneth Grant and the Canadian Mission in their quest for converts in Trinidad around 1870.

Second, in the Fall of 2013, Kenneth Grant's great grandson, George Grant, passed away in Barrie, Ontario. He had witnessed living conditions in many countries and devoted his life to serving people with a different kind of missionary zeal.



Emma Jutlah, Bible Woman (with a hat) and women converts.

So, what did I see?

There were the familiar characters like Kenneth Grant, his relatives, friends and successors. They dedicated much of their lives to spreading the word and offering fibre to the spirit of those who had traded life in places like India for unknown corners of Trinidad. These Canadian Missionaries gave new hope to waves of settlers in Trinidad over the decades. They set up primary schools with teachers to serve in

communities, many remote. They provided orphans and unfortunate kids an opportunity to learn from books and acquire valuable life skills in a co-operative environment. Later, they added secondary schools to extend the education program. We, ourselves have benefited as students or teachers at San Fernando C M (Grant) School, NGHS, Naparima College and St. Augustine Girls High School.

And then, there were the Bible Women whose praise was sung by Mabel Brandow in a book, *Our Church Women (1868-1983)*, about the role played by local women in the Trinidad Missionary endeavour. They were assistants to the Canadians, travelling by bus, buggy and foot to share with fellow villagers some of their new knowledge and faith. The photograph at left, taken from Brandow's book, shows three ladies, new converts, still in orhnis, and a Bible Woman wearing a hat. That smiling, slender lady in the hat is none other than the grandmother of my husband, Cliff. I didn't know her but he tells me of her kind and loving nature and the special pride she felt on Sunday afternoons as she boarded a buggy to spread the mission.

Enter George Grant, a different kind of Missionary. George was a son of Jackie Grant, who captained the 1934 West Indies cricket team in England. George was born in 1933 in Trinidad and he attended Queen's Royal College (QRC). He spent several years in Grenada, England and (then) Southern Rhodesia before going with his family to South Africa where his father was appointed principal of a Mission Station. That was where George became exposed to the plight of black Africans, some living in rural moonscapes, others escaping to the cities to eke out a living. George was a brilliant student, and after completing a degree in Economics and Agriculture in South Africa, he sought to persuade the authorities to institute a variety of projects in black rural areas.

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page)

George was, however, determined to do more.

Economics began as an inquiry into ‘The Wealth of Nations’. But George saw the problem as being ‘The Poverty of Nations’ so he began searching for answers through a study of economic development at Oxford



University. Following this, he came to Canada, and in 1966 he and Cliff met in the Economics doctoral program at the University of Toronto.

George was focussed on unlocking doors that have kept many countries in a state of poverty. He was a prolific writer, expounding his ideas on the development of rural and regional programs, the use of commodity money, and alleviating poverty

through trade and migration. He consolidated his key principles in his book *Tackling the Poverty of Nations*. He even experimented with the idea of small-scale farming in his Simcoe County operation to test its relevance in certain countries. Though basically an idealist, he could not escape the conclusion that the notion would most likely not gain traction, especially where land reform might be necessary. In his writings George has made a useful contribution to our thinking about the economic causes of poverty and what might be done about them.

George was devoted to a different kind of missionary life when compared with those in the traditional role. His wife, Bernice, is of Jewish ancestry, and she has always stood by him, and supported the full development of his economic ideas, Cliff and I have shared a rich and close friendship with these wonderful people over a period of almost fifty years, and for this we are very grateful.

NAAC Bursary Winner for 2013: Sydney George

Sydney George was the recipient of the NAAC Bursary for 2013. Sydney demonstrated that she was worthy of the award because of her high academic achievement during her High School years. She also contributed many hours of volunteer work while attending the French Immersion Program at Pickering High School. Her volunteer work included fundraising at her school and working with kids at summer camp.

Sydney pursued her musical interest by playing in Panache a few years ago and influenced her brother to join the band. In the spring of 2013, she volunteered at the opening of Treble Clef Music School. Sydney is currently enrolled in the first year Life Sciences, Bio-Med Program at the University of Waterloo. Her goal is to become a doctor and is in the process of arranging for a medical student to mentor her at Waterloo University.



Dr. Ralph Ramoutar Baney, 1929–2014

Memorial Service, February 8, 2014

First Presbyterian Church, Howard County, Columbia, MD, USA 21045

Eulogy by Dr. Clarence Madhosingh ©

Dr. Ralph Ramoutar Baney, a man with exceptionally dextrous hands; who with almost biblical capabilities, turned wood into life with his sculptures. His works of art have glorified buildings in his native Trinidad, the walls of Buckingham Palace, Valjevo's City Hall in Serbia and the residences of many famous people. His art has been on display worldwide, and reported in books and journals. Ralph himself has received numerous awards including an honorary doctorate from the University of the West Indies in Trinidad and an award for teaching excellence from the Maryland State Board of Community Colleges. Yet, for all his talent and reputation and as a pioneer in sculpture as an art form in Trinidad, I don't think that he was appropriately appreciated or supported by the relevant agencies on his native island at that time.

Of course, there is a substantial other dimension to Ralph's life as a husband to his dear late wife, Vera; as a father to his cherished son, Clarence, as a relative to many and a loyal and lasting friend to hundreds.

Ralph and Vera had almost fifty years of a loving, caring and artistically productive marriage together. Vera's childhood as an orphan was even more difficult than Ralph's. Although she was deliberately denied the opportunity to attend high school, on her own initiative she eventually obtained a Bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland in 1980, the same year Ralph obtained his Ph. D from the same University. Vera attained her own international renown in the field of ceramics and was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of the West Indies in 2007, before she was handicapped by a stroke in 1999. Her health and welfare became Ralph's first priority. This was a difficult period for Ralph and Clarence. Nevertheless, Vera trained herself to use one hand and continued to work on her projects. Sadly, Vera passed away in 2008. For both Ralph and

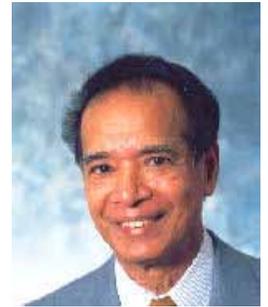
Clarence, the loss of Vera was heart-breaking for, in different ways, Vera was a large part of each of them.

One night when Ralph was once visiting me in London, Ontario, he and I were discussing his career and he mentioned that after years of specialized exhibitions world-wide, he was contemplating the next one to be comprehensive, tracing the development of his art forms chronologically through the years. I suggested that he may like to start the display with a painting which he did for me shortly after our high school days before his professional years. He did not recall that painting. I still had it wrapped from a recent move. I retrieved it and Ralph diligently unwrapped the painting and after a good long look at his early amateur art, he took a deep breath and said, "I don't think I really want to go back that far." And we both had a good laugh.

Now, with his father's passing, young Clarence has lost both caring parents and all the personal support that came from them when they were with him. Suddenly, he has a full plate of chores, including the completion of his doctorate studies, which he must manage on his own. He will have to find the courage, the energy and the spirit, which is there within him, to face the challenges in the coming weeks and months and years. Of course, good friends like Ben Biniker and the community of friends from the church and the university, will now assume greater significance in his life and activities. The legacy of Ralph and Vera will still be there as a silent sentinel providing that unique ethereal and spiritual guidance and support always. I, too, am only a 'phone call away'.

I have been fortunate and honoured to have Ralph as a dear and valued friend for seventy years.

(Continued on page 13)



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My friendship with the family was close and I know Ralph and I regarded each other no less than brothers. Indeed, I was further honoured to have their son Clarence named after me. This changed my life as I had to start behaving myself to set a good example. This relationship with the Baneyes, I think, qualifies me to relate some of the less familiar aspects of Ralph's life and character. I recall an eminent person telling me once. "I respect you for what I know you are; now I respect you more knowing where you came from to get here." So, I will tell you where Ralph came from so that we may appreciate more fully the man that he was.

Trinidad, in the West Indies, was a British colony when Ralph was born there in an earthen hut with thatched leaves for the roof. There were no furnishings in Ralph's home as you have here. Water was fetched in buckets and the light with which he studied came from a kerosene lamp. Across the road lived Sir Norman Lamont, a Scottish baron and multi-millionaire in a huge mansion with servants on a large estate. Such was the disparity in Trinidad in those days. Both of Ralph's parents worked as peasant farmers. I ate at his home many times. The meals were basic consisting of roti, much like a pita bread, with curried vegetables from their home garden. Indeed, this is what Ralph brought to school daily for his lunch. We all think that the "brown bagging" phenomenon started a few years ago in North America. Well, Ralph brought his roti lunch to high school wrapped in used brown paper bags in the 1940s.

Each school week morning at 4:30 am, Ralph collected vegetables from the garden, loaded his bicycle and rode 3 miles from his home in Philippine Village to sell them in the San Fernando town market before he came to Naparima College, a Presbyterian Missionary high school, at 8:15 am. There were no school councillors then to advise students. Students made their own decisions. There were no local universities and going abroad to study was expensive. Bright students hoped for scholarships which were few and Ralph was fortunate to have obtained one to

study art in the UK at the Brighton College of Art. From a mud hut in Philippine Village in the small island of Trinidad to a Ph.D from the University of Maryland with a brilliant career in teaching and in sculpture and the arts in this great country, the USA, is no small feat. The journey was hard and long and therein lies the other dimension of Ralph's character and achievements. It is important to recognise that although Ralph's parents were poor, they did not live in poverty. They were rich with pride, a strong spirit and the energy and will to ensure that, with education, their children would fare better than themselves in life. And there were no credit cards in those days. When things got tough, it meant simply eating less, wearing less and working harder – a lesson in living that served Ralph well throughout his life.

Many know what Ralph was through his renowned accomplishments; fewer of us know who Ralph was as a person. I saw Ralph as a Gentle Giant. Ralph was always pleasant company, self-possessed with a ready smile and an easy sense of humour. He was as gentle as a good Christian could be but physically, Ralph was no giant. He complained once that axing those logs made him feel more like a lumberman than a sculptor. His inherent modesty belied his artistic intellectual magnitude and his great creative capacity. He crafted masterpieces from mundane blocks of wood with every cut, with every chip and with every scrape, for months, with the patience of Job and the diligence of a surgeon.

Ralph portrayed the majesty of Man by the quality of his mind, by his personal life and by his accomplishments. His dedication to his belief in himself and his artistic objectives allowed him to succeed, through adversity, to achieve what he accomplished in art and what he became as a man. His art is as personal as they are universal and a part of this civilization's achievements. The legacy of his art and his life will impact generations to come.

Life is energy and energy is infinite. The energy of Ralph's Spirit is eternal. May his Spirit live in heavenly peace eternally. The sentiments of friendship transcend words. Farewell dear friend.



Christmas Dinner & Dance



The Gasparillo Posse: L to R: Prem Ramsahai, Noel Mungal, Kelo Harrysingh & Anand Ramsahai.

Photos by: G.D. Teelucksingh



Panache in performance



At the podium: Marjorie David



Mark & Shanti Inman



*Sitting: Cynthia Ramdeen & Dr. Vidhya Gyan Tota-Maharaj
Standing: Thelma Teelucksingh*



L to R: Laura, Prem & Sherry Dipchan-Maharaj



MC Selwyn Baboolal



Colin & Nadia Ramdeen



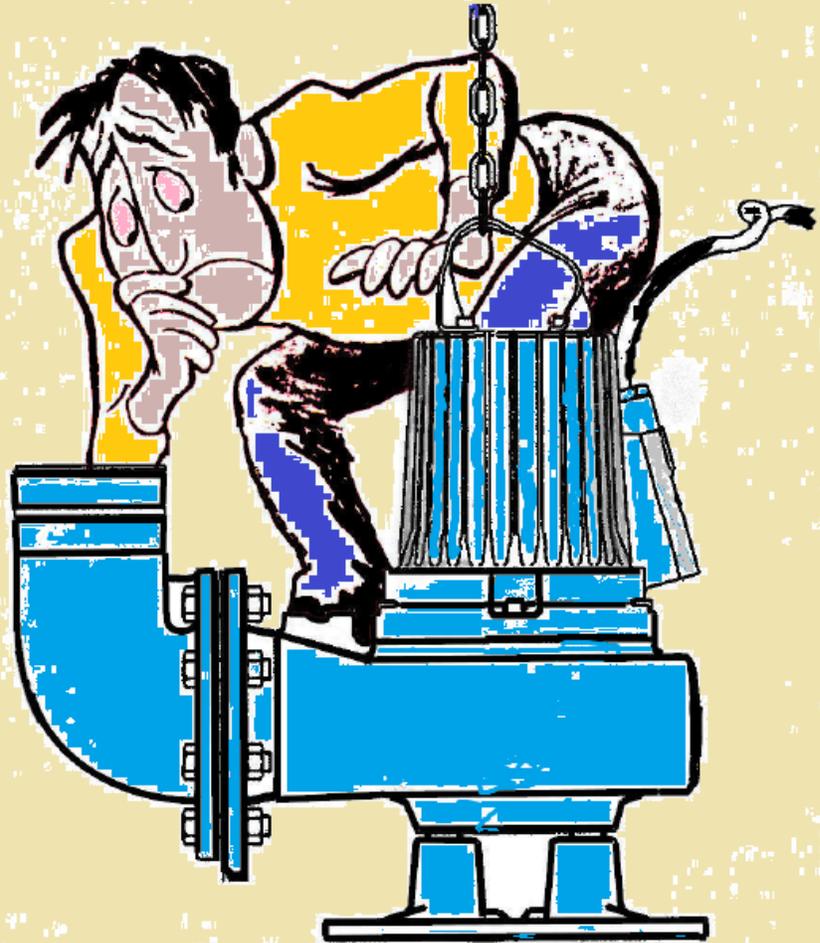
Marlyne & Gerry Sinanansingh

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Turkish Delight

by Shirley Lobin

The word has been getting out: Turkey has become a hot travel destination. Ten years ago, I cleared Turkish customs in ten minutes. Even five years ago, it took no more than fifteen. Most recently, however, the authorities have had to expand the number of customs officials to about twenty five, and even at the speed at which each is processing the arriving passengers - one in about every forty-five seconds - it still takes me half hour to reach a customs



officer's booth. At that rate, they would be stamping two thousand passports per hour! When I look back at the line, it's just as long as ever, since some more planes have landed.

So what's causing this latest upsurge in travel to Turkey? For one thing, the ongoing military atrocities in Syria that are forcing many Syrians to flee across the border into Turkey for asylum. And because Syrian Muslims tend to be more orthodox than their Turkish counterparts, they represent - claim opponents of the current Prime Minister - potential votes for him, hence his openness to them.

Secular Turks and the western world worry that Turkey, under its current politics, might be retreating from its almost century-long policy of secularism and modernism that Atatürk - "Father of the Turks" - achieved for it in 1923. My Istanbul-based hosts and friends, Ali and Işil, had planned to take me to a popular bar on the Asian side of Istanbul, but they tell me that the city government's recent alcohol ban has made some places "dry." Is this a sign of things to come? As secularists, as young people who are wedded to their western lifestyle, and especially as parents of a young child, they wonder, and worry.

But the tourists are not bothered, not even by the recent political unrest in Taksim Square. Just a week

or two after the protestors have been tear-gassed out of the square, the airport queues are still packed, not only with the usual European visitors, but by tour groups of people I have not noticed here before in such large numbers: Japanese, Chinese, Koreans, Malaysians, Singaporeans, and many individuals who might be Arabs and North Africans. I even spot a few Indians, from India I think. My tour-guide friend tells me she has been guiding tours non-stop for over two months now.

I'm not really surprised, though. Turkey is an enchanting place, and it has never failed to charm me ever since my first visit to Istanbul in 1983 when I was still youngish and a novice independent-traveller. Back then, I met a young carpet seller, Bülent, in his little shop that hugged the south wall of Sultan Ahmet Mosque. He spoke excellent English, though when it exited his mouth it sounded like little bursts of firecrackers. Every day, I came by to chat with him, in English; Turkish was too impossible for me to attempt. He spent all week trying to sell me a small carpet that I made the mistake of saying I liked. "I can't afford it," I told him, "so don't waste your time trying to persuade me." "You have to bargain," he coaxed. "But I hate

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bargaining,” I protested. His price started at \$500. Every day, with no encouragement from me, he dropped the price further. Then one day, when he reached \$100, I said, “I’ll take it.” He was surprised; by now, it had become a game for him. He never really expected me to buy; nor did I.



On my next visit to Istanbul, the carpet shops were still in the same place, and a man at one of them looked like he might be Bülent. “Do you remember me from twenty years ago?” I asked him. He looked at me and replied, impatience edging his voice, “Thousands of people come into my shop every week; do you expect me to remember anyone from so long ago?” I felt rather foolish. But, after he stared at my face for a few seconds, he suddenly blurted out, “Shirley Lobin!” Now, whenever I’m in Istanbul, I make sure to visit him and his wife at their shop, the carpets now replaced by jewellery. Sometimes, I remind him that, though he moaned and groaned that he was making no profit on that carpet, I had paid him at least twice what it was worth then, when, unlike today, *Turkish liras* were denominated in millions. He just smiles.

Sultan Ahmet Square in Old Istanbul (the part of the city that lies in Europe) is the prime destination

of most tourists - the foreign as well as the Turks themselves - to this city. It is always bustling with activity, late into the evening, from spring to summer to fall. Free outdoor performances - music, dance, theatre - take place at set times during the day to showcase Turkish and Arabic culture. One evening, a young man in the crowd of onlookers so captivates

the audience with his own private belly-dancing show that for five minutes we forget all about what’s happening onstage. Throughout the square, itinerant vendors are doing a brisk trade in roasted chestnuts, popcorn and boiled corn. Potential patrons line up patiently outside the countless restaurants inside and around the square, lured especially by the heavenly aromas of *köfte* (beef meat balls) and lamb *kebabs*, or sometimes, by a performance of *dervishes* doing their whirling dance.

Every few minutes, yet another busload of camera-wielding tourists arrives. Often, they have only a

few hours to take in the sights, so they scamper madly from one to the next: Sultan Ahmet Mosque (popularly called the “Blue Mosque” because of the blue tiles that line its interior), Aya Sofya (a church-turned-mosque), Topkapi Palace (home to the erstwhile Ottoman sultans) and, a little further away, Sirkeci Train Station (the southern terminus of the historical *Orient Express* from Paris), the Egyptian Spice Market, the Grand Bazaar, the *hamams* (Turkish baths), and much, much more. Byzantium, Constantinople, Istanbul: these are the various names under which this city has thrived and survived its thousands of years of history, from the Greek Empire, to that of the Ottomans, to its present-day independent state. It’s impossible to get bored here.

The Blue Mosque, with its minarets soaring into the skyline, continues to be an active place of Muslim

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worship. You are free to relax in its inner courtyard, people-watching or just listening to the soporific rise and fall of the imam's voice over the loudspeaker as he calls the faithful to prayer. Just across from the mosque, the imposing Aya Sofya presents a pleasing spectacle as its walls change colour from pale pink to rich coral in the setting sun. Beginning life in the

6th century as a Greek Orthodox Church, the Aya Sofya was converted into a mosque a thousand years later under the conquering Ottoman Turks. After their demise, Atatürk transformed it into a museum. One of its most popular attractions is the so-called Wishing Column on the inside. According to legend, the Emperor Justinian's headache disappeared when, by chance, he leaned his head against it. Since then, visitors have been rubbing their

finger on a certain spot on it, then touching that finger to the part of their body that is ill, in hopes of a miracle cure. I have no illness (that I know of) but I rub it, just in case. The constant rubbing on the tough marble has worn down the spot into an inch-wide hole.

Sultan Ahmet Square is spread across a low hill at the southern tip of the peninsula that juts into the Sea of Marmara. A fascinating spectacle is that, if you are approaching this peninsula by water, its entire outline with the Blue Mosque and its minarets, the coral-hued dome of Aya Sofya, and the egg-shell tinted walls of Topkapi Palace all jump out at you in a single, sweeping gaze. Catch it at the point when the sun is just slipping down

behind the horizon, and the sight is inexpressibly magical.

Beyond Istanbul, Turkey is no less intriguing, as I discover on a two-week bus tour of the western half of the country. Assos is a sleepy, hilltop Greek-Turkish village on the Aegean coast, its old stone houses splashing haphazardly over the rolling hills, goats scampering playfully wherever they please,



Blue Mosque

and sweetly crinkly-faced old women selling hand-embroidered shawls, hand-strung necklaces of semi-precious stones, and antique silver rings for the princely sum of three dollars. "Will you let me take your photo?" I ask one of the crinkliest of them. "No," she replies (in Turkish, translated to me by my friend), "you will put it on the Internet." Not far away is the town of Troy where Helen's face launched a thousand ships, but while its ancient Greek ruins are interesting, they are far outshone by those of the later Romans at the town of Ephesus further south. At Ephesus, the Romans bequeathed Turkey with an amphitheatre - today, better-preserved and more spectacular than any in their home country - and

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public toilets where men, a dozen or so at a time, could socialize while sitting over holes cut out and separated by mere inches along the length of a white-marble bench. Underneath, a drain of running water whisked away their waste.

Along the Mediterranean coast, the gently-rolling sea water sparkles in the sun like diamonds sprinkled upon a bed of blue sapphires. According to legend, Cleopatra's Bath (now reduced to a few small ruins in a little bay) is where she worked her charms on Marc Antony. And maybe on Caesar, too. What a woman! We females hope that some of her talents will seep into our pores along with the water.

Inland, at Pamakkule, we are met with a strange sight: snow in summer! But on closer inspection, it turns out to be calcium deposits interspersed by wisps of rising air from hot springs. This was a favorite spa of the Romans. I notice that the surrounding land is strewn with hundreds of Roman burial caskets, all of hand-carved marble. Shockingly, they just lie around, untended; the museums are already chock full of others just like them.

Not every Western tourist gets to go on a bus tour of Turkey for Turks only. I was lucky; my friends arranged it for me *in situ*. To pass the time as we travelled, we sang, we danced in the aisles of the bus, my fellow-travellers stuck *lira* notes into my blouse in appreciation when I attempted their Turkish style of dancing, and they gave me a resounding ovation when I read my little speech - in Turkish - thanking them for one of the most fun-filled two weeks of my life. They even looked after me when I got a bout of the "runs" that lasted three excruciating days. In short, they made me feel special.

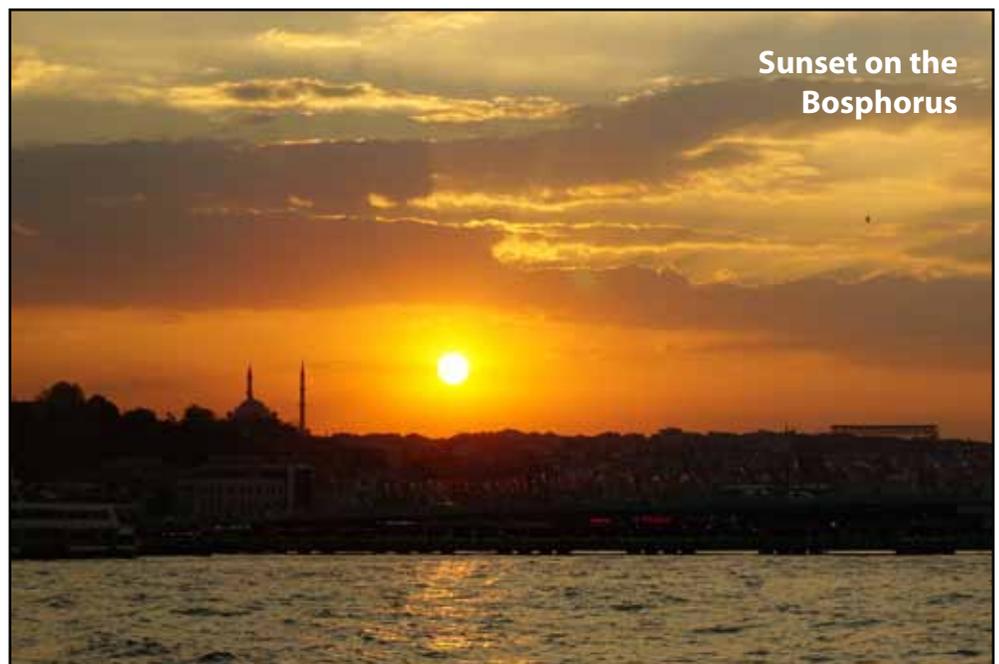
On the final night of

the bus tour, Esra, one of the young tour guides, started laughing at my Canadian "Eh?" Every time I enunciated it, she laughed even harder. Soon, we were rolling with uncontrollable mirth on the back seat of the bus. The laughter quickly rippled down toward the front of the bus in little waves, infecting all whom it touched, though they had not the slightest clue what they were laughing about. I think that was the day I stopped saying "Eh?"

In Turkey, I'm easily picked out as a foreigner because the dark brown of my skin is such a rarity among Turks. One late evening in Istanbul, at a week-long fiesta of folk dancing, I was sitting with Esra on a low stool outside one of the tents, sipping tea. Some young children were prancing around, playing, pausing to practice their English on me. One little boy, about six years old, sat on the ground just feet away from me, chin cupped in his hands, a smile flickering over his face as he stared at me. "Why are you staring at her?" Esra asked him. "Because," he replied, "I never saw a real, live one like that. Only on TV."

Out of the mouth of a child!

shirleylobin@yahoo.com



News From Naparima College

NAPARIMA COLLEGE REPORT TERM II 2013/ 2014

Naparima College was founded in 1894. 2014 is significant for us at Naparima College because it marks our 120th year anniversary. At the heart of our celebrations, our strategic vision and plan is in sync with a distinct ambition to continue growing as the premium, educational institution, in Trinidad and Tobago's secondary school sector. As such, Naparima College, applied for Diamond Status through the Ministry of Public Administration's "Gold to Diamond" 2014 initiative. Today, we continue to set ourselves to new challenging targets for one reason only—to fulfill our core purpose of creating national, regional and international opportunities for Naparima College graduates and in this brief update, we have chosen to highlight a few momentous occasions for the period January 2014 to April 2014. In February 2014, we brought a new cultural dimension to Naparima College with our 120TH ANNIVERSARY CONCERT on 1st February 2014. This Concert gave our highly talented teachers and students (past and present) an opportunity to showcase their talents and was an intensely entertaining and inspiring experience. Our guest presenters and conductors included Avinash Maharaj, Staff Skits, Errol Fabian, 'Crazy', many other onstage performances by the Naparima College Steel Orchestra and our recently formed, Naparima College Sign Language Choir.

120TH FOUNDERS DAY CELEBRATIONS

Our annual Founders Day celebrations for 2014 was held on Wednesday February 5th at 8.30am in the College's Auditorium. Dr. Ramdath Ramkissoon, past student, who entered Naparima College in 1937 and later taught at the College was our esteemed guest speaker. Dr., the Honorable, Tim Gopeesingh also addressed the audience and fondly reflected on his time as a student at Naparima College. Awards were given the members of staff for over 25 years service to Naparima College and also the key stakeholders.



*(Left) Picture of Founding father, Rev. Grant;
(Right) Dr. Dowlath, Dr. Tim Gopeesingh and Rev Brenda Bullock observe
laying of evergreen in front of picture of Founding Father Rev. Grant.*

Naparima College shares in the belief that the best teaching talents, as well as, long standing services must be recognized. This year's recipients, who received awards, during the Founders Day Ceremony, were staff members who have pioneered new methods of learning, teachers, office and ancillary staff, whose work would have been outstanding for more than 25 years.

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News From Naparima College

(Continued from page 21)

At Naparima College, administration and staff understand and appreciate that there is huge global demand for skills in The Languages, the Arts and Science. As such we engage our students in these annual events: the Language Arts Department's Oration and Elocution Competitions, the Science Department's Science Fair, The Modern Studies and Business Department's Career Fair, Carnival Function and NAPSAC Walk-a-Thon.

SCIENCE FAIR 2014's theme: 'Environmental Sustainability'



Students from Lower, Middle and Upper school, displaying their creativity during Science Fair. Some projects included new and innovative methods to assist with recent Oil Spill 2013.

Notice

***Happy 50th Anniversary
to***

Errol And Phyllis Jardine

on April 27, 2014

Your friends at NAAC wish you many more happy years!!

Indian-Trinidadian Women Writers

AN OVERVIEW

Frank
Birbalsingh

For historical and sociological reasons, Indian-Trinidadian women writers are late arrivals on the Caribbean scene; they first make an appearance in the

1990s, long after male Trinidadian and West Indian authors generally had established themselves by the 1950s, and even after African-Trinidadian or other West Indian women writers had emerged in the 1970s and '80s. One reason is that Indians arrived in the Caribbean two and a half centuries after Africans, who had become fully indigenised in the region in terms of language and culture well before World War One; another is that, like literature everywhere else, West Indian literature was first produced by male rather than female authors. It also seems that sexist attitudes were more firmly entrenched among Indian-Trinidadians than other ethnic groups and had a greater inhibiting effect on the education and socialisation of Indian rather than other women in Trinidad.

Despite its late arrival though, or perhaps because of it, the work – mainly fiction – of the six authors discussed in this essay – Lakshmi Persaud, Ramabai Espinet, Shani Mootoo, Artie Jankie, Niala Maharaj and Lelawatee Manoo-Rahming – assumes a revolutionary aspect in its presentation of female Indian-Trinidadian characters. Stories and novels by the chief male Indian-Trinidadian authors who preceded these six women – notably Samuel Selvon, Ismith Khan and V S Naipaul – contain portraits of many female Indian-Trinidadian characters, but they tend to be sketched in bare physical and emotional outline, and they tend to play roles that are secondary in importance to those of their male counterparts. Who can be more uncertain, naive and subservient than Urmilla, Tiger's young wife in Selvon's landmark novel *A Brighter Sun*, or more dutiful, obedient and self-effacing than Meena or Lakshmi in Ismith Khan's *The Jumbie Bird*! And, although Mrs Tulsi in V S Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas* is a controlling matriarch, she is an anomaly – playing an acknowledged masculine role by substituting for her husband. If there is an exception, it is Binti, Kale Khan's rejected wife in

The Jumbie Bird, who stubbornly survives as a single woman by selling coconut oil and coal and later opening a small business selling vinegar. But exceptions prove rules; and not until the appearance of the female authors considered in this essay do we get rounded, fully fleshed portraits of Indian-Trinidadian women who are leading participants in the action of their stories.

The chief protagonist and narrator in Lakshmi Persaud's novel *Butterfly in the Wind* is an Indian-Trinidadian girl, Kamla, growing up in her village of Tunapuna during the 1950s and '60s. Since we see her mostly as a child or adolescent, Kamla herself is not the fully fledged portrait of an adult woman, but her story at least introduces us to her social background and the inner dynamics of a typical Indian-Trinidadian family within the ethnic pot-pourri of Trinidad's diverse population. Kamla's Hindu family has prospered financially since the first Indians arrived as impoverished, indentured, agricultural immigrants in Trinidad in 1845. She portrays her father as a model parent who owns a rum shop and grocery, while their family life is seen as an embodiment of cosiness, warmth and security.

Kamla describes a colonial, Caribbean education system that indoctrinates students with foreign (mainly British) information by rote, enforced often through brutal corporal punishment. Religion is a problem too because Kamla is a Hindu in a Catholic school where she learns everything from English songs to Negro spirituals, but nothing about her Hindu culture. Kamla's experience illustrates the greater difficulty of developing educational and other institutions in a multi-ethnic British Caribbean colony like Trinidad, rather than in one like Barbados with a more uniform ethnic (African-Caribbean) population. In addition, although it may sound precocious for someone of her age, Kamla perceives a potential for ethnic disunity in the rambling, mismatched cultural diversity around her; despite Trinidad's majority African population at the time, she remarks on the 'psychic importance' (Persaud, *Butterfly* 184) of India's independence in 1947 being recognised only by the island's Hindu Mahasabha movement. She laments: 'It [Indian independence] should have been of equal importance

to all non-white races in British colonial Trinidad, but sadly, we were a people already divided amongst ourselves' (ibid).

Kamla also reveals inherited disadvantages of gender in Trinidad. She believes, for instance, that opportunity for higher education is a special privilege and thanks her parents for offering it to her, 'a female child, disadvantaged by custom — an untold freedom and privilege' (Persaud, *Butterfly* 202). Gender inequality is also evident in an anecdote about the milkman Baboo who is greatly respected in his village as an authority on the Hindu scriptures, yet betrays hypocrisy and patriarchal abuse when, with total impunity, he abandons his wife for a younger woman employed as the family's maid. Although they are not clearly articulated, the incident introduces distinctly feminist longings in Kamla's adolescent mind.

Additional issues of ethnic rivalry and corruption appear in Persaud's second novel *Sastra*, where the main focus is a love story that pits traditional and modern sects of Hinduism against each other, with the lovers, in the manner of *Wuthering Heights*, continuing their relationship beyond death. Persaud's third novel, *Raise the Lanterns High*, conjures up a more eerie atmosphere through action that unfolds both in Trinidad and India. In the Trinidad section, set in the 1960s, a young Hindu woman must decide whether to marry the husband chosen for her after she secretly observes him raping another woman. Persaud then creates an impressively vivid portrait of an historical, eighteenth-century Indian milieu complete with elaborate details of dress, religious rituals and dietary practices. More impressively, *suttee* (ritual suicide), a practice which must appear barbarous to Western readers, is plausibly exposed, in the debate among the three queens, as the result of the manipulation of ancient texts by corrupt courtiers, priests, politicians and military officers to control the lives of ordinary people. The author's fourth novel, *For The Love of My Name*, deploys action on an imaginary Caribbean island — Maya — which, despite the fact that Guyana is not an island, considers a politicised, racial conflict that is an exact replica of events in the régime of Robert Augustus Devonish, aka Forbes Burnham, which pitted Indian- and African-Guyanese against each other between 1964 and 1985.

Persaud lived briefly in other parts of the Caribbean and finally settled in Britain, but diasporic themes of displacement and homelessness do not enter her novels in quite the way they do in the fiction of Ramabai Espinet. Espinet has lived in Canada most of her life and is the author of poems, essays, children's stories and one novel, *The Swinging Bridge*, in which the forty-two-year-old narrator, Mona Singh, is also born in Trinidad and lives in Canada. Mona recalls her life story from the arrival of her Indian great-grandmother Gainer in Trinidad in 1879 to a period shortly after her family's migration to Canada in 1970; and this individual family narrative reconstructs the entire history of Indian indenture in Trinidad from a distinctly female Indian-Trinidadian perspective.

In contrast to *Butterfly*, the action of *Bridge* is raw and unrelenting, inspired by an urge to expose unsavoury secrets of Indian-Trinidadian culture, especially sexism that has been long concealed in dark corners of a history of slavery and indenture. While still at primary school, Mona hears the word 'coolie' used as a term of racial abuse to define Indian-Trinidadians solely by their indentured status, as lowly and

cringing, socially beyond the pale. It incites in her a flaming anger: 'a coolie is an ugly nasty thing. I hated coolies' (Espinet, *Bridge* 204). Mona's internalisation of ethnic hatred, so outspokenly expressed, illustrates the raw and unsparing quality of Espinet's novel as a whole.

While Kamla's father in *Butterfly* is a paragon of parental virtue, Mona's Da-Da in *Bridge* is a tortured soul who, in one incident, calls his daughter 'a little bitch' (178), burns a dress of hers which he considers too short and provocative, and forces her to kneel on gravel and march, military style, which makes her feel like 'kneeling on thousands of little knives' (179). All this is mainly because he suspects Mona of having an affair with a Creole boy. Da-Da's sadistic cruelty has obvious affinities with the physical brutality and sexual exploitation of women that are part and parcel of the history of slavery and indenture on Caribbean plantations.

Less well known may be the collusion between sexism and brutality within the Indian indentured family itself. There is, for instance, no hint of this in Persaud's *Butterfly*. Quite the opposite. Espinet, on the other hand, stresses lamentable wife beatings, cutlass attacks and murders of women by Indian indentured husbands, fathers and other male relatives. If such cruelty from Indian men partly derives from Indian traditions, it certainly finds a fertile environment in the brutal practices of Caribbean plantations.

Denouncing the sexism and cruelty of indentured Indian men towards their womenfolk introduces a strident and political tone to Espinet's novel, and directly challenges the view of indenture as a 'righteous family pact' (*Bridge* 279) while championing a more adventurous version of indenture as 'a journey of young widows looking for a new life' (ibid). But perhaps Espinet goes too far by betraying a note of retaliation when almost every other male Indian character in *Bridge* is either violent like Mona's Da-Da or a potential philanderer/rapist like her Uncle Baddall, leaving female characters largely bereft, holding hands in solemn resistance to their shared victimhood. At school Mona and her friends can only whisper about their predicament: 'We heard of girls being cursed and even beaten by family members for so much as looking at "Man." And husbands too, beating and kicking wives' (187). Still, whether her reaction is retaliatory or not, Espinet's portrait of Indian-Trinidadian sexual mores remains the most comprehensive that we so far have in fiction.

So far as nationality is concerned, as an Indian whose family has lived in Trinidad for at least three generations, Da-Da supports the dominant People's National Movement (PNM), an African-based party led by the African-Trinidadian Dr Hector James, a pseudonym for Dr Eric Williams, who dominated Trinidadian politics from the 1950s to the 1970s. Da-Da firmly believes that Africans and Indians have been indigenised or creolised by their long residence in the Caribbean: 'He [Da-Da] saw himself as an Indian man and a Trinidadian, neither cancelling out the other, a natural inheritor of the Creole culture he loved' (71). In Da-Da's view, both Indian-Trinidadians and African-Trinidadians are Trinidadians, full stop. But he becomes disenchanted by the deep-seated Afro-centricity of the PNM and of African-Trinidadians who advocate 'forced *douglarization*' (75) — 'a coercive drive to intermarriage between Africans and Indians'

(ibid); and his conversations boil over with anger, as reported by Mona:

I heard these discussions at home in taxis, in shops, even at school. In Da-Da's letters I read the map of our departure from that early island home to a Canadian migrant existence. (72)

Migration, however, is no panacea for inherited problems of identity and nationality which inevitably transmute into wider diasporic afflictions of displacement, exile and homelessness. By fleeing to Canada, Da-Da jumps from the frying pan into the fire, exchanging African-Trinidadian racism for white racism in his new 'home'. Besides, in this multilayered novel, his family faces the ambivalence of Canada which exists side by side with a longing for Trinidad as home. This provokes a sense of desperation when the impending death of Mona's brother Kello from AIDS pushes him to urge Mona to recover their first home — the Trinidad family property which had been sold by Da-Da.

Thus migration complicates the notion of 'home' as some family members are left in Trinidad while new ones are born in Canada; and Horace Baddall, Canadian-born son of the notorious philanderer Uncle Baddall and a French Canadian woman can, without any real knowledge of his Trinidad 'home', yield to fantasy and seriously venture on a wild, imaginary idea of prospecting for Indian (Rajput) treasure there. Horace's fantasy perfectly matches Salman Rushdie's idea of 'imaginary homelands' among Indian immigrants who, feeling they cannot reclaim what they have lost by leaving India, instead 'create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind' (Rushdie 10).

Espinete conjures impressive coherence out of multiple strands connected with Mona's extended family and the search both for her family's property and the songs her Indian great-grandmother used to sing. The plot, which is circular, begins with Gainder's flight from India and ends with discovery of her songs in Trinidad, and celebrates the inherent, if suppressed, spirit of independence in women. This, after all, is the driving force in *Bridge* — exposure of strategies such as racism, sexism and classism used to prevent Indian-Trinidadian women from reaching their full potential.

At the same time, Espinete creates a protagonist — Mona — whose energy, independence and assertiveness contrast sharply with the submissiveness of heroines in the work of earlier male novelists. To some extent, the contrast may be explained by the stronger influence of indenture on these earlier heroines during the 1940s and '50s for, by the 1960s and '70s, when Mona grows up, long after the demise of indenture in 1917 and independence in 1962, sexual liberation was in the air as a worldwide movement. It also validates Espinete's portrayal of revolutionary energy and iconoclastic ambition in Mona when we consider that similar qualities must have been needed by the current Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago — Kamala Persad-Bissessar — in her struggle against patriarchal and historical precedent, to become the first female head of her nation in 2010.

Although Espinete's *Bridge* is a flagship work of sexual liberation in Caribbean literature, hints of female

homosexuality appear in only one relationship. Where *Bridge* is less explicit about homosexuality among Indian-Trinidadian women, the fiction of Shani Mootoo blazes a pioneering trail on the subject. Born in Ireland of Indian-Trinidadian parents in 1958, Mootoo grew up in Trinidad and in 1977 migrated to Canada, where she still lives. She has so far produced one volume of poems, three novels and a volume of stories, *Out on Main Street*, which was her first book.

Like Espinete, Mootoo's fiction examines themes of race, colour, sexuality, class, identity and nationality among Indian-Trinidadians. Some stories in *Out on Main Street* look specifically at the experience of female Indian-Trinidadian immigrants in Canada. 'Sushila's Bhakti', for example, considers strains and stresses felt by Sushila, an Indian-Trinidadian immigrant living in Vancouver, trying to make a career as a painter. Sushila's displacement from Trinidad and cultural mixing in Vancouver slowly induce in her a feeling of floating aimlessly, as if she has lost the solid sense of belonging she once had in Trinidad.

Because of her brown skin, Sushila is regarded as an Indian in Vancouver; but she speaks no Indian language and feels alienated when mistaken for one of numerous subcontinental migrants who also live in Vancouver and speak Indian languages among themselves. As someone who neither observes Hindu rituals nor wears Indian clothes there is nothing, except skin colour, that identifies Sushila as Indian, and the result intensifies her sense of appearing mysterious, nondescript, as neither a proper Indian immigrant nor a proper (white) Canadian. Her professional life too is problematic; after an exhibition of her work, Canadian art critics don't know quite what to make of her paintings and politely murmur vague, complimentary clichés about authenticity. Overwhelmed by sheer frustration, Sushila seeks refuge in recollecting familiar images of Trinidadian street festivals like *hosay* and *phagwa* which may be Indian in origin, but are now transformed by a century and a half of creolisation in Trinidad. Emigration = exile = homelessness. Sushila's reactions are part of the diasporic experience already seen in Espinete's *Mona* and members of her extended family living in Canada.

In Mootoo's first novel, *Cereus Blooms at Night*, bizarre events unfold in a town ironically named 'Paradise' on the imaginary island of Lantanacamera — a stand-in for Trinidad. Similarly, the action of her second novel *He Drown She in the Sea* takes place on another fictional island, Guanagaspar. These fictional settings hint at a search for 'home' by people from the postcolonial Caribbean driven by a combination of economic and ethnic grievances to seek better living conditions and a more stable nationality abroad. Mootoo's *Cereus*, however, is mostly concerned with ambivalent or fluid sexuality, while *He Drown She* concentrates on classism and nationality.

In *Cereus* Chandin Ramchandin, an alcoholic, commits incest regularly with his daughters while his wife escapes abroad with her female, white missionary lover. One character, Ambrosia, who is born a girl, changes her sexual identity to become a boy. Meanwhile, in *He Drown She* the central event — the attempted drowning of Rose by her husband Shem Bihar — is prompted by Rose's sexual infidelity and its adverse implication for Shem's social status as Attorney General of Guanagaspar. (In *Bridge*, Mona similarly complains about her

black, Chinese and mixed blood school friends being able to socialise more freely than her because they are more urbanised or creolised and less hidebound by ancestral customs.) To cap it all, true to Mootoo's penchant for magic realism, Ambrosia's transformation and the escape of Rose and her lover by boat from Guanagaspar are presented as magical events that lift ordinary characters and happenings out of the limiting blandness of everyday existence into an imaginary realm of happiness, hope and self-fulfilment; Ambrosia is happier as a boy named Otoh, whilst Rose and her lover hope to find refuge and freedom elsewhere.

In *Valmiki's Daughter*, Mootoo's fourth novel, the Trinidadian locale of a Mootoo novel is acknowledged by name for the first time and its landscape, vegetation, trees, flowers, animals etc fulsomely celebrated in brilliant, visual terms which remind us that, in addition to her fiction and poetry, Mootoo is also a visual artist and videographer. Her description of San Fernando, for instance, the southern Trinidadian town, takes up most of a twenty-page-long chapter that furnishes the most complete pen portrait of a West Indian town in imaginative literature — equal in literary merit to Dickens's pen pictures of London, although Mootoo's San Fernando, with its uniquely Caribbean physical contours and tropical colour and variety, could not be more different from Dickens's murky, clogged and fogged up London:

Bleachers encircle the park. Behind them is the foot of the San Fernando Hill, a once magnificent natural promontory and wildlife paradise in the heart of the town, a forest of bamboo, silk cotton, poui, and flamboyant, a birdwatcher's haven, a reptile sanctuary, a nature lover's refuge, disfigured now with treeless trails that ensnare it, tractors and trucks crawling up and down its raw bruised sides, moving whole cubic acres of its white bedrock daily, its most perfect beauty pulverized for a most singular profit. (*Valmiki* 24)

The chief protagonists in *Valmiki's Daughter* consist of Valmiki Krishnu, his family and their social circle — all Indian-Trinidadians, who live in San Fernando. But the difference could not be greater between a simple peasant like Selvon's Tiger or a lowly, rural shopkeeper like Kamla's father in *Butterfly* and Valmiki's associates. The latter are educated, Hindu professionals, top entrepreneurs and businessmen rolling in wealth and social prestige. To these élite Indian-Trinidadians, their indentured origins are either too distant a memory or hauntingly remembered as a guilty stain; and instead of the genuine ambition of Tiger or the warm domesticity of Kamla's home, the lives of Valmiki and his friends are riddled with shallow values of self-indulgence, ostentation and deceptive respectability that, ironically, harbour the very racism and classism of which their forebears, as 'coolies', were once victims.

Valmiki, a medical doctor, is bisexual and neglects physical relations with his wife in favour of a sexual affair with Saul, a working-class African-Trinidadian. With the cunning connivance of his secretary, Valmiki also sleeps with white, female patients and is strongly attracted to Anick, a French-Canadian woman who is married to the son of one of his best friends. On top of all that, Anick has a love affair with Valmiki's bisexual daughter Viveka, whose portrait as a young woman,

struggling against the ostensibly puritanical values of her hypocritical society, is both sensitive and touching. Part of Viveka's appeal is that she is completely unaffected by the shallowness, hypocrisy, racism or classism around her — values in which her mother Diveka is steeped.

Although Persaud, Espinet and Mootoo consider a host of themes, from race, class, ethnicity and nationality to diasporic concerns about exile and homelessness, only Persaud, albeit using an historical Indian milieu, writes directly about India. Not to say that Espinet and Mootoo neglect India as the historical origin of Indians in the Caribbean — any more than African-Trinidadian authors like Earl Lovelace or Dionne Brand neglect Africa in their fiction — but they also acknowledge that creolisation is fundamental, both for Indians and Africans in the Caribbean.

Ariti Jankie's *Hush! Don't Cry* is a rare example of fiction on contemporary India by an Indian-Trinidadian author. Jankie, who was born in Trinidad in 1954, worked as a journalist in Trinidad, England and India and has written two other books, one a collection of stories and another a non-fiction work. In *Hush! Don't Cry* Meera Roopnarine marries Kapil, an Indian doctor who repeatedly assaults her in Trinidad and has affairs with local Trinidadian women, one of whom dies from an attempted abortion performed by Kapil himself. This prompts the couple to move to India where, in addition to her husband, Meera is sadistically persecuted by Kapil's family. There are numerous separations and reconciliations, but the couple's marriage seems predestined to failure. Rather than predestination, however, the rapid and contradictory changes in the novel suggest that *Hush! Don't Cry* is more a work of journalistic documentation, inspired partly by topical reports of bride burning and dowry deaths in India and partly by a desire to exorcise Indo-centricity — unrealistic adulation of India and Indian culture by Indian-Trinidadians. Jankie's 'Introduction', for example, speaks of 'the common plight of a number of young [Indian-Trinidadian] girls seduced into marriage by lofty dreams while romancing their roots' (*Hush!* iv).

The main achievement of *Hush! Don't Cry* is its documentation of male violence towards women in India. Nor is it male violence only, since Kapil's female relatives join in Meera's persecution in India. This at least provides a context for the fury of Espinet's crusade against violence from Indian-Trinidadian men towards their women, who suffer more from cutlass attacks than any other community in Trinidad (and Guyana). But, as already mentioned, even if a tradition of sexist violence against women was brought from India to the Caribbean, it too has been creolised by an inherently oppressive cultural ethos inherited from slavery/indenture.

Creolisation and its twin, nationality, also appear in *Like Heaven* by Niala Maharaj, an Indian-Trinidadian who studied creative writing in the USA and worked as a journalist and communications consultant before settling in Amsterdam. The title of *Like Heaven*, her only novel, is part of a quotation from Derek Walcott's Nobel lecture 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory' which offers a sober meditation on Caribbean nationality and appears as an epigraph to the novel.

Walcott describes Port of Spain, capital city of Trinidad and Tobago, as 'A downtown babel of shop signs and streets, mongrelized, polyglot, a ferment without history, like heaven' ('Antilles' 71). His description is correct in so far as the West

Indian population consists of descendants of people from multiple cultures from Africa, Asia, Europe and the Middle East, who are continuously creolised by living together in loose association without having yet established a history of collective action as a single nation. To drive home this point, a second quotation from the same lecture appears as an epigraph to Book Two of the novel, claiming that the 'basis of Antillean experience' is 'this shipwreck of fragments, these echoes, these partially remembered customs' that 'are not decayed but strong' (Walcott, 'Antilles' 70). What seems problematic is that, despite acknowledging fragmentation and ferment as basic aspects of Caribbean experience, Walcott also detects positive qualities — 'heaven' in the first quotation and strength in the second.

Maharaj's hero in *Like Heaven*, Ved Prakash Saran, displays dedicated entrepreneurial energy and insatiable ambition in building a huge business empire in northern Trinidad. He also acquires enormous wealth for his extended family and, through his success, inspires his ethnic group — Indian-Trinidadians — to gain political power. This political triumph bears a strong resemblance, in its ethnic make-up and timing, to the victory by Basdeo Panday's party, the United Democratic Congress (UNC) in Trinidad and Tobago in 1995. But Ved's triumph is pyrrhic, gained at the expense of intense turmoil in his personal life and tragic division in his family. Ved's narrative, composed seventeen years after events in the novel, betrays awareness of the futility of his commercial success and remorse over ruptured relations with his wife Anjani (Anji), who divorces him after a tormented marriage. Anji is later murdered by someone apparently hired by members of Ved's family, although not before she bitterly accuses Ved of blind greed, racism and sexism.

What sustains *Like Heaven* is not only Anji's eloquent and idealistic insight into the rise and fall of Ved's career, but the narrative of the novel itself with its captivating humour, sardonic wit and barbed, vernacular speech from eccentric characters like the narrator's mother Ma, whose comments, for example, on the Catholic church in Trinidad are typical: 'Once they [the Catholic church] smell money, they will excommunicate Lucifer himself to get a share of it' (Maharaj 184). Ethnic fragmentation is rife, expressed through the very language of the novel in which African-Trinidadians are sometimes described as 'niggers', and Ved's affair with one of his African-Trinidadian employees is marked by strong words and physical injury. Nor does the political triumph of one ethnic group over another qualify as the democratic verdict of a genuine nation.

The action of *Like Heaven* implies that Trinidad is a sea of crime, corruption and chaos, and corroborates Walcott's previous description of the island as a 'shipwreck of fragments'. This judgment is boosted by a quotation from Walcott's poem 'The Spoiler's Return' that forms the epigraph to Book Three of the novel: 'Hell is a city much like Port of Spain' (Maharaj 344). Walcott's comparison of Port of Spain to both heaven and hell seems contradictory or paradoxical. So is Maharaj's choice of 'Like Heaven' for the title of her novel about a society stewing in corrupt and lawless ethics. But when Ved defends his spectacular business success by claiming 'I was a serious contributor to society, not a volatile hooligan' (Maharaj 397), he ironically confirms the

hooliganism of his carnival culture. For Ved's success is not his whole story. Others have made important contributions to his career, notably Nerissa, whose patient loyalty and selfless service from the very start sustain Ved through testing moments, and are finally rewarded when Ved marries her. Anji, meanwhile, reminds Ved of moral values which he ignores and for which she pays the ultimate sacrifice. Thus the Caribbean context considered by Walcott and Maharaj is mixed, partly heavenly and partly hellish — truly paradoxical.

The final author considered in this essay, Lelawatee Manoo-Rahming, has so far written two volumes of poems, *Curry Flavour* and *Immortelle and Bhandaraa Poems*. Although born in Trinidad, Manoo-Rahming now lives in the Bahamas, where she also writes stories and essays and produces sculpture, drawing and painting. Concern with identity/nationality is a prominent theme in Manoo-Rahming's poems which probe her role as a Hindu woman who is born of Indian parents in the Caribbean, but feels cut off from contact with her ancestral homeland. In 'Footsteps in this Land', for instance, the stark plight of the persona is laid bare: 'I am alone/without a story/in this land/where my children/refuse to be born//in this land/where I have/no umbilical cord' (Manoo-Rahming, *Curry Flavour* 23). The persona's umbilical connection is with India and painful separation leads her to implore the indigenous Caribbean goddess Atabeyra, 'Great Mother of the Caribbean Sea/Goddess of childbirth', to build a tunnel through which her children can cross and bring her a cry, a footstep, even a voice from 'my ancestral spirits/in that faraway land/in the east' (*Curry Flavour* 24). In some poems, the persona appeals for help from other indigenous Caribbean deities, for example, the sea goddess Coatrische, suggesting that the poet's original Indian culture has been greatly modified (creolised) by her family's long residence in the Caribbean.

Evidence of this modification is seen in poems which celebrate such features as Caribbean music, food or the sheer beauty of the physical landscape. For example, Manoo-Rahming's first volume has an Indian-centred title, *Curry Flavour*, but her second — *Immortelle and Bhandaraa Poems* — mixes the unmistakably Caribbean immortelle tree, formerly planted as a shade tree in cocoa plantations in colonial Trinidad and Tobago, with the Hindi word 'bhandaraa', a Hindu ceremony or ritual performed twelve or thirteen days after someone's death.

The title poem 'Immortelle' is dedicated to the memory of calypsonian Ras Shorty, aka Garfield Blackman, who invented a new genre of music, 'SOCAH' (more commonly 'soca'), which blends Indian music and musical instruments with African rhythms. The female Indian-Trinidadian persona in the poem openly confesses her love for soca: 'I emerged black/Hungry for your SOCAH/Music, your blending/Of India and Africa' (*Immortelle* 35). Such is the persona's hunger that she introduces both a religious and sexual element in direct address to the calypsonian: 'Lord Shorty I wanted to be/Your Indrani — your East Indian Chick/To follow you into Piparo Forest/Like Sita accompanying Rama/Into his forested banishment' (ibid). The persona elevates Ras Shorty to the status of the Hindu god Rama, while she becomes his divine consort. A later stanza has the persona asking Shorty to dress her naked body in 'ropes and ropes/Of your greying

dreadlocks' (*Immortelle* 36). The persona betrays total devotion by standing naked before Shorty, pretending to protect her modesty, although she notes with sly wit and titillating sexual innuendo: 'I was no celibate Sita/You were no Rama' (ibid). Other poems celebrate musicians including the Indian-Trinidadian Sundar Popo, who was the leading singer of Hindi songs with a fast rhythmic beat. In 'Bhandaaraa Puja for Sundar Popo Uncle', also celebrating diversity and mixing, the persona thanks Sundar Popo for 'Mixing Bhojpuri Hindi and creole' (*Immortelle* 32).

Signs of Manoo-Rahming's practical, almost clinical approach to female sexuality have already appeared in quotations from her poem on Ras Shorty. There is little emotion when she writes explicitly and fearlessly about women's bodies or their role in the world. For example, in 'Vaginal Scan' in *Immortelle*, the persona reacts to being examined by a female doctor, but it is impersonal and clinical. 'My Coontie' is less so, however, when the vagina rather playfully objects to being called titillating names like 'coochie, cave, slit or clit' (*Immortelle* 89) and demands 'I am Vagina/ And I just want to be called/By my right name!' (ibid). Pleasure in sexual activity is celebrated in many poems, always with equal participation from men and women. Equality is not explicitly asserted, rather, it is implied in the complementary roles played by both sexes, one with the other. Five sections in her volume *Immortelle* are each dedicated to a goddess, the fifth being the Hindu Shakti, which is described as the concept or personification of divine feminine creative power, sometimes referred to as 'The Great Divine Mother' in Hinduism. Yet Shakti 'surrounds and animates the energy of the male god' (*Immortelle* 95), suggesting less a feminist than a womanist approach that stresses sexual equality within a context of complementary relations between male and female.

The revolutionary nature of the works discussed in this essay is obvious; already mentioned are timid and uncertain Indian-Trinidadian literary heroines who, as largely secondary characters, meekly fulfil dutiful, martyr-like service to husband, home and family. Not only are the women characters discussed in this essay primary or leading protagonists, they are also mostly university-educated, independent professionals invented by authors who are beneficiaries of a modern movement of women's liberation that originated in the

1950s and '60s. Independent, ambitious and self-motivating female Indian-Trinidadian characters like Mona Singh, Viveka Krishnu or Anji Gopaul are a new breed. The family structures of childcare or conventions of work in which these modern women characters can flourish may not have emerged as yet, which is why Viveka's marriage is unlikely to last and Anji is first divorced, then murdered. No doubt the unselfish caring of characters like Nerissa, and complementarity from authors like Persaud and Manoo-Rahming may be part of the future. What the writers discussed in this essay imply, meanwhile, is that Indian-Trinidadian women, both in fiction and real life, have turned over a new leaf.

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