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## Intermarriage, 'Douglas,' Creolization of Indians in Contemporary Guyana: the Rocky Road of Ambiguity and Ambivalence

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This paper is primarily concerned with inter-racial marriages between Indians and Africans in Guyana during the early 1990s. Rivalry and conflict between Indians and Africans have long provided the fault lines of political, economic, social and cultural tensions. Local criticism of intermarriage that it only aggravates racial antagonism indicates just how rocky is the road to social harmony and integration. But intermarriage therefore can serve as a litmus test for assessing the processes of pluralism and creolization. Intermarriage may provide a barometer to measure the solidarity of the nation as a whole.

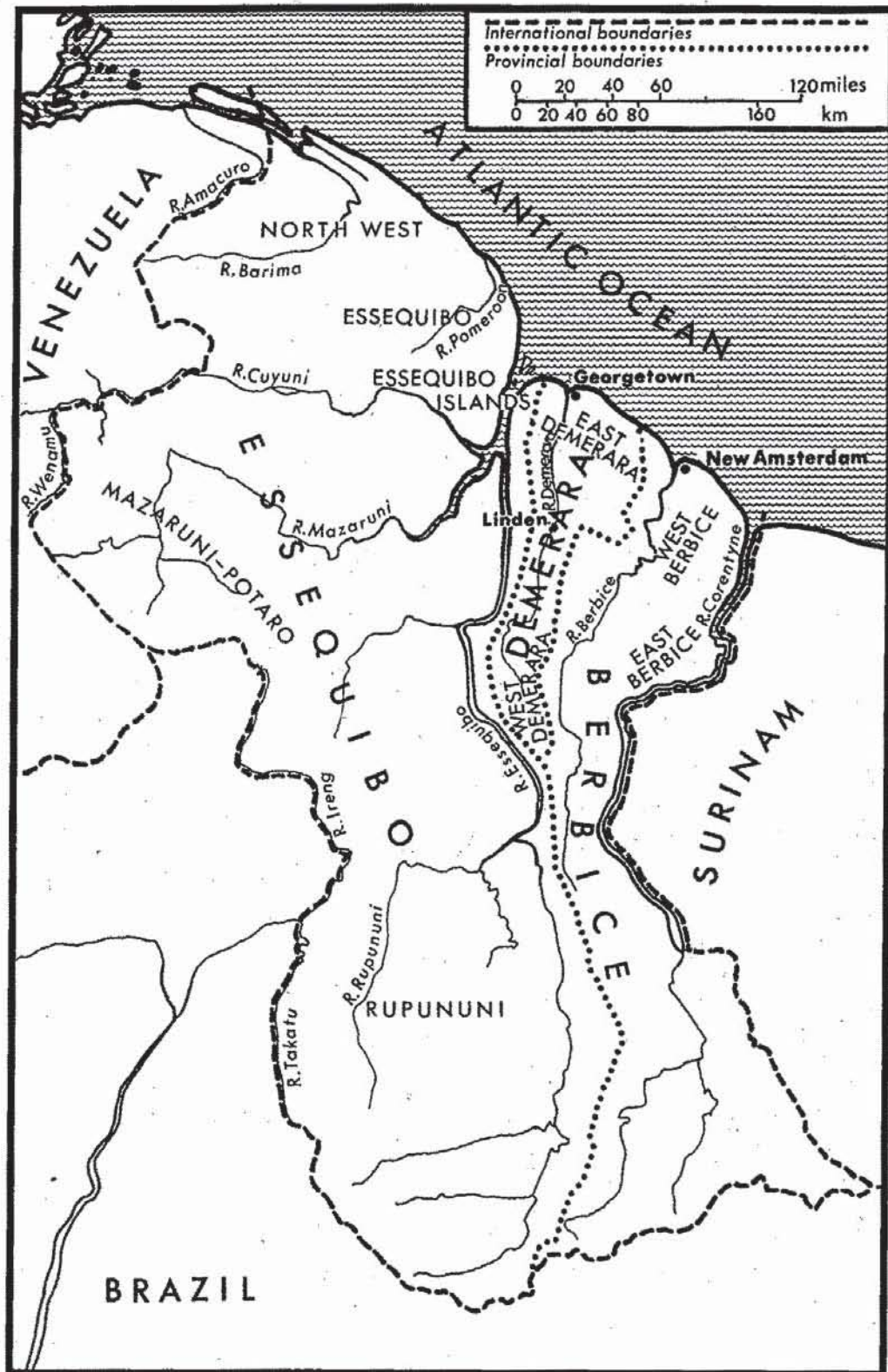
Guyana has witnessed some of the worst examples of ethnic conflict over the last 50 years, notably the riots of the early 1960s. Nevertheless intermarriage and the number of 'douglas' (the offspring of such unions) have been increasing, at least from the 1970s. New forms of cultural and social identity are developing among Indians generally processes which we can conveniently call nativization and creolization. But these processes should not all be seen as necessarily smooth, inevitable or even desirable. This paper will discuss some of the difficult issues involved.

Already 'creolized' but race-conscious Indians feel that cultural diversity and pluralism can be successful goals without the amalgamation of ethnic cultures towards a seemingly unified 'Guyanese' culture. To them, intermarriage might serve to increase tension within a process of creolization from a variety of ethnic streams, towards the formation of an imagined Guyanese culture. Apparent economic and political challenges can be met not by biological assimilation and amalgamation but by a process of ethnic pluralism. There thus exists a wide spectrum of opinions about creolization, and the future outlook seems vague.

**Keywords:** intermarriage, *douglas*, creolization, racial conflicts, Guyana

### 1. THE CHALLENGES OF INTERMARRIAGE

Guyana is one of the most racially/ethnically divided countries in the Caribbean, and racial conflicts have caused serious disturbances. Colonial Guiana's nature as a plantation economy precluded the development of a common identity as 'Guyanese'



*Modern Guyana*



until the lead-up to independence in 1966.<sup>1</sup> Often called 'land of six peoples' (Swan 1957),<sup>2</sup> Guyana has seen the most acute racial antagonisms between the two major ethnic groups, '(East) Indians'<sup>3</sup> and 'Africans' (Blacks).<sup>4,5</sup> The most recent data shows that out of a total population of about 837,000, 'Indians' comprise 51%, and the second major group 'Africans' (blacks or Creoles) comprise 43%, thus together totalling well over 90 % (1998 UN).<sup>6</sup> The remainder are categorized as follows: 'Whites' (mainly of Dutch and British origin), Portuguese (mainly from Madeira and other dependent islands), Chinese, Amerindians (Akawaio, Patamona, Arekuna, Makusi, Waiwai, Wapisiana), and 'Mixed Races'.<sup>7</sup> Although such evidently 'racial' categories imply distinctive differences, they function more as cultural than physical boundaries since 'cross-fertilization' has blurred the physical boundaries. Thus local 'racial' categories have been synonymous with ethnic terms. The set of 6 primary categories used in the census are those which residents normally also use in general conversation.<sup>8</sup> The census relies on self-assessment by each citizen or family head. Under the emic term 'race' therefore, there is a system of cultural and social segregation, and 'race' assigns membership of a community. Not many people identify themselves as 'Mixed Race,' including the offspring of children from African-Indian unions called 'douglas.' But there is no sense of a 'Mixed Race' community.

However notorious racial/ethnic tensions have actually been, in conversation

<sup>1</sup> Here I use 'Guyana' meaning the post-independent nation, and 'Guiana' meaning the colonial.

<sup>2</sup> There are some other expressions about Guyana's multiracial/multiethnic composition, such as 'land of many peoples' (Premdas 1996, 41).

<sup>3</sup> In contemporary Guyana 'Indians' in general refers to those whose ancestors came from India as indentured labourers and are sometimes referred as 'East Indians' to distinguish them from the natives generally called 'Amerindians.' There are also recent Indian immigrants and residents, mainly in the business world. They are called 'Indian Nationals' and would not want to be mistaken as locals. Many of them further distinguish themselves by claiming Aryan ancestry.

<sup>4</sup> 'Africans' can be used interchangeably with 'Blacks' in the vernacular and 'Creoles' or 'Afro/Black Creoles' in literary form. 'Blacks' and 'Creoles' can be written with small letters. In Guyana, but not in Jamaica and some other Caribbean societies, 'Negro' may also be used without automatically implying derogatory connotations.

<sup>5</sup> In this paper for the sake of convenience I just use 'Indians' and 'Africans' without single quotation marks for Guyanese Indians and Africans.

<sup>6</sup> Migrations from the Caribbean particularly to Europe (in case of the British Caribbean, to the U.K.), the U.S.A. and Canada have characterized many Caribbean societies. It is said nearly half the Guyanese citizens live outside of the country. Particularly during the Burnhamite regime, many Indians with wealth, technology and higher education left the country out of sheer terror.

<sup>7</sup> According to the 1980 census, out of a total of just under 760,000, Indians comprise 51.38% (389,760), Africans 30.49% (231,330), Mixed 11.04 % (83,763), Amerindian 5.20% (39,867), Portuguese 0.004% (2975), Chinese 0.003% (1842), Others (European other than Portuguese, Syrian, Lebanese, etc.) 1.20% (9082). So Africans and Indians together composed 82%.



with outsiders, Guyanese tend to emphasize that the different racial/ethnic groups live harmoniously alongside each other and cooperate in many ways. They may point out how everybody appreciates cultural diversity and the amalgamation or creolization of Guyana's cultural streams. People may even describe general tolerance towards biological mixing, intermarriage and the growing mixed population, and cite the Guyanese national motto—'One People, One Nation, One Destiny.' Yet reality still falls far short of a truly peaceful and integrated multi-racial/ethnic nation. The apparent acceptance shown towards intermarriage just described is largely simple politeness and for show. People's real feelings and opinions may be quite the opposite.

Guyana's ethnic composition is unique in the Caribbean. Unlike most Caribbean societies, where Africans are in the majority, in Guyana Indians outnumber Africans.<sup>9</sup> This has provoked bitter ethnic rivalry and competition in pursuit of power; Africans have insisted on their right to rule the post-colonial nation while Indians, though relative newcomers, have begun to speak out about their rights as the majority.

Until the historic general elections in October 1992, most Indians had long felt oppressed, intimidated, and excluded from the mainstream creole society unless they showed willingness to be assimilated into Afro-creole culture. There remains a feeling of being the minority in cultural representation and social status at the national level. During the colonial period, Indians were regarded as mere indentured labourers and their descendants remained disfavoured. Their traditional marriage customs were treated with disrespect and were not legally recognized. Under the 28 years of PNC (People's National Congress) government, from 1964 to 1992, Africans controlled most of public life. This was especially so during the rule of President Linden F. Burnham, from 1964 till his death in 1985. But the 1992 election brought victory for the Indian based People's Progressive Party (PPP) with the Civic Movement.

Contemporary Indian-African marriage may provoke more serious repercussions among Indians, especially Hindus than among Africans, because Indians generally think it triggers a profound sense of anomaly and transgression. Although there has

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<sup>8</sup> Most people will readily identify with only one of these six categories even though they come from mixed ancestry. Those clearly unidentifiable or "really clearly mixed" may say they are "Mixed Races": for example, those first generation of mixed parentage and those whose physical features show distinctive traits from not one or two but several races. However, the same person may identify her/himself differently according to the particular context and whom they are talking with. So ethnic/racial identity in contemporary Guyana is a relative frame of reference and can be chosen according to social climate, personal preference and of course strategic sensibilities.

<sup>9</sup> The period between 1891 and 1911 was a turning point for Guyana since the ratio between Africans and Indians was reversed. In 1891, Indians formed 37.85%, and Africans 41.05% of the population. But in 1911, Indians turned out to be 42.74%, and Africans only 39.01%. Between 1891 and 1968, Indians increased from 37.85% to 50.41% of the population, whilst Africans decreased from 41.05% to 31.09%.



been a history of unions between Indians and Africans, intermarriage nevertheless is normally regarded as a social offence and the betrayal of one's kin and community however successful the marriage may be in reality. It is worse than crossing religious and/or sectarian boundaries, which albeit troublesome has occurred mostly within the Indian community. Such are the negative aspects of intermarriage with Africans that even 'progressive' Indians may express tolerance and understanding towards the cases of other Indians, but will not risk disclosing any relevant, personal experience.

It is said that the number of intermarriages and the size of mixed populations has increased particularly since the 1970s. However, my fieldwork revealed that such couples still have to overcome enormous obstacles of bias, stigma, harassment and even threats to their lives. It is very important to realize that all Indians and Africans recognize the existence of this 'bottom line' in their relationships together. As a result, intermarriage is a very delicate and difficult zone to tackle, but reconciliation of the many touchy issues is undoubtedly vital for the peaceful development of the nation.

In this paper, I shall firstly explain briefly the historical background of Indian-African intermarriage. Secondly I shall try to elucidate how contemporary inter-racial conflict has affected intermarriage with Africans from Indian points of view, based on my fieldwork in 1991 and 1992. Thirdly, I will touch on issues about *douglas* (offspring of Indians and other races, especially Africans), and their attitudes towards their parents' racial groups and personal identity formation. Lastly, I will probe into the more generalized process of creolization among Indians and cultural pluralism through the lens of intermarriage and the positioning of *douglas*. These elements should provide a crucial barometer or litmus test to measure the real nature of inter-racial relationships and hence the solidarity of the nation.

## 2. BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF INTERMARRIAGE AND 'SHACK-UP' WITH AFRICANS IN GUYANA<sup>10</sup>

After the abolition of slavery in 1834, an indenture system was introduced to replen-

<sup>10</sup> According to Danns and Persaud (1988), in 1987, out of a total of 497,610 persons who were 14 years and over (the legal minimum age of marriage for females albeit with the parental consent), 36.7% were legally married, 11 % had common law unions, 4.2% visiting relationships, 5.8% widowed, 7.3% divorced, and 34.9% single. In other words, 52% were involved in some form of conjugal relationship. Of those, 70.7% were legally married, 21% were in common law unions and 8.1% in visiting relationships. Though the figures suggest "a greater preference for legal marriages," this does not necessarily mean the stability of the marital relationships nor the degree of "happiness" or the quality of their marriage life is high. To resolve these issues, we must also consider the relatively high rate of separation, divorce, re-marriage, elopement, desertion, suicide, marital and domestic conflict and other problems including abuse and violence. The incidence of all these is higher among the Indians who seem to have emphasized traditional family values and family-oriented ties.



ish the falling labour force on sugar estates in the British Caribbean. Mainly under this so called "new system of slavery" (Tinker 1974), from 1838 to 1917, a total number of 238,909 Indians (Laurence 1994, 522-523; Cross 1996, 17-18)<sup>11</sup> came to British Guiana. The majority were Hindu,<sup>12</sup> but they came from different geographical, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds, albeit mainly from the present day Uttar Pradesh and its surrounding areas. Linguistic creolization began fairly early; Bhojipuri soon became their *lingua franca* and creole plantation English also needed to be learned. As the main purpose of Indian immigration was purely economic, mature men were most in demand.

The entire colony was built on a plantation economy and from the beginning an imbalanced sex ratio was a feature of all ethnic groups, except the Portuguese.<sup>13</sup> The Indians in British Guiana were no exception. Especially in the early years, the colonial government's agents in the Caribbean would embark as few women as possible to maximize efficiency and profit. The first group of indentured labourers included only 5 women out of 249.<sup>14</sup> However, this quickly led to problems and soon rules established the minimum ratio of women, for instance 12 out of 100 men in 1844, and after 1870, 40 (Nath 1970, 134-144).<sup>15</sup> Among those taken to the colony of British Guiana in 1851, females were as low as 11.3 % of the males (Moore 1987, 161).

The stark shortage of women caused serious unrest and disturbances among men. The competition for the small number of available women was severe. Cases of more than two men sharing one woman were not infrequent. Jealousy and fights due to wife stealing and adultery escalated, and there was terrible abuse of women, even murder, on top of distrust and strife among men. Seeing these grave problems among the

<sup>11</sup> The indenture system began in 1838 and was formally ended in 1917. In some years no Indians were brought. For the annual number of importation of Indians, see Laurence 1994, 522-523; Cross 1996, 17. Nath has the figures of both sexes and children, with mortality figures, and the name of the plantations they were sent to, especially for the first voyages (Nath 1970, 10-11, 20-21): Dabydeen and Samaroo also quote the same figure as Cross in their Introduction to their edited book (Dabydeen & Samaroo 1996, 1). Premdas puts the total figures of Indian indentured labourers as 238,960 (Premdas 1996, 42)

<sup>12</sup> As for religion: Christian 57%, Hindu 33%, Islam 9%, Others 1%. The figures on religious affiliation according to racial and ethnic identity are not available. It is clear that East Indians are predominant among the Moslems.

<sup>13</sup> Here I do not count Amerindians. For the Portuguese sex ratio, see Moore 1987, 157

<sup>14</sup> In 1838, another vessel brought 152 Indians, and 6 were women. (Nath 1970, 11)

<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless the average between 1845 and 1870 was 32, and it was only after 1870, that the rule was generally observed (Nath 1970, 134-144). Among those taken to British Guiana in 1851, females were as low as 11.3% of the males (Moore 1987, 161). With the efforts of the imperial government to increase the importation of females (a minimum of 33 per hundred males in 1856, and 40 in 1868) and the high proportion of females born on the estate, "the overall proportion of Indian females resident on the plantations improved from 27.33 per hundred males in 1851 to 58 in 1891" (*Ibid.*, 162).



Indians, the Colonial Government enforced a law to punish severely "harbouring another's wife." However, even this did not seem to have prevented the problems from worsening.<sup>16</sup> Suicide was not uncommon due to male-female troubles.<sup>17</sup>

Elopement remained a common alternative. Literature suggests that after cutting all ties with their home community, some eloped couples could enjoy the challenge of building a new life in a new community, and might even look forward to reconciliation with their natal household members, particularly after their children were born. However, recent cases, and my own fieldwork, fail to show much evidence of toleration, and indeed there have been quite a few cases that such females were taken back by their parents or relatives even many years later.

Colonial authorities did not interfere in Indians' private matters unless they involved violence or disturbed the plantation system. Hence much of Indian traditional culture and practices were tolerated by the establishment, even though it gave a low priority to what Indians might consider appropriate and essential. Teenage wives on the estates were normal, and they procreated Indian population satisfactorily,<sup>18</sup> especially after 1946, the final year of a campaign to eradicate malaria which had been rampant on the estates. Fertility has been considered to be a sign of blessing.<sup>19</sup> Indian girls in general are still the youngest of all ethnic groups to enter marriage.

It is important to note how the scarcity of women changed some crucial aspects of Indian ideas and customs of marriage and the position of women in their family and society. It elevated their value in general and affected *satee*, child marriage, dowry, etc.<sup>20</sup> *Satee* disappeared, though a widow must still show great respect for her late

<sup>16</sup> This seems to have had a lot to do with the immoral attitudes of ruling class men as well. "Nor was the greatly resented practice by plantation managers and overseers of cohabiting with the wives and daughters of immigrants an infrequent occurrence." (Moore 1987, 171)

<sup>17</sup> Suicide is still one of the commonest ways among Indians to protest and resist the awkward and difficult situation regardless of gender and age. In 1992, I witnessed the funeral of a middle aged Indian man who had killed himself because of female troubles, leaving his wife and children with immense embarrassment. I often heard during my fieldwork how easy it seemed for many Indians to commit suicide. In 1918, Guiana/Guyana, with females comprising 39.6% of the population, had the lowest suicide rate among the British colonies: 100 per million. Trinidad, with 35% females came second with 406 per million, and Jamaica, with 41% female, came third with 396 per million (Nath 1970, 143).

<sup>18</sup> According to some of my interviewees, the older generation, i.e. roughly those born before the second World War usually had more than 10 children. On average, 7 to 8 people in a household was common about 35-40 years ago in poor rural areas.

<sup>19</sup> If a wife cannot bear a child, the marriage is most likely to be broken due to pressure from her in-laws and the frequent conflicts this creates. Indian men whose wives cannot have a child by them, tend to have extra-marital relationships which are invariably accepted as "natural" and "understandable" by his families and relatives.

<sup>20</sup> Much of the literature touches on these aspects. See for example Jayawardena (1962; 1963), Nath (1970 [1950]), Moore (1987).



husband, his family and kin. Child marriage continued for some time,<sup>21</sup> but gradually acculturated to governmental and creole norms, and finally ceased.

A father with an eligible daughter could of course achieve influence and power through the strategic selection of her husband. It was not infrequent for parents to break an arrangement, if for instance they were offered a better choice (including a higher bride-price) elsewhere. Double arrangements at the same time by one family were not rare, either. Traditional custom called for caste and religious endogamy, village exogamy and arranged marriage, but new forces for change were growing.

Though customarily engaged and married as children, girls began to show their own preferences for choosing partners. On the estates, women earned wages in their own right, which inevitably strengthened their independence and power. They even took the initiative in separation and divorce for the sake of a new partner.

The original marital status of Indians before they crossed the *kala pani* was recorded on arrival during registration. Several cases of false identification of caste came to light since it was not difficult to take advantage of the opportunity to claim higher status, in the hope that no knowledge of one's native village would be transmitted to the new land.<sup>22</sup> Indians even framed out a new fictive kinship network based on their affinity, en route to the new colonies.

Customary marriage was tolerated but remained despised by the establishment. It would not be recognized legally until 1891, when the new Immigration Ordinance (No. 18) was passed. However, despite evident stigma only a handful of customarily married Indians seem to have applied for legal recognition, because the procedure was complicated, time consuming and expensive to them since it required, for example, travelling a long distance and approaching a magistrate or Christian clergy. Traditional Indian 'bamboo weddings' (especially Hindu marriage) were enjoyed and guaranteed sufficient recognition within the Indian community, whether the officiating *pandits* or *imams* were licensed officially or not. Moreover, since customary marriage was not legal, separation was fairly easy and convenient whereas it was costly to obtain a legal divorce.

There were continuous pressures for conversion to Christianity, and it came hand in hand with school education since most schools were run by missionaries. For a long time most Indians were against conversion and would not send their children to schools for fear that their children would be indoctrinated.<sup>23</sup> Some however soon became aware that conversion and assimilation into creole culture facilitated employment (civil service and teaching especially) and social improvement through education. For those aspiring for upward mobility, Christianity was an important gateway. There appeared therefore an increase of Indian Christians, many of them (Canadian)

<sup>21</sup> During my fieldwork in 1992, I heard how even a 6 year old girl was remembered to have been married to a 10 year old boy though they would not cohabit until much later.

<sup>22</sup> It was said that those who crossed the *kala pani* would lose their natal caste.



Presbyterian. Some did not abandon their traditional religion but continued to be affiliated and participated in important rituals. This has contributed to the syncretism of Caribbean Hindu rituals and beliefs as well as their religious lexicon and architecture.<sup>24</sup>

Both Africans and Indians were regarded as economic and political tools to maintain the plantation system and British colonialism. Therefore for a long time they were not allowed to ally together and unite to form a labour union. It was most convenient for the establishment to divide Africans and Indians, and at times deliberately keep them apart to encourage prejudices and grievances against each other. Collective resistance such as strikes, besides day to day resistance, was not unknown however. Indian-African coalitions for rebellion were consolidated sometimes, in the face of their common enemies. Rodney emphasized the importance of such a "class"-based inter-racial cooperation (Rodney 1981).

It was natural therefore to expect some inter-cultural mixing. An example was a Muslim Mohurram festival to commemorate the martyrdom of two grandsons of the prophet Mohammed.<sup>25</sup> Indians generally were allowed to practice their traditional activities as long as these would not hinder their work. This celebration gradually attracted Africans not only as curious observers but also as participants carrying the *tazzias* in the procession, imitating Indians by 'beating their breasts, uttering the same words and swelling the demonlike yells.' ... In the 1870s there are accounts that Africans organized their own "tadjas" (Moore 1987, 180-181). These even achieved some popularity among Hindus.<sup>26</sup> In the early days, Islam was even regarded as 'a sect of Hinduism' by non-Indians (Bisnauth 1989, 163). Many Indians however feared it would lose its authentic meaning by become a 'national' event.

As cultural contacts and inter-culturation in such religious festivities proceeded, creolization gradually began to spread and become a little more diversified. Such cross-cultural contacts also included gambling, picnics, schooling, etc. Nonetheless inter-racial interaction, especially during the 19th century, remained restricted and did not happen in the central and crucial areas of cultural practices (Moore 1987, 180-

<sup>23</sup> There were schools exclusively for Indians on the estates, and Indian parents preferred not to send their children to village schools to avoid intermingling with Africans. Plantation managers were against Christianization for a long time as it distracted labourers from their work and thus meant economic loss. Even children were regarded as part of the estate labour force. Some missionaries however encouraged labourers to be independent and not automatically submit to the white elite class and its cultural norms. (Moore 1987, 196-202).

<sup>24</sup> Often a Hindu temple is called "church" instead of '*mandir*' in Guyana. In fact church buildings are not infrequently acquired and modified in part or entirely into Hindu temples. Church architecture has also often strongly influenced the design of Hindu temples. See Singh (1980).

<sup>25</sup> Mohurram festival was a *Shia* (*Shi'ite*) celebration, and the orthodox *Sunnis* despised it. In Trinidad, *Sunnis* pleaded to the local government to ban it.



181).<sup>27</sup>

Such social mixings seem to have facilitated more and more cases of local cohabitation, called 'shack-up'/'live home' between Indian men and African women. In 1841, cases of 'shack-up' of Indian men and African women achieved notoriety in Plantation Bellevue.<sup>28</sup> In the same year, even the first legal marriage between an Indian man and an African woman was recorded at Plantation Wales,<sup>29</sup> and also in 1842 two more cases on the predominantly Indian Plantations Highbury<sup>30</sup> and Waterloo.<sup>31,32</sup> However, these were rather exceptions: most Indians there would have preferred to go back to India to bring wives (Moore 1987, 181). Intermarriage was never encouraged nor envied by the majority of Indians. Earlier intermarriages of Indian men and African women were in fact strongly discouraged in both communities.<sup>33</sup>

The norm of marriage and family remained fairly similar to that of 'Mother India,' and Indian men still try to impose patriarchal authority over women. However, during the latter part of the colonial period, women had already begun to have a say in marriage and family matters. They were weary of Indian men's persistent dominance and jealousy coupled with violence and brutality. The post-war climate and the campaign for political independence seem to have encouraged many to seek alternatives. This may explain records of evidently non-problematic inter-racial marriages in the

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<sup>26</sup> The Muslims only comprised 3% of the East Indians and Christians, a mere 0.1%, according to Raymond T. Smith, and the vast majority were Hindus. Such festivities were therefore popular because they allowed participants to share their Indian identity regardless of their religious commitment [Smith 1959, 39], though it was observed that some from the orthodox *Shia* sect were not pleased with the phenomenon.

In addition, some conflicts between the two ethnic groups occurred even during the festival. When writers are against separatists or pluralists, they have a tendency to exaggerate as 'fact' the level of inter-mixing of ethnic and religious groups and the amalgamation or creolization of Indian culture.

<sup>27</sup> Bronkhurst (1888) has vivid descriptions, too.

<sup>28</sup> In East Bank Berbice.

<sup>29</sup> In West Bank Demerara.

<sup>30</sup> In East Bank Berbice.

<sup>31</sup> In West Bank Berbice.

<sup>32</sup> Whether their relationships were amicable or not was not recorded, nor could any further information be found on their children.

<sup>33</sup> Smith (1953) mentioned that in the communities he studied intermarriage with Indians was "practically non-existent" and when an African young woman suggested a desire to be married with an Indian, the reactions she got were of "scandalized disgust." Mixed children, not necessarily of those of African and Indian parentage, were somewhat looked down upon. Similar descriptions can be found in his later books (Smith 1956, 1962).

The recent literature based on fieldwork describes some cases of intermarriage, all as examples of problems. See Williams (1991, esp. Ch. 9).



latter part of the 1950s. According to Smith and Jayawardena, "inter-racial unions... , mainly Negro-Indian and Chinese-Indian... produce[d] no particular hostility from the rest of the community. Neither the parties to the unions nor their offspring suffer[ed] any social disability." (Smith & Jayawardena 1958, 356)<sup>34</sup>. As communities have nurtured their own history and atmosphere of inter-racial relationships and some African communities were tolerant and even welcomed them, it is no wonder that some inter-racial unions could survive and attract less trouble. However, it remained the general rule that inter-racial unions and marriage were denigrated and detested by Indians.

### 3. CONTEMPORARY RACIAL CONFLICTS AND INTERMARRIAGE: INDIANS' POINTS OF VIEW

It seems that contemporary racial tensions and bitterness between Indians and Africans are primarily the result of de-colonization, particularly after the formation of the first Guianese political party, the PPP. Thus political aspects have tended to be intrinsic to inter-racial conflicts. The PPP's membership was at first multi-racial/ethnic and pushed a radical process of de-colonization. It split in 1955, and the beginning of racial politics began with the African leader L. F. Burnham leaving and establishing the PNC with a predominantly African membership, and nurturing "a legacy of racial bitterness" (Hubbard 1969, 79). Since then, the PPP has been known as 'the Indian party,' and the PNC, 'the African party.' The political turmoil period of the 50s and early 60s also witnessed very severe racial violence, which is now generally agreed to have been instigated by the CIA.

Though Indians blame all the racial collisions on Africans, Africans in turn blame them on Indian mobs. Some Indian sources claimed the racial riots started in Wismar, a predominantly African community, and the neighbouring community of Linden,<sup>35</sup> also regarded as an African town. Indians emphasize that they were mobbed and persecuted till virtually all of them needed to leave. Particular versions of an event become normative in each ethnic group. Such stories reveal how terribly each racial group can hurt the other and will not yield to compromise easily. Burning, looting, raping, and killing, inflicted with insatiable anger and hatred, are still vivid memories for many who witnessed the horror of those 'burning years.'

Among those who fled racial violence, according to some informants, some Indian families joined a newly squattered community which was predominantly African.

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<sup>34</sup> Further, they stated "in the middle-class levels of Guianese society Indians behave in very much the same manner as the members of other ethnic groups. The males usually seek wives who will enhance their prestige and assist them in their mobility aspirations, which means that there is higher proportion of inter-racial marriages." (Smith & Jayawardena 1958, 356)

<sup>35</sup> The town was named after the late President Burnham, and is the heart of the bauxite industry, where almost all the employees are Africans.



Both before and after the troubles, it seems there were Indians who were amicable and cooperative and made good friends with Africans, and vice versa. However, even such people might become targets of attack from both sides during riots. Quite a few intermarried or cohabiting couples suffered from their ambiguous situation and many are said to have been victimized.

Although the situation eventually quietened down, it was difficult to forgive and forget. What may have been pre-conceptions of racial stigma were now reinforced and aggravated by real experience. Many people began to racialize various aspects of their lives and national issues whenever they saw political and economic rivalry. Very little justification was needed to explain a problem in a torrent of racial polemic, that could easily turn into violence if a suitable target were near. If independence meant politicizing the masses, it also racialized politics.

Inter-racial marriage, though private and personal in many ways, has inevitable political connotations. This became more obvious especially after the announcement of the 1992 general elections in August. My interviews in the field happened to be during this historical moment, and I needed to pay careful attention to how my interviews related to the general political, economic, and social environment. I suddenly sensed how ordinary citizens, who before had shown little outward political concern, now exhibited heightened sensitivity and tension, and their discussion of their lives took on an increasingly racialized tone.

By the time I could start interviewing intensively in August, 1992, negative attitudes towards racial issues were beginning to dominate, though residents in Greater Georgetown (the capital), racially mixed towns and villages wanted to emphasize their apparent social cordiality and cultural pluralism. When it came to the most intimate inter-racial mixing, that is, intermarriage and "miscegenation", many said they remained still rare and exceptional though the numbers were increasing. Even the members of the most inter-racially mixed political party, Working People's Alliance (WPA, Marxist in origin and still known as the 'Rodney party'<sup>36</sup>), though proud of the racial diversity in its membership and thus feeling free from racial bias, were generally pessimistic about the racial prejudice of ordinary citizens. All the other ethnic groups tend to share the view that both Indians and Africans are highly racist and have long held strong grievances against each other.

On the whole mutual misunderstanding and tension have kept them apart except for trade and other basic economic transactions which brought them together but did

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<sup>36</sup> The headquarters in Georgetown is called 'Rodney House.' Walter Rodney the main founder of the WPA and remained was immensely famous in the Caribbean and Africa especially during the 1960s and the 1970s. The investigation of his assassination was regularly postponed by the PNC government, which was widely rumoured to have been involved with the murder out of fear of Rodney's extremely charismatic popularity among the masses. As Marxists, not only Rodney himself but other prominent leaders have been considered racially 'bias-free' and 'just' regardless of their own racial background.



not allow them to mingle wholeheartedly. Residential separation (but not to the extent of segregation) along racial lines on a street and/or sectional levels in a community, village, town and city remains common, and such areas receive ethnic/racial names. Market places are almost always multiracial/multiethnic venues, except during riots, but interaction between the different races/ethnic groups remains relatively superficial.

Here we may see a pluralist model: people "mix but do not combine" (Furnivall 1948). Inter-culturation and creolization can occur but seem naturally limited. Indians are far from limited to a single point of view, but seem held in an orbit around those who keep themselves to themselves, or those who are actively intolerant and equate Africans with 'monkeys' and 'uncivilized' 'barbarians,' etc.

Even those who are in their 50's and 60's can remember very few examples of intermarriage during their childhood, particularly between Africans and Indians. Some would deny any memory of such unions. Educated Africans tend to hold fairly enlightened views towards racial issues, but if they were forced to recall past days, sophisticated tolerance may be clouded with racist memories, and they come out with remarks such as, "Indians dem were called 'coolies'<sup>37</sup> and regarded as low second class. African dem wouldn't even t'ink of goin' fi dem...."

Once the general elections became of paramount concern for Guyanese, I could see a widening gap between those who sounded positive and optimistic about the future of Indian-African relationships and those who remained negative and pessimistic arguing that, rightly or wrongly, the scars of recent sufferings could not be erased, racial prejudice would trample on basic human rights, and nothing good could come from inter-racial marriage or 'shack-up' and even casual sexual liaisons. Racial/ethnic stereotypes, both positive and negative, had perpetuated people's basic frame of thinking about anything to do with interaction (Shibata 1993; 1998).

It is important as well as interesting to appreciate how Indian-African marriage was not merely racialized but also gendered. From its inception, this kind of marriage basically meant marriage between Indian men and African women as a natural consequence of the imbalance in the sex ratio. However, even among the earlier cases, marriage between Indian women and African men were not unknown, as we have seen already. Indian women had quickly gained a certain independence backed by their economic power and even the power to negotiate and manipulate their sexual and marital partners. There was however a reaction. Patriarchy lay at the core of preserving Indian traditions. The majority of Indian men had not seen such female independence back home, but to their private irritation and horror was added the fear

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<sup>37</sup> According to an African educational officer, sometimes Indians in Guyana have been called "babu," meaning "uneducated," "not bright." However, in India it applies particularly to Bengalis, and doesn't imply "not bright." The latter information I owe to Dr. Nick Allen at the Institute of Social and Cultural Anthropology, Oxford University (private conversation in 1994). This also shows how language creolization took place.



of losing face and authority. There was even dismay that proper or 'authentic' Indian culture might disappear unless traditional family values were reinforced. There was, and remains, a conscious realization that Indian culture and society depended on the control of women.

Instability among Indian labourers due to the lack of women eased of course with the increase of the female Indian population. Emphasis on 'traditional' marriage and family life where the father and husband are the central authority figures became the keystone to uphold Indian integrity and prevent creolization.

In terms of Indian-African marriage and/or sexual relationships, it is the combination of Indian women-African men that seems to be the most provocative and gets on Indian nerves most. Indian women were and are still regarded as the core of procreation of the Indian population, and because of their fertility, the Indians have already surpassed the Africans in number.<sup>38</sup> Both Indians and Africans have been very sensitive and cautious about their population ratio, since in a 'democratic' society the more numerous community would dominate the other. Indians have already acquired the reputation of economic dominance in the country, and Africans have become distressed about also losing their political and social power. Taking an Indian woman into the African community, as a wife, can readily be understood in terms of a strategy to reduce the ability of the Indian community to grow.

Furthermore, though deferent to their menfolk, Indian women in general are guaranteed a role of great importance and responsibility. They are regarded as a collective representation of 'Mother India' and thus a fortress to defend Indianness against other racial/ethnic groups. During indentureship, they were offered the possibility of repatriation, but as the years went by, more and more chose to stay. This however, does not mean they discarded their tie with 'Mother India' totally. Though in a practical sense the majority lost touch with the changing reality of India in general, and their home villages in particular, this fact did not diminish, and in fact probably enhanced, the spread of a mythical vision of India which nowadays underpins the identity of the entire local Indian community. This is why many Indo-Guyanese generally try to see recent Indian merchants or immigrants as compatriots, even though such 'Indian Nationals' often return this welcome with reservation, indifference and even scorn.

Africans likewise underwent a somewhat similar process of romanticizing their African homeland. Often the whole continent was termed 'Mother Africa' and the 'cradle' of ancient civilization (Egypt, Ethiopia, Timbuktu, etc.). African women still

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<sup>38</sup> According to the census figures both in 1891 and 1911, in 1891, Indians were 37.85%, and Africans 41.05%. But in 1911, Indians came to be in the majority, occupying 42.74%, whereas Africans, 39.01%. From 1891 to 1968, Indians increased from 37.85% to 50.41% while Africans decreased from 41.05% to 31.09%. Through these census figures, we can see a steady growth of Indians, and a relative decrease of Africans since 1891. In addition, by 1891, the female ratio among Indians increased to 58%.



value their reputation as fruitful procreators which used to horrify the white minority rulers. Matrifocality and the large number of single mothers have assisted in maintaining this stereotype of African women and 'stray' African men.

The most powerful collective stereotypes however have been created and controlled by men, and significantly they give more positive images to Indian, rather than African, women. Indian women are often referred to as innocent, child-like virgins who are docile and loyal whereas African women are feared as 'sophisticated,' sexually active adventurers who can be bossy and 'promiscuous' (Shibata 1991, 74-76, 1998, 88-91). Indian women have acquired their favourable image to men of all races, even African men. Indian women have been mythologized with romanticism, such as links with the image of Shita in the popular story of the Ramayan(a).<sup>39</sup> Perhaps this has only been possible because their primary place has been in the home and out of the public eye, unlike the confident brassiness of their African counterparts who may chat loudly and make expressive postures in the street, not only with their male and female friends, but with almost anybody. Indian women are taught to be demure and discrete, sensuous rather than sensual. African women, by comparison, seem to have been considered aggressively sexual and provocative by the others.

Therefore, if they choose to step out of their assigned role, if they refuse to be a Shita and dare to marry out and be united with the so-called worst enemy of Indian compatriots, they can only expect the severest stigma, at the very least, and know they will be lucky to escape violence and persecution.

The downside of the image of the Indian woman as a faultless innocent virgin has been that she should carry the faults of her menfolk and her family without complaint, and dutifully and courageously perform family traditions and affairs including the various *pujas*, the more communal religious functions and festivities. Essential to this responsibility is a traditional marriage. If she marries an African, other Indians, and especially members of her own family, may genuinely feel that she has been 'raped,' not only because her union with an African is not recognized, but because it has violated her nature as a daughter, sister or Indian. Her transgression has disgraced the honour not only of her family, but in fact of all 'pure' Indians. If her boldness and liberality stirs the anger and hurts the pride of Indian men, she may find herself even treated as a whore, to be punished as an example to others who might feel tempted to challenge Indian masculinity and patriarchal authority.

Given how the very real struggle between Indians and Africans has shaped their modern communities, it should not be surprising that intermarriage by an Indian woman conjures up not only sentiments of cultural betrayal, but also is seen like an own goal in the main game of ethnic conflict, which is Indian men versus African men. It is noteworthy how African masculinity has thus been widely built up as offering the kind of sexual potency and prowess that no Indian woman, given the chance,

<sup>39</sup> cf. Vertovec mentioned a kind of selectivity of interpretation of *Ramayana* (Vertovec 1992).



would ever refuse. In this way Indian masculinity is trivialized and Indian men are exposed as self-satisfied, 'impotent' or 'timid' etc.

As stated above, frequent domestic violence and even murder of wives or partners among Indians remains prevalent. If a man finds his partner having an affair, cutlasses, machetes (and hackia sticks) for cutting sugar cane are turned into brutal weapons. Stories abound of cutting wives' bodies into pieces, chopping up their bodies, beating them up and abusing them sexually. Sexual exploitation and domestic violence by their partners have only recently begun to be discussed among Indian women as detestable social problems rather than passively accepted by them as part of their *dharma* and *karma* or duty and fate.<sup>40</sup>

Such a situation of course has been shared by other cultures as well. Some African women who married Indian men have been individually harshly treated by their relatives and members of both communities. However, it is Indian women who married African who have been regularly persecuted violently by Indians, threatened with death and even murdered (including the murder of children or family members) (Shibata 1998).

It is vital not to forget how people can be extremely sensitive and even fussy about their own physical features and colour of their skin. 'Somatic norm image' to quote H. Hoetink (1967), has been important in various ways in public and private life. The classic polar spectrum still exists where White (Northwest) European physical traits (fair skin, strait or wavy hair, tall nose, thin lips etc.) provide one extreme and constitute what is considered superior, beautiful and desirable, and what are considered West African Negroid features (dark skin, kinky hair, flat nose, thick lips etc.) provide the opposite, undesirable and detestable Black extreme. As doctrine this was promulgated during slavery and indentureship as a measure to maintain control within the colony, and especially on the plantations, through the idea that white supremacy and subjugation of non-European immigrants was divinely ordained and a kind of natural law. Indians, except Madrassis (whose hair may be considerably curly and skin colour quite dark), tend to consider themselves closer to Europeans in terms of 'somatic norm image' than to Africans. Such models of biological discrimination have played a key role in controlling access to power in Indian society. British colonialists capitalized on this, with of course the important addition of placing them-

<sup>40</sup> Different levels of women's organizations began to take up such issues. One voluntary organization, for example, called "Red Thread," was set up in 1986 with much cooperation from Jamaica's "Sistren Theatre Collective," which initiated ordinary working class women's efforts to sensitize and dramatize women's problems with a view to sharing and solving them. It is mostly supported by lower class women with a few "radical" members from the educated "fairer" class. When I visited the Red Thread office in Georgetown in 1992, they told me they were still in the embryonic stage. They insist women must feel they have to voice of their own problems in order to share and develop a common sense of womanhood regardless of racial and class differences.



selves at the top of the social pyramid. At least within such a hierarchy, Indians could feel naturally superior to Africans, and saw intermarriage with Africans as corrupting the natural and intrinsic order.

For an Indian woman labouring like a drudge, with little right to her own opinions or freedom, intermarriage might seem not so much a transgression against Indian culture, but an escape or safety-valve from an impossible situation, and perhaps even vengeance on her family or the transcendence of 'pure' Indian culture and the discovery in herself of more than whatever role Indian culture might offer her. No matter how many Indian men and even her family might wish to see her as a disgusting traitor, she can also be seen as a courageous heroine.<sup>41</sup>

So long as 'Mother India' is the rallying cry for the claim that Indians should be fairly represented in society, most Indians will feel it is their responsibility to preserve family norms and oppose, or if possible prevent, intermarriage. In fact the above descriptions should make it clear that intermarriage with an African is represented as going over to the enemy, and the epitome of the worst possible kind of betrayal. It is referred to as the rape of a mother, and therefore unforgivable. The notorious riots and their still fresh memories have done nothing to reduce the way in which racialism has been made a building block of modern Guyanese 'democracy.'

#### 4. THE POSITIONS AND VERSATILITY OF 'DOUGLAS'

Offspring of Indians and other racial/ethnic groups have been termed '*douglas*' in Guyana.<sup>42</sup> The original Hindi or Bhojpuri word meant 'bastard' or 'offspring of miscegenation' and mostly referred to the offspring from inter-caste marriage. Its original meaning included the sense of unforgivable breach to the norm and uneffaceable stigma.<sup>43</sup> With the passage of time and as the indigenization of Indian indentured immigrants proceeded, quite a few cultural and linguistic changes occurred, small

<sup>41</sup> Contemporary Africans and Indian women emphasize Indian males as "narrow-minded," "racist," "too obedient to their parents," "extremely jealous," and "fearful" of African women and men who may retaliate against them if they choose African partners. I would say the attitudes of increasingly independent Indian women have made the most contribution to the changes in the partnership model. I came across quite a few admiring comments about 'courageous' Indian women who have had the initiative, education and guts to marry out.

<sup>42</sup> Pronunciations differ from society to society. In Trinidad they pronounce closer to 'dog(o)la' while in Guyana it is close to 'dagla' or 'doogla.' While no fixed orthography exists for this term, the latter spelling is used for example in Williams (1991). If a child is from Indian-Chinese parentage, (s)he may be called '*chiney-dougla*.'

<sup>43</sup> An Indian scholar from high caste himself, who resided in Trinidad, once disclosed his unhideable feeling with a parting shot, 'Anybody who knows its true meaning, would dare not say such a word !!' He was very uncomfortable with localized Indo-Trinidadian sense of 'Indian-ness' and their cultural practices including intermarriage.



perhaps in the eyes of other racial groups but nevertheless significant to the development of a distinctive Guyanese Indian community. Knowledge of Hindi declined drastically, and even among Indians in the countryside, where people think they see typical Indian village life with almost no other races present, the *lingua franca* is creole Guyanese English with some phrases and words in Bhojpuri or whatever. It seems during the creolization process, the original meaning of *dougla* has altered and its bitterness was diluted and neutralized. Some, including conservative Indians, may use the word without much horror and contempt.

Generally Guyanese mean by *douglas* for children with only one Indian parent. The other parent is usually African but can be a member of any other ethnic group. The fact this term has been used in this way suggests that such a mixed person is viewed from the Indian side, that is, Indo-centric. Therefore, a *dougla* almost always implies 'defficiency' or 'some thing minus,' and cannot get rid of negative connotation by itself. Inter-racial unions and intermarriage have increased over time and thus one would expect the size of the mixed population to be growing, but somewhat strangely, the statistical figures show only a fairly steady ratio of 'Mixed Race' as about just over 10% of the total population.<sup>44</sup> The census category "Mixed Races" primarily meant the mixture of whites/Europeans and Africans probably up till the early 1960s (Rauf 1974).<sup>45</sup> In strict biological terms, the category could also embrace *douglas* (or 'coolli-douglas'). But identification as 'Mixed Race' remained scarce and ambiguous, no doubt because inter-racial unions and marriage were not officially encouraged and the census returns indicated affiliation to a community, rather than individual racial pedigree. Nevertheless in daily life the distinctiveness of mixed offspring was recognized because a rich terminology arose such as '*mulattoes*' (European-African), '*bovianders*' (European [mainly Dutch]-Amerindian),<sup>46</sup> '*cabbaculas*' (African-Portuguese or African-Amerindian), '*santantones*' (Portuguese-African), '*coolli-douglas*' (Indian-African or other) and '*chiney-douglas*' (Chinese-any other). These may also be simply called 'No Nations' or 'Cosmopolitans.'<sup>47</sup>

It is very interesting to observe and compare how Indians and Africans appreciate or depreciate *douglas*' physical appearances. I could not find much information on physical traits of *douglas* in the historical literature, and even in the field it was not

<sup>44</sup> Population Statistics and Census figures show from 1841 to 1891 showing for the Mixed do not have specific breakdowns based on race except 1851 and 1891 according to Moore (1987, 274).

<sup>45</sup> According to Moore, "biological mixing was promoted by a gradual increase of interracial marriages between white men and Creole women especially in the last decades of the century, although the actual number may not have been large. (Moore 1987, 210)

<sup>46</sup> Citing James Rodway (1912, *Guiana: British, Dutch and French*. London: T. Fisher Unwin, 179), Williams supports "as early as 1912 even the Boviander category was no longer primarily composed of European and Aboriginal mixes." Amerindians are often called 'Bucks,' basically pejorative but can be neutral in its meaning.



so clear whether or not people have recognized *douglas*' characteristics. People have mentioned particular features such as fairer complexion, less curly or kinky hair,<sup>48</sup> less flattened nose, thinner lips, but an entire description is too difficult for words. What I learned to recognize as *dougl*a was the combination of certain physical features with behavioural traits such as reserve, diffidence and a desire to please. Regularly during my fieldwork I heard many positive comments on their beauty and charm, especially from Africans, such as "the more mixed, the more beautiful/the better quality you get," "(they are) pretty/good-looking/lovely," etc. This however does not say that Africans have any negative attitude to the preservation of 'pure' African 'blood' or approve the dilution of African racial purity. They are still proud of their African blood, despite the white racist bias which was long embodied within creole cultural values through colonialism. It is important to add that in this context they hardly mention diluting Indian blood or weakening Indian power. De-Indianization has hardly been an issue for the majority of Africans so far as the features of *douglas* are concerned. On the contrary, Africans seem to have taken delight in *douglas*' features out of genuine curiosity and as a kind of art form.

On the other hand, as Indians in general would not want to bless such unions, it is difficult to hear similar praise from them. Nonetheless, I hardly heard any actual abuse from Indians about *douglas*' physical features unless they seemed particularly African. When there are several children, Indian in-laws tend to treat harshest the *dougl*a who is darkest and shows the most African features and favour most the one who is fairest and looks most Indian (Shibata 1998).

In an exclusively Indian gathering, you may hear people triumphantly boast that intermarriage can dilute African blood or 'improve' African features with Indian blood. This does not exemplify that Indians 'approve' intermarriage with Africans but rather suggests some *may* tolerate the result of such 'misdemeanour.' This does not contradict how the same people will be utterly horrible about any Indian woman who marries an African. The stain to honour must remain indelible.

In *Stains on My Name, War in My Veins: Guyana and the Politics of Cultural Struggle* (1991), B. F. Williams mentioned that mixing of blood implies a personal and familial stigma, and in a worst case scenario, *douglas* would be rejected and become social drop-outs. My own interviews confirmed this, with a further twist that *douglas* could be discriminated against as a disgrace to a whole "nation,"<sup>49</sup> i.e. the, racial/ethnic group as a whole, especially for Indians. Ethnic categories are hier-

<sup>47</sup> Williams (1991, 131) has such spellings. Within Mulattoes, in certain British colonies, there existed different terminologies according to the degree of mixing as in 'Quatroon,' 'Octroon,' etc. Mulattoes are interchangeably used by 'coloureds.' 'Cabbaculas' seems an equivalent of 'caboclos' in Latin America meaning offspring of indios and Blacks.

<sup>48</sup> Some are teased of the curly hair very brutally. Even a 'santantone' man who inherits wavy hair though the skin is much lighter (in his words "fair") as his Portuguese blood put, used to be called "tar brush."



archically ordered in the folk worldview, and a mixture of more than two is often interpreted to cause "wars in the veins" which undoubtedly would affect such a person's life. Any failure, bad luck or misfortune is likely to be judged to have been caused by the more inferior blood of the unions. Given that the majority of Indians, male and female, boast unhesitatingly about their 'racial purity' whenever their racial pride is challenged, *douglas* must be inferior to 'pure' Indians and yet superior to Africans, and misbehaviour or failure can be attributed to their African blood.

The saying goes, "children bring peace." In fact, in some cases, *douglas* have gradually softened the hard feelings of their grandparents, and a reconciliation was established and kin relations could be revived. However, this is not always the case. Especially if a dark *douglas* resembles the African parent, Indian natal families are likely to remain unforgiving and will reject the *douglas* grandchild. Even the murder of the child or a wife who bore such a 'mongrel' is possible (Shibata 1998, 91-94).

Insofar as *douglas* 'look' different from both Africans and Indians, they are also often thought to behave differently too. I was intrigued how often I heard them praised by Indians as behaving better than so-called 'pure' Africans, and vice versa. Blaming them for not being African or Indian did not prevent appreciating their good points, for example it was easier for them to be fairer in views and attitudes, even more energetic, lively and independent than 'pure' Africans and Indians. My own observations largely confirmed that because of their upbringing and their ambiguous position in society, this was often true. The majority of my *douglas* interviewees, regardless of sex, age, and educational background, were well spoken, honest, and generous, thoughtful, courageous and mature. But if the demeanour of *douglas* wins praise, suspicion may not be far behind: all their tact and fairness can be interpreted as mere opportunism to obtain favours from both communities simultaneously. Appreciating *douglas* as individuals or even as a category is not the same as sharing rights to community.

In the case of Indians or Africans, identity is simply and easily constructed around the unquestioned sense of 'belonging' to a family that is clearly located within a neighbourhood, a family and kin network and a racial group. The processes of factionalism and patronage so endemic in Guyana are premised upon being part of such communities. Intermarriage is a decision by individuals who unquestioningly belong, to test their original (natal) community boundaries and maybe move out. But for *douglas*, the sense of belonging to a community, beyond perhaps the nuclear family itself, is anything but unquestioned. Theirs is not therefore a dilemma about "moving out" but of exercising a choice to "move in."

Not surprisingly, my *douglas* informants discussed their sense of identity in terms of the conditions in which they were brought up favourable or unfavourable, loving or

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<sup>49</sup> In some contexts, 'nation' may mean a caste or *varna*, especially among high caste such as Brahmins.



unloving, and often difficult and then their own struggles to build a life in the wider world. This was the story of their beginning. There was no sense of deeper ancestry, rooted in African or Indian tradition.

The majority of my *douglas* informants displayed a deep regard for their mothers. I have already explained how my inter-married informants, particularly Indian women, confirmed that the majority of inter-racially married couples (again with an emphasis on women) have experienced many hardships just because of crossing racial boundaries.<sup>50</sup> Through their testimonies, it should be possible to see more clearly the nature of the problems they faced in establishing a family. These women had generally developed a relatively firm view that while race was still an important factor in their lives, they should definitely be free from racist ideas. Quite a few women confessed that it was only after they were married that they realized how easily and fast racial/ethnic stereotypes could be imagined or transmitted in even the simplest social discourse and events. The difficulties and problems related to intermarriage hopefully led the couples and their *douglas* children to know each other better and resolve their problems.

Most of my intermarried interviewees talked about how they repeatedly needed to question their own racial identity and that of their children, and found the whole process somewhat enlightening, as a test of their moral conscience as well as a growing understanding about the nation's racial problems. However furious or frightened they might feel, they were determined not to allow the situation to break them. Many actively try to challenge the prevalent values of the status quo. They make sure their *douglas* children will never be racist but be fair in their relationships and judgment of others, however horrible or confusing their own experiences.

But the dilemmas facing *douglas* and their parents are often different: being born *douglas* is not the same as choosing intermarriage and bearing a *douglas*. Parents are not often *douglas* themselves. As a result, whatever the high-sounding wishes of their parents about building a non-racial society, many *douglas* have tried to identify with either the African or Indian community especially in their early years and avoid the ambivalence of being considered "mixed" or *douglas*. Such a strategy can mean overcoming the ambiguities of their appearance by strongly adhering to the racial bias of one group or the other.

There is a well known Trinidadian calypso 'Split Me into Two' sung by Douglas C. I., himself a *douglas*, about how a *douglas* may oscillate between being African or Indian and also be ostracized by both (Shibata 1993b, 215-216). He is called 'nigger' by Indians and 'coolie' by Africans, but knows very well he is neither 'nigger' nor 'coolie.' He even isn't sure if he has a "country" or 'homeland' to go back to since if

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<sup>50</sup> Larger number of my interviewees turned out to be the combination of African men and Indian women, and this is supported by many other informants, both African and Indian, too. Some have claimed that this combination would be more easily accepted than vice versa. Both cases are found not only in rural but also in urban areas.



all were told to leave the country (in this case Trinidad), where would he go? Obviously he knows he cannot be accepted by either Africa or India. On there is no reason why he should feel he desires to go either of them. He has to stay in Trinidad. By that definition, Guyana may not be a country or nation: it's just a place where people from different nations live. This implication may be close to the truth, for after all Guyana used to be just a ruthless plantation colony, never a country or nation to the British, and thus the census categories effectively demanded foreign affiliation. Only the mixed population need to seriously question whether they have a country to go back to. As the song exemplifies, *douglas* can't be split into two!

As inter-married wives and mothers rather than husbands and fathers, suffer ostracism and persecution the most, and fear the same fate for their children, the family will usually seek to live within a community least hostile to her, normally African or mixed.<sup>51</sup> When a couple lives harmoniously with the local community, their identification and that of their *dougla* children tend to be the same as the predominant racial group of that community. There are some who live amicably in a predominantly Indian community, and therefore seem to have less problem identifying with Indians, but they are a minority. In the wider community, they may not be so easily accepted. Individuals within the same family of course may make different choices, depending on their own experience, their own friendship groups, etc.

In the calypso song above, the boy seeks a third way. The answer he sees is to be proud of being neither Indian nor Africa, but being both Indian and African. It is the argument of course that relates to richness in cultural diversity, but not racial nationalism, and *douglas* are not 'halves' but rather 'doubles.'

Of course in practice such 'double' identity is not simply a combination of one race plus another. If this were the case, it should be easy to claim to be 'Indian-African' or 'Indo-African' or 'Afro-Indian' etc. But such terms have not been an option. Instead, people built around the Hindi word '*dougla*,' previously a highly negative word that propelled the incumbent away from the Indian community. With usage over time, the word has lost much of its original horror, but it is clear that what people sought was a vocabulary to express 'people without pedigree.'

However, things may be looking up for *douglas* who think like the boy in the Calypso cited above. If being Indian or African identifies one with Guyana's cruel colonial past, *douglas* can be championed as signifying something truly home-grown: a real creole Guyanese. In fact, during my fieldwork, I came across quite a few positive remarks about *douglas* as truly representative of the new Guyana. A few politicians thought there was possible political capital to be made here. Some ambitious politicians and businessmen have chosen intermarriage for themselves (Shibata

<sup>51</sup> This is not to say Africans are always welcoming Indians or intermarried families or *douglas*. According to 'pure' Indian, African communities are more likely to eliminate and expel 'outsiders' segregating and discriminating.



1998). Certainly the abandonment of Guyana by world business was due to the ugly way racism seemed to drive out 'development' and foreign aid. It seemed time for a more active and progressive promotion of racial reconciliation and harmony.

But *douglas* are not the epitome of the new entrepreneurs that development experts and multinational corporations might be looking for. They are not the beginnings of thrusting, cosmopolitan, capitalist cultural agents in Georgetown. Their experience may have made *douglas* wise observers rather than active participants but the main lesson they learn is to keep their heads down. They are hardworking, loyal and even keen followers but not leaders and certainly not pioneers in the avaricious pursuit of money and power. They think they have no community of their own and therefore no constituency or power base unless they can lose the image of being *douglas*, and be accepted as either Indian or African. As *douglas*, they have learned that success may bring suspicion, and if they stand out they fear they will be the first to be squashed down. Where they might be distinctive as a group is that they are very much integrated into creole life style, for example in language (Creole Guyanese English), religion (Christianity), clothes ('western'), manners, etc. They know the score, and if the skills they have learned are the skills of the chameleon distinguished for not being distinguished, it must be because they have found no place for themselves as lions on the school playing fields, or in the neighbourhood, or in the national arena. They seem to have learned the strength of flexibility.

Nevertheless, the opinion I repeatedly heard from ordinary Guyanese was that they were tired of the way they seemed cursed by racialism and spokesmen who were 'bullies' rather than representatives. At least until the 1992 elections, it was not difficult to feel sympathy, especially for the Indian majority, because the 'sharks' seemed to be in charge of the swimming pool. Still, it is difficult and probably unfair to envisage a Guyana that does not resonate to the rhythms of factionalism and patronage. The challenge to government and economic leaders is to build power blocs that do not depend on racialism, and can resonate to a truly multiracial national beat. This will give the so-called 'No Nation' *douglas* their rightful place in Guyana.

As yet, my *douglas* informants scarcely felt they are being favoured because of their powers of tolerance, social observation and understanding. At least up to the 1992 elections, any advantage enjoyed by *douglas* seems to be that they could be approached and negotiated by the African ruling class rather as the British had appropriated the coloureds or mulattoes in the old days against the Blacks: as a buffer against the Indians and to keep 'pure' 'backward' Indians out of government and other important posts as long as and as much as possible.

## 5. INTERMARRIAGE AND THE ROCKY ROAD TOWARDS THE CREOLIZATION OF 'INDIAN' CULTURE

If the Indian community might seem conservative and inflexible, at least regard-



ing marriage and intermarriage, it is crucial to understand that this is the result of radical internal changes from the moment the first Indian pioneers embarked from Indian ports. There has been a long process of indigenization and creolization, enough to horrify contemporary 'Indian Nationals' but nevertheless very slow and incomplete to compare with Africans, for instance. In Guyana, the Indians shed Hindi and Urdu, and spoke Creole English, but was this creolization into the status quo or rather a way to diminish the differences between themselves as Indians: distinctions inscribed in Indian languages but not creole English? They largely dropped the caste distinctions as well as other differentiating elements they came with, whilst carefully trying to maintain key rituals and festivals. Traditional rituals and festivals were largely 'retained,' but over time many of them have been reconstructed in the light of new needs and circumstances. Authenticity was defined by appeal to collective memories rather than to any classic text or canon.

After the indenture system was terminated in 1917, not many Indians came and settled in British Guiana. In the early 20th century, the (colonial) Indian Government officially revoked their citizenship in Mother India. Like it or not, Indians in Guiana/Guyana realized that where they lived had become their 'country,' but not—unlike the Whites—their 'colony.' Gradually the Indian immigrants and their descendants came to think of their Indian identity based on 'race' rather than caste or language, kinship, village or province or most of what divided Indians into separate communities back in India. The British administration stratified Guiana by assigning everybody to a 'race' based on *their* concepts of race and ethnicity. The term 'coolies' was also used to bracket Indians as a whole regardless of their differences, but they preferred the terms 'Indian' or 'East Indian.'<sup>52</sup> A united front was expected by the administration, which did not want to be troubled by caste problems, and was clearly in the self-interest of the Indians. Thus what was cherished about Mother India was what was collective, and could be shared by all Indians: classically, the arena of religious ideas and ritual.

Although caste was out of place in plantation life (and of course during the voyage to Guyana as well), the knowledge possessed by the higher castes remained necessary. The very few Brahmins at the top and a small *varna* Kshatriya often locally called 'Chattri' were maintained, with the primary task of preserving tradition. Indians never stopped performing *pujas*, celebrating festivals, and performing marriages, funerals etc. in an 'Indian' way. The urge to reproduce Indian culture was strong and the efforts of the Brahmins more or less satisfied the locals, however insufficient or mistaken they might appear to a trained Brahmin from 'Mother India.'

Fallen into a strange world with little choice about where to live, what work to do, etc. and facing alien, threatening, 'others' were surely enough to let Indian person-

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<sup>52</sup> The term 'East Indian' is used to avoid confusion with 'West Indian' derived from 'West Indies.' 'West Indian' has been coterminously used to denote 'Afro Caribbean.' Indians normally call themselves "Indian."



al, social and cultural identity become reformulated around the element of race and ethnicity. Moreover, there was a genuine fear of cultural breakdown and a horror of life unsupported by cultural tradition. Life was unquestionably hard and short, but it need not be brutish as well. Establishing a clear racial boundary to the community, and a strong collective identity was therefore more than just a political strategy to oppose other ethnic groups. The troubles of the first Indians in Guiana, and the problems facing all subsequent Indians when they first arrived, demanded a kind of cultural 'cleaning' and the revival of a sense of discipline and duty within which a strong family and community life could flourish. Otherwise there was almost nothing to stop people exploding into violence or becoming the mindless, soul-less domestic 'animals' or movable property that the plantation managers and overseers as well as the colonial government seemed to demand.

Worry about females, above all infidelity, could drive Indian men 'mad.' Racial pride partly functioned as a doctrine to keep the peace. It policed women who married or "shacked up" with Africans or those who broke tradition by refusing to obey their menfolk. Racial endogamy has remained a vital principle over the years. This can only be partially explained by simply saying women were a scarce resource, or Indians needed a boundary, or that Indians are by nature 'racialist,' which begs the question entirely. Indians in Guyana dispensed with a lot of cultural baggage from the homeland, so what they kept was surely only what they found was most essential for 'civilized' life. Those Indian labourers needed Indian women, a need the administration also quickly heeded for social stability, for colour in their lives, and for all those roles (which Indo-Guyanese have been careful not to abandon) at home and in ritual where the common good and the will to go on living depends upon a faithful woman. Given the shortage of Indian women, the incidence of intermarriage, the reality that many Guyanese are 'mixed' to one degree or another, and the fact that so much in Indo-Guyanese culture has been creolized, this valiant, ruthless defence of the very traditional place for women is surely remarkable.

Of course it presents women with the stark choice between being a 'saint,' and rather a slave, to her menfolk, or being a 'devil' who can destroy the social order and drive men to violence. What is it about this Ramayan(a) like model that resonates within Indian communities throughout history and throughout the world? In Guyana at least, it was clearly a model demanded by men, because so much of their life was hard, competitive and humiliating, and because they feared the disintegration of culture.

Performance of rituals and other cultural practices was important to maintain Indian identity. Strict adherence to homeland norms however was not necessarily required or practically impossible. Alterations crept in inevitably and furthered the ongoing process of indigenizing Indian culture. But the sense of authenticity remained and direct influence or participation by other racial groups have generally been discouraged, although outside guests are supposedly welcome. I mentioned



earlier the opposition evoked when Africans wanted to participate in the local *tadja*. It is noteworthy that this sentiment was shared by the majority of Indians, regardless of their religious faith (though some *sunnis* opposed): creolization of this traditional religious festival into a national Indian festival stopped at the border of racial/ethnic boundaries.

'Indian' of course is not just a category to compare or compete against non-Indians, usually Africans. The segmentary tendencies among Indians also mean that there is debate over what is truly 'Indian.' When the goal of one Indian faction is also shared even partially by other racial groups, cooperation and even coalition is likely. Examples would include forming and participating in political activities, involvement in religious functions and supporting and contributing to voluntary organizations and humanitarian causes such as the Human Rights Movement, educational organizations and women's groups. Racial boundaries are not forgotten but need not hinder working together, even against other Indian groups.

One sign that religion and rituals among Indians have taken key roles for confirming their collective identity and family values is that Guyana has not witnessed the kind of nationwide conflicts waged between rampaging Hindus and Muslims in India. In fact, when they heard about them, Guyanese Indians were thoroughly amazed and disgusted at such 'narrow-mindedness.' They expressed their pride and even a sense of superiority in developing a tolerance towards religious differences because "wi Guyanese are *matis* or *bhai* (buddies and friends) and can get along wid anybody. Look at wi. Wi made dis country comin' from all o'er de world." Nevertheless, religious and even sectarian differences did and do matter in their lives. Both Hindus and Muslims vow that their beliefs and practices must remain 'authentic.' It is just not something they fight each other about. There is generally a high tolerance of religious pluralism within the Indian community. Labelling something or someone as *schismatic* implies Indian solidarity, but not religious authenticity, is at risk.

This might seem a problem for Indian Muslims. Though still a small minority, contemporary Muslims tend to emphasize the universal values of Islam, and its openness to all who would profess their faith, regardless of race or ethnicity. Their big annual events, though not many, attract all kinds of people.<sup>53</sup> In the central mosques in Georgetown, on ordinary Friday worship/prayer, sitting among many Indians one can see some Africans and people from other racial groups, including a few Amerindians, who have come to worship together. However, intermarriage is not encouraged, whatever the Koran might say. Likewise, although Indian Muslims may say

<sup>53</sup> What I observed took place in mosques with mostly Indians in membership but some Africans and a very small number of Amerindians were present. As the majority of the members are Indians, there was an unavoidable feeling among ordinary members that the mosque is 'Indian.' However, the leaders, both middle aged and young, did hold a liberated opinion even though it might be just a honeyed specious statement to non-Muslims, "there exists no racial prejudice or discrimination among Muslims."



they are not in principle totally against inter-sectarian (in Guyana there are *Shia*, *Sunni* and *Ahmadiyya* groups) and inter-religious marriage, but they won't forget to add immediately these are not recommended or encouraged. Their position is that the applicant member of the mosque has to prove in front of the *imams* or leaders that the partner would convert or at least agree whole-heartedly with Islamic beliefs and commandments and that their children will be raised as members of that particular sect.

Inter-racial marriages do occur among Guyanese Muslims in visible numbers, although still small between Indians and Africans. This causes some embarrassment, especially when intermarried couples were fired by the non-racial teachings of Islam. The leadership claimed that such couples did not and should not encounter any serious problems. However, those couples I interviewed spoke of racial harassment from their families, their spiritual leaders and even their partners! Their experience testified how even sharing the same faith may not easily overcome racial prejudice, and just how deep-seated racial issues can be.

Hindus, on the other hand, unlike Christians or Muslims, need feel no embarrassment about having a doctrine that is evangelical and universal for all mankind. As a local *pandit* said, 'Hindus were born Hindus.' Although theologians might argue on the theory, in practice, Hinduism is 'racialist,' in the sense that no other race can be Hindu. Conversion from Hinduism to Islam or Christianity is possible but the opposite is inconceivable. Non-Hindus, and non-Indians may be invited to religious events, but may not feel particularly welcome. On significant occasions, a place may be reserved for guests or visitors, with a sign of welcome. There may be an exchange of greetings and they may be invited to participate and share food and drink afterwards. A very small number of African neighbours who are regarded 'friendly' may be invited in this way.<sup>54</sup>

Similar behaviour can be observed in both Muslim and Hindu weddings. Since wedding rituals and parties are generally held at the homes of brides and grooms, and take place on a large scale and over several days, it is regarded as normal to invite a few African 'friends' and friendly neighbours. During my fieldwork in 1992 (August to October), I was present in six weddings, four Hindu (two in Sanatan Dharm(a),<sup>55</sup> two in Arya Samaj, one Muslim (*Shia*), one Christian (Anglican). Except for this last Christian marriage, I saw only a very small number (either one or two) of Africans as guests. I never saw them exchange friendly greetings with neighbouring guests and they remained fairly quiet even during the feast. The whole picture was just like what

<sup>54</sup> I witnessed a couple of times that an African was invited to a personal *puja* though as a guest, normally (s)he remained silent and just observed with a few exchange of words. Such a guest might enjoy an Indian delicacies of food and 'sweet meat' etc. in an 'authentic' setting. However, I did not get the impression the guests were actually enjoying the occasion but just were curious and received a kind invitation as a sign of friendship.

<sup>55</sup> The Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha was formed in 1927 and by 1930, it had become very influential in defining their religious orthodoxy (Bisnauth 1989, 153).



Furnivall stated: "they mix but do not combine" (Furnivall 1948).

Their presence did not seem to prove their genuine acceptance into an Indian network as welcomed guests in such occasions. Some Indians plainly affirm it, too. I also saw several Africans present as onlookers, standing at the fringe of the party area and observing everything with curiosity. Hindu weddings especially are still held in a 'bamboo wedding' style, and some of the ritual procedures can be easily observed by non-participants since the main rituals are held outside in a yard. Hindu weddings, especially those of Sanatan Dharm(a), are very colourful and filled with elaborately decorated items, colourful elegant clothes and headgear with bright ornaments for the bride and groom, abundant jewels, exuberant cosmetics and long exotic performances. Some Africans feel very attracted.

With the exception perhaps of Diwali,<sup>56</sup> some contemporary Hindu rituals and functions are very much carefully arranged so that Africans will not feel like even visiting them, unless formally invited. As a few *pandits* and attendants confessed, without an invitation, (s)he would probably be left alone without any assistance or sign of welcome, although there would be no unpleasantness, such as an invitation to leave. The rituals and functions are performed basically for the Indians themselves. Melodious *Bhajan* singing accompanied by music from *tablas* and other percussive instruments appeal to many Africans because of the popularity of the equally lively pentecostal and other Afro-Guyanese syncretic worship rituals which emphasize their musical devotion. The faces of gods and goddesses in *mandirs* and shrines also bear some resemblance to African religious images. Certainly Africans see more in common between African polytheism and traditional rituals and Hinduism than with the monotheism and relatively stark rituals of Islam and Protestant Christianity. However, it is not an interest which Indians appreciate or reciprocate.

Guyanese Hindus are divided in their affiliations. Sanatan Dharm(a) (Maha Sabha) boasts to be the most 'authentic' and 'orthodox' and enjoys the majority of members within the Indian community. They are said to be also the most 'racist,' propounding segregationism and pluralism not only on religious but also racial issues. From the Africans' point of view, the Pandits Council is the most conservative and narrow-minded organ and a clandestine but loud mouthpieces of racialism. It is unlikely any Indian, including Indian Muslims, would agree with this in public, but many have made the same statement in private.

*Kali Mai puja* (worship), a very syncretized Madrassi based religious cult, seems to attract the most multi-racial following. Most of the devotees are from the lower classes. So-called 'decent' Indians, and in fact, the majority of 'proper' Hindus (either Sanatan Dharm[a] or Arya Samaj), have difficulty with it because of its bloody sacrificial ritual, the deafening noise and the frenetic and sometimes erotic body move-

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<sup>56</sup> 'Deepvali' and/or 'Diwali' are also used. This 'festival of lights' attracts the largest gatherings including non-Hindus as onlookers.



ments of participants. The healing power of the ritual however is thought very strong, and thus attracts 'odd' and troublesome people too. I saw some African faces among the waiting clients and was told that among the devotees, intermarriage or 'shack-up' was growing and members were far from racist. Probably because of these reasons, ordinary Hindus would not call such members 'Hindus.' The cult itself may be known as a representative of truly 'Guyanized' (hence 'authentic' 'creole') religion and culture rather than a branch of Hinduism.

Christianity, though in theory free from racial bias, has shaped its respective sects and denominations in somewhat race-conscious ways. The Anglican Church, for instance, has only a small little Indian membership, and many Indian Christians would positively not want to attend. As one confided to me, "dey let yuh down" and "mek yuh feel inferior or sometin". The clergy has been rumoured to maintain a white bias, largely acceptable to Africans, who constitute membership the majority of Anglicans. It is unreasonable to expect any Indian to feel welcome.

The Roman Catholic Church has Indian members and has produced a few Indian priests. I witnessed quite a few inter-racial couples, including some Indians. Like Muslims, Roman Catholics strongly expect both partners in marriage to share the same faith. Most importantly, inter-religious marriage must wait until there can be a witnessed vow to respect, share and obey the Roman Catholic faith. The couples are requested to attend specially arranged lessons to understand the catechism prior to marriage, particularly about fidelity and bringing up children in the Catholic faith.<sup>57</sup>

Some Lutheran churches near villages or estates have attracted Indian converts as well. They have faced some burdensome problems caused by inter-racial unions, although of course doctrinally it is opposed to racism. One clergyman admitted the difficulty not only of solving such problems but also of alleviating their repercussions in other congregations and neighbouring communities. An Indian pastor, himself married inter-racially, confided some very complicated stories to me about members of his church. He felt very discouraged that Christians could be so 'racist.'

Presbyterians however used to have a policy of racial segregation and its legacy can still be witnessed. There are separate Indian and African churches, and this has hardly led to noticeable racial mixing in the wider congregation.

Pentecostal churches and evangelicals seem to offer the most genuinely multi-racial atmosphere in their membership and attendance. Yet worship together does not seem to be leading to inter-culturation.

All in all, Christian churches have been said to be fairly multi-racial, and yet if we look at the congregation and church hierarchy more closely, even racial issues still cloud the scene. The Christian world is neither well integrated nor homogeneous.

<sup>57</sup> Therefore intermarriage between a Catholic and a Muslim can be very controversial. I interviewed a couple of a Portuguese (more precisely *santantone*) Catholic husband and a Muslim Indian wife. This case was most interesting as both of them were and are not nominal believers but devout practitioners. Obviously the most difficult problems arose in child upbringing.



Rather, it has been very racially heterogeneous, segregationist and culturally pluralist.

Almost all intermarriages (here, excluding 'shack-ups') are well said to be the result of careful thought, and couples are usually very sensitive towards such critical elements as religion and race. Each partner has to battle with his/her conscience whenever s(he) encounters problems arising from intermarriage and where religion is at issue concern about salvation. Intermarriage is without doubt a courageous enterprise, and each case is very different. It is easy to just relay stereotypes and hearsay about intermarriage, but the reality is very complicated and refuses easy understanding.

At least up till the end of the 19th century, British Guianese society "exhibit[ed] simultaneously very clearly distinguishable features of both class stratification, as well as racial and cultural segmentation signifying structural and segmental pluralism" (Moore 1987, 211). Contemporary scenes have changed since then with the further process of creolization or fusion within Indian culture and society and more integration into Guyanese creole society. Nevertheless, the Indian community, especially in the countryside, remained however rather aloof. The fundamental structure was a hierarchy based on racial traits, but it was also class based and further divided according to various factors such as political commitment and economic activity. Social strategies were regularly pluralist and segmentary, as we have seen. Whilst it is still true to say that the majority of Indians are more or less confined to rural agricultural sectors, either working on the sugar or rice plantations, growing vegetables or herding cattle etc., social stratification based on merit and achievement is coming into play. This is because of increasing social mobility mainly made possible by economic success and higher education. Visible 'success' by 'progressive' Indians has stimulated many hitherto 'conservative' rural compatriots to be more independent and ambitious. Indian business experts have finally acquired genuine praise and Indians now dominate key economic fields, scholarship, and respected professions (lawyers, doctors, dentists, chemists, etc.).<sup>58</sup>

Though almost all Indo-Guyanese no longer keep ties with their ancestral villages in Indian sub-continent or original kin network, many contemporary Indians, both young and old, have been keen on reviving Indian culture to get more appreciation from other Guyanese. Religious missions have been invited from India, including some highly influential advocates of Sai Baba. Indian traditional dancers and other artists have been enthusiastically welcomed. Active groups like Ghandi Youth Organization (Hindus) have taken a lead in exhibiting cultural shows or the most recent popular Indian videos as distinctive cultural markers to encourage a renaissance of the Indian spirit and also to strongly advocate the necessity for proper Hindus to learn Hindi and/or Sanskrit however elementary they may be. The active, young members of such organizations have been well educated at ordinary public or private schools,

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<sup>58</sup> Nath has a big section describing Indian achievements. Nath (1970).



which are basically multiracial, but have decided against being absorbed into Guyanese creole culture which is essentially Euro-Afrocentric.

The resurgence of Indian culture, or more precisely, 'Hindu Renaissance' or '*Sanskritization*' can be dated back to the 1970s with the arrival of Indian cultural missions and evangelists to reanimate Indo-Caribbean culture (mainly Guyana, Trinidad and Surinam) and the USA. In the late 1960s,<sup>59</sup> the Black Power movement had shaken the Caribbean and propelled Afro-Guyanese to feel they had a natural claim to be the main protagonists in the drama of building the new nation after Independence in 1966. The crude assertions of the Burnhamite PNC orchestrated their affirmations of African pride and Guyanese authenticity into an attack on the Indians, who were not only becoming economically powerful and culturally prominent, but also had their own political party, the PPP. If the PPP managed to mobilize the rural Indians to vote, the natural Indian majority would kill any chance of an African government.

The challenge from the PNC clearly antagonized conservative sections of the Indian community, particularly among the Hindus. There was a drive to create community leaders. The authority of members of the Pandit Council was increased. There was increased emphasis on the importance of ritual observances and participation in religious and cultural performances, on the promotion of literacy in both orthodox Hindi and Sanskrit used during rituals and knowledge of Indian history and culture in general. There was dismay among the most conservative racial locals that Indo-Guyanese had lost so much of their ancestral culture.

This resurgence of Indian culture was also fueled by another kind of crisis: distrust by the more conservative older generation toward the trend among the younger generation to be 'Americanized' at top speed. Americanization was being taken up as essentially a model of 'modernization' especially after the government's socialist approach was generally felt to have virtually crushed the whole national economy, including the Indian sector (to which minimal support had been given). Political dominance by the largely African PNC, the deterioration of the national economy and the impoverishment of Indian workers, the long history of administrative control and favouritism practised by the Africans, together with the threat of coercion by force and cultural denigration by Afrocentric cultural values.....all contributed to a massive out-migration to the U.K., the U.S.A., and Canada, especially the U.S.A..<sup>60</sup> American

<sup>59</sup> One big factor for the spread of the movement was the very famous Rodney Affair in 1968, when Walter Rodney was forced to come back to Guyana, his native land. He began his tremendously energetic work both in education and politics. The foundation of Working People's Alliance as well as his tragic murder in 1978 are both very well known..

<sup>60</sup> New York has the biggest Guyanese community. The national airline Air Guyana only has two airplanes and among the small number of all the flights, the New York flight has been the most important enterprise and the most popular. Once this was the only way to get overseas apart from neighbouring Paramaribo (Surinam), Brazil, or Trinidad.

England was the main destination naturally during the 1950s. But the journey was by sea.



films and videos, TV programmes, imported daily commodities, with the addition now of news, photos and presents as well as remittances sent from the (fortunate) emigrants, all influence the younger generation enormously. The value and influence of such close ties with Indo-Guyanese diaspora communities remain immense.

In contemporary Guyana Indians tend to go to Indian popular films and watch both 'traditional' and 'contemporary' Indian dramas on video. They listen to Indian pop music like 'Kanchan music' or even Indian *soca*<sup>61</sup> or *chutney*<sup>62</sup> (used also for wedding parties), eat Indian cuisine and wear saris and put *sindhur* on the *tika*, etc. They still feel comfortable with and proud of *jhandis* put out in the yard here and there and dance energetically to contemporary Indian pop rhythms. However, they know they are surrounded by other options. Most easily available are Afro-Guyanese alternatives. Young Indians can find much to appreciate in modern Afro-Guyanese culture, especially calypsoes and black contemporary music. But even among the youth one encounters highly racial advocates of Indian 'authentic' culture, who denounce creolized Indians as 'bitches.' Attraction towards Afro-culture of course can lead not only to friendship but also intermarriage with Africans. Conservatives among their peer groups and of course among the older generation are very sensitive to such behaviour and feel they still have authority and right for censorship. They are no longer the majority, but their voices are the loudest and the Indian community resonates with their fear of racial and moral 'corruption.'

Amidst all these polar pressures, most Indians seemed to be united against radical changes, and actively neutral. Far from passive, there is an urge to stand firm and fight back against any kind of extremism. This is because there is a real fear that any form of extremism may provoke another bout of racial violence. Behaviour that divides the community should be avoided. This view therefore sees intermarriage as both a major result of disunity and a major cause of violence.

The resurgence of Indian culture seems to have coincided, ironically, with a visible rise in intermarriage. The revival of Indian culture brought more public recognition and praise for Indian womanhood. It was as 'Mother India' that the power of Indian tradition was evoked. Many goddesses in the Indian pantheon were pointed out to show how Indian femininity should never be belittled nor diminished unfairly. At the same time, Indian women's 'progress' and 'success' was not only becoming more highly appreciated in society, but their achievements were also being compared favourably with those of the Indian men as well as Africans. Besides the typical image of a traditional Indian young woman as an obedient virgin confined to the household and preparing for wife-and mother-hood, individual Indian women were becoming known not merely as intelligent or hardworking but as enterprising and in-

<sup>61</sup> *Soca* is a fusion of soul and calypso. It was originated in Trinidad.

<sup>62</sup> *Chutney* also is a creolized Indian popular music originated in Trinidad. 'Chutney' itself is a word for cooking.



novative. The example of pioneers who left their homes for further education or to work in cities, and even to go overseas alone to obtain higher qualifications generated a climate in which more women became aware of more attractive opportunities than local tradition seemed to offer. It was a time for new endeavours and new thinking, unencumbered with the hindsight of experience. It should not therefore be surprising that more girls married out than before.

Through one set of lenses, the intermarried woman is a traitor to her race and ignorant of and/or indifferent to her tradition, whilst through another set she is a heroine fighting in the front line to bring integration to a cruelly divided society by bridging the racial gap and producing *dougla* children who can be the flagships of racial harmony and reconciliation. It is important to remember there has been no unanimous voice among any racial/ethnic group, and therefore too generalized comments risk misunderstanding and enforcement of 'wrong' stereotypes. This paper hence should be read as a brief sketch of marked discourse on race, marriage and creolization. The questions for now must be whether the cases of intermarried couples and their *dougla* children help us to understand the racialized nature of Guyanese society, and whether they are genuinely changing Guyanese society.

The answer is yes and no and leaves ambiguity. In the right circumstances, *douglas* are a natural buffer and mediator between the conflicting races, living proof that together they can create a 'beautiful' nation. But the reality that most *douglas* are unusually self-conscious, prudent and careful suggests their time is yet to come.

The majority of Indians are 'creolized' but remain race-conscious. They feel that cultural diversity and pluralism can be successful goals and Guyana can prosper without the amalgamation of ethnic cultures and the creation of a unified 'Guyanese' national culture. To them therefore, intermarriage is 'wrong' if it increases tension between the races. In other words, economic and political challenges can be met not by biological assimilation and amalgamation but by a process of ethnic pluralism. This of course is a way of saying, 'Divided we stand, united we fall.' It may not sound politically correct, but it is their logic born of sad experience.

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