

# HORIZONS

168 years, Indian Arrival in Guyana

*Guyana*

*India*





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# indian immigration

GT&T extends warm greetings and best wishes to the Indian Community as we celebrate the anniversary of the arrival, in Guyana, of the original Indian immigrants.

Our nation has benefitted greatly from the diversity of our culture and the contributions made by all Guyanese.



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# Foreword



I have always been fascinated by the myriad facets surrounding East Indian arrival to British Guiana, never resisting the opportunity of interacting with elders within my family and the community in an effort to learn of their experiences on the plantations and their indomitable struggle to preserve their culture.

When my uncle and publisher of this magazine, Mr. Lokesh Singh, approached me with the concept of identifying the Indians' contribution to our diverse culture, I was intrigued and impatient to begin the journey of unraveling the past. We recognized the value of recording unsung but compelling moments of our ancestral history, which although handed down through generations, remains largely un-documented.

With the name 'Horizons', we also pay tribute to the descendents of those indentured immigrants who, like their foreparents, have infinite ambitions and continue to impact on every area of endeavour in Guyana and the world at large.

Every member of the diverse young team assigned to the magazine treasured the special time they spent exploring the past.

Delving into the photo archives at the National Trust of Guyana with Nirvana, the Trust's researcher, I felt as if I had stumbled upon precious treasure as each old and poignantly haunting image was revealed. The feeling was beyond description.

Whether it was Jessica, gushing about the warmth emanating from the two grandmothers from Berbice, Mensah reverently preserving ancient documents, or Simantini and I poring over old pictures in a vain attempt to decide which ones we wanted to feature, it was obvious that we were all caught in the magic of the past; of people who persevered and made Guyana their home in spite of all the odds – the East Indian Indentured Immigrants.

As Editor, I faced the practical problem of deciding how much and what to put in our first issue, but with the generous contributions of so many who wrote for, or provided pictures, for the first issue, our resolve to make this an annual magazine was strengthened. We promise you many more insights into the East Indian legacy in our subsequent issues.

I hope you will feel the pulse of Indian history and recognize the horizons waiting to be explored by their descendants as you turn each page of this magazine, our tribute to one hundred and sixty eight years of Indians' presence in Guyana.

**Vindhya Vasini Persaud**  
Editor



21 Jan 07.  
Demerara  
Dear Miss Alice -  
Arrived safe  
all well. Sister sick  
Compliments to your  
Parents. Love to  
you & young brother  
your affectionate  
Ramu Prasad



# Message from The President of The Republic of Guyana



**President of  
the Republic of Guyana**

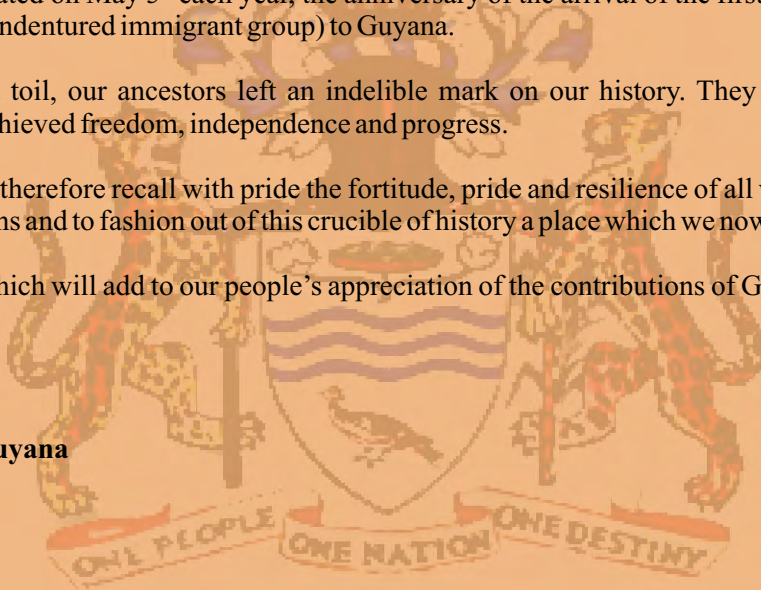
**A**rrival Day, May 5<sup>th</sup> has been added to the calendar of our national holidays and is of special significance to all the peoples of our country because it celebrates the cultural diversity of our heritage and recognizes the contribution of all indentured immigrants. It is celebrated on May 5<sup>th</sup> each year, the anniversary of the arrival of the first batch of East Indians indentured labourers (who were the largest indentured immigrant group) to Guyana.

Through years of sacrifice and toil, our ancestors left an indelible mark on our history. They forged for themselves and their descendents a society that has achieved freedom, independence and progress.

On this Arrival Day 2006, let us therefore recall with pride the fortitude, pride and resilience of all who came to these shores to work under the most arduous conditions and to fashion out of this crucible of history a place which we now proudly call our home.

I wish to commend this effort which will add to our people's appreciation of the contributions of Guyanese of East Indian descent to all aspects of life in Guyana.

**Bharrat Jagdeo**  
**President of the Republic of Guyana**







**Message from the Minister of Culture, Youth & Sport**

It is indeed a very worthwhile project to develop this magazine dedicated to celebrating the impact and achievements of the East Indian Community in Guyana since Indentureship.

In retrospect, every field of endeavour, has seen Guyanese men and women of East Indian descent excel, bringing laurels to Guyana and making positive contributions to our development. Our archives and libraries are rich with invaluable information on outstanding Indo – Guyanese.

Guyana would have been poorer without them, thus the ‘Horizons’ Indian Immigration Magazine’s role in bringing to the fore these great sons and daughters will provide another medium through which this rich legacy can be highlighted and perpetuated.

Congratulations!

**Anthony Xavier  
Minister of Culture,  
Youth and Sport**



**Message from the Indian High Commissioner**

I am very happy to learn about the publication of the ‘Horizons’ magazine to coincide with the celebrations of the Indian Arrival Day 2006.

Indian Diaspora is twenty five million strong living in 110 different countries, including Guyana. They continue to be connected with India through spiritual, emotional and cultural bonds while contributing substantially for the glories and prosperity of the countries of their adoption.

Guyana is a multi religious and multi ethnic society to which all communities, including Indo - Guyanese, have made great sacrifices and contributions. I am very confident that all communities will continue to contribute towards the well being of the country and succeed in forging a strong and prosperous country in which the aspirations of all its citizens are fully realized in the true spirit of ‘ One People, One Nation, One Destiny.’

As the relations between India and Guyana reach new pinnacles, the need to communicate arises frequently. This may be in the context of a problem, an idea, an opportunity or an event. I am sure that ‘Horizons’ will contribute its bit to this process of communication and a healthier interaction between the peoples of both the countries.

I extend my best wishes to all those associated with the HORIZONS magazine for its success.

**Avinash Gupta  
Indian High Commissioner  
To Guyana**





**Message from the Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha**

**M**ay 5th is a significant and historic day in the annals of our history. It was one hundred and sixty eight years ago this day that the first batch of Indian immigrants, our fore parents, arrived to the then British Guiana on the vessel WHITBY. They had travelled thousands of miles on a 112 day journey from their native land India to a land envisioned flourishing with opportunities, prosperity and happiness. They were unaware of the torturous treatment and exploitation they would encounter for years to come.

For me, Indian Arrival Day is not simply for celebration but more an occasion for reflection. Unfortunately, very little is written about our fore parents' history. The arrival of indentured labourers enhanced the landscape of this country and added colour to the cultural strains and folklore

Indentureship has been a reality and constitutes a substantial part of our history. As such, the event ought to be approached with a nationalistic outlook recognizing it as something which is Guyanese and not only an occasion for the Indian Community.

Cultural diversity for me has never been divisive. Indeed it has added richness to culture and life itself. The world is truly plural with people pursuing the divergent way of life. In Guyana we have grown to accept and respect each other's way of life which must continue and be nurtured with the opportunity to embrace whichever stream appeals to us.

Indian Arrival Day has grown with great magnitude. I recall my association with the first public functions and was pleased that the Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha fostered the celebration contributing to its expansion and the broad involvement of people.

Our festivals and more so, this historic event should serve to create the atmosphere of togetherness which will influence the unity and harmony of our Guyanese society.

**Reepu Daman Persaud  
President,  
Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha**



**Message from the Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana**

**I** am thankful for this opportunity to send a message on behalf of the Muslim Community of Guyana on the occasion of the 168 Anniversary of arrival of East Indians in Guyana.

First of all, on behalf of the executives of the Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana, I would like to extend to all Guyanese greetings on this important occasion. Whereas our arrival in this country was divisive in intent, we the descendants of those who came must be united in the observance of these historical events.

In reflecting on the arrival of our forefathers in Guyana, we have to always remember the background under which our forefathers were brought to Guyana. It is very important to know that the British Plantation owners had their own agendas. It was one of divide and rule. Our noble forefathers were brought here to replace our African brothers and sisters on the plantations. Our so called masters set the stage for the divisions we are now witnessing in our communities.

It is important that we teach our children the rich cultural and religious values that we brought here from India. The Indian community has contributed as have the other communities to the development of our country. It is important for us to continue to foster unity among all our people so that we can all benefit from the great sacrifices made by our ancestors. Let us make a pledge on this day to work towards the unity of Guyanese people.

**Fazeel M. Ferouz  
President,  
Central Islamic Organisation of Guyana.**

# MESSAGES





**Message from the  
Indian Arrival Committee**

On the occasion of the 168<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the arrival of Bharatiyas [Indians] who came as Girmityas [indentured labourers] to work on six sugar plantations in British Guiana, the Indian Arrival Committee sends greetings to all Indo-Guyanese and mixed Indo-Guyanese resident in Guyana and in the Diaspora.

Indian Arrival Day marks the commencement of the contribution of Indian immigrants and their descendants, the Indo-Guyanese, who by working hard and applying themselves, very often in difficult circumstances, contributed immensely in all spheres of life to the development of Guyana.

While it is appropriate to celebrate the arrival of Indians it is necessary for every Guyanese to realize and be reminded constantly that building a multi-ethnic country like Guyana proceeds from the recognition that each group brought something here and the secret, therefore, to nation building is unity and working together.

Happy Indian Arrival Day to all!

**Evan Radhay Persaud  
Indian Arrival Committee**



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- Tennis Rolls
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Eat  
Healthy...**

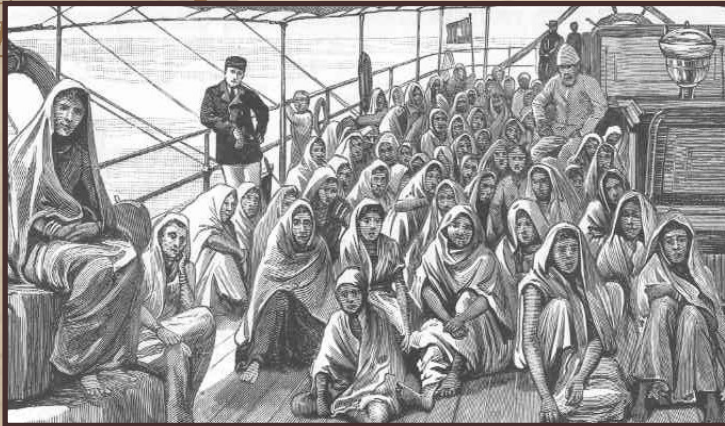




# HISTORY

By: Tota C. Mangar

## The Arrival of East Indians In Guyana



**M**ay 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006 commemorates the 168<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the arrival of East Indian indentured immigrants in Guyana the former colony of British Guiana. Indeed, for over three quarters of a century (1838-1917), Indian indentured labourers were imported from the sub-continent of India to the West Indian colonies ostensibly to fill the void created as a result of the mass exodus of ex-slaves from plantation labour following the abolition of the despicable system of slavery and moreso the premature termination of the apprenticeship scheme in 1838.

This influx into the Caribbean in the post-emancipation period of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries was only one segment of a wider movement of Indian labourers to other parts of the world, including Mauritius, Ceylon, Fiji, the Strait Settlements, Natal and other parts of the African continent.

Overall, where the English speaking Caribbean is concerned, substantial numbers of indentured Indians were imported. Based on statistical evidence, Guyana was the recipient of 239,909 East Indian immigrants up to the termination of the system in 1917; Trinidad 143,939; Jamaica 36,412; Grenada 3,033; St. Vincent 2,472; St. Lucia 4,354; and St. Kitts 337. In addition the non-English speaking Caribbean also imported Indian Indentured labourers during this period. Of the French colonies (now Overseas Departments) Martinique received 25,509; Guadeloupe 45,844 and French Guiana 19,276. Suriname, while under Dutch rule, imported a total of 35,501 immigrants.

Following the abolition of slavery in 1834 and the termination of the apprenticeship system in 1838, a state of fear, uncertainty and gloom was uppermost in the minds of the then British Guianese planters. They were very conscious that a grave labour shortage on the estates would certainly mean economic disaster to themselves and the sugar industry in general.

The mass exodus of ex-slaves from the plantations during this crucial period of 'crisis and change' merely served to confirm planters' fear and uneasiness. This movement was not entirely surprising as several decades of slavery had resulted in the plantation being seen as the symbol of dehumanization, degradation and demoralization, and the victims, quite naturally wanted to rid themselves of white planter class, social, cultural and political domination, and to assert their economic independence. With great enthusiasm and in the face of tremendous odds they started the village movement and peasantry.

The importation of indentured labourers from the Indian sub-continent was part of the continuing search for a reliable labour force to meet the needs of the powerful plantocracy. In the case of Guyana, East Indian immigration had its origin in the "Gladstone Experiment". John Gladstone, the father of British statesman, William Gladstone, was the owner of the West Demerara plantations, Vreed-en-Hoop and Vreed-en-Stein, at this juncture of the country's history.





# HISTORY....

As a result of the acute labour problem, Gladstone wrote the Calcutta recruiting firm, Gillanders, Arbuthnot and Company inquiring about the possibility of obtaining Indian immigrants for his estates. The firm's prompt reply was that it envisaged no recruiting problems and that Indians were already in service in another British colony, Mauritius.

Subsequently, Gladstone obtained permission for his scheme from both the Colonial Office and the Board of Control of the East India Company. The first batch of Indian indentured labourers arrived in Guyana on board the steamships "Whitby" and "Hesperus" in May 1838, and these first arrivals were on a five-year contract. This initial experimentation was not confined to Gladstone's two estates but it involved plantations Highbury and Waterloo in Berbice, Belle View, West Bank Demerara and Anna Regina on the Essequibo Coast as well.

This immigration scheme, involving Indian immigrants, commenced in 1838 with a temporary halt from July 1839 to 1845, after which it continued virtually uninterrupted to 1917 during which time 239, 909 immigrants landed in Guyana. Of this figure 75,547 returned to the land of their birth while the remainder who survived the system chose to remain here and make this country their homeland.

In the main, the system of Indentureship could be characterized as one of "struggle, sacrifice and resistance" where the Indian immigrants are concerned. The system itself was closely linked to slavery. British historian, Hugh Tinker, who did extensive work on East Indian Labour Overseas, describes it as a "New System of Slavery".

Anthony Trallope, who visited the Caribbean in the 1850's, viewed it as "A depotism tempered with sugar". Chief Justice in the second half of the Nineteenth Century, Charles Beaumont, aptly describes it as "a rotten, monstrous system rooted in slavery."

The late distinguished Guyanese historian, Dr. Walter Rodney highlighted the harshness of the Indentureship system and its "neo-slave nature". Another Guyanese historian Dr. Basdeo Mangru argues that slavery and indenture showed remarkable similarities in terms of control, exploitation and degradation. In any event it is reasonable to conclude that the very nature of the Indentureship system that prevailed, lent itself to struggle, sacrifice and resistance on the part of the indentured labourers.

From the very inception the system was plagued with controversy. True enough there were strong "push" factors which motivated the people to leave their homeland such as high levels of unemployment, chronic poverty, indebtedness and even famine and at the same time many were disposed to respond to promises of better times and what they perceived as "greener pastures".

Even so, professional recruiting agents, the arkatis' in North India, and the 'maistris' in South India, resorted largely to deception and coercion to get supplies. Many were lured by way of glowing promises and were assured of lucrative employment and enriched opportunities. Recruiters exploited their ignorance and simplicity, and some were hoodwinked, cajoled and lured to leave their homes under false pretences while some were even kidnapped. Indeed, fraud, deceit and coercion permeated the whole recruiting system between 1838 and 1917.

Against tremendous odds the immigrants struggled for their very survival on board ship. Overcrowding of the emigrant ships, inadequate food, lack of fresh water, water-borne diseases such as cholera, dysentery and diarrhoea, and the long and arduous voyage made life unbearable.

In many instances, the consequence was a high mortality rate to as much as 20 to 30 percent. Immigrants consoled themselves through singing, drumming and story telling, and of greater significance was the lasting friendship that developed among the 'jehazis' or shipmates.





part of my family  
**FOR GENERATIONS!**



the freshness of breeze

in a bottle





# HISTORY....

In the colony indentured labourers had to endure the critical period of 'seasoning' or adjusting to their new environment. This in itself was no easy task, and some found themselves introduced to plantation labour very quickly after their arrival.

On the estates, the indentured labourers experienced the harshness of the system. It was obvious that the powerful plantocracy had effective control of the immigrant labour force. An important aspect of this control was the contract under which the immigrant was recruited. While it stipulated the obligation of the labourer and the employer, the labour laws weighted heavily against the former. As in the case of the slave laws, the plantocracy benefited immensely under the contract laws. After all, the implementation of the laws and the period of industrial residence were taking place thousands of miles from the labourer's homeland in a social and political environment dominated by the employer.

It was not surprising therefore that the laws were easily varied and very often abused by the plantocracy to suit their 'whims and fancies'. Of added significance was the fact that some Immigration Agent-Generals and Stipendiary Magistrates tended to side with the planter class. As a result cases of intimidation, assault and battery were often covered up.

Moreover, court trials were subjected to abuse and were, in many instances, reduced to a farce as official Interpreters aligned with the plantocracy while the labourers had little opportunity of defending themselves.

Throughout the period of Indentureship, immigrants were faced with meager wage rates and unrealistic task work. Weekly earnings depended on the number of tasks, the nature of the tasks, whether it was weeding, shoveling, manuring, planting or harvesting and the speed with which they were completed. In any event, it was the employer who invariably determined the wage rate and whenever there was a fall in sugar prices immigrants found their earnings minimized.

One immigration agent was baffled to know how immigrants at Plantation Bel Air existed due to insufficient earnings to support life, while Coljar, a spokesman for immigrants, was quoted in October, 1869 as saying: "Times are hard. We cannot live on the wages we are getting: our stomachs are not being filled".

Indian indentured labourers experienced a persistent problem surrounding the "muster roll", which was held every morning. Non-attendance meant the penalty of a fine which was arbitrarily deducted from their wages. The pressure of getting into the fields early in order to complete unrealistic tasks at the expense of missing the muster roll was very great. On the other hand, if he attended the muster roll and failed to complete the day's task, the end result was the same arbitrary deduction of wages. In effect the labourer had little choice. One way or the other he was penalized.

The Indian immigrant often went before the courts as victims of the labour laws and the legal system in general. The planter had at his disposal several instruments of prosecution. He could prosecute for refusal to commence work, or work left unfinished, absenteeism without authority, disorderly or threatening behaviour, or even neglect. Punishment resulted in fines or imprisonment.

Moreover an immigrant imprisoned for misconduct could have his indenture extended to include the period in jail. This meant the immigrant was effectively punished twice for the same offence. At the same time convictions of immigrants were inordinately high. Charges could be made on mere orders of managers, and even for trivialities. In 1863, for example of the 4,936 prisoners who were in the Georgetown jail, 3,148 were indentured labourers.

Moreover, *The Annual Report of the Immigration Agent-Generals for 1874-1894* showed an alarmingly high figure of 65,084 convictions of immigrants for breaches of the labour contract.



# HISTORY....



This development reinforced the fact that the indentured labourer was far from docile. He was struggling, sacrificing and resisting. The numerous instances of cases under the labour contract were ample proof of his restlessness and non-compliance with a harsh and oppressive system.

Throughout the period of indentureship, the immigrant suffered from a paucity of social amenities. The tenement ranges or “logies” were small and unventilated, potable water was virtually non-existent, and medical facilities and sanitation were poor. As a consequence outbreaks of diseases tended to assume epidemic proportions.

Through vagrancy laws immigrants had their movement restricted. This was an integral part of planter’s strategy to localize labour and to place restraints on workers’ liberty. The labourer had to get a ‘pass’ signed by the estate manager if he wanted to leave the estate of residence. This pass system exposed the labourer to indignity at the hands of colonial police who were empowered to apprehend him without a ‘pass’. Managers used it as an effective control device and also as a means of preventing workers from making comparisons of wage levels at different estates. The fear was that such knowledge could easily lead to discontent and desertion.

It was because of their powers of control over the indentured labourer that planters became increasingly arrogant. Some repeatedly, and openly, boasted that the labourers on their estates should be “at work, or in hospital or in gaol” – during working hours, such was their attitude. One Demerara planter publicly stated, “give me my heart’s desires in Coolies and I will make you a million hogsheads of sugar”.

It was not surprising therefore that from the 1860s onwards the myth of Indian docility was to be seriously challenged. Indian indentured labourers began to openly defy the system. As a consequence there was a steady deterioration of industrial relations, increasing working class protests and imperial investigation. “Struggle, Sacrifice and Resistance” manifested in numerous labour unrests.

Violent eruptions were occasioned by many specific and localized grievances, such as overbearing behaviour of managers, wage rate disputes, disagreement over tasks, sexual exploitation of women by overseers and the arbitrary deduction of wages of labourers.

The first such disturbance took place at Plantation Leonora, West Coast Demerara in July 1869. The shovel gang complained that wages were withheld because they could not complete a job on waterlogged soil. They also demanded extra pay to do the job. A confrontation between armed police and the labourers was narrowly avoided, but the ringleaders were arrested, convicted and incarcerated at the penal settlement, Mazaruni. The following year violence erupted at Plantations Hague, Zeelugt, Vergenoegen, Uitvlugt, Success and Non Pariel.



Another major disturbance took place at Plantation Devonshire Castle in 1972. The root cause of this uprising was widespread dissatisfaction with the allocation of tasks, prices offered, long hours of work, unilateral pay deductions from labourers, wages and general ill-treatment and abuse. This time there was confrontation with colonial police who opened fire and five labourers lost their lives while some were seriously injured.

Riots and disturbances continued with regularity in the 1890s and in the early years of the twentieth century. Four years before the termination of the Immigration scheme, five labourers from plantation Rose Hall lost their lives during a strike and disturbance.

Indeed, towards the end of the indentureship system labour protest had assumed various forms including work stoppage, mass picketing, violent demonstrations, marching to the Immigration Department, assaults on managers and overseers, coupled with passive resistance such as feigning illness, malingering and deliberately performing poor work.

Indentured labourers also struggled and made tremendous sacrifice in other areas, as for example, in the face of an often harsh and oppressive environment, they persisted with their religious and cultural practices. From the late Nineteenth Century, temples and mosques began to dot the coastal landscape and their traditional languages, music, dress, food and folklore were made to prevail. In the face of language barriers, they adjusted to the needs of a western education in order to enhance their upward social mobility. In the long run they, and their descendants, emerged in the professions to become teachers, headmasters, doctors, lawyers, accountants and civil servants.

They toiled unceasingly to ensure the survival of the sugar industry and the emergence of the rice industry.

They contributed significantly in the areas of village development, cash crop cultivation, cattle-rearing, milk selling and other economic activities during the period of indentureship. From the late nineteenth century Indian immigrants displayed a high occupation profile in a number of off-plantation economic activities including cab-drivers, bankers, tailors, carpenters, boat-builders, charcoal makers, goldsmiths, porters, small scale manufacturers and fishermen.

In recent times their descendents have made, and continue to make tremendous strides in the social, economic cultural, education, political and trade union fields. Many of them are today leading sports personalities, entrepreneurs, educationists, politicians and trade unionists in their own right. The Late President and Father of the Nation, Dr. Cheddi Jagan was himself the son of indentured labourers who found themselves in the bound-yard of Plantation Port Mourant. To assume the highest office in Guyana was no mean feat by this extra-ordinarily gifted man. Our current President, His Excellency Bharrat Jagdeo is also the proud descendant of East Indian indentured labourers. Indeed, descendants of immigrants are actively engaged in every facet of life in Guyanese society of today.

Our forefathers of yesteryear have certainly been inspirational in the furtherance of national development through their grit and determination. Clearly 'Struggle, Sacrifice and Resistance' were 'part and parcel' of the Indian immigrant psyche during the neo-slavery system of indentureship, 1838-1917. They and their descendants have survived largely through their resilience, persistence, custom, tradition and commitment to family which invariably promotes thrift, industry and self-esteem.





# Pure Artesian Well Water

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# Portraits

of descendants of the East Indian Immigrants

*Through The Ages. . . .*

By: Jessica Xavier

Throughout my life, I have been given opportunities to learn and educate myself on numerous cultures of the world, but never have I been offered a chance to dive into a cultural past which I had no idea would take me on such an exciting journey. A journey that would leave me not only mesmerised at its cultural traditions but also eager to learn of its origin. The traditions and tales that I have been told, ultimately, led me to the history of the first years, of an East Indian race in Guyana.

My assignment was simple, research the backgrounds of families, and tell their story. I jumped into it thinking, what could I learn?

I was introduced to two of the most heart warming women I have ever met, and their life stories stunned me, not only because their lives were hard compared to ours these days, but because they have no regrets of such a life and they possessed a calming and spiritual presence that was overwhelming.

## “Meh did dead but meh come back to life!”

My journey led me first to Rotterdam, not Rotterdam, Holland, but Rotterdam, Berbice, where I met with Jasodra Maraj. Emerging from her back yard, with a cutlass in her hand, I was amazed at the physical structure of a woman who is 92 years old, full of energy and possessing an aura which beckoned from within. Shy and very concerned with her image, she asked to be excused and hurried up to change her clothing, (which was our fault for arriving a bit late).

Coming downstairs all dressed in a beautiful light green attire, with her scarf and her head tied with the traditional romal, she was filled with energy and smiles which just brightened my day. She gave a sense of comfort to everyone around her. We sat down and began her story. Born in Mara, Berbice which in her day was referred to as, “the New Calcutta,” this 3rd generation descendant of Indian Immigrants, who speaks Hindi and treasures her traditions, was a hard worker.

She has no real memory of her mother or father, but lived with her grandmother who came on one of the ships with her daughter, both tricked into boarding the ship which they thought was destined to her great-grandmother’s house in another part of India. She says they were terribly disappointed to arrive here in Guyana, but came to grips with the new life that they were about to start living.

Her grandmother in her mind was a woman of great strength and keen on tradition. Her parents had died and the responsibility of maintaining the family rested on the shoulders of her eldest sister and her grandmother, but she never escaped her own daily hardships. They all worked in the fields of the Mara Sugar Estate. She practically grew up in those fields, for at the ripe age of 13 she started working and was allotted back breaking tasks, such as, weeding trenches, fetching wood, bailing punts and other difficult chores which her “driver” insisted on her doing.



**Jasodra Maraj - 92 Years Old and Full of Life**

Dressed in old dresses, to work everyday, her memories of the factory were nothing but positive, for she got along with everyone at the factory. She never had time for things like education and other little girl fantasies, but she was quite content with her life. She said in the day when the teachers sent for her to go to school she hid under the bed because she had to stay home to “watch cow.”



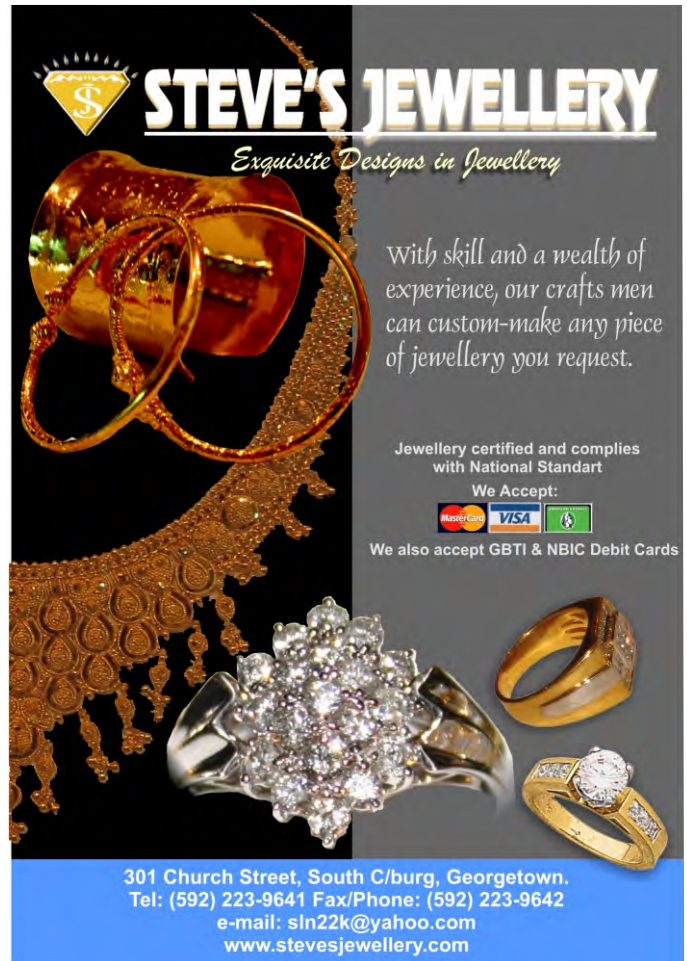
She left Mara to live in Rotterdam with her husband, whom she married at the age of 20 in an arranged marriage.

She resides there to this day. In a new family of 8, with an unfortunate loss of her husband and her eldest daughter, she has no regrets in life, and would change nothing that has made her the person she is today.

Full of life, Jasodra at this age still maintains her household, with the cleaning and cooking. She said her body is so used to working hard that she just can't sit still, she fears she'll just conk out.

Although she was never given the opportunity of returning to India, she was given the chance to travel to Canada, where she lived for 8 months, but grew weary of just staying home and having no responsibilities. She had also taken a trip to USA, where she also couldn't find herself adapting to such a life. When asked to give advice to the present day generation she said, "God before anything, don't do wrong things and show your children a good example."


With a bit of humour I proceeded to ask the question, "How is it that you look so good for your age," and with a broad, sheepish smile, she said "I does pray nuff beta, and me does care myself." She was very ill a few weeks before my visit and the only comment she made was, "Me did dead but me come back to life." In this we learnt of her fear of needles and of being ill. Other than that, this amazing woman, pleasant and strong in her beliefs, did nothing but touch me in a peaceful way with her life story, one which I know I will never forget.



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# Portraits. . . .

Still along the path of the Indian history, another very warm and welcoming individual that I had the pleasure of meeting was a Mrs. Sukhdaih.

Sitting on a bench outside her simple home, but radiating a palpable warmth and energy Sukhdaih's wiry frame belies her age of 95 years.

Born in Mara, Berbice on the 30<sup>th</sup> of December 1911, Sukhdaih lives surrounded by memories of another era. A direct descendant of Indian immigrants, she easily recalls that both of her parents like other jahaji came to British Guiana on the ship Mercei from their native India. Like her they lived in Mara and were blessed with five children; two daughters and three sons.

Life in those times was not easy as even females had to work on the estate. She was not sent to school at all as she was needed to supplement the family income and had to work. At the tender age of 16 years after her marriage she started to work in the fields. Her duties ranged from cutting and trashing cane with her bare hands to loading the punts and weeding the dams. Looking back she remembers how her hands hurt after these tasks but she had no choice. With her worn hands she had to go home and grind masala. She chuckles "life did hard, ah wuk hard, money been small, but abe did live happy, abe eat nuff that time, thing did cheap cheap." Work hard, money small". The family's clothing was simple and their shirts and skirts were made of sugar bag material.

Today at 95, she still clings to that work ethic and the simple life. She cleans her own room, cooks and weeds the yard. She is fastidious about her clothing, washing them only with rainwater and ironing them herself. The energetic lady claims not to suffer from any illness and accredits it to keeping active and busy to this day. She sums up her zest for life simply by saying – "when the body get used to working hard, it difficult to stop".



**Mrs. Sukhdaih and Jessica Xavier having a chat**



**Mrs. Sukhdaih - 95 Years Old**

Early marriages in those days were not uncommon. Sukhdaih's marriage was arranged at the age of 14. She shyly admits that her husband loved her very much. Evidence of his great love for her manifested itself when he took his mother back to India. On his mother's death there, his relatives who were well established barbers in the village in India offered him a large quantity of land and encouraged him to stay in India. He refused and returned to British Guiana to be with his wife. While in India, he received some religious training and on his return he became a religious leader and counselor for the village.

It was at the time of her marriage that Sukhdaih received the very noticeable tattoo on her forearm. The tattoo or 'godnah' was placed on the arms of married women in those days. Although she too had to follow this tradition, she was unsure of the significance. What she remembers was that she was told if she did not have the godnah done, her in-laws would not accept anything from her hands. "You know old people," she chuckled. Sukhdaih is a practicing Hindu who places great importance on prayers. She ends her day with Sandhya or prayer. The sprightly lady attributes her good looks to praying a lot and not eating much meat. She strongly advocates that people need to know their religion to have a good life.

Full of wit and mirth and at times lapsing into Hindi dialect which she learnt from her parents who only spoke Hindi Sukhdaih candidly confesses how much she loves to dress up. She wistfully remembers how she wore jewellery from head to toe, sporting several earrings at one time and big 'tilaris and galihar' (necklaces).



Today she wears only a few pieces because she is afraid of being robbed. In her words, "before we dress up in nuff jewellery, from head to toe, but these days, you can't cuz dem ah thief nuff." She notes that on a few occasions she gets to wear some of her finery, usually at family or village weddings where she is asked to sing traditional wedding songs. Although she still sings, this lady of indomitable spirit remembers travelling to Suriname and Demerara to sing in her youth.



**Mrs. Sukhdaih - Playing The Drum**

Sukhdaih laments that the present generation is lazy and stubborn. Although she had no children she remembers that long ago when parents spoke, children obeyed but noted that that is not the case today. Her advice to today's youth is "learn to live in good unity and love, be respectful to others." Reflecting on her life Sukhdaih would not change any moment as she learnt a lot from each experience.

With such history and information, I was also touched by her warmth and hospitality. The chance of meeting this woman, who opened my eyes to such a past, was not a meeting in vain, but one which was much respected and will be appreciated for many years to come.



**Mrs. Sukhdaih (Left) - Dancing at a Wedding House**

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# Experience

An Immigrant's Journey

By: Vindhya Persaud & Yogmattie Chung



Kalpu, Paragi & Children



Chandrowtie

The arduous journey made by Indians, destined for a life of indentureship in British Guiana, was fraught with many unpleasant events that have been chronicled over the years. Almost every Indian household has a story to tell of their ancestors, as to how they were coerced or duped into making the journey.

However, there were some personal defining moments on the ship. Stories unfold when speaking with descendants of the immigrants and it is clear that many of these have been told to each generation to preserve the memories.

Pandit Durga Prasad, a 19 year old lad who hailed from Pitharpur, Partabgarh, Uttar Pradesh, landed on the shores of British Guiana in 1914 and like many of those who accompanied him at the time did not anticipate staying beyond the five year period of indentureship under which he was bound. He had left off his studies at Calcutta University maybe in search of a better life like so many others.

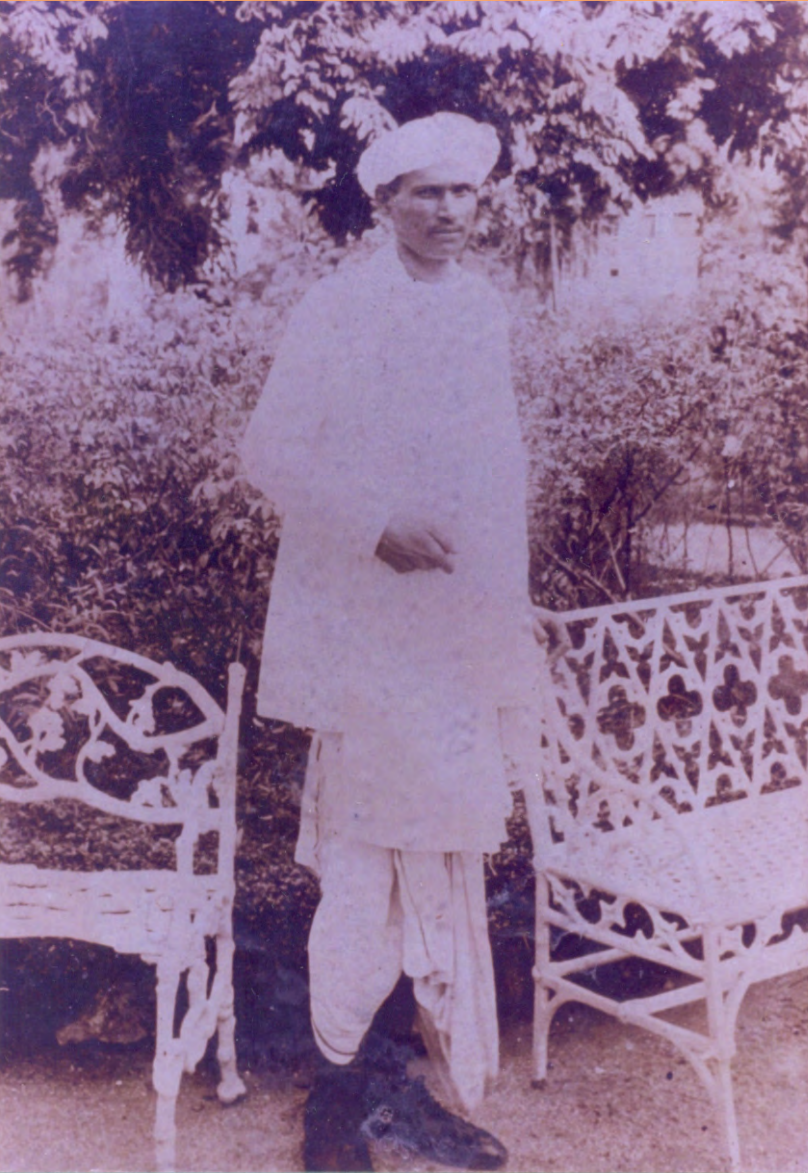
On board the ship S. S. Sutledge, Durga Prasad formed friendships with other jahaji (shipmates) that have endured until today. It did not matter that they were from different regions in India; they shared the same plight of an unknown destiny.

His dearest friend on the ship was Kalpu who was travelling with his wife Paragi. Although on their arrival the friends parted company, as Durga Prasad was assigned to Plantation Diamond and Kalpu to Plantation Lusignaan, what none of them realised was that their offspring would remain irrevocably linked by those early bonds until today. Durga Pandit's 8 year old son, Reepu Daman Persaud would be the 'syballa' (little male attendant) for Kalpu's son, Rambaran's wedding. Pandit Reepu Daman is fondly called Chacha (father's brother) by Rambaran's children and grandchildren.

Durga Prasad's destiny led him to become one of British Guiana's leading pandits. He was respected and, in the close knit community, transmitted many of his homeland's customs and traditions to those who accepted him as their spiritual 'guru'. The stories are many and Yesu Persaud, Paul O' Hara and Basmattie Rambaran, in addition to his son and daughter, have fond recollections of Durga Prasad's contribution to Hinduism. He is credited with being the pioneer of Ram Leela in Guyana.

Much before the introduction of the Ram Leela and some years after his marriage to Jasodia, Pandit Durga Prasad along with his two children Mahadai and Chandrowtie made the return trip to India in 1930.





**Pandit Durga Prasad**

Now 80 years old, his second daughter Chandroutie who was five years old at the time of the return trip to India remembers her father deciding to return because he wanted to visit his relatives. As a child she was very excited because not many persons had the opportunity to go back to India.

Chandroutie's memory of the length of time the ship took to get to India is that of a five year old, 'very long'. But what still remains in her memory are the sparkling white uniforms worn by the ship's officers against the backdrop of a very crowded ship. The Dispenser, Pitamber Doobay, who also made the voyage back on the ship, was also a great favourite of young Chandrowtie, and more than once she mentions receiving candies from him. According to her, his surroundings were always spotlessly clean.

On their arrival in India, the family was taken to her father's home where many of his relatives and friends had gathered to receive him. Although his parents were both dead, his brother welcomed them to the family home. Her father's family seemed to be involved in agriculture. Chandrowtie says:

"I vaguely remember the shape of the house and the yard. It was a flat house with a small upper room. To me the house seemed large and there were lots of people around but I don't know how they were related. I remember people passing by the house selling things such as jalebi, mithai and other sweets."

In the one year they stayed there, she recounts how she played with the neighbours' children and often visited the market with them. Very often they would buy fruits for her. Chandrowtie did not attend school for that year but picked up quite a bit of Hindi. Her father's family spoke only Hindi and she had to learn to speak so that she could communicate with them. Her Guyanese born mother spoke basic Hindi which she had learnt from her husband and knew enough to carry on a conversation. However, she recalls her mother being a bit apprehensive about meeting her father's family.

"I know that my Mother used to say that when she went to India with my father, his relatives took a while to accept her but once they got to know her they liked her. She received a lot of gifts. Deed (my big sister) and I got gifts also. My Mother used to bring out her gifts and show her friends when they visited. She would talk about the trip and who she met there. Among the things we got were, Tharis, clothes and a foot ring. I still have the Thari I received there."

After one year in India, Pandit Durga returned home and resumed his life in British Guiana, performing pujas, training pandits, teaching hindi and performing in the Ram Leela.. Apparently he had performed in the Ram Leelas before coming to Guyana. His daughter thinks that her father never planned to stay in India for a long time he just wanted a chance to visit his family.

Pandit Durga died in his forties and did not live to see his son Reepu Daman ably span the worlds of religion and politics. Durga's only son has the distinction of following in his father's footsteps and is a pandit. He has also held the highest post in the country. Reepu Daman made the trip back to his father's village as the guest of the speaker of Lucknow, Basudev Singh in 1976. He was delighted to meet with relatives of his father who remembered Chandrowtie's visit. They seemed surprised when he told them that he was Durga Prasad's son as they had no memory of a son visiting with the family. Reepu Daman Persaud was born more than five years after his family's return from India. His search for his ancestral village and relatives was possible in those early years because he has in his possession his father's passport and ship record.



**Daughter and Son of Pandit Durga Prasad Chandrowtie & Pandit Reepu Daman Persaud**





## A Rich Culture Is *Discovered*

### Deepavali - The Festival of Lights

**F**estivals contribute to the cultural tapestry of all countries. Each festival brings with it a unique blend of customs, traditions and acts as a harbinger of goodwill, peace and fraternity. Centuries ago, Deepavali was celebrated in the confines of the logies and the villages. Our foreparents, the indentured immigrants strove to maintain their culture and religion with whatever limited facilities were available in those times. Diyas were lovingly crafted out of mud and the radiance given off from these little lights served as a beacon of hope to them as they toiled under the most horrendous conditions.

Deepavali, which literally means 'a row of lights', is celebrated on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of the Hindu month of Kartik. That dark night or Amawasya is conducive to the twinkling lights that illuminate every nook and cranny. Worship of the goddess Maha Lakshmi is the main focus of Deepavali. The aspirant performs Lakshmi puja and seeks her blessing for material and spiritual fulfillment. The festival encourages the participation of the entire family and it has long been the custom in Guyana for everyone in the home to gather in front of their Lakshmi murti at dusk chanting prayers and mantras before emerging to light their first diya. Collectively devotees attend their mandirs and petition the mother with one voice – TAMASO MAA JYOTIR GAMAYA, lead us from the darkness and the depths of despair and ignorance to the path of light and truth. Prior to the day itself the home and mandirs would be thoroughly cleaned and decorated in preparation for the Goddess of light, Maha Lakshmi.

The ladies of the home would in recent times design elaborate rangolis (coloured tracings on the floor) and be absorbed in making sweet delicacies for family and friends. At this time, the household would be sanctified as vegetarian fasts are the norm. Hindus would also abstain from alcohol and other negative things.

Deepavali is preceded by Triodasi and Chaturdasi. On Triodasi, a yama diya is lit with prayers for longevity. Three to five diyas are lit on Chaturdasi or Choti Diwali in remembrance of the defeat of Narkasur at the hands of Lord Krishna. This day is special for women as they propitiate Lord Krishna who had released many women who were held captive by the despot Narkasur. It was on this day that Lord Krishna re-established the principle so beautifully composed in the Manu Smriti – Where women are honoured there the gods dwell. Goverdhan Puja is performed the day after Diwali reminiscent of the time when Krishna Bhagwan held aloft the Goverdhan Mountain to protect the villagers from the rains and thunderstorms. The five day observance concludes with Bhai Dhuj, a day for the renewal of filial ties between brother and sister.

The many occurrences associated with the festival assure that despotism and injustice had to be crushed to allow the emergence of Ram Rajya. The vanity and haughtiness of King Bali or the arrogance and autocracy of Narkasur must not again unfold.



Gaily decorated Horse Cart - Diwali Motocade, 1970's





Over the last three decades the festival has gained prominence, and features on Guyana's list of national holidays.

Deepavali has emerged from homes and mandirs and presently many commercial entities and public buildings are decorated with lights to welcome the goddess Maha Lakshmi. The trend of using electric lights has increased and more persons are supplementing their diyas with these creating an aesthetically appealing look that has passers by gasping in awe. Diyas are hardly made by individual householders, but those professionally made from clay can be purchased from stores and vendors. Novel innovations to the once simple mud diya filled with ghee and lit with a cotton wick include wax filled diyas and electrical diyas. The humble diya has certainly withstood generations and in spite of all the new-fangled techniques it still reminds the Hindu to rekindle that inner light within and to extend to all those he or she comes in contact with.

The Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha's Country-wide Motorcades have become synonymous with the celebration of Deepavali. Thousands of Guyanese of every stratum of society and cultural belief throng the roads to witness the processions of beautifully decorated and illuminated vehicles depicting the theme of Deepavali.

In the olden days it wasn't unusual to see horse-drawn carts gaily bedecked for the motorcade. With the advent of advanced technology the vehicles ranging from low-bed trucks to sleek cars are carefully designed with sophisticated lights and mobile parts. Guyanese who have migrated overseas have attempted to hold motorcades with some success, but the Dharmic Sabha's motorcades are still outstanding and major tourist attractions.

Deepavali in its many dimensions addresses questions which are not only philosophical, but also economical and social in orientation. Deepavali is thus all embracing in its significance. Socially not only the whole family is involved in its observance, rather the entire community participates in a spirit of visible cordiality and joy.

Deepavali threatens darkness in all its dimensions and influences the emergence of an illuminated society in which there exists understanding, tolerance, love and cordiality.

Societies are built and sustained on foundations such as these. Festivals like Deepavali serve to rekindle hopes and expectation, and influence society in a positive direction. Deepavali revitalises and renews the spirit of optimism from which a new beginning can be constructed, based on equity and noble intentions.



Depiction of Mother Lakshmi



Fireworks on Diwali Night





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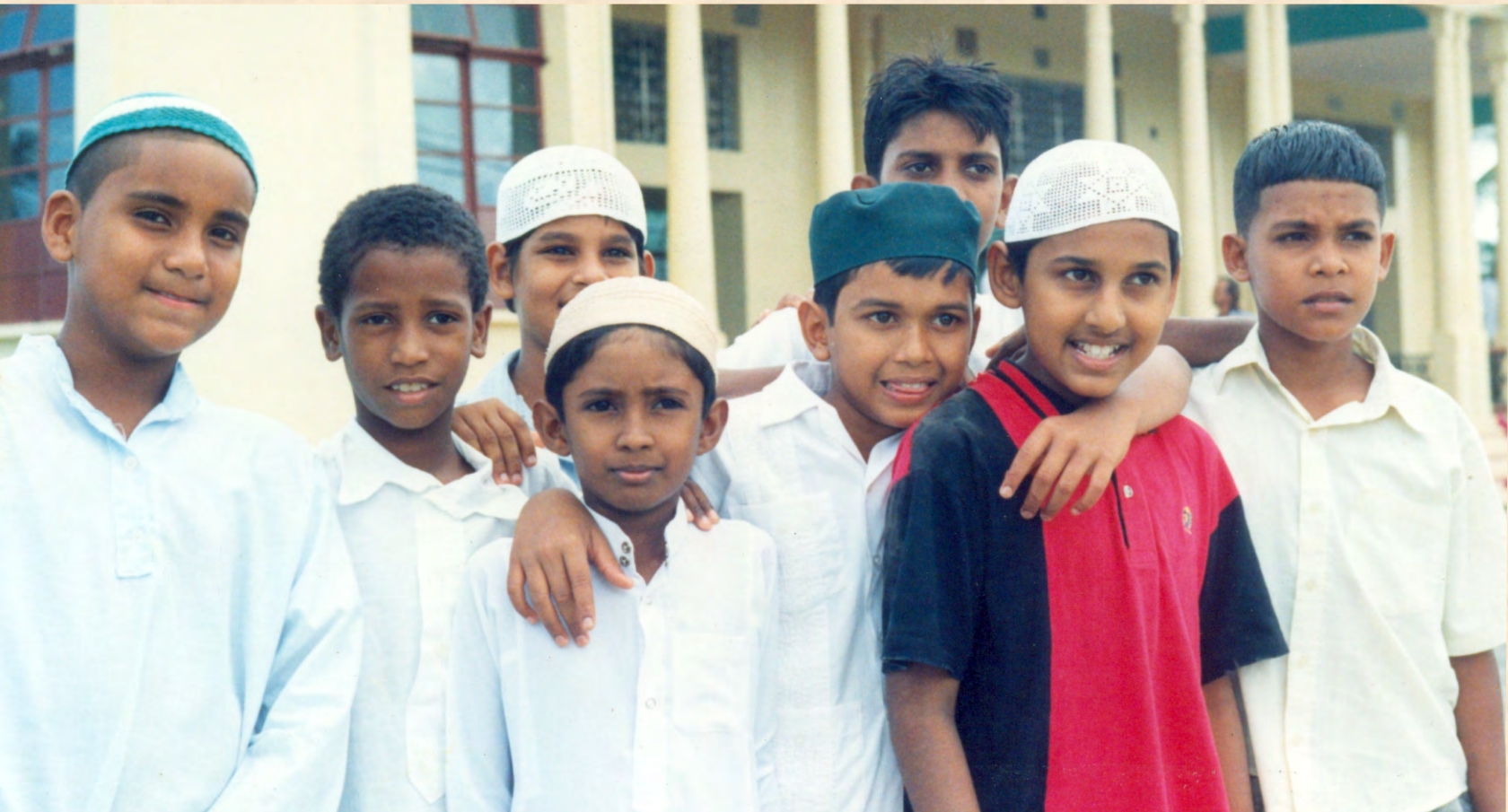
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## A Rich Culture....

## Eid ul-Fitr

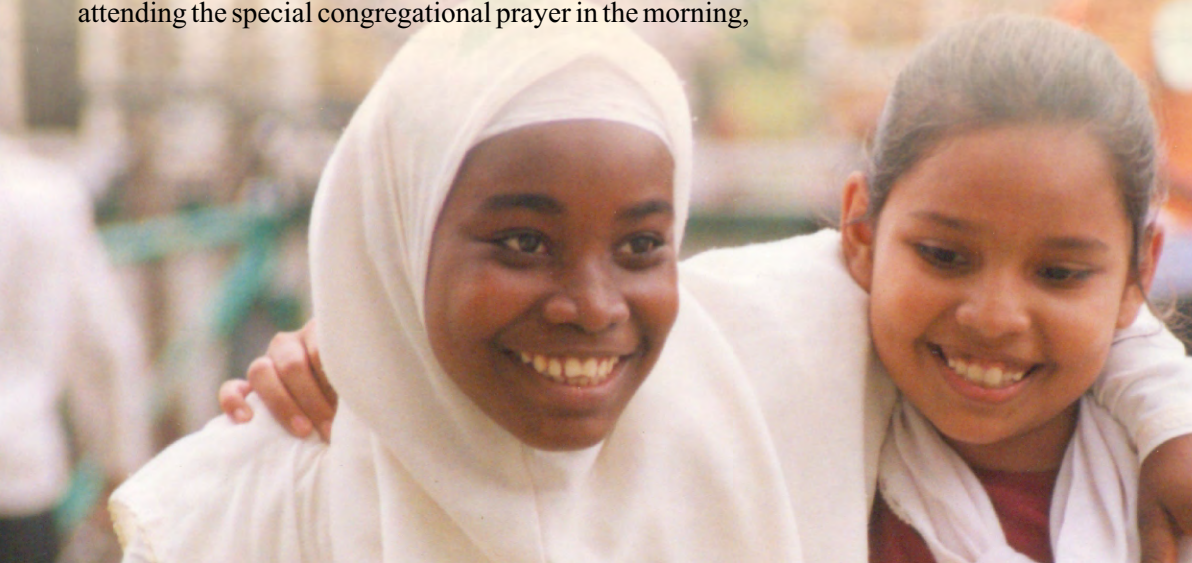
By: Hakeem Khan

**E***id ul-Fitr* often abbreviated as simply Eid, is an Islamic holiday that marks the end of the month of fasting. *Fitr* means "to break" and therefore symbolizes the breaking of the fasting period and of all evil habits. On the day of the celebration, a typical family gets up very early and attends special prayers held only for the occasion in big mosques, in large open areas, stadiums or arenas. The prayer is generally short, and is followed by a sermon. The festivities and merriment start after the prayers with visits to the homes of friends and relatives and thanking the Creator for all blessings. Eid is a time to come together as a community and to renew friendship and family ties. This is a time for peace for all Muslims in the world to devote to prayers and mutual well-being.

It is a joyous occasion with important religious significance. Happiness is observed at attaining spiritual upliftment after a month of fasting. Muslims dress in holiday attire. After attending the special congregational prayer in the morning,

worshippers greet and embrace each other in a spirit of peace, love, and brotherhood. Visiting friends and relatives is common. For Muslims, Eid ul-Fitr is a joyful celebration of the achievement of enhanced piety. It is a day of forgiveness, moral victory and peace, of congregation, fellowship, brotherhood and unity. Muslims are not only celebrating the end of fasting, but thanking their God for the help and strength that they believe he gave them throughout the previous month to help them practice self-control.

It is a joyous occasion, similar to Christmas in its celebration but with strong religious significance. The giving of a special charity for this occasion is obligatory. Muslims dress in holiday attire, attend a special community prayer in the morning, and visit friends and relatives. Greetings of "a blessed 'Eid" are exchanged. In some places, children are given gifts or money by their parents and relatives.







## A Rich Culture....

# The Hindu Wedding

By: Vindhya Vasini Persaud

**H**indu weddings reflect much of the richness of Indian traditions and culture. No one can remain impervious to the kaleidoscope of colour, rousing music and *joie de vivre* that accompanies the wedding festivities. Like an album with moving pictures, a Hindu wedding creates an indelible impact not only because of its richness but because it captures in every aspect be it food, clothing, cooking, music, dance or rites, the extent to which we have managed to preserve customs and traditions handed down from generation to generation.

Although time has relentlessly marched on, many customs have remained embedded in the fabric of Indian festivities. Others, like arranged marriages, are not rigidly enforced by Hindu families. In present day 'arranged' scenarios, suggestions are made by family friends or relatives to either the boy or girl's family of potential spouses based on knowledge of their background, upbringing and personality. Chaperoned meetings are organised and the Pandit is consulted as to the compatibility of the pair. Once the 'gana baite' and the couple agree, the wedding is fixed for an auspicious date. Grandmothers dramatically recount the experience of seeing their husbands for the first time on their wedding day and of having no say in the matter, many of them even younger than sixteen. They shake their heads and say "Love comes after marriage, what is all this thing of letting boy and girl pick? Love marriage? Humph!!! Two morning and they divorce .....not like in we time."

It is well known that Hindu weddings allow most members of the family to play significant roles in the ceremony and in the festivities leading up to the day. Months in advance, the families are plunged into a whirlwind of preparations to ensure all the finer aspects are arranged, whether it is mandap design, bridal dress, cuisine or choice of invitation.

Invitations sent today, whether prepared locally or imported from overseas, are ultra modern with appropriate pictures, verses, symbols and artistic embellishments. Gone are the days when a few grains of dyed rice (neota) were placed in the hands of the invitee and a verbal invitation issued.

The festivities commence with the engagement or 'mangni'. The father of the bride places the engagement ring on the groom's finger on behalf of the bride in a simple mangni ceremony a few months before the wedding. The saying is 'chat mangni, pat biya' – Quick engagement and quicker wedding.

The Tilak ceremony was an ancient custom practiced by indentured immigrants. It allowed the bride's father to visit the home of his future son-in-law with other male members of the family and welcome him into the family, present him with gifts and place a tilak or special mark on his forehead. Tilak has virtually faded from the list of ceremonies preceding the marriage.

The wedding day is preceded by the matikore, sangeet and mehendi. These pre-rites prepare the bride and groom for their new stage in life and allow them to share special moments with members of the family. They also provide an opportunity for merriment and feasting.

The matikore or *dig dutty* as it is popularly called in Guyana is essentially prayers to Mother Earth or Dharti puja and is done two days prior to the wedding. 'Matti' means earth and 'kor' means digging. The same rites are done separately at the homes of the bride and groom. At the bride's home, her mother wends her way to a clean spot some distance from their home and to the accompaniment of the tassa drums and traditional songs offer prayers for the fertility and prosperity of her daughter's marriage. Matikore has traditionally been dominated by the female family members. After applying sindoor, (the mark of married women) to the foreheads of the married women assembled there, female relatives would hoist the tray aloft after collecting a small sample of earth to take to the home for the puja. At her home, the bride traditionally garbed in yellow, symbolizing fertility, sits with the pandit and performs puja. She receives a protective thread or *raksha sutra* on her wrist and the hardi or dye is blessed. The dye which is said to have restorative, cleansing and beautifying powers is smeared on the bodies of bride and groom after the matikore.



Young bride engaged in Puja on her Matikore night





Before the bride is escorted by her mother to her specially prepared chamber where she stays out of sight until the wedding day, five married ladies or little girls engage in chumawan. The bride sits with her hands filled with rice and a gold bangle; symbols of economic prosperity. Each child or lady would take a small quantity of that rice and khus grass and touch the head, shoulders, hands, knees of the bride five times. Each time the rice is cast away ensuring all negative forces are removed from the bride's person. The remainder of the evening is filled with wedding music and dance as the ladies, confident that no men folk are around, show off their special moves. Tassa has always been the main form of music although many persons have added recorded music to the entertainment. Vibrant traditional marriage songs are also sung by the older ladies to the accompaniment of the dholak played by a lady. All those present are treated to mithai and a light meal of channa and phoolorie.

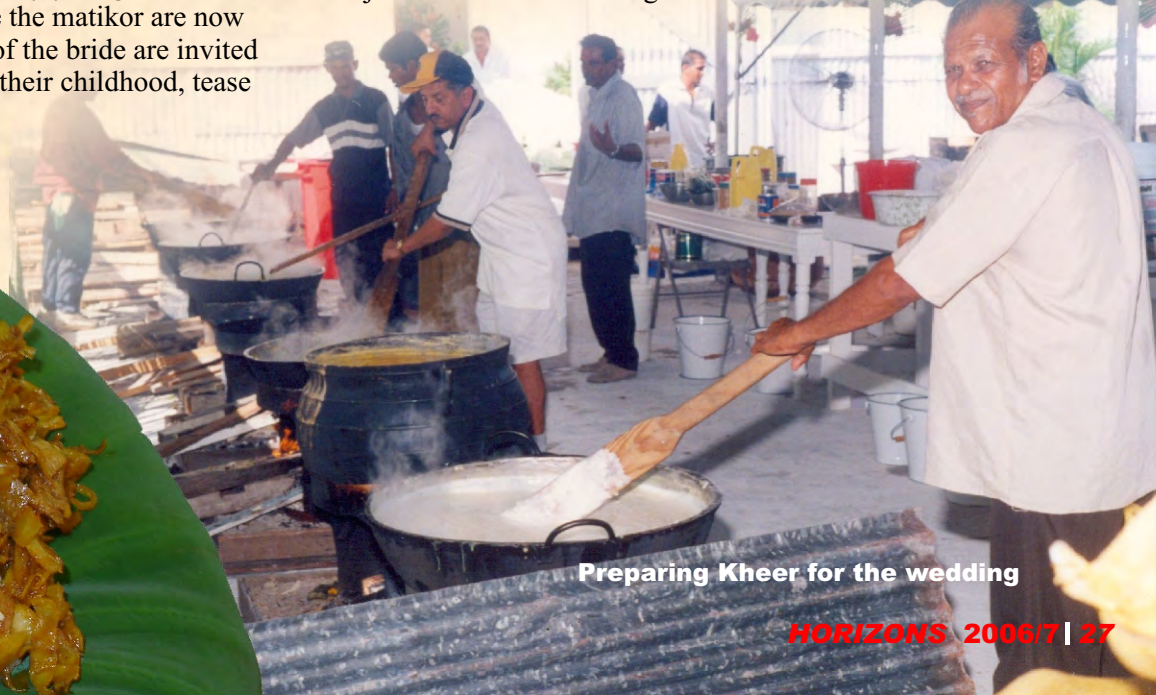
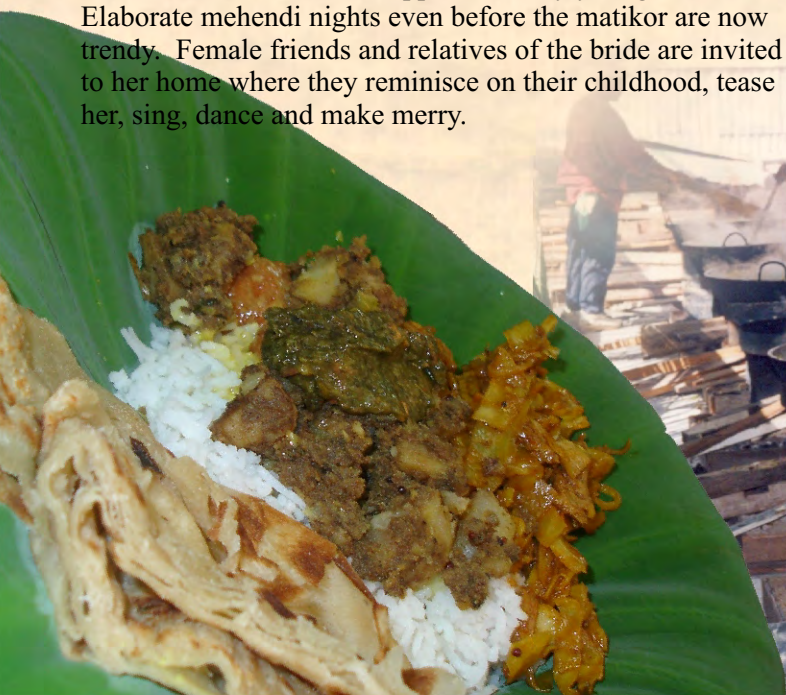
The following day, friends and family meet at the 'wedding house' for the sangeet night. This is a very old custom and in the past talented singers would arrive from all over the country and perform traditional wedding songs as well as tent or taan singing for the enjoyment of the guests. With the loss of many of the older singers, live singing today consists mainly of filmi wedding songs. In Guyana, this night is also called the cook night and men and women cut up vegetables for the next day. The cook night has always provided the opportunity for dancing, fun and teasing of the bride and groom. The bride's hands can be adorned with the mehendi on this night as well.

The filmi mehendi scenes appeal to many young brides. Elaborate mehendi nights even before the matikor are now trendy. Female friends and relatives of the bride are invited to her home where they reminisce on their childhood, tease her, sing, dance and make merry.

Someone skilled in applying the mehendi applies intricate designs on the bride's hands and feet and even on her friends. With new technology mehendi paste can be bought in tubes or cones, making it easy to apply. Stick-on mehendi tattoos are also fashionable! The artist applying the mehendi to the bride's hands carefully weaves the groom's name among the designs telling the blushing bride that the groom has to find all the letters of his name on her wedding day. She is expected to keep the paste on for many hours as it has been said the brighter the colour on the hands the more the bride will be loved by her husband.

The wedding day brings with it a buzz of excitement. Early in the morning the mothers would go to the home of a female relative for the lawa. Rikki Jai's "Mor Tor" vividly describes the exchange of parched rice (mor lawa tor lawa) between the mother and the female relative. The tassa would be heard in rhythmic sequences, each beat telling of a different event on the wedding day.

Guests attending a Hindu wedding are mesmerized by the vivid colours and décor. Whether in a mandir or home, the mandap or maro or wedding canopy has always been the focal point. With the link to India strengthened by exposure to Bollywood movies, mandaps have become intricate and works of art. From those that can be rented to those constructed by family members, they reflect the blend of past and present. Mandaps were at one period of our history constructed purely out of bamboo, festooned with crepe paper or tinsel decorations, flowers and fruits and vegetables which were added to encourage fertility in the marriage. Even now, bamboo, which is a symbol of fertility, has a major role in Hindu weddings.



Preparing Kheer for the wedding



The bridal trousseau has perhaps undergone the most significant changes over the last 168 years. Brides dressed in dyed yellow cotton are but a faded memory. Access to imported Indian garments resulted in Hindu brides being draped in flamboyant red or white chiffon or silk saris generously encrusted with sequins. Even these have now been replaced by an array of designer ghararas, lehengas, fusion outfits and saris in a range of brilliant hues. Over the decades, the Hindu bride has consistently been adorned with real gold jewellery be it the heirloom galihar or tilarie or simple pieces of jewellery as it is the belief that gold is fortuitous. Exposure to Bollywood films, travel to India and the Indian diaspora have resulted in brides opting for exquisite stone-work costume jewellery, modish hair styles and chic bridal outfits. The groom today can also be choosy about his apparel. He can coordinate his outfit with the bride and appear in elegant achkan suits or sherwani, reminiscent of India's nobility with matching turban. However, unlike the brides, many grooms still continue to tread the traditional path of their predecessors, arriving garbed in a yellow or pink jora jama complete with lavishly embellished mowr.

Amidst tooting horns and the competitive rhythms of the bride and groom's tassa, invitees to the wedding become enfolded in the warmth and customs of a heritage lovingly protected and handed down by our ancestors. They observe, with a myriad of emotions, the warm embrace or milap of the fathers, the emotional handing over of the precious daughter of one household to another in kanyadaan and the cementing of the couples union which is characterized by the exchange of garlands, circumambulation of the fire, seven steps, reciting of vows and the placing of sindoor on the Dulhan's (bride's) maang or forehead.

The conclusion of the wedding is the signal for the tassa to begin a triumphant melody to which relatives and friends of the couple dance with gay abandon and joy. Appropriate wedding songs are provided by singers or recorded music. Every moment is recorded by photographers and videographers.

Lavish vegetarian meals are the hallmark of Hindu weddings. No one is allowed to leave the wedding without first partaking in the 'seven curry spread'. It seems as if all the vegetables available in Guyana can be consumed with rice and puri; be it pumpkin, baigan, eddoes, potatoes, bhaji (spinach) or katahar (jackfruit). The cooks, traditionally male, would have prepared all of these including the traditional 'wedding house puri' (thin puris fried in oil). Dal puri is also a popular favourite today.







**Fashionably dressed female guests pose with the Bride and Groom**

Those new to the experience battle with the unique lotus leaf which serves as a platter for the meal and which is peculiar to Guyanese Hindu festivities. Some even make the mistake of sampling a bit of the leaf before the wisar, after much laughter, would say “No, no don’t eat your plate.”

Even a connoisseur of food should not miss the sumptuous kheer or sweet rice which completes the meal. For the more fussy palates other authentic Indian sweets like gulab jamun and barfi can be found side by side with the old favourites: cow’s milk pera and mithai.

A Hindu wedding compellingly impresses upon those attending vastness of our legacy. We are graphically reminded that in spite of the influx of modern amenities, facilities and the winds of change the foundations on which the traditions were laid are entrenched and that every conceivable aspect of the festivities still bear in some way the stamp of our fore-parents.





# Tracing Roots

## *President receives rose petal welcome in Ancestral village*



In August 2003, Guyana's 39 year old President could not help being overwhelmed at the outpouring of affection showered on him in Thakurain ka Purwa, an anonymous village in India. Nature too, auspiciously blessed President Jagdeo with rain on his arrival. From the moment he stepped out of the Indian Air Force helicopter, and set foot in the gaon, the villagers, who until four days before were blissfully unaware of their internationally acclaimed descendant, welcomed him with a trail of rose petals and emotional greetings in their native Hindi dialect which he later confessed he did not understand. He seemed thrilled at the warmth emanating from every member of the 28 families living there. It was little wonder that after a short while, 24 families claimed kinship with him.

For many of them, he brought hope of better conditions for their village. In 2003, their village was still without electricity and its roads were untouched by concrete. The nearest health centre was at least 3 miles away. As news of the President's imminent visit traveled to this obscure village, preparations were rapidly made. A few bricks were placed on the road and the hitherto unused electrical power poles, erected some 20 years before, were resuscitated. With the President's arrival, villagers enjoyed 12 hours of electricity for the first time! Witnessing and marveling at these swift improvements the villagers could not help but expect great things from this smiling descendant of one of their own who holds the powerful position of Head of State.



*The Indian Air Force Helicopter transporting President Jagdeo to his ancestral village*

"Luck has smiled on us now that the president's roots have been traced here. Otherwise our village would have always remained an unnoticed and uncared for place," village chief Mohammed Ishaq told one of the foreign journalists on hand to record the President's visit.

Although the President needed the interpretive skill of Foreign Minister Digvijay Singh, he reached out to many of the thousands of villagers who had trekked to the little village in the Chatrapati Shahuji Maharaj district (formerly known as Ameethi) of Uttar Pradesh for a glimpse of Jagdeo who had made the one-hour trip to his ancestral village.

India's famous hospitality was evident when the beaming President was garlanded by children and adorned with a red 'tikka'. A choir sang: "We welcome you to your ancestral land. We have been blessed by your steps today" as sugary Indian delicacies were served. President Jagdeo exuded charm and did not demur when he was ushered into a newly erected pandal to avoid the leaking mud houses.



*A villager presents President Jagdeo with gift on the occasion of his visit to his ancestral village.*

Everyone wanted to share moments with the President and he received a number of gifts including saris from the women of the village for his female relatives in Guyana. The village chief, a Muslim, gave him a copy of the Hindu holy text, the Ramayana. Residents did not lose the opportunity to plead with Guyana's leader for his help in negotiating for funds from Indian officials for better farming facilities and even a statue in his honour.

"I shall speak to the local authorities and see if they can help all of you out," the president promised.

President Jagdeo confessed that the entire experience was an emotional one for him and that he was extremely proud of his roots. He also disclosed that thoughts of his grandfather occupied his mind; the hardship he must have suffered as a 17 year old lad on a journey to an unknown land. He regretted that he had never met his grandfather who died before his birth and as such did not know much about him.





*President Jagdeo launches the website to assist persons of Indian ancestry across the globe to trace their ancestry*

I am emotional ... it is a humbling experience," Jagdeo told reporters as he landed on his ancestral soil. "Today, I think about my grandfather who had left the village — what was going on in his mind at that time, I do not know. He was a brave man," Jagdeo said

With only his grandfather Ram Jiyawan's name the Indian Government used Indentureship records and questioned old folks in an effort to trace the ancestral relatives and village of the Guyanese President. He was able to meet four of his surviving relatives.

Ninety year old matriarch, Ram Dulari, the oldest surviving relative of the President's grandfather, remembered Jagdeo's grandfather fleeing the village in around 1912 as cholera gripped the area. "I still remember Ram Jiyawan. Fed up with poverty he left the village — he was right. His grandson is the President of a country today," she said.

It was a moving sight. On his knees, the President held his grandaunt Ram Dulari's hand. "I am happy to meet you," he told her in English. "Welcome to your homeland," she replied in Awadhi.

Ram Dulari, the village's oldest grandmother felt that the villagers will forever remember the presidential visit -- and were hoping for tangible benefits. When she was asked what the President's visit to the little known Thakurain Purwa meant to her, the old lady candidly replied, "We are very small people, how can we ask him for anything? It all depends on his benevolence."

In his grandfather's impoverished village where only one young man had escaped illiteracy, Bharrat Jagdeo, the son of a labourer, would be considered extremely blessed to have had the opportunity to pursue a degree in economics and ultimately ascend to the position of one of the world's youngest Presidents.

"We had never dreamt that one of us will ever rise to such heights like him. This is a moment we want to freeze and save for the rest of our lives," exulted Lal Bahadur, a relative of the Guyanese President. "He looks just like one of us," he remarked.

In a brief comment to the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Associated Press (AP) President Jagdeo thanked the Indian Government for tracing his ancestry. He also indicated that he would be staying in contact with his relatives.

The President also launched a website: [www.indianroots.nic.in](http://www.indianroots.nic.in) which could assist persons of Indian ancestry to trace their ancestral places and next of kin in India. This website is designed to address queries from members of the Indian Diaspora on their ancestral roots in a systematic manner. In an interactive mode, a data-base will be developed through a questionnaire and the data will be transmitted to the administrative units in the relevant places in India and the persons making the queries will obtain a feedback.

The President had made his first visit to India in 1993 with the Late President Dr. Cheddi Jagan as Finance Minister. There were major changes in India since his first visit, he said, but his initial impression of India was that it was a powerful country, one leading in information technology, and even producing fighter aircraft and nuclear weapons. He was not impervious to the still high level of poverty which made an indelible impression on him.

He acknowledged the mystical beauty of India and that there were so many things to learn about the people - their food, culture, and religion and though Hinduism is the major religion, they worship differently.

Guyana and India have significant historical and cultural ties. The linkages between the two governments have been strong for the past decades.

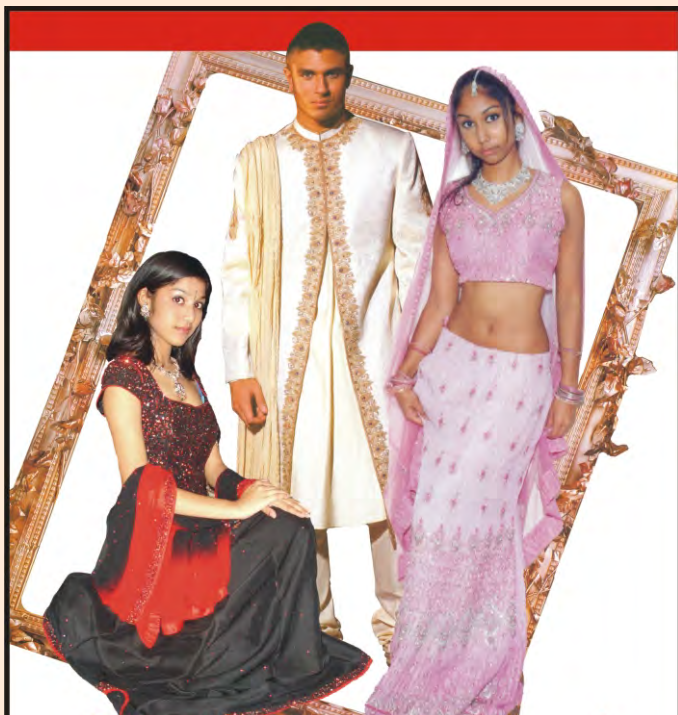
President Bharrat Jagdeo's State Visit to India was aimed at enhancing economic ties and cultural relations. Subsequent to that visit, the Indian Government is financing the construction of Guyana's first cricket stadium, among other major developmental projects, and continues to provide opportunities for scholarships to Guyanese regardless of ethnic descent.

Since his return to Guyana, President Bharrat Jagdeo has received a few letters from his 'new family members.'



*President Jagdeo pays homage to his ancestors*





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# Business

## The Pioneering East Indians

### Indians In Business

Indian Business men and women are particularly prominent in the economic development and business life of Guyana. This was not always so. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it was the Portuguese group which produced the commercial class and industrialists. Indians in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries had little chance to venture into commerce and industry in any big way since they were tied to the land by law, custom and economic pressure.

There was also quiet colonial, governmental and official pressure to keep them out of business life of the country and confined to agriculture.

By the 1920's and 1930's, however, other than small retail shops or market stalls, a few Indian businessmen ventured into Water Street in Georgetown and the main business areas of New Amsterdam. They were generally successful and though many Indian family businesses - for they were all family businesses - went under during the world depression of the early 1930's, those who arrived grew.

Today, a gamut of businesses are controlled or owned by Indian men and women, all descendants of the pioneers of the commerce and agricultural initiative. This article features present day Indian business giants who have in one way or another impacted on Guyana's economy through their contributions. It is by no means an exhaustive list, merely a sample of the movers and shakers of the national and in a few cases international business world.



Water Street in the early 20th century

### Yesu Persaud

By: Neil Marks



#### Yesu Persaud

**A** CENTURY had passed since the first set of East Indians stepped onto the shores of British Guiana. Theirs had been decades of tireless work for meager wages. The sugar plantations became their home. They lived in logies (thatched roof houses). Yesu Persaud was born in one such logi. Seventy years later, on the very plantation, Diamond, where his parents toiled daily, lies the epicenter of Guyana's most diverse private sector enterprise, Demerara Distillers Limited. Yesu Persaud is in charge!

El Dorado is a worldwide brand and so is Yesu Persaud. When Abdul Kalaam, President of India, land of Yesu's foreparents, presented him the Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award this year, it was another defining moment for him. He was recognized for furthering the interests and causes of Mother India. Today, hailed as Guyana's most prominent businessman, Yesu Persaud is a study of hard work and utter passion for excellence.

His birth on the Diamond sugar plantation was followed by the same struggles as those of his parents but it would lead him to an exciting career and a name to be reckoned with.



# Business

Having written exams in sixth standard at Grove Primary School, Yesu could have become a pupil teacher. He chose the other option: attending high school. They were only two premier ones at the time, Queen's College and Bishops High School. His parents could only afford one of the lesser schools, Modern Academy. However, in less than a year he had to 'bail out'. The money was just simply not there.

He started out working at Atkinson Base, today the Cheddi Jagan International Airport. He did whatever work came along. He moved on to the city, working as a counter clerk with Parsram's and Sons, an Indian store. The job would last him only a year.

He decided that the sugar plantation would be next for him to traverse. He ended up a sanitary assistant, inspecting drains, and the like. He was later promoted to supervisor. He was put in charge of several "gangs" on the estate. He was also appointed Punt Captain, charged with ensuring that the sugar cane reached the mill, grinding on which depended the livelihood of hundreds.

During those years, Yesu Persaud married and had a child. He had saved enough to make a move. Guyana was no longer his calling. England, home of the domineering colonial master, was. By 1956, he had saved just enough to make the journey, and some extra cash, in case of any eventualities.

He spent ten years in England, studying accountancy and qualified as a Certified Chartered Accountant. By then, he had three other children.

Upon his return home, he was appointed Inspector of Taxes at Inland Revenue. He didn't spend too long in the position as he felt that it wasn't challenging enough. Instead, he took up a position with Sanbach and Demerara Company as an accounting officer. Within three years, he was chief accountant and in the fifth year on the job, he ascended to the position of Group Finance Director of what was then one of the largest trading enterprises. He was the first local to hold the position. It was challenging.

In 1975, when President Forbes Burnham channeled the economy towards nationalization, he was one of the negotiators for the UK Company. After nationalization, all the expatriate staff resigned. Yesu had the opportunity of going overseas, but the then Minister of Agriculture, Gavin Kennard, made him an offer to take over management of a group, now known as Demerara Distillers Limited (DDL). He saw it as an opportunity of a lifetime. And so it became. DDL, today, stands out as Guyana's most diverse enterprise, employing over 1, 100 persons. Yesu Persaud is in charge.

But the going was not easy. After he took over, Diamond Liquors, Guyana Distillers, the economy would face massive decline at the hands of Burnham. Yesu Persaud began steering the company towards expansion, rebuilding Diamond, and putting down the first bulk terminal, plus the nation's first vinegar plant.

By this time, Guyana went into serious economic straits. With foreign currency restricted and a ban placed on many items, during 1979-85, the Guyana dollar was worthless. Managing the businesses was a tough task, but Yesu Persaud would pull through, always seeing expansion as the way forward. When Desmond Hoyte became President at the death of Burnham, he instituted the Economic Recovery Programme. So the economy started growing, and so did DDL.

Yesu Persaud felt, also, that he should get involved in the movements pressing for a restoration of democracy in Guyana, and for this his life was threatened. He doesn't want to talk about it. He says, better forget it. Guyana was restored to democracy in 1992.

DDL continued to expand. In 1994, Yesu Persaud recognising the need for a real Guyanese commercial bank, started Demerara Bank.

## El Dorado

When asked what was the hallmark of his success in business? Yesu Persaud says 'El Dorado Rums'. The global award winning El Dorado range of Rums are distilled, blended and bottled by DDL.

Demerara is popular across the world for its rich, unmatched history of in excess of 300 years of sugar and rum production. In the 17th and 18th centuries, there were in excess of 200 small distilleries operating, each attached to the existing sugar plantations, from which a special blend of rum was produced. However, with the passage of time, consolidation and amalgamation, today, there remains just the one distillery at Plantation Diamond on the East Bank of Demerara - wholly owned and operated by DDL, the company boasts.

The Diamond distillery, which Yesu Persaud took over in 1975, has the capacity to produce in excess of 26 M litres of pure alcohol annually, and is the largest supplier of bulk rums and alcohols from the Caribbean to brand owners in Europe and North America. The company's impressive list of clientele includes companies such as Diageo, Jim Beam Brands, Hiram Walker, Allied Distillers, and Corby's. One should talk to Yesu Persaud for guaranteed supplies of aged rums for the production of the El Dorado 25 years old, the El Dorado 21 year old, the El Dorado 15 years old, the El Dorado 12 years old and the El Dorado 5 years old rums.

Under the chairmanship of Yesu Persaud, over the last ten years, DDL has pursued a very aggressive expansion and diversification programme. Today, the company is truly an international one, with subsidiary companies in Trinidad and Tobago, Peru, the United States and Holland. The company operates a bottling plant in St. Kitts, and has associated companies in Canada, and India.



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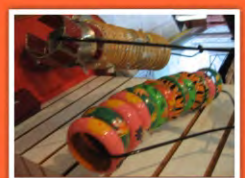
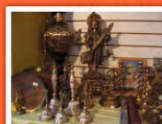
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A.P.J Abdul Kalam (President of India) Presents The Pravasi Bharatiya Samman Award To Yesu Persaud - January 9, 2006 for his outstanding achievement in the field of Business.

In addition to the company's own flavorful brand of the SOCA soft drinks, the company holds the franchise for the production and distribution of the world famous Pepsi, Slice and 7-Up.

While DDL has brought much satisfaction to Mr. Yesu Persaud, apart from El Dorado, his joy lies in his second baby, the Institute for Private Enterprise Development (IPED). IPED provides supervised loans and business development services to groups and individuals in the micro and small business sectors countrywide.

Yesu Persaud's involvement in cultural activities became significant in 1988, with the establishment of the Indian Arrival Committee to celebrate the centenary of Indian Immigration to Guyana.

Today, the group is called the Indian Commemoration Trust and one of its signal achievements has been the establishment of the Indian Monument Gardens where Arrival Day celebrations are held annually.

This is by no means an exhaustive story of Yesu Persaud. Much much more can be said of his contribution to business development in Guyana, he having spearheaded the formation of the Private Sector Commission. He also holds a diplomatic post, that of Honorary Consul for Chile in Guyana

Yesu Persaud is a recipient of two National Awards, these awards are presented by the Government of Guyana to citizens of outstanding calibre. In 1981, he was awarded the Golden Arrow of Achievement (A.A.) for his outstanding contribution to the development and expansion of the distillery industry in Guyana. And in 1983, he was awarded the Cacique Crown of Honour (C.C.H.) for his exemplary work in the development of new industries in Guyana. His award list is comprehensive. So is his affiliation to many Caribbean and international bodies.

Yesu Persaud is the tower of success behind DDL. His contribution to helping Guyanese out of poverty is immense. His contribution to Indian cultural development is more than significant. But what does Yesu Persaud yearn for? What has he always yearned for?

His closing thoughts: "Guyana is a multi-racial country. All of us have to work together to build a nation all of us would be proud of. Sure, the Indians have made a significant contribution to the development of Guyana, but it could not have happened in isolation. The other ethnic groups shared an equally important contribution. What we want is political stability. We could transform this place in five years. This country need not be poor."

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# Business

## Sattaur Gafoor



### Sattaur Gafoor

Chairman of successful conglomerate, Gafsons, Abdool Sattaur Gafoor whose business track record precedes him continues to hold the reins of the company even after the age of 60.

Rising from humble origins, Sattaur Gafoor has astutely managed to steer his company through Guyana's worst economic crisis keeping abreast of international technological advances and creating employment for hundreds of Guyanese with his expansive programmes. The shrewd businessman is currently in the midst of an ambitious expansion of his Houston Complex which is situated on the East Bank.

With an investment of \$5B (including stocks), it is expected that the complex would boast the standard of international, modern departmental centres in the United Kingdom. Mr Gafoor's vision encompasses stretching the actual length of the complex from the East Bank Public Road all the way to the Demerara River. Work has already begun on that aspect. To accommodate the clientele's vehicles he assumes in the future the current parking lot will have to be converted to a four storey parking lot.

Gafoors is already a household name in Guyana due to its thriving hardware section which supplies windows and doors that grace the homes of many Guyanese.

With such tremendous achievement no one can comprehend why Sattaur Gafoor still suffers from the complex of not completing his tertiary education. This savvy businessman nurses the dream of fulfilling academic goal and plans to read for an executive MBA after his retirement. Mr. Gafoor frankly says, "I was not a very good achiever at school. I had to work to assist my father and my time for my studies was very limited. When I left school I resolved to improve my education capability and to try to achieve something outstanding. I feel I have achieved something... The most important thing now is education for myself."

These words reveal the true nature of a man who has achieved under every climate in Guyana with 'street sense' and inherent business acumen. He has obviously instilled his educational values in his children as two of his sons are practicing surgeons abroad and his eldest is a computer engineer with vested business interests overseas. His wife Amina Gafoor, herself a literary scholar, holds a Masters degree in Philosophy. This passion and thirst for knowledge began very early in his life when he sacrificed his own dreams for higher academic achievement in order to provide for his brothers and children's education. In 1959, after completing his Senior Cambridge (A-level equivalent) at the Central Corentyne High School, he joined his father's lumber yard and hardware store.

Today, his educational drive is also transmitted to his company's workforce as he spends at least \$300,000 a month to educate his 750 strong staff. Their training includes public –speaking under the directorship of Toast Master's International, skills training for their occupational level, and a once a week personal interaction with their boss who discusses world affairs and local news. Even the porters are not exempt from this as they are taught to read, write and do basic arithmetic. The transportation excuse does not work with Mr. Gafoor as he provides transportation home for his staff after their courses. If you are amazed at the novelty of the education programme, do not be. Sattaur Gaffor has long realized that intelligent workers are an asset and increase sales. "A more knowledgeable staff speaks fluently and they are not afraid of anyone," the businessman frankly states."

Simplicity is this conservative individual's watchword. He enjoys the anonymity afforded by his low-profile life style, content with a simple house and car. He freely accepts that many people would not recognize him as the man behind the name Sattaur Gafoor.

Mr. Gafoor who hails from No. 56 Village Corentyne, Berbice, presently controls 100% of Gafsons and is the only member of his family in the company. Since he took over the company in 1973 from his father, he has made great strides both nationally and regionally, shifting the focus of the company towards manufacturing.



Gafoor cites differences with the Late President Burnham as the reason for his migration in 1980 to Barbados. The change in location, lead to the establishment of companies in Grenada, Dominica, St Lucia and Jamaica before his return to Guyana 1992 at the invitation of Dr Cheddi Jagan. The Dominican business has closed but the existing companies are managed by his son and brother.

Mr. Gafoor has already made long term plans for the future of his company. Sugrim Mohan was hired by the company to draft the five and ten year plans. He is not averse to the idea of remaining Chairman if asked. But the next five years will see the company going public and his personal stock reduced. The process to corporatise the firm is almost complete and the task to change the current image to corporate organization is the responsibility of the chief executive officer.

The boss of the business worth some US\$50 M declares succinctly, "The future of any organisation that wants to live beyond the life of its founder can only be achieved via a corporate institution. ... We will take the company public as fully as possible."

For Mr. Gafoor the journey to the spanking new complex located in Houston has been long and filled with challenges but he fondly recalls the days of horse carts and pot-holes in Sussex Street. His office was headquartered there between 1978 and 1996 prior to its relocation to the original residence in Hadfield Street.

He opines that the 51 year old company should have been consolidated many years ago as he recognizes the advantage of having most of the sections housed under one roof.

Guyanese will benefit from the improved Houston Complex and can enjoy browsing in a variety of eateries and shops and at the same time have the ease of paying their bills and visiting a pharmacy. It seems the decision to buy the lot for \$2B stretching from the Houston Public Road to the Demerara Waterfront from Eddie Vieira has borne fruit.

The question he is often asked is why he continues to invest in Guyana with its political and social tensions. "You can never write-off a country. No country ever dies. If only we can resolve our racial differences, this country can take off," was his initial response. But he notes that to an extent, his resilience has been a result of patriotism, "I could have been sitting in the US or Canada playing the (stock) markets.

However, there is the question of self-satisfaction...a sense that you are doing for your country, which was in the first place the foundation of your success. You know what it is to see a piece of land and transform this? It gives tremendous satisfaction. It is not money that motivates us." As part of its ongoing charitable budget, the company has this year constructed ten homes for the poor, free of cost.

"My greatest satisfaction has been that my employees respect me and do not see me above them. I do not demand respect but try to earn it. I try to earn their confidence and to my mind when I pass around, they show tremendous respect."

His wish for Guyana is for the political leaders to forget the past and to become statesmen, following the example of Nelson Mandela and to put the country first. (*Adapted from Stabroek News*)

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## Kayman Sankar

By: Dr. David Chanderbali



### Kayman Sankar

**K**ayman Sankar must be accorded a permanent and prominent position amongst the most successful Indian businessmen of Guyana. For more than half a century, he has been inextricably linked with the growth and development of the local rice industry. No annal would be conclusive without a catalogue of the ambitious expansion programmes he undertook to transform his dream into stupendous reality. From humble beginnings as a small-scale subsistence rice farmer, he rose to the illustrious status as the largest exporter in Guyana, if not the Caribbean. His is a wonderful story of phenomenal and unprecedented success. He is Mr. Rice himself!

Kayman Sankar is a first-generation descendant of indentured East Indians. The first child of Sewsankar and Dukhnee, he was born on June 3, 1926, at Cornelia Ida (CI). Kayman was followed by three brothers and a sister. Their home, like so many on the West Coast of Demerara, was modest and their life-style was characterized by strict observance and practice of the tenets of orthodox Hinduism. Kayman once said, "We would all join our hearts and thank the Lord for keeping us alive."

Kayman's education began and ended at primary school without failing a class. At such tender age, he indulged enthusiastically in gardening at school and at home. Watching the seedlings grow, flower and fruit, he once philosophically said, "It was like I was bringing life out of God's earth." He would wax poetically, "I often wondered where they came from; whether they were hidden in the earth and suddenly they would emerge to drink the rain and warm themselves in the sunshine." His early affinity with elementary agriculture was to blossom later into a highly successful agrarian vocation in scientific rice cultivation.

At age nine, Kayman's parents began to encounter serious financial problems actuated mainly by his mother's prolonged illness. This misfortune forced Kayman to leave school and to supplement the family income. First he became a milk-vendor but because, as he admitted, he was too "trusting and naïve" he gave up the milk business. As a "big chap" for his age (he was nicknamed "Polo" after Eddy Polo the cowboy hero of the silent movies) Kayman took up employment as a labourer at CI sugar estate. Later he admitted, "It was there and then that I realized that chemical fertilizers can increase yields significantly." He added, "My job in the backdam taught me that technical farming is a must and that soil acts as a storehouse for plant food. If the soil is to be productive, then the nutrients must be put back into it."

Working at CI estate created in Kayman a distaste for the nature of such employment and inculcated in him a burning desire to work for himself. He ventured into the jewellery business but it was not lucrative. He then undertook bull-ploughing contracts and subsequently shop-keeping and later hire-car driving. The accrued profits were invested in rice-lands! These were early indications of creeping prosperity in the Sankar family.

Under these promising circumstances, at age eighteen, Kayman married Mavis (Auntie Mae) Ramnauth according to orthodox Sanatani Hindu rites under an exquisitely-decorated "marro" with great pomp and elaborate ceremony. The young couple were later blessed with Seeta, Beni and Sattie.

When Kayman moved his locus operandi to Dunkeld / Perth on the Essequibo Coast in 1956, he and his brother, Mahadeo and nephew Nandalall, did not expect to encounter so many prodigious difficulties. Labourers were few; the estate was overgrown with bushes and tall trees; basic infrastructure was either inefficient or non-existent; the land itself was frequently flooded by the nearby Atlantic resulting in heavy salinization of the soil, which was incompatible with rice cultivation; the roads were often impassable; and Mavis remained for a while with the children at CI. The venture into rice cultivation saw the failure of five successive crops, and Kayman and his partners lost nearly everything. It was a tremendous disappointment for mere mortals.

Kayman consoled himself by asserting, "When a man loses faith in himself he is finished." Kayman was not to be daunted, and he sought help.



# Business...

The fortuitous combined intervention of Charles Kennard, a brilliant entomologist, and Dr. H. Ahmad, a soil chemist, concluded that there was too much salinity in the soil. Leeching the soil; changing the variety of the paddy seed; improving drainage and irrigation; and application of insecticides and weedicides resulted in a steady rise in harvest. The silver lining had appeared. Kayman said, "Boy, David, it was the hand of God testing my faith."

Kayman and his partners began to make rapid progress. They bought the newest model tractor and a Super 92 Combine; they liquidated their debts; they cleared more land; they applied more effective fertilizers, weedicides and pesticides; they added tractor after tractor; and they found ready and lucrative local and foreign markets.

In 1966, Mahadeo and Nandalall amicably agreed with Kayman that they would dissolve the partnership and cultivate their own lands at Bounty Hall and Dunkeld / Perth. Kayman bought Hampton Court and took his share of machinery.

It was Adrian Thompson, once Commissioner of Lands and Mines, who said, "Kayman, boy, one day you will be a Maharajah." Kayman lived up to his own expectations as well. In 1975, he registered his business at Hampton Court as Kayman Sankar and Company Limited (KSC). The Sankar Dream of establishing an air division was accomplished in 1985 with the Kayman Sankar Aviation Limited (KSAL). Its primary objective was to facilitate seeding, spraying, and fertilizing. From then onwards Kayman allowed his son, the English-trained Agricultural Engineer, Beni, to gradually assume day to day responsibilities of all the Sankar Holdings while he provided continuous leadership. He led the purchase of several aircraft that provided reliable air transport to company personnel and supplies as well as to the vibrant mining operations in the interior.

In the years that followed Kayman initiated further accelerated expansion to the parent Company's operations. At Hampton Court, he extended the drying capacity; he installed a new multi-stage mill; he built new air-conditioned offices, a huge hangar, a six bedroom guest house, a mess hall, a fish pond, a livestock corral, radio communication, and the Hampton Court Cricket Ground and Pavilion.

KSC expanded into Kayman Sankar Aviation Limited at Ogle; Kayman Sankar Investments Limited (KSIL) at Blairmont and Bath; shipping facilities at Airy Hall; and Headquarters in Georgetown.

Kayman's extraordinary success in life led him to believe as he often said, "It is better to give than to receive." He promoted cricket on the West Coast of Demerara and on a monumental scale at Hampton Court; he gave generously when others' crops failed; he provided monetary gifts to numerous mandirs, mosques, and churches, and to orphans and widows.

Kayman's philanthropy radiated in many other directions. His family built and upkept the Hampton Court Nursery School and contributed largely to several cultural organizations like the Hindu Dharmic Sankritic Kendra in Georgetown and to several schools; he lectured and held seminars on correct agricultural practices; and served gratis and diligently as a Parliamentarian for five years as a principal spokesman, particularly on rice.

In conclusion, Kayman can be safely regarded as a pioneer in large-scale modern rice cultivation in Guyana, if not the Caribbean. His extensive acreages of paddy fields, his ultra-modern methods in rice agronomy, the rice factories of the latest technology, the commodious drying facilities, the revolutionary thermo-electric generating plants, the fleet of agricultural and commercial aircraft, the efficient and sophisticated communication system, and the ample export facilities combined to distinguish Kayman Sankar as Guyana's Ultimate Rice Magnate.



Kayman, flanked by son Beni (left) and wife Mavis (right), addresses staff.

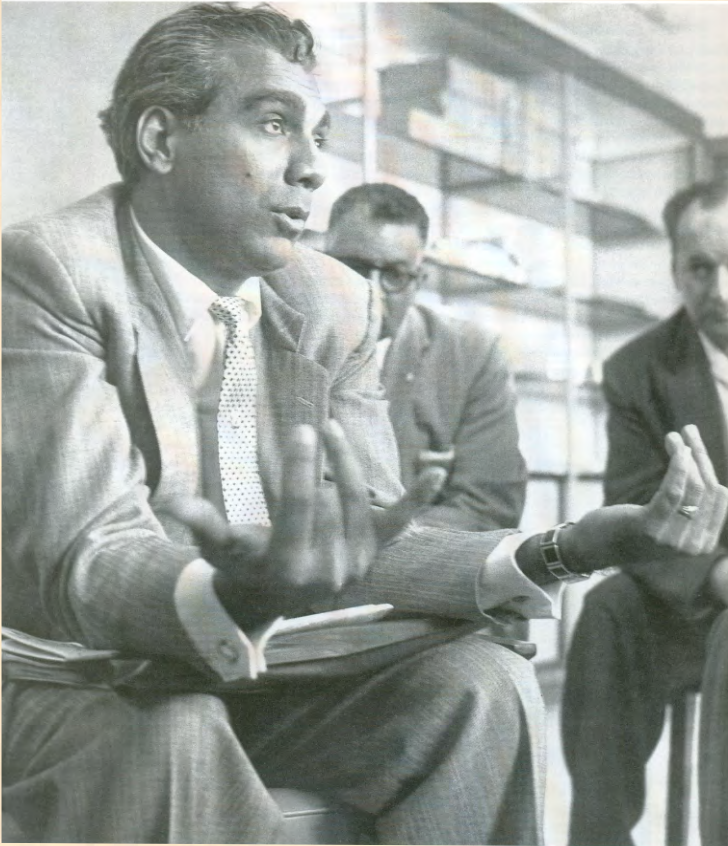
An advertisement for Golden Cream Margarine. On the left, a smiling woman's face is partially visible. In the center, a large dollop of margarine is shown on a spoon. To the right is a tub of Golden Cream Margarine. The text "Bring Great Taste to life with..." is written in red above the margarine. Below that, "golden cream" is written in large, stylized yellow letters with a blue outline, and "MARGARINE" is written in blue letters on a yellow background. At the bottom, "454g" is written. On the right, it says "Manufactured by: STERLING PRODUCTS LIMITED Providence, East Bank Demerara". The Sterling logo is a stylized green 'S'.



# Shaping

## Indian Politics Through Worker Resistance In Guyana

*Dr. Prem Misir*



**Dr. Cheddi Jagan**

The abolition of slavery brought freedom to about 80,000 slaves; but this freedom would not have seen the light of day had it not been for African resistance. Slave revolts in Barbados in 1816, in Demerara in 1823, in Jamaica in 1824, in Antigua in 1831, and again in Jamaica in 1831 together with the Anti-Slavery Movement, and fluctuating sugar profits, created the ingredients for the Abolition of Slavery Act in 1834. And by 1848, the African peasant class of villagers emerged. Around 1850, Indians replaced slaves on the sugar plantations, taking on the distinctiveness of a new rural working class; Indian resistance throughout the 19th century challenged the might of the planters' oligarchy and the colonial parliament, where each uprising, riot, or discontent laid the foundations for more disturbances, and where each disorder unleashed new dynamics in their quest to undermine the imperialist stranglehold.

By the 1850s, the slave-owning plantocracy came to an end. And limited liability companies became the new owners and controllers of the sugar plantations. But Indian resistance, constant sugar crises, the freeing up of crown lands in 1898, and the 1891 constitutional reform enabling the electorate to choose legislators, were pivotal forces advancing the final demise of a decaying planters' oligarchy.

The focus in this paper is to show how Indian resistance shaped Indian political evolution in this country; note that Indian working people were the key architects of this persisting resistance during indenture; and not the petty Indian merchants and the educated Indian middle class who were in awe of the plantocracy. They demonstrated great inclinations to assimilate the planters' value system and generally accepted and complied with cultural imperialism.

Planters' control over labor was total under slavery; with the end of slavery, plantation owners yearned for a 'controllable' labor force as a surrogate for slaves on sugar estates. British plantation owners believed that India fitted the bill; India's huge population was a ready-made labor pool; labor with agricultural skills; and India, a British Colony, negating the need for negotiations with foreign authorities. Indian arrival to the sugar plantations of the Caribbean as indentureds under such rationale became a reality, initiating in Hugh Tinker's words, 'a new system of slavery'

Indentureship gave total control of labor to planters; indentureship prohibited any individual or collective bargaining; and during indenture, strikes were deemed 'uprisings' or 'disturbances'. A further enhancement of total control emanated through Ordinance Number 9, 1868 where wages were not released if planters determined the indentured's work to be incomplete or unsatisfactory. In fact, this Ordinance produced and reproduced the most telling and recurrent complaints by Indian indentureds.

Indentured Indians inhabited a dehumanized total institutional environment, with no mobility, enslaved by the tyranny of the rule of law, and reduced to a history of humiliation parallel to conditions of African slavery; the neo-slave nature of indentureship is well established.

White planters, Colored, and African lower status groups loathed the Indian culture, thus: "Their language was 'outlandish', they knew no English; their clothes were strange and their religion was heathen. They lacked the cultural characteristics valued in the society, and in return the society withheld its rights and privileges from them." Indians arrived in the Caribbean as outsiders and remained as 'outsiders' even today.

Given the harsh treatment meted out to Indians, how did they manage to maintain their culture? The answer has to do with their resistance and resilience. Their resistance to the White planters was a rallying point for cultural continuity and the genesis of Indian political evolution. Just a few examples would substantiate that Indian resistance was a characteristic feature of plantation life. Indians staged 88 strikes and disturbances between 1886 and 1888, and they received 65,084 convictions for labor contract violations between 1874 and 1895.



In 1881, 3,168 were labeled criminals because of their struggles with planters. In fact, compared to other British Colonies, British Guiana became the worst offender where planters used the criminal courts to enforce labor laws, as evidenced in the table for 1907:

**Table: Indentured Adults & Convictions in 1907**

	<i>Indentured</i>	<i>Convictions Under</i>
	<i>Adults</i>	<i>Labor Laws (no. / %)</i>
British Guiana	9,784	2,019 (20%)
Trinidad	11,506	1,869 (16%)
Jamaica	2,832	237 (8%)
<b>Fiji</b>	10,181	2,091 (20%)
Mauritius	47,000	1,492 (3%)

Disaffection among both indentured and unindentured Indians produced intermittent violence representing one pole on the range of Indian assertiveness; their disaffection created the germ for political activism. In 1872, low wages at Plantation Devonshire Castle produced mass protests where police shot and killed five and wounded seven workers. The Parliamentary Papers, No. 49 of 1873 claimed that Oederman, a Brahmin (upper caste), was the instigator of this uprising. Planters believed that upper-caste Indians were the source of constant instigations on the estates. The Sugar Planters' Association even urged immigration authorities in Calcutta in 1889 not to recruit upper-caste Indians; and Alleyne Ireland, an overseer, referred to these upper castes as '...incurable rascals, sowing the seeds of discontent...'

Rigid labor laws produced criminal convictions for the slightest violations. Medical doctors and magistrates operated in the ruling class interests, once they were paid off handsomely. Indian women became frequent targets for sexual assaults by White overseers. Although arrests were common, Indians continued to resist.

There was the case in January 1882 of Narain Singh who went to the Immigration Agent-General (IAG) to lodge a complaint pertaining to his wages; he was advised to present his complaint to a magistrate; this he did and the magistrate then invited the manager of Plantation Providence to review Narain Singh's complaint. The manager summoned Narain Singh and told him he was under an indenture contract and that he left the job to proceed to the Immigration- Agent General (IAG) without appropriate permission; the magistrate then dismissed the case.

Gooljar, a returnee, was the chief architect of the 1896 Non Pariel riots. Gooljar came under indenture in 1871, completed his indenture, became a cloth seller, and worked with the police force. He took advantage of the return fare to India in 1890, but returned to Guyana in 1894 as a reindenture. Planters having already had their share of upper caste as instigators, now faced another type of recalcitrant, the reindentured; planters were reluctant to employ reindentureds, as these reindentureds already experienced and expressed bitterness for the 'exploitative' dynamics at play in plantation labor; making them even more motivated to advancing the resistance effort.



**Indians at the Immigration depot.**

Bechu, a Bengali immigrant, accorded upper-caste status by planters, was indentured to Plantation Enmore in 1894, but emancipated himself from indentureship in 1897. Bechu aggressively articulated the abuses of indentureship; in November 1896, in penning his first among many letters to the newspaper, Bechu spoke about White overseers' sexual exploitation of Indian females; refusal of estate hospitals to provide medical treatment to unindentured Indians; blatant encouragement of Indians to remain in Guyana, although they eagerly wanted to return to India; and planters' frequent breaches of labor laws pointedly intended to exert total control of Indians. It is remarkable that Bechu was the first Indian to present evidence to a Royal Commission, the West India Royal Commission in 1897.

Time-expired (free) Indian immigrants as Gooljar and Bechu, were those most likely to advance the resistance effort; on the other hand, newly-arrived immigrants, the indentureds, were perceived as very malleable. And planters sustained their malleability through a policy that intentionally separated them from free Indians. This 'schism' policy served to reduce free Indian resistance efforts whenever there was a large influx of new immigrants as between 1877 and 1881.

Planters also eliminated any form of organized labor through fragmenting local leadership with transfers to other plantations. For instance, after the 1896 Non Pariel riots, the deputy manager informed the local immigration sub-agent of some small disgruntlement on the plantation, and requested that five immigrants be transferred; they then found their way to Georgetown. Notwithstanding the debilitating capacity of the political struggle under these circumstances, resistance persisted; by the end of the 19th century, Indian resistance definitively began to undermine the power of the plantocracy.

Indian women, too, intensely suffered under indentureship; as victims of abuses, they sparked off protests and so too contributed to the resistance effort as their men folk. Sporadic protests emanated from the weeding gang, largely the women's domain. Salamea, an indentured woman worker was the ringleader of a major disorder at Plantation Friends in Berbice in 1903. Other cases of women's role in the resistance effort abound. Interestingly, Indian worker resistance transcended gender, accelerated the resistance pace through this gender unification, rapidly limiting the planters' monopolistic power, and casting the foundations for middle-class development.





**Gathering outside Immigration Department.**

At the turn of the century, middle-class Indians, mainly second-generation attorneys-at-law bonded with working-class and peasant Indians in the struggle for improved education, more fruitful usage of agricultural lands, and better environmental health facilities; a manifestation of intra-ethnic class solidarity; this solidarity within Indian village settlements promoted the welfare of Indians and simultaneously gave credence to the persisting resistance effort. Parahoo, a prominent cattle owner and butcher in Berbice actively supported the welfare of his Muslim brothers and sisters; large Hindu landowners also in like manner advanced the welfare of Hindus; and educated Indians in the IAG lent considerable support to their fellow Indians during indentureship. This thing about promoting welfare might not have been what it seemed to suggest; it was the middle-class way of fortifying its material base. Middle-class Indians exploited other Indians in land purchases and rentals; For instance, Rumburran and Gundoorra, purchased seven estates in Berbice; then sold some of the front lands making over 100 percent profit; they rented the backlands at \$2.88 per half-acre plot. These were only two cases among many.

A class is only as strong as its material base, meaning that a middle class defined by its fragility and infantilism, would be motivated to reinforce its material base to sustain its dominance; and if this meant exploiting its own ethnic group, so be it. This middle class had control over the means of mental production, so that the working people who lacked the means of mental production became subject to it. Similarly, African and Portuguese proprietors also extended welfare to their respective ethnic groups, and utilized similar dynamics of exploitation.

Unmistakably, in the last quarter of the 19th century, Indian workers and peasants initiated an active resistance effort that was not matched by the emerging local professional Indian middle class; this middle class was urban-based and socialized to accept planters' values; they easily complied with the plantocracy's norms; a behavior quite distinct from the behavior of rural Indian workers and peasants. The Indian middle class tried their hand at establishing the 'East Indian Institute' in 1892, in order to forge enhanced ties with each other, and to be increasingly supportive of the colonial ruling

class; it died a natural death; for good reasons, too; for some alignment of this urban Indian middle class with planters implied some disavowal of rural Indian working people's concerns. But the educated Indian middle class became the chief beneficiaries of the emerging political opportunities.

**Let's look at a laundry list of the colonial and fragile Indian middle class political maneuverings:**

1. Ramdeal was the first Indian to win a seat in 1892 in the Cumberland District of Berbice.
2. Phillip Daniel Guyadeen in 1908 sought a seat in the Combined Court and lost.
3. Prabhu Sawh, an affluent storekeeper in Georgetown unsuccessfully sought permission to place Indians on the official electors' list, as only 0.6% of Indian males from a total of 51.8% of adult Indian males were included in the electoral list in 1911.
4. An Indian was appointed a member of the local authority of the Sheet Anchor County District.
5. Edward Luckhoo, a solicitor, elected Mayor of New Amsterdam.
6. Indians fully represented in local authority districts in the villages founded by Indians and those set up by the Government in lieu of a return passage to India.
7. Indians approved a Resolution of Dissociation against the recall of Governor Egerton by Africans and Colored groups.
8. The British Guiana East Indian Association (BGEIA) established in 1916 had no mass following; it functioned within the middle-class and not the working people's interests.
9. C.R. Jacob was elected to the Legislative Council in 1935; and Ayube Edun was nominated to that Council in 1943. Both organized the Manpower Citizens' Association in 1936. They addressed working people's issues, but had no mass following; with no mass foundation, there was indeed political vacuum, as workers' issues were largely unresolved.



Dr. Cheddi Jagan assessed this political scene in the 1940s; he saw planters and the political middle class were only interested in preserving the status quo; there was no mass-based party; and the working people's interests and needs were excluded from both the Indian and African middle-class agenda. Dr. Jagan with Ashton Chase, Jocelyn Hubbard, and his wife Janet Jagan, then sought to fill this vacuum, bringing forth a new dawn in Guyana's politics; the Political Affairs Committee (PAC), forerunner to the People's Progressive Party (PPP), heralding the beginnings of the mass-based party and the articulation and resolution of workers' concerns.

The PPP continued from where the PAC left off; unrelenting agitation for Independence became the number one item on the PPP's agenda. This feverish campaigning prompted the arrival of the Waddington Commission; this was a success long in the making for the PPP struggle against colonial hegemony; a struggle that conceived and gave birth to universal adult suffrage; a struggle that designed the road map for Independence. The first election under universal adult suffrage happened in 1953 during the Cold War.

In the run-up to the 1953 election, Daniel Debidin, a Solicitor, was Leader of the United Farmers' and Workers' Party; earlier, he defeated John Carter to enter the Legislative Council in 1947; Debidin's subsequently party evicted itself from the electoral contest and he ran as an Independent, obtaining 16.7% of electoral votes. Debidin's problem was that his political vision focused only on middle-class Indians and not on working-class people in this multiethnic society.

Another middle-class Indian Dr. J.B. Singh who was in the Legislative Council for 21 years, contested the 1953 election. PPP's Fred Bowman (with 42.3% of the votes) defeated Dr. Singh (with 26% of the votes) in an Indian-dominated constituency. General Secretary of the Man Power Citizens' Association (MPCA) Sheik M. Shakoor lost his deposit securing only 411 votes. Balram Singh Rai, an Attorney-at-Law, was a National Democratic Party (NDP) candidate for the Central Demerara constituency in 1953; he lost his deposit securing only 421 votes.



**Opening of Legislative Council In 1957**

**L-R: Shiek Mohamed Saffee, Balram Singh Rai, Fred Bowman, Ram Karran, Janet Jagan, Edward Beharry & Cheddi Jagan.**

Rai became a member of the PPP after the suspension of the constitution in 1953.

The PPP won in 1953 bringing forth the first national unity government in Guyana that included Dr. J.P. Lachhmansingh and Jai Narine Singh as Ministers; the latter lost his election bid to the Legislative Council in 1947 and became a member of the PPP just before the 1953 election. After the PPP's removal from office in 1953, Jai Narine Singh, among others, engineered the PPP split in 1955.

The colonial authorities constituted the interim government of the 1954-1957 years with mainly anti-PPP people from the middle class and elite groupings comprising such Indians as Rahaman Gajraj, James Ramphal, and Lionel Luckhoo, among others.

There were many stalwarts like Ram Karran and several Africans like Ashton Chase who remained loyal to Jagan's PPP. Ram Karran was with the PPP from the 1950s, becoming a Minister in the 1957 PPP Government that also included Edward Beharry; Beharry's position was later rescinded in 1960 due to his anti-government position on the tax measures concerning the sugar industry. The PPP won the elections again in 1961.



**1961 Cabinet**

**L-R: C.V. Nunes, Ranji Chandisingh, Fenton Ramsahoye, B.H. Benn, Cheddi Jagan, Sir Ralph Grey, Ram Karran, B. S. Rai, E.M.G. Wilson, C.R. Jacob Jr, H.J.M. Hubbard, G. Bowman, L. Mann.**



And its 1962 budget drew the ire of wealthy Indians, many of whom joined the United Force, such as Rahaman Gajraj, and Hari Prashad who became its Chairman. At this time, several well-known Indians opposed the PPP; these included Balwant Singh, Richard Ishmael, Hoosein Ganie, Abdool Majeed, an affluent Indian merchant and President of the United Sad'r Islamic Anjuman.

Rai was no longer a PPP member by the time of the 1964 elections. His Justice Party (JP) secured a mere 1,334 votes; and Hoosein Ganie's Guyana United Muslim Party (GUMP) obtained 1,194 votes. Rai called for Indian votes on the grounds that the PPP was anti-Indian and anti-religious; one of Ganie's handbills told the Guyanese people that "A vote for GUMP was a vote for Allah". Guyana's electoral history pointedly indicates that political leaders only focusing on their own class interests reinforced with blatant opportunism, and not the people's interests, falter at electoral times.



**Reepu Daman Persaud acting as speaker of the National Assembly.**

Then there is Reepu Daman Persaud, a product of plantation labor, a PPP Member of Parliament for 40 years and founder of the Guyana Hindu Dharmic Sabha; he currently holds the portfolio of Minister of Parliamentary Affairs; acted as Prime Minister and as President of Guyana on several occasions.

Clearly, Indians were not docile during indentureship. Indians demonstrated a remarkable history of active resistance. Labor unrest that facilitated Indian solidarity also simultaneously was a remarkable method used for ensuring cultural persistence. The dynamic resistance to achieve and sustain cultural persistence and continuity created the ingredients for an Indian political evolution and mobilization. Indentured Indian working people, through their challenge to colonial hegemony, created the Indian political middle class; but that early political middle class idolized colonialism inimical to workers' concerns; the later political middle class steeped in advancing its own ethnic group's interests, blatant opportunism, and imperialist intrigue, also neglected workers' concerns. The Indian political middle class has not delivered the goods; time for recreation of a new Indian middle class, to work in solidarity with Indian workers, and eventually reaching out to the working people of this country in sustainable alliances.

*(To be continued...)*





# Famous

## Indo-Guyanese Cricketers

By: *Winston McGowan*

The origin of cricket in Guyana is not definitely known. It is believed that the game was introduced in the country by British residents probably early in the nineteenth century. From then the game spread to other inhabitants, including East Indians, who first arrived in 1838.

By the end of the nineteenth century a growing number of East Indians in British Guiana had begun to play cricket. This development was given a great fillip in the early decades of the twentieth century by three important events.

### EARLY CRITICAL EVENTS

The earliest of these events was unprecedented, namely, the selection of an East Indian for the first time in a Guyanese national cricket team. This occurred in January 1910 when J.A. Veerasawmy, a left-arm bowler, was chosen to play in a game against Trinidad at the Queen's Park Oval. In this game, which Trinidad won by an innings and 180 runs, Veerasawmy's contribution was negligible. Batting at Number 11, he had scores of 0 and 1 not out and failed to take a wicket, conceding 37 runs in 8 overs.

Owing to his departure for England to pursue legal studies and the disruption to regional intercolonial cricket caused by First World War, Veerasawmy did not represent British Guiana again until eleven years later in September 1921, again against Trinidad in Trinidad. In that match, which the Trinidadians won by an innings and 80 runs, Veerasawmy was his team's most successful bowler, capturing five wickets for 67 runs in 37 overs, of which 13 were maidens.

Veerasawmy played only one other first-class game for his country. That game was against Trinidad at Bourda in September 1922, when he had scores of 12 and 2 not out and analyses of one for 33 in 7 overs and 0 for 9 in two overs with the ball.

Veerasawmy's selection for British Guiana fired other Indian cricketers with a desire to represent their country. The second Indian to have that honour was C. Pooran, a middle-order batsman who played in a game against Trinidad in 1929 at the Queen's Park Oval, but suffered the ignominy of being dismissed for a duck in both innings. Not surprisingly he was never selected to represent British Guiana again.

Veerasawmy was also largely responsible for the second event which gave an impetus to Indian cricket in British Guiana. Owing mainly to his initiative, in 1914 the British Guiana East Indian Cricket Club (B.G.E.I.C.C.) was formed in Georgetown.

This club soon became the best and most influential Indian cricket club in the colony, producing most of the early accomplished Indian cricketers.

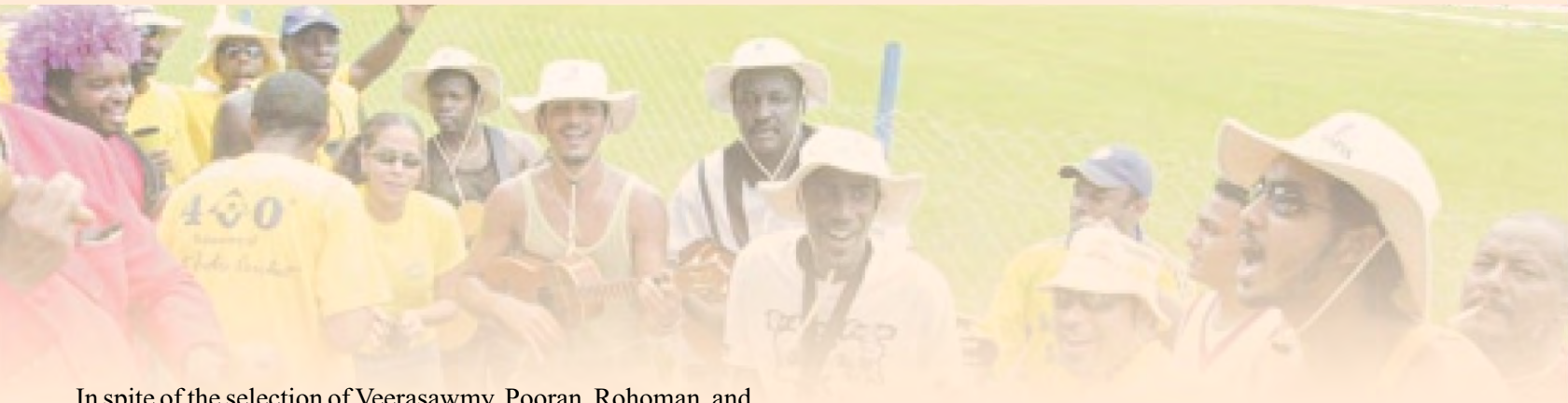
The third development which boosted Indian cricket in the early twentieth century was the beginning in 1919 of two competitions for Indian players. One competition was virtually annual between Indians in the three counties of Demerara, Essequibo and Berbice for the Flood Challenge Cup presented by Thomas Flood, a leading Indian businessman and politician. The other competition, which was inaugurated by Veerasawmy, was a periodic one for the Kawall Cup between Indians in British Guiana, Trinidad and Suriname, with the first contests taking place in 1919 and 1924. These two competitions helped to bring to prominence the Indians who represented British Guiana in the 1930s and 1940s.

### THE 1930s AND 1940s

In the 1930s two Indians were selected for the national team in intercolonial matches. The first was R.B. Rohoman, a slow bowler who played two games in 1934 against Barbados and Trinidad. In the first of these games against Barbados at the Queen's Park Oval, Rohoman was his team's best bowler, capturing 11 wickets for 194 runs, 4 for 64 in the first innings and 7 for 130 in the second.

The second Indian to play for British Guiana in the 1930s was Chatterpaul Persaud, the first accomplished Indo-Guyanese batsman. In his intercolonial debut against Barbados at Bourda in 1937, Persaud scored a century (174), sharing a mammoth record partnership of 381 runs for the fourth wicket with Peter Bayley (268), enabling British Guiana to secure a rare easy victory over Barbados by an innings and 229 runs. Persaud missed a century by four runs in his next first-class innings a week later against Trinidad when he scored 96 and was involved in two century stands. His brilliant batting was a major factor in his team's winning of this 1937 regional intercolonial tournament.





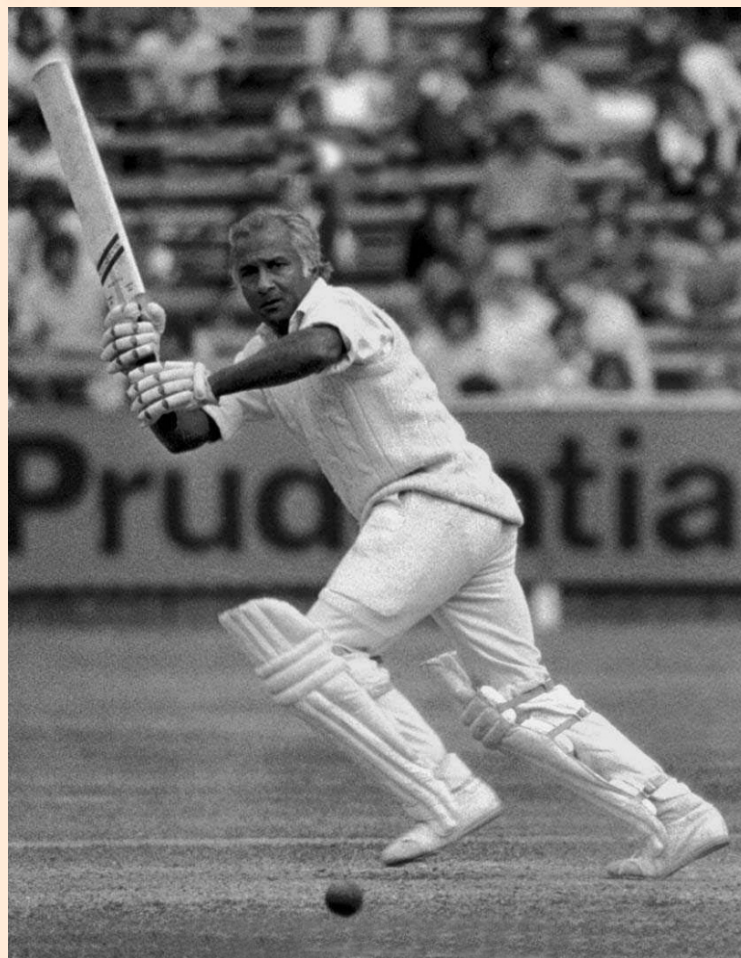
In spite of the selection of Veerasawmy, Pooran, Rohoman, and Persaud and in the 1940s J. Bahadur, J. Naipaul and Sonny Bajnauth, until the 1950s very few Indians represented the country in cricket. Most national cricket teams did not have a single member of Indian descent. This was due partly to the discrimination suffered by players from Berbice in team selection, where marked preference was given to cricketers from Demerara, especially Georgetown. In these circumstances the only Indian who appeared regularly in the national team before the mid 1950s was Ganesh Persaud. Persaud, a Georgetown-based player who was a middle-order batsman, participated in eight intercolonial games in 1950, 1951 and 1952, scoring 419 runs in 14 innings with a highest score of 96 and an average of 29.92 runs an innings.

### THE MID 1950s A WATERSHED

This situation began to change markedly in the mid 1950s owing largely to the initiative of the West Indian batsman and Guyanese skipper, the Barbadian, Clyde Walcott, who in 1954 was appointed Cricket Organiser and Coach on the estates of the British Guiana Sugar Producers' Association. His influence was partly responsible for the selection of several Berbicians in the national team, including three Indians, the middle-order batsmen, Rohan Kanhai and Joe Solomon., and the wrist spinner, Ivan Madray.

The invaluable contribution of these three players played a major role in enabling British Guiana to win the first regional quadrangular tournament staged at Bourda in 1956. Both Kanhai (129 and 195) and Solomon (114 not out and 108) scored two centuries, while Madray was the team's leading wicket-taker. These games were also unprecedented in Guyanese cricket history by the inclusion of as many as four Indians in the national team- Kanhai, Solomon and Madray, being joined by the all-rounder, Wilfred Edun in one game and by the medium, pacer, Bajnauth, in the other. Thereafter Indians were almost invariably regular members of the national team.

The 1950s were also a watershed in another way. The decade witnessed the selection for the first time of Indo-Guyanese for the West Indies team, following the precedent set in 1950 when the Trinidadian spin bowler, Sonny Ramadhin, became the first Indian to represent the region. Wilfred Edun, a medium-fast bowler who was a useful batsman, was a member of the West Indies touring side to New Zealand in 1956, but was not selected for any of the four Tests. The country had to wait until the following year, 1957, for its first Indian Test player, Rohan Kanhai, who represented the West Indies in all five games in a series in England not only as a batsman, but also as a wicket-keeper in three of them.



### ROHAN KANHAI

Rohan Kanhai is the finest batsman produced by Guyana and the most outstanding West Indian player of Indian extraction. He had a long and distinguished career both for Guyana and the West Indies. He is arguably the finest, certainly the most audacious and inventive, strokeplayer in the long history of West Indies cricket. The zenith of his career was in the early 1960s when he was the West Indies most productive batsman with excellent aggregates of 503, 495, 497 and 462 in four successive series. In his entire career of 79 Tests he scored 6227 runs, including 15 hundreds and 28 half-centuries, with an average of 47.53 an innings. In the last thirteen of these Tests, he served as captain, the first Indian to lead the regional team.

His achievements as a Guyanese in Tests are numerous and unique. He was the first Guyanese to score a Test hundred at Bourda, a double hundred in a Test, two centuries in the same Test and to lead the West Indies for an extended period.



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	<p><b>HON</b></p>	<p><b>GE</b> <b>GIGABYTE</b> <b>hp</b> <b>APC</b> <b>COBY</b> <b>jWIN</b> <b>EPSON</b> <b>LG</b> <b>TOSHIBA</b></p>	

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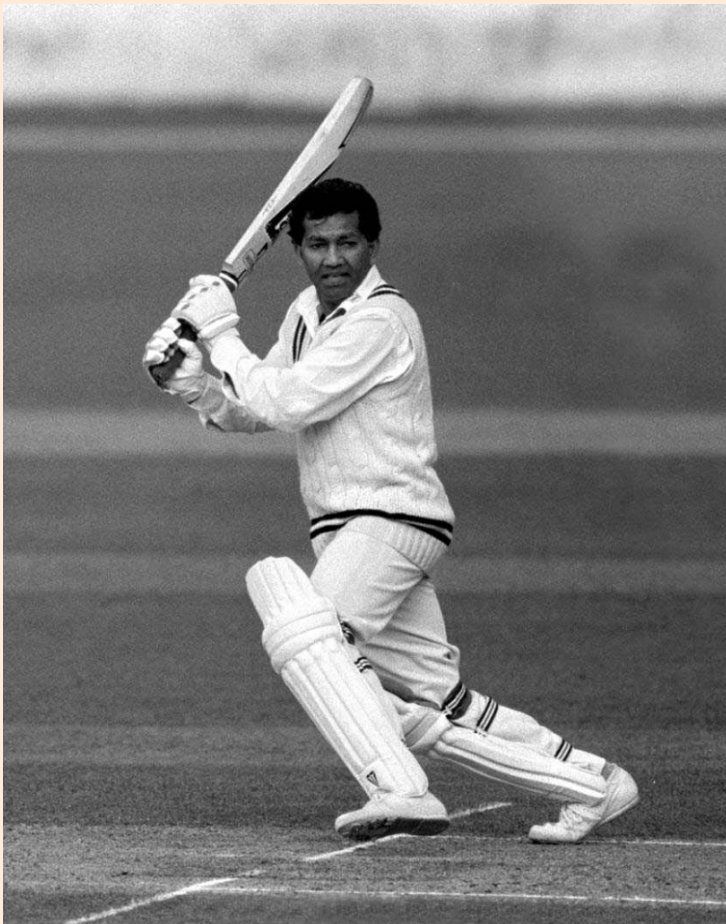


## OTHER INDO-GUYANESE TEST CRICKETERS

Kanhai proved to be the first of an increasing number of Indo-Guyanese to have represented the West Indies in Test cricket. The list includes in chronological order Ivan Madray, Joe Solomon, Alvin Kallicharran, Leonard Baichan, Sewdatt Shivnarine, Faoud Bacchus, Shivnarine Chanderpaul, Ramnaresh Sarwan, Mahendra Nagamootoo, Narsingh Deonarine, and Ryan Ramdass. Kanhai, Madray and Solomon may be regarded as the first generation of Indo-Guyanese Test players, Kallicharran, Baichan, Shivnarine and Bacchus as the next and the others as the latest generation. The most successful of these players in Tests were Solomon, Kallicharran, Baichan, Chanderpaul and Sarwan.

### JOE SOLOMON

Joe Solomon, a contemporary of Kanhai, was a reliable right-handed middle-order batsman who had an excellent defence. The finest achievement of his career of 27 Tests was in his first Test series in India in 1958-59 when he became the first Indian and Guyanese to head a series batting averages. Solomon scored 351 runs with a phenomenal average of 117 runs an innings. He, however, is best remembered for effecting two run outs that produced the first tied Test in cricket history against Australia at Brisbane in December 1960.



### ALVIN KALLICHARRAN

Apart from Rohan Kanhai, Alvin Kallicharran, an aggressive left-handed batsman, is arguably the most outstanding Indo-West Indian cricketer. Among his achievements were a century in his first Test innings against New Zealand 1972 and heading his team's batting averages in his maiden Test series.

His Test career, like that of Faoud Bacchus later, came to a sudden end in 1982 when he was banned from the West Indies team for playing cricket in apartheid South Africa. By then he had played 66 Tests, scored 4399 runs, including 12 centuries and 21 fifties, at an average of 44.43 runs an innings. He led the team in nine Tests in 1978 and 1979 during the Kerry Packer World Series Cricket crisis, the second Indian to be accorded that honour.

In his long and successful first-class career Kallicharran played more matches and scored more runs and centuries than any other Guyanese in the history of the game. In 505 such matches, he made 32, 650 runs, including 87 centuries, with an average of 43.64 an innings.

### LEONARD BAICHAN

Leonard Baichan, a solid, stolid, determined opening batsman was one of the most successful Indo-Guyanese cricketers, though he had only a short Test career of three matches. Like Kallicharran, he had the distinction of scoring a hundred in his first Test, 105 not out against Pakistan at Lahore in February 1975. His Test career batting average of 46.00 is better than that of any other Guyanese except Kanhai and Clive Lloyd.



### SHIVNARINE CHANDERPAUL AND RAMNARESH SARWAN

Shivnarine Chanderpaul and Ramnaresh Sarwan are the only Guyanese in the current West Indies team. Both of them made an impressive entry into Test cricket at the age of nineteen, Chanderpaul scoring 63 against England at Bourda in March 1994 and Sarwan 84 not out against Pakistan at Kensington Oval in May 2000. Apart from Brian Lara, they are the team's best batsmen. Chanderpaul has served as captain of the team for four series and Sarwan seems likely to follow him in that capacity.

Since the 1950s Indo-Guyanese cricketers have been making a substantial contribution to Guyanese cricket and a useful one to West Indies cricket. Twelve of the forty Guyanese who have played Test cricket are Indians. Their contribution has been mainly in the area of batting, for only three of them, namely, Ivan Madray, Sewdatt Sewnarine and Mahendra Nagamootoo, were selected mainly for their bowling. None of them, however, were successful with the ball in Test cricket.



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# The Origin of the *Qasida*

By: Raymond Chickrie

The *qasida* (hymn of praise) has always been a part of the Muslim tradition in Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago and Suriname. It spread from the heart of Arabia to the Islamic periphery. Arabic language impacted heavily on the vocabulary, the grammar and the literary prose of other languages such as Persian, Urdu, Turkish, Bosniak, Hausa and Swahili among others. Its contribution to the literature of these languages helped their revival. Today *qasidas* are written in Arabic but also in other languages spoken by Muslims and have become a part of the Islamic cultural expression.

There are four types of *qasida*, which are characterized according to their evolution. The pre-Islamic *qasida*, rooted in the ancient Arab tribal code; the panegyric *qasida*, expressing an ideal vision of a just Islamic government; the religious *qasida*, exhorting different types of commendable religious conduct; and the modern *qasida*, influenced by secular, nationalist, or humanist ideals.

Guyanese Muslims have only been exposed to religious *qasidas*. However, in Guyana, until recently, there was no formal school of *qasida* teaching. But this has changed with the establishment of Guyana's First Sunni Muslim School tutored by Pakistani Scholar, *Maulana Noorul Hadi Haleem*.

This school, established by the *Muslim Youth League of Guyana* and the *Anna Catherina Islamic Complex*, is the only Muslim institution in Guyana that teaches the Urdu language and *Qasidas*. What Guyanese Muslims know about *qasida* is what has been handed down from one generation to another. It is not a written tradition, but rather an oral one which until recently inevitably has lost its scholarly character.

Madrasahs do not teach *qasida* in Guyana but a few Islamic organizations in Guyana do hold *qasida* competitions. The question remains, who sets the standards for winning and what are the criteria for winning? This aspect of cultural Islam no doubt has been influenced by the host environment. Today in Guyana there is a great success in the effort to resurrect this tradition. However, the influence of those whom have studied in the Arab world, continues to impede the effort.

The *Guyana United Sadr Islamic Anjuman*, the country's oldest and only statutory (by an Act of Parliament) Islamic representative organization was the first organization to organize *qasida* competition in Guyana. This was done for many decades until its that organization's dormancy. In 1999 the *Muslim Youth League* in conjunction with the CIOG held a national *qaseeda* competition.



In its editorial, the Muslim Journal writes, "then it was announced on television that Qaseeda and Mowlood is an "Indian" something and therefore has nothing to do with Islam." (1999, p.2). With two thousand people attending the final Qaseeda competition, the Journal writes, " The people have spoken, and no Shaikh, Maulana, Qari, Hafiz or selfproclaimed Islamic scholars can deny the voice of the people".

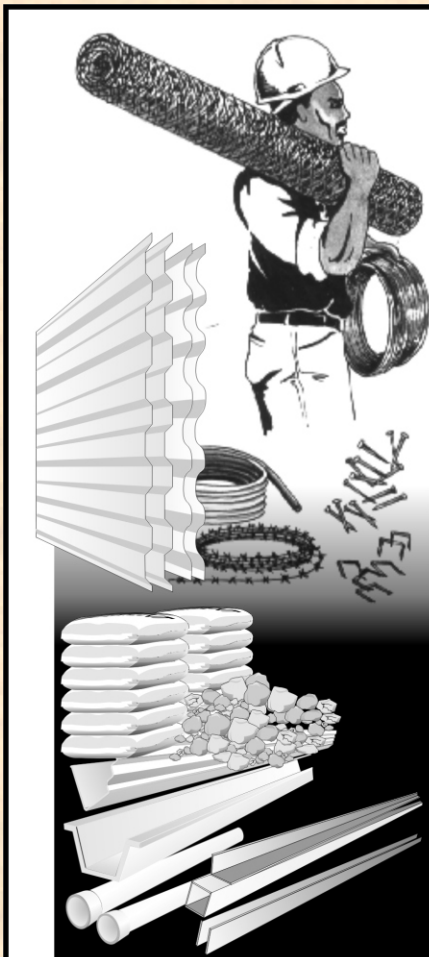
The visits of several scholars to the Caribbean, notably Maulana Fazlur Rahman Ansari, Maulana Abdul Aleem Siddique and his son Maulana Ahmad Shah Noorani Siddique, provided opportunity to the Guyanese Muslims to seek clarification from these scholars of the Hanafi madhab regarding the practice of *tazeem* (*salaatus salaam*), *milad-un-nabi* and *qasida*. These scholars endorsed these practices and refuted claims that these are evil innovations. They were able to convince the locals that based on the *Qur'an*, *Hadith* and the *fiqh*, they were within the parameters of Islam, and if kept within the boundaries of Islam these practices are good innovations'.

In recent times, the MYL initiated the effort to receive the support of qualified ullema from India and Pakistan (where their fore parents came from).

This has made it possible adamant pronouncements of the practices of *tazeem* and *moulood* as being totally correct, in line with Islam and challenge the views of the opponents with equal "proofs" from *Quran* and *Sunna*.

Urdu is an emotional issue these days especially since the majority of Guyanese Muslims are of Indo-Pakistani origin. It has resurfaced in the past five years, and effort is underway to bring it back to life. Annually there is *Qaseeda* (poetry) competition by MYL and other organizations. The CIOG has also commenced *qaseeda* competitions too. The MYL initiated the cooperation between Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago through the staging of the International Qaseeda Competition held annually in different countries.

The MYL is at the forefront in linking Guyana, Suriname and Trinidad. The appointment of *Maulana Noorul Hadi* several years ago to Guyana has given a tremendous boost to Urdu in Guyana. Until the 1960's Urdu was synonymous with Guyanese Muslims. *Maulana Hadi* according to the MYL is concentrating greatly on teaching Urdu. He also helps to coordinate the international Qaseeda competition.



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# “Radio Is My Life” - Ayube Hamid

By: Neil Marks

Ayube Hamid does not have a favourite song, per say. But one, Mohamed Rafi’s “Suhani Raat,” has come to define him on radio in Guyana. He started Indian Memory Album in 1953 and that “pleasant night” continues to play right down to today. He has not paused, nor does he intend to press the stop button just yet.

One of his greatest pleasures has been to visit Sumdatt, North East Delhi, India, from where his grandfather came to then British Guiana. Discovering the location was sheer delight. His foreparents came here and brought up a son that has distinguished himself in broadcasting and catapulted many local artistes to fame.

Age has caught up with Uncle Ayube, as he is affectionately called by those who hold him in high esteem. He is one of those pioneers of Indian programming on the local airwaves.

“Radio is my life,” he says without hesitation.

When I pulled up at his house in Georgetown, he peeped through the window. It is where he lived with his wife, Jinnette, for all of their 46 years together. She died recently. He knew I was coming. He directed me to come to the front door. I turned the door knob. Once. Twice. It eventually opened. He took a while to get down the stairs. This September, he would be 80.



Ayube Hamid

“I don’t mind it. I treat it as exercise,” he laughs, as he guides me up the stairs to his living room.

The phone rings, he hustles across the room to get it. “Wrong number,” he mumbles, “it happens all the time.” He sits down now to let me in on his life. At the end he says, it is the most he has ever told anyone. He wonders how I got him to reveal so much.

He was born at Danielstown, Essequibo Coast. His family members were Muslims. He attended Madrasah at the local Mosque, where the gamut of the Islamic way of life was taught to him.

In school, he excelled and secured one of just two county scholarships offered to his region. That landed him a place at the elite Queens College.

His first job was with a firm engaged in geographical exploration for bauxite. He operated a technical instrument which sent an electronic charge through the earth and depending on the chart reading, he recognized whether it had hit a bauxite ore or not.

However, he would land a career in radio that would last a lifetime. On April 1, 1952, he joined the radio station as an announcer, putting over news, music and conducting interviews. This was shortly after the great fire of 1951 burnt down the Philharmonic Building which housed the then radio station VP3BG.

With a year on the job, his knowledge of Urdu and Arabic, derived from a strong Islamic background, together with his expertise in English prompted then radio boss Rafiq Khan to set him on a journey that would become the job of a lifetime.

He replaced Mohamed Akbar as the announcer. Of course, he says, there were other Indian announcers on radio. Names like Sugrim Singh, Azeem Khan, Paul O’Hara, Ishri Singh, Sunny Mohamed, and Moses Hussain, came to mind. “They were all my protégé,” he says.

He took over Indian Memory Album in 1953, featuring old Indian music from several genres. He was a class act at introducing the songs. Not many could do it. The albums were written mostly in Urdu and Hindustani. His groundings in Urdu gave him the advantage.

Then, in a small way, he, along with others, started a local talent show in the radio on Sunday afternoons that blossomed into a bigger event, and was responsible not only for the further propagation of Indian music on the radio, but the development of the talents of those who went on to make a name for themselves.





**Ayube Hamid & Rafiq Khan in the early days.**

When the radio shifted from North Road to High street in the 1960's, Local Indian Performers, became a much looked forward to event for those who figured they could sing. He auditioned them, and put the best ones on the programme. They were given no tangible rewards.

“They just did it for the fame,” he recalls. ‘But you had to know how to sing,” he points out. Mohan Nandu, Gobin Ram, Tilak, Sudama, Balnain, Beni Balkarran are some of those who appeared on the programme. Artistes came from as far as Berbice and Essequibo for a chance to make it big.

His promotion to the administrative post coincided with a change in the concept of managing the radio station. Local Indian Performers was no longer on the frequency after that change.

However, his Indian Memory Album continued. There were other Indian programmes on the radio, but nothing of depth. Records and tapes, with music including Bhajans were just played. However, with local artistes still desiring a spot on the airwaves, they recorded their own voice and sent it in. “If it was good, it was played,” he says.

His job at the radio station saw him broadcasting live, and emceeding many memorable concerts of International Indian troupes that visited Guyana. The list includes the greats like Lata Mangeshkar, Manna Dey, Mohamed Rafi, Mukesh and Kishore.

“I was very involved in the productions. I learnt from them. I learnt that they were not satisfied to display their talent in India only, but in the diaspora where Indians were,” he says.

Nowadays, the face behind the voice that many heard for decades on the radio, is now seen on television. Uncle Ayube now brings into the homes of Guyanese what are most commonly referred to as “evergreen” Hindi film songs.

“It’s just like taking Indian Memory Album and putting pictures to it,” he says. He also hosts “Reflections” an Islamic programme, on TV.

Uncle Ayube was one of those who founded the Gandhi Youth Organization and he is a Trustee and member of the Queenstown Jama Masjid.

For his contribution to broadcasting in Guyana and for his social work he was awarded three national awards, the Medal of Excellence, the Medal of Service, and the Arrow of Achievement.

In 2005, he was honoured by the Indian Commemoration Trust, for his help in the setting up of the Indian monument gardens, and also by the Muslim Youth Organization. He will be honored by the Indian Arrival Committee this year.

Uncle Ayube looks back at the decades of Indian musical culture and says the power of Indian music is that its rhythm has the power to transcend ethnic boundaries and is loved by the masses. He is not that great a fan of Chutney music, but admires the way the rhythm has caught on to other groups, than Indian. Most, even ethnic East Indians, don’t understand the words, but they enjoy it. Today, he is cognizant that Indian music is defined by what comes out of the Indian film industry. He calls it a “diluted” form.

‘Indian music has now become so adulterated with western influence that only the purists now enjoy an evening of Raag, Thumris, Ghazals and Bhajans,” he says.

“But, we must be proud, that despite the adulteration, he passing of years from indentureship has not and will not obliterate the love and send of cultural belonging to this Guyanese cultural form. It is my fervent wish that we should teach the community and ourselves in general the language and so appreciate what we hear in Indian songs when we hear them,” he adds.

So next time you hear Indian Memory Album on the Voice of Guyana from 19:00h on Mondays, know you are listening to the voice of a man who has made the radio his life, who has exemplified himself in his career, who brought life to the voices of many, and who dares to continue as long as his voice allows him.



**Ayube Hamid with local Indian performers at Radio Demerara - 1962**



# the indian heritage monument

## *The Story*

*By: Yesu Persaud*

**T**he Indian Monument Site at the corner of Church and Camp Street is a very historic Monument. It commemorates the first indentured Indians who arrived in then British Guiana on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1838.

In August 1987 a group met including Yesu Persaud, Lloyd Searwar, Roy Prasad, Ishmael Bacchus, Fazia Bacchus, Ronald Ali, Hemraj Kissoon, Mr. Pat Dial, Dr. Sukdeo, Iris Sukdeo and Ayube Hamid to discuss the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Arrival of Indians in Guyana which was to be celebrated on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1988. It was unanimously agreed that the one person who had the ability to get persons to work together and to get all the groups to come together was Yesu Persaud. He was duly appointed Chairman of the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee.

In May 1988, during the visit of Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, Vice President Of India, to celebrate 150 years of Indian Arrival in Guyana, Mr. Yesu Persaud, the Chairman of the group had a private discussion with him and informed him that our Committee wanted to build a Monument to commemorate the arrival of East Indians in Guyana and he promised that the ICCR will do whatever they can to help us.

After looking around for a while we found a site at Camp and Church Street suitable to put up a monument. We approached the then Mayor, Mr. Compton Young. He told us that spot we identified was very low but if we can make it into a garden then to go ahead since he had no use for the site. Nearly 1000 loads of sand and dirt was used to fill up the site.



We held a competition countrywide seeking drawings or sketches what the monument should look like. Hundreds of entries were received from Berbice to Essequibo, most of these had the concept of sailing ships.

The Committee chose the winning entry which was a ship that looked like the “Whitby.” An architect from India came and worked closely with our local architect, Mr. Albert Rodrigues, whom we renamed Albert Singh, then mapped out a plan of what the garden should look like and infrastructure work for the ship. The ship builder also came to Guyana and returned to India to construct the ship.

The architect and ship builder returned to Guyana when the ship arrived to help in the setting up of the Monument.

Our Indian Anniversary Committee was converted into a “Trust”, The Indian Commemoration Trust 10 years ago. Today the Monument Garden is very beautifully kept and is maintained voluntarily with help from the business community. Fund raising activities are also held from time to time.

Every year activities are planned and celebrated at the Garden on May 5 to commemorate Indian Arrival Day. Activities are also held for special occasions such as Diwali, Phagwah, Eid at the Monument Garden.





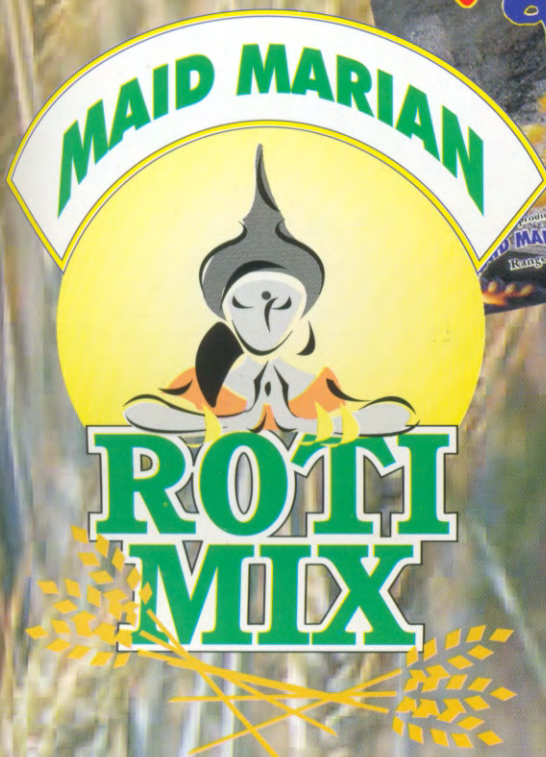
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# **INDI GARAM MASALA**

*Blended with Eleven Spices*



*"Taking Taste to the next level"*

**Manufactured By:**  
**Edward B. Beharry Company Limited.**  
191 Charlotte Street,  
Georgetown, Guyana.

