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Abstract

There is a marked contrast between historical and sociological constructs of the religious experience of Indians in the Caribbean and its portrayal in fiction. The historical evidence is that whilst there have been major changes away from the cultural practices and world view that Hindus and Muslims brought with them as indentured labourers to the Caribbean, a majority of Indians in Trinidad and Guyana adhere in some way to the rites, beliefs and values of Hinduism and Islam. Even today, despite determined Christian proselytization and the material advantages which conversion offered in the past, less than twenty percent of Indians are Christians. Hindus and Muslims worry about the state of their religions and the Pundits and Mulvis complain about the increasing secularization of their flocks, but it is clear that being a Hindu or Muslim is central to many Indians' personal identity and to the survival of Indo-Caribbeans as a distinct cultural group. Though Indian attitudes to Christianity and converts are by no means uniform, in general they have tended to be relaxed. There was gratitude for the role of the Christian missions in championing Indian education in the past, though resentment and active opposition to aggressive attempts at conversion. Those Christian Indians who became socially prominent aroused a mixture of pride and envy, pity and contempt for 'abandoning' their own culture. In the past, popular Hinduism borrowed and absorbed elements of Christianity (just as Indian Presbyterianism became progressively rehinduised); in the present one senses a measure of ecumenical indifference.

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There is a marked contrast between historical and sociological constructs of the religious experience of Indians in the Caribbean and its portrayal in fiction. The historical evidence is that whilst there have been major changes away from the cultural practices and world view that Hindus and Muslims brought with them as indentured labourers to the Caribbean, a majority of Indians in Trinidad and Guyana adhere in some way to the rites, beliefs and values of Hinduism and Islam. Even today, despite determined Christian proselytization and the material advantages which conversion offered in the past, less than twenty percent of Indians are Christians. Hindus and Muslims worry about the state of their religions and the Pundits and Mulvis complain about the increasing secularization of their flocks, but it is clear that being a Hindu or Muslim is central to many Indians' personal identity and to the survival of Indo-Caribbeans as a distinct cultural group. Though Indian attitudes to Christianity and converts are by no means uniform, in general they have tended to be relaxed. There was gratitude for the role of the Christian missions in championing Indian education in the past, though resentment and active opposition to aggressive attempts at conversion. Those Christian Indians who became socially prominent aroused a mixture of pride and envy, pity and contempt for 'abandoning' their own culture. In the past, popular Hinduism borrowed and absorbed elements of Christianity (just as Indian Presbyterianism became progressively rehinduised); in the present one senses a measure of ecumenical indifference.

However, almost without exception, the fictional portrayal of the practices and institutions of Hinduism (the experience of Muslim Indians

has scarcely been touched on) in Indo-Caribbean fiction has been rebarbatively negative. Rites have become meaningless, pundits are invariably venal and ignorant and, in the Caribbean, the world view of Hinduism has become absurd. The consequences of separation from India form one of the explanatory frameworks in novels which explore the breakdown of a whole Hindu world, but in this article I argue that one finds in the work of several Indo-Caribbean novelists the view, both implicitly and explicitly expressed, that it was the contact with the Christian world-view, through missionary proselytization, which destroyed the wholeness of the Hindu world and the psychic integrity of the individuals within it.

Superficially, the treatment of contact with Christianity and of Christian converts in Indo-Caribbean writing reflects wider social attitudes. It has focussed on popular stereotypes and has generally been satirical in presenting the convert as motivated by material self-interest, though several works reflect the more sympathetic popular view that the Christian convert is to be pitied.

The dominant stereotype has been the Christian Indian schoolmaster, with the middle class woman who mimics European standards of 'immodesty' in a supporting role. Thus in V.S. Naipaul's *A House For Mr Biswas* there is Shekar's wife Dorothy, 'lewd and absurd' in her short frocks pretentiously speaking Spanish in front of her stalwartly Hindu sisters-in-law, or Doreen James in Shiva Naipaul's *Fireflies* who has travelled so far from the origins that her eyes shine with 'anthropological fervour' when she enters an Indian peasant's hut.

The figure of the Christian Indian schoolmaster first surfaces in Seepersad Naipaul's novella 'The Adventures of Gurudeva' in the character of Mr Sohun, and is continued in Mr Lal in *A House For Mr Biswas*, Harricharan Narine's Mr Lalla in *Day's Gone By* (1976) and in Shiva Naipaul's Mr Mallingham in *A Hot Country* (1983). The dominant elements of the stereotype are low-casteness, a delight in flogging the heathen Hindu child, a hypocritical moral probity and an exaggerated adherence to the Protestant work ethic. Even Seepersad Naipaul's portrayal of Mr Sohun, sympathetic in comparison to other treatments, is significantly ambivalent. On the surface the character of Mr Sohun exists as a mouthpiece for the author's criticism of the ignorance and caste bigotry of some of the Sanatanist pundits who were trying to revive the authority of traditional brahminical Hinduism. However, the treatment of the issue suggests other motivations. For instance, whilst the overt point of the contrast the story makes between the willingness of the 'chamar' Christian teacher of the previous generation to abase himself to

his Brahmin pupils and Mr Sohun's vigorous attack on caste distinctions is that times have changed and that caste is now irrelevant, the fact that both teachers *are* low-caste fits into a Hindu stereotype of the Christian convert. Moreover, the way that Sohun lectures Gurudeva, his former pupil, now a self-professed pundit, at considerable length on the subject and superciliously makes fun of him, is rather too self-justificatory, as if Seepersad Naipaul felt that Sohun needs to reassure himself about his status: 'In the same way chamars are not sweepers — they are often school teachers; and so can be said to have changed places with Brahmins...' (p. 96).

In V.S. Naipaul's *A House For Mr Biswas*, there is a less sympathetic emphasis on the low-casteness of Mr Lal, another Presbyterian flogger, ignorant, in his dirty cuffs and sweat-stained jacket. The same stereotype of the flogger is to be found in Narine's *Day's Gone By* and Mr Mallingham in *A Hot Country* pursues a life of 'unremitting labour, of rigorous effort, narrowly directed towards the narrowest of ends' (p. 7).

The dimension of moral fervour tends to be portrayed as hypocritical or absurd. In V.S. Naipaul's 'A Christmas Story', discussed in more detail below, Randolph's high-minded cant overlays a career of self-seeking corruption, whilst Shiva Naipaul's Mr Mallingham, in a thoroughly clichéd scene, savagely beats his daughter whilst making her recite the Lord's Prayer. Even in Clyde Hosen's story, 'I'm a Presbyterian, Mr Kramer', which acknowledges the moral courage of Reginald Cornelius Hassan, ironises its moral basis. Hassan is shocked to discover that his boss, a white man, with a distinguished war record, whom Churchill once shook by the hand, is a brutal sexual harasser of the women in the office. Probity and absurdity are caught in Hassan's reproving phrase, 'I'm a Presbyterian, Mr Kramer, and I won't stand for this iniquity', but Hosen indicates that the moral rectitude is built on the false foundation of an undue respect for whiteness and a sense of shame in his own family's past as estate labourers.

The motivation of materialistic self-interest and cultural self-contempt, widely mocked in the popular Indian phrase, 'rice Christian', indeed, acknowledged in the work of two writers whose backgrounds are Christian. Clyde Hosen's story, 'Curtains', satirically portrays two characters competing to escape from the shame of their 'Indianness'. Verna Taslim, the Presbyterian school teacher's wife despises her Muslim neighbour, Mrs Sandarim, because she still wears orhni and sometimes goes barefoot. But then Mrs Sandarim out-mimics her neighbour, even down to preparing a Christmas dinner complete with ham. 'Aray, suar? What, pig?' Taslim asks incredulously. Sandarim's daughter, once Dolly, now

Mary, explains: 'Catholic better than Presbyterian.' In Dennis Mahabir's novel, *The Cutlass Is Not For Killing*, the main attraction of Christianity is presented as the opportunity to leave behind the despised life-style and culture of the rural Hindu: 'The Karmarkars had individual names and faces — their bodies were cared for with good food... The family was alert, intelligent and constantly warned of the narrowness of their own people' (p. 25). However, the novel suggests that this is gained at a price. Ben Karmarkar's 'spiritual loneliness' indicates some inner loss, whilst pride in status is mixed with an element of racial self-contempt: 'Hartley was not too proud of what his English friends saw of his people, and felt as if they regarded him, and a few like him, as the exception to the rule' (p. 96).

This note of regret over the Christian convert's loss is echoed in other novels and stories. For instance, in 'The Adventures of Gurudeva', Sohun delivers Gurudeva a long lecture on the finer points of Hindu theology, even though he knows that it will go clean over Gurudeva's head. Naipaul's point is that Sohun's conversion has cut him off spiritually and socially from a religion to which he is still attached: 'But Mr Sohun was talking more to himself than to Gurudeva. He had read widely on Indian philosophy and religion and must needs talk it out' (p. 96).

In V.S. Naipaul's *The Mimic Men* (1967), the main focus is on the tragic estrangement suffered by the narrator's father after he has been taken up by a missionary and his wife and then abandoned when they leave the island. K.K. Singh concludes: 'It had all led to nothing, so far as my father was concerned... I used to get the feeling that my father was a man who had been cut off from his real country ... shipwrecked on the island and that over the years the hope of rescue had altogether faded' (p. 88). Thereafter, though Singh's father attempts to 'rediscover the glory and a way of looking at the world' (p. 126) by becoming Gurudeva the sanyasin, the purity of the rituals he tries to revive are sullied by their implication in racial politics of Isabella, and the whole enterprise ends in '...an ugly clearing, a disfiguring of the woods.... Such childishness was not what I had expected from Gurudeva' (pp. 176-177).

The same sense of losing one world without gaining another is echoed in Shiva Naipaul's *A Hot Country* (1983) in the portrayal of Mr Mallingham, who after his conversion becomes so ashamed of his past that he declares: 'I came out of darkness, out of blankness. I have no past' (p. 44). He too is a castaway for whom 'conversion', like a knife, had severed the umbilical cord' (p. 106). He has gained nothing in return. He tells his daughter, 'If there was no God there would be no reason for anything.

Life would be one big joke'; he has lost an inclusive Hindu sense of the sacredness of life itself and his Presbyterian exclusiveness leaves him only with a sense of futility.

Of course, these are perceptions of Presbyterianism, which in some measure bear witness to the peculiar mixture of unease and contempt and pity which many Hindus seem to have felt towards converts.

However, several of the works of fiction discussed in this article also show a keen awareness that the source of such Hindu feelings is Hindu defensiveness. For instance, though the characterisation of Sohun in 'The Adventures of Gurudeva', moves ambivalently between sympathy and irony, the fundamental point is that Sohun's perceptions of the backwardness and absurdity of the Hindu world have wounded it to the core. Similarly, though the portrait of the grubby Mr Lal in *A House For Mr Biswas* is notably unsympathetic, V.S. Naipaul does not conceal the fact that Mr Lal's arrogant perceptions of Hindus, as lacking the 'thoroughness, discipline and what he delighted to call stick-to-it-iveness' of the convert, are those of the wider society which in the end overwhelms the world of the Tulsis. In V.S. Naipaul's short story, 'Tell Me Who To Kill' (1971), the narrator tells how his father mocked his Christian brother, Stephen, 'behind his back for that name, but all of us are proud of Stephen and we well enjoy the little fame and respect he gave us in the village'. Naipaul very acutely seizes on the Hindu wish that the Christian convert will have paid some personal price for forsaking his ancestral religion. The narrator's father tells him that 'Stephen is not happy with his Christian wife, and that Stephen, because of his progressiveness, is full of worries' (p. 74). This is shown to be wishful thinking when the narrator admits, 'And if he have worries, they don't always show.' However, when Stephen's son 'gone foolish' in Montreal, the narrator's father 'feel he win' (p. 84). The wound created by the very existence of Stephen's respectable Christian family is shown by the way the narrator is forced to see his own mother through their scornful eyes, 'rubbing her dirty foot against her ankle, grin and pull up her veil over the top of her head, as though it is the only thing she have to do to make herself presentable' (pp. 76-77). For this the narrator must hate them, think of Stephen's wife as 'Miss Shameless Christian Short-Dress', think of them as the enemy: 'When you find out who your enemy is, you must kill him before he kill you' (p. 83).

This combination of reflected Hindu social attitudes and acute self-awareness of their source is displayed most powerfully in V.S. Naipaul's 'A Christmas Story'. On the surface, Randolph is very much the stereotype: hypocritical, a flogger of Hindus and profoundly Euro-centric in his

values. However, by a masterly use of first person narration, Naipaul plunges the reader into the psychological heart of Randolph's contradictions and equivocations.

His narrative takes the form of a 'frank' confession, which like most frank confessions, admits only to conceal. However, because Randolph is at least partially aware of the contradictions in his feelings, he becomes a moving figure. As a retired and impecunious head-teacher he has embezzled the funds of the new school whose building he is supervising. However, he only actually confesses to being 'repeatedly in error' in his calculations, of there being 'repeated shortages' and that 'To cover up one error I had to commit twenty acts of concealment'. Ironically invoking the intervention of a karmic fate, he carefully denies his responsibility for what occurs: 'I felt myself caught up in a curious inefficiency that seemed entirely beyond my control, something malignant, powered by forces hostile to myself' (p. 41). What Randolph has seen in Presbyterianism is the promise of material prosperity granted in return for prayers and faith. It is the failure of that 'promise' which provokes Randolph's fraud and he is swift to find within the ideological apparatus of his shallow faith a means of half-justifying what he has done. When the social advantages which Christians had had in the earliest days of his conversion begin to wane, and Randolph sees his ignorant Hindu cousin Hori prospering in his transport business, he admits 'my faith was undergoing its severest strain'. So often the phrase a 'nightly wrestling with God' signifies only that Randolph is quarrelling with God because he has failed to give him the prosperity and status he desires. He repeatedly talks of his 'zeal', but it is clear that it has two functions: to convince himself that he is right and to convince his superiors he is worthy of advancement. Righteousness in the eyes of God becomes confused with righteousness in the eyes of men. His motive for burning the school down is so that his shame, 'the pit of defilement', will not become known amongst the poor villagers he despises. And when the school does burn down at, we suspect, his wife's and son's hands, Randolph pretends to see divine intervention: 'And lo, there was a boy bearing tidings. And behold, towards the West the sky had reddened, the boy informed me that the school was ablaze. What could I do?' Naipaul then neatly underlines the 'niceness' of Randolph's conscience by having him report how he takes his family to the races on Boxing Day, but protesting 'We did not gamble. It is against our principles' (p. 46).

At a superficial level, then, 'A Christmas Story' satirises the Indian Presbyterians for pretending a superior code of probity and Western

pragmatism in contrast to the alleged fatalism and amorality of Hinduism. But the story says much more than this.

Firstly, the story penetrates to the heart of Randolph's shame by showing how he has learned to see Hinduism with European, Christian eyes: 'Hinduism, with its animistic rites, its idolatry, its emphasis on mango and banana leaf and — the truth was the truth — *cowdung*, was a religion little fitted for the modern world.' As a result, he becomes ashamed of his Hindu name, Choonilal, and delights in the 'rich historical associations' of his adopted name, and calls his own son Winston. He is 'pleased to say' that the Christian Indian women in their short frocks 'resembled their sisters who had come all the way from Canada' (p. 27).

However, Randolph's tragedy is also that the process of conversion is doomed to remain incomplete. Thus, although he says he has abandoned Hinduism because he sees it only as 'meaningless and shameful rites', what he most enjoys in Presbyterianism is its ritual: '...pleasure was given me by the stately and *clean* — there is no other word for it — rituals sanctioned by my new religion.'

And though Randolph is aware of how absurd he must have looked ('the picture of the over-zealous convert' (p. 28)) as dressed in his Sunday suit of white drill, he eats his beef with a knife and fork, and how all this might be seen as laying 'too great stress on the superficial', his rationalisation that for him 'the superficial has always symbolised the profound', fails to see that this is exactly the kind of defence a Hindu might make of having physical representations of the Gods, anathema to iconoclastic Presbyterians. Repeatedly, Randolph slips between awareness and unawareness of his buried attachments to Hinduism. For instance, just after his conversion he feels that eating with his fingers was now 'so repulsive to me, so ugly, so unhygienic, that I wonder how I managed to do it until my eighteenth year', though later he is able to admit that 'food never tasted as sweet as when eaten with the fingers' (p. 27). However, when his boorish cousin Hori comes to dispute with him, insisting that hands are more hygienic than knives and forks, Randolph unconsciously demonstrates how deep-seated his Hindu instincts are. To test him, Hori begins picking his teeth with one of Randolph's forks. Randolph confesses that after Hori leaves: 'I took the fork he had handled and bent it and stamped on it and then threw it out of the window' (p. 29). Afterwards he looks at the incident as one which shows how difficult it is to sustain a Christian attitude of mind when faced by ridicule; really the episode illustrates Randolph's Hindu instincts over pollution. Naipaul also ironically has Randolph express his one moment of grace, when he

decides to reveal his deceits, in terms which are characteristically Hindu. Thinking of an earlier moment of disappointment he concludes: 'And if I had the vision and the depth of faith which I now have, I might have seen even then how completely false are the things of the world, how much they flatter only to deceive' (p. 35).

In this story, then, there are a number of different voices to be heard. There is a defensive Hindu satire of Presbyterianism, there is a serious concern with what Naipaul clearly feels is a deficiency in its creed (that the notion of Divine grace permits an evasion of personal responsibility for the consequences of one's actions) but above all, what Naipaul shows in the story is that whilst Randolph's conversion has corrupted the wholeness of his former way of looking at the world, the residual elements of Hinduism (all the more destructive for being unacknowledged) in his world view conspire to undermine and corrupt the new religion and culture he has adopted. The Christian Indian figure emerges in this story as a truly representative though specific instance of the experience of the community as a whole. Randolph is painfully caught between two mutually corrupting world visions, the experience which, of course, Naipaul describes as his own in *An Area Of Darkness* (1964).

The way in which the secession of even a minority of Christians from the Hindu fold and the contact with Christianity itself is felt to inflict a corrupting and mortal wound on Hinduism is most savagely and explicitly expressed in Harold Sonny Ladoo's *Yesterdays*. Ladoo himself came from an Indian Christian background, though untypically an impoverished rural one, though one can only speculate on the biography which underlies his nihilistic vision. In some respects *Yesterdays* echoes V.S. Naipaul's *The Mystic Masseur* in expressing the view that attempts to 'revive' Hinduism in the Caribbean are anachronistic and absurd. However, Ladoo roots the reason for this very explicitly in the consequences of Christian contact. Poonwa plans to go on a reverse proselytizing mission to Canada, but his motives are fraudulent and corrupt. He wants to escape from Karan settlement to the comforts of Canada, excited by the stories he has heard about the sexual degeneracy of American women, but above all Poonwa's mission is corrupted by his desire to revenge the humiliations he suffered at the hands of the Canadian Missions, particularly the sadistic blonde Canadian teacher who, 'full of apostolic conviction', has used her teaching job as a 'platform to wage war against the heathen children' and in particular Poonwa whom she has beaten with piano wire. Poonwa rails against the Canadian Missions for teaching 'Indians how to worship at the values of the white world.... They are mimics.' However, he himself has been so

thoroughly infected by the experience that he has not only become thoroughly Indo-Saxon (he tells his father, 'men like you, father, shouldn't be allowed to live in the British Empire' (p. 85)) but obsessed with the Christian world. He is a frustrated virgin whose sexual activity consists of keeping a 'philosophical' diary full of juvenile anti-Christian dirty-talk:

Question.... Name one miracle

Ans.... Mary was still a virgin after Jesus passed through her legs (p. 43)

He plans to build five torture chambers in his reverse missionary school in Canada in which to flog his converts, make them wear Hindu garments and 'teach them that white is ugly and evil; only black and brown are good' (p. 106). He plans to 'teach the white world compassion. They have lost it.' Ladoo's satire is, of course, double-edged, set against both the original missionaries and the pretensions of the Hindus to lead a religious revival. The point is that Poonwa and the Hinduism he represents has not only become degenerate through separation, but it has been so deeply wounded by the Christian contact that its 'revival' can only be an absurd act of inverted mimicry. Poonwa's only real act of revolt is to agree to 'bull' Sook, the village homosexual, in the Church, 'as an opportunity to get even with the Christian blonde and the blue-eyed Jew' (p. 107). Although Ladoo's novel is set in 1955, it is clear that he is alluding in it to the 'cultural revival' which was going on in the late 1960s and 1970s, based around Indian student groups at the University of the West Indies in Trinidad. Poonwa's speech on his mission could have come out of one of those campus journals:

Christianity broke the spirit of the Indians and the spirit of the Negroes as well. Today on this island the young Indian boys are drinking rum and fighting and killing each other.... There is a reason for this. They have no culture. They are lost! ... Indian culture had not been completely broken by the Indenture System. Today the Indians, instead of making it their cultural heritage, they are ridiculing it, and making a mockery of it. Soon they will become a people without an identity.

Although by the 1960s, Indian Presbyterianism was no longer the force it had been, and both Hindu and Muslim communities had achieved a considerable degree of institutional stability, there were new attempts to win converts made by a number of aggressively evangelical Christian sects.

The intolerant and culturally destructive style of such brands of Christianity is portrayed in Sharlowe Mohamed's *Requiem For A Village* (1982), a naively written tract which portrays the corrupting impact of a funda-

mentalist Christian mission on a mixed Indian village of Hindus, Muslims and Presbyterian Christians. The novel is written from a Presbyterian Indian point of view, so that its overt message is that such missions give Christianity a bad name, but its underlying theme is the way the mission divides Indian from Indian and from values and traditions still shared by the villagers irrespective of their faith. In his story, 'The Process of Living', Shiva Naipaul uses the experience of a young woman, Clara, who becomes the victim of a predatory Christian hunter of souls, as an image of what he feels is the psychic fate of Indians in the Caribbean. Horatio Reuben, 'Servant of the Lord', begins preying on Clara after her husband leaves her behind when he goes to America. His motive in pursuing Clara is to punish her husband who with irreligious rudeness had earlier thrust him from their yard. Reuben tries to destroy Clara's remaining affection for her husband, telling her that her source of suffering is attachment to 'a most ungodly man' (p. 119). After his sessions with her, Clara emerges debilitated as though Reuben has been 'siphoning off her vital juices into himself'. In bringing her 'comfort', Reuben teaches her a bitter knowledge which had 'given birth to bitterer despair' (p. 122). The analogy with the Indian experience as a whole is strongly suggested in the language of the following passage:

Roderick's return would intensify her sickness. It was not possible to re-embark on that voyage. That was asking too much. The ship was broken in two. But memory would not be stilled; and the renunciation that Reuben demanded ... was not possible either. That was also asking too much of her. The heavenly spaces were inhuman, terrifying. She would never be at home in them. (p. 122)

Clearly, in the novels and short stories discussed in this article the contact with Christianity is but a metonym for a much wider experience of cultural colonisation and the corruption of ancestral authenticity. But since it is a specific aspect of the process which takes place at the very heart of the individual's way of looking at the world, then perhaps it is not surprising that though in historical and sociological discourses the contact with Christianity appears as seemingly peripheral to the Indian community as a whole, in fiction the results of the contact are portrayed as deeply destructive.

1. See, for instance, Kusha Haraksingh, 'The Hindu Experience in Trinidad', paper presented at the Third Conference on East Indians in the Caribbean, 1984; J.C. Jha, 'The Hindu Sacraments (Rites de Passage) in Trinidad and Tobago', *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 22, No 1, pp. 40-52; Morton Klass, *East Indians in Trinidad: A Study in Cultural Persistence* (New York, 1961); A. & J. Niehoff, *East Indians in the West Indies* (Milwaukee, 1960); Harry Ramnath, *The Unwritten Laws of Hinduism* (Trinidad, 1982).
2. See J. Harewood, *The Population Of Trinidad and Tobago* (Trinidad, 1975), pp. 107-111; Dwarka Nath, *A History Of Indians in Guyana* (London, 1970), p. 246.
3. See J.T. Harricharan, *The Work of the Christian Churches Among the East Indians in Trinidad During the Period of Indentureship 1845-1917* (Trinidad, 1975); Brinsley Samaroo, 'The Canadian Presbyterian Mission as an Agent of Change in Trinidad During the 19th and Early 20th Century', paper presented to the Fourth Conference of Caribbean Historians, U.W.I., St Augustine, 1972; Samaroo, 'Missionary Methods and Local Responses: The Canadian Presbyterians and the East Indians in The Caribbean', paper presented to the Second Conference on East Indians in the Caribbean, U.W.I., St Augustine, 1975; H. Sitahel, 'The Mission of the Church in Trinidad', unpublished Master's Thesis, McGill University.
4. Tensions tended to surface during periods of electoral conflict where Hindus and Indian Christians supported different political parties. See W. Mahabir, *In and Out of Politics* (Port of Spain, 1978).
5. See Dale Bisnauth, *A Short History Of The Guyana Presbyterian Church* (Guyana, 1979); and Jeremy Poynting, 'A Dumb God Buried in Your Grandfather's Copper Trunk: Indian Religious Sensibility in Indo-Guyanese Poetry', *Kyk-Over-Al*, Vol. 35, 1986.
6. I have argued elsewhere (in an as yet unpublished article, 'Ancestral Voices in the Indo-Caribbean Novel') that the Hindu world vision, which V.S. Naipaul and other Indo-Caribbean novelists have proclaimed dead, in fact maintains a stubborn after-life in their work.
7. Although Doreen James is never actually identified as Indian, itself a deliberate irony, it is clear from the response of the old peasant she and Ram visit that he mistakes her for a Khoja.
8. *The Adventures of Gurudeva and Other Stories* (London: Deutsch, 1976), pp. 25-123.
9. London: Deutsch, 1961; quotations from the Fontana edition.
10. San Fernando, 1976.
11. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1983.
12. For a fuller discussion of the context of this story, see Poynting, 'A Proper Wonder At His Achievement: The Fiction of Seepersad Naipaul', *Toronto South Asian Review*, Vol. 4, No 1, 1985.
13. *A Flag On The Island* (London: Deutsch, 1967); quotations from the Penguin edition, pp. 24-46.
14. *The Killing Of Nelson John and Other Stories* (London: London Magazine Editions, 1980), pp. 42-51.
15. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-80.
16. New York: Vantage Books, 1971.
17. London: Deutsch, 1967; quotations from the Penguin edition.
18. *In A Free State* (London: Deutsch, 1971), pp. 63-108.
19. Toronto: House of Anansi, 1974.

20. Groups such as the Society for the Propagation of Indian Culture whose statements can be found in journals such as *Embryo* and *Pelican*.
21. The activities of Christian fundamentalist groups considerably worried Indian cultural militants. See K. Ganessingh, 'Afro-Christians Lead the Attack on Indian Culture', *Mukdar*, Vol. 1, No 2, 1974, pp. 45-49.
22. Trinidad: Inprint Caribbean, 1982.
23. In *Winter's Tales* (Macmillan, 1974); in *Beyond The Dragon's Mouth* (London: Deutsch, 1985), pp. 96-126 as 'The Dolly House'.

Book Reviews

David Dabydeen, *Slave Song*. Mundelstrup, Denmark: Dangaroo Press, 1984. 72 pages. £3.95.

David Dabydeen's *Slave Song* consists of fourteen poems which have been minted from Guyanese folk-speech. The book carries a long introduction in which Dabydeen defines his approach to a history of exploitation and slavery that is the background to the verse he has written. There are useful, indeed essential, Notes and Translations.

'The language is angry, crude, energetic' (p. 13) but sustains, Dabydeen argues, a 'potentiality for literature [that] is very great indeed' (p. 15).

I must leave readers to judge the introduction for themselves. In this short review I shall confine myself to gauging, as it were, the quality and the tone of the verse.

The folk-poetry of the Caribbean is well known for its straight rhythm. It frequently relies upon devices such as the drum to gain or exhibit momentum or power. There is a radical difference in *Slave Song*. The rhythm is not committed to external props but to linguistic and internal emphases that help to deepen one's *visualisation* of the traumas of violence suffered by the characters in the poems.

Take the opening lines in the poem 'For Mala':

Yesterday deh pull out young girl from de river tangle —
 Up in de net in de fish, bloat, bubby bite —
 Up, teet-mark in she troat and tigh:
 Was na pirae.

The last line is carefully plotted and calculated to help us *see* a pathos and a terror beyond the net of natural disaster. The body in the tangle of the river has been raped by human devils not mangled by perai. Indeed the river of which the poem speaks is a coastal