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Douglas Poetics: Orientations of Indianness and Mixedness in Trinidad

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

*I dedicate this book to Shirley Anne Tate.
Without her, this journey would not have happened.*

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Preface

This book came about as a result of my doctoral research, and the ethnographic component as found here was conducted in 2014. As this book will explore, race is not a subject that most people feel comfortable talking about – certainly not to an outsider like myself. The nuances and discourses of how people navigate culture, identity, race and gender, outside of the political arena, were not only fascinating but seemingly carried echoes of the colonial past in its various expressions which got me thinking about linkages between the contemporary present and the era of Indian indenture in the Caribbean – a lesser known and an even lesser taught underrepresented aspect of British and South Asian history.

I was always fascinated by the journeys of the old Indian diaspora. Whatever experiences of the indentureship heritage that I carry are thanks to my elders. Although I and my siblings are removed from that experience, my parents have not been unaware of their ancestors' heritage and have sensitively engaged with it. While the diasporic movement during that time reads today as a matter of historical archives only for me, and I imagine most millennials, it is a legacy that should always be remembered. I felt a tangible reminder of this legacy during a visit to the UNESCO world heritage site Aapravasi Ghat, formerly an immigration depot where after months of suffering the harshest travelling conditions by ship from India, the indentured labourers disembarked to start their new life in Mauritius. After this experience and in an exploratory conversation with Shirley about the historical similarities between Mauritius and Trinidad, this brought me to a novel by Peggy Mohan (2007, p. 204) who said '...the migration came across to me as a story of women making their way alone, with men in the background, strangers, extras. In the history books it had always been the other way around: it was the men who were the main actors. But there was also this unwritten history of the birth of a new community in Trinidad. And it was women who were at the centre of the story'. Having been profoundly moved by this novel, I decided to embark on my Trini adventure to look at contemporary Indianness and mixedness in that part of the world. Though I am neither from nor located in the Caribbean, I sincerely hope my thoughts are a contribution to a vibrant intellectual community in which Caribbean scholarship has touched me in profound ways and in which works on gender, racial and sexual relations will undoubtedly influence for a very long time. I owe a lot of intellectual debts to writers and creatives whose ideas have shaped my own in a number of ways. On that front, I am appreciative to Shalini Puri whose concept of dougla poetics first got me thinking about mixing that moved away from typical categorisations.

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I would like to thank all of my family. My father who was my refuge against many personal storms and who despite facing so many of his own battles, never gave up on mine. He had the opportunity to share with me the magic of the island nation of T&T for the duration of my fieldwork, and I will always treasure that time. My mother whose love, inspiration, beauty and humour kept me going. My ever-dependable big brother Kiran and my 'Gran Pouvoir' sister Davyna who were a source of joy during the writing process. I thank my late friend Abbas for his encouragement. Trinidad, the land of calypso, carnival and chutney, has become a spiritual home of sorts. With a big heart, I thank the country and the people for giving me an adventure that I will always cherish and the University of West Indies (UWI), St Augustine for providing me an intellectual community who often made me flesh out aspects of my writing. Professor Patricia Mohamed deserves a special mention, as someone who has not only become a personal role model but whose warmth, intellect and compassion have left a lasting imprint on my work and well beyond. Professor Jane Parpart's warm hospitality during my stay in Trinidad also meant a lot to me. Thanks also go to the staff of the Institute for Gender and Development Studies (IGDS) and Dr Piya Pangsapa who granted me centre affiliation. My understandings have also been helped immeasurably by conversations with Professor Brinsley Samaroo who basically made my visit to Trinidad possible. He sadly passed in 2023, and I will always be thankful to this special human who embodied the spirit of Trini culture in so many ways from his coinage of the term 'Presbindu' to his sheer passion for his

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community work. Accompanying him on fun trips across the island, from a sugar museum to community temples and colourful jhandis, reflecting the life and history of different communities remains a fond memory. I also thank Dr Clem Seecharan, Dr Matthew Bishop, Dr Dylan Kerrigan, Dr Jeanne Roache-Baptise for her exceptionally lively seminars and Dr John Campbell for his equally entertaining and effervescent Caribbean Civilisation lectures. I extend my warmest appreciation to the young women for consenting to be interviewed and for sharing their hearts and minds. A special note of thanks goes out to Roma, Amanda and Jason. I thank Vahni Capildeo for her friendship and dialogue along the way. Jamie Badoo and Sharda Patasar for their assistance and camaraderie. The lovely ladies of Spring Village whose anecdotes had me in stitches constantly and whose advice on the benefits of peanut punch will always be remembered! I am also grateful for the time The India High Commissioner, Dr Malay Mishra, allocated to me. To Burton Sankeralli, a self-identified anarchist philosopher, a special thanks is owed for his enlightening tour of the 'alternative barscape' of Trinidad which comprised a variety of rum shacks and 'neo-classical snackettes' across the Northern range. I thank Jim Mungal, the Trinidad High Commission in the United Kingdom and Dr Maria del Pilar Kaladeen for their additional insights and guidance. I express my sincerest gratitude to my alma mater Leeds University and to Alexa for her compassion, light and wisdom which kept me going through many an academic turbulence. To the editorial and production team at Emerald – a special thanks for your patience.

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