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Changing Patterns of Marriage, Family, and Kinship Among the East Indians in Rural Trinidad

Abstract. — *Using observational and survey data collected in a large East Indian community in rural Trinidad, this paper describes a number of important changes in family organization including a rising age at marriage, personal choice preference in spouse selection, the absence of village exogamy and the importance of the nuclear family in local practice and ideology. Attention is also focused on wedding ceremonial changes, interpersonal roles within the household (particularly the more egalitarian relationships between parents and children), and changes in kinship behavior and ideology. Behind this catalog of changes has been the intention to call into question the theoretical adequacy of those studies of the East Indians in the Caribbean that have stressed cultural retentions and the tenacity of north Indian institutions in the face of pressures for change. According to this perspective the traditional Indian family has been able to weather migration, indenture and over a hundred years of social and political changes in an alien setting. By contrast, the major thread running through the present description is that the organization of the contemporary East Indian family is more adequately assessed by reference to local factors which tend to determine the kinds of institutional patterns found among rural villagers. [Caribbean, East Indians, Marriage and Family, Social Change]*

Introduction

Among the Hindu East Indians in Trinidad, Guyana, and Surinam, the three Caribbean countries containing sizable populations of Indians whose ancestors emigrated from the South Asian mainland in the second half of the

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