



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Researching the Enduring Cultural and Religious Legacy of Indian Indentured Laborers in Suriname Through History and Literature

Rana, Anusha

Citation

Rana, A. (2024). *Researching the Enduring Cultural and Religious Legacy of Indian Indentured Laborers in Suriname Through History and Literature*.

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [License to inclusion and publication of a Bachelor or Master Thesis, 2023](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3926705>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



**Universiteit
Leiden**

**Researching the Enduring Cultural and Religious Legacy of Indian Indentured Laborers in
Suriname Through History and Literature**

Anusha Rana

Researching the Enduring Cultural and Religious Legacy of Indian Indentured Laborers in Suriname Through History and Literature

Anusha Rana S2567121

Thesis BA3 1083VBTHEY

Supervisor: De Waal, Assistant Professor

Leiden University, Faculty of Archaeology

Leiden, 01-05-2024

Draft Version

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	4
1.1 Aim and Research Question	4
1.2. Historical Background	5
1.3. Methodology	6
1.4. Relevance	7
2. CHAPTER 2: INDO-SURINAMESE HINDUISM	10
2.1. Introduction to Chapter 2	10
2.2. Evolution and Persistence of Hinduism	10
2.3. 'Hindustaniness': An Indian-rooted Identity	12
2.4. Hindu Temples: 'Arya Dewaker Mandir'	13
2.5. Christian Missionaries: How Hindustanis Resisted Conversion	14
2.6. Conclusion to Chapter 2	16
3. CHAPTER 3: LANGUAGE	17
3.1. Introduction to Chapter 3	17
3.2. Linguistic Heritage	17
3.3. Indo-Surinamese Languages	18
3.4. Conclusion to Chapter 3	19
4. CHAPTER 4: SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND CONTRIBUTION	20
4.1. Introduction to Chapter 4	20
4.2. Ethnic Dynamics and Economic Progress	20
4.4. Traditional Rice Cultivation Practice	21
4.5. Conclusion to Chapter 4	22
5. CHAPTER 5: POLITICAL CONTRIBUTION	23
5.1. Introduction to Chapter 5	23

5.2. Why Is The Political Status Relevant?	23
5.3. Political History	24
5.4. Political Changes After WWII	26
5.5. Hindu Cultural Preservation: The Indian Point of View	27
5.6. 20th Century Politics in Suriname	29
5.7. Where Does the Indian Community Stand in this?	29
5.8. Conclusion to Chapter 5	30
6. RESULT AND DISCUSSION	31
7. LIMITATIONS	34
8. CONCLUSION	35
ABSTRACT	37

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Maaïke De Waal, for her guidance, advice, and unwavering support and encouragement throughout the period of completing my thesis. Her expertise in the Caribbean region has been a very helpful factor in shaping my research. Her feedback was very insightful and helpful in completing the research. I would also like to express my gratitude toward my family and friends for their support and motivation, love and encouragement while I was writing my thesis.

1. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Aim and Research Question

The main aim of this research is to determine the social, economic, cultural, religious, and political standing of the Indian community in Suriname in order to aid in the preservation of their heritage and culture. For instance, by studying the community's culture, religious artifacts and historical sites, a contribution is made to their heritage preservation and documentation. Some of the examples of religious and cultural artifacts and sites are temples, traditional festivals, languages. Tracing their historical roots from the beginning of the indenture system to their current social standing, through understanding their religion, culture and the ways in which they have managed to contribute to society, especially in terms of contributing to the economy and politics of Suriname. It is also interesting to note the cultural and ethnic blend that has taken place in the country, with other groups such as the Creoles, the Javanese, the Chinese, and local Surinamese groups. The adaptation, integration and ultimately the challenges faced due to the multifaceted and diverse nature of this country will be studied in this thesis, through the perspective of the Indian community, focusing on challenges such as economic disparity, hurdles of preserving one's culture in a multi-ethnic country, political and social representation, and especially maintaining the Hindu religion and culture in a predominantly Christian nation. An important reason why I chose to focus on Suriname is because, based on personal observation, and having lived in the Netherlands, there is a noticeable lack of knowledge about the country Suriname itself, especially regarding its geography and culture. Why I further chose to focus on the Indian-Hindu community is because coming from a Hindu background myself, and I was curious as to how the religion and the Indian culture manifested itself in Suriname.

I will examine this based on the main research question and subquestions:

RQ: How has the cultural and religious legacy of Indian Indentured Laborers in Suriname endured over time, influencing contemporary cultural practices and religious beliefs in the country and how can heritage and archaeological preservation play a significant role in maintaining and understanding this legacy as expressed in history and literature?

RQ1.1. In what ways have religious practices, particularly Hinduism, evolved and persisted among the descendants of Indian indentured laborers in Suriname?

RQ1.2. How has the linguistic heritage and identity of the Indian indentured laborers persisted in Suriname?

RQ1.3. How has the socio-economic status of the Hindustani community helped preserve their religion and culture?

RQ1.4. How has the political status of the Hindustani community helped preserve their religion and culture?

Research Objectives

The main objectives of this study are:

- To study the cultural and religious preservation of the Indian indentured laborers starting from the period of indenture (1873-1916) and migration in the 19th century.
- To study the economic and social standings of the Indian community in contemporary Suriname.
- To determine the political connections and contributions the Indian community have made in Suriname historically and in the contemporary scene and how that has helped in preserving their religion and culture.
- To examine the archaeological and historical preservation of Indian-Hindu heritage sites and artifacts in Suriname, emphasizing their importance in understanding the broader study of the Surinamese history and culture.

1.2. Historical Background

As it has been mentioned in the previous section, Suriname is a nation that is the epitome of cultural and ethnic diversity. Nestled within the culturally diverse and vibrant Caribbean, this nation is home to many different ethnic groups like the Creole, Indians, Javanese, Chinese. There is a blend of culture and traditions, challenges within the political and economic areas, and a need for fair representation of each community (Ramdayal, et.al, 2021). However, the focus here is on the Indian/Indo-Surinamese people, or better known as the Hindustani Surinamese people. As it has been mentioned previously, the focus has been put on this community due to the lack of representation and knowledge about their community, their history and culture. Another reason is because I am personally interested in the Hindu community's status in Suriname, as I am Hindu myself, and can relate to their cultural and religious practices. Their history begins in the 19th century when they became replacements for the Creole plantation workers that had rebelled against the colonizers, who were then left with a shortage of labor. The colonizers were forced to turn toward Asian countries, particularly India, Indonesia, and China to recruit manual labor who would work for them in their plantations (Ramdayal, et.al, 2021). In India, the northern regions of Uttarakhand, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, etc. were targets for the indenture system. India, at the time was under the British rule, and these states in particular were well-practiced in terms of plantation and agricultural work as per the British demand, due to their large population, which meant a larger number of free labour. Economic hardship, overpopulation, and oppression was

prevalent in India at the time, driving the Indians to opt for the indenture labor system (Ramdayal, et.al, 2021). Suriname at the time was a Dutch colony, and India was a British colony; both the Dutch and the British empires had similar interests and relied heavily upon cheap labour. Hence, they agreed to collaborate to cultivate a larger system of cheap labor, therefore, the indenture system was initiated. On June 5, 1873, a lot of immigrants from these respective regions in India were brought to Paramaribo, Suriname on a ship by the name of Lalla Rookh (Ramdayal, et.al, 2021). Approximately 35,000 immigrants arrived in Suriname from India on this very ship. Based on their contracts, these laborers received a five-year work period, after which they could either become permanent settlers or leave the country. As it happened, a smaller group of people applied for a second contract to permanently settle in Suriname, while a third of the population returned to their homeland in India (Ramdayal, et.al, 2021). The smaller group that remained in Suriname gradually grew in number, created a community for themselves where they thrived and eventually made their mark in Surinamese society, while preserving their roots and cultural identity, and still do in present-day. This was the beginning of the Indo-Surinamese legacy and foundation in the nation; the most important part of their history that relates to their cultural and ethnic identity. However, they also faced discrimination in the form of long and harsh working hours with little to no salary, they were faced with poor living conditions, and were completely exploited by the Dutch colonizers (Ramdayal, et.al, 2021). Studying the history reveals the endurance of the Indian community and their cultural roots in Suriname, providing them a special place for their unique and blended lifestyle to thrive.

1.3. Methodology

This thesis makes use of a literature-based approach to explore and examine the cultural and religious life of the Indo-Surinamese community. Existing historical documents, scholarly work, and primary sources have been used in order to document and analyze the journey of the Indian community in Suriname. The type of literature that stood out were books written by descendants of the Indian laborers that came to Suriname or other parts of the Caribbean. Important key words such as ‘Suriname multi-ethnicity’, ‘Indian-Surinamese community’, ‘Hindu religion in Suriname’, ‘Indian-Surinamese languages’, were used to delve into the research of the community. Elements such as the Hindu religion, Indian languages, Indo-Surinamese politics and socio-economic status have been tracked in order to trace the preservation of their culture and heritage. Critical analysis of the literature will be done from various departments of study such as history, sociology, anthropology, religious studies. Book chapters, peer-reviewed articles, dissertations, and archival records will be analyzed in order to collect information. This thesis aims to arrive at a holistic view about the Indo-Surinamese community.

1.4. Relevance

Suriname is a country that represents diversity and multiplicity in terms of its cultural and ethnic background. The history and coming together of this Caribbean nation is one of several challenges, discrimination, assimilation, and unification. In this grand mix of cultures and ethnicities, it is important that each ethnic community is represented fairly in society, in terms of social, political, and economic fairness. In this research, the Indo-Surinamese or the Hindustani community and their culture, religion and lifestyle will be studied. The Hindustani community was initially marginalized and isolated in the political and social scene, which meant that it was challenging for them to remain represented in the Surinamese society. This was also due to their lack of geographical and socio-economic mobility, which limited their chances of interactions with other groups (Ramsoedh, 2001, p. 94). While the light-skinned Creole groups often took center stage in society, especially in politics, the Hindustani and other minority groups are overshadowed by their majority (Ramsoedh, 2001, p. 93). Studying the history of the Indian community also highlights a very important time in global history itself, that of slavery and indentured labor by the Dutch and English. It contributes to an important conversation that largely takes place in society today; that of globalization, mixture of culture, and most importantly the preservation of minority groups and their culture and heritage, for instance, the temples and religious artifacts of the Hindustani group. It is also important to note and understand that these large mixtures of different groups and ethnicities come with a lot of challenges and complexities, which also need to be highlighted and discussed. The Indian community in specific have an extensive history and take up a significant part of Suriname in terms of its culture, religion, economy, and politics. They are as much a part of the nation as any other ethnic group that resides there, therefore, it is important to highlight and represent their history and culture in a nation where it is difficult to stand out in the same aspects. Additionally, in an era of debates surrounding cultural diversity and inclusivity, this study adds to the essence of this topic and contributes to the richness of not only Suriname's cultural and ethnic diversity, but also that of the whole Caribbean region that is known for its diversity and global mosaic. Lastly, the cultural and religious preservation of the Hindustani community, its heritage and identity are an important and relevant topic in today's day and time, where they try to fit themselves into a puzzle of mixed cultures and ethnicities. It is important that they preserve their roots and history, their religion and culture for their current and future generations to establish a sense of belonging and representation.



Figure 1. Map of Suriname. Focus on the Paramaribo region of Suriname. (geology.com website, https://geology.com/world/suriname-satellite-image.shtml#google_vignette)

1.5. Thesis Outline

The introduction of this thesis includes the relevance, background, and research objectives which will fall under Chapter 1. Chapter 2 will discuss the preservation and evolution of the Hindu religion that was brought from India by the laborers, highlighting the importance of heritage preservation, as mentioned earlier, historical structures like Hindu temples in Suriname, and religious Hindu artifacts such as idols of various gods and goddesses. Chapter 3 will discuss the unique blend of languages spoken among the Indian community and how that contributes to the preservation of their cultural roots and identity. Chapter 4 will talk about the economic status and treatment of the Indian community, along with their contribution and impact in the Surinamese economy. Chapter 5 will discuss the political standing of the Indian community, historically and in the contemporary sense as well, providing a broader idea of the overall social standing and impact of the Indian community in Suriname. Studying the Hindu culture through this perspective allows for a study of better representation of this community in politics and therefore

a focus on their economic status and especially the preservation of their heritage. A collective result and discussion section will provide answers to questions previously asked in the thesis and it will be elaborated and discussed, along with a section of limitations. Lastly, the conclusion will be laid out which will summarize the main points from the entire thesis, after which the references and appendices will be written down.

2. CHAPTER 2: INDO-SURINAMESE HINDUISM

2.1. Introduction to Chapter 2

This chapter aims to provide an extensive study of the gradual development and modification of the Hindu religion in Suriname that was brought by the indenture laborers in the 19th century from India. Studying historical and religious sites such as Hindu temples in Suriname, and further delving into the material and religious culture such as idols of gods and goddesses allow for a better preservation of their heritage and culture. This will be explored through my first subquestion:

RQ1.1. In what ways have religious practices, particularly Hinduism, evolved and persisted among the descendants of Indian indentured laborers in Suriname?

2.2. Evolution and Persistence of Hinduism

Apart from the religious development, the term '*Hindustaniness*' will also be introduced and elaborated upon. It essentially encapsulates the different ways in which the Indian community was able to maintain their cultural roots and identity. When they arrived in Suriname, what they had with them was their deep-rooted religion and culture from different parts of Northern India. Once they began settling in the new land, their religion and culture took on new forms as well, mixing and blending with other ones like the Creole, Javanese, Surinamese cultures. With this, a new and unique form of the Hindu community began thriving in Suriname, adapting to its new environment while simultaneously maintaining old traditions as well. It is a fascinating and emotional journey of the Indian people who migrated to new land taking with them their teachings and traditions, maintaining resilience against all odds. They faced racial and economic discrimination in a land that was predominantly Christian, and they were also forced to survive with limited resources and pay. They fought hard to maintain their religious and cultural roots and identity in a foreign land with many other ethnic groups already present. This sure came with uncertainty and challenges, however, they were not only able to maintain their culture but also make it thrive. And now, with a fusion of various other cultures and traditions, a unique form of their religion and culture stands out in the country. In essence, the journey of the Indo-Surinamese people represents resilience, bravery and cultural evolution. Tracing the roots back to the indenture period, this chapter encapsulates the journey of the Hindustani people, their religion and cultural identity.

According to Strange (2023), as of 2022, 19.9% of Surinamese identify as Hindu. Among the vast ethnic and religious diaspora of Suriname, Hinduism consists of the largest population

among the South Asian descent crowd. During the period of indenture 37,000 British Indian laborers arrived in Suriname, out of which 12,000 returned to India while the rest of them remained in Suriname to start a new life (Algoe, 2011). A new form of Hinduism was created by the laborers that settled in Suriname; it discarded some features such as the caste system that was prevalent in Indian Hinduism at the time (Strange, 2023, p. 117). As the laborers were arriving in Suriname in boats all clustered together, they had no other option but to unite with each other; no better way to do so than letting go of traditional systems that hamper it. This factor, alongside the access to land enabled the Hindu community to thrive culturally, economically and politically (ibid., 2023, p. 117). However, a small number of people among the laborers were Hindu priests or ‘pandits’; they took on important roles or positions in the community despite the discontinuation of the caste system (Ramsoedh, 2017, p. 169). Brahman priests were given the highest honor or responsibility to perform rituals and ceremonies, whether it was a birthday, a funeral, or a wedding. Performing such rituals are still considered very important in contemporary Suriname, especially with the help of Brahmin priests. They became the “guardians of the old customs and religious practices” (Ramsoedh, 2017, p. 170). There were two schools of thought with which the Hindu community identified themselves; first was the traditional Hindu ideology of ‘*Sanatan dharma*’, which is the essence of Hinduism itself, and translates to ‘eternal order’. Another movement was the ‘*Arya samaj*’ with which a group of Hindus resonated in terms of its ideologies and beliefs, and it directly translates to ‘Noble society’. Both practices were ways for the Hindus to maintain their religious/ethnic identity and honor (Strange, 2023, p. 119). Devotional practices known as ‘*bhakti*’ which directly translates to ‘devotion’ towards specific gods and goddesses prevailed as well. The Indian practice of Vaishnavism i.e. the worship of Lord Vishnu and seeing him as the Supreme God continued to be a part of the religious belief system in Suriname. Devotional practices towards Shiva and Shakti are equally important and popular within the community. One of the main scriptures, the Ramayana, is also in continuous use; performances like the ‘*Ram Lila*’ are quite popular (Strange, 2023, p. 120). Other divine figures such as Ganesha, Hanuman, and Saraswati are always present along with the main gods and goddesses too. Traditions such as keeping a ‘*puja*’ or a prayer room/corner at home or keeping devotional flags of divine figures are still prevalent in Hindu homes (Strange, 2023, p. 120). The Hindustani community was able to maintain their culture and religion at a large scale, especially in terms of the Hindu religion. Further, a Hindustani cultural identity was created which not only encapsulated the Hindu religion, but also other spheres of their Indian identity, such as their language too. This ‘*Hindustaniness*’ has been elaborated further with several other examples along with it. How else were the Indians able to not only maintain, but thrive in the Surinamese community? This has been answered below.

2.3. 'Hindustaniness': An Indian-rooted Identity

The term here refers to the cultural identity and heritage of the Indian people in Suriname, at least what they were able to maintain once they moved to Suriname. Hindustaniness in this case includes not only what was brought from India, but also the changes in traditions and customs of Hinduism along the way. Once it mixed with other ethnic groups and cultures in Suriname, it began taking on a different form; this includes in the spheres of politics, education, and daily life. For instance, their community members began taking part in politics and representing their group, also further integrating into the Surinamese society by mixing their language with the local Surinamese languages. (Ramssoedh, 2017, p. 165). The development of Hindustaniness went through several stages and phases, through which it retained its core values and characteristics. The first phase being during the Dutch colonial period (1667-1975), where Hindustanis were forced to take on a Dutch lifestyle, when it comes to language and politics. However, despite this forced assimilation, 'Hindustaniness' was retained (Ramssoedh, 2017, p. 165). A second phase came (1940s-1970s) with the segregation and clashes between ethnic groups in the country, specifically between the Creoles and Hindustanis. The initial ethnic dominance from the Creole group, and other clashes between these groups caused a political, social, and cultural segregation between them (Ramssoedh, 2017, p.166). The last phase was when the largest Hindustani political group lost its power in the 1990s. Since then, politics has not been so defining in terms of 'Hindustaniness'. Cultural diversity is now considered more important than political power or any other determinant; it is also the driving force behind socio-economic and political stability itself (Ramssoedh, 2017, p. 166). The solidification of the Hindustani identity among the Indo-Surinamese crowd took place in various stages through different ways; in terms of education, religion, politics, and daily social life. Firstly, both the Hindu and the Muslim population built their own respective mosques and temples in the country, maintaining and solidifying their religious beliefs and systems. The two main Hindu communities, the Sanatan Dharma and the Arya Samaj had contributed to the educational sector. In the education department, Hindustani primary and secondary schools were established, creating a Hindustani community with its own education system, religious life and politics. Not only this, but the Hindustanis also ended up starting their first radio show in the 1960s, which was run in the Hindi language. This further contributed to the Hindustani identity while maintaining the root language (Ramssoedh, 2017, p. 176). Another historical reason as to why the Hindustanis were able to maintain their roots was because one particular policy of the indenture system was that Indian laborers were allowed to return to their home country after their five-year contracts ended, and new contract workers were coming into the country as well. This meant that the connection between India and Suriname was strengthening as time went by and upto present day, it continues to strengthen. This is another factor as to why Hinduism and Indian culture was maintained or influenced continually in Suriname (Ramssoedh, 2017, p.171). Furthermore, Dutch

colonizers attempted to assimilate all ethnicities and groups under one Dutch law. While this worked with the Creole group to a certain extent, this clashed with the growing cultural identification of the Hindustanis. While the Creoles succumbed to the forceful Westernization of the colonizers, the Hindustanis not only maintained their culture and heritage, by retaining their religious practices and traditional language, but also actively used it as a weapon against westernization by missionaries (Ramsোধ, 2017, p.172). Further, an example of Hindu heritage in Suriname will be provided, highlighting the importance of heritage preservation in the Hindu community in Suriname.

2.4. Hindu Temples: *'Arya Dewaker Mandir'*

The Arya Dewaker temple was built in Paramaribo, Suriname on February 11, 2001. This temple is a great example of how the Hindu religion is being practiced in present day Suriname (Bakker, 2015, p. 1). The idea of building a Hindu temple began way back in 1929, when an Indian pandit by the name of Mehta Jamini established the Arya Dewaker Association. Since Mehta Jamini was under the Arya Samaj movement, the principle of the temple follows that of Arya Samaj; the belief in one God, the Brahman. This is where Hinduism here differs from the typical polytheistic and ritualistic practices in India. However, Arya Dewaker is not the first temple that was built in Suriname, Indian laborers had already begun building small domes with '*murtis*' or 'sculptures' on the plantations (Bakker, 2015, p. 5). In the 1930s, preachers of the Arya Samaj and the Sanatan Dharm movements felt the need to gather in small groups to listen to lectures and sermons given by their religious leaders. This led to the formation of a hall with '*murtis*' or 'idols of divinity', and rituals performed by '*pandits*' or 'priests'. The members of the Arya Samaj and orthodox Hindu people alike began building temples in many areas of the Paramaribo region during the early 1900s. One of the main Vishnu temples was inaugurated in Paramaribo in 1949, becoming a blueprint for temples built after that (Bakker, 2015, p. 6). Going back to the Arya Dewaker temple, its impact is such that the Arya Samajis have attempted to build similar temples in the Dutch cities of Den Haag and Almere. Furthermore, it has become one of the main tourist attractions of Paramaribo today (Bakker, 2015, p. 31). The Arya Dewaker temple has therefore become the religious, cultural, and social pride of the Hindu community in Paramaribo, and Suriname in general. It has become a center for religious and cultural grounding, community engagements and social gatherings for the Hindu community. They find their roots and traditions connecting to this temple, by performing sermons and rituals here and meeting others from the community. In essence, the Arya Dewaker temple is a sacred space that holds the Indian community in Suriname together, a place where they can find solace and connection with their roots. The following paragraph will highlight the different ways in which the Hindustanis resisted conversion, further contributing to the preservation of their own religion and culture in a predominantly Christian nation.



Figure 2. Arya Dewaker Temple. Hindu temple in Paramaribo, Suriname. (Arya Samaj website, <https://www.thearyasamaj.org/detailtopstories?topstoryid=13&topstorypage>)

2.5. Christian Missionaries: How Hindustanis Resisted Conversion

Christian missionaries played a significant role in spreading Christianity, particularly Catholicism, during the colonial period and beyond (1730s-1900s). Their efforts contributed to the overwhelming majority of Latin Americans identifying as Christians. Today, Latin America is predominantly a Christian territory with roughly nine out of 10 (85-90%) Latin Americans being Christians, from this percentage, Catholics represent 57.1% of the population (Statista, 2021). In contrast, in Guyana and Suriname a significant share of the population identifies as Hindus, 31% and 19.9%, respectively. Hindustani communities, primarily of Indian descent, demonstrated resilience against conversion efforts by Christian missionaries. Rooted in their cultural and religious traditions, Hindustani communities in these regions maintained their Hindu and Muslim faiths despite external pressures. Christian missionaries in Suriname initially focused on providing spiritual care, but after 1817, they began conversion efforts, particularly targeting plantations where they were granted access by owners. (Roosken, 2010, p. 34).

Efforts to convert newly arrived Hindustanis from British India began right away in 1873 in Paramaribo. There were sporadic baptisms on various plantations, and only a small amount of religious teaching was given during this time. (Roosken, 2010, p. 36-37). To put it in simple terms, people were converted into Christianity without teaching enough about the religion or its practices. In Suriname, catholic missionaries faced several difficulties in converting Hindustanis, prompting them to modify their approaches throughout time. Initially, some missionaries learnt Hindi and used religious literature from British India to improve communication. Different strategies, such as preaching, missionary home visits, and the distribution of Christian material in Hindi, were used to spread Catholicism's agenda. However, converting Hindustanis proved more difficult than expected (Roosken, 2010, p. 39-40). Some of the challenges included language barriers and strong cultural ties to their religions. Additionally, Hindustanis in Suriname often faced pressure from their communities to maintain their traditional beliefs and adhere to their known religious practices.

Recognizing the uniqueness of Hindustani religious systems, Catholic missionaries utilized an indirect method that attempted to gradually integrate them into Catholicism, often through instruction at Catholic schools. This strategy enabled Hindustanis to retain aspects of their culture such as speaking their own languages, and allowing them to continue their Hindu beliefs and practices while being introduced to Christianity. Between 1910 and 1931, nineteen Catholic schools for Hindustani children were founded in and around the Hindustani settlements in Paramaribo, encouraging both education and cultural preservation. The indirect techniques emphasized establishing goodwill, providing material and financial assistance, building Catholic schools in Hindustani-dominated areas, providing education, medical care, social services, and creating job opportunities. However, a significant number of converts persisted in maintaining their original beliefs and customs, regarding Catholicism as secondary or primarily advantageous for social progress (Roosken, 2010, p. 39-40). Catholic schools attempted to introduce Hindustani children to Catholicism starting in primary schools, however, after completing primary education many of them often reverted to their previous customs, a phenomenon missionaries termed as "lapsing back" (Roosken, 2010, p. 42). Lastly, the conflict between Catholic and Protestant missionaries negatively affected conversion attempts. This struggle discredited Christianity in the eyes of many Hindustanis, obstructing both Catholic and Protestant missionary efforts. Allegations of bribes and gossip harmed the legitimacy of missionary activities, according to Steinberg and others. Steinberg was a researcher who focused on the multi-ethnic nature of Suriname, highlighting the complexities around missionary activities as well (Roosken, 2010, p. 43). Why were the Hindustanis so difficult to convert? De Klerk advocated for respect and tolerance towards the Hindustani community in Suriname, stressing that embracing Christianity did not necessarily mean abandoning their culture and belief system. He was a Catholic missionary/advocate who worked in Suriname during the

period where Christian missionary activities were at its peak. De Klerk's stance however, showcased a more inclusive and tolerant approach among Catholic missionaries. (Roosken, 2010, p. 45).

The low conversion rate of Hindustanis to Christianity and the high rate of reversion to their former religion and culture can be attributed to their deep cultural ties to Hinduism, which gave them a strong sense of identity and belonging. Furthermore, ineffective missionary approaches, socioeconomic pressures, and a lack of profound spiritual connection to Christianity contributed to Hindustanis maintaining their religion and culture. As time went by, missionaries recognized how difficult it was attempting to convert the Hindustanis while the population was gaining more autonomy and rights. Suriname's independence in 1975 marked a shift in the Catholic Church's approach, shifting from a mission territory to an autonomous institution. As a newly independent country, Suriname redirected its efforts toward integrating its diverse ethnic groups, prioritizing the quality of conversions over sheer numbers. While conversion remained the objective, the methodology underwent significant transformation, stressing equitable treatment while still aspiring to cultivate a devout Christian following among the Hindustani (Roosken, 2010, p. 47).

2.6. Conclusion to Chapter 2

In conclusion, the study of the origin and evolution of Surinamese Hinduism showcases a cultural and religious vibrancy in the lives of the Surinamese people. The journey of the Indian laborers from the time of indenture up to present day, and how they preserved their religion and culture is a show of resilience and bravery. The concept of 'Hindustaniness' shows how this community managed to forge an identity for themselves in terms of culture, religion, contributing to the preservation of their heritage. Through the establishments of various temples, schools, political parties, the Indian community has not only preserved their culture but managed to make it thrive in a new land with many other ethnic groups already present. The Arya Samaj temple has become a center of pride and connection for the Hindu community in Suriname, with its grand Hindu design. It not only serves a religious purpose, but also brings the Indian community together and helps them preserve their culture and traditions, such as practicing their Hindu faith and building Hindu temples, in a so-called foreign land. This chapter showcases the how the Hindu community managed to make their mark and thrive in Suriname, while simultaneously preserving their cultural, archaeological and religious heritage and culture.

3. CHAPTER 3: LANGUAGE

3.1. Introduction to Chapter 3

This chapter aims to explore the intricate and dynamic interactions between language and culture, especially within the Indo-Surinamese community. Through a detailed study of the language's history, development, and current use, this section intends to shed light on the resilience, adaptability, and the powerful preservation of Indian heritage. Retaining the traditional Indian language contributed to the cultural and historical continuation and of course, the heritage protection of the Hindustani community. I will explore this through my second subquestion:

RQ1.2. How has the linguistic heritage and identity of the Indian indentured laborers persisted in Suriname?

3.2. Linguistic Heritage

Language is a powerful medium through which communities express their identity, remain connected to their roots, and preserve their heritage. It is especially important to preserve language when it comes to cases like slavery and migration. For groups that were taken to new lands with a different language and culture, it was important that they maintained and preserved their own language and culture, in order to remain connected to their roots and homeland. This helps a community retain a sense of identity and a sense of self in an unfamiliar land with people from various other cultures and ethnicities present as well. It not only keeps their culture and roots alive, but also plays a significant role in keeping the community close in a place where uncertainty and discrimination might have been common in daily life. As language is maintained, forthcoming generations develop ancient wisdom and knowledge, stories and myths, and experiences from their homeland which keep their culture alive and ignite a sense of homeliness. They are then able to continue with their age-old traditions and rituals due to the maintenance of their home languages. By studying the origin and development of the Indo-Surinamese language, one gains insightful knowledge based on their heritage and culture, their identity and history in Suriname. The maintenance of their root languages shows that they were resilient people, standing strong under pressure during times of discrimination and forceful conversions by colonizers. One can trace the historical, social, economic, and political trends within the community through studying their language, and much of it has been maintained and developed. It is also interesting to note the various adaptations and evolutionary stages languages go through to become what they are today. Following are some of the examples of Hindustani languages that bear roots in India, but show traces of mixture with local Surinamese languages as well.

3.3. Indo-Surinamese Languages

Sarnami is well known to be the most widely spoken language in Suriname, and it is also known as the only Caribbean Hindustani language variant that was able to persist in the region. This modern Hindi language is an amalgamation of various other Northern Indian languages from the time of indenture, specifically during the Dutch colonial rule era (Yakpo, 2017, p. 129). The structure and development of the Sarnami language has been significantly changed due to mixture with other languages, especially Sranan and Dutch. This has caused noticeable changes in the language structure, such as transition from a traditional-final to a head-initial order i.e., there is a change in how the words are put together. For instance, changing positions in the order that they appear in sentences (Yakpo, 2017, p. 129). Certain changes in the Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) can be traced as well, compared to its counterparts in the Indian languages. However, other aspects of the language, such as the noun vs. adjective and noun vs. adposition have remained similar over time. Having been in an environment where dominant languages such as Sranan and Dutch were already present, Sarnami has been pressured into adapting and changing quite a lot over time, while also being able to maintain certain aspects of the Indian root languages (Yakpo, 2017, p. 129). This study is the first to look at how contact-induced changes have taken place in Sarnami in terms of how the words change orders in sentences; it represents a comprehensive examination that has been supported by statistics and data derived from primary sources (Yakpo, 2017, p. 129). However, even with the many evolutionary patterns that Sarnami has gone through, it continues to be used thoroughly in the Indo-Surinamese community, connecting them with their roots. In contrast, the Indian language Bhojpuri has become an endangered language in Guyana and Trinidad alike (Yakpo, 2017, p. 130). It is interesting to note that Sarnami shares linguistic and cultural similarities with other Hindustani language variants spoken in Fiji, Mauritius, and South Africa. The impact of Sarnami was strong enough locally that the Dutch term for it is called ‘Hindoestaans’, even though this language took on different forms in other places (Yakpo, 2017, p. 130). In essence, the study of Sarnami and its variants spoken in other countries, represents the culture of the Indian diaspora and contributes to their heritage protection, through the study of their language. The term ‘koineization’ has been used i.e., in various languages from Indian states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand were blended to form new languages like Sarnami. As it has been mentioned previously, this fusion took place in the times of indenture when thousands of Indians were recruited for labor services in Suriname and taken there to replace the African slavery system (Yakpo, 2017, p. 130-131). At the beginning of Sarnami’s formation, the influence of Sranan and Dutch were limited, however, this gradually changed when the 20th century saw socio-economic changes, and an increase in education which eventually led to the Suriname-Netherlands migration. The diversity and diaspora gave rise to a unique linguistic blend (Yakpo, 2017, p. 131).

As can be noted from the different processes Sarnami has gone through, it is a complex evolution of linguistic development (Yakpo, 2017, p. 131). The processes of blending, reorganizing, and simplifying make it more sophisticated in terms of its development. The development can be tracked even today through comparison with Sranan and Dutch. It is gradually changing from a Subject-Object-Verb to Subject-Verb-Object order, highlighting the gradual mix and blend of these languages (Yakpo, 2017, p. 134). Sarnami stands out even among the other Indian languages spoken in the Caribbean like Bhojpuri, Maithili, and Maghi; especially in its word order in sentences. The difference lies in the way Sarnami puts subject first, then verb and object at the end. This difference is the result of Sarnami blending with Sranan and Dutch, taking on a unique path in its development among other Hindustani languages in Suriname and the Caribbean overall (Yakpo, 2017, p. 146).

3.4. Conclusion to Chapter 3

In conclusion, Sarnami is the most widely used and most resilient Hindustani language that is still being used in present day Suriname. It holds profound significance for the Indo-Surinamese people in terms of cultural, linguistic, and ethnic identity, connecting them to their history and roots. By continuing to study and speak Sarnami, one can trace back to its origin in India and Northern Indian languages, keeping the Indo-Surinamese cultural and ethnic identity alive. Furthermore, since Sarnami represents a unique mix of different languages, one can also track the cultural and local blend of different ethnic groups within Suriname and the Caribbean region. Sarnami then becomes a notable example for linguistic history and development, with its various stages of mixture and blending with other languages. This naturally involves other groups of Suriname into the picture and represents the overall history and cultural diversity in the country. One can see that various ethnic groups have interacted and exchanged their culture and language over time, highlighting the richness and complexity of Suriname's history and culture. Sarnami has now become a living language, spoken over generations in the Indo-Surinamese community, preserving and maintaining its unique culture and heritage. This preservation also becomes vital for the future generations to remain rooted and connect with their ancestors. Moreover, the survival of this language represents the resilience and adaptability of the Indian community in a foreign land. It shows how they navigated their way in a new land, with new culture, meanwhile preserving and maintaining their own through religion, language, and other means.

4. CHAPTER 4: SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS AND CONTRIBUTION

4.1. Introduction to Chapter 4

The fourth chapter focuses on the socio-economic status and ethnic groups within the greater region of Paramaribo from 2004 to 2012. The Paramaribo region is situated in the Northern coast of Suriname, being the largest city there. It is the political, social, and economic hub of the nation. A majority of 541,000 people reside in the region, especially the highly urbanized areas of the region. By analyzing the socio-economic status defined by occupation, the correlation between ethnic groups and their occupations becomes evident, revealing the socio-economic classes and income inequality in the region (Rompaey, 2021, p. 491). This chapter highlights how Hindustani people settled along the coast and continued to work in the agricultural sector after the abolition of the plantation system and how World War II (WW2) led to economic, educational, and social advancements among the Hindustani and Javanese populations, causing growth in Suriname's trade, agricultural and other economic sectors. The use and cultural significance of the rice varieties that are being cultivated today in Suriname and its relation to the rice that were historically grown by the Hindustani people and the evidence of rice exchange between Hindustani rice farmers and other ethnic groups in Suriname, is also discussed to reflect the endurance of agricultural practices derived from Indian indentured laborers. I will explore this through my third subquestion:

RQ1.3. How has the socio-economic status of the Hindustani community helped preserve their religion and culture?

4.2. Ethnic Dynamics and Economic Progress

Based on the 2004 and 2012 national census, the study identifies Hindustani, Creole and Javanese communities as the largest ethnic groups in the Greater Paramaribo region (GPR), each with their distinct migration timeline and history. Since the arrival of the Hindustani community in 1873, their economic evolution most notably began with the onset of WW2, driving their economic, educational and social progress (Rompaey & Fung-Loy, 2021, p. 495).

In the Surinamese society, the level of fairness of one's skin or the "degree of whiteness" is a significant factor that determines one's socio-economic success. This colonial beauty standard is the reason Creoles with lighter-skin have greater socio-economic standing for they are able to integrate with the colonial elites. Due to the darker complexion of the Hindustani community, they were considered inferior by other ethnic groups. Having been brought into the region

separately to work in the plantations, historically the Hindustani and Javanese ethnic groups have resided in different areas of the region. The Hindustani community worked as indentured laborers from 1873 to 1916 and as the Creole population left along with the abolition of plantations in the 1930s, the colonizers adjusted their policies to incorporate the provision of land to persuade the Indians and Javanese plantation workers to permanently settle into working at the plantations. Unlike the Javanese workers, the Indian workers decided to settle into smaller lands outside of the plantations to independently work in the agricultural sector as small-scale farmers (Ramsaedh, 2017, p. 167). The Indian community began producing vegetables, dairy, and most importantly rice, for the locals of Suriname residing in urban areas.

During as well as shortly after World War II (WW2), between 1940 to 1980, as food shortages led to the demand for agricultural produce especially rice, the Indian communities began advancing into large-scale agricultural production and took greater ownership over larger lands. Their active cultivation and trading of rice during this period propelled them into a key market player in the agricultural sector and gave way to significant economic advancements among their community, which enabled them to invest in education. This led the Hindustani population to venture into occupations beyond agriculture such as entrepreneurship, transport, trade, mining, and construction, gradually contributing to an upgrade in their social status and lifestyle. As the Javanese workers remained in the plantations, the socio-economic gap between the two ethnic groups began growing (Ramsaedh, 2017, p. 168).

4.4. Traditional Rice Cultivation Practice

In 1927, traditional East Indian rice cultivars or varieties were tested for large-scale commercialization at the Experimental Station in Georgetown. By 1933, specific landraces were identified for breeding new varieties such as *Moetmoeria*, *Fini tere*, *Djerehi*, and *Skrivimankoti*, with *Skrivimankoti* being preferred and most commercially viable (Ramdayal et al., 2021, p. 2). The study explains Hindustani farmers have lost the “traditional rice landraces” introduced by their Indian ancestors in the 1800s, possibly through extensive exchanges of the ancient landraces with Maroons. The study interviewed Hindustani farmers, particularly those bearing names such as “Koelie aleisi, Mbotombolia, Patalika, or Watralanti” to confirm the continuity of ancient Indian landraces in Maroon rice fields. However, Surinamese farmers now mostly cultivate modern rice varieties developed by rice institutes in the 2000s. While modernization has led to the adoption of advanced rice varieties resulting in the disappearance of traditional East Indian rice landraces, Ramdayal (2021) explains the continued significance of rice in rituals and ceremonies of the Hindustani community in Suriname such as weddings and funerals using store-bought rice (ibid., 2021, p. 13).

In Hindustani wedding ceremonies, rice is used in various ways to symbolize fertility, prosperity and welfare. Similar to popcorn, husked rice is fried in a pan or 'karhaija' and stirred using a broom known as 'printa sibi' over a fire by the relatives of the bride and groom (Ramdayal et al., 2021, p. 11-12). In Sanatana Dharma wedding traditions, upon their arrival in the bridal tent, the bride and groom adorned with earthenware, brass, or copper bowl known as 'talsa' or 'lota' by pressing rice or padi into the cow dung that has been smeared on in specific patterns (ibid., 2021, p. 11-12). To celebrate the bride's departure from her home to her husband's home, the mother of the bride throws rice as a symbol of everlasting happiness of the newlyweds (ibid., 2021, p. 11-12). In Hindustani funeral ceremonies, rice is offered in running water. Hindus from the Aria Dewaker movement offer '*pandits*' bags of milled rice after the funeral (ibid., 2021, p. 11-12). During religious festivals such as Diwali, the festival of lights, the Hindustani population harvest rice and cook it with sugar and milk to make a sweet rice dish called '*mita bhaat*' (ibid., 2021, p. 11-12). The enduring significance of rice in rituals and ceremonies of the Hindustani community highlights the perseverance of their cultural heritage amidst the changes in the agricultural practices in Suriname and their community's social standing. Preserving the oral history of former Hindustani rice farmers and traces of traditional rice varieties from Maroon fields could account for the legacy of traditional rice cultivation by descendants of Indian contract laborers in Suriname (Ramdayal, 2021, p. 2).

4.5. Conclusion to Chapter 4

In conclusion, this chapter offers insights into the socio-economic, ethnic, and cultural complexities of Suriname, with a specific focus on the GPR. By examining occupation to measure socio-economic status, the study on rice evolution and types, reveals the correlation between ethnic groups and the occupations they hold. It highlights the economic, educational, and social advancements among the Hindustani populations during the period of WW2, causing growth in Suriname's trade, agricultural and other economic sectors. Furthermore, the research explores the preservation of cultural and religious traditions among the Hindustani community, particularly focusing on rice cultivation as tradition and modernity interplay in Surinamese society. While modernization has led to the disappearance of traditional East Indian rice landraces, the significance of rice in rituals and ceremonies of the Hindustani community in Suriname still remains. This research ultimately suggests the importance of laying the groundwork for policy interventions and community initiatives to foster cultural conservation of the Hindustani community and their tradition and legacy in Suriname.

5. CHAPTER 5: POLITICAL CONTRIBUTION

5.1. Introduction to Chapter 5

This chapter delves into the political involvement of the Indo-Surinamese people through which one will be able to explore their social dynamics, power, identity, and their representation in the diverse Surinamese politics and society. Over the many decades, the Indo-Surinamese people have come a long way; from being plantation workers and migrants in a new land, to becoming an integral part of society where they participate in the politics and economy actively. This chapter will explore the journey of this community from its humble beginnings to its current day position in the Surinamese politics and society in general. The chapter will be structured in the following manner; firstly, the contemporary political scene will be provided for context and comparative analysis. This part will shed light on the Surinamese politics and socio-economic status. Furthermore, it is important to then explore the historical aspect of the political scene in Suriname, in order to track the development and evolution the power dynamics took along the way. The historical section will once again highlight the topics of colonialism and discrimination through the political lens. It will help us understand the complex dynamics between the various cultural and ethnic groups and how their interactions played out in the political scene. Where do the Indo-Surinamese community stand in terms of contemporary politics? And how did they end up in the position that they are in today? This is the central theme of this chapter. This eventually ties into the general sense of self and identity that the Indo-Surinamese people carry in this diverse nation. Through political representation, they can preserve their culture, religion and heritage more efficiently. Their culture in a vastly diverse country will be properly taught about and represented in society, in pop culture, in art, in the economy, and in the education sector depending on their political status and power. How much power does the Indo-Surinamese community hold in contemporary Suriname? And what impact does this make in terms of their religious and cultural preservation and representation? These questions will be answered below.

I will explore this through my fourth subquestion:

***RQ1.4.** How has the political status of the Hindustani community helped preserve their religion and culture?*

5.2. Why Is The Political Status Relevant?

Why is it important to study political status in relation to the community's cultural and religious heritage? Suriname is a very ethnically diverse country, and their politics is tied to and influenced by the history, economy, social status of all these different groups. In this case,

politics become more tricky than usual, because Suriname is a country where the cultural groups are vastly different from one another, therefore with vastly different demands and opinions as well. So where does the Indian community stand in this political chaos? This determines how well represented they are and how well they can preserve their culture and traditions. The more power they have, the better they can preserve and represent their heritage, culture, and religion. The cultural and religious aspect is important as it is, but what is also important is the influence they have on the education sector. The larger public in Suriname should be able to learn about the history and significance of the Indian community in the country. In this way, fairness and understanding in diversity can be achieved from a young age. It is important for the Indian community to be equally represented in the Suriname society as the other ethnic groups are; this chapter will explore just that through the lens of the political scene. Lastly, it is of utmost importance that the culture and heritage, whether it is tangible or intangible heritage, should be preserved.

5.3. Political History

The political history of Suriname changed drastically in the mid-19th century, when it took a sharp turn towards a more inclusive representation for all groups by the 1930s, especially in terms of political representation when members of all communities began taking part in politics. Before this change, in 1865, a colonial constitution by the name of ‘regeringsreglement’ established a representative body called the ‘colonial council’. However, only a certain section of people was favored in this council; to be specific, the light-skinned Creoles were favored among all others. This so-called representative body excluded the working-class Creoles and the Asians from participating in the politics of the nation (Ramsoedh, 2017, p. 31). Coming back to the 1930s, there were people who began to plea for the consideration of Asian interests as well. This is where things changed; until then the political scene had only favored a certain group, the light-skinned Creoles to be precise. Eventually, the light-skinned Creoles began dominating the political scene for a while before things began changing gradually, and the Asian population started being included (Ramsoedh, 2017, p. 31). However, despite much effort towards inclusivity and consideration, the politics of Suriname remains unstable to this day, due to its ethnic diversity. In ethnically and culturally diverse countries like Suriname, it is challenging to make fair choices that favors each group equally. Conflicts in opinions, needs, and choices arise due to cultural and religious differences, which makes it difficult for a country like Suriname to be secular in all aspects. Additionally, Suriname has a notorious history of military coups and corruption, making its political scene even more unstable to add to the matter, since Suriname was decolonized in 1975, its political instability has increased. Corruption and nepotism have heightened, leading to more military coups with a notable one led by Sergeant Desi Bouterse,

which shook the political ground and weakened the constitution like never before (Ramsoedh, 2017, p. 36).

Even though democracy was restored in 1985, tensions still existed between various political and military groups. A notable clash took place between Bouterse and Ronnie Brunswijk, who was the leader of a rebel group 'The Jungle Commando'. On the other hand, other political parties such as the 'Front for Democracy and Development', representing different ethnic groups also emerged alongside the military groups. This reflected Suriname's multi-ethnic political nature, but also the chaotic side of it (Ramsoedh, 2017, p. 37-38). Overall, democracy took over from the second half of the 20th century; however, public trust in the government remains low. Ironically, the public participation rate remains quite high as people from different groups are driven by the motive of fulfilling their own personal cultural agendas (Ramsoedh, 2017, p. 43).

Going back to why the Hindustanis began settling in Suriname; plantation owners began bribing the indentured laborers with small plots of land in return for free work. They began preferring free laborers over indentured laborers who had work hour contracts. Due to this change, a large number of Hindustanis began settling in Suriname permanently. They were mostly located in the Nickerie and Commewijne districts, where they were able to sustain themselves through agriculture, trade and commerce. (Roosken, 2010, p. 54). In the education sector, it was made compulsory for Hindustani children to attend school aged seven to twelve, and this was introduced in 1878. However, the children's assistance was needed on the plantations, and these schools were far away in distance, hindering the attendance of these children. This led to the introduction of 'coolly schools' in 1890, where children were taught in their native language rather than in Dutch. This was due to the assumption that most Hindustanis would eventually return to India, so learning Dutch would be redundant (Roosken, 2010, p. 55). However, there were certain critics that went against the idea of 'coolly schools', notably the Catholic publication *De Surinamer*. They argued that teaching Hindustani children in their native language will hinder the process of assimilation. Twelve years later, in 1907, coolly schools were officially abolished in order to push for assimilation. New versions of schooling and education were introduced where Indian teachers were responsible for teaching Hindi and Dutch at regular schools, even though they were formally untrained. This was a preparation for the kids to start learning Dutch and continue their entire education in Dutch (Roosken, 2010, p. 55). The Dutch colonizers tried their best to promote their own culture through education and other means, however it was clear that Suriname was not heading towards a Dutch centered lifestyle. The Hindustani and Javanese populations in particular resisted the assimilation process; while some adhered to the Dutch culture at a superficial level, they remained rooted to their own culture and traditions (Roosken, 2010, p. 56). The Dutch, however, did not give up their assimilation strategies. In 1929, the Dutch Minister of Colonial Affairs cultural preservation and practices of

other ethnic groups in efforts to promote assimilation. They feared that if they did not do this, their plan of establishing a Dutch settlement would go in vain. Additionally, in 1927, the Dutch government came up with another scheme that would promote the Dutch power further; they granted Dutch citizenship to all Hindustani children that were born in Suriname (Roosken, 2010, p. 56).



Figure 3. Map of Nickerie and Commewijne. Nickerie and Commewijne were areas where a large number of Hindustanis settled. (ResearchGate website, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-the-Republic-of-Suriname-depicting-the-ten-administrative-districts-as-well-as-the_fig4_319611802)

5.4. Political Changes After WWII

A lot of things changed for the Hindustani population after World War II; firstly, the assimilation policy ended, and Suriname eventually gained independence from Dutch colonial rule. Prior to the war, the Hindustani population had little to no involvement in the political scene, because as it has been mentioned before, the light-skinned Creoles were largely favored over every other group. However, after the war, things began changing gradually i.e. political awareness among the Hindustani population increased over time (Roosken, 2010, p. 66). Initially, inclusivity in the political scene was quite messy and chaotic. The Hindustani and Javanese members were excluded from the Surinamese delegation, which led to opposition from these groups.

Eventually, Hindu and Chinese delegates were added, however, the Muslim community was excluded this time. They all demanded fair representation in the Surinamese politics, rightly so. Suriname then saw the formation of several political parties due to this unrest. In 1948, the Dutch delegation began considering change and adaptation to the interests of these groups, however, they believed that the majority of the population was not ready for such responsibility. Most of the protests and outrage came from the Hindustani community, and universal suffrage was then implemented. A man by the name of Jagernath Lachmon played a significant role in improving the political status of the Hindustani community, through his leadership and political power. He was able to represent the Hindustanis and fight for their rights. However, his focus was largely on the Hindu Indians rather than the Muslim community from India (Roosken, 2010, p. 66). The Hindustani population and political leaders felt the need to migrate to the Netherlands because they were always in opposition to the Creole political groups in Suriname. Fearing their dominance, they joined forces with the Dutch delegation and pledged a five-year period allowing Surinamese citizens to freely migrate to the Netherlands. Even before the negotiations took place, Hindustani and Javanese leaders had already prompted for their population to move to the Netherlands, and after independence in 1975, a mass migration from all ethnic groups took place to the Netherlands (Roosken, 2010, p. 67). This chapter illustrates the reasons why the Hindustani population was able to prosper and upkeep their customs and culture despite the assimilation policy from the colonizers, and despite mixing with other ethnic and cultural groups. Since the Indian laborers were brought during the time of British rule, they were considered British subjects for fifty years after they had arrived in Suriname. Only in 1927, they began to be considered either Surinamese or Dutch subjects. As it has been mentioned earlier, efforts were made to educate Hindustani children according to the assimilation policies; however, there were many factors that hindered this process too (Roosken, 2010, p. 68). Another factor as to why the Indian community were able to preserve their culture so well, was due to the impact of a governor by the name of Coenraad Kielstra. He was responsible for legally recognizing their religious and cultural traditions, for instance, legalizing Hindu and Islam marriages and rituals. However, it is important to note that Kielstra still believed in the supremacy of the white race over others, and a firm belief in Western supremacy (Roosken, 2010, p. 68). His reign heightened the consciousness among the Hindustani community like never before, even having created segregation among other ethnic groups due to this reason. His reign was therefore one of the greater reasons as to why the Hindustani community persisted the way they did (Roosken, 2010, p. 69).

5.5. Hindu Cultural Preservation: The Indian Point of View

There was another side to the story of assimilation, where Christian missionaries attempted to convert the Hindustani community, or at least impart their values and beliefs onto them. This

intensified once the colonizers and Christian missionaries recognized the Hindustani community as permanent settlers in Suriname (Roosken, 2010, p. 72). The Hindustanis resisted this conversion because it is said that they had a very negative view of the Christian faith and the dark-skinned Creoles and their lifestyle. The Hindustani considered them unfamiliar and foreign, and associated them with a promiscuous and lazy lifestyle, which was everything that went against the Hindu values. They associated Christianity with taking up a Creole lifestyle, which was one of the many reasons they resisted conversion. British Indians held prejudices against dark-skinned people, this could be a result of British colonization and discrimination in the Indian subcontinent at the time (Roosken, 2010, p. 72). Additionally, Christian missionaries would generally target Hindustani children for conversion, which was seen as very disrespectful from the Hindustani elders, as they had a hierarchical family structure with clear roles based on generational and gender structures (Roosken, 2010, p. 73). Another reason why the Hindustani as well as the Islam population stuck to their own customs and culture was because India is an ancient land with a very long history of culture and traditions, losing that against a Western faith was not in the question for them. This commitment was reinforced by new immigrants who were arriving from India, and who brought along India's essence with them. This strengthened their ties and connection with their homeland and inspired them to make a home out of the new land they were now a part of, with values and customs from India. So, from the beginning at the plantations, the Hindustani community was able to maintain their customs and traditions and build a home for themselves in Suriname, with many factors reinforcing their roots and connections to India and its ancient traditions (Roosken, 2010, p. 73). It also helped that the Hindustani settlements in Suriname were slightly secluded and isolated, which further aided in the preservation of their culture and religion. The Brahmin priests were also largely responsible for the preservation of the Hindu culture, since they were the ones initiating and hosting religious rituals and occasions. The Hindustanis were always known to have a very distinct culture and religion than those of the Europeans, Creoles, Javanese, etc. Being Hindu meant that they were deeply loyal and learned in their own traditional ways, which made it more challenging for the missionaries to convert the Hindustani population (Roosken, 2010, p. 74). Moreover, in order to maintain their culture and religion, the Hindustanis in Suriname made great efforts to duplicate their religion and traditions from India. For instance, the holy river Ganga in India is an important religious water body; the Hindustanis in Suriname mirrored this practice of worshiping a river in Suriname as well. They would perform sacrifices and rituals in the river as they did in the Ganga River in India. This was a way for them to remain close and connected to their homeland (Roosken, 2010, p. 75).

5.6. 20th Century Politics in Suriname

Starting from the 20th century, the Surinamese politics witnessed an absence of the typical left and right, conservative and liberal politics; this was mainly the result of three factors. First and probably the most prominent reason why Surinamese politics is unstable is due to the ethnic diversity and segregation that is persistent there. Secondly, statesmanship was overtaken by political entrepreneurship, which led to a lack of rational leadership. Lastly, Suriname's economic foundation was weak as it is, this further aided in the complexity and instability in the political sphere (Ramsoedh, 2001, p. 92). Democracy took over the colonial system between 1900 and 1954, however, there was a ban on forming political parties by colonial law. Eventually, post-1954, Suriname was able to attain a self-governing system, known as the New Style Kingdom, which further led to increased political clashes and military coups. Military coups were another huge factor in destabilizing the political landscape of Suriname. In 1980, a military coup/dictatorship resulted in political violence, repression, and immense destabilization. Democracy was restored but the military officers and groups were still dominating illegally, through narcotics and other illicit activities (Ramsoedh, 2001, p. 92). This political fragmentation was further catalyzed by bribery, nepotism, and corruption, marginalizing the Hindustani group along with other ethnic groups and causing a socio-economic disparity. The first political parties emerged in 1946, however, they did little to diffuse the fragmentation and the ethnic diversity continued to hinder the process of unity (Ramsoedh, 2001, p. 92).

5.7. Where Does the Indian Community Stand in this?

The Indo-Surinamese journey has gone through many different stages over the years; initially being secluded and marginalized from the political scene and within the broader society, they gradually made their way into the political ground only to dominate and make their mark in some sense. Historically, the Hindustani community faced discrimination and marginalization, however, they fought their way to equality and fair representation in the Surinamese politics. Their leaders began taking more prominent roles in the political landscape. Even though the Hindustani community felt the need to migrate to the Netherlands due to political dominance by the Creole groups, they still made sure they achieved fair representation and rights in the Surinamese politics. In contemporary Surinamese politics, the presence and dominance of the Indo-Surinamese continues to shine, even within the context of ongoing ethnic diversity and fragmentation. The Hindustani community has managed to make its mark in the Surinamese society, especially in politics.

5.8. Conclusion to Chapter 5

In conclusion, the political landscape of Suriname in the 20th century has been defined by complexity rooted in ethnic diversity, sophisticated and intricate history, and socio-economic challenges. The ethnic fragmentation, along with the difference in ideologies and opinions has led to an unstable political environment in present-day Suriname. During the colonial period, democracy was introduced, however, only the light-skinned Creoles were favored among all other groups, especially in political representation. However, over time, inclusivity crept into the political scene, giving way for other ethnic groups, especially the Hindustani community, some leverage. Post 1954, a new era of self-governance had arisen, along with numerous clashes between the government and the military. Military coups destabilized the political ground and shook the constitution's foundations, leading to a period of violence and repression. Despite the democracy being restored, the military presence was still prominent, leading to fragmentation, nepotism, corruption, etc. Hindering unity and progress of the nation. Overall, the political history of Suriname is backed by complexity mainly due to ethnic diversity. In order to achieve a state close to fairness and balance, inclusivity and combating corruption, nepotism, etc. will be necessary.

6. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This thesis explored the religious, cultural, socio-economic, and political involvement of the Indo-Surinamese community, and how all of these areas further aided in the preservation of their culture and religion. The historical point of view, as well as the contemporary scene have been analyzed in order to draw a comparison and track the development and evolution of their role in the Surinamese society. The second chapter explores the religious preservation of the Hindu community; providing valuable insight into the community's struggles and challenges and ultimate success in preserving their culture and religion. After thorough examination, it can be concluded that the Hindu religion was not only preserved, but it also took on different forms and has been able to thrive in the country. It stood against the conversion efforts of the Christian missionaries and colonizers enforcing their Western lifestyle. Despite several other challenges, the community managed to keep the core values and belief systems of their homeland intact, and they were able to remain connected to their roots.

It is very interesting to note the complexity of Suriname in terms of its cultural and ethnic diversity, and how these different groups manage to create their own legacies within this mixture that sometimes manifests as chaos. The Hindustani community was especially successful in terms of maneuvering through this labyrinth of such a diverse country, where everyone is fighting to keep their community protected and intact. They solidified their cultural and religious identity by building temples in the country, practicing their rituals and traditions despite several efforts from colonizers and missionaries to diffuse the same. The Hindu religion in Suriname despite having gone through several changes, adaptations, and mixtures, represents its core values that root from India, further solidifying the presence and cultural identity of the Hindustani community to this day. This proves how ancient and therefore deeply rooted the Hindu culture is, and it also goes to show that the Hindustani community were so deeply identified with it, that they were not ready to give it up at any cost. Chapter 3 delves into the examination of the languages spoken in the Indo-Surinamese community. It was found that the Sarnami language among others has endured over time and is still widely in use in the country. Alongside the other two widely spoken languages, Sranan and Dutch, Sarnami takes the lead in popularity in terms of usage by the common people of the Hindustani community. It faced several changes and underwent a number of adaptations before it became what it is today, having been mixed with other languages like Dutch and Sranan. However, it managed to maintain its roots from India, showcasing vocabulary and words that originated in different parts of Northern India.

This language is unique and has become a significant representation of one of the factors that contributed or still contribute to the Hindustani identity. It is again an example of the resilience and connectedness among the Hindustani community, and their commitment to their own culture, language, and religion despite the many changes they faced along the way. By studying the development and evolution of Sarnami, one can track the history of the Hindustani community; their struggles and challenges, their thoughts and feelings through poetry and books, and their overall experience in terms of migration and the indenture system.

The fourth chapter explores the socio-economic status of the Hindustani community, which ultimately decides the state of cultural and religious preservation for the community. Through the study, it can be noted that ethnicity and socio-economic standing is intertwined, especially in the Greater Paramaribo region. The census data from 2012 tracks the development of the Hindustani community in terms of their economic status, which grew significantly after World War II due to their expertise in rice cultivation. Their economic status, social status, and political status grew steadily over time, as they carved their way into the Surinamese society. Rice cultivation for them was one great way to maneuver their way into affording a higher standard of living and representation in Suriname; it not only elevated their social status in society, but also helped preserve their culture ever more deeply. Since rice cultivation has its own ritual significance for the Hindustanis, this was a great way to both practice their culture and rise up in the socio-economic status. Despite having lost their traditional rice landraces brought from India, they still managed to retain the significance of rice cultivation. The concluding chapter highlights the political development of Suriname and the place the Hindustanis occupied in it.

Through research, it can be noted that the Hindustani community was initially marginalized and discriminated against. There was a lack of representation from their group, meanwhile the light-skinned Creoles were being favored in the political scene. However, as mentioned before, World War II brought a lot of positive changes for the Hindustanis; they emerged as a political force, forming groups and drawing strength from leaders who took initiative to preserve their religious and cultural identity. Leaders like Jagernath Lachmon played a significant role in uplifting the community and fighting for their rights and representation.

Even though political dominance from other groups forced a lot of Hindustanis to migrate to the Netherlands, they still showed resilience and commitment in the face of adversity. They put in every bit of effort they could in order to retain their identity and make a home out of Suriname. Despite the ongoing corruption, nepotism, and general political instability in Suriname, the Hindustanis have definitely made their presence known and respected in the Surinamese society.

7. LIMITATIONS

During my research on the Indo-Surinamese community, I faced several limitations and challenges that I will discuss further. One major challenge that hindered my research was that the majority of the literature was written in Dutch, with a very limited number of books and articles in English. The language barrier limited my research scope and range to a great extent. Furthermore, the English material I did find were not recent publications, and dated back several years. This created a lack of development and data analysis from recent years within the Indo-Surinamese community. I was therefore unable to draw comparisons in development to the extent that I had hoped for. Another reason as to why this research was limited, was since Suriname is a largely ethnically diverse country, there is not a lot of content about one single ethnic group, rather there are books and articles pertaining to Suriname or the broader Caribbean region.

Overall, further research and publications need to be taken regarding this topic. This culturally diverse Surinamese community deserves more research and publications in English for a wider reach among the global audience.

8. CONCLUSION

The Indo-Surinamese community has had a long history of migration, cultural, religious preservation and integration into the Surinamese society through the politics and economy sectors. As their story develops, one can see their remarkable resilience and enduring spirit towards protecting their culture and remaining connected to their roots. A comprehensive study of their history, religion, language, economic and political status has been done, through which one can understand their complex history and their current social standing in the Surinamese society. Starting from the initial days, the Indo-Surinamese community has faced adversity and challenges, having moved to another nation with new people and a completely different culture and lifestyle. Despite the ethnic diversity in Suriname, despite the discrimination they faced they managed to make a mark in society, they managed to upkeep their religion and traditions and remain connected to their roots.

The historical scene represents the struggle against colonial assimilation and missionary conversions. Christian missionaries and Dutch colonial figures tried their best to convert the Hindus into Christians, and tried to enforce a Dutch lifestyle upon them as well. However, the Indo-Surinamese people resisted hard against this conversion and remained united and resilient against it. This was one of the biggest threats to the Hindu community, the Christian missionaries tried over and over again through different means to convert and convince the Indians to adopt a Dutch or Western lifestyle and that included adopting Christianity too. The Hindu community managed to not only preserve their religion and culture, but they also passed it on through generations, built temples and continued their religious and traditional practices. The religion that they brought with them to Suriname was modified in many ways due to environmental changes and mixture with other ethnic and cultural groups, however, the core values and beliefs of the ancient religion of Hinduism remained and is still practiced to present day. The Indo-Surinamese community managed to make a home out of Suriname by following ritual practices from India, like giving religious significance to a river in Suriname by emulating the holy Ganga River in India. The preservation of their language from different parts of India also largely contributed to the overall preservation of their religious and cultural identity. Even though their language evolved and mixed over time, the core essence of the Indian roots remain and that has helped significantly in remaining connected to their history and roots.

Even within the political scene, they initially struggled to make their way into the higher positions of the Surinamese politics; having been marginalized, discriminated against and not receiving enough representation. However, with time, their engagement in politics grew, and they managed to assert their presence in the political arena. Hindu political groups began forming, and notable leaders such as Jagernath Lachmon made a significant difference in the involvement of

the Indo-Surinamese community in politics and made sure they were well-represented in the nation. In the contemporary political scene, they have enough power to preserve their religion and culture and also make sure they are well-represented in society. The legacy of the Indo-Surinamese community spreads across continents, having marked their presence in the Netherlands as well, where they continue to preserve their cultural and ethnic identity.

To answer the main research question, “*How has the cultural and religious legacy of Indian Indentured Laborers in Suriname endured over time, influencing contemporary cultural practices and religious beliefs in the country as expressed in the history and literature?*”; the conclusions drawn above are the many different ways through which the Indian Indentured laborers managed to endure and retain their religious and cultural legacy over time. Having gone through several stages of evolution and development within the community and in the context of Suriname, they managed to make a secure safe for their community and their religion in Suriname, amidst all the other ethnic groups that co-exist there. As the cultural and ethnic dynamics in Suriname continue to evolve, the story and journey of the Indo-Surinamese community becomes a beacon of light for resilience and endurance in the face of change, migration, discrimination and marginalization. Their journey reminds us of the importance of cultural and religious diversity, fair co-existence, and harmony. By representing and sharing their culture, Suriname moves towards a more inclusive and diverse society, aiming for fairness and secularism as their end-goal. This research also showcases the vibrancy and diversity in Suriname, and how they upkeep harmony and peace while also facing certain challenges along the way.

For further research, researchers could focus more on the stories of the individual ethnic groups of Suriname and how they co-exist in relation to other groups in the nation. The mixture and blending of these different groups has resulted in a unique culture which deserves more exploration and research. Prioritizing cultural preservation in a multi-ethnic nation is a tough challenge, and therefore, conducting more research and study on these subjects brings light to the situation and further helps with the preservation and representation.

Word Count: 12,776

ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the lives of the Indo-Surinamese community in Suriname, delving into their complex history of migration and their involvement in the indenture system introduced by colonizers for plantation labor work. The research centers around the investigation of how much the Indian laborers and their descendants were able to preserve their religion and culture in the ethnically diverse land of Suriname. This research examines the different ways in which the Hindustani community was able to preserve their Hindu religion, and the different factors that contributed to the preservation of their heritage and cultural identity. Through the extensive research of their economic and political status, and mainly the study of their religious preservation itself, one is able to decipher how much of their religion and culture they were able to preserve and the different approaches they took. The history of their economic status, and their current economic status determines how much of their religion and culture they are able to preserve, similarly, how much representation they have in the Surinamese politics also determines their heritage preservation. By studying their religion and culture through economic and political aspects, there is an opportunity to study this from different perspectives. In essence, this thesis showcases the resilience and adaptability of the Indo-Surinamese community in the face of adversity, discrimination, and marginalization. This research showcases the mark the Indo-Surinamese community were able to make in the Surinamese society despite the ethnic diversity, and it highlights their history and legacy in the Surinamese society, and in the Caribbean region in general.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Algoe, R.K. (2022). Institutional development of Christianity, Hinduism and Islam in Suriname and Trinidad: an exploration in religious practices and festivities from 1900-2010. *Academic Journal of Suriname 2011*, 2(1), 186-197.

Arya Samaj (2013). Spectacular Arya Samaj Temple of Suriname. The Arya Samaj. <https://www.thearyasamaj.org/detailtopstories?topstoryid=13&topstorypage>

Bakker, F. (2015). The Arya Dewaker Mandir in Paramaribo: A Hindu Temple with a Message. *Electronic Paper Series in Hindu Studies*, 2.

Fung-Loy, K., & Van Rompaey, A. (2021). Socio-economic and ethnic segregation in the Greater Paramaribo region, Suriname. *The Urban Book Series*, 491–505. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64569-4_25

Geology.com. (n.d.). Satellite image of Suriname. Retrieved from https://geology.com/world/suriname-satellite-image.shtml#google_vignette

Ramdayal, M., Maat, H., & van Andel, T. (2021). The legacy of traditional rice cultivation by descendants of Indian contract laborers in Suriname. *Journal of Ethnobiology and Ethnomedicine*, 17(1), 60. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13002-021-00485-6>

Ramsoedh, H. (2001). Playing Politics. *Twentieth-Century Suriname*. (pp. 91-110). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004475342_009

Ramsoedh, H. (2017). Democracy and Political Culture in Suriname. R. Hoefte, M.L. Bishop, P. Clegg (Eds.), *Post-Colonial Trajectories in the Caribbean: The Three Guianas* (pp. 30-45). Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

Ramsoedh, H. (2017). The Development of Hindustaniness in Suriname: Reconstruction, Mobilization and Integration. M.S. Hassankhan, L. Roopnarine & H. Ramsoedh (Eds.), *The Legacy of Indian indenture: Historical and contemporary aspects of migration and Diaspora* (pp. 165-194). Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group.

ResearchGate. (n.d.). Map of the Republic of Suriname depicting the ten administrative districts as well as the. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Map-of-the-Republic-of-Suriname-depicting-the-ten-administrative-districts-as-well-as-the_fig4_319611802

Roosken, E. (2010). *Caught between Christianization, assimilation and religious independency*. [Masters thesis, Erasmus University]. Erasmus University Rotterdam. <http://hdl.handle.net/2105/8174>

Statista (2021). Religion affiliations in Latin America 2020. Statista. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/996386/latin-america-religion-affiliation-share-type/>

Strange, S. (2023). Hinduism in Suriname. In K.A. Jacobsen (Ed.), *Hindu Diasporas* (pp. 116-124). Oxford University Press

Yakpo, K. (2017). Out of India: Language contact and change in Sarnami (Caribbean Hindustani). In *Boundaries and Bridges* (pp. 129–150). <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781614514886-005>