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Words and Work: Education and Work Among Indo-Muslim Women in Trinidad, 1930–1960

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Abstract

This paper examines Indo-Muslim females' access to education and participation in formal work over three decades, 1930–1960. In particular, it acknowledges that access to primary and secondary education at the micro level was attained in circumstances of negotiation and collusion and in circumstances where there was a growing recognition of the universalistic-achievement values. Increasing female access to education is assumed to enable empowerment. As such, this paper also examines the employment opportunities available to young women. For young Indo-Muslim females, opportunities were generally limited to private and what can be termed the “semi-public” sphere. The existing patriarchal norms which operated served to ensure that marriage and motherhood, though not explored in this paper, were the means by which these young females were fully accepted by society. Using both written sources and interviews with Indo-Muslim females growing up between the 1920s and 1950s, this paper focuses on their education and labour market participation experiences as representatives of the Muslim community. These experiences in the school and in the labour market led to a reimagined and reshaped social order that added layers to their Muslim identity.

Historical overview of the community

From 1917, if not before, the Muslim community was in a state of flux — straddling several worlds (Western-Christian, Indian and Muslim) and evolving along class lines. Social mobility via land acquisition and education was pursued with some vigour. As generally posited in the recounting of history concerning the migration of Indians starting in 1845 from the subcontinent, an estimated 80 per cent of the migrants were Hindus, 15 per cent were Muslims and the rest were tribal, Christians, Sikhs, and others (Lal 1996.). By 1946, the Muslim population accounted for 31 per cent of the Indian population and 5.8 per cent of the total population (Harewood 1975).

The age and sex of a particular sub-population are of particular significance not only in analysing the extent to which that population would acculturate to the wider society or require services but also in giving insight into the possible aspirations of the actors by generations. The sub-Indian population of school (5–14 years) and working (15–44 years) ages was growing as seen in **Table 1** below and this can be seen as advantageous to the community as it could stimulate a preference not only for increased and longer participation of their children in education but could force a reassessment by the younger cohort of their parents' preferences, thus increasing overall accommodation to the host society.

1946			1960		
Age Group	Indian	Sex Ratio	Age Group	Indian	Sex Ratio
0-4	34,211	994	0-4	51,290	1,017
5-14	50,544	1,022	5-14	88,934	1,001
15-44	83,967	1,047	15-44	123,387	996
45-64	20,483	1,404	45-64	29,602	1,264
65+	6,542	1,153	65+	8,732	1,110
Total	261,485	-	Total	301,945	-

Source: Jack Harewood, *The Population of Trinidad and Tobago*, CICRED Series, 1975, p. 100.

The above-mentioned distribution would suggest that the members were more prone to admitting elements from Western-Christian society that would be likely to support their world views. The younger sub-population may be seen as the means to realise the aspirations of a community as was articulated by Nana, in Peggy Mohan's (2007) novel *Jahajin*, who dreamt of moving his children into the middle class and to take the next generation into the professions. The role of the family was likely to be ambiguous, either supportive in its attitude towards education for females and thus serving as an important "stability factor", or constraining or limiting access and choice.

For Muslims for whom the seeking of knowledge was *sunnah* (tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, upon whom be peace) the transition to admitting secular education into their practices should have been seamless. But the dichotomisation which existed between secular and sacred was not acceptable to Muslims as they believed "that the real basis of all knowledge is a faith in the values which are inculcated by religion" (Qureshi 1985).

Education, therefore, was perceived as a site of religious reproduction linked to the survival of the Islamic faith and the Muslim identity. When, among the later generations, secular education gained in importance it was balanced with religious education offered through *maktabs*. For many parents, post-primary and secondary education increased the chances of their children's assimilation into the wider society's culture and values which they resisted. Access to education invariably meant a shift from the private to public domains; a relinquishing of social control and behavioural codes that governed the minority society which might lead to an assimilation of the norms and values belonging to the majority through the process of layering.

That said, there were parents who desired an education for their children, viewing it as a useful mechanism for social/occupational mobility. The Muslim community was one that had a set of prescribed codes, as well as pattern of thinking, acting and viewing the world. The inherent differences in the response to boys and girls receiving schooling was the premise that males needed to be the providers and protectors while females should be home oriented, and if at all engaged in productive labour, they were to complement the male and not be in direct competition with him. Further, education and schooling was often seen as being a means of self-expression and as "a site of resistance against marginalising cultural practices" for the younger generations (Keaton 1999). This fear was also echoed in Seepersad Naipaul's *Adventures of Gurudeva and Other Stories* (1976) in which it was expressed that young girls "learned to write love-letters, then again, they wore knee-length frocks, and — the most shameful thing of all — many of them chose their own husbands." These actions that resulted from education and schooling were seen as contrary to the codes of the community.

Participation of young Muslim females in the education system

Before delving into the conversational narratives that would allow us further insight into the young Indo-Muslim female's access to education, it is useful to look at the enrolment numbers between 1924 and 1930. The Muslim population stood at 32,615 in 1946¹ and attendance by Muslim children at primary schools remained at a constant seven per cent of total enrolment for the period 1946 to 1951 (Census 1946). As can be clearly discerned, the overall enrolment of Muslim children was low and the numbers were likely to be even lower for young girls. This thus hints at the legitimisation/de-legitimisation of access to education and, by extension, to employment opportunities. Consequently, females were more likely to be deprived of or receive limited schooling, influenced by the gendered perceptions of the relevance and value of education to their lives. The next few paragraphs look at the access females had to primary and secondary education which took place as a result of community interactions, negotiation and collusion.

ZMI, who attended the Tunapuna CM School, also reflects on the reason why there was this reluctance to send female children to school: "My eldest sister did not go to school. She was 18, already married when I born. The philosophy in those days was that if yuh educate girls dey would get too sensible and do wrong things."² Shaheeda Hosein also recounts a similar experience of rural women who "came of age" in the 1920s and 1930s in Trinidad. So, as a woman in Tacarigua recounts in the following:

Kassim, Halima. 2012. Words and Work: Education and Work Among Indo-Muslim Women in Trinidad: 1930–1960. *CRGS*, no. 6, ed. Gabrielle Hosein and Lisa Outar, pp. 1-16.

I never go to school. Those days they didn't use to send we... They send the boys... they say they wouldn't send the girl children, only the boy children... Indian people didn't like to send they daughter to school. Some people say if you send you daughter to school they will meet boys and they going to write letter... It have a story about Saranga and Tharabhij – a king's daughter and a king's son, and two of them go to school. So they write letter (to each other). And the teacher send and tell the fathers, the two kings, "You children done learn" (Hosein 2004).

SAB, who had no formal secular education and limited religious education, lived in St. James (formerly Peru Village). As a married woman in the 1920s and 1930s with seven children, she was influenced and encouraged to send her six daughters to school by an Afro-Trinidadian neighbour.³ This is an example of one of the acculturative processes at work in colonial Trinidad, where there was a confluence of social determinants of the minority and majority population. As a result of this influence, her children were the recipients of a formal secular education attaining a fourth or fifth standard education at the Mucurapo R.C. School as well as an Islamic education after school.⁴ Utilising monies she acquired from vending, SAB sent her children to school. While SAB's daughters' education was terminated at the primary level, her son received a secondary level education at the Osborne High School, Port of Spain. "It was acceptable for my brother to be educated so he could get a proper job with de government," said SAB's daughter RAR.⁵ This was linked to the overarching gender binary classification of provider-protector/producer-nurturer. So, while the girls got married, SAB's son after completing secondary school worked as a clerk in the Red House, then sought employment at the El Socorro TIA School and began acquiring the symbols (car) associated with masculinity and status in society before migrating to the United Kingdom in 1958. The urging by an Afro-Trinidadian that resulted in an Indo-Muslim woman sending her daughters to school was not unique to an urban area alone. JMA of Mausica, whose father was a coal seller, said that her mother was encouraged to send her and her two brothers to school by an Afro-Trinidadian neighbour, Daphne Springer, who was an unmarried teacher at the Arima Government School.⁶ The result of these community interactions granted those who benefited from them the opportunity to think, imagine and aspire to a life beyond that which they knew even if their agency and capacity to act and transform was constrained by the parameters of their lives and religious-cultural identity.

AB's mother, HB, was educated in Islam and several languages (Urdu, Farsi, Arabic and English) in her childhood home in Curepe by a family member, just as her mother had been before her.⁷ HB's experience made her receptive to the idea of formal education for her daughters though her husband was not so enthralled with the idea. As such, HB sent her children to the Arima Government School. AB, age 13 or 14, was in Standard VII when her brother was at the Arima High School. The primary school hosted a prize-giving function and AB received several prizes for her academic performance, thereby gaining the attention of an official from the Arima High School. The secondary school official approached AB's parents. He knew AB's brother was attending the Arima High School and so, heartened by that, urged her parents to continue their daughter's secular education by offering them financial inducements — a reduction in school fees. AB,

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although present at the meeting and excited about the idea of attending secondary school, could not volunteer an opinion. She recalls her mother's difficulty in rendering a decision:

My mother's initial reaction was not to send me. She saw no need to educate her daughters to secondary level. They would not go to work. They would stay at home and learn about taking care of the house. Girls of my mother's generation did not work. They became housewives, supporting their husbands. Boys had to be educated at secondary school so [as] to be employable. My younger brother went to CIC [St. Mary's College] as Arima High School did not offer Cambridge Advanced Levels. My mother wanted her younger son to be a "professional"...My mother was concerned about sending me to a mixed school. Such intermixing was not acceptable. My mother, finally, decided to send me. Education for boys and girls was in keeping with the spirit of Islam. Also, my brother was there to keep an eye on me. My father's family did not like it though. They said so, over and over. But, my father accepted it. He trusted my mother's judgment. My father would give my mother his household salary and she would do the household budget.⁸

The question arises, therefore, whose honour was being protected in this alliance of gender and generation in accessing higher education? The gender dilemma was clear — marriage and motherhood was the destiny for girls, not education which was seen as a “means of self-expression and as a site of resistance”. Clearly, there was active support for a distinctly gendered, nuanced way of upbringing girls and boys in that household. Eventually, AB graduated from high school and was employed initially at Arima High School before marrying and retreating to the private sphere. This shows subtle shifts that were occurring within the dominant gendered culture through external forces and the result of individual agency. She eventually attended The University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine campus, in 1962 at the same time her daughter attended. After graduating from UWI she was employed as the Principal of the Haji Rukhnudeen Girls High School in Tunapuna until the death of her husband in 1984.

State-recognised institutions came in for more support, at times, than private educational institutions. This may be linked to the heightened consciousness of the State as part of the continuum of the modernity processes in which State validation and legitimisation of the community is imperative in the process towards accommodation and citizenship. Certainly, this was so among the well-to-do. HMM, who turned five in 1945, was sent to the San Juan CM School, but when the TIA Islamia Private School was given state recognition in 1949, her parents withdrew her from the CM School and placed her at the TIA Islamia School.⁹

Historical writings tend to focus on the irregular attendance of Indian children at school, attributing such to the need by parents for their children's productive labour in the fields or the household. For some parents, their child's reproductive and productive labour was an economic necessity. Responsibilities and obligations were the cornerstones of family life. Mutual supports and responsibilities affecting these larger consanguine groups are

not just considered desirable, but they are made legally incumbent on members of the society by Islamic law. The minimal secular and religious education acquired provided the means for women and men to secure a livelihood and some measure of economic security and supported the continuity of their religious and cultural systems.

The interview with MS also emphasized the influences which led boys also to do what was expected of them and assist with taking care of the family, thereby fulfilling universal gendered norms. He was enrolled at the Barataria E.C. School and irregularly attended school until Standard III, as he had to assist in the household. From age nine, he would assist his father with sewing. MS was 11 when his father died. His mother had never engaged in productive work and was worried about how they would survive. MS had seven younger siblings. MS recalls the conversation he had with his mother following his father's burial:

Ma, doh worry. I would help. I would sew the clothes.

But, we dohn't have a pattern. We ain't know how to cut the material for pants and shirts.

Ma, we have a pattern. I know how to cut the material. I watch Pa do it plenty times.

Son, but what about school? I want yuh to go to school an learn.

Ma, dohn't worry about school. I have to help. Sewing would do that.¹⁰

MS said his mother insisted education was important and that he must finish primary school:

Finally, we agree. I would sew in the morning and go to school after lunch. The best of two worlds. I knew we had to find a means to survive and this was the best. My father had a contract with people like K.S. Abraham, Nabbie's, Habib's and Fakoory's in Port of Spain. We continued to sew for them. Once they were getting the clothes, good quality, good fit and customers did not complain, they were happy for us to continue sewing. We also had private customers. While I was at school, Ma would take the bus or train to Port of Spain and deliver them [the clothes] to the stores.¹¹

Until MS turned 15, on the verge of entering Standard V and required to leave because he was "too old for primary school", he continued to sew in the morning and attend school after lunch. When he restarted school after his father's death, it was June and exams were to be held in August. "I sat the exams and came 17th out of a class of 35. I did well in Spelling, Reading and History, but did badly in Maths. The teacher congratulated me for working hard. I had only begun to attend classes regularly in June."¹² MS further recalls:

I really liked school. I wanted to go on to secondary school. All my friends were going to secondary school. I could not go. I had to work. I had my family to look after. They depended on me. I thought to myself that my friends would go on, after secondary school, and get good jobs. I never told my mother how I felt. I thought and thought about it. Finally, I

*decided that if I can't go to secondary school and I have to be a tailor, I would become the best tailor that I can be. I also decided that if I can't go to school I would continue to improve myself. I listened to the BBC news everyday on radio and read the newspapers whenever I get, old or current.*¹³

A few years of primary education provided the groundwork for individuals to become self-educated through reading. MS also continued to be actively involved in the Muslim community, eventually attaining the post of Imam at the Bamboo *masjid* (mosque).

MNR attended San Fernando CM School (now New Grant Memorial) and Naparima Girls' College.¹⁴ She, too, participated in the enforced dual education system, attending *maktab* until she completed primary school. For many Muslim children, religious education coexisted with secular education. It not only affirms Muslim identity and ensures the survival of the faith, but may also be seen as diluting any potential risk that may be associated with secular schooling. Nevertheless, the *maktab* which offered instruction on the tenets of the faith, offering of prayers, and reading of the *Quran* by learned men can be viewed as a site of empowerment as it provides, in the words of Aihwa Ong (2006), "alternative ethical norms of humanity".

While primary education had become the norm by the 1940s, secondary education was still regarded not only as a luxury but as the domain of males, by some. Yet, there were some exceptions. HMM sat the College Exhibition at the TIA Islamia School, circa 1952. She recalls the following:

*Only three students of the entire school were chosen for secondary school. In those days there was an entrance exam to St. Joseph's Convent, Bishops Anstey and St. Augustine Girls'. It cost \$16.00 or so a year to attend these schools. I wrote the exams for the St. Augustine Girls', but I did not pass. The Principal, Mr. [Nabab] Ali spoke to my mother and encouraged her to send me to secondary school, saying it is an investment. My mother was a widow, by now. She told Mr. Ali that she would see what she could do. I eventually went to the Progressive Educational Institute here in Baratania.*¹⁵

Again, we see the influence of external force and individual agency coalescing to provide opportunity for HMM to acquire a secondary education.

The imposition of gendered norms varied according to the socio-economic dynamics within a family. MKS attended the San Fernando E.C. School before entering Naparima Girls' High School. Tragedy struck the family when MKS was in her freshman year at high school; her mother was physically incapacitated. An aunt suggested that she quit schooling to help in the household.¹⁶ Fortunately, MKS' family (her father was a tailor) was able to hire a domestic servant which enabled MKS to complete secondary schooling followed by a commercial course. The story for SMS, another interviewee, was different. SMS went to the San Fernando CM School before attending Naparima Girls' High School. While at high school, SMS' attendance was irregular due to house chores and

having to help her mother look after her younger siblings. After completing third form, SMS left school to do a secretarial course, but never sought employment. Instead, she stayed at home and assisted her mother. SMS recalls her mother's family, particularly her paternal aunt's reaction to her attending secondary school:

They fussed about it a lot. They would drop remarks for my mother. They would say things like "with all that education she have she go still have to cook, clean an look after husban an children when she marry"; "yuh wastin time educatin she, she still hav to be wife"; "why yuh doh marry she? if she get too ole or educated no man go marry she". They wanted my mother to hear their opinions so they would make these remarks whenever she was present...No, my father was never around when they made these remarks.¹⁷

When SMS' mother, JK, got married at 16, she was illiterate. She could not sign her name. It was JK's husband who taught her to sign her name and the rudiments of the 3R's.¹⁸ Consequently, it was not surprising that JK's family was unsupportive and displeased that SMS was acquiring an education. Although she quit high school, SMS continued her secular learning by resorting to subterfuge to improve her knowledge. Her eldest brother had completed his secondary education and was already working. He would loan her his schoolbooks:

I use to wrap them up in old newspapers and hide outside under a tree and read them. I was afraid of being caught by my mother's family. They would laugh at me and make hurtful remarks. They would tell me that "I feel I better than them because I properly educated". My father's family did not say anything.¹⁹

Her father's family did not object to SMS' schooling; they were part of the petty bourgeoisie and Trinidad-born Indians and as such, had gradually acculturated to the norms and values of society. JK's parents were India-born and came to Trinidad as indentured labourers and were peasant farmers. Adherence to cultural identity tended to be stronger among the first generation of immigrants.

In 1946, the literacy rate among the Indians 10 years and over was almost equal to that of the illiteracy rate. In simple terms, this meant that 49.5 per cent (65,558) of the total Indian population of 132,363 was literate (Statistical Digest 1935-1955).²⁰ According to the 1960 census, in the total population there were approximately twice as many women 15 years and over who had received no education: 1.9 females: 1 male (Rubin and Zavalloni 1969, 207). Participation by East Indians in denominational schools has been widely discussed as well as the underlying reasons for such preference over government schools by Shameen Ali (1993), Bridget Brereton (1981), Brinsley Samaroo (1988, 1984), Elizabeth Seesaran (1994), among others. Secondary education continued to remain confined to small numbers up to the 1940s or so, drawing children from the ranks of the socially and economically mobile families. There was the overarching perception of educational attainment as a structural requirement for mobility and, as such, the cost benefit of educational participation increased. There was no exploration of higher

education aspirations in the conduct of this study. Rubin and Zavalloni note in their 1969 study that more students at the government and government-assisted schools expected to attend university. The percentage aspiring to attend university was highest among Indians regardless of type of school attended (Rubin and Zavalloni 1969, 69). The Indian students came from the Hindu, Muslim and Christian denominations; however, on the basis of the survey data, the authors note that the percentage of both sexes aspiring to enter university was higher among Hindu and Muslim students than among the Christian Indian students. Moreover, the Muslim-Hindu group ranked well above the Christian in terms of “striving orientation” and had higher aspirations and expectations concerning their future than did Christian Indian students (Rubin and Ravalloni 71-72).

Class and economic circumstances contributed to determining educational trends. Primary education moved from being non-acceptable for females to being almost commonplace by the 1960s as a result of social mobility, community interactions, negotiation and collusion. The narratives reaffirmed that the Muslim community was not only heterogeneous but subscribed to universal notions on social mobility and conventional yet nuanced notions of gender roles. Judging from the narratives, females were clearly not passive recipients of schooling but played a role in constructing notions of gendered identity. The period, 1930 to 1960, was therefore marked by ambivalence in which external forces and individual agency coalesced to influence notions of identity and patterns of mobility. In this regard, there needs to be further evaluation of the material circumstances of the lives of Indo-Muslim females from the 1930s onwards and framed in the context of wider social issues such as the labour unrests of the 1930s and the shifts from a post-colonial to an independent society.

Despite all of that, it must be understood that the Muslim identity in the context of a Western-Christian society still retained its own characteristics and complexities; they would add another layer, adopt norms and values and develop a certain bonding with their new society but not at the expense of their Islamic faith and Muslim identity. Hence, the reference to the dual education system made earlier. This also presents a new area for research: Muslim identity in the contemporary Caribbean in the context of global Islamophobia and contestation of identities.

Shekels and work

In the previous section, access to primary and secondary education at the micro level was attained in circumstances of negotiation and collusion, in which there was a growing recognition of the universalistic-achievement values. Education readily alters the perceptions of employment and provides opportunities for same. Work is often seen as a cost incurred by those who want to consume the goods thus made available to them. The *Qur'an* and the *Hadith* see work as fundamental to earning sustenance. Hence, work is regarded not only as a right but a duty and an obligation.

The majority of the Indian population was settled in villages, providing seasonal labour to the neighbouring estates, and they remained rural residents until the mid-twentieth century. In fact, the population census of 1946 showed that most Indians resided in the counties of Victoria and Caroni. By 1945, the centenary anniversary of the Indians' presence, it was noted that “many other Indians have from time to time taken up

professional studies abroad and today ... are well represented in the legal, medical, teaching and other professions” (Kirpalani et al. 1945). In fact, many of them in the words of the protagonist in Mohan’s novel were meeting Brahmins (Westerners) as equals on their, the Westerners’ turf. Nevertheless, many Indians remained employed in the agricultural sector. Some were small shopkeepers, moneylenders, tailors, shopkeepers, coal sellers, and coconut vendors. Others sought employment in the semi-urban and urban areas as scavengers, porters, etc. By the 1950s, the Indian community displayed a marked population growth, reconstitution of family life, shift towards urbanisation, development of a peasantry and growth of a small professional class. It may be posited that as the economic power among the population increased, education was perceived as a more valuable commodity by the urban, merchant, Christian Indian sub-group.

For some parents cognisant of the opportunities, education opened up the future for their sons in terms of civil or teaching services or as professionals. It meant acceptance by the wider society. Their gaining these jobs would signal acceptance by the society, improve the family’s status and their social and economic opportunities. Women, regardless of socio-economic or educational background, always worked in the private and/or public domain, combining their role as wife and mother and as worker and, hence, asserting their adult identity. As family life became more fully established, women worked to supplement the family’s income. Eventually, jobs broadened to include employment in the teaching and civil service and, later on, in the professions.

Women worked to supplement the family’s income within the confines of the home, another manifestation of *pardah*. This particular manifestation may be seen as an attempt to restrict women’s mobility to within the family, further creating differentiated spheres of activity. It may also be a signal that the family was moving into the middle class and concerned with respectability. The women living in the 1930s had little or no formal education but used their domestic skills to supplement the family income and improve the quality of life and opportunities for the family. AB’s mother was forced to supplement the family’s income as her husband’s salary was too small to meet all the needs and wants of her family including the education of the children. To this end, HB began baking breads and cakes which she sold to a parlour in Arima.²¹ This enterprising activity soon became a family affair; the daughters would help their mother with the preparation of the goodies while the sons would do the delivery — again the sexual division of labour defined by spatial interactions.

Females also used their domestic role to make a living. Thus, work reaffirmed the responsibility of females as homemakers. Sewing to supplement the family’s income was a little more common. This was certainly the case with HAJ’s mother, MJ, who taught people to sew and do embroidering. She would occasionally sew for people of the Warrenville district.²² SMS’s mother would sew Western clothing for people in the San Fernando district.²³

When ZK and her husband separated, circa 1950, she was left with eight children ranging from twelve to two, without financial support from her husband.²⁴ To survive, she started to work as a domestic from home, taking in ironing and washing from the neighbours.

This work allowed her to remain at home and care for the children. When the oldest child turned 14, ZK left her in charge and began working as a domestic for people around Port of Spain.

Commitment to ensuring that the family's business was successful constituted part of familial loyalty and was far more important than completing primary school. It also reaffirmed the pre-eminence of the family and placed the burden of its economic security on the elder child. ZM who turned 12 in 1946 was removed from the Barataria E.C. School by her mother because her mother needed help at home with the younger children. Sibling care giving was not unusual then, nor is it in today's economic climate resulting from migration or economic dislocation. Additionally, ZM was being taught to sew. Her brother had opened a garment factory in 1946 and within a few months she was employed there:

My brother, the one with the garment factory, wanted me to go to secondary school, but my mother did not think it was right. She wanted me to help at home and help my brother in the factory. My mother felt it was important for her daughters to sew and be good housewives.²⁵

In 1946, HAJ's father and her uncle established a garment factory. With some similarity to ZM, HAJ, 12, was removed from the Warrenville CM School. Unlike ZM, she was sent to work at the factory. At the factory, she was taught the process of sewing a garment. After HAJ's marriage in 1953, arranged by her mother, she continued to work at the factory. "I contributed to the household in monetary terms equally with my husband. He never demanded that I contributed, but I did. That is the way it was."²⁶ Islamic tenets speak to women's earning capacity and indicate that a wife's income is hers to dispose of as she wishes. HAJ's actions demonstrate sex/gender role configurations and perceptions regarding complementary roles.

In an approximation of ZM's and HAJ's situation, AB's youngest sister did not follow the family's tradition and become a teacher. She gained employment at Kirpalani's, Port of Spain. HB, although wanting her children to work either in the teaching or civil service, did not object as Kirpalani's wife was her first cousin.²⁷ At the Port of Spain store, Murli Kirpalani was often there, so he could act as protector of his young cousin's virtue.

Young females who had no experience working were forced to work when they got married. JMA had absolutely no experience of agricultural work, although her family had a "kitchen garden and a few animals at home".²⁸

After her marriage in 1938, when she moved from Mausica to Caroni, JMA went to work at the Caroni Sugar Estate cutting paragrass the next day:

I know nothing about this. I watch what the other women an dem doin, but ah stil not sure. Ah still had to do de work. I get plenty cut from de blade and holding de handle. Plenty blister. When I get home in the evening, meh hands bleedin an

*plenty painin. Ah had to go to work de next day, still. Yuh couldn't stay home. I learn. It took ah time but ah learn to cut the grass widout getin cut.*²⁹

During harvest time JMA would load cane:

*I use to reach the estate around 3:30 in the mornin. Some women use to be there already. It was real dark. We would light flambeau. It was hard work. There were snakes an all kinda insects. You finish loadin for day around 5. I get paid fifty cents for loadin a ton of cane. Sometime we would plough the land for rice, too.*³⁰

Soon she and her husband left Caroni Estate and began renting land from Caroni. JMA and her husband had to do everything — loading, furrowing, weeding, harvesting and cleaning the blight.³¹ Her parents would seldom visit and she, herself, rarely visited them.

*Life was hard. Ah was working long hours so I never had time. I never say anythin to meh father. But he knew. He never like it, but wha could he do? I was livin wid me husband.*³²

Maternity leave was not a feature of life in the early twentieth century. Pregnant women continued to work until the very last days of the final trimester. As a woman in Tacarigua coming of age in the 1920s and 1930s noted “you have to climb up dey [ladder to the truck] with that four bundle or five bundle of cane... I do that until I was four months pregnant. When the belly get too big, well then they use to give me bucket, to give water to the others” (Hosein 2004). It was not unusual for the women to give birth and return to the fields very soon thereafter. Maternity and motherhood were luxuries the working classes could ill afford.

Attitudes of immigrants' descendants change over time. The need to improve one's social, economic and political status effected changes in the lives and attitudes of the immigrants' descendants. Their cultural traditions became diluted over generations and as they added layers of Western-Christian norms and practices to the Muslim identity.

MKS was married two years after leaving Naparima Girls' High School. Initially, her husband did not want her to work. In 1953, when the Carapichaima ASJA Primary school was opened, her husband agreed to her working. By this time, MKS had three children. Furthermore, her sister-in-law's family (her husband's sister) lived near the Carapichaima school. No doubt, this was the deciding factor in MKS being able to work. After teaching for more than a year at the Carapichaima school, MKS was transferred to the Princes Town ASJA Primary School in 1955:

*Teaching at the Princes Town ASJA School was difficult. The journey from home to school was long. You had to do this twice a day. I still had to look after the house, husband and the children. It was hustling and tiring.*³³

After teaching at the Princes Town school for a term, MKS applied for a transfer which was granted when the San Fernando ASJA Primary School was opened in 1956. MKS

was only able to work within an Islamic environment after seeking agreement from her husband.

Following her marriage, HMM did not work. She became a full-time housewife and in 1960, two years after she married, she had her first child. Shortly afterwards, they left for England so that her husband could study law. While there, she had three more children. It was also the first time she went out to work, leaving her husband free to pursue his studies full time.

I went out to work to help out with domestic expenses. I worked at the White Lilies Department store. I had a part-time job sewing toys [soft/stuffed] toys for a factory. The children were at the nursery.³⁴

In 1964, HMM's husband completed his degree and decided to return home with his family. Upon her return, HMM left the public sphere and retreated to the private domain. Her husband stopped her from working "believing it was his duty to look after the family".³⁵ HMM, having left the ranks of paid employment lost her independent existence, and therefore became an object, once again. She resumed the role and function of full-time wife and mother. Her ability to work and earn had served its purpose, to improve the status of her husband and through him hers and that of her children.

These narratives highlight that women moved from working in the informal to the formal sector but that move was contingent upon family tradition, socio-economic circumstances, class, geography (though this paper does not fully explore the rural/urban significance) and the length of time in which a family was resident in the island.

Conclusion

The narratives which provide a thoughtful sense of individual self also allowed for reaffirmation of the existing literature on accommodation and negotiation within the society by migrant groups. However, the voices of Muslim females are interesting and valuable in the context of the broader narrative of an Indian community in Trinidad that shows nuanced and subtle differences in how their Muslim identity and Islamic faith may have influenced choices. The narratives further demonstrated how females fit their lives into and around the pervasiveness of gendered norms and family values and circumstances and gave some insight into the personal struggles of growing in the dual space of Muslim and Western-Christian.

Agency was both empowering and reflective of structural factors. Women (mothers) were the principal instigators and motivators in their children's education. Educational participation was attained in circumstances of negotiation and collusion. This should be seen as part of the nurturing process. It was a conscious recognition of the worth of education and the attempt by the mothers to ensure a better reality for their daughters. The role of female agency was aided by access to financial resources. Sexual division of labour, which was founded on complementary interdependence, reasserted itself in the labour market participation. The generation of young Muslim men and women, usually third and beyond, who accessed secondary and some level of post-secondary education

were of the emerging middle and upper classes that were gradually adding layers of the norms and values of the Western-Christian society to their Muslim identity.

The level of coincidence between the majority and minority group in settlements undoubtedly facilitated, maybe even accelerated, the diffusion of universalistic-achievement values. Class, education, ethnicity and gender had an impact on the development and influenced the progress of Indo-Muslims, as they attempted to carve out their own “space” as a community separately but also as part of the larger society.

¹ There was no breakdown of the Muslim population according to age in the 1946 Census of Trinidad and Tobago.

² ZMI, personal interview, 28 March 1996.

³ RAR, personal interview, daughter of SAB, 22 March 1996.

⁴ In 1936, the Mucurapo R.C. and the Mucurapo R.C. (Indian) were amalgamated and regrouped as the Mucurapo Girls’ R.C. and the Mucurapo Boys’ R.C. School (Administrative Report of the Director of Education, Council Paper No. 22 of 1936). Consequently, SAB’s first two daughters born 1919 and 1921 would have attended the Mucurapo R.C., whereas her other daughters, born between 1923 and 1932, were finishing or starting their education at Mucurapo Girls’ R.C. School.

⁵ RAR, personal interview, daughter of SAB, 22 March 1996.

⁶ JMA, personal interview, 26 March 1998.

⁷ AB, personal interview, 21 March 1996.

⁸ AB.

⁹ HMM, personal interview, 20 June 1996. The TIA Islamia Private School charged a fee of \$3.00 per term and together with donations received, the school was able to maintain itself, though it had a mass influx of students from San Juan and its environs that led to overcrowding at the school.⁹ (HMM and Mohammed Rafeeq, secretary of the TIA Board, personal interview, 2 April 1996.)

¹⁰ MKS, personal interview, 19 February 1998.

¹¹ MKS, personal interview.

¹² MKS, personal interview.

¹³ MKS, personal interview.

¹⁴ MNR, personal interview, 28 November 1997.

¹⁵ HMM.

¹⁶ MKS, personal interview, 25 October 1996.

¹⁷ SMS, personal interview, nee Muradali. 19 February 1998.

¹⁸ SMS’ maternal grandparents were from India. It is, therefore, not unusual that education for the first generation was not emphasised. Her uncles though were given a primary school education. My paternal grandmother, Katiban Juman, was also illiterate. She could not sign her name. Her husband, Abdool Kassim, taught her only to sign her name.

¹⁹ SMS.

²¹ AB, personal interview, 21 March 1996. In fact, in the decades of the 1940s and 1950s, my maternal grandmother who lived in St. James would also make use of a similar service provided in the area by her Afro-descendant neighbours. The unbaked goodies would be taken to vendors by the sons of the household and collected at a pre-arranged time from the neighbours. This particular baking business was a bit unusual, but was nevertheless influenced by HB’s family who rented oven space in their large brick oven to neighbours in the Curepe-St. Joseph area. Commercial bakeries were not as widespread in those

days. Baking of cakes and breads was usually a family activity. Generally, cakes and breads sold in parlours were haram as they used lard in the ingredients. Although lard was less expensive, AB also indicated her mother used butter because it was halal. The cost increased slightly, but the taste was good. Lard can be obtained from any part of the pig as long as there is a high concentration of fatty tissue and, of course, the pig is unlawful (haram) in Islam.

²² HAJ, personal interview, businesswoman, 11 December 1996. Her mother, Mehiron, was born in 1914.

²³ SMS, personal interview, 19 February 1998.

²⁴ ZK, personal interview, 31 July 1996. ZK and her husband eventually divorced. While divorce was seen to bring shame and dishonor to the girls' family, separation and divorce afforded her the opportunity to define life for herself and her children within the parameters of the existing religious and cultural systems.

²⁵ ZM, personal interview, 23 April 1997.

²⁶ HAJ, personal interview, 11 December 1996.

²⁷ AB, personal interview, 21 March 1996.

²⁸ JMA, personal interview, 26 March 1998.

²⁹ JMA.

³⁰ JMA.

³¹ Within two years they began purchasing land from Caroni. The first was two acres and cost \$5.00 an acre.

³² JMA.

³³ MKS, personal interview, 25 October 1996.

³⁴ HMM, personal interview, 20 June 1996.

³⁵ HMM, personal interview.

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