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### Re-Examining Indian Arrival Day

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The annual observance of Indian Arrival Day needs to be re-examined by our society. Every year, there is mention of the arrival of the first batch of immigrants from the Asian continent to Trinidad. The Fatel Rozack departed the Calcutta harbour, in India, on 16th February 1845 with 231 Indians. The correct name of this ship is Fath Al Razak (Victory of Allah the Provider) however, it is commonly referred to as the "Fatel Rozack". After 103 days on the seas, the ship arrived in Trinidad on 30th May 1845.

We need to realise that the entire Indo-Trinidadian population did not 'arrive' on that historic trip in 1845. During 1845-1917, scores of ships transported thousands of Indians from India to the Caribbean. Among the ships which docked at Trinidad were: Alwrick Castle, Allanshaw, Grecian, Brenda, Avoca, Clyde, Mutla, Chenab, Rhone, Hereford, Jarawar and Wiltshire. These ships, which were mostly British, visited Trinidad on more than one occasion. Thus, after 1845, the overwhelming majority of ancestors of Indians in Trinidad 'arrived' on ships other than the Rozack and at different times. Other British colonies as Jamaica, British Guiana, Grenada and St. Lucia also received Indians from these ships. Interestingly, the 'arrival' of Indians in Trinidad was not a permanent status. Hundreds returned to Trinidad after completing their term of indentureship. During 1904-1908, between 670 to 827 persons returned to India.

A common misconception is that Indians transported to Trinidad originated from the same provinces in India and thus possessed a similar background. Nothing could be further from the truth. Differences in caste, religion (Hindus and Muslims), sects, age and gender added to the milieu which was created in the new host society. The occupations and levels of adaptation and assimilation also varied among the indentured immigrants. Furthermore, during the early decades of indentureship, not all the Indians in Trinidad originated from India. Some came from neighbouring colonies of Grenada, British Guiana and Martinique. Some Indians after serving their contracts in other places as South Africa, were re-indentured to the Caribbean. Indians worked on various sugar estates. Among these estates were Waterloo, Woodford Lodge, Picton, Union Hall, Bronte, Esperanza, Caroni and Canaan. Another fallacy which should be removed is that all Indians worked on the sugar plantations. A significant percentage of Indians were employed on the cocoa, coffee and coconut estates. Also, a considerable number of East Indians sought employment as shop owners, petty traders and as primary school teachers in the Canadian Missionary Indian (CMI) schools (established by the Presbyterian missionaries from Nova Scotia).

A glimpse of the population figures provides an idea of the extent of immigration. In 1914,

the colony's Indian population was 118,822 in a total population of 352,145 persons. By 1927, the East Indian population in Trinidad had risen to 127, 326. The trip across the kala pani was not merely a trade in human cargo but also had a wider, more pronounced environmental impact. Products from India which were included on the ships, heading for the West Indies, were cloves, ginger, saffron, dhall, peppers, mustard, spices, ghee and the now infamous-- marijuana. Our landscape provides visible evidence of the items brought by the indentured labourers. Fruits, originally from India, such as mangoes, guava, tamarind, ochro and seime thrived in the tropical conditions of the Caribbean. Third and fourth generation East Indians need to seriously ask themselves -what does Indian Arrival Day mean to me in a society as diverse as Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean? Does it mean voting for a political party, ethnic wear or listening to a particular radio station ? Obviously, attending a cultural programme and eating particular foods are no longer hallmarks of identifying Indians in the society. Today, many young Indians are unaware of the personal and financial sacrifices of the early immigrants to ensure a better future for their offspring.

Today, Indians should be acutely aware of the prejudiced individuals (newspaper columnists, religious leaders, politicians and cultural artistes) who are intent on dividing the society and turning back the hands of progress. These persons lusting after power and publicity possess myopic agendas of dividing the society, promoting isolation and racial antagonism. It is fortunate and a blessing that the majority of our population have chosen to deliberately ignore the socio-political rantings, pseudo-doctrines and frequent distortion of facts which are paraded by these individuals. Indeed, it is the independent, rational and logical thinking population which have ensured the peaceful co-existence, assimilation and interaction of individuals in our country.