Small Man Big Dreams

The Story of Boloji

Introduction

In 2005 I was diagnosed with a brain tumour. I taught that it was the end of my life on earth. Members of my family felt angry and hurt that an individual like me who has dedicated years of my life in the service of Swami Ganapathi Satchidananda[[1]](#footnote-1) of Mysore, India, should have to experience such trials.

My children began questioning the integrity of Swami Ganapathi. They were unhappy about his perceived indifference to my suffering. Their faith in Swamiji was now being questioned. They felt that if Swamiji was sincere and caring that he would intervene on their father’s behalf and save him from death.

I underwent the operations. There was no guarantee from my surgeons that I would survive. The risk of death was very high. I understood that prayer was the only friend at this critical hour. Thankfully, the operation was a success.

I did not hear from Swamiji but I felt his presence all along. I am certain that he had intervened to ensure that the operation was successful and that I recovered speedily.

My wife and children were there at my side giving me all the support they could. My recovery was now viewed as a miracle. My wife and children felt convinced that Swamiji intervened and saved me from death.

Recovery from this near death experience has renewed my faith in Swamiji. This experience dawned upon me the reality that life is fickle and that only faith in Bhagavan can help us in the end.

I believe that it would be a great opportunity for me to share my life experience which I hope others would read and find joy and fulfilment. This is my story...

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Chapter One

Early Life

Mohini Sirju

I am popularly known as Boloji but while growing up I was called Sona[[2]](#footnote-2). My father called me Sona all his life. My registered name at birth is Ramkissoon Ramnarine. Today, I hardly hear any one calling me Ramkissoon or Ramnarine or Ramkissoon Ramnarine. Even my Guru, Swami Ganapathi Satchidananda, calls me Boloji. My boss, supervisors and colleagues at Forestry also called me Boloji.

Born on August 05, 1950 at Sanford Street East, California in central Trinidad, I was the 7th child in a family of thirteen-five boys and eight girls. I had two elder brothers, Harry and Jai and four elder sisters-Basdai, Samdai, Chanardai and Phulandaye. I could only imagine the excitement and exuberance they would have displayed when I came into the family! My younger siblings were Krishna, Vishnu, Prema, Indra, Prabha and Sita.

My father, Ramnarine Rambarran, was employed as an electrician at the Brechin Castle Sugar Factory owned by Tate & Lyle[[3]](#footnote-3). He was born, grew up and lived his entire life in California. I did not know his parents.

He was an orthodox Hindu doing his pujas at home, participating in religious festivals and offering jal on weekends. He was not a Hindu activist as such. His life was centred on his family- his thirteen children and wife.

My mother was Sunnia Ramnarine. She had two brothers, one a shopkeeper and the other a barber. Their three houses were situated on a compound with no fencing separating them. This allowed a free flow of human traffic between the three houses.

Mohini Sirju, my Nani, played an influential role in my early life. Nani was short, dark and talkative but always constructive. She was always busy doing house work and making preparations for her duties as a naw[[4]](#footnote-4). Most of her time was spent gathering leaves, flowers and other articles for puja. Her services were in great demand in the districts of Couva, California, Phoenix Park, Esperanza, Claxton Bay and other parts of central Trinidad.

I did not know my Nana. I learned that he was a labourer in the sugar-cane estates and that he died three months after I was born. His death created a void in Nani’s life. With her children living apart from her, she adopted me for comfort, solace and companionship. I became the centre of her life. As a babe she would place me inside a box cart and push me to her many religious engagements in the districts. This possibly provided me with the sanskars[[5]](#footnote-5) that later shaped and guided my life.

Nani showered me with love and would make all sacrifices to ensure that I was happy. She would make sugar cake and other sweets for me. Anything I wanted that was affordable to her, she would get it for me. I also remember her as a disciplinarian. When it was evening I would stop all play and clean my body to get ready for the lighting of deeya and evening prayers. When she got up on mornings she would utter her prayers before leaving the bed. She also encouraged me to do the same. This value I kept with me to this day.

A vegetarian all her life Nani expected that I would eat the foods that she prepared. Bhaji, bodi, baigan, tomato were some of her favourite dishes. Saijan bhaji was also prepared. At first I did not like it but later I developed a taste for it. Sada roti and chokha was another favourite meal of my Nani. I did not like the baigan choka but would always enjoy the tomato chokha. Nani also had home-made pepper sauce and mango anchar in mustard oil to enhance the taste buds.

Nani was also the sponsor of annual Bhagavat and Ramayan Yagyas at her home. It was her initiative and she would exercise that leadership role to ensure that all arrangements were in place. I remember her saving pennies under her mattress. While her children, relatives, friends and neighbours would make donations of food stuff and money toward the yagya, she was determined to ensure that she had the finances to meet all her expenses.

Thanks to my Nani, I was familiar with all the pandits at the time in the district of California. They included Mahadeo Pandit[[6]](#footnote-6), Bhajan Pandit, Capildeo Pandit, Ramdath Pandit, Moon Pandit and Siewdath Pandit. Nani, I recalled distinctly, always instructed me to bow at the feet of the pandits. Later, these pandits would bless me and support the many projects I was associated with.

Nani lived beyond a hundred but ailed for the last twenty years before passing away. She suffered from high blood pressure, diabetes and other complications. She was cared for by her son Ramrattan and his wife. My mother would make daily visits to render assistance to her.

My mother and her brothers would come together to continue the yagya that became an integral part of the family. With my Nani sick, the yagya was now held bi-annually. Every member of the family would assist, contributing cash, goods or labour. Many neighbours and friends also contributed to making the yagyas a success. The last yagya was held in 1974. I was at the Mausica Teachers’ College and was successful in getting the Kirtan Mandali of the Mausica Hindu Society to attend the yagya to sing devotional songs.

Chanderbhan Maharaj

My Nani’s brother was Chanderbhan. He was a yogi in the truest sense. He would fast and spend his time in prayer and meditation. The family members and the community at large felt proud that an individual with such religious determination was living amongst them. He was considered a role model for young spiritual aspirants and many of them would join with him in devotion.

Rabindranath Maharaj was the only son of Chandrabhan and Drupatie Lutchmansingh[[7]](#footnote-7). He was a few years older than I. He lived a Hindu life like his father and many of the younger members of the community including I would look up to him for inspiration. At age 14, Rabindranath migrated to India to study at an Ashram. I felt that his determination to leave for India to pursue the path of spirituality was exemplary since no one in the community has done so before. We were all hopeful that he would return and his knowledge and experience would help us all.

I was told that Rabindranath experienced financial difficulties while in India and was rescued by Christian missionaries. Grateful for their kindness, Rabindranath Maharaj converted to Christianity and later wrote a text titled “Death of a Yogi.” Today, Rabindranath Maharaj works with Benny Hinn’s Ministry.

Panchaitee

My mother was always conscious of her Hindu identity. She was an active member of the California Ladies Panchaitee[[8]](#footnote-8). Led by Pandit Mahadeo’s wife, the Ladies Panchaitee held a monthly Full Moon Puja[[9]](#footnote-9). Since there was no mandir in the district, members would volunteer to host the puja at their homes.

Two pandits were attached to the Panchaitee-Pandit Mahadeo and Pandit Rambhajan (a.k.s. Bhajan Pandit). While Pandit Mahadeo was the anchor, Pandit Rambhajan substituted when Pandit Mahadeo had an emergency or another engagement.

I attended all of the Full Moon Pujas with my Nani. My mother and other siblings would also be present. It was one singular activity that held the Hindu community of California together.

Ekadasi Puja was also observed by the Panchaitee. This, however, was not as regular as the Full Moon Puja which was a unifying force in the Hindu community of California.

Pre-school

I remember attending Miss Smith’s Nursery School. It was located on San Ford Street East. I attended the school for two terms. We did not learn to read but we were taught many nursery rhymes. For part of the afternoon we were left to play. I remember playing under a huge breadfruit tree. The flowers of the tree would fall to the ground and we would play with them.

Primary School

My primary school life began at the California Government School. I went there for only one year. As Indo-Trinidadians we never felt welcomed. A few parents protested against having Indian children attending the school.

My father and other parents took the decision to transfer us to the Esperanza Presbyterian School though it was little more than two miles from home. We felt welcomed there. Though it was Christian, it was an Indian school. The majority of children were coming from Indian homes that shared the same cuisine and culture.

We would walk two miles to school, return for lunch, walk back to school and return home on evenings. There were bull carts but they would leave before sunrise. There were many of us from California and the journey on foot was always a happy one. We would break cane and suck and pick mangoes when in season.

I enjoyed school and would stay away only when I was sick. Sometimes there was no one accompanying me and I would walk all the way alone. I was always a bright student. Very early the teachers noticed my ability and made me skip standard two and go directly to standard three. I later skipped standard four to reach standard five.

I became a member of the Trail Rangers, a group of children that was trained to represent the school in concert and drama competitions. My involvement in the Trail Rangers was not planned. I became involved when a teacher trusted into my hands a pair of shak-shak. I had learned to keep timing in the Sandhya group with a pair of jaal so it was not difficult for me to keep rhythm.

I was fascinated by the other students wearing uniform and marching and so I joined them. I did not continue for long. I preferred the musical choir. Ms Mooze, a teacher at the school, was committed to the musical choir. She thought us to sing in soprano. We entered many competitions in the Caroni District and won.

I loved magic and would look forward to magicians coming to our school. The few that came were from abroad. Another feature of primary school life was the end of term concert. Each class would be allowed to perform an item. Sometimes in a play, different classes were given different scenes to perform. I always enjoyed being on stage and never for once did I felt overcome with fear. I remember being told that should stage fright enter you, it would always be best to look at the wall at the back of the audience.

My many appearances on stage helped to build my self-confidence. I always felt that self- confidence was very important for the growth and development of the individual. Much of what I am in my adult life, I owe to my extra-curricular activities at Esperanza Presbyterian.

The hardships I experienced going to school in the 1950s helped to fortify me. Though the challenges were many I persevered. I was always determined to do the best in the given circumstances. My personal philosophy was that all experiences-good or bad-should be channelled to one advantage. I believe that hardships and challenges at an early age are the crucibles that build character.

Dow Village Ramleela

Ramleela[[10]](#footnote-10) at Dow Village, California had started in the 1880s and has continued uninterrupted to this date. It is a ten-day event that starts on a Friday and culminated on the next Sunday. In the 1950s when I was a pupil at the Esperanza Presbyterian School I would look forward to this event. It was the biggest event in the calendar for the people of Dow Village and the neighbouring districts of California, Phoenix Park, Windsor Park, Cottage, Esperanza and Couva.

The leaders of the Ramleela were Rambhajan Pandit, Siewdath Pandit and Ramdath Pandit who were well known in the community. I had known them at pujas and yagyas where they officiated and my Nani served as the naw.

One aspect of Ramleela was the raising of funds. This was done a month before the event. The pandits would lead a delegation from home to home soliciting donations. They would carry a taria with a lit deeya. The villagers would eagerly welcome them and make financial offerings.

The principal of the Esperanza Presbyterian School would make adjustments to the time-table to dismiss school half an hour earlier for pupils to attend the Ramleela. The children always looked forward to going to the Ramleela. There were mainly children at the Ramleela during the week since parents and adults were busy at work. However, on weekends the adults would come out in their numbers.

The cast, though majority Hindus, always attracted non-Hindus. I recall Gandhi, a Muslim, playing the role of a leading character for many years.

There were the vendors selling polourie, kachourie, saheena and other Indian sweets. Most of the time I did not have money but if my Nani was in the audience she would buy delicacies for me.

The Ramleela would begin at 3:00 p.m. and finish before sunset. The pandits held the view that after 6:00 p.m. the demonic forces grew in strength and as such would be difficult to defeat. Even the burning of Ravan, the demonic king, was done before dark. This philosophy dictated the closing of the Ramleela before dark.

I recalled the cast being mainly children. The only adult characters were Ravan, Sugreeva and Hanuman. There were no girls in the cast. The role of Sita was played by a boy. The character Ram was also boy.

Bamboo was used to make the props and frame of the huge effigy of Ravan. Steel was never used. The bamboo frame of the effigy of Ravan was plastered with kite paper. It was huge and imposing, more than twenty feet in height and anchored to the ground by ropes.

The public address system used in the Ramleela had one funnel. It was loud enough for me to hear but I was keen on looking at the characters in their brightly coloured costumes.

One character that I loved was Narad. He would interact with the audience, telling them jokes while at the same time updating them on scenes that were being re-enacted. He was also there to manage the crowd.

A yagya was held in the mandir during the course of the Ramleela. Immediately after the closure of the Ramleela the players and the pandits would hurry to the mandir. There they would bathe and prepare themselves for the yagya which entailed reading of the Ramayan. Again, the pandits that conducted the Ramleela were the ones that read the Ramayan.

The pandits and the cast of characters would also live in the mandir during the re-enactment period. They would not eat any food prepared outside but only what was prepared within the mandir.

Sandhya Group

There was a Sandhya[[11]](#footnote-11) Group in the California community. It was located at San Ford Street East. Some of the members were Ramkay Suratsingh, Balliran Kuarsingh, Pandit Mahadeo’s elder daughters, Drupati and Sumati, and my brother Harry. There were two brothers, Boyie and Nassif Masoon, from Dow Village. Though Muslims they identified with the Sandhya Group. Boyie played the harmonium and Nasif the bulbul. The leader and live wire of the group was Hari Ram[[12]](#footnote-12).

Hari Ram’s parents had died and his aunt took him, his brother and a sister to live with her at San Ford Street East. His aunt was married to Joseph Pulwarty, a senior chemist at Brechin Castle. Under the guardian of his aunt Hari Ram had a primary and secondary school education. Hari Ram was later employed at Brechin Castle Sugar Factory where he worked as a junior chemist.

A close associate of my brother Harry, they spent many hours together in contemplation. They were always engaged in discussions and planning strategies to spread Hinduism in the district. One of their first projects was the formation of a Sandhya Group.

Swami Purnananda[[13]](#footnote-13) was the leader of a mission of five monks from the Bharath Sevashram Sangh, India that visited Trinidad in 1952. They were guests of the Sanatan Dharma Board of Control[[14]](#footnote-14). One of the projects for execution was the training of youths in an ashram at Felicity.

Swami Purnananda and the other monks were invited to Pandit Mahadeo’s temple. The Sandhya group was also invited to perform a Sandhya. After listening to Hari Ram’s chanting of the mantras Swami Purnananda invited him to join the ashram. Hari Ram accepted the offer to train in the ashram along with Harry.

The work of the Sandhya group at San Ford Street East was boosted when Hari Ram graduated with the title Brahmachari Hari Ram[[15]](#footnote-15). The California Sandhya Group was now integrated into the work of the Ashram. There were regular exchanges between the California Sandhya Group and the Ashram at Felicity. Through these exchanges I came to know the other brahmacharis such as Mesho Rohit, Atmaram Maharaj and Bridgelal Basraj[[16]](#footnote-16), all residents of Felicity.

The Naw Jawaan Indian Orchestra was located at Felicity and its leader was Chander Bali, a renowned musician. He was a devotee in the Ashram and would make his orchestra available for cultural performances and fund raising activities. As a boy I felt privileged to be in the presence of Chander Bali.

Chapter Two

Presentation College, Chaguanas

When I wrote the Common Entrance Examination in 1961 there were only thirty-one secondary school places for pupils in County Caroni. These places were in two secondary schools-Presentation College, Chaguanas and Holy Faith Convent, Couva, both Roman Catholic Schools. I won a place in Presentation College, Chaguanas.

This was a huge achievement and my father and mother felt a sense of pride. It was the first time that one of their children would be attending secondary school free. They pledged to make all the sacrifices for their son to succeed.

Presentation College was a boys’ school. Its original name was St Phillips and St James. In 1961 St Phillips and St James was relocated to the present venue and renamed Presentation College. I was in the first batch that included Manohar Ramsaran[[17]](#footnote-17), Surindra Solomon[[18]](#footnote-18) Theo Cuffy[[19]](#footnote-19), Ranjie Nanan, and Doodnath Ramkissoon.

I now had to wear shoes. At primary school I never wore shoes. It was the norm to go about barefooted but going to Presentation College was entering into another social setting where a new behaviour and dress code were demanded. It also meant an increase in expenses and given the large size of my family it meant cutting back on already scarce resources.

My entire family was supported by my father’s small income. My two elder brothers, Harry and Jai, were apprentices at the Brechin Castle Sugar Factory and received stipends. Combined, their incomes did not meet the growing family expenses.

At age 12 I began going around the village with a box cart selling vegetables on evenings. I also sold grapefruits and oranges at Macaulay Park when there were sporting and cultural activities. The profit from this business venture was small but much needed.

There were other students attending Presentation College from California. One of them was Kalil Mohammed. He came from California Government School and started college the same year with me. Another student from California was Krishna Rattan. He was a son of Johnny Rattan. Other students were the two Daisley brothers who were in higher forms.

Going to school at Chaguanas was a challenge. I had to walk two miles from home to the train stop at Brechin Castle Sugar Factory. I would buy a monthly ticket. It was cheap. I would display the ticket to the conductor and take a seat.

The train was used to transport passengers and cargo. There were three classes of passengers-1st Class, 2nd Class and 3rd Class. The first class ticket was the most expensive and the seating accommodation and the cleanliness of the carriages were of a high standard. The more wealthy passengers would travel first class. I never travelled first class because I could not have afforded it.

I travelled third class. Third class travel was for the poor. The carriages were always dirty. The frame of the carriages was steel but the walls and seats were board. The train was always dilapidated and much of the damages were done wilfully by the passengers that depended on it.

It was the habit for passengers-students and adults- to vandalize the train. A common prank was to kick open the wooden doors just before the train reached the iron bridge at Brechin Castle. The door would hit against the iron bridge making a loud crashing noise. I did not approve of such behaviour but there was nothing I could have done. I would sit away from the door so that the guard would not accuse me of engaging in these hostile acts.

On a few occasions my friends would not disembark at Chaguanas. We would continue riding the train until Jerningham. There we would disembark and wait to board the train coming from North travelling to Chaguanas.

Once we rode the train to Jerningham and disembarked. We waited on the train coming from the North. The usual time of arrival had passed and there was no sign of the train. When the train arrived, we were already late for school. We anxiously entered the carriage and sat quietly not uttering a word to each other. We knew that we would have to account to our Principal, Father Murphy. When we finally arrived in school Father Murphy called us to his office and did not hesitate to punish us. From that day I never ventured to ride the train beyond Chaguanas.

I suspected that a large percentage of the pupils enrolling at Presentation College did not win a place on merit but because of high social status, family connection and affiliation with the Catholic Church.

I was encouraged by my teachers to get involved in extra-curricular activities. I decided to join the cadets. I did the initial training and enjoyed it very much. However, when I was told that I had to buy uniform-shirt, pants, boots, cap- I realized that I would have to drop out. There was no way my parents could have afforded that extra cash. I did not bother to inform them.

I never played cricket or football. However, I was asked to train with the rugby club. I was doing well in the training. Although I was small in size compared to the other boys, I was strong and that helped me to do well in the field. Again, my father did not support my participation in the rugby sport and I had to quit.

My teachers were Catholic Fathers. It was later that non-priest teachers began teaching at Presentation College. Some of the teachers were past students who after passing their Advanced Level Examinations were inducted into the teaching staff.

One feature of school during my years at Presentation College was the emphasis on the building of character. My Dean of Discipline was Brother Cyril. His interaction with students was very positive. He always came across as one who cared for the welfare of his charges.

I always had to balance my studies with working with my parents and siblings to improve the family income. With increasing expenses and limited income my parents hit upon the idea of retailing vegetables and ground provisions. The goods were bought wholesale at the Chaguanas Market on Fridays and retailed on Saturdays at the Brechin Castle Market and Dow Village Ramleela Market. Harry,Jai and I would sell at the Brechin Castle Market and my mother and father would be at the Dow Village Market.

There were always some provisions remaining every week. My mother got approval from her brother to construct a shed at the front of his shop which was located at the corner of the Southern Main Road and San Ford Street East. This sale, though slow, brought in some further income but still not enough to meet the growing expenses of the family. Expenses continued to climb as my younger brothers and sisters began enrolling at private commercial schools where tuitions had to be paid.

My mother came up with the idea of opening a roti shop. There was one roti shop but it was about one-half mile away. This roti shop opened when Federation Chemical was commissioned in the late 1960s. The provision shop was expanded and refurbished into a roti shop. Approval was granted by the Public Health Department and the District Medical Officer. It was named Cultex Roti Shop.

My father was supportive of this business initiative. He worked together with my mother and provided all the support that was needed. He was determined to see that the roti shop succeeded. Father would rise from bed at 4 a.m. and grind dhal. This he did dutifully before leaving for work.

By 1965 train service was becoming obsolete. Fewer people were using it for transport. The government took a decision to stop the train. It was replaced with a bus service. The bus service was owned and operated by the Public Transport Service Corporation (PTSC). The management structure that once managed the train was now used to manage PTSC.

I would board the bus at 7:00 a.m. on the Southern Main Road, California. This bus came from Princes Town and its destiny was Port of Spain. The bus would travel along the Southern Main Road making stops for passengers to embark and disembark. In half an hour the bus would arrive in Chaguanas and I would disembark at the round-about in the vicinity of the then Seereeram Gas Station[[20]](#footnote-20). The bus would continue its journey to Port of Spain through the Princess Margret Highway and I would walk down the Chaguanas Main Road to Presentation College.

There were few motor vehicles on the Main Road in Chaguanas. It was a common sight to see animal drawn cart and bicycles. The businesses were located in family homes-a business on the first floor and family residences on the second. A few established businesses I can recalled were Lalla Bookshop, Dulip Singh’s Tailoring, Jubilee Cinema and Charran’s.

School days were very challenging. I did both the Sciences and Arts. I believe I should have specialised. Nevertheless, I enjoyed Geography, Literature and History. In the sciences I enjoyed Physics and Chemistry.

When I wrote the General Certificate of Education (GCE) I passed two subjects. I was accepted by the principal to remain another year. When I wrote the Examination for the second time I passed two more subjects.

There was also no one in the family to guide me. If I had an elder sibling who had been through secondary school and was successful, that would have motivated and inspired me. Nevertheless, I remained determined and focused.

California Hindu Youth Organization

During my years at college the California Hindu Youth Organization was like an oasis that brought peace and solace to my life. I would always look forward to the weekly satsangh and special programmes. This youth organization also anchored me in my dharma, thus helping me to resist the efforts of proselytisers to woo me away from my ancestral heritage.

The California Hindu Youth Organization was born in 1958 and had for its patron Pandit Mahadeo. The youths had much respect for him. Another mentor was Capildeo Maharaj, a brother of Pandit Mahadeo and a teacher at Presentation College, San Fernando. Pandit Bramdeo Maharaj, another brother of Mahadeo Pandit, was also supportive of the activities of the group. He was then the manager of the Central Operation of the Trinidad &Tobago Electricity Commission. The youths would admire Pandit Bramdeo, who, despite holding such a high office, continued to be passionate about Hinduism and the Hindu community.

Members of the youth group included Krishna Arjun, Winston Arjun, Chilli Arjun, Jainarine Bhola Maharaj and Kamla Maharaj (son and daughter respectively of Pandit Mahadeo) , Jai Ramnarine (my brother). I recalled serving as Secretary.

Pandit Mahadeo later built a family mandir which he made available to the public for worship. The Youth Group began hosting Hindu festivals such as Shiv Ratri, Krishen Janamasthami and other religious ceremonies. Hosting our events at Pandit Mahadeo’s Mandir attracted the extended family and relatives of Pandit Mahadeo. I was amazed at their commitment to dharma that made them present without exception!

The Youth Group was allowed the use of two lots of land. This land was in bush and the members came together and cleared it. It became the venue for hosting our annual Divali festival and other activities such as bazaars and fundraising events.

The Youth Group was registered with the Caroni Association of Youth Groups. This provided an opportunity for Hindu youths to meet with both Hindus and non-Hindus. This was important as it helped Hindus to move into the wider social arena. I represented the Youth Group at many youth conferences both at the County and National levels.

California Youth Assembly

The California Youth Assembly was another group that worked to unite the youths of the district. One of the key players in this group was Johnny Rattan. Johnny Rattan was committed to social work and would always encourage youths to get involved in their community.

Through the Youth Assembly youths participated in drama, debating and the Prime Minister Best Village Competition. Many were critical of our participation in Best Village which they labelled “creole culture and PNMism.” Johnny Rattan was able to convince us that participation would contribute to self-development.

A member of Staff at the Brechin Castle Sugar Factory, Johnny Rattan would use his relationship with the white managers to get second hand books from England. These books formed a library at his home. It was an impressive collection. It was the first time I was seeing a library. Johnny Rattan would invite other youths to come to use the library. He did not lend the books. In those days books were a novelty and many youths embraced that opportunity.

CALDRAC

Debating Clubs were popular in Trinidad until the 1960s. In California there was CALDRAC-California Drama and Debating Club. Johnny Rattan was a member of that Club which played a significant role in developing the self-confidence of the youths.

California Sports Club

In San Ford Street East there was another club. It was a Sports Club. The sports were played on the road. Joseph Pulwarthy played a major role in this club. He would put a mike on his car and move around the neighbourhood inviting the public to come and participate in the sports. I recalled that in the beginning the prizes were three marbles for the 1st Prize; two marbles for the 2nd Prize and one marble for the 3rd Prize. Later the prizes provided were trophies, some of which are still treasured and displayed in living rooms.

Chapter Three

World of Work

Equipped with passes in four GCE Subjects, I was now available for the world of work. Krishna Arjoon and I would send out applications for employment. Some of our applications were acknowledged and others were not.

Both Krishna and I decided to travel to Port of Spain to visit the various ministries with the hope of finding jobs. One morning we boarded a bus for Port of Spain. We went to the Public Service Commission and made enquiries about vacancies.

We were invited for an interview. It was the first time I was being subjected to one. Nevertheless, I was confident that I would do well. Both Krishna and I were successful. The requirement for the position of Laboratory Assistant was three Ordinary Level subjects, one being a science subject. We were offered immediate employment at John Donaldson Technical Institute and San Fernando Technical Institute.[[21]](#footnote-21)

On October 23, 1969 I took up employment at San Fernando Technical Institute located at Les Efforts in San Fernando. I travelled by taxi. The fare was 25 cents from California to San Fernando. I took up work at 8 am. My starting salary was $90 per month. I would give my father my salary and he would give me a sum for travelling and other expenses.

I would walk from library corner to Technical Institute. For lunch I ate doubles and drank a juice. The cost of one doubles was six cents. In the evening I would have a rock cake and a juice.

I would work the regular 8 a.m.-3 p.m. classes. This session was paid by the Ministry of Education. The 4 p.m.-6 p.m. classes were paid by the Board of Industrial Training.

At Technical Institute I always felt accepted by the Principal and Staff. The Principal was Vivian Gopaul and the Vice Principal was Youseff Ghanny.

I was determined to have a full certificate. I enrolled at Extra Murals. I would arrange any lab work that was requested and inform the supervising teaching. This arrangement was usually twice per week.

At Technical Institute Craft and Technical courses were taught. The full time student body was drawn from pupils who were successful at the then School Leaving Examination. Many of the students, who did not have the stipulated School leaving Certificate, were recommended by Ministers of Government.

Others were selected because of their skills in footballs. Because of this lack of focus, indiscipline was endemic. Many of the teachers were attributing the indiscipline to the students who came on football scholarships. The failure rate was very high. They did mainly the craft subjects such as Metal Work and Wood Work.

There were pupils from the manufacturing and petroleum industries. They came in the afternoon to do studies in the technical fields. There were also students who came for day classes for two or three days during the week. Most of these part-time students were highly qualified.

Students from the industries invited me to take up employment in their companies. I did not accede because I felt that work in that sector was unstable. I opted to remain with the public sector where I felt a sense of security.

I was very friendly with the pupils. I would help them in their quest for better facilities. I would also assist the pupils in the annual Carnival celebrations and other social events. There was no Divali celebration or other Indian social or cultural activities. There were few Hindu teachers on staff.

I was now working for $212 per month. My father always complained that the money was too small. He wanted me to join the Administrative Staff at Brechin Castle in the Public Relations Department. I was invited for an interview at Sevilla House. The interviewer felt that I was an ideal person for the Public Relations Department. I was not interested and held on to my position as a Laboratory Assistant.

I had my first taste of alcohol at Technical Institute. I was 21 years old when I succumbed to peer-pressure. We did not have much work to do and the Lab became a place for socializing. Regular card playing and cooking of food took up a greater part of our working hours.

The Roti Shop at home generated some additional income which helped to meet the growing family expenses. The family felt more secured financially. My parents were thrifty. They would save regularly. The fruits of their thrift manifested when my father purchased a property at the corner of San Ford Street East and Southern Main Road in 1970.

The property was a dilapidated wooden house that was occupied by tenants. The owner of the property sold the property against the wishes of his family. His family wanted the property to be kept within them. The owner, however, felt that it would be impossible to get the tenants to vacate and reasoned that his best option was to sell the property.

My father purchased the property for $10,000. A down payment was made to the bank and the property was held as security until the loan was repaid. My father bought the property with the hope that I would contribute toward the monthly instalments. My work as a Laboratory Assistant was earning a remuneration of $90 per month. I pledged my full support to my father in this business venture. He had faith in me that I would not disappoint him.

The property had five tenants. I pleaded with then to leave but they would not do so voluntarily. There was one tenant who had a reputation as a “Bad John.” I was scared that he would react in a violent manner. Fortunately, he was the first to leave without a word of protest.

I did not collect rent from the remaining tenants and would threaten to demolish the building with their belongings. I was scared for my life but I was also committed to developing the property. Seeing that I was not making idle threats they finally left.

Basdeo Panday

1971 presented a leadership vacuum in the Indian community. The Democratic Labour Party (DLP), the traditional political vehicle of the Indo-Trinidadian community, was conned into a “no vote campaign” resulting in the DLP not contesting a single seat. The result of the 1971 General Elections was the PNM winning all 36 seats. Bhadase Sagan Maraj, President of the Maha Sabha and President of the All Trinidad Sugar Union, also died that year.

Basdeo Panday[[22]](#footnote-22) was nominated an Opposition Senator in the Parliament of Trinidad and Tobago by Opposition Leader Roy Richardson. Panday had also established a legal practice in San Fernando and had an office.

The National Association of Hindu Youths (NAHY) was born In Panday’s law office. The objective of this organization was to provide social services to the children of sugar–cane workers. I came to learn about this organization and would accompany others to meet and interact with Panday and other members of NAHY.

One of the early projects started by NAHY was a music class in Esperance, San Fernando. I attended several of these classes and saw Panday playing the tabla. Classes were also conducted in the academic areas and volunteer teachers were recruited by Panday from the Naparima Teachers’ College.

Panday discussed with us his intention of reaching out to other parts of the country. We agreed that it would be ideal to start similar works in the district of California. I was determined to work with him because I discovered that he had the ability to inspire and lead people.

The following Sunday Panday arrived at my home. The other activists-Jung and Tenny- from the district were present. We walked along the road and stopped at homes. One of us would ask for the head of the home. We would introduce Panday as “a lawyer.” The people expressed “awe.” Like me, it was a culture shock to experience a lawyer coming to the villages to talk to sugar-cane workers, the majority of them barely literate. For many consecutive Sundays we continued this visit to homes from 8 am until midday. Our walk-about took us to Phoenix Park, Winsor Park, Esperanza, Dow Village and California.

After these walk about we would generally meet at my home for lunch. Panday would always sit and eat. I discovered that he was jovial and had the ability to communicate well with the villagers.

After several weeks a public meeting and Divali celebration was held at Macaulay Park. It was well attended. Panday welcomed the guests and outlined the aims of NAHY. He made an appeal to the people to organize themselves and called upon the youths to become involved in public affairs. I was impressed with his oratory skills. I felt empowered after listening to him. He definitely was one with great leadership skills.

I later learned that Panday had fought the 1966 General Elections on a Workers and Farmers Party (WFP) led by Stephen Maharaj and lost his deposit. The WFP did not win a single seat. Many of the candidates of the WFP were trade unionists and sympathetic with the plight of the working class. Panday subsequently opened a private practice in San Fernando. He became legal advisor to Oilfield Workers’ Trade Union (OWTU) and editor of its newspaper, the Vanguard. He was also legal advisor to the All Trinidad Sugar Estate and Factory Worker Union.

I transferred from Technical Institute to Couva Junior Secondary School in 1972. In that same year I met Lutchmin and we got married. She was from Chase Village, Chaguanas. Our wedding was a small ceremony with only family members, relatives and close friends.

Sai Baba Movement

The Sai Baba Movement in Trinidad was pioneered by Suruj Rambachan[[23]](#footnote-23) , Baliram Maharaj[[24]](#footnote-24) of Arima and Chilo of Marabella The early Satsanghs were held at the residence of Baliram Maharaj in Arima.

While an undergraduate at the St Augustine, Suruj founded the Society for the Propagation of Indian Culture (SPIC). Through this organization Divali was celebrated for the first time at the St Augustine Campus. Initially, the Campus administration refused to grant permission on the ground that lighting of deeyas can result in fires. This did not deter the members of SPIC. Led by Suruj, a delegation from SPIC met with Bhadase Sagan Maraj[[25]](#footnote-25), the President General of the Maha Sabha. Bhadase Sagan Maraj responded by signing an open cheque which was forwarded to the Principal. Seeing Bhadase Sagan Maraj’s signature on the cheque the Principal gave way to the students’ request.

Baliram Maharaj is a businessman from Arima. A proud Hindu, his parents worked closely with Doon Pandit[[26]](#footnote-26) in the 1940s to establish the Gandhi Ashram which pioneered education for children and a breakfast shed to feed the poor. The Gandhi Ashram became the venue for the Arima Hindu School when the Maha Sabha launched its school building programme in 1952.

It was at a Satsangh hosted at the residence of my cousin Scott that I was first introduced to Suruj and Baliram. Both Baliram and Scott were married to two sisters. This introduction blossomed into a relationship that was centred on the promotion of Dharma.

Marabella was the first venue for weekly Sai Satsanghs in south Trinidad. It was conducted on the second floor of Chilo’o Hardware on Southern Main Road, Marabella on Thursdays between 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Devotees from near and far would participate in this Satsangh.

I enjoyed the format of the Sai Baba Satsang. Apart from not being too long–only one and a half-hour- the Satsangh engaged the devotees in the repetition of chants. This engagement of all the devotees in the singing of the chants was a break from the norm which was a pandit doing all the speaking and singing.

The discourse was also short, not more than seven to ten minutes. It was generally drawn from one of Baba’s discourses. Many prominent citizens delivered discourses at these satsanghs. These included Basil Pitt, a former Minister of Government and Tajmool Hussein, a distinguished attorney-at-law, Member of Parliament and a framer of our Independence Constitution.

Film shows on Sai Baba and his spiritual and social work were an integral part of the Sai Satsangh. I found these film shows to be most informative. It was an innovative and interesting way to communicate Hinduism to the people.

I assisted Suruj Rambachan with contacts in the community to host satsangs. Many families in the districts of Couva/California welcomed Surj Rambachan and his Sarawati Kirtan Mandali in their homes. The attendance was always good and the people always went away feeling spiritually fulfilled.

I witnessed many miracles in the Sai Satsangs. These miracles were mainly the flowing of honey or ghee or vibhuti, from murtis and the manifesting of ash or vibhuti. These miracles were happening at Satsanghs throughout the country. Wherever there was news of such miracles I made it my duty to be there. Sai miracles took me to distant parts of the country.

The Sai Baba Movement was attracting Indians from the professional class, many of whom were reluctant in the past to identify publicly with Sanatan Dharma.

Now married, I was determined to acquire a home. I had applied for a house through the National Housing Authority. I reasoned that my father already had so many siblings and that I would be doing a good by moving out and establishing my independence.

My mother and father protested. They wanted me to remain with the family. My father told me that he depended on me to continue paying the mortgage on the recently acquired property. I re-think my move and decided to build a house on an available lot at the back of our house. This did not come to past. Instead, I was successful in winning a place at Mausica Teachers’ College.

Chapter Four

Mausica Teachers’ College

The decision to resign my job as a Laboratory Assistant and enrol as a student-teacher at Mausica Teachers’ College was seen, in the eyes of my parents, as the worst decision that anyone could make. I had resigned a permanent position with the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, receiving a salary of $212 per month, to take up studies for two years for a stipend of $40 per month. I now had a wife. My father and mother did not understand the reasoning behind my decision. I was determined to take the risk with the expectation that I would be better off in the long term.

Mausica Teachers’ College was located on Mausica Road, Dabadie. It was a residential school with both male and female students. The students were housed in dormitories- a female wing and a male wing.

The intake was 110 when I registered in 1973. We were the last batch of residential students at the College. The Ministry of Education was implementing a policy to close Mausica and to open two in-service teachers’ training colleges, one in south and the other in north Trinidad.

Mausica Teachers’ College was opened in 1963. Prior to Mausica there was the Naparima Teachers’ College in San Fernando and the Government Teachers’ College in Port of Spain. The Naparima Teachers’ College was administered by the Presbyterian Board of Education. At the Government Teachers’ College the intake were teachers who were already in the system. The need for more teachers caused the government to open a pre-teaching facility.

The syllabi at Naparima Teachers’ College and the Government Teachers’ College were not planned. It was expected that the opening of Mausica would provide a common curriculum for all teachers irrespective of their denomination. Mausica Teachers’ College ensured that the teachers hired were qualified and trained to deliver the curriculum.

New strategies in teaching were being implemented. For the first time I was exposed to the use of audio-visual equipment as a teaching aid. This was not only fascinating but also an effective strategy to teach a lesson.

I noticed that the subject areas were also developing. The introduction of an elective subject provided the opportunity for teacher-pupils to specialize in a subject area in the curriculum.

Mausica Hindu Society

The Hindu Society was a major club at the Mausica Teachers’ College. When I joined the Society I was seeing these student-teachers for the first time. Many of them have taught for many years before.

When the Hindu Society met, the members unanimously voted me for President. I did not turn it down. I accepted it as a challenge and pledged that I would make a success of this opportunity. I was conscious of the hours of studies required and my commitment at home on weekends. Despite this, I felt that I had the ability to lead the Hindu Society.

Two lecturers worked closely with the Hindu Society. They were Fanny Roopchand, Vice Principal of the College and Dr Ralph Persad, a lecturer in Agricultural Science. Some of the more active students in the Hindu Society were Krishna Gajadhar, Siewdath Saroop, Sita Jaikaran, Khiman Devisingh, Indra Bhagallo, Krishna Dube, Primnath Gooptar, Sheila ?, Alexander Boodoo and Manodath Maharaj, amongst others. These individuals made many sacrifices to ensure that all the events of the Society were successful.

The Mausica Hindu Society was much admired by the principal, lecturers and student-teachers. Ms Daphne Cuffie, in recognition of the talent and commitment of the members, invited our participation in a musical play titled “Criss Cross.” Criss Cross was successfully staged at Queen’s Hall and Naparima Bowl. I was among the cast of actors. A third show was planned for Arima. When news reached that my father died, the principal took the decision to cancel the show as a mark of respect.

Father Passed Away

My father death was a great loss to the family. He was only 54 years old. Ailing, he was hospitalized at the San Fernando General Hospital for a few months and then transferred to the Caura Chest Hospital. He died there.

My sister Prema was getting married. Bamboo tents were constructed on the yard to accommodate the guests for the wedding. My two brothers, Harry and Jai and sister Dolly, had returned from England, to visit my sick father, at hospital. All preparations were underway for the wedding.

I recalled my father summoning me to a meeting where he pleaded with me to stay with the family and not to go on my own. I promised him that I would not abandon the family.

Always in high spirits, father’s death was caused by a burst blood vessel. It was triggered by the excitement as he hanged the jack in a game of all-fours. The wedding was cancelled and the family was plunged into mourning.

I always admired my father’s commitment and dedication to his family. There was never any sacrifice too big for him to make for the family. While his death was a huge loss to the family, joy returned when my wife gave birth to a baby girl on the day after his cremation. She was named Pratima.

The roti shop was the main income in the family. My brother Krishna continued assisting my mother. My wife continued staying during the week at her parents’ home along with the baby and returning on weekends. I returned to Mausica Teachers’ College to continue my studies.

In 1974 the Hindu Society’s objective was to make the Divali celebration the largest ever in the history of the College. With the advice of Dr Ralph Persad and Fanny Roopchand we applied to the principal to have celebrations for five consecutive nights. It was the first time that such a large scale celebration of Divali was being undertaken in a public institution.

Principal Daphne Cuffie offered her fullest co-operation. As President of the Hindu Society I insisted on working to have the entire student body and staff’s participation. We were not to be disappointed. The majority of student-teachers co-operated with the Hindu Society.

We also made arrangements to have vegetarian meals prepared and served by the kitchen staff to all guests for the five nights. This was done efficiently and professionally. Delicious meals were prepared and served to all.

Another arrangement was to get artistes to perform each night. One performance was a steel band from Enterprise, Chaguanas playing a Divali bhajan. To ensure an excellent presentation, Krishna Dube journeyed to the pan yard on evenings. There he spent several hours with the band while they rehearsed until late into the nights. That steel pan musical item was a big hit!

The Sai Movement was making a strong impact on the Hindu community. In recognition of this religious phenomenon, the Mausica Hindu Society dedicated its 1974 Divali Magazine to the Sai Baba movement. This was a bold step to promote a religious and cultural movement that was new to Trinidad and Tobago.

I had established a cordial relationship with the devotees of the Sai Baba Movement and Suruj Rambachan in particular. Devotees of the Sai Baba Centre of Arima were invited to conduct Satsangh at the Hindu Society’s Divali celebration. It was the first experience of a Sai Baba Satsangh for many and they enjoyed it.

A guest speaker was invited to speak on an aspect of Divali each night. The feature speaker for the fifth night was Basdeo Panday. When Panday arrived some members whispered to him that there was racial discrimination at Mausica but requested that he did not speak about it. When Panday began his speech he said: “I was told there is racism and discrimination in this learning institution but was asked not to talk about it.” Basdeo Panday also mentioned that there was no need to refer to him as a Senator since he had resigned.

Basdeo Panday was always the personality we later came to know. He used the occasion to raise issues both at the community and national levels. His speech was received with thunderous applauses. He also congratulated the Hindu Society for their efforts toward preserving the heritage brought by our ancestors.

The final night of the Divali celebration was carried live on Radio 6:10 AM. Negotiation for such an arrangement was done by Gideon Hanoomansingh[[27]](#footnote-27) who was employed as a broadcaster with 6:10 AM.

While we were students at Mausica Teachers’ College, Surin Capildeo[[28]](#footnote-28) and Deodath Ojah Maharaj[[29]](#footnote-29) would meet with the Mausica Hindu Society. Deodath Ojah Maharaj was a graduate of Mausica Teachers’ College. Both Deodath Ojah Maharaj and Surin Capildeo were members of the Youth Arm of the Maha Sabha. Many discussions were held on the future of the Hindu community.

A Hindu Youth Conference was held at the West India Club in Port of Spain. Its objective was to bring together the youths of the nation. The meeting was sponsored by the SDMS and Surin Capildeo was the feature speaker. The Mausica students were invited and I led a delegation that participated fully in all the sessions.

After this Conference, the Mausica Hindu Society became friendly with the St James Hindu Mandir. The Hindu Society held its annual Saraswati Puja at the St James Mandir to seek the blessings of Mother Saraswati before writing the final term examinations. The puja was marketed for the entire Mausica student-body and attracted many non-Hindus.

The successful co-operation of the Hindu Society in the celebration of Divali and other activities was transferred to our studies. We formed ourselves into a study group. The level of co-operation was very high. Those of us who were strong in one area helped those who were weak. We also shared our notes and text books.

When results for our final examinations were released every member of the Hindu Society had passed. We were happy but not surprised because we had all worked hard and expected such results.

Graduation was held at a hotel in Port of Spain. Regrettably, many of us did not attend, because there was a conflict with us and the administration. It was a low note to end our studies at Mausica but we were happy to stand up against something that we felt was not right.

In September 1975, I volunteered and I was accepted by the Maha Sabha and placed to work at the Munroe Road Hindu School. My principal was Ramdial Mangray of Endeavour, Chaguanas. I was happy to be placed in a social environment where I can help pupils, not just academically but also religiously and socially. The Hindu school was a ready catchment of young Hindu minds for dissemination of culture and history. Other members of the Mausica Hindu Society, such as Premnath Gooptar did volunteer to teach upon graduation in Hindu schools.

I was also keen on furthering my academic qualification and moving up my career path. The Ministry of Education was offering a part-time Agricultural Science Workshop on Saturdays to train teachers to teach Agricultural Science in the secondary school. I completed the course and in 1976 took a transfer to the Marabella Junior Secondary School, to teach Agricultural Science.

I later transferred to the Carapichaima Junior Secondary School to be closer at home. My working hours was 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. I wanted to pursue studies for a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture at the St Augustine Campus, UWI as a part-time student. When I applied I was not accepted. Instead, I enrolled with the Faculty of Arts and Humanities to pursue a degree in History.

While teaching at Carapichaima Junior Secondary School it dawned upon me that teachers who were in the Technical-Vocational Department were enjoying a higher salary and that the workload I was carrying for the day was much greater.

Despite this, I was now better off financially than when I was at San Fernando Technical Institute working as a Laboratory Assistant. My salary was now more than $2,000 compared to the $ 212 I was receiving then.

Chapter Five

Hindu Jawaan Sangh

The Hindu Jawaan Sangh was born in December 1975. It came into existence to fill a void in the Hindu Community. The founders noted that there was no organization genuinely representing the welfare of the Hindu youths. They observed that the participation of Hindu youths in decision making was negligible.

The SDMS was vibrant during its school building era of 1952 to 1956 but soon lost its momentum. The SDMS was carried by its pandits and schools but there were no real effort to address social issues such as conversion and the challenges of westernization. Hinduism was confined to “family” and “community” and played no significant role at the national level.

The 1970 Black Power Uprising[[30]](#footnote-30) awakened in the population a pride in their ancestral cultures. The Africans’ slogan was “proud to be black” and the dashiki shirt was worn with pride. African spirituality was now being explored and many were determined to claim their social space. This impetus of the Africans to identify with their ancestral heritage emboldened the Indian community to embrace its heritage. One expression of that identification was the birth of Mastana Bahar in 1970. It was hosted by Sham Mohammed, a Member of Parliament and Minister of Government.

The 1971 “no vote” campaign which resulted in the People National Movement winning all 36 seats in the Parliament was a major blow to the psyche of the Hindu community. This was followed by the death of Bhadase Sagan Maraj, President General of both the Maha Sabha and the All Trinidad Sugar Estate and Factory Workers Trade Union.

With this power vacuum, many youths offered leadership in their villages. Numerous youth organizations were born. Other leaders stepped forward to provide leadership at various levels in the society. One such organization was the Hindu Jawaan Sangh. It blazed a trail, awakening and bringing religious and cultural awareness to the youths. It was also challenged to present Indian festivals at the national level. The rise of the Jawaan Sangh was not sudden but one that had its genesis in many years of religious and cultural work in the villages over many of years.

One Saturday afternoon in 1975 Sona Seepersad of Princes Town and Haripersad Harikissoon of Chaguanas visited me at my home. Sona was the founder of the Vedanta Society of Princes Town, a branch of the Ramakrishna Mission of India. Harikissoon was a teacher at the St Augustine Senior Comprehensive School and the President of the Endeavour Hindu Youth Organization. They were introduced to me by Krishna Dube.

A graduate of the St Augustine Campus, UWI in 1971, Harikissoon was a witness of the Black Power Uprising that had its genesis at the St Augustine Campus where he was a undergraduate. Upon graduating Harikissoon established the Endeavour Hindu Youth Organization. With the assistance of Samlal Jadoonanan[[31]](#footnote-31) of the Trinidad Sevashram Sangh[[32]](#footnote-32), Hindu youths were taught Havaan and Sandhya. There were regular observances of religious festivals in the Hindu calendar. Another major feature of the Endeavour Hindu Youth Organization was the sponsorship of an annual Nine-Night Ramayan Yagya. The Endeavour Hindu Youth was the guardian of Hinduism in Endeavour throughout the 1970s and 1980s.

An off-shoot of the Endeavour Hindu Youth Organization was the Ramanan Kirtan Mandali. This Kirtan Mandali sang at yagyas throughout the country. A few of its performances were aired on radio. Two individuals who had their initial training in vocals with the Ramanan Kirtan Mandali were Pandit Rabindranath Maharaj and Dr Prahalad Sooknanan.

While employed as a teacher at the Rio Claro Government Secondary School (1972-1975) Harikissoon rented an apartment in Rio Claro. On that said street Krishna Dube also rented an apartment. Both of them were devotees at the Rio Claro Mandir and came to know each other. They would visit each other at their respective apartments and share meals. They continued meeting in the regular weekly devotion and other religious festivals in the mandir.

Also working in Rio Claro was Ramsewak “Lord” Ramphalie . Also from Endeavour, Ramphalie was employed as a postman at the Rio Claro Post Office and would stay at the homes of relatives in Rio Claro during the week. Ramphalie would make visitis to Harikissoon’s apartment and came into contact with Krishna Dube.

Another person who was renting and working in Rio Claro was Ramchand “Lenny” Seerattan. He was from Rock Road, Penal and was employed with the Nariva County Council as a Clerical Officer. Lenny also came into contact with Harikissoon and Ramphalie through the religious programmes in the temples.

Harikissoon started a Hindu Society to rally the Hindu students and teachers at the Rio Claro Government School. Weekly meetings of the Society were held, bhajans were sung and festivals such as Divali were celebrated. Many workers in the Jawaan Sangh such as Lalchan Dookie, Ramesh Ramsumair, Anand Laukeran and Timothy Ramnanan were members of the Hindu Society.

Harikissoon, Dube and Ramphalie observed that many villages in the Rio Claro district had no regular Hindu activities. They identified other individuals who shared their interest and vision. Many were enthusiastic to welcome such programmes in their communities. This led to weekly satsanghs in the neighbouring villages of Poole, Ecclesville and Navet.

In 1975 the Youth Arm of the SDMS hosted a Hindu Youth Conference at the West India Club in Port of Spain. Suren Capildeo and Deodath Ojah Maharaj of the SDMS Youth Arm were the sponsors of the Conference. The members of the Mausica Hindu Society were also invited to participate in this conference. Also in attendance was Haripersad Harikissoon.

This Hindu Youth Conference provided a meeting ground for other Hindu activists. At that Youth Conference it was recognized and accepted that the Hindu youths were dormant and needed to be awakened. It was at that Conference that Harikissoon conceptualized the formation of a youth organization to address the needs of Hindu youths.

In December 1975 a Hindu Youth Rally was organized to mobilize youths from throughout the country. This youth rally took the form of a bus excursion to Bonasse, Cedros. Youths came by bus from San Rafael, Penal, Endeavour, Rio Claro and California. It was an impressive gathering of youths! Seeing the enthusiasm of the youths the leaders of the respective youth groups came together at Manmohansingh’s residence and unanimously declared the birth of the Hindu Jawaan Sangh.

Subsequent to the excursion, the meetings of the leaders were held at the Montrose Vedic School in Chaguanas. Some of the members in attendance were Harikissoon, Primnath and Ramnanan “Gopee” Goopeesingh, Ramsewak Ramphalie and Doolarchan Hanomansingh.

Gopee was a dedicated worker for Hindu dharma. He was a graduate of the Bharatya Vidya Bhavan[[33]](#footnote-33) led by Professor H.S. Adesh[[34]](#footnote-34) of India. With his knowledge of Hindi and drama Gopee organized and conducted classes in Hindi and drama in many villages in Penal. He was well known and loved by Pandits and other leaders.

California was identified as a “central” location for the Hindu Jawaan Sangh to have its weekly meetings. At first the meetings were held at my residence. I was given the task to identify an office for the Jawaan Sangh.

I made contacts with Joseph Pulwarty, a businessman of California. Pulwarty had a building on the Southern Main Road. It was an old wooden building and he agreed to rent it for the sum of $300 per month.

This office became the headquarters of the Jawaan Sangh. Members would meet on Saturdays from 1:00 p.m. to plan activities and discuss issues. The office added prestige to the organization because few Hindu organizations could have boasted of having an office for its meetings.

A Hindi Class was held at the office between 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. It was tutored by Dr Hargulal Gooptar, a Cultural Officer at the Indian High Commission in Port of Spain. Primnath Gooptar would drive his car from Arima to Port of Spain where he would pick-up Dr Gooptar and bring him to California. One of the students of that Hindi Class was Kamla Tiwarie (nee Maharaj).

The presence of Dr Gooptar emboldened us. We would take him around to temples and other social events. His association with the Jawaan Sangh provided the members with much needed legitimacy.

The Jawaan Sangh began using the services of the Film Unit of the Indian High Commission. An officer from the High Commission would come to the village equipped with projector, screen and films. The Endeavour Hindu School was one venue for such film shows and the attendance was always overwhelming. With few families owning a television, both young and adults came out to view these shows. The film shows were both entertaining and informative. It provided the audience with much needed information on India that helped them to build a sense of pride.

Joseph Pulwarty was also the owner of a projector. The projector was used to show films at Mahadeo Pandit’s Mandir. I informed the members of the Jawaan Sangh that film shows attracted large audiences and that it was a good vehicle to mobilize the youth. The members agreed to my suggestion.

The Jawaan Sangh borrowed Pulwarty’s projector but eventually bought it for a reduced price. I had some initial experience in using a projector while I was employed at San Fernando Technical Institute. I felt that I needed to know more and so I proceeded to do a course with the American Embassy on operating a projector.

With a projector and knowledge of operating it, the Jawaan Sangh borrowed films from the Indian Embassy. The venues for viewing these films were community centres, mandirs, schools and at times the open park. I had a wagon which was dubbed “Jai Bharathi.” With the projector and films, Harikissoon, Ramphalie and I journeyed to more than seventy-five (75) villages throughout the country. At times we were joined by Gopee, Dube and other members.

The audience was huge. There were children, their parents and the elderly. A film would usually last 30 minutes. This was followed by an address by Harikissoon. His speech was slanted to inspire pride in their dharma. After the speech another film would be shown. Sometimes a third film was shown on Friday and Saturday nights.

Through the film shows we made contacts with cultural activists who shared the aims and objectives of the Jawaan Sangh. Within three months we had individuals and groups that were ready to work with the Jawaan Sangh.

Cultex Restaurant & Bar

In the midst of my activism with the Jawaan Sangh I was conscious of my responsibilities in the family. Though I was married and had a child my mother insisted that I take charge of the land that was purchased on the Main Road. I did not want to disappoint my mother. I was aware of my role as an elder brother and a son after my father’s death. I was also conscious of the solemn promise I made to him to stay with the family. I was determined to see that a pathway to financial security was built for my siblings.

I went to the bank for a loan to begin construction of a building on the land. It was my first experience with doing business with a bank. The only loan my parents had ever taken was the one to purchase the land. The original Cultex Roti Shop was built with their savings.

The bank asked that the land be on my name. When I returned home I informed my mother of the bank’s request. Some of my siblings were not in agreement and protested. My mother dismissed their protests and agreed to remove her name. I returned to the bank and negotiated a first loan of $60,000. With this sum available I immediately began construction of the building.

The shed that was the roti shop was now old and insanitary. Public Health inspectors, on more than one occasion, had expressed dissatisfaction with the physical condition of the shed. My mother was aware that the roti shop had deteriorated over the years. The clientele had grown to include workers from the Point Lisas Industrial Estate.

I had to work with some degree of urgency. I was also engaged with pursuing the acquisition of State lands for the construction of the California Temple, my activism with the Jawaan Sangh and caring for my family.

The new Cultex building went up and the customers who were loyal to my mother remained. With a modern restaurant outlook the clientele increased rapidly. My brother Vishnu was left to manage the business and my sisters and wife provided the labour. My mother was the main cook and supervised the entire operation.

Among the patrons at Cultex were members of the Jawaan Sangh. After our meetings at the Hindu Jawaan Sangh’s office the members would come to Cultex for refreshments. Cultex was now a venue for many social activities of the Hindu Jawaan Sangh. Many members began using the restaurant to celebrate their birthdays.

My business did not detract me from my involvement with the Jawaan Sangh. I pursued the philosophy that all were being done for the improvement of the community. Despite this I was under pressure from my mother and wife. They felt that I should cut all ties with social and cultural activities and focus my energies on the family business. I resisted them because I knew that the work with the Jawaan Sangh was necessary for the growth and development of the Hindu community.

Divali Song Festival

The Divali Song Festival for secondary school pupils was a first for the country. It was organized by the Jawaan Sangh. Our operational strategy was to contact the teachers who were active in organizing the Divali choirs in their respective schools. It was hoped that these teachers would embrace the project and train the children for the festival.

Teachers responded positively to the programme. The Divali Song Festival took the form of a competition. A challenge trophy was the main incentive for participation. We were unable to afford cash prizes.

I performed the role of master of ceremonies in these programmes. It was a role I enjoyed and everyone was pleased with my performance. My popularity as a master of ceremonies began to rise in the Jawaan Sangh and everyone began looking forward to my appearance on stage.

One off-shoot of the Divali Song Festival was a Cultural Exchange Tour to Guyana and Suriname. Each of the twelve schools that participated in the finals submitted their most talented member. Rana Mohip and Rooplal Gildharie were among the young artistes that went on that tour to Guyana and Suriname in 1978.

Secondary School Sanskritic Sangam

Another off-shoot of the Divali Song Festival was the birth of the Secondary School Sanskritic Sangam. The initiative to establish the Sangam was spearheaded by Pandit Ashram Maharaj, then a teacher at the San Fernando Government Secondary School. The Samgam continues to be an integral part of the extra-curriculum activities of the secondary school system.

Phagwa

Phagwa, the festival of colours, was celebrated at two public venues-Aranguez and Orange Grove Savannah, Tacarigua. The Aranguez venue was organized by the National Phagwa Council[[35]](#footnote-35) and the Orange Grove Savannah by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad[[36]](#footnote-36).

The SDMS was not engaged in Phagwa. Sat Maharaj[[37]](#footnote-37), its General Secretary, was weary of the high consumption of alcohol and other unruly behaviour at venues. More so, the celebration at the Aranguez Savannah was threatened by behaviours that were inconsistent with the spirit of Phagwa. Conscious of these developments, Sat Maharaj remarked that “the Maha Sabha is not going to touch Phagwa with a jandhi rod.”

Phagwa at Clarke Road, Penal

In 1977 the Jawaan Sangh took the decision to sponsor Phagwa at TRINTOC Recreation Ground, Clarke Road, Penal. This was a huge undertaking and the members of the Jawaan Sangh were confident that the potential was there for a successful programme.

Every evening Harikissoon, Primnath, Ramphalie, Gopee and I would visit the many Phagwa and Chowtal groups. We journeyed to villages in Fyzabad, Siparia, Debe, Penal, Dow Village, Balmain, Cunupia, Endeavour and Felicity. We also visited groups from El Dorado, Tacarigua, Aranguez and other parts of north Trinidad. We were encouraged by the responses we received.

For prizes the Jawaan Sangh provided more than $10,000 in trophies and cash. The trophies were huge and it was the first time that artistes were given the opportunity to compete for such prizes. The challenge trophy for the overall winner was more than five feet in height. All the trophies were displayed on stage for the viewing by the members of Phagwa bands and the public.

Again, I was the Master of Ceremonies. I donned myself with a white T-shirt and dhoti and wrapped my head with a red cloth. I was much loved and respected by the members of the Jawaan Sangh and I promised myself that I would do a good job.

Standing on the stage, the huge audience was a panoramic display of humanity in all its splendour and colours. It was the largest gathering that I had witnessed. I was overwhelmed by the large crowd and their display of gaiety and exuberance. It was a unique and moving experience!

More than seventy (70) Phagwa bands appeared on stage. Each group performed exceptionally well. There were judges to determine the winners. The groups were judged on presentation, singing, and drumming. I was now confident that the Jawaan Sangh has a role to play in the revival of of our Hindu heritage.

Phagwa at Saith Park, Chaguanas

Emboldened by the success of Phagwa Celebrations at Trintoc Recreation Ground, the members of the Jawaan Sangh were determined to open Phagwa venues in the many corners of Trinidad. The response we received from Trintoc provided us with the impetus to open another venue the following year. We chose Saith Park, Chaguanas as the venue.

Phagwa was celebrated at Felicity but the entire central Trinidad had no other venue. The location of Saith Park in the heart of Chaguanas was an accessible venue for the travelling public.

The celebration was a success. Hundreds of people participated and bands from various parts of the country rendered Phagwa songs and dances to the rhythmic beat of the dholak and jaal.

The manpower for the Saith Park celebration was provided by the Endeavour Hindu Youth Organization. I remained at Clarke Road where I was once again given the role of MC.

Caribbean Hindu Youth Conference

The Jawaan Sangh initiated talks with Guyana and Suriname to host a Caribbean Hindu Youth Conference. Primnath Gooptar, Mungal Chattergoon[[38]](#footnote-38) and Haripersad Harikissoon made several trips to Guyana and Suriname to meet with Hindu leaders in the respective countries. In Guyana they met with the Hindu Dharmic Sabha led by Ripu Daman Persad[[39]](#footnote-39), officials of the Hindu Maha Sabha, the Mahatma Hindu Organization and other leaders. In Suriname they held talks with Dr Pahalad Singh and the leaders of other Hindu organizations. Contacts were also made with Dr Hemchandra Persad of Jamaica.

After lengthy discussions it was agreed that T&T would host the conference. The Jawaan Sangh accepted the challenge and the dates were set.

The first response of the Jawaan Sangh was to get the local Hindu organizations to support the effort. The Divine Life Society[[40]](#footnote-40), led by Swami Satchitananda, was very supportive of the event.

Held at the St Augustine Campus, the opening night witnessed speakers from the different organizations, both locally and aboard, speaking of the hopes and expectations of such an event. This was followed by workshops and discussion papers on Saturday and Sunday.

The Youth Conference, the first of its kind, was a huge success. Everyone was happy that a common platform was built to discuss issues affecting the Hindu diaspora of the Caribbean. Many expressed a strong desire to make the Caribbean Hindu Youth Conference an annual event.

Caribbean Hindu Conference

The Caribbean Hindu Conference was another event hosted by the Jawaan Sangh. Again, it was attended by delegations from organizations in Guyana, Suriname and Jamaica. The objective of the Conference was to establish a Caribbean Hindu Council to act as a watchdog to safe guard the wellbeing of Hindus in the Caribbean.

Kenneth Lalla[[41]](#footnote-41) and the late Sudesh Shivrattan[[42]](#footnote-42) played critical roles in this event. Being attorneys-at-law, they drafted a constitution for the Caribbean Hindu Council.

Regrettably, nothing concrete came out of this event. It turned out to be another “talk shop” where long speeches were delivered but implementation was neglected. The objective of Conference to establish a Caribbean Hindu Council was never realized.

Temple Management Workshops

These workshops were aimed at introducing managerial techniques in the management of mandirs. The workshops were conceptualised by Suruj Rambachan, then a lecturer in the Faculty of Management at the St Augustine Campus of the University of the West Indies. Other academics such as Indar Sahadeo[[43]](#footnote-43), Dr Ramesh Deosaran[[44]](#footnote-44) and Anant Rambachan[[45]](#footnote-45) were among the lecturers.

Delegates from mandirs across the country participated. It was a unique opportunity for them to learn to manage their mandirs more efficiently. The response was positive.

My wife had a change of heart and was now more understanding and supportive of my social and cultural activism. She was happy that I was spending time in constructive activities and not engaged in drinking of alcohol and other anti-social behaviour. In 1978 my second daughter was born. She was named Satima.

Chapter Six

Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha

By 1979 the Hindu Jawaan Sangh was losing steam. It was challenged to sustain the many projects it had started. In addition to lack of finance, it was experiencing a loss of manpower brought about by migration and growing family commitment.

Harikissoon proposed that the Jawaan Sangh merge with the SDMS to form its Youth Arm. His rationale was that the Maha Sabha had schools and a Pandit Parishad and that there was no shortage of finance and other resources.

I strongly objected to this suggestion. I felt that the Jawaan Sangh had done a significant amount of work and that it had goodwill to help it along. Other members chose to be passive observers of the debate. Harikissoon’s argument won out and the Jawaan Sangh was dissolved to merge with the Maha Sabha.

The demise of the Jawaan Sangh can be attributed to the failure of its leaders to build a headquarters. I believe that without a home there was no hope for the Jawaan Sangh to continue its projects. Though an office was rented for meetings, there wasn’t any venue to host events.

Student at ECIAF

In September 1979 I took up a scholarship to study at the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry (ECIAF). It was a two-year residential programme and a secondment from my teaching position. I continued to receive my teacher’s salary.

The student-body was drawn from throughout the English–speaking Caribbean. For the first year I followed the rules and lived on the compound. I adjusted well to my the new routine. I also developed a good relationship with my lecturers.

By the second year I decided that I would take time to be with my wife and children. I had a car and I would sneak out of the compound. I am certain that administration was aware of my action but chose to leave me on my own. They were aware that I had a family and was involved in running a family business. I was careful not to leave every day. I also ensured that I return the next morning on time for classes.

I chose to do Forestry for my elective. I had done plant and animal husbandry for elective at Mausica and forestry was an opportunity for me to broaden my knowledge in the field agriculture. My studies had two parts-practical and theory. Field trips were a major part of my studies. My field trips took me throughout Trinidad and Tobago

Despite the busy study schedule and my involvement in the family business, I found time to work with the ECIAF Hindu Society. It was an active social club within the institution and integral to the learning process.

The Hindu Society would meet on Fridays, a period time-tabled for social and cultural activities. Our Friday Satsangh comprised of the singing of bhajans and a discourse. The Hindu Society also celebrated Divali. The 1979 Divali celebration was organized by the year-two student-body. My year body organized the Divali celebration the following year.

The Hindu Society maintained a cordial relationship with the neighbouring communities. Our bhajan group would visit mandirs and sing in satsangs and yagyas. We had talented musicians and singers. I played the dolak. There was a mandir in Las Lomas with which we developed a cordial relationship and attended many of its programmes. The members were always happy to welcome us.

My studies and family commitment did not prevent me from participating in social and cultural activities. I was not prepared to abandon the many social and cultural programmes that were initiated by the Jawaan Sangh. I was prepared to work with Harikissoon and the others to ensure that those programmes not only continue but flourish.

Youth Arm of the Maha Sabha

In 1979 a special meeting was called to elect a Youth Arm of the Maha Sabha. Many of the former members of the Jawaan Sangh were elected to serve as executive officers. Projects such as the Phagwa celebrations at Clarke Road and Saith Park were now held under the banner of the Maha Sabha. Harikissoon, Gooptar and I were elected executive members of the Maha Sabha.

I recalled my election to the Maha Sabha Executive. My name was proposed by Suresh Rampersadsingh. Sat Maharaj responded that his proposed list of names for election to the executive was filled. He then asked Pandit Siewdath whether he was willing to step down to give way to me. Pandit Siewdath was no stranger to me and he consented to have his name removed to accommodate me in the Executive of the SDMS.

Chowtal Sammelan at Penal

The Chowtal Sammelan was held in collaboration with the SDMS and financed and hosted by Ramdharry Caribdass[[46]](#footnote-46). Scores of chowtal groups from across the land and hundreds of celebrants participated in the event. The Chowtal Sammelan took the form of a competition. Both cash prizes and trophies were provided for outstanding performances. Meals were also prepared and served to everyone.

The following year a Chowtal Sammelan was held at Robert Village, Tableland. This venue attracted chowtal groups from Rio Claro, Tableland, Biche, Williamsville and other parts of the south east region. Cash prizes and trophies were given as incentives.

Indian Arrival Day

Ramdath Jagessar[[47]](#footnote-47) and Harikissoon studied at the St Augustine Campus and knew each other. While teaching at St Augustine Senior Comprehensive Secondary School Harikissoon and Ramdath would come into contact with each other. Through these meetings they would discuss ways and means to organize the Hindu community.

Ramdath Jagessar was the founder and chairman of the Indian Revival and Reform Association (IRRA). A regular activity of IRRA was the publishing of a quarterly pamphlet. Its editor was Ramdath Jagessar. Other members were Anand Maharaj, Rajiv Sieunarine and Rajnie Ramlakhan[[48]](#footnote-48).

One edition of the pamphlet was on the arrival of the Indians on 30th May, 1845. Ramdath Jagessar described May 30 as the birthday of the Indian community in Trinidad and highlighted the many contribution Indians made towards the development of the nation.

The members of IRRA were invited to a meeting of the Youth Arm. A discussion was held and a decision was taken to host a cultural programme at the Spring Village Hindu School, Curepe to commemorate the anniversary of Indian Arrival Day (May 30, 1979). Sham Mohammed[[49]](#footnote-49), founder of Mastana Bahar and a former Minister of Government, was identified to deliverer the feature address.

The celebration was sanctioned by the Executive of the SDMS. The programme was well received by all present. Sham Mohammed delivered the feature address and called upon the Indian community to come out and celebrate their contribution to the development of country with pride and joy. Once again, I performed the role of MC.

The following year the SDMS hosted Indian Arrival Day Celebrations at Lakshmi Girls College.. The feature speaker was delivered by Dr Idris Hamid, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church. Author of “A History of the Presbyterian Church of Trinidad and Tobago”, Dr Hamid endorsed the event. Again, I performed the task of MC.

Forester One

I graduated in 1981 and was appointed a Forester One. My duties were wide ranging but very exciting. It included the following: patrolling the forest, supervising daily paid workers, acting as an ex-officio game warden and an ex-officio litter warden, and supervising the approval of licences to saw millers, lumber jacks, and quarry operators.

Going to the forest was very risky. Foresters were never allowed to go alone into the forest. I recalled the many sink holes caused from forest fires and into which someone can accidentally fall. It was also a norm to hire the services of a tour guide to take us into the forest.

Once while travelling through the forest with a tour guide we came upon a freshly constructed grave. When I asked the tour guide if that was not a grave, he retorted that I should keep walking and stop asking questions.

Cultex Sold

By the 1980s Cultex was making a profit. We were now able to meet our bank instalments, pay our workers and make a descent profit. Emboldened by the profit, I did a feasibility study to establish a second business.

I made a down payment of $20,000 on a property on the Main Road, California. I was given three months to meet the balance of $60,000. I was now unable to raise the sum and so lost the down payment.

I began making arrangements to buy a property at Freeport. I made a down payment of $60,000 and to open a supermarket. The business did not materialise. Unable to meet my mortgage payment, the property was sold.

I was now discovering the ups and downs of business. Cultex, which only recently, was a profitable business, was now losing money. I began to experience sleepless nights and depression. I was always hopeful that things would turn around for the better. Unfortunately, it was taking a very long time!

The challenges of running a business and looking after a family were having its toll on me. I was determined that my job would not be sacrificed. Business was deteriorating and I was becoming more aware of the need to hold on to my job.

I pleaded with my mother to sell Cultex but she hesitated. KFC had expressed an interest in purchasing the property. She was supported by her brothers. Nevertheless, it was always my problem to meet the monthly payment.

The bank notified me that it would come on Fridays to collect the week’s sale. I had no choice in the matter. An officer of the bank began arriving on Friday evenings to collect the money. There was no money left to pay the family members who were toiling in the business every day.

My mother fell ill and was in bed. Her condition was brought about by the many years of labour in the roti shop. This was compounded by a fear that the property would be lost to the bank.

I began to get sick. I spent seven days in the hospital. I felt like I was going crazy. My hands were feeling numb. My doctor discussed my symptoms and told me that it was brought about by mental worries.

My mother died in 1982 and on the day of the bandara, the bank sent a receiver to take possession of the property. Thankfully,a good friend, found a buyer, the same person who bought the property at Freeport.

Cultex was sold for $650,000. It had a debt of $300,000 which was paid to the bank. I believe that it was the best that could have been done. I also ensured that the money received was divided among the three brothers-Vishnu, Krishna and me who my mother had given the Cultex property. I encouraged my two brothers to buy properties with their shares from the sale.

The family asked the new owners for a six-month grace period to leave the property. The grace period gave us time to relocate. My wife had two lots of land at Bank Village, Carapichaima on which we built our new home.

The sale of the property left many members of the family angry. Some felt that they should have been rewarded financially from the sale. For several years family members never communicated with each other. It was in 1986 when Swami Ganapathi Satchidananda was visiting the California Hindu Mandir that my siblings came together and some of the fears and suspicions were put to rest.

My brother Krishna was a regular drinker and it was having a toll on his life. Fortunately, he was able to turn around his life by joining the Raja Yoga. He continues to participate in the activities of the Raja Yoga.

Vishnu went on to get a work as a fabricator at Nestle. His life was now stable. My younger sisters were now all married and living with their families. I was now experiencing a feeling of freedom and relief from the burden that had plagued me for several months. I felt happy to re-discover myself.

Harikissoon Dismissal from the SDMS

In 1982 Harikissoon was dismissed from the Maha Sabha. He was accused of using the Endeavour Branch of the Maha Sabha to host a lecture by Swami Bashyananda[[50]](#footnote-50) of the Ramakrishna Mission of India without the approval of the Maha Sabha. Harikissoon was of the opinion that a branch of the Maha Sabha was a self-autonomous body that can act independent of the National Executive.

I sat in a meeting of the Maha Sabha and witnessed the dismissal of Harikissoon. He was accused of using a Branch of the Maha Sabha to undermine the authority of the Executive. Harikissoon was never given the opportunity to respond. Everyone remained silent as the Secretary of the SDMS misrepresented the facts.

A series of allegations were made against Harikissoon. I remained committed to continue serving with the SDMS, because,I did not want to see projects started by the Jawaan Sangha, now given to the Maha Sabha, just disappear.

Birth of the Hindu Seva Sangh

In 1983 the Hindu Seva Sangh was born. I recalled attending a meeting at the Chaguanas Temple where approximately forty Hindus from across the country came together to elect an executive. Present were former members of the Hindu Jawaan Sangh and new faces representing the Indian Revival and Reform Association.

I did not take any position because I was a member of the Maha Sabha. While I recognized that there was much work to be done, I did not want to appear weak by jumping out of the SDMS and joining this new organization.

My relationship with Harikissoon and other members of Seva Sangh was cordial. I was hopeful that I would work with all Hindus and Hindu organizations to promote the values of Sanatan Dharma.

One of the early projects of the Seva Sangh was the raising of funds to help temples and families in need. The Seva Sangh was willing to host a seven nights Ramayan Yagya to raise funds to contribute to the building of the California Hindu Temple.

Chapter Seven

California Hindu Temple

The California Hindu Temple & Cultural Building Committee Limited was registered as a non-profit Charitable Organization in 1978. Its President was Harry Ramsingh, a businessman. Other members were Siewnarine Ramcharitar, Rolly Ramadhar, Winston Arjoon, Udho Ramnarine (no relation) and me. I served as Secretary.

The aim of the Committee was to bring together the many splinter groups that had a desire to build a temple for the Hindus of California. After coming together they unanimously agreed that if Harry Ramsingh was appointed President they would remain and work with the Committee.

Many fund raising events were held- a trip to Tobago, a trip to Curacao, a Jolly Rogers Tour, a Car Raffles, Curry Q and Bazaars among others.

Acquiring a parcel of land was our first objective. We applied to State Lands and Caroni Ltd. We did not get a response from Caroni Ltd but State Lands responded offering one lot of land at the California Settlement near the Gas Station. We turned down that offer for two reasons. The land was inadequate and it was located in an area away from the majority of Hindus.

A second offer of land was made next to Community Centre and mosque at Macaulay Park. This was some distance from the main body of worshippers. Additionally, the community centre was used for parties and fetes and it was not ideal to have a temple located next to it. That argument convinced Bissundath Ojah Maharaj[[51]](#footnote-51), the Chairman of Sugar Industry Labour Welfare Committee.

A third offer of land was at Carlsen Field, Chase Village. This we felt was outrageous and insensitive of the fact that the temple building was a community exercise. This offer was not accepted and the search for a parcel of land continued.

It was during the General Elections of 1981 that I began fraternizing with the People’s National Movement (PNM) with the objective to get this parcel of land. I remembered attending a meeting at the Chaguanas Junior Secondary School. I was invited by a member of the PNM who promised me that I would have the opportunity to meet with Prime Minister George Chambers.

I remember Chambers telling me not to worry that he would approve a parcel of land. The very day he gave me the name of an individual who would ensure that the land was handed over to the Committee.

A few members of the Temple Building Committee were critical of my fraternizing with the PNM. Despite their protests, I stood my ground and felt justified in my action.

I pursued the recommendation given to me by Prime Minister George Chambers and was granted written permission to occupy the land and start construction. I was promised that a deed would be given but that it would take some time.

Two lots of lands that the Committee had purchased were sold. The payment from the sale was now used to initiate construction of the mandir. Some of the members of the Committee that were directly involved in the supervision of the construction were Suresh Rampersadsingh, Winston Arjun, Udhu Ramnarine, J.B. Maharaj and the Ladies Group.

In 1981 the California Temple Committee held a Nine-Night Ramayan Yagya to raise funds for the construction of the temple. Sat Maharaj provided the different pandits to officiate each night. He also provided a list of generous Hindus to our Committee for us to solicit donations. Ramdharry Garibdass of Penal, a contractor, was one such donor. He provided the gravel for the foundation.

Bal Ramdial, Conservator of Forestry, had won “Express Individual of the Year.” Employed at Forestry Division I had worked with Bal Ramdial and was aware of the work he had accomplished in the field of forestry. I suggested to Sat Maharaj that the Maha Sabha should honour Bal Ramdial for his achievement. Sat Maharaj agreed and during one night of the yagya Bal Ramdial was invited and presented him with a plaque. Sat Maharaj delivered the feature address.

Another Yagya was organized by the Hindu Seva Sangh to raise funds for the construction of the temple. The officiating pandit was Rabindranath Maharaj of Endeavour. The Seva Sangh was successful in raising a large sum of cash which was donated to the Temple Committee.

California Temple Building Committee

With Cultex out of the way I focused my energies and time on building the California Hindu Temple. The land was no longer an issue. The challenge was to raise funds and erect a temple in the fastest available time.

1n 1986 another Yagya was sponsored to raise fund. Delivering the discourses was Suruj Rambachan. During the course of the yagya I was called before the Executive of the Maha Sabha and was accused of breaching Maha Sabha’s protocol by inviting Suruj Rambachan to officiate in a Maha Sabha Mandir. Our Mandir was a registered as Branch ( #155) of the Maha Sabha but it never occur to us that we would be in breach of the Maha Sabha’s Constitution by hosting Suruj Rambachan.

During the Yagya I attended a meeting of the National Executive. Sat Maharaj chose to chastise me in meeting for having Rambachan officiate at a yagya in the mandir. Sat Maharaj held the view that the California Temple was a branch of the Maha Sabha and I was wrong in having Suruj Rambachan officiate at their temples. It was the end of almost four years of work with the Maha Sabha.

The community of California was divided. Some Hindus who were sympathetic to the SDMS stood outside the temple and protested on the last day of the yagya amongst whom was Pandit Siewdath[[52]](#footnote-52). The Ladies Group and other devotees such as Suresh Rampersadsingh and others stood with me.

In the midst of all that was happening I renewed my focus on building the California Temple. I wanted a huge structure that would act as a meeting ground for Hindus. As a boy I recalled Hindus having to host Swamis in cinema halls. I was convinced that with the cooperation of other committee members the goal was never too much to accomplish.

When the physical structure was completed the Committee approached the Canadian Embassy for assistance to build a pre-school, an art & craft room, rest rooms and change rooms. For these projects we received the sum of $47, 512. It was a proud moment for the Committee and devotees. Other Hindu organizations followed suit and benefitted from the generosity of the Canadian Government. One such organization was the Academy of Hinduism.

Our Pre-School was the first of its kind in a temple. Other activities observed by the mandir were the celebration of Hindu festivals such as Shiv Ratri, Phagwa, Indian Arrival, Divali, Sunday Morning Devotion, Hindi Class and a library. The library was the first of its kind in a temple. The books were donated by the Indian High Commission.

The California Hindu Mandir became a venue for hosting Phagwa and Chowtal competitions, firstly under the Maha Sabha and later under the United Hindu Organization.

The challenge now was to get a written lease. Despite numerous visits by me to State Lands Division, the approval was not forth coming. Thanks to the intervention of a resident of California who was employed in the State Lands Division that the lease agreement was prepared and released to us. The annual rent for the land was fixed at $1.50 per year.

Striving for Excellence

I was enjoying my work as a Forester. More so I wanted to share with the public and more particularly, the school population the many facts and benefits of forest. Given my background in teaching I felt confident that I had the ability to achieve such a noble goal.

I initiated several projects during my tenure as a Forester. One project was the establishment of an Environmental Express, an exhibition on wheels. In that bus were stuffed animals and recordings of the sounds that animals make.

I had four assistants in my staff. I was also careful to make the lesson relevant to the requirements of the syllabi. The Forestry Information Unit was voluntary and informal and was not allocated funds from the Ministry of Agriculture.

Another project that was initiated by the Information Unit was a public speaking competition. This was done prior to the coming into existence of the Environmental Management Authority (EMA). The Public Speaking ran for 2-3 years before it was officially handed-over to the EMA.

The Forestry Information Unit was now formalized. I was appointed head and given a staff. I took the initiative to convert an abandoned building at the Forestry Division at Long Circular, Port of Spain into an office.

At Forestry Division, San Fernando the Forestry Information Unit developed a classroom with 40 chairs and audio-visual equipment. We also created the Forestry Information and Exhibition Centre. This project provided a forum for schools in south Trinidad for pupils to educate themselves on the value of forest.

The Caroni Visitor Centre was another initiative of the Forestry Information Unit. In 2001 I took the initiative to develop that site into a classroom setting and to equip it with stuffed animals and pictures of plants and animals including birds and reptiles. In 2008 the Caroni Swamp was awarded “Best Heritage Site” by the National Heritage Committee of Trinidad and Tobago.

Indian Arrival Day at Gilbert Park

Indian Arrival Day was organized at Claxton Bay by the Hindu Seva Sangh. A re-enactment of the arrival of the Fatal Razack at the Claxton Bay Fishing Port was planned.

Meetings were held with the Sumati Sabha, a women’s group of Sum Sum Hill, Claxton Bay. Some of the women had relatives, friends and neighbours who were fishermen. They promised to arrange with the fishermen and invited the members of the Sangh to a meeting.

The fishermen were happy to be part of the re-enactment ceremony. Their sole request was that the fuel for the engines be sponsored. The Sangh readily agreed. The re-enactment of the arrival of the Fatel Razack[[53]](#footnote-53) was held at 10 a.m. Many of the villagers dressed in the costumes of the jahajees and boarded several boats at another point and went out to sea. More than a dozen pirogues participated in the event, each carrying an average of 8 to 10 “immigrants”. There were scores of people lining the coastline in their colourful traditional garment awaiting the arrival of the ‘immigrants’. Television crews and other reporters were at hand taking pictures and writing in their note pads.

A youth group from California participated in the re-enactment. They also took part in the procession from the jetty in Claxton Bay to Gilbert Park, Point Lisas. While hundred walked the Southern Main Road with police escort, there were dozens of cars trailing the procession. Many remarked that it was the largest procession they had witnessed in that part of the country.

I was seated in a car with a mike delivering a commentary on the event. It was necessary to remind people of the significance of the event amidst the pomp and festivity. Tassa drums and cymbals were played. There were also members of the Hare Krishna chanting “Hare Rama Hare Krishna” and dancing on the street to the rhythm of the dolack and majeera.

The procession arrived at 1:00 p.m. at Gilbert Park for a cultural programme. An Inter-Faith Service was held to begin the activities. Representatives from all the religious denominations praised the Indo-Trinidadian community for the sacrifices they have made towards the development of the country.

An aspect of the programme was a skit. This skit was presented by the youth group including youths from the California Masjid. The skit had a theme that was relevant to the message of the celebration. It was well received by all. This was followed by a cultural show featuring songs, music and dances. There were addresses by other prominent members of the community including Members of Parliament.

Indian Arrival Day at Cedros

Suruj Rambachan was the Chairman of the St Patrick County Council. The members of the Seva Sangh discussed with him the erection of a statue at Bonasse Village, Cedros that would depict the Indian indentureship experience.

Rambachan agreed with the project and pledged the full support of the St Patrick County Council. Prabhu Sawh[[54]](#footnote-54), a prominent sculptor of Rousillac, was contacted to do the sculpture. The members of the Sangh along with Rambachan agreed to depict an Indian indentured male, female and a child standing in ship.

The unveiling of the statue attracted a large audience. Members of the Seva Sangh from all parts of the country were mobilized for this event. Media houses were also invited. The crowd became very angry and aggressive with the media after Rambachan, in his address, highlighted unfair reporting of Indian culture by the media. Despite the hostility and aggression of the crowd, the programme went smoothly. The statue was unveiled amidst thunderous applauses. I felt a sense of achievement and pride. It was truly the first statue that was representative of the local Indian history. There was the Gandhi statue in the Promenade in San Fernando but that was a project of the Indian Government.

Chapter Eight

Dattertreya Yoga Centre (DYC)

In 1986 I was working with the Hindu Seva Sangh. Randolph Chandrakate and David Balroop were searching for a venue to host Swami Ganapathi Satchidananda. They wanted the use of the California Hindu Temple and came to my home in Bank Village, Carapichaima. I did not hesitate but readily acceded to their request.

In 1976 when Swamiji first came to Trinidad I had a glimpse of him at the Aripo River. I was in the company of Krishna Dube and Siewdath Saroop enjoying an outdoor picnic. The Swami looked to our direction and waved. We waved back to him.

I felt a sense of respect for Swamiji though I was eating meat and drinking alcohol. I recalled him having a youthful appearance. His hair and his beard were long and black.

I did not feel any sense of guilt when I saw him. In fact, the Swami did not register or impacted on my mind. I think that my gesticulation to him was out of custom and not because of any personal devotion. In 1976 I was working as a teacher and was engaged in social and cultural work with the Hindu Jawaan Sangh.

Swamiji first trip to Trinidad was funded by Micheal James. James had visited India where he came into contact with Swamiji. A request was made to Swamiji to visit Trinidad and he agreed once all the necessary arrangements were made.

I was fortunate to meet the Swami on one of his later visit to Trinidad at the residence of an official of the Indian High Commission in the company of Haripersad Harikissoon and Ramsewak Ramphalie. That visit to Swami Ganapathi was initiated by Harikissoon. Present at that meeting were an Indian official from the Indian High Commission, his family, Swamiji, Ramphalie, Harikissoon and me. Swamiji was seated on a couch and the rest of us on the floor.

I recalled Swamiji asking the three of us to introduce ourselves. After I spoke he immediately identified me as a worker.

I did not feel any changes in my consciousness in the presence of the Swami or when I left. I felt that he was just another Swami visiting Trinidad. Nevertheless, I had tremendous respect for Swamis because I felt that they were in the forefront of the struggle for Hindu dharma.

The California Temple was recently built and I wanted as many activities as possible. I saw the planned visit of the Swami as a means to make the temple active. The California Temple was built to accommodate a large number of people. I recalled a Swami visiting California and delivering a lecture on Kundalini Yoga in a cinema. There were no temples in the district with the seating capacity to accommodate a large audience. There and then I recognized the need for a large temple.

I took time to visit places where the Swami was visiting. One such place was Doolchand Ramdath’s residence in Princes Town. The session was held during the evening. When I arrived there were a number of cars. It took me some time to get a park.

I had a few drinks of alcohol earlier. I was accompanied by a few friends and Krishna, my younger brother. They decided to stay behind and I proceeded to move through the thick crowd. The expression on many faces was that I was invading their space. I took a seat not far from Swamiji.

Swamiji was able to call the date of birth of a all the devotees in the inner circle. However, he did not tell me my date of birth. There were about 200 devotees and I began to feel embarrassed that all of them in the inner circle were acknowledged and I was ignored.

Later it dawned upon me that ignoring me was done to help me curb my ego. I would be the first to admit that I had a big ego. I felt ashamed and humbled at the same time. It was like my inside wanted to come out. Swami was looking me straight in my eyes and smiling. I did not get angry but saw Swamiji’s action as one directed to helping me.

A film “Datta Darshanam” was shown to the audience. After seeing the film I approached David Balroop to borrow it. Balroop told me that I could not have it because I was not a member of the DYC. I besieged Balroop to tell the Swami that I would like to borrow the film. Before Balroop could ask Swamiji, he said “let him have it.” I took the video cassette home and made a copy.

There was nothing special about the film. I borrowed it because of my love for viewing religious films. The film told the story of Dattatreya-the merging of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh into a single deity. I have known Brahma as the creator, Vishnu as the sustained and Shiva as the destroyer but I had not heard of Dattatreya.

I welcomed this concept of the merging of the three deities into a single deity. I have noticed that new sects have been emerging in Hinduism. There is the worship of Vishnu and Shiva and in more recent years a growing number of Shakti worshippers.

The film “Datta Darsharnam” projected a message of unity among all worshippers. The film also emphasized the many tests and challenges that a devotee would have to endure to reach enlightenment. The film reminded me of the story of Harichandra Taramati who had to endure many trials until he was finally victorious. I believe that the film was itself an instruction by Swamiji to develop myself.

I also saw the film as projecting spiritual growth as superior to social and cultural work. The film also confirmed in my mind that all sects of Hinduism were one and the same.

Dr. Ramdath, a son of Doolchan, was hosting the Swami at his home in Palmyra. Swami was materialising objects-rings, chains, vibhuti- and presenting to devotees. I sat there looking on but in my mind I was hoping that Swamiji would give to me a jaapa mala. My desire was fulfilled when Swamiji manifested a mani mala (sixty-six beads) and presented it to me. “Mani’ means mind and the mani mala is used in jaap to control the mind.

I returned home and showed the mala to my family. They were all happy. All doubts I had about Swamiji disappeared. In my home the atmosphere was filled with the aroma of vibhuti. This fragrance stayed for three months. I then took a decision to stop consuming alcohol. This was the turning point in my life.

Programme at California Temple

The programme at the California Temple was well attended. People came from near and far. Swami Satchidnanda of the Divine Life Society was among the devotees. Swamji insisted that I sit next to him. It was then that I felt that Swamiji had a big role for me in the Dattatreya Yoga Centre (DYC). It was the last day of his two-week stay in the country.

To become a member of the DYC an applicant had to fill a form and provide an application fee of thirty-five dollars. The Executive would meet and then deliberate over the application before taking a decision. I became a member by decree. Swamiji appointed me to the Executive. There was silence from others. If there was protest it was not done openly. The members appeared to be ready to abide by the Swamiji’s decision.

Swamiji returned to India and I was now given the task to work with the DYC. I was invited to an Executive Meeting which I attended and made my contribution. I attended several Executive Meetings at the homes of devotees. I hosted a few meetings at my home in Bank Village, Carapichaima.

These meetings would last for one to two hours. Matters discussed were the raising of funds and the construction of a mandir. A three-acre parcel of land was donated by Ramesh Persad Maharaj, President of DYC.

Present at those Executive Meetings were Roderick Noel, Reverend Dr Earl Chandool, Siewnarine Singh, Randolph Chandrakate, Swami Krishna Singh, Doolchan Ramdath, Dr Khemchan Ramdath, David Balroop and Ramesh Persad Maharaj.

These meetings were very fruitful. The discussions and deliberations were open and free. I was happy that the meetings were not shrouded in the conflicts and tension. I sat quietly and spoke only when it was necessary. The members of the Executive were professionals who appeared to know what they were about.

A monthly Satsangh was held at the residence of Randolph Chandrakate. I dutifully attended that Satsangh. It was beneficial to me spiritually and helped to deepen my commitment to Swamiji and his mission. Satsanghs were occasionally held at the homes of other devotees and I was only too happy to attend.

I recalled sitting with Swamiji in a room at the California Temple when he said to me: “Boloji, I would like you to build a temple this size for me.” I listened intently and silently promised that his desire would be fulfilled.

The year was 1988. The Executive of the DYC was meeting at the residence of Dr Ralph Seepersad in Diego Martin. I asked: “Swamiji! Are you ready to build the temple?” he responded: “Yes.” I realized that Swamiji was happy that I have raised the matter.

This incident convinced me that Swamiji has the ability to read the individual mind. I believed there and then that Swamiji knew that I was the devotee to build the temple.

Immediately following the meeting, the members journeyed to Carapichaima. Pieces of peas stakes were cut and stuck into the ground to demarcate the perimeter of the mandir and the position of holes to be dug.

I recalled stepping into a six feet by four feet hole to make the offerings. Mantras were chanted by Swamiji and other pandits from India. Within two days a foundation stone was laid

I took it upon myself to ensure that this mandir was constructed. Within fourteen days the main sanctorum was constructed. A 4 x4 x 4 pit was dug into the ground and Swamiji then performed a homa and blessed all the devotees.

I was placed in charge of the construction not only because of my experience but because I was living in close proximity to the temple. The construction that was set out was accomplished, but not without challenges. Many of the devotees that made pledges of cash and materials had to be reminded on more than one occasion. Others did not fulfil their pledges.

There was much resistance by the leaders of the established organizations to accepting the teachings of Swamiji. Many complained that visiting Swamis were only interested in raising funds to take back to India. Other critics labelled the organization a cult.

I was determined that the new temple would be constructed. Other devotees were equally interested and prepared to make the sacrifices to see the temple coming into fruition.

The construction of the roof of the mandir was done with discarded materials. A hardware donated steel rods that were buried in dirt. I was successful in negotiating credit from a hardware in tranches. I received $10,000 in the 1st tranche; $20,000 in the 2nd tranche; $30,000 in the 3rd tranche and $40,000 in the 4th tranche.

When there was no money or materials, I would appeal to a photograph of Swamiji. Miraculously, devotees would come forward with cash. I recalled a devotee giving us the use of a truck. With the truck we would drive to homes and businesses to accept donations of cement and other materials.

Finally the temple (120’ x 60’) was constructed and the Datta Hall (30’ x 70’). A house was also constructed for Swamiji.

Consecration of the Mandir

In 1990 the mandir was consecrated by Swamiji. Hundreds of devotees attended. The compound was muddy and Swamiji made an appeal to devotees to have the compound paved.

I felt that the construction that took place was a miracle. It was not done without the intervention of Swamiji. In the consecration ceremony Swamiji remarked that all of the 1, 333,000 deities were present to bless the event. I experienced the company of the great sages and felt a spiritual transformation.

I was told by a Swami that in my last incarnation I was his devotee and that my wife, in her past life, was a devotee of Lord Ganesh and would make a special mala for the annual Ganesh Pujas and Festivals.

Taking Datta to the People

I initiated contacts with temples in various parts of the country-Garth Road, Point Fortin, Penal, Rio Claro- and conducted Dattetreya Satsangh. These were venues that I knew during my work with the Hindu Jawaan Sangh. Devotees were ready to accept this new philosophy. During these satsangs I played the dholak, sang and also delivered discourse on the life of Swamiji and Dattatreya.

Academy of Hinduism

Simultaneous with the building of the mandir complex I was enrolled in a Pandit’s Training Programme with the Academy of Hinduism. The Academy of Hinduism was the brainchild of Pandit Khemraj Maharaj of Bamboo No 1. Other pandits who were tutors in this course were Mukram Sirju and Ramcharan Gosine. This course which lasted a period of two years included astrology, history of Indians in the Caribbean, puja rites, funeral rites, Ramayan and a range of other knowledge and skills. Marriage rites were taught after graduation.

Boloji to the Rescue

With the opening of temple in 1990 there was the demand for two youths to train as pandits. Gyan Ramlogan and Satish Ramroop were approached but they declined. At this critical moment Swamiji instructed that I should be the officiating priest at the temple. Siewnarine Singh (Dada) was appointed my assistant.

Dada and I were trained for one week in the South-Indian Puja System by Pandit Murli of India. The training focused on proper pronunciation of mantras. Pandit Murli felt that I was equipped for the task ahead.

During the 1990 curfew (6 p.m. to 6 a.m.) following the attempted coup of 1990, I would break the curfew and drive from Bank Village to the Datta Temple, do puja and then head for work in Cumuto to reach before 7 a.m. to dispatch daily-paid workers to perform their tasks. No police ever stopped me. I believe that they knew who I was.

I also conducted puja between 4-5 a.m. and 6-8 p.m. during the curfew.

The puja comprised of four sets of rituals. Abhishek rituals were done on Thursdays and Sundays. This entails the bathing of the murtis with milk, dahi, ghee, honey and sugar and the changing of clothes.

I believe that through the Datta influence, pujas such as “Purna Kumbha,” a ritual that does not need a bedi, was revived. As a pandit, I would now encourage devotees living in the urban centres to use the purna kumbha style of worship.

Panduka Puja, the worship of Swamiji sandal was introduced. I believe that Ram instructed Bharat to do Paduka Puja. This was done in Satsangh.

When I became involved with the Dattatreya Yoga Centre (DYC) in 1986 I was now living at Bank Village, Carapichaima. I continued to be involved with the California Temple. In 1988 I was conducting the Sunday Morning Service at California Temple and then hurrying back to the DYC to join in devotion there.

Some members of the California Temple felt that my loyalty was divided and protested. I was now a pandit and my commitment to my jajmans was being given precedent. I continued working with the California Temple but not in the forefront.

The Maha Sabha staged a protest and got my elder brother, Harry, to support them. Despite these setbacks I continued to rally with the devotees to keep the mandir independent of the of the Maha Sabha.

The California Temple granted permission to SWAHA to host a 108 bedi pujas. Sant Keshav Dass of India was granted the use of the temple facilities to host programmes. The Mandir Committee provided all the support.

By 1993 I resigned my executive position with the mandir. I felt that I should give way to the people of California to manage the mandir. I was now free to focus on my work with the DYC.

Aripo Shrine

The shrine at Aripo on the foothill of the Northern Range started simultaneously with the temple at Carapichaima. The work was initiated by Siewdath Saroop and his family. Saroop, his wife, his father, his brother and other members of his extended family began clearing the land- cutting down trees and shrubs. After the land was cleared, the Saroop family took gravel from the river bed and tout and constructed a shrine.

The original temple was thirty feet by thirty feet and the kitchen was thirty feet by thirty feet. A hall was also identified for construction. Its dimension was thirty feet by fifty feet. A homa shala was also erected. All these structures are connected by footpaths.

The security of the structures has always been a challenge. In the beginning we had a watchman on site. His booth was burnt to the ground and he was afraid to return.

Saroop was very depressed. He felt that all the hard work he and his family have contributed may finally go up in smoke. Swamiji, however, was determined that the project continues. He instructed that the burnt structure be cleared.

Swamiji instructed that Ganga Puja and a Shiva Lingam Puja be done once per month on the site. This monthly puja was done on the bank of the river and it attracted scores of devotees from throughout the country. These pujas were able to build commitment in the minds of the devotees. Hundreds of devotees began arriving during week and weekends. I was happy to perform pujas between 1990 and 2003.

Hindustan

I was assigned to work with the devotees at the Rama Datta Temple in Hindustan, Princes Town, to conduct puja once per month. This puja is done on the 1st Sunday in the month from 4:00 p.m. I am pleased to say that that puja continues to this date. The only time I was not there was when I was sick and had to undergo surgery. When I recovered in 2008 I resumed visiting Hindustan to do puja.

I am also assigned to the Penal Datta Temple at the corner of Clarke Rochard and Rock Road, Penal. The land on which the temple is constructed belongs to the State. The granting of title to the land is yet to come forth.

Penal

I also conduct Datta Satsangh at the Sachchidanda Ashram at #5 Rochard Douglas, Penal on the 2nd Sunday in the month between 6-8 p.m. This Satsangh is hosted by the Saroop family of Rock Road, Penal.

I first knew Saroop when he was a student-teacher at Mausica and an active member of the Hindu Society. He was also a member of the Penal Rock Road Hindu Youth Organization and the Hindu Jawaan Sangh.

Saroop was always in the background during activities of the Jawaan Sangh but was very involved in the physical preparation of the venues. At the Phagwa celebration at Clarke Road, Penal he used his tractor to transport the planks and other materials for the stage.

Saroop also worked along with Bissondath Gopaul, Deo Seerattansingh and Ramnanan Gopeesingh and others to make contacts with mandirs, phagwa and chowtal groups, pandits and cultural activists in the Penal-Debe-Siparia district.

The Satsangh first started in 1991 at the home of Saroop at Rock Road, Penal as a family satsangh. The devotees in attendance were the members of the Saroop extended family. It included his mother, father, brothers, sisters, their spouses and their children.

The Satsangh was conducted by Gyan, Gokool and me. I would conduct the puja and give the discourse. Gyan played the harmonium and also sang. Gokool played the harmonium. I played the dolak when there was no one to play.

In the beginning the Satsangh was held on the 2nd Saturday in the month. This went on for many years before it moved to the Sachchidanda Ashram.

The Sachchidananda Ashram is built on a parcel of State lands at the corner of Rochard Douglas and Penal Rock Road. The land, approximately 40 feet high ( above ground level ), was graded to removing more than 10 feet of top soil to create a flat base for the construction of the temple.

The present structure is 40’ x 100’ ( and expanding ) and includes a Datta Hall, a house for Swamiji, a kitchen, a universal hall and toilet facilities. The facilities are not completed and work continues.

My work at Forestry Continues

100 Years of Forestry was celebrated to honour all the workers in Forestry for their work. I was appointed a member of that committee. All the workers were presented with plaques and other tokens.

I was always pleased with my performance in Forestry. All my seniors were always high in praise of my work and this was reflected in the annual appraisal of my work.

Another project I started was the making of a film on forestry through the Film Unit of the Forestry Division. Several recordings were done. I used the agricultural science syllabi of the primary and secondary school to guide my content. Before the project was completed, the project was taken out of my hands, by juniors to me and heavily criticised. Nothing further was done.

Trapping and tagging of animals was another initiative by me, in Forestry. A professional from Africa was brought to lead this initiative. I worked for several months on this project in the Central Range. Unfortunately, the project was never attended with seriousness and was finally abandoned.

Like all institutions I had my ups and downs. Despite this, I can say with pride that I have accomplished my goals to make the nation more aware of the value of forestry.

In 2010 I retired from Forestry and the Public Service. I had no regrets but was now embracing the new windows of opportunities that would be opened to me. I felt that I would now have all the time that I would need to do the many projects I have in store. More than that, I wanted all the time to serve Swamiji.

Chapter Nine

Post-Retirement Activities

Federation of Hindu Organizations

I have been invited to work with the Federation of Hindu Organizations in 2012. I was hesitant to get involved in any new activity after my surgery because I felt that I would not be able to make any meaningful contribution. Gyan Ramlogan insisted that I serve as an advisor and my name would be identified in that capacity whenever the leaders of the Federation met.

The Federation is an association of non-aligned mandirs, that is, mandirs that operate independent of the larger organizations such as the Maha Sabha and Swaha. Some of the active persons in the Federation are Pandit Samsundar Ramdeen, Gyan Ramlogan, Pandit Amar Seepersad, Pandit Krishen Ramdeen and Pandit Satyanand Gosine.

Two objectives of the Federation are to make the temple relevant to the needs of the community; and to get Hindus to return to the temples. One programme that is being implemented is a two-hour spell of continuous chanting of the Hanuman Chalisa and the mantra “Om Namo Hanumate Namah.”

So far the Federation has met at temples at several venues for 2013. These include Calcutta No 2, Freeport; Rukminia Trace, Barrackpore; Dattatreya Temple, Carapichaima; Amar Jyothi Mandir, Cunupia and Sangre Chiquito, Sangre Grande.

The Federation meets on the 1st Sunday in the month between 4-6 p.m., a time when I have an on-going commitment to conduct a Satsangh at the Princes Town Datta Centre. Nevertheless, I was able to attend one session when the regular Satsangh was cancelled due to the visit of Swami Ganapathi.

In a planning meeting of the Federation I was appointed to co-ordinate the chanting at the Dattatreya Temple. The meeting also mandated me to serve in the Education Committee of the Federation. One project the Education Committee plans to develop is the publication of tracts highlighting aspects of Hindu dharma for free distribution. The theme of the tract would be “Hanuman as He Affects the Individual.”

Also on the Federation Education Committee’s agenda is the publication of monthly magazines to highlight all aspects of Hinduism. It also has plans to develop syllabi for the teaching of Hinduism at both primary and secondary levels. It is my hope that this magazine would be a resource material for teachers to guide them in religious instructions. The content of the magazine would include knowledge of scriptures, Hindu history, festivals and social issues.

Another aspect of the work of the Education Committee would be to highlight the inner meaning of aspects of Hindu dharma. For example, the burning of Ravana is symbolic of the destruction of the negative qualities. Ravana should not be viewed as an evil person that lived 10,000 years ago but the embodiment of negative qualities that are the main contributor to societal ills.

The programmes of the Federation are well attended. The chanting of the Hanuman Chalisa and mantras is done with the accompaniment of the drums and other music. I would like to recommend to the Executive Committee of the Federation the inclusion of a discourse. This would provide the congregation with much needed knowledge of Hinduism.

Other Religious Works

Some families would contact me when there is a death in the family to read from the Ramayan or Garuda Purana. Gyan Ramlogan would usually accompany me to several of these homes.

I have observed that outside of funerals, the majority of Hindus do not identify as Hindus. I have proposed to Gyan that a specific programme be developed with the singular aim to address this problem.

Hindus need to be in regular contact with each other. Some avenues to reach out to Hindus are facebook, blogs and emails. Swami Ganapathi has more than 1,000 email addresses in T&T to convey regular messages to devotees. He also has an internet site-“dattapeetham.com.”

Wednesday Class

In 2006 I started a class for retires. This class continues to be on Wednesdays between 4:00 to 7:00 p.m. The programme includes reading and searching for the inner , from the Ramayan and Bhagavad Gita, chanting of mantras and the Hanuman Chalisa. The programme concludes with a prayer.

The class has six members – all retirees. Rarely would the class be cancelled. Everyone looks forward to the discussions and debates that emanates.

The Ramayan and the Bhagavad Gita are discussed to discover their deeper philosophical meaning. The members are not afraid to disagree or express a unique point of view. This attitude of free debate and discussion has helped to weld the class together.

I have also opened a web site to share with ALL whatever, I have learned about Hinduism. My web site is http://ptboloji.weebly.com/

Chapter Ten

People Who Influenced My Life.

Rabindranath Maharaj was the son of Chanderbhan Maharaj. His mother was Drupatie who later became a Swami and goes by the name Swami Atmananda. My early life was deeply influenced by both Rabindranath and Chanderbhan.

Influenced by his father Chanderbhan Maharaj, Rabindranth left for India to live as a spiritual seeker in an ashram. This event brought a sense of pride in me and the entire family. It gave the family a sense of fulfilment that one among them was leaving for India to seek God. Rabindranath was only fourteen years when he left for India.

Harry Ramnarine, my eldest brother, was another individual that influenced and shaped my life. Harry was head of the San Ford Street Sandhya Group. He would chant the mantra and guide us in the rituals. He also played the harmonium and was the lead vocalist. Being my elder brother, I would look up to him for inspiration. Because of Harry’s involvement, I was allowed by my parents to accompany him on visits to other religious venues.

Felicity was a venue that I visited with the Sandhya group. There we came into contact with other devotees: Mesho Rohit, Bridgeraj Basraj, Atmaram ‘Bandolay” Maharaj and Chander Bali. Chander Bali was renowned musician and the leader of the popular Nau Jawaan Orchestra. I always felt honoured and privileged to be in his presence.

Jonny Rattan, a resident of San Ford Street West, California, was another individual that had an impact on my early life. Johnny was a committed social worker. He was employed in the Accounts Department of Brechin Castle. The founder of CALDRAC, a debating and drama club, Johnny took pride in acquiring books from expatriates employed at Brechin Castle and loaning them to youths.

Another early influence on my life was Hari Ram who later became Swami Satchidananda and founded the Trinidad Branch of the Divine Life Society. Hari Ram lived at his aunt’s home at San Ford Street East and was engaged in religious activities at a very early age. When Swami Purnananda visited Pandit Mahadeo’s home and heard Hari Ram chanting of mantras, he invited Hari Ram to join him at the Ashram at Felicity.

Hari Ram trained with Swami Purnananda and later went on to establish Sandhya groups throughout the country. By 1965 there were as many as seventy-five sandhya groups affiliated with the Divine Life Society. Hari Ram later migrated to India where he studied at Sandipani Sadanalaya, Mumbai and later at Rishikesh, India. He was bestowed the title Swami Satchitananda and then returned to Trinidad.

I was impressed with the amount of work and the influence that Swami wielded. The huge temple at Carlsen Field and the other branch at Enterprise were two popular venues for Hindu worship and cultural activities. In the 1970s Swamiji played a critical role to promote and propagate Sanatan Dharma when other religious bodies were dormant.

As an adult I continued to maintain that contact with Swamiji. The Jawaan Sangh and the Hindu Seva Sangh also worked closely with him. The DLS teamed up with the Jawaan Sangh to host the 1st Caribbean Youth Conference and the 1st Caribbean Hindu Conference. The Divine Life Society participated fully in these two conferences.

I would regularly visit Swami Satchitananda in the latter part of his life. He was ailing and his activities had slowed down. We would sit and chat for long, discussing issues affecting the Hindu community. His death was a great loss. I don’t believe that community has replaced him fully.

Mahadeo Pandit, his wife and his brothers were a beacon of hope to the Hindus of California. With no temple for worship Pandit’s wife founded a ladies group and conducted monthly full-moon katha at members’ homes. Through this monthly activity the Hindu community was able to rally and preserve its cultural and spiritual identity.

Pandit Mahadeo built a private temple at his home but made it available to the community. The Sandya Group and the Ladies Panchaiti would use the temple for their regular activities. Havaan was also conducted by Krishna Arjoon on Sundays with the Hindu Youths of California.

Special events such as Shiv Ratri and Ram Naumi were attended by Pandit Mahadeo’s brothers and their families. The presence of the members of that family was a tremendous boost to the image of the Hindu community.

Pandit Mahadeo’s brothers were educated and held prominent positions across the land. Pandit Mahadeo was employed as a chemist at the Laboratory at Brechin Castle; another brother was an engineer at T&TEC; a third was an English Master at Presentation College, San Fernando.

Mahadeo Pandit was very generous and would walk with a bag with fruits and other ingredients for offering. If there was nothing to offer or something was absent, he would always make it available. I was so impressed with that quality of Pandit Mahadeo that I have adopted it in my vocation as a pandit.

Another quality of Pandit Mahadeo was that he was never concerned about what the people gave him for offering. Whatever he was given was always received with love.

Ramleela was a big event in my life as a boy. I would look forward to the annual Ramleela. It was colourful and there were lots of friends to meet and things to eat. Later I came to discover that the organizers of this event were Pandit Siewdath, Pandit Ramdath and Bhajan Pandit. It was their organizational skills that were responsible for getting so many things done.

These three pandits would postpone all other activities and dedicate their time and energies to have this ten-day event executed. The preparation of venues, costumes and other props would begin weeks before the start of the event.

The coordination of the event was most impressive and equally so was the co-operation of the three pandits-one would read the Hindi, the other would translate and the third would give a detailed description of the scene being re-enacted.

Basdeo Panday was another source of inspiration in my life. He was very determined and focused in what he was doing. I found that no sacrifice was too much for to make towards achieving his goal. I also admired the warmth and love he displayed toward the people.

Chapter Eleven

Thoughts & Ideas

Lord Hanoman and Mother Ganga are the two deities that remained on Earth to serve humanity. They are symbolic of water (Mother Ganga) and air (Hanoman). I also believe that Hanoman is the presiding deity for the Environment-rivers, mountain and forest. He is described as Pawan, son of the Wind God and pervades the world.

I hold the view that Lord Shiva was the first conservationist when he drank the halaha poison that was threatening to destroy the world. Havan is integral to the environment since it plays a significant role in purification of the atmosphere. The ingredients used in the havan are derived from the forest. These include ghee which comes from the cow which is dependent on grass for food; gugul is a resin derived from trees. When the havan is performed, the smoke that emanates helps to remove poisonous gases from the atmosphere. At the Dattatreya Center havan ( Homa ) is performed in a deep pit so that the smoke can have the widest impact on people.

Resins are also used in the purification of potable water. At Aripo River where a Datta shrine is located the water is always clean. I believe that the leaves from the trees that fall into the river contain resins.

Water is essential for life. Without water a plant cannot germinate. We have to pay obeisance to the rivers and the seas. We also need to work vigorously to curb the pollution scourge that is threatening our water courses.

Lord Hanuman jumped to Lanka means that through the power of the breath or pranayama, an individual can lift himself. Mastery of the breath can bring about great changes in our physical, mental and spiritual wellbeing. Lord Hanuman was a yogi who had mastered this science of the breath or pranayama.

Once a pandit argued that it was wrong to have the Lord Hanuman murti at the DYC in Carapichaima facing east. He said that the last time Hanuman faced east was when he was trapped in Lanka. I have found this to be very narrow minded. I retorted that when Lord Hanuman faces east he is paying homage to Sun, his Guru the Sun.

I advise my devotees that morning is best for mental work because there is less emission of toxic waste and the tamasic qualities are generally asleep. Dawn is also ideal for worship because the air is pure and the sun is now rising. I do not recommend that sandhya be done when when the atmosphere is polluted. Dusk, however, may be most convenient period for worship in the devotee’s time schedule.

Swami Ganapathi has given me the title “Sharma” which means one who engages in religious work and the pursuit of knowledge. He must have seen some positive qualities in me to bestow such a title.

Pandit is the correct pronunciation and not pundit. Pandit means one who is learned. Purohit means one who is versed in rituals. I believe that there is much merit in performing puja and I look forward to doing puja every day.

Ramayan and its Hidden Meanings

I am of the view that each character in the Ramayan has a relationship with you. For example, Sita represents the jiva or individual soul. Rama is the Supreme Soul or Paramatma. I don’t believe that Manthara was conniving and evil. She was part of the plot to bring about the destruction of Ravan who was the reason for Ram taking birth on earth. Ravan represents the negatives qualities-greed, anger, hatred and lust.

Chapter Twelve

My Family

In 1972 I was married to Latchmin from Chase Village and brought her to live at my family home at San Ford Street East, California. I was employed as a Laboratory Assistant at the Board of Industrial Training Institute which is more popularly known as Old Tech (Technical Institute).

I wanted to acquire our own home and had applied to the National Housing Authority for a house. In the application I had identified Pleasantville as my first choice of location. At that time Pleasantville Housing Estate was now developing. I felt it would be a good choice because I was employed in south Trinidad and I would be closer to my place of work.

My parents discouraged me from leaving the family. They both believed that I had a duty to look after the welfare of the family after they have gone.

In 1973 I had my first child. She was named Pratima. She was born on the day after my father’s funeral. My second child Satima was born in 1978 and my third child, Artima was born in 1986.

While my wife looked after the household it was my responsibility to drop off children to school and pick up after school. This continued throughout their primary, secondary and even tertiary level education.

In 1982 when the family came to Bank Village, Carapichaima, my wife opened a Kindergarten. In 1993 when the Datta Temple was opened my wife integrated her kindergarten into the activities of the organization. She was paid a stipend to continue as a teacher.

A special training programme was held to train pre-school teachers. The training programme was co-ordinated by me with the assistance of other teachers. The participants of this programme went on to open their own schools. A few remained and worked with the Dattatreya Kindergarten.

Pratima is employed as a teacher with the Ministry of Education. The holder of a Bachelor of Education, she is a graduate of the UTT. Satima has completed a Bachelor in Education and is also teaching with the Ministry of Education. Artima is pursuing an ACCA programme. She has completed year 1 and Year 2 of the programme. She is employed with SHELL.

Pratima has two children. They are Priya and Preeti. I am interested in passing on to them my knowledge of Hinduism and other relevant knowledge and skills. For this reason I have started a class on Mondays between 5:30-7:00 p.m. for my daughters and grandchildren to learn about Hinduism. The syllabus for the class includes chanting of mantra, reading from the Ramayan and Gita and the singing of bhajans. The class has been in existence for the past three years and everyone looks forward to it. I am not willing to sacrifice the class for any other activity!

We use the Ramayan as the base text. The class begins with mantras to invoke the blessings of Swamiji. It is believed that the mantras would awaken the intuitive insights of devotees. The mantras are translated into English and proper pronunciation is stressed.

Bhajan singing is another aspect of the programme. Each person must sing one bhajan; others may sing more than one. We also do the Ramayan Sumiran. This is followed with reading from the Ramayan. We began reading the Ramayan from the first page, the beginning. Usually we would read a lesson which was followed with a discussion. Our objective is to look at the philosophical and inner meaning of the Ramayan. For example, Sita is interpreted as the atma or soul separated from Paramatma or Ram. Ravan is viewed as the many vices and attractions of the senses that separate us from Paramatma.

My entire family is rooted in the Dattatreya Yoga Centre. The entire family is convinced that Swami Ganapathi had intervened to help me when I was undergoing surgery. They know that I am alive today only because of the blessings of Swamiji. The family feels a sense of obligation and gratitude for all that Swamiji has done for them.

I am convinced that Swami Ganapathi has the powers to heal. However, one must have faith to benefit from his healing powers. I received help from Swami Ganapathi when it was discovered that I had a tumour in my brain. I began suffering with headaches, bouts of dizziness and fainted on many occasions. After careful examinations by a medical team I was diagnosed with a tumour. The doctors recommended that I undergo surgery immediately.

Swamiji intervened during my surgery and ensured that I recovered. He is a medium through which God acts. When I was sick my children wrote a letter to Swamiji asking why I had to be suffering. After I recovered Swamij remarked that “Boloji cannot go now; Boloji has much more work to do.”

I know that I have to do more seva to kill the ego. I have served the Ashram as a priest for more than a decade and have no regrets. I see it as a labour of love. It was Swamiji that directed me to build my house on the site where I am located only because he has some higher role for me.

I once had financial difficulties and I went to Swamiji. I was developing a parcel of real estate for sale. Swamiji advised me to donate one lot as “daan” or charity. I did as was instructed. In no time the other lots were sold!

Miracles

In this recent visit Swamiji visited a pre-school. In my mind I was saying “Swamiji, I want a sweetie.” Suddenly, Swamiji called me and said: “Boloji, here is your sweetie.” Swamiji once gave me a mala. It was exactly the mala I desired.

I believe that every devotee can have the grace of Swamiji but they have to prepare themselves through devotion and austerities to receive it.

The End

1. Swami Ganpathi Satchidananda is the founder and spiritual head of the Dattareya Yoga Centre. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Sona is a Hindi word. It means gold. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Tate & Lyle was a British Company that purchased several sugar-cane estates and factories and consolidated them into a single company. In 1975 the Government purchased Tate & Lyle and renamed it Caroni (1975) Limited. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A Naw is an assistant to the Pandit. He or she has the duty to prepare the altar and ensure that all the paraphernalia for worship were available. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Sanskars are the impressions in the mind that shape the character of the individual. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Pandit Mahadeo was the father of Kamla Tiwarie, wife of Bhoe Tiwarie. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Drupatie Lutchmansingh went on to become Swami Atmananda and has an Ashram at Craignish, Princes Town. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. A panchaitee is a group. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Full Moon Puja is a special ritual held monthly on the day of full moon to nullify the negative impact of the full moon on people. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ramleela is a street theatre re-enactment of the Ramayan. The annual Ramleela at Dow Village is more than one hundred years old. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Sandhya is a Vedic prayer. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Hari Ram was the name of Swami Satchidananda before becoming a sanyasin. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Swami Purnanda was the head of a delegation of five Swamis from the Bharat Sevashrama Sangh of India that came to Trinidad in 1951 on the invitation of the Sanatan Dharma Board of Control. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The Sanatan Dharma Board of Control, led by C.H. Buddhu, merged with the Sanatan Dharma Association to form the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha. . [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Hari Ram remained a dedicated student at the Ashram in Felicity and was bestowed the title “Bramachari Hari Ram.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Bridgelal Basraj (1928-1981) of Felicity played a significant role in the development of the work of the Bharat Sevashram Sangh’s work in Trinidad and Guyana. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Manohar Ramsarran became a Member of Parliament. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Surindra Solomon was a national scholarship winner. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Theo Cuffy, Doodnath Ramkissoon and Rangie Nanan represented T&T in cricket at the national level. Ranjie Nanan served as captain of the T&T Cricket Team and went on the play for the West Indies. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Mario’s Pizza is located on the compound. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. This Institute was relocated to Tarouba. The “old” building is now a venue for a secondary school and is referred to as “Old Tech.” [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Basdeo Panday was Prime Minister of T&T between 1995 and 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Surujrattan Rambachan is currently the Deputy Political Leader of the United National Congress and Minister of Works in the People’s Partnership Government. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Baliram is President of the Supermarket Dealers Associaition. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Bhadase Sagan Maraj was President of the Sanatah Dharma Sabha. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Doon Pandit was a faith healer, social worker and Hindu activist. He played a major role in the formation of the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha and its school building programme. He also initiated discussion with the State for Hindus to benefit from an ecclesiastical grant. He was awarded Member of the British Empire (MBE) in 1949. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Gideon Hanomansingh is a well-known media personality with more than 40 years of experience. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Surin Capildeo is an attorney –at-law and the son of Simbhoonath Capildeo, a founder of the SDMS and a former Member of Parliament. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Deodath Ojah Maharaj is a nephew of Doon Pandit. His father was Pandit Karoo Ojah Maharaj, the youngest brother of Doon Pandit. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. The Black Power Uprising was a revolt by urban Blacks against a government that was elected by Blacks and the Prime Minister and Ministers were Blacks. During the Black Power Uprising the Indians-35 per cent of the population- went about their daily routine oblivious of this social uprisings and its potential impact on the lives. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Samlal Jadoonanan was a dedicated worker for Hindu Dharma. His passing away was a huge loss to the Hindu community. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. The Trinidad Sevashram Sangh is a local branch of the Bharat Sevashram Sangh of India. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. The Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan (BVS) continues to sponsor classes in music and Hindi. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Professor Adesh was sent by the Indian Commission for Cultural Relations. He settled in Trinidad and began the BVS. He current lives in Canada. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. The National Phagwa Council was founded by L.N. Parray. The Aranquez Savannah has been the venue for Phagwa for more than sixty years. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Vishwa Hindu Parishad was founded by Pandit Teeluckdharry. The organization is headed by Pandit Ram Teeluckdharry, a son of Pandit Teeluckdharry. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. The SDMS actively promotes the Phagwa in its mandirs and schools. The annual Children’s Phagwa is a premiere event and is attended by both the President and Prime Minister of the country. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Mungal Chattergoon (1943-2009), photographer, was an unrelenting worker for Sanatan Dharma. He remained committed to the philosophy and principles of the Hindu Seva until his sudden passing away from a massive heart attack. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Repu Daman was a member of the People’s Progressive Party of Guyana and served as Member of Parliament for many years and a Cabinet Minister. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. The Divine Life Sciety was incorporated by an Act of Parliament in 1966. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Kenneth Lalla was a former Chairman of the Police Service Commission. He lives at Valsayn, north Trinidad. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Sudesh Shivrattan was lawyer. He passed away in 2013. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Indar Sahadeo was a lecturer at Cipriani Labour College. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Professor Ramesh Deosaran is current head of the Police Service Commission. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Professor Anant Rambachan was then Brahmachari Anant Rambachan. He is currently a professor of religion. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ramdharry Garibdass was a contractor and was well-known for his generous financial contributions to temples and all religious and cultural activities. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ramdath Jagessar was a journalist with the Guardian. He was the main ideologue in the development of Indian Arrival Day. He also served as Secretary of the Hindu Jawaan Sangh. He lives in Canada with his family. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Rajnie Ramlakhan was a teacher, short story writer, columnist and Hindu activists. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Sham Mohammed was a lawyer and Cabinet Minister when he founded Mastana Bahar in August 1970. Many felt that as a Minister of Government he shouldn’t be the presenter. Sham Mohammed refused to give in to such argument. Today Mastana Bahar is 43 years old and remains the longest local television production in the country after Indian Variety. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Swami Bashyananda was deported after representation was made to the immigration department objecting to his presence. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Bissundath Ojah Maharaj was a Government Senator and son of Pandit Karoo Ojah Maharaj. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Pandit Siewdath Maharaj of Esperance Village, Couva served as Upa- Dharmacharya of the SDMS. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. This was the ship that brought the first group of Indians to Trinidad on May 30, 1845. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Prabhu Sawh created the Sundar Popo statue at Debe and the Seewdas Sadhu statue at Waterloo. The former was a project of the Sundar Popo Monument Committee and the latter was done by the Hindu Seva Sangh. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)