Preface

The field work upon which this study is based was carried out on the island of Trinidad during the period from June, 1957, to June, 1958. The work was made possible by a fellowship from the Social Science Research Council, and I wish to express my gratitude to that organization. I am also indebted to the Institute for the Study of Man in the Tropics for the financial assistance given by a fellowship under its Research and Training Program during the summer of 1957.

It was in the course of a seminar conducted by Professor Charles Wagley of Columbia University and Dr. Vera Rubin of the Institute for the Study of Man in the Tropics that I first became aware of the problems inherent in the unusual ethnic composition of Trinidad. The presence within the context of a New World society of a large ethnic group whose cultural heritage derived from India offered a rare opportunity for research into problems of acculturation and cultural persistence.
During our first two months in Trinidad my wife and I lived in a rural village in County Caroni. The population of the village was about equally divided between East Indians and Negroes. We acquired there a preliminary acquaintance with rural Trinidad life and were able to delimit the scope of the problem and form hypotheses for further investigation. I received invaluable guidance and advice during this period from Dr. Vera Rubin and from Mr. Lloyd Braithwaite of the University College of the West Indies.

It became apparent that in such a mixed community it would always be difficult to distinguish what was Indian from what was West Indian in patterns of association, sanctioning mechanisms, forms of marital union, and many other aspects of life in the village. For my purposes it was necessary to find a village with a predominantly East Indian population, in which the full round of present-day East Indian life in Trinidad could be observed.

Such a village did not necessarily have to be representative or typical. Rural Trinidad, indeed, presents such a varied topography, ethnic complexity, and heterogeneity of agricultural pursuits that it is difficult to say what would be "typical." Even "East Indian" villages provide a bewildering variety of types.

Almost from the first, my attention was directed toward the village I have called "Amity." This village was by no means a unique phenomenon, but it provided a relatively rare—and for my purposes, ideal—opportunity to study all aspects of rural East Indian life within the physical bounds of one community. Throughout this study I shall concentrate upon elements of community structure. In using the term "structure," I am following Radcliffe-Brown in referring to the "complex network of human relations... social relations of person to person... the differentiation of individuals and classes by their social role" (1952: 190-91). In assembling the structural elements, I have been guided by the "variable comparative terms" suggested by Arensberg: Individuals (persons or animals); Spaces (territory, position, movement); Times (schedules, calendars, time-series); Functions (for individual and group life); and Structure and Process.
Amity could be observed elsewhere, in other East Indian villages, but in one case the people of the particular village had no ricefields to cultivate and in another they had no temple, and so on. In Amity, there was a full round of life.

My wife and I moved into the village at the beginning of September, 1957. We had the good fortune to find an empty house on the main street, just behind the Canadian Mission School, and we lived there until the end of June, 1958.

The usual techniques of anthropological field work were employed during the study. Relevant material was gathered from official records and available private papers. I interviewed persons of importance in the county administration and the management of the nearby estate, as well as doctors, ministers, educational officers, agricultural officers, and others whose work affected, and was affected by, the lives of the villagers.

Within the village we conducted a census and formally interviewed persons of both sexes and of all ages and positions within the community structure. Shorter interviews were conducted with members of about fifteen percent of the total households in an effort to acquire information about household composition, nature of marital unions, occupations, caste membership, extent of kin networks outside the village, and many other things. We tried very hard to achieve a representative sampling of the village.

Interviews were also conducted with villagers who could offer information about certain special subjects. These included religious and political leaders, shopkeepers, small farmers, and those engaged in such specialized occupations as midwifery and crabcatching. All gave freely of their time and knowledge. A group of village elders, who continually demonstrated both their honesty and their earnest desire to be of assistance, helped me to determine what Amity was like (1955: 1146). These were my guides; the responsibility for the use to which they were put is mine alone.
in its early years. Drawing on the almost encyclopedic knowledge of these men, I was able to establish the number and location of the castes represented in the village as well as the membership of each caste. These men could provide information about almost every marital union in Amity, its degree of respectability, and the caste affiliations of the respective spouses. This provided an invaluable check on information gathered in the course of household interviews.

Unquestionably, the most important technique employed was that of participant-observation. We lived in the village and participated directly in many of the activities of its inhabitants. After an initial period of uncertainty we were assigned a position within the community structure, with a kind of quasi-upper-caste membership. It was suggested by one villager, for example, that we never eat pork for this is one of the signs of low-caste membership. Beef, on the other hand, was permissible for us since it was known that we were not Hindus. We attended almost every wedding in the village or involving an Amity family. We were invited to wakes, funerals, and religious ceremonies of various kinds. My wife was made welcome at the private women's parties at which the birth of children were celebrated. Where we could, we recorded these events with camera and tape recorder. We were active participants in such temple ceremonies as Siw Rāti, and we joined in the wild celebration of Holi on the village streets.

We entered even further into the life of the village. On one occasion I was made a member of an informal panceyt, or council, called to settle an intricate family dispute. Another time, I was asked to accompany the men of a village family—and to participate as one of the official members—when they journeyed to a distant village for the purpose of “engaging” a boy in marriage. As a member of the party, I experienced firsthand the hostilities and tensions present in such situations. I attended sub rosa political meetings during the election of 1958, and was trusted with the secrets of both factions.
The people of Amity all speak English, with varying degrees of proficiency, and almost all have some acquaintance with Hindi. Hindi terminology is used particularly in discussing kinship, religion, and rice cultivation. Certain inconsistencies in the spelling of such terms occur in the text. Unhappily, they were unavoidable. There is a more or less standard English spelling in use today for the Hindi spoken in north India (see, for example, de Bary 1958: xiii-xv). Where I have quoted from the works of others, or referred to Indian phenomena not present in Amity, I have tried to follow the conventional spelling. For example, I have said that there is no "caste panchayat" in Amity. On the other hand, in transcribing terms actually in use in the village, I have employed my own spelling, in an attempt to approximate village pronunciation. Thus, I speak of the "village panceyt." But there is a further problem for Trinidad. Many Hindi words, particularly personal names, are spelled in English letters by the villagers in terms of a local orthography. I have followed them in this, and proper names—"Sookdeo," "Jairam," "Pooran," etc.—are always in the local spelling. Although all the names occurring in the text are common Trinidad East Indian names, in no case do I ever refer to any individual in the village by his real name. As italicizing all unfamiliar Indian terms in the text would have resulted in a patchwork of roman and italic type, terms beginning with a capital letter have been set in roman.

The spelling used for "Amity" Hindi terms throughout this work should not be taken to represent a formal linguistic analysis. It is simply an attempt to approximate the village pronunciation. There are a number of problems glossed over in this spelling. The "r" sound, for example, is usually a rolled dental, as in prajā. Occasionally one hears what sounds like the "r" of English, as in kartik, while some people pronounce words such as the latter with no "r" sound at all. The "r" has been included here, though with some trepidation. The "s" sound varies from "s" to "sh," and I was unable to determine
whether this represented free variation or was of phonemic significance. Both “s” and “sh” have been used in the text in terms of the way particular words seemed most frequently to be pronounced. In any case, neither “s” nor “sh” are pronounced quite as in English, but are closer together, somewhere between palatal and alveolar. “t,” “d,” “r,” “p,” “g” and “j” are unaspirated when they appear alone, as in pandit. An “h” after any one of them indicates aspiration, as in bhé. “c” is used to represent an unaspirated, voiceless, palatal plosive (the sound spelled “ch” in English, as in “church”), as in cattri. Followed by an “h,” as in chotkî, the same sound is aspirated. It was very hard to detect aspiration when the aspirant was a final one, as in mārājh, and some East Indians spell the word without the “h.” Many villagers insisted that the aspirant was really present, and in such cases I usually took their word for it. Though villagers who are literate in Hindi know of the retroflex plosives of Hindi, one rarely hears them in daily speech, though again it was hard to be certain. In this text I have ignored the distinction between retroflex and non-retroflex sounds, spelling both the same way. This book may be said to raise the question: “What happened to Hindi after one hundred years in Trinidad?” But there is no attempt to answer that question—that is left to those better qualified.

Ten vowels have been used here, and this would appear to be adequate, though again certain problems exist. Is the “oi” of poi pronounced as in “Chloe,” or is there a diphthong, as in the English “boil?” I could not be certain. The vowel signs used here are to be pronounced, roughly, as follows:

a the “uh” of English “but” (when “a” is a final, as in sudra, it is barely detectable).
ā the “a” of English “father.”
i the “i” of English “fit.”
i the “ee” of English “feet.”
u the “oo” of English “foot.”
ā the “oo” of English “boot.”
Nasalization is indicated by a tilde over the vowel, as in ħār. The problems of Hindi plurals have been avoided, and English plurals have been used.

Whenever monetary figures are given in the text, they are in British West Indian currency. “Dollar” and “cent” signs occur because B.W.I. currency uses the decimal system and the same signs, but it should be noted that $1.00 B.W.I. was roughly equivalent to $1.68 in United States currency.

One last comment on usage is necessary. The heterogeneity of the Trinidad population creates terminological problems. There are “Negroes,” “Whites,” “colored,” “Portuguese,” “Syrians” (which includes Jews), “Chinese,” and “East Indians” on the island—plus various mixtures. I have used the word “Creole” to refer to anyone, of any ethnic group, who participates in the general “Creole,” or West Indian, culture of Trinidad (cf. Braithwaite 1953: 10-11). For certain purposes it became necessary to distinguish particular groups. Thus, the villagers of Amity consider themselves and their ethnic group distinct from the “Creole” society and its culture, and are referred to as “East Indians.” Again, while the rural Trinidad “Negro” of relatively unmixed African descent may well consider himself a “Creole,” or “West Indian,” the Amity villager makes a sharp distinction between the rural “Negro” and the city “Creole,” and where it is necessary, so have I.

Conventionally, only my name may appear on the title page of this book. Nevertheless, many other people have made substantial contributions to it at every step of the way, and I should like to express my sense of deep indebtedness to them all.

I am particularly indebted to the members of my doctoral committee,
Professors Conrad M. Arensberg, Charles M. Wagley, and Elliot P. Skinner, who have advised and guided me from the inception of this work. I hope these pages adequately reflect their good counsel and the many hours of their valuable time that they devoted to my work.

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I want to thank all the people in Trinidad who assisted us in so many ways: Mr. Kenneth Fletcher, Mr. Andrew Carr, Mr. Sigmund Assee, Mr. A. V. S. Lochhead, the Honorable Mr. Ulric Lee, Senator Omah Maharaj, Mr. L. E. Rousseau, Mr. Cyril Solomon, Mr. L. Beard, Mr. Ben Sealy, Mrs. Sookpaloo, Mr. Robert Lalla, the Reverend A. Sultanti, Mr. and Mrs. E. Yufe, Mr. Brian Chen and Mr. Edward Lall. There were so many, indeed, that it is impossible to record all the names of those who helped make our stay in Trinidad both meaningful and pleasurable.

A nimakharām is one who eats at a man’s table and then fails to show a proper sense of gratitude, and I would be a nimakharām indeed if I did not especially acknowledge the debt we owe to our good friends Dr. and Mrs. Michael Rabindranath Ojah Reesal. Michael Reesal first introduced us to Amity and counseled us throughout our stay. His deep and compassionate understanding of his own people made our task immeasurably easier. May every young anthropologist on his first field trip make such friends as these.

To all the wonderful people of Amity we are of course particularly indebted. These pages tell of their village as they showed it to us, and, I hope, as they would want to have it portrayed. Through their efforts we had the most exciting and fulfilling year of our lives. We
are “bye-family” to them now, for our daughter, Perri Elizabeth—whom they called Toolsi-Devi—was born into the village, and in the deepest sense of the word Amity will forever be “our” village. Mr. Solomon Lochan and Mr. and Mrs. Basraj Bridglal helped us in ways that can never be sufficiently acknowledged, and Mr. Hardeo Ramsingh provided—along with much else—the original of the map of Amity used in the text. It is only with reluctance that I must admit there are simply too many names for me to list them all. I thank everyone, and to all I say, “Sītārām, bhēyo or buhīno.”

My wife, Sheila Solomon Klass, supported and encouraged me through the seemingly endless academic years. In the field, she did more than a fair share of the research. As the raw notes became manuscript and then book, she encouraged me with her never failing confidence, she typed and revised and proofread. There are no words with which I can adequately express gratitude for all of this. I shall therefore say only—and very inadequately—that this book is as much the product of her labors as it is of mine.

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