Coolie Pink and Green

2010, Patricia Mohammed, dir., experimental documentary film, 25 minutes

http://www.cultureunplugged.com/storyteller/Patricia_Mohammed#/myFilms

Promotional poster of Patricia Mohammed's Coolie Pink and Green, 2010, experimental documentary film, 25 minutes.
COURTESY OF PATRICIA MOHAMMED, FILM DIRECTOR.
In contrast to other themes in the Indo-Caribbean experience, films featuring the migration stories of indentured labourers have received little academic attention. Patricia Mohammed's short experimental documentary film *Coolie Pink and Green* is therefore a welcome addition to studies on Indians in the Caribbean. *Coolie Pink and Green* was filmed in Trinidad, home to over 468,000 Indians whose ancestors were brought by the British from India to labour on sugar plantations as indentured servants between 1845 and 1917. The general thesis of the film is that Indo-Trinidadian culture has been experiencing enormous social change to the point where this once-sojourning society finds itself caught between cultural retention and modernization. Indians are torn between these two choices. Mohammed portrays this ambiguity through two Indo-Trinidadian characters: a man in his seventies and a young woman in her later teens or early twenties. On one hand, the older male character cherishes his ancestral identity and encourages the younger Indian generation not to deviate from the past regarding serious issues like marriage and religious practices. On the other hand, the young female character is faced with the choice to embrace either her ancestral values or the modern and urban Trinidadian society. This process is not radical but gradual, and thereby has created binary modes of behaviour among Indo-Trinidadians. Some of this experience of being caught between two worlds is expected—culture is not static, especially when it is transplanted into a new and different environment. The typical solution however has been to dismiss the past and embrace the present. Mohammed shows that this has not been the case in Trinidad. Indians there have certainly upheld their ancestral identity, that is, their religious practices, their endogamous marriage patterns, their musical genres, and even their Bhojpuri language. Yet Indians have also traded their saris for Western clothing. Indo-Trinidadian men are not as patriarchal as their counterparts in India, and Indo-Trinidadian women work in both the private and public sectors.

What makes this film interesting is the ambivalence of both characters and the Indian community at large. Without realizing it, the older generation of Indo-Trinidadians has in fact experienced social change. During indenture, for example, their ancestors tried to maintain the caste structure they had known in India but this was not possible because of its inconsistency with the Western-oriented plantation system. Most Indo-Trinidadians, therefore, do not live by the caste system. Nevertheless the older generation persists in asking the younger generation to maintain a diluted form of Indian culture practiced during indenture. In Mohammed's film, while the young Indo-Trinidadian female character embraces modernity over her ancestral values, she does so within her own cultural context. She does not become creolized like certain Africans but instead gravitates towards a global Western identity not unlike processes of