

EAST INDIAN DRUMS

of Tunapuna, Trinidad

The Moslem Drums that can be heard five miles away



- **HUSSYA FESTIVAL**

sacred to the memory of Hassan and Hussein

- **CEREMONIAL DRUM**

- **WEDDING DANCE**

- **IMITATION STEELBAND**

- **6 CEREMONIAL DRUMMERS**

*Rahamat Ali (tassa), and 2 other tassa players,
one dhole, two ghang players*

Drums

It was dark as we approached Tunapuna. Light from the windows shone out on empty streets. No crowd of onlookers seemed to be enroute to the drumming, yet there could be no doubt about it, drums were in Tunapuna that night. Even at the distance of blocks away, the noise was deafening.

Our taxi driver, Rasheed Mohamed, whose aged *already passed over* father was high plenipotentiary of Moslem priests in Trinidad, had arranged the session for us.



Mohamed

Abruptly, he stopped and we unloaded. In the yard alongside a frame house, a hundred watt bulb hung from a tree. Underneath it a fire blazed, fed by two boys from the house. Around the fire were six men: two *ghang* (cymbals) players and four drummers. Their goatskin drums had been wetted, then stretched taut, and were now being held at the edge of the flames to dry, until the tension of the skins was right.¹

Two types of drums are used: three *tassas*, smaller drums about the size of snare drums, and the *dhole*, a small but deep bass drum. The dhole was slung over the neck of the player and strapped around his chest in such a way that he could beat on both ends,—which he certainly did, and although a little man, with great force, jumping in the air between every second stroke to gain leverage, as the drum swung back and forth from the impact of his bare hands.

The noise was more than deafening. I have been subjected to many situations where the environment of sound was overwhelming, but here in the open air, ten paces away from the six men, every instrument was at the pain level. Perhaps that is why they have *two* *ghang* players, and it may be the explanation of why no crowd collects. Two blocks away, the *ghang* is still loud, and the drums may be heard from five miles away when the air is still.

¹This procedure was repeated between each subsequent section of drumming.

Hussya festival drums, sacred to the memory of the two brothers Hassan and Hussein; wedding dance; ceremonial drums; "imitation steelband." Leader: Rahamat Ali

Trinidad, the melting pot

The towns and villages of Trinidad speak eloquently of the strains of successive conquest and occupation, as well as of the strains of people inhabiting them: Sangre Grande, Valencia; Ecclesville, Monkey Town; Carenage, Grande Riviere; Flanagin Town; Oropuche, Chacachacare. Then there are Chandernagore, Calcutta Settlement and Tunapuna.

Men and women from the opposite ends of the earth took root in Trinidad, married and produced "creole" families. From such intermarriages in this cosmopolitan melting pot



Around the fire were six men . . .

PHOTO: COOK

has arisen a new vitality and life blood peculiar to the Caribbean people. Hindus, and Moslems, —East Indians,—were brought by the British to Trinidad just as were the Africans, and others, for a labor force, to work the plantations of this remarkably fertile island. They now account for a third of the island population.

But the East Indian did not assimilate into the rest of the population easily or to the same extent as other elements, nor can it be said that there were reasons of religion or culture; other extremely dissimilar cultures had combined, with exciting results. Instead, over the years he kept to himself, worked, slaved and saved while living in a hovel. Consequently as a group, the East Indians are now well removed from the original laboring caste; from tenant farming they have come to landholding, shopkeeping, and entering into the realm of big business in Port of Spain.

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