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Words and Work: Education and Work Among Indo-Muslim Women in Trinidad, 1930–1960

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Abstract

This paper examines Indo-Muslim females' access to education and participation in formal work over three decades, 1930–1960. In particular, it acknowledges that access to primary and secondary education at the micro level was attained in circumstances of negotiation and collusion and in circumstances where there was a growing recognition of the universalistic-achievement values. Increasing female access to education is assumed to enable empowerment. As such, this paper also examines the employment opportunities available to young women. For young Indo-Muslim females, opportunities were generally limited to private and what can be termed the “semi-public” sphere. The existing patriarchal norms which operated served to ensure that marriage and motherhood, though not explored in this paper, were the means by which these young females were fully accepted by society. Using both written sources and interviews with Indo-Muslim females growing up between the 1920s and 1950s, this paper focuses on their education and labour market participation experiences as representatives of the Muslim community. These experiences in the school and in the labour market led to a reimagined and reshaped social order that added layers to their Muslim identity.