

Why and How did the Festivals Survive?

Introduction:

This week we discuss the reasons these festivals survived despite the difficulties and obstacles faced by the organizers and participants. Let's go!

1. 416,000 Indian and some 20,000 Chinese immigrants came to the Caribbean by 1917 to join the over 700,000 ex-slaves. Enough of them were committed to the preservation of their cultures. They had a desire to see it continue and be passed down to their children and the future generations.
2. Imagine that you are in a strange land, thousands of miles away from home, it would be quite natural for you to gravitate towards customs and practices and people that you are familiar with rather than those of the new place that you are in.
3. The festivals helped them to **maintain their sense of identity**. For many this was important in the maintenance of their sanity, especially in those times when they became homesick and lonely.
4. Social life on the plantations and in the colonies was restrictive to say the least. **There were not many provisions if any for the recreational aspect** of the masses. The elite did not care about them at all. How boring it must have been! You can then well imagine how they welcomed every opportunity to participate in such enjoyment and pleasurable activities.
5. They worked on the estates for up to nine hours per day. The rigorous labor required of them left them with little energy each day. Some of the festivals were held on weekends and provided a big **escape from the usual drudgery of plantation life and work**.
6. They were able to meet people of similar faith and culture. **Friendships** were formed which in some instances led to marriage.
7. They had the necessary items needed to practice the festival. What was lacking or not available in the Caribbean, they could either improvise or simply do without.

8. Some of the festivals **were not expensive or required much time and effort.**

For example, the Harvest festival- all a farmer had to do was to choose and present the best of his crop or animal to the person in charge.

9. A number of persons were usually involved in the organization and implementing stages of the festivals. This made people more willing to co-operate since the burden would not be left on any one person or individual family.

10. It gave one a **sense of pride and self worth** to be able to contribute and participate in one's own religious festivals.

11. Participating in the Holi and Divali festivals had material as well as spiritual benefits that could not be bought. **Eid -ul-Fitr** the Islam festival that celebrates the end of a month of fasting (**Ramadan**) presents the Muslims with a great opportunity to do alms giving which is a very important pillar of their beliefs.

12. There were **leaders** who were available to conduct the exercises such as the Muslim **imam**. The support and sponsorship of the Churches and private individuals were crucial. Men of influence and purpose such as our great hero, **Marcus Garvey** injected life, creativity and vitality in the celebrations thereby attracting a large group of people.

13. It also provided an **important link** for the parents who sent their young children to participate in the festivals. Children who were active in the Choirs or plays would certainly be more favored to receive any opportunities for position that may arise. Where the Church has influence, they would certainly recommend such a child or young person.

14. **The ruling class did not accept the masses** of the people as their equal. As a result they were excluded from various recreational activities and clubs that were owned and operated by them. This meant that they had to find their own means of entertainment.

15. In some instances the festivals were held in proximity to the masses but out of the 'circle' and reach of the upper class that did not approve of them.

16. The rum drinking aspect and noisy festivity attracted those poor Hindu laborers and villagers who were a sort of **outcasts** to their own people.