Pilgrimage to India: Experiences of South African Hindi Speaking Hindus

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Abstract

Pilgrimage is part of the Hindu social-religious structure since ancient times; over time it has become integrated into general recreational tourism. To South Africa's Hindi speaking Hindus India is the "Holy Land" or Spiritual Motherland, as it has always been for the native Hindus. Beginning in the earlier part of the 20th Century with pilgrimage to (*inter alia*) the Four Spiritual Centres (*dhams*) and the four *maths* established by Shankaracharya in the 9th Century C.E., the Hindu tourist still enjoys the spiritual visit to India with the advantage of greater variety of destinations as well as comforts. This ethnographic study will approach the Hindi speaking South African Hindu's travel to India from the Hindu theological point of view in order to elicit the experiences of the pilgrims and their impact on them. Using the grounded theory method (Babbie & Mouton 2008: 498) qualitative research will be undertaken through in-depth interviews with Hindi speaking Hindus in order to gauge their involvement in the ancestral religio-cultural spiritual values and with places in India associated with these. Discussion pays attention to the participants' spiritual perspectives and also takes account of the facilities offered by modern tourism to the pilgrims. As such the paper deals with both the spiritual as well as secular aspects of Hindu pilgrimage.

Key words: pilgrimage; tirtha; devotion; transformation, development; murti

Introduction

The religious pilgrimage segment of the international tourism and travel industry, in which people travel from one place to another, is to see, experience or pay homage to an exalted or divine personality. This journey is made out of deep seated yearnings and faith, and may end in a complete transformation; such as the Magi experienced in T S Eliot's "Journey of the Magi". They returned home after adoring the infant Jesus in Bethlehem, "no longer at ease here, in the old dispensation, with an alien people clutching their gods" (Eliot 1991:74). Such transformation is recorded in works such

as the Bhagavad Gita, Song of Solomon, the Vedas and medieval Hindu devotional poetry.

Religion and pilgrimage evolved in human societies as they developed, and tried to comprehend the phenomena around them and those which lay beyond: these were the transcendental, mystic, esoteric and the supra-natural.   Experiences of "devout" souls in most religions led to the conclusion that the mighty Universal Power or God makes Its presence known in diverse ways, and encourages humanity to cultivate It: The Srimad Bhagavad Gita (18.5) says that "Acts of Yajna (sacrifice), gift and austerity should not be given up, but should be performed; Yajna, gift and austerity are purifying to the wise" (Chidbhavananda 2005: 848-9).   The aforementioned acts constitute the essentials of a pilgrimage also; and the commentator of the above verse, Swami Chidbhavananda, asserts that "The world stands to gain thereby. Maximum good to all concerned emanates from these meritorious acts". Shankaracharya who founded the four *maths* (Monasteries), also stipulated pilgrimage to the four *dhams* or Divine Centres in order to evolve into a better society (Expert informant-Pandit Bijendranath Mishra, 11/06/2011).

The South African Hindi-speaking Hindus brought and maintained their religio-cultural practices in South Africa; and magnificent temples were erected before the end of the 19th century e.g. Sri Gopallal Temple, Verulam, and the Durban Hindu Temple, Somtseu Road, Durban. Over the period of one hundred years thereafter, temples in North and South Indian styles, as well as worship centres of the Neo-Hindu Movements (ISKCON, Ramakrishna Centre and Divine Life Society) began to provide spiritual sustenance to the Hindus. In time, although aware of the great religious cultures of India, the local Hindus developed their own holy places of pilgrimage such as the Sri Mariamman Temple in Isipingo, Jagannathpuri in Tongaat and later the Sri Radha-Radhanath Temple of Understanding (ISKCON) in Chatsworth, whose annual Ratha Yatra and Beach festival are widely supported. Elsewhere in the Diaspora, too, e.g. in Mauritius, the Ganga Talao has become a site of pilgrimage.   In the context of the ISKCON festivals in Durban, Kumar (2009:96) cites Jacobsen that events such as ISKCON's chariot processions in the diaspora "create new sacred spaces challenging the old notions of sacred spaces being fixed permanently in the land of its origin". Lord Venkatesvara or Balaji's Temple at Tirupati is replicated in India as well as abroad, in the USA. The growing number of Hindu temples worldwide stands testimony to the mobility of *tirthasthans*.

The South African Hindus participate in the local religious / spiritual events, including those provided by visiting spiritual luminaries. However, the old sentiment of going on pilgrimage before the end of one's lifespan, to India,

the Holy Motherland, has not diminished over the generations. Hinduism is not monolithic, with one text, one doctrine and one deity: therefore pilgrimage is not legislated for; it is merely recommended.   Going on pilgrimage therefore was something to look forward to, for spiritual illumination, upliftment as well as expiation, such as journeys undertaken by the protagonists of the Ramayana and Mahabharata.

The modern pilgrimage or *tirtha yatra* to India is being undertaken in larger numbers to a variety of destinations, either single or multiple, to ancient sites and modern spiritual centres in India. The mode of travel (by air most of the journey) and standards of conveniences may have improved from the time our earliest settler forefathers made their trips to the motherland.   The fervour has not diminished.

The mode of travel to places of pilgrimage within India also included air travel in ancient times.   Valmiki (Yuddhakanda CXXII to CXXIV) in his Ramayana describes Rama's homeward journey from Lanka on the Aerial Car Pushpaka.   Rama pointed out to Sita the places that he and Lakshmana traversed while looking for her, and then the car was brought down at the Holy Hermitage of Bharadwaja near Allahabad (Prayag). Pushpaka provided a tourism-cum-pilgrimage purpose.   Tulsidasa, in the other authoritative version of the Ramayana, the *Ramacharitmanas*, also describes this aerial journey with great clarity of detail (Lankakanda 117-121). The sights of the beautiful countryside and the precincts of the holy hermitages are elaborately described.

This study is an exploratory attempt on a subject with a vast canvas and multifarious facets. It also has to be guided by the social science framework in which pilgrimage concerns the development of man as a social being. Nevertheless, an understanding of the Hindu concept of pilgrimage, some of the major centres and sites for pilgrimage and the experiences of the devotee-pilgrims must inform the study. As a living phenomenon of human development, coupled with the increasing exposure to "spiritualization" especially through the Neo-Hindu Movements, as well as the re-invigorated presence of the traditional sources of faith through modern technology which enables internet worship, pilgrimage provides impetus to look inwards, and the lure to visit the source country, India.

Pilgrimage is visiting, attending or staying in a place (often city with one or more sacred sites) considered holy or auspicious for the individual, and finally for society. The ultimate goal of this engagement at the place of pilgrimage is freedom from the process of birth and rebirth (samsara or ocean of life). Hence the term *tirtha* is applied for place of pilgrimage (also *tirthasthan*) and the act is called *tirthatan*. The sacred spot was originally

conceived of as a watery place, probably on the basis of the Ganges River which "King Bhagirath succeeded in bringing down from the heavens (Milky Way) on to earth to liberate the souls of the sons of King Sagar" (Parvatiya 1996: 261-262). This powerful purifying property of the Ganges, which liberated souls trapped in limbo between death and rebirth, became attributed to the River Ganges, towns and cities on its banks, other rivers and lakes, temples and other venues where Divinity or human saintliness had made an abode or appearance. The term *tirtha* (ford) refers to a place where a river can be crossed. Life is perceived as an ocean, and the holy places are the "fords" which help to liberate us from sins and material bondage. Sri Sathya Sai Baba (in Shemesh 1993: 231) advises that evolved souls such as Vyasa and Valmiki, in keeping with Vedic injunctions, liberated themselves from the bondage of earthly life, and helped others to achieve the same through their teachings (*svayam tīrṇah parān tārayati*). Hence the great Sages and Seers, their compositions e.g. Vedas, Srimad Bhagavata Purana, Ramayana and their earthly habitats also became sites of pilgrimage. The altruistic motive in pilgrimage and spiritual upliftment thus operates at all levels in the world.

In ancient Hindu literature making pilgrimage as an act of expiation for violence and murder was prescribed amongst other forms of penitence (Parvatiya 1996: 576). Pandit Bijendra Mishra commented in his interview that the Pandavas visited all the *tirthas* to expiate the killings in the Mahabharata war, ending at Badrinath (interview with Pandit Bijendra Mishra). Another very important and ancient tradition is the offering of libations for propitiation of one's departed parents, at Gaya for fathers and Siddhapur for mothers (Parvatiya 1996:272 and 964 respectively). Both these holy places have been infused with divinity and spirituality through the efforts of great saints and sages.

The birth places of the incarnations of God (Vishnu) in Ayodhya (Rama) and Mathura (Krishna) and the final earthly abode of Krishna in Dwarka are some of Hinduism's supremely important *tirthasthans*. Tulsidasa in his *Ramacharitmanas* states that on the day when Rama's birth occurred and is commemorated according to scripture, all the holy *tirthas* of India come to Ayodhya (Balakanda 33, 6). This invests the Ramajanmabhumi (Rama's birthplace) with multifold potency and sanctity. Elsewhere, Tulsidasa extols Prayag, the city of Allahabad where the Ganges, Sarasvati and Yamuna unite (Balakanda 1, 7) as the King of *tirthas*, once again extolling the Ganges and the festivals held at Prayag, e.g. the Makar Sankranti (14 January) which promotes love, forgiveness, unity and friendship amongst people (Sharma 1997: 166-167), the Magha Snana (ibid 180) and the periodic Kumbha and Mahakumbhas. These vast gatherings assume a festive, fair-like atmosphere; however, the mind is fixed on the Gita's lesson (18.5) that Acts

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of Yajna (sacrifice), gift and austerity should be performed, since they are purifying (Chidbhavananda Supra). Further "mobility" of the *tirthasthans* is seen in the tradition that all the *tirthas* reside in Lord Shiva's trident at Kashi (Varanasi) and Kashi is the eternal imperishable city.

Over the millennia the *tirthas* of India, be they Mountains (Himalayas), Hills (Govardhan, Arunachala, Vindhyachala, Venkatachala), Rivers (Ganges, Yamuna, Godavari, Narmada, Sarasvati, Sindhu, Cauvery), Lakes (Mansarovar-now in Tibet) and Pushkar, Trees (Vatavriksha-the holy fig tree) at Prayag (Allahabad), Temples in all the Holy Regions (Kshetras) e.g. Kurukshetra, Prabhasa Kshetra, Subrahmanya Kshetra and Gokarnakshetra, the four Dhams or divine abodes established by Shankaracharya in the 9th century for the spiritual and cultural unity of India (Puri, Dwarka, Rameshvaram, Badrinath), as well as the Saptapuris or seven Holy Cities that liberate --Kashi, Kanchi, Haridwar, Ayodhya, Dwarka, Mathura, Avantikapuri (Ujjain) have helped Hindus to evolve spiritually. There is a tendency to compile another group of *char dhams* (four divine abodes) by placing Gangotri, Yamunotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath together. Shankaracharya had consecrated an image of Goddess Ganga at Gangotri and the respondents refer to these four in their narratives as *char dham*. These four *dhams* are all in the same region in the Himalayas. All provide easy access to spiritual development. To the Hindu, the whole of India is sacred: Srigopinath Kaviraj (1996: 210) declares, "Divine beings manifested in India. Temples such as Mahakaal and Rivers such as the Ganges grace the land of India. It is man's great fortune to be born here". Some places and objects are empowered with special gifts. Lord Krishna stated in the Srimad Bhagavad Gita (10, 20), "I am the Universal Self seated in the hearts of all beings"; further He claimed to be the foremost amongst each aspect of creation e.g. Meru amongst mountains (10, 23), amongst immovables the Himalaya (10, 25), Asvatha among trees (10, 26) and Ganga amongst streams (10, 31). The divine energy and grace of the Supreme are present in all objects of earth; therefore there is no place without some significant, revered object.

Hindus perform a variety of pilgrimages according to need. Trips to Gaya or Siddhapura are undertaken out of filial piety. They also make annual pilgrimages to their favourite temples, shrines etc. e.g. Jagannath Puri, Tirupati, Shirdi and Prashanti. Besides visiting Ayodhya, the birthplace of Sri Rama, many devout Hindus undertake the pilgrimage following Sri Rama's footsteps throughout His exile, from Ayodhya, Prayag (Allahabad), Chitrakut, Ram-Tek (near Nagpur), Nasik or Panchvati, Pampa (Vijayanagar), Rameshvaram, Setubandha (Rama's bridge to Lanka) and even to Lanka (Biswas in Vyas 1997: 225-240). Likewise the circumambulation of the Govardhan Hill near Mathura, in honour of Krishna's rescue of the villagers of

Braj, is an arduous but spiritually satisfying undertaking (Parvatiya 1996: 300).

Hindu life in all its varied aspects continued throughout the millennia, with minor and sometimes beneficial changes or additions emanating from the political conditions of the time. Pilgrimage required that people go to certain venues; where they needed accommodation and the necessities of life. Whilst Ashoka had encouraged his subjects to replace the violent occupation of hunting with pilgrimage, the Mughal rulers encouraged commerce in holy places out of practical necessity and the envisaged taxes, especially in the Sacred Vaishnava sites of Vrindavan and Ayodhya (Doniger 2010: 256). This also indicates the popularity of pilgrimage at that time. As the socio-economic situation improves in India, more people are going on *tirtha yatras*, especially during the special festivals associated with different divine personalities or holy personages; which occur throughout the year. The appearance of new religious movements, leaders and followers, is adding to the tapestry of pilgrimage-related experiences, making one feel that the more economically and technologically empowered India is becoming, the greater is the attention to the spiritual aspect of existence and the salvific effects of pilgrimage and prayer given by Indians. South African and other diaspora Hindus are in a similar position, facilitated by improved socio-economic standing and technology.

The concept and practice of pilgrimage had become an integral part of Hindu life over the millennia: post funerary rites such as at Gaya, and other compulsory penances for sins were unavoidable for the Indian Hindu. Pilgrimage for the peace and freedom of the soul took the next place in order of priority. The diaspora Hindus created many of their own *tirthas*, however, the trip to the holy land ever remained on their agenda. This research project will try to elicit and record some of the feelings and experiences of South African Hindi-speaking Hindus with regard to this *tirtha yatra* in the Holy Land of India.

Theory and methodology

It must be noted that the briefest description of the spiritual pilgrimage aspect of life in India is given, in order to point out major centres, pilgrim categories etc. The Hindu *tirthas* situated in countries bordering India i.e. Pakistan, Bangladesh, Srilanka, Nepal (and Chinese controlled Tibet where the two major *tirthas* Mansarovar and Mount Kailash are restricted for access) have not featured. The modern diaspora has created its own sacred geography as part of the dymamic development of a vibrant people. Also, the ancient temples of South East Asia built by Hindu Rulers in Cambodia (Angkor Vat), Indonesia (Prambanan) etc. are in a separate category as

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Heritage Sites. The perennial philosophy of *ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti,* Truth is One, sages call It by different names (Rigveda 1: 164: 46) applies to the pilgrimage undertaken by Hindus: they see the same truth in the various shapes, forms and projections of the Divine.

This study entails experiences of male and female pilgrims; however there is no scope for a feminist standpoint epistemology because of the belief that souls are devoid of gender, in spite of the patriarchal nature of Hindu society. Babbie & Mouton (2008: 37) state, *inter alia* with respect to the feminist standpoint epistemology that "more radical critiques questioned the capacity of social research to address the experiences of women adequately". Manu's designs for the harmonious development of society provided for the nurturing of women as a prerequisite. Ernest Wood in his foreword to Motwani's "Manu Dharma Shastra" describes it as "precepts or rules on the proper maintenance and conduct of life, both individual and social". Motwani (1958: Preface xii) added that these teachings affected the collective life of the people. Aspects of Manu's laws are perceived as either patriarchal or anti-feminine, but scholars view his contributions as far outweighing any such demerits. Furthermore, the Bhagavad Gita, a central religious text of Hinduism, is viewed as promoting egalitarianism in the spiritual realm; making women dependent on themselves and not their husbands for liberation. The *tirtha* does not confer rewards by proxy at least amongst the living; hence women were spared hegemonic control in this respect (Lantigua 2008: 62). This relationship between men and women, which relaxes traditional strictures, is deemed to be an enactment between "beings endowed with faculty of mind or reason" (Motwani 1958: 26). The spiritual domain thus overrides the patriarchal, androcentric environment of Hindu society, "wherein value is seen in women only in relation to men (Shukla 2010: 25).

Religio-cultural theory is closer to the subject at hand. Hulmes (1989: 3) saw religion and culture as a key to social cohesion. The Manu Dharma Shastra's foremost concern was with this aspect of society. Hence Toulis (cited in Chirkut 2005: 74), whilst asserting that religion is central to people's lives, places religio-cultural theory in perspective for the understanding of traditions and rituals.

The spiritual experience of the pilgrimage is the focus of this study; but it is not exclusive. Social aspects of the trip, interpersonal relations, post-pilgrimage contacts etc. also have their place. Hence the grounded theory method will be used, to exploit the flexibility, wherein "data collection, analysis and theory stand in reciprocal relationship with each other" (Strauss and Corbin 1990: 23 cited in Babbie & Mouton 2008: 498). These authors further clarified that "one does not begin with a theory, then prove it, rather,

one begins with an area of study, and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge". For an ethnographic study like the present, this approach could prove to be very appropriate, yielding further "pertinent data" through theoretical sampling (Ojong & Muthuki 2010:14), to fill in any "gaps" in the pilgrims' experiences. The inquiry into the experiences of the South African Hindi-speaking Hindu pilgrims to India proceeds in an ethnographic, qualitative research direction.

The author of this paper has been presented a unique opportunity to explore and record a phenomenon close to her life and career over the past thirty years. As a Hindi-speaking Hindu in the South African diasporic location and familiar with many of the sacred sites in India, and teaching Hindi language and literature, it was inevitable that she would encounter in the literature of India traces of India's religious practices and traditions which were known and / or practiced by the diaspora Hindus. This was an ideal locus for ethnographic study of the life-changing experiences of pilgrimage in India. Babbie and Mouton (2008: 279) state *inter alia* that "Ethnography can be described as the data of cultural anthropology that is derived from the direct observation of behaviour in a particular study. This method of describing culture is carried out within the parameters of qualitative research, especially of studying human action in its natural setting or venue, through the eyes of the actors themselves (Babbie & Mouton 2008: 278). The fact that the actual experience (*tirthatan*) occurred in a different venue should not be an obstacle, since the study is one of lived experiences, unfolded in the surroundings regular or familiar to the actors / subjects and based on recall or reminiscence. Naidu (2010: 97) writes approvingly of Velocchi's (2005) views that ethnographic methods, emphasizing how individuals create meaning, are best suited where there is the challenge regarding distinguishing practices, hegemonic structures and demands made on women. It was stated that Hinduism is not a monolithic or hegemonic religion, nevertheless the patriarchal and androcentric construction of human society make them inseparable. Altogether, this study will reveal how these problems are negotiated without destabilizing social / family relationships.

Gender did not play any role in this study as research design: nevertheless, 5 males and 5 females between the ages of 39 and 75 years were interviewed. Besides sharing the Hindi language, the respondents were highly religious Hindus subscribing to different denominations viz. Saiva, Sakta, Vaishnava or Sai Baba devotees. They were furthermore, well-read and informed individuals. The subjects were known through various types of contacts in the community with whom the researcher has been interacting over a lengthy period. The subject of enquiry itself whilst having a personal nature did not inhibit the actors in their responses. Structured questions were put to all the subjects in familiar surroundings where both parties were at ease.

There was considerable rapport between the parties, and researcher advocacy, an unavoidable facet of qualitative research, did surface some times. The empirical part of this project was enjoyable as well as informative, and could definitely lead to further research.

General Information

The Respondents (R) made up of 5 males and 5 females had eight married and two widowed members. They were 3rd and 4th generation Hindi speaking Hindus in South Africa. Their gender is not specifically indicated in the analysis because this is not relevant to the study. The interview was conducted under six broad divisions viz. Conceptual, *tirtha yatras* / Tours to India, The Pilgrimage or Tour, Experiences in Pilgrimage, Experiences after Pilgrimage and Wider Implications of the tour.

Analysis

a. *Conceptual*
Most respondents were aware of *tirtha yatra* since young adulthood; four of the older respondents were aware since childhood. They got acquainted with *tirthas* through scriptures, religious books, friends and family who have been on pilgrimage, television documentaries, DVDs and satsangs (Religious gatherings). The older respondents also became familiar with *tirthas* through the oral tradition through grandparents and parents. R1's father was a well informed and educated priest who "used to tell us stories from the scriptures," and R6's family always spoke of their past history. This highlights the importance of the oral tradition as well as family cohesion; the cultural history and values of the Hindi-speaking Hindus have been passed on to future generations via the oral tradition for centuries.

All the respondents were inspired and excited to go on *tirtha yatra*. R1 related that "Being a seeker of truth, after I joined the Sathya Sai Organisation, I joined a group of fellow seekers. Early childhood did impact in my later life and did inspire my decision to find more meaning to life". R1 also said that "to me the whole of India is a *tirthasthan*; others indicated the following as places / *tirthas* visited: Rishikesh, Haridwar, Ayodhya, Chitrakut, Varanasi (Vishwanath Mandir, Tulasi Manas, Shiv Mandir, Durga), Gaya (for *shraddha*- propitiation of ancestors), Allahabad (Prayag), Triveni (the sangam at Allahabad), Delhi (temples, e.g. Lakshminarayan Temple, Birla Mandir), Kolkata (Dakshineshwara Kali Temple), Belur Math, Amritsar (Rama Temple), Mumbai (Temples-Siddhi Vinayak, Mahalakshmi, Shirdi, Prashanti, Jaipur (temples), Mathura / Vrindavan (Krishna Temples, Hare Krishna Temple), Jammu (Vaishno Devi), Kurukshetra, Char Dham (Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Yamunotri), Somnath, Dwarka, Rameshwaram,

Kanyakumari, Saryu River, Ganga, Yamuna, Gokul, Akshardham, Kashmir (Shiv Temple), Mumbai (Hanuman Temple), Chamundi temple in Mysore and the ISKCON Temple in Bangalore. The foregoing are some of the leading places of pilgrimage visited by the respondents. Notice must be taken of the Himalayan *char dhams* above. The most senior respondent, paid homage to approximately 50 famous temples in North India, ghats and temples along Ganga, ashrams, and many in South India (R5). The list covers most of the places / *tirthasthans* visited by all interviewees. R5, a proud and devout Hindu, also paid homage to the Supreme at a Sufi Mosque and St Xavier's Church in different cities. This is significant because Hinduism teaches the unity of the Supreme in the Vedic dictum "ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti" (supra), echoed in Tulsidasa's Ramacharitmanas "Whatever feelings each held with regard to the Lord, in that form they beheld Him (Balakanda 240: 4). As different abodes of the One Supreme, the pilgrimage centres have no boundaries. R5 exemplifies this approach to the notion of religious boundaries.

b. *Tirtha Yatras / Tours to India*

Only five respondents went to India specifically on pilgrimage; others combined their pilgrimage with a holiday. The latter interviewees also visited tourist sites e.g. historical gardens, palaces, Taj Mahal, Forts and Museums. Extensive shopping was also done as Indian garments, jewelry, artifacts, books etc. are cheaper and provide wider choices. Such combining of economics and leisure tourism is a phenomenon noted since Ashoka's reign (265 - 232 BCE) and became commercially a matter of interest to the Mughal rulers (16-17 centuries A.C.) because of tax gathering. The average Hindu may be able to enjoy pilgrimage only as part of a general package, owing to constraints of time, finance and other interests. There must be compromise between the ephemeral and the eternal.

Two main categories of Avatar had existed for the past two millennia: the Avatar or Incarnation (in flesh and blood e.g. Kurma, Nrisimha, Rama, Krishna) and the Archavatar where the divine attributes of the Supreme were embodied in an image or murti (e.g. Balaji or Sri Venkateswara at Tirupati). Doniger (2010: 677-678) says that like other conceptualizations of mother deities for promoting religious harmony in Kerala in 2008, the goddess "Bhagavati riding on an elephant, went down to the local church to visit her 'twin sister,' the Virgin Mary". Doniger continues that the goddess Santoshi Mata, popularly worshipped by women in Uttar Pradesh since 1960's has no antecedents in Hindu religious lore, but suddenly leapt to all-India popularity after the release of the (mythological) film 'Jai Santoshi Ma' in 1975. Simple worship of Santoshi Mata in the home confers the appropriate rewards (Doniger 2010: 678). Not much has been heard from the priesthood

concerning Santoshi Mata worship because a priest is not required for her worship. This is an example of "filmavatar" or photo-descent of the divine where an imaginary embodiment of the divine virtues (*daivi sampada*) prescribed by Lord Krishna in the Srimad Bhagavad Gita, Chapter 16, becomes the recipient of veneration and supplication, and becomes energized to reciprocate (or so it seems). The question was put to the expert informant Pandit Mishra whether a *tirthasthan* exists for the "recent" mother goddess Santoshi Mata. Pandit Mishra responded that Santoshi Mata is worshipped with a photo (picture) placed in front of the devotee. Saint Narsi Mehta of Gujarat (1414 - 1480) wrote Mahatma Gandhi's dearest hymn "Vaishnav Jan" describing the ideal servant of God and society (Parvatiya 1996: 474). One line referring to this "Vaishnav Jan" is translated thus: "All the sacred places / objects of pilgrimage dwell in the body of such a person". Rising from Sainthood to Divinity is an open possibility in the Hindu world view. This is how Gandhi saw God in the poor.

The five respondents who went specifically on pilgrimage did plan extensively. Books, the internet, friends, family, travel agents, etc. were consulted. Others factored certain *tirthasthans* into their holiday itinerary. R7 said that "visiting *tirthasthans* was incidental to holiday planning". In spite of pilgrimage being incidental to their trip, they still read extensively on *tirthas*, spoke to informed people; went with an open mind, meditated on deities and prayed to make pilgrimage possible. It is clear that Hindus in general will not miss a visit to a holy place even if it is not on their priority list.

The most popular deities that drew the pilgrims to visit holy *tirthas* are Krishna, Rama, Hanuman, Devi (in different forms in different places), Sai Baba (Sai Baba of Shirdi and Sri Sathya Sai Baba), Shiva, Vishnu etc. All were emotional or sentimental and expressed their feelings with regard to the pilgrimage in different ways. The respondents revealed that they experienced a yearning- "Alas, a long cherished dream was about to materialize" and were overjoyed. Some mentioned that they made the journey with an open mind. The journey itself was indescribable, overwhelming, nostalgic and emotional.   Sadness, pity, devotion and satisfaction invaded their hearts. Most respondents were devotion driven; tears streamed down at many *tirthas* for having arrived in the presence of God. The sadness and pity were evoked by human suffering, beggary, abject poverty, even in the wealthy abodes of the Lord - one of the enigmas / anomalies of modern life, especially in India. Wealth and penury subsisting side by side reflect the material and spiritual aspects of existence. Nevertheless the informants interpreted their experiences in the light of the idea in Hinduism that sees God in the poor through the concept of Daridranarayana, that is, service to the poor attracts merit.

c.   *The Pilgrimage / Tour*

Respondents were generally happy with travel arrangements, accommodation and food with few exceptions. They looked for clean cheaper accommodation with the quality of 4-5 star hotel food. The country has much to offer besides the *tirthas* such as tourist sites, scenery, excellent shopping that is very affordable. However, in recent years things are becoming more expensive including hotels and travel. R2 indicated that "India is safe; even safe for women to move around clad in jewellery with handbags at night. R4 and R5 said that India is incredibly unique. There is safety in numbers when on tour in India. The possibility of crime against lone people in isolated spaces must be borne in mind. R4 said "At times I felt like a time traveler gone back into the medieval ages", while R5 said "India is incredible. No description will adequately prepare you for the experience". Other comments were that "the country is breathtakingly beautiful despite its extremes" of poor and rich, starvation / abundance, traditional and western way of life, urban and rural life, concrete jungles and the most scenic natural beauty away from the cities etc. Where man has created squalor, nature still showers her beauty on India. The respondents have rightly observed that an upgrade in accommodation and services would make pilgrimage more enjoyable.

d.   *Experiences in Pilgrimage*

The respondents were excited, elated and happy to have *darshan* of the holy places. R1 said, "I was filled with love for Bhagavan Sri Sathya Sai Baba". In some cases there were nervousness and anxiety, not knowing what to expect. Many were emotional and shed tears of joy; for others the experience was indescribable because "it is a feeling of total surrender to God". Some even said they were overwhelmed by the large crowds and queues, touting and 'greedy' priests in some places (R9). R7 felt acute disappointment at the neglect in a few places. However, the general view is that India has hundreds of *tirthasthans*; most are good with a few exceptions. One respondent says with conviction that "To me the whole of India is a *tirthasthan* or place of pilgrimage and every trip I made to India was a pilgrimage (R1). This is supported by the fact that many pilgrims to India offer *pranams* (greetings) to Mother India when they disembark for the first time on Indian soil. They touch the ground (earth) in an act of reverence in the same way they do when they see or have darshan of a deity in a temple. The Bharat Mata Mandir (Temple of Mother India) in Varanasi attests to this (R9). Many have called India "the Cradle of Spirituality". For most Hindus in the Diaspora, India remains their spiritual Motherland and it is the Holy Land that God has traversed in the form of Rama, Krishna,

Hanuman, Sri Sathya Sai Baba etc. Even if the Hindi speaking Hindus go to India only for a holiday, most carry in their hearts great reverence for the land and are drawn to the holy places in the vicinity of their chosen places of interest; India has holy shrines every few kilometers and it is therefore not difficult to balance worldliness with spirituality; hence the feeling of satisfaction after every trip to India and the yearning to return to India. Most respondents said that the urge to go back to India, including the holy places, is very strong.

People go on pilgrimage for *darshan* (viewing) of the holy sites; out of love for God; just to "feel" or experience the holy place (R9); for peace of mind, good health, protection, blessings (R2); to experience different ways of devotion and worship in different parts of India (R6). R5 said "Initially, it was my dream to make an all-encompassing pilgrimage. After my experience, I am addicted to India. It is my annual getaway".

Generally, people's experiences were similar while on pilgrimage. Some have been once but many have gone on pilgrimage on various trips because India is such a vast country and one cannot see many of the holy sites in a single trip. Some, like R2, return to the same site on every pilgrimage (Haridwar) and may include other holy places on their visits.

As far as the procedure at the *tirthas* is concerned one has to generally comply with the system of offerings at each shrine - prayer, *prasad*, gifts or money. However these are not compulsory. The difference was the individual's emotional / spiritual experiences. R1 said that "Sri Sathya Sai Baba was the perfect Host". The *Ista Devata* (personal Deity) makes all the difference. If you worship God in the form of Mother then the Vaishno Devi experience was wonderful; those who worship Rama and Krishna were excited, elated, intoxicated with devotion in Ayodhya (birthplace of Rama), Chitrakut (Rama began his exile from here), Tulsi Manas Mandir (R7) and Brindavan (Krishna's childhood was spent there). For R10 setting foot in Mathura where Krishna was born was overwhelming; for some it was the banks of the holy Ganga (R2). Where the crowd was vast it was frustrating (e.g. Tirupati); but at the smaller, quieter shrines the experiences were overwhelming and memorable - this creates a burning desire to go back.

The *murtis* were of all different sizes, from small to life-size and those out in the open were gigantic (towering into the skies). There is the tendency to erect gigantic images of deities, which can be seen from afar, and can draw and inspire devotees. Hanuman images come foremost to mind in this respect. However, what seems to have mattered to the pilgrims were their devotion and yearning for God rather than the size of the *murtis*.

According to the respondents there were many priests and helpers; some were avaricious, wanting to make quick money from tourists; but generally people were helpful and very friendly. Respondents have forged relationships with some of the people / priests and continue to send family and friends on pilgrimage to them. Most respondents did not give *Dana* (donations) in a big way but did give generously to the poor, the beggars and paid the priests for their services. However, making offerings inside a temple in the form of *prasad*, gifts and money is common practice for Hindus.

Some respondents complained about the pollution of the *ghats* and rivers, neglect of shrines, donation seekers who disturb one's prayer and meditation, long queues and separation of males and females in very crowded areas creating the fear of getting lost. People do not mind males and females being separated for worship as long as it is in an organized way. None of the respondents who are all Hindus experienced any discrimination. However R10 indicated that a temple in Bhubaneswar and one in Varanasi allowed only Hindus to enter. The Vishwanath Temple in Kashi (Varanasi / Banaras) has military security and metal detectors; whereas the magnificent Vishwanath Temple in the Banaras (Kashi) Hindu University denies entry to those who condemn worship through images.

There seems to have been no "discrimination" *per se* on the basis of gender or any other consideration amongst Hindus. People experienced no discomfort if members of their group had to separate on gender basis. It happens at a few places -- Prashanti (Puttaparthi) and most Sri Sathya Sai Baba *satsangs*. At Varanasi the Sankat Mochan Hanuman temple has separate queues for approaching the deities and making offerings. One cannot help the crowding: Vaishno Devi is open 24 hours a day and yet bookings are essential. At Tirupati Lord Venkateswara is like an industrial entity that never shuts down. Queues are long even for those who pay for shorter waiting periods. The queues and "fleeting glance" *darshan* (viewing) of Balaji Lord Venkateswara would be more tolerable if the officials treat pilgrims who have come to communicate with the divine with respect. Known as the Vatican of the East, Tirupati draws devotees from all sectors of Indian society from within the subcontinent and abroad.

e.   *Experiences after Pilgrimage*

About feeling fulfilled after pilgrimage R1 said "Darshan is like fire; the more fuel you add the brighter it burns. In other words the more you have the more you want and if Baba wills it I will definitely go back". R2 is fulfilled and says "Haridwar is for me heaven on earth and I will go back again and again". Every respondent felt fulfilled and would like to return. Some have

forged relations with priests, made new friends while others have not. All (without exception) would like to go back to India on pilgrimage; some to certain places like Akshardham, Prashanti, Haridwar, Char Dham, Vaishno Devi; some to all and some to only their Ista Devata shrines. All indicated that they would encourage their friends and family to undertake pilgrimage; of these, one respondent would not encourage people to go to Tirupati (R5). This is a great pity that the abode of Lord Vishnu / Lord Rama in the Tirupati Venkateswara Temple invites such comment because of poor management.

Respondents have grown in more ways than one after pilgrimage. Some responses were "I am able to forgive more easily, I am trying to detach slowly (R1); "Become more God conscious, God fearing and appreciate true Hindu values (R2); "Has made me a better person especially with spiritual advancement & general outlook (R3); "learnt to be more accommodating and understanding" (R4); "I have gained a better understanding of scriptural references to places and events" (R5); "I now have first-hand experience, my thinking is more broad-minded and I make allowances for variety "(R6); "Has reinforced my faith in the deities which in turn has convinced me that devotion as the essence of faith is the prerequisite for spiritual rewards" (R7); "We have problems but there are others worse off than us -- spare a thought for them. Has made me understand life -- be good and do good" (R8); "Made me realize that we complain about everything more than is necessary" (R9); "I appreciate my roots; we exposed our three sons to this experience as well. I've been spiritually enriched greatly, and realize that religion is to be lived and it is not some abstract phenomenon that we all strive to reach. It has become clear, tangible and accessible to me and my family (R10).

Some respondents had some unusual mystical experiences which are outside the scope of this paper, but they credit God for these experiences saying that the shortcomings were of their own doing in some cases, and in others "the shortcomings in the trip were not factors that influenced the experience in a negative way; in fact we became easy and accepting / tolerant of the shortcomings by the end of our journey (R10). "Unusual" experiences can be regarded as the usual or commonplace in certain contexts. R1 regards Sri Sathya Sai Baba as the indweller of her being. This being so, Sai Baba can cause her to experience anything, even make her offer Rupees 200 to a fellow devotee who had lost her money earlier! What / Who else could have moved her to give a substantial amount (at least in India) of cash to a total stranger without a word passing between them, than Sai Baba Himself!

The secular aspects of the trip that the respondents enjoyed were varied. They loved the interaction with Indian people who were surprised that we still maintain our culture; respondents loved the food, tours and shopping,

plus the history of India, and the general experience; they also loved the British, Mughal and Indian Architecture, more especially in Mysore and Jaipur. They also liked the Taj Mahal, Golden Temple, Vrindavan Gardens, Rajdhani Express (train), Goa and visiting new places by train as well as the "admirable chaos" in the streets. From an old description of "organized chaos" India now gets a new image, i.e. "admirable chaos", from a diaspora Hindu. Much depends on what we believe and wish to see.

f.   *Wider Impact of Tour*

Pilgrims met people from all over the world in India. They describe their meetings in different ways; some of these are: Excellent meeting of people of all nationalities who come with a common purpose. One is exposed to the kaleidoscope of cultures whilst assembling for a common purpose (i.e. God). I adore those who travel far and wide for darshan. However, there is little time for meaningful interaction besides friendly greetings. One respondent was astounded at the number of European tourists in Haridwar, Rishikesh and Varanasi. They were appropriately dressed in *kurta-pajama* and seemed to know exactly what they were doing while performing *puja*, and seemed perfectly comfortable (R8 and R9). Their devotion is strong and worth emulating.

To the question, "Would you consider pilgrimage/sacred/religious tourism as a valid segment of tourism in general?" 90% said "yes, pilgrimage must be considered a valid segment of tourism in general". All believe that this experience has social benefits. It is noteworthy that the spiritual effects of pilgrimage are world-affirming and socially positive.

To the question "Should there be more and better facilities for this type of tourism?"-- most respondents agree that there must be better facilities and it would help if there were modern conveniences on the way to the different *tirthasthans*. The *ashrams* are very neat and orderly, however, the temples need more order. Majority expressed sadness to see everyone having to pay to enter some of the temples (the Shiva temple in Bangalore). In Haridwar you offer a donation before entering; the money is used to maintain the place as well as feed the poor.

Most respondents unanimously agreed that pilgrimage invokes a sense of fellowship amongst devotees and a desire to assist the impoverished; that it should be combined with ecotourism, and leisure travel and history, with all appropriate facilities. Tourism packages would be ideal especially in India which is rich in spirituality, history and natural beauty. Only R8 indicated that pilgrimage must not always be combined with general tourism, but concedes that pilgrimage *cum* holiday in this expensive day and age works

and is a great idea, not to speak of shopping!   General tourism is for the material, outward enjoyment. Religious tourism directly impacts on the inner life. This is explained in the following anecdote: When asked why he, a blind man, comes regularly for Krishna's *darshan* (viewing), Surdas had famously retorted, "HE SEES ME".

"In which ways has your approach to life changed after your pilgrimage?" To this question the responses resonated well with the reasons for pilgrimage discussed in the earlier part of this paper. Ten responses follow: "The pilgrimage has made me realize that life is a gift of the Divine and we need to make the best of every moment. We have to realize our own divinity; all of us are just playing a role in this Cosmic Drama of coming and going and we need to help each other on this spiritual journey" (R1). "I have become more spiritual, trying to follow the principles of a true Hindu; trying to become a better person and more God conscious. I have gone on pilgrimage to India 34 times and would like to go every year for the rest of my life" (R2). "It has given me a more mature approach especially with regard to decision making" (R3). "I feel more spiritually inclined" (R4). "I am more tolerant; I have gained much understanding and I have changed my approach to life. We need to embrace Unity in Diversity" (R5). R2, R4 and R5 have reported tolerance, maturity and spiritual growth. R6 "appreciates the progress we have made in following our religious practices, *satsangs* and our temples that follow Sanatan Dharma". R7 declares that "rather than a change to my approach to life, my experiences have intensified my belief that sincere devotion to the deities yields both spiritual as well as material rewards". R8 has hardened his former soft nature, to avoid exploitation by the priests (*pandas*) at temples. He also decries the profiteering by members of the travel / leisure industry and would like to see better organized religious tours. R9 further contributes that pilgrimage has made her realize that the simple things in life are what matter, and that people from other countries think that South Africans are ignorant of our culture and religion, making us vulnerable to cheats. R10 now has an agenda to overcome the challenges of the *tirtha yatra.* R10 had responded that any "physical shortcomings" did not influence their experience negatively, and had become accepting of these shortcomings by the end of the trip. R10 has become more "focused" now; and the challenges of the *tirtha yatra* led to appreciation of the effects of the pilgrimage. His "agenda" thus relates to mindset or readiness to accept the challenges whilst continuing *tirtha yatras.*

Conclusion

The social aspects of tourism aid the realization of individual, personal goals, and in turn are enriched by the improved or transformed perceptions and feelings of the pilgrims.

Many questions will remain unanswered for now: The spiritual domain is not easy to negotiate one's way through, on account of the varying disciplines, rituals, meditations and physical austerities required in the wide variety of *tirthasthans*. R6's responses regarding experiences support the view that fulfillment was achieved but after much perseverance. What is clear, however, is that the *atma* or soul needs to attain a certain pristine state before merger with the Universal and cessation of the cycle of birth and rebirth (*samsara*) which the *tirthas*, by definition, help us do. R7 expressed this view, stating that devotion is the essence of faith and is a pre-requisite for "spiritual rewards". The intervening problems caused by human indolence, greed, intolerance and ignorance, also in the *tirthasthans*, have to be resolved. The socio-economic mechanisms to ameliorate conditions need to be applied. R9 refers to this aspect in the response.

The questions asked in the abstract have been addressed adequately. The *Bhagavad Gita*'s requisites of Yajna (sacrificial offerings), Dana (charity) and Tapas (austerity or penance) form the core of the external accoutrements or paraphernalia of pilgrimage. Prayers and sacrificial offerings were made; gifts to the priest given, and Tapas or physical discipline in the form of walking, waiting in queues and fasting complete the picture. Only some pilgrims performed public charity on a large scale.

Hindu religious and spiritual philosophy provides for a balanced development on the material and spiritual plane through the four social forces or goals (*purusharthas) – dharma* (duty, righteousness), *artha* (material goals), *kama* (fulfillment of wishes) and *moksha* (liberation). It further regulates human life through the four *ashramas* or institutions according to the chronological age of the individual viz. *brahmacharya* (student, celibate), *grhastha* (family, collective life), *vanaprastha* (detachment) and *sannyasa* (renunciation). The *purusharthas* and *ashramas* both point finally in the direction of spirituality through *moksha* and *sannyasa.* Every spiritual experience or trip to a sacred place reinforces the invisible link of the human with the divine. It is noteworthy that all ten respondents like T S Eliot's Magi, would "do it again".

Caste and denominational issues did not surface during the subjects' experiences, although R6 expressed joy at meeting a fellow priest from his *gotra* (clan) which has greater binding force than mere caste. The same R6 also worshipped in a Soofi Mosque. R6 felt great affinity for his kinsman most probably out of family-feeling, especially on account of the circumstances of separation through the indenture system. R6 reveals another trait which merits attention, viz. worshipping in a Sufi Mosque. Other respondents also visited shrines etc. of other religious groups. Hinduism advocates *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* (the whole world is one family); and *ekam sad viprā bahudhā vadanti* (the Truth is one, sages call it by different names – Rigveda 1.164:46). They are Catholic in their outlook with regard

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to other religions and adopt an ecumenical stance in matters within the broad Hindu fold – thus distinct Hindu values and universal values are brought close. Lord Krishna (*Bhagavadgita* 10, 26 et. seq.) shows how He is in and foremost among a number of earthly entities – humans, animals and plants, whilst Tulsidasa in Ramacharitmanas (Balakanda 240: 4) asserts that people visualize the Divine according to their subjective faculties. This can help to understand how Hindus still go to India to experience the Divine at original sites of manifestation, as well as create new sacred places in the diaspora. God and matters of faith are not confined in time or space.

All the subjects were satisfied with their experiences of visiting holy places; even the expression of inconvenience with regard to facilities is muted. Only the queuing and pushing at one of the world's most revered Hindu Centres (Tirupati) is considered a dampening factor. The respondents have grown through their spiritual journey starting from the outer world of temple and priests to the inner self where "the indweller of all beings" resides. Pilgrimage thus contributes to the development of society making people happy, understanding, patient, friendly, charitable and "sensible and positive". The difficulties and constraints of the *tirtha yatra* matured the respondents into patient, appreciative beings. It also made all of them realize that they are fortunate in comparison with the poor people surrounding the *tirtasthan.* Human service is one of the hallmarks of Hinduism, with aphorisms such as *manava seva madhava seva* (service to man is service to God) and *seva paramo dharma* (service is the highest religion) and Tulsidasa's "There is no greater religion than serving others" (*Uttarakanda* 40: 1). In South Africa these values are reflected in the many services rendered by Hindu religious institutions towards education, health, nutrition and frail care for all the needy people.

The universal nature of Hindu beliefs and practices helped to establish them in climes far away from India, in the ancient world and in the modern diaspora. This study has shown how Hindus value their ancestral heritage but also cherish those sites and institutions they forged or created in their new homes. Manu's *Manavadharma Shastra* provided for *dharma, artha, kama moksha;* and thus Hindus are able to assimilate material and spiritual benefits comfortably. The respondents evinced this faculty of adaptation in the study, taking tourism and *tirtha,* material and spiritual, together.

The foregoing has also demonstrated the tremendous scope for more focused research in the field of religious tourism, especially to the eastern countries.

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Religious Sentiment and Politics of Defining Hindu Texts

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Abstract:

In the context of rightwing student protest on Delhi University campus in 2011 to demand the withdrawal of an essay written by Prof A K Ramanujan, there developed a politico-legal situation in which students deployed both political pressure as well as legal suit to achieve their goal. This incident raised not only questions of political involvement in defining what Hinduism should be and how its sacred texts ought to be read, but the debate also attempted to shape the 'sacred text' by carefully and systematically obfuscating select materials to fit in with the viewpoint from a particular section of the Hindu society. In this paper I wish to examine some of the underlying issues in regard to the broader issue of religious sentiment. I examine the issue of rationalizing Hindu texts through moral discourse, the role of Hindutva ideology in rationalizing Hindu texts, and the role of modern Hindu tendency to restrict Hinduism to Vedānta ideas and thereby creating an unintended consequence toward a prejudicial understanding of Hinduism. I also wish to analyze the role of rightwing organizations in taking the neo-Vedānta ideas and using them for their own political agenda. I wish to argue that by rejecting Ramanujan's essay the Hindu rightwing students effectively defined what Hindu texts ought to have contained in them by denying the fact that any other narratives ever existed in the 'sacred' texts of the Hindus.

Keywords: Religious sentiment, Hindutva, Hindu Texts, neo-Hindu, Ramanujan Debate, Ramcharitmanas, Rāmāyaṇa, Mahābhārata, Srividya, Tantra

Background to the Ramanujan's Essay Debate

In 2004 the Delhi University's department of History included the essay of Prof. A.K. Rāmanujan entitled "Three Hundred Rāmāyaṇas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation" in its undergraduate degree programme

as a compulsory reading. According to some commentators the arrangement was for a period of four years, that is, up to the 2008 academic year. In 2008, the Delhi University's Council decided to continue with it. But in October 2011 the university's Council resolved to remove it from the reading list under alleged pressure from the rightwing Hindu protestors on the Delhi University campus. However, according to some members of the university, the decision to act was precipitated by the court action brought by the rightwing supporters and the court order to the Council to internally settle the matter and report it to the court in a matter of days. It was reported that the Vice Chancellor, through the university Council process, hastily decided to withdraw the essay from the reading list of the said course in the History department. Be that as it may, the ensuing debate on the saga went global through both the mainstream media as well as the social media.

There was much debate on this issue in various blogs, Facebook discussions as well as in mainstream and popular media. One of the things that surfaced through these various debates is that the department of History did not take into account the fundamental mistake that Prof. Rāmanujan made in constructing the essay. The mistake of Rāmanujan seemed to be twofold—first, he tried to undermine the accepted view, especially the sociological fact that among North Indian Rāma devotees the Tulsidas Rāmacharitmanas was the most authentic Rāmāyaṇa in which both Rāma and Sita are divine beings; second, in his essay, Prof. Rāmanujan referred to the idea that Sita was depicted in some narrations of the Rāma story as Ravana's daughter and that Indra was cursed with one thousand vaginas for his sexual misconduct with the wife of a sage. The rightwing student reaction to this was so intense that they allegedly beat up the chair of the department of History. For them, it was the ultimate insult to question the beliefs about their God Rāma and his divine spouse Sita. Under normal orthodoxy, Prof. Rāmanujan would have been a heretic, for he questioned the accepted views of Rāma devotees. And using this so called heretical view to teach history to South Asian students in a history department was considered offensive to the religious sentiments of the students. In the absence of details of religious affiliations of students who took the course over the years, it was assumed that they were Hindu, at least in some cultural or nominal sense. One detail that came out in the public debate was that the chair of the department at the time of the incident was a Muslim, which reinforced the suspicions of collusion to insult Hindu sentiments.

What Rāmanujan's essay did was to question the hierarchy and power of the dominant society not just by alluding to the existence of several diverse stories or narratives (as he prefers) of Rāma but, most importantly, by bringing up the erased memory of the sexual encounters between gods and humans. I say erased because notwithstanding innumerable references in the Hindu texts from the Vedas to the mythological and epic narratives, they are forever seemingly suppressed from the mainstream Hindu public. This, I believe, is done by a systematic creation of what I would call a public Hinduism which began in the nineteenth century. By carefully editing out any allusion or reference to ideas and views that might be seen to a modern Hindu objectionable and perhaps embarrassing, the architects of this public Hinduism made it monotheistically and ethically appealing to the average Hindu practitioner. As a result, the philosophical notions such as Brahman have been transformed into more appealing personal supreme God idea.

Re-Presentation of Hindu Texts

In general, there is a sense that regional versions of some of the Hindu texts, such as the epics and the mythological ones, have been rendered in such a way that allusions to incidents or events that seem awkward in later times were either deleted or modified. Deshpande (1993:217) reminds us in the wake of the Hindu rightwing attack on the Muslim mosque in Ayodhya—

I am certain that these pop-Hindus do not know, for example, that when Tulsidas wrote the Rāmāyaṇa, he removed the story of Shambuka altogether. Shambuka was a Shudra who had undertaken to do 'tapasya!. The shastras did not permit it. Hence Ram killed him. Tulsidas found this quite uncomfortable. He could not justify Ram there and therefore he removed the story. The story appears in the original Rāmāyaṇa by Vālmiīki. Tulsidas was apologetic about it and expunged it from his text.

Nevertheless, in the Sankritic tradition as well as in various regional traditions, the authors of Hindu texts used metaphors of sex consciously to construct a worldview in which the mundane and the spiritual cohabited comfortably side by side. They did not seem to have seen any incongruity in using such language and metaphor which to the modern reader might seem inappropriate. There is a plethora of institutions and organizations that offer teachings of Hinduism today that quite consciously obfuscate such references in the Hindu religious texts as we noted above.

Sufficient evidence exists within the Hindu tradition for the transformation of outward ritual practices that involved sex, meat and wine. In the early history of Hinduism, both Buddhism and Jainism may have effected such changes. But in later periods, Brahmanism became more and more ritualistically orthodox by eliminating or suppressing or sublimating what seemed unacceptable or meant for private discourse only—e.g., the Smārta Brāhmans transformed the left-handed Kaula Tantra into sublimated Śrī Vidya practice which might have been effected by or around the time of Śaṅkara, the Advaita philosopher. Even so, almost all esoteric traditions required strict ritual initiation and a dedicated practice under the supervision of a teacher. Western scholarship has long pointed out the role of the works of Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Nietzsche, Levi-Strauss and Chomsky in bringing to the fore this 'phenomenon of concealment' that has a profound secrecy or privacy to it. (Slotten 1977: 186)

Within the Indian tradition, Capwell (1974) has pointed out the extent to which esoteric sexual practices among Baul poets have been sublimated by later Bengali literary tradition dominated by intellectuals such as Rabindranath Tagore (1974). But the idea that things of secrecy get sublimated reinforces the common assumptions that symbols are always binary and never interchangeable. For instance, sexual symbols are sublimated in public because they are always associated with erotic meanings. But the Indian tradition may point to the contrary in the sense that the meanings of symbols are not always fixed but are transformed and given new meanings through myths, legends and language.

Although Indian texts such as the Upaniṣads, the epics, and mythological texts have certain pedagogical significance in offering spiritual and ethical guidance to Hindus, it would be erroneous to see their role primarily from that point of view. Indian texts are also performative, and therefore derive their significance as texts of entertainment within a religious context. In recent years, scholars like Radhakrishṇan (2009) have attempted to defend Hindu texts by arguing that they too have an ethical component in response to critique that ethics is not central to Hindu tradition. South Asian studies scholars have increasingly given significant focus to ethics in Hindu tradition (See Dhand 2004; Gupta 2006; Pathak 2006; Sharma 1999), let alone a host of recent books deriving business ethics for a modern time. While there is nothing problematic about looking for ethical imperatives in Hindu texts, inadvertently, such attempts rationalize Hindu texts to the extent that it

culminates in the popular mind that the sole purpose of these texts is to offer moral lessons.

This trend of rationalizing Hindu texts through moral ideas as well as normative ideas of liberation has been pointed out by a number of scholars. Against the charge of some "inside" scholars (e.g., Agehananda Bharati and others) that neo-Vedānta produced 'inauthentic' Hinduism, Brian Hatcher offers a history of neo-Vedānta that profusely used ideas from the east and west eclectically (Hatcher 1999). His book makes it abundantly clear the extent to which neo-Vedānta has played a role in constructing a discourse on Hinduism through appropriating skillfully in order to make something that has been denounced from Christian and Islamic influences a more palatable Hindu view and hence for public consumption. In the process of this rationalization based on eclectic approach what becomes evident is, as Hatcher puts it, "apparent betrayals of meaning and errors of memory occasioned by the eclectic's selective habits of borrowing" (Hatcher 1999: 27). Inadvertently, however, this new discourse on Hinduism has become the hand-maid of Hindutva ideology.

The alliance between Hindutva and the modern interpretations of Hinduism vis à vis various modern Hindu institutions is evident in much of the literature dealing with the Hindutva phenomenon[1]. At a popular level this association is first seen in relation to Shiv Sena and the Hindutva. As Lele (1995) points out, Sena's initial rival in Maharashtra was Communism and the Left. But in later years, as Sena forged links with the capitalists in urban areas and feudalists in rural areas, his attention turned toward the Muslims and the Dalits. And in the increasing anti-Muslim and anti-Dalit rhetoric it found itself the chief ally of Hindutva and thus became its main proponent.

Meera Nanda points out that the modern discourse on Hinduism is to a large extent shaped by the new phenomenon in India where politicians conspicuously show their allegiance to religious gurus. She points out that the "elected representatives bowing before sadhu-sants is being touted as the Hindu ideal of 'dharmarajya'". (Nanda 2001: 2551) Nanda's argument in fact takes us even beyond the Hindu discourse into the very centre of the larger Indian discourse when she criticizes the idea that in fact the so called

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[1] Brian Hatcher links the modern definitions of Hinduism in terms of Vedānta with reformers such as Rammohan Roy, and apologists like Swami Vivekananda and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. (see Hatcher 2007:302)

Hindu ideals were the root cause of the impediments in Indian society. She argues

[G]oing against the grain of current trends in Indian sociology, which has either ignored or glorified the role of religion in Indian society, I will argue that there are elements of Hindu meta-reality – indeed, its central axioms of dharma, karma and moksha – which continue to impede the development of a liberal and secular civil society which respects the fundamental equality of right-bearing individuals.

She further argues that it "is as sources of ideological hegemony, and not as the ultimate, unchanging motor of Indian history, that the content and uses of the central philosophical concepts of Hinduism bear a serious and critical examination." (Nanda 2001: 2552)

Offending Religious Sentiment

It is in the context of such increasing rationalization and moralization of Hindu textual traditions that one finds the promotion of an idealized and ethicized version of Hinduism that becomes a potent weapon in the hands of the Hindutva ideologues. The self-interest of the Hindutva ideologues in promoting an increasingly ethicized Hinduism is to ensure the ideological hegemony over the vast cultural diversity of India. But, ironically, they have implicitly accepted the misplaced external critique that Hinduism is steeped in eroticism and idol worship and is therefore the reason for their speedy appropriation of an ethical programme of Hinduism. The contemporary urban middle class educated Hindu becomes annoyed by discussions in scholarly publications on Hindu texts that do not conform to the ethical depictions of Hinduism. For them, those materials that seem too erotic are alien to Hindu texts. Majority of the Hindus are even unaware of the pervasive existence of materials that they seem to find uncomfortable within the sacred texts. Therefore, when scholars engage in discussions on such materials in the sacred texts, it appears that they are deliberately doing so to offend the religious sentiments of Hindus.

This phenomenon of 'offending religious sentiment' in India has become increasingly pervasive in the context of popular belief that the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata are primarily moral texts. Commenting on the ascendency of the Rāmāyaṇa story as a moral text, Hindery (1976: 289) points out— "Small wonder, therefore, that it has been considered responsible for disseminating in nearly every city and village the Hindu moral values that

survive today." When texts become elevated to such moral high ground, it is understandable how significant the phenomenon of religious sentiment can be in a religiously diverse society such as India.

Legal Parameters of Religious Sentiment

In principle, Indian law is very stringent in protecting followers of any religion from being offended on the grounds of religious belief. However, most laws of the Indian Penal Code are very broad and can be interpreted in various ways. It is noteworthy that many of the used in contemporary India were constructed by the British colonial administration . There are various sections in the Indian Penal Code that could be invoked quite opportunistically and with political twists for they are too broad. The IPC chapter 13, section 294 deals with a obscenities in public place.[2] IPC chapter 15, section 295 deals with "Injuring or defiling place of worship with intent to insult the religion of any class." Section 295A deals more specifically with the offending of someone's religious feelings.

"Whoever, with deliberate and malicious intention of outraging the religious feelings of any class of [citizens of India], [by words, either spoken or written, or by signs or by visible representations or otherwise], insults or attempts to insult the religion or the religious beliefs of that class, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to [three years], or with fine, or with both."

Note that the law makes it clear that it must be with a "deliberate and malicious intention". Although scholarly publications have not been effected from such "deliberate and malicious intentions", technically they can come under the provisions provided in this section. Establishing the motive of "intention" can be trickyand it is here that the issue gets political. In a 2012 article in a national newspaper, *The Hindu*, Praveen Swami pointed to some interesting applications of IPC section 295. In 1976, the State of Uttar Pradesh confiscated "Naicker's contentious *Rāmāyaṇa*" . In the subsequent appeal, the Supreme Court of India simply ducked the issue by arguing that "the law fixes the mind of the Administration to the obligation to reflect on the need to restrict and to state the grounds which ignite its action". "That is

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[2] [294. Obscene acts and songs.- Whoever, to the annoyance of others-(a) does any obscene act in any public place, or (b) sings, recites or utters any obscene song, ballad or words, in or near any public place, shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to three months, or with fine, or with both.]
See: Praveen Swami, "India's Godlaws fail the test of reason", The Hindu, 7 May 2012. Found   at http://www.advocatekhoj.com/library/bareacts/indianpenalcode/index.php?Title=Indian%20Penal%20Code,%201860 [accessed on 04. 11. 2013]

about all", the judges concluded." Under the same provisions, the Supreme Court upheld the ban of "P.V. Narayanna's *Dharmakaarana*, an award-winning re-reading of the Hindu saint, Basaveshwara" by the State of Karnataka. (*The Hindu* 7 May, 2012)[3]

The law makers seemingly buckled under the pressure of political realities. However, in 1927, the Lahore High Court judge, Dalip Singh refused to ban *Rangila Rasul* (the Colorful Prophet) solely on the basis of "public outrage." Such legal independence is compromised in the contemporary Indian political reality which has given ample power to the right wing to potentially hijack freedom of expression, scholarship and knowledge production under the guise of offending the religious sentiments of a social group.

Religious Sentiment—Victim and the Dominant at the Same Time

While religious sentiment has seemingly become a potent weapon in the hands of the Hindutva ideologues, the minority communities are rarely able to deploy it for their civil and political protection. The Dalit communities are particularly vulnerable in this context. Not only are they the bottom of the barrel of Hindu society, they are indeed exposed to caste related discrimination coupled with their religious discrimination from within Hinduism. This means, 'religious sentiment' is largely a political instrument to achieve certain political and economic goals. The law is most effectively used for the higher caste Hindus to remain dominant within the system. The problematic nature of this situation is that on the religious front, Hindutva takes the victim role, while the very same membership of Hindu leadership by virtue of their landed caste and higher caste status in villages plays the role of the dominant. This victim role in one context and a dominant role in another can be clearly seen in the context of urban and rural politics respectively. In urban setting in places like Delhi and in the larger national discourse on religion Hindutva has been attempting to position itself as a victim in relation to Muslim and Christian missionary activities. Claims that Hindus are losing their members to other religions through conversion are the basis on which they have tried to build a national religious discourse that places them at the center of that discourse.Ironically it is this victim role that seems to give Hindutva leverage to mobilize political and social pressure against other groups, especially Muslims, Christians, and Dalits. They claim a sort of 'otherness' in their own cultural milieu. This self-induced otherness is

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[3] See: http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/indias-god-laws-fail-the-test-of-reason/article3391863.ece [accessed on 04.11.2013]

what seems to give Hindutva the basis to exonerate themselves when they are accused of inciting caste and communal conflicts. When Hindutva is placed in the victim mode it is most advantaged and powerful politically as it is placed within the proximity of public sympathy.

The Delhi debate around Ramanujan's essay certainly gave Hindutva the leverage to claim the victim status under the guise of 'offending religious sentiment'. It is as a victim of religious discrimination that the rightwing student organization sought to mobilize pressure through legal suits under the broadly framed Indian Penal Codes which, for the most part, are unwieldy for any meaningful interpretation without political involvement. It is not surprising therefore to find that the court simply referred the matter back to the University Council to internally settle the matter and report to it. The unintended consequence of this entire bizarre episode in which the rightwing students co-opting the University Council and the Delhi High court to force the removal of an academic essay on a Hindu textual matter is that it is no longer a religious authority or a traditional commentator who would determine what constitutes canonical but, rather, it is the political motivations of a section of the population providing the framework for the authorization of the canon, or in this case what must be read as the Rāmāyaṇa and what must not be in it.

Making Sense of the Construction of Text in South Asia

So, how does one make sense of this fundamental shift in understanding how religious texts get defined and validated in the South Asian context? Hatcher argues that the bourgeois class in colonial India rationalized the Hindu texts to define Hinduism in ways that would enable them to remain worldly engaged in material enjoyments and at the same time keeping the religious senses controlled (Hatcher 2007: 309). It is this two-fold logic that seems to be at work in modern middle class Hindu society when they approach Hindu religious texts. Material engagement in the world implies involvement politics. What is interesting is that Hindutva as a modern bourgeois society wants to ride on the crest of material politics while at the same time maintaining religious ideals of sense control. There seems to be an internal logic and rationalization at place that necessitates two explanations for anything that needs to be clarified in the Indian context – the mainstream explanation and the discretely held internal explanation.

We can illustrate this by a detour to the Mahābhārata text where we might find the clue. We know that Vyāsa gives one explanation at the beginning of the Mahābhārata for the birth of the Pāṇḍavas (Mahābhārata 1.1.66ff)[4]—that they are born of the different gods—god of Dharma, Vayu and Indra as per Kunti's sons, viz., Yuddhishtira, Bhima and Arjuna; and the other two sons of Madri were born of the twin gods, the Ashwins. Here the central motif is Kunti and the inability of Pāṇḍu to father his own children due to a previous curse. But the very same Vyāsa gives a different story later on in the epic (Mahābhārata 1.188). When Arjuna wins a contest in the court of Drupada and claims the hand of the king's daughter Draupadi, Kunti unwittingly tells Arjuna to share his present with the rest of his brothers. Drupada resists the idea that his daughter would be married to five men. He claims that he had never heard of such a practice before. Yudhiṣṭira, the eldest of the Pāṇḍavas gives a rather naïve reply saying that ancient customs are mysterious (Mahābhārata 1.187.28-29). Seeing Drupada not yet convinced, Vyāsa, who was also in the court, takes Drupada to a private chamber and gives him another explanation. In this explanation, Indra once disturbed Śiva as he was engaged in a play of dice with his wife Pārvati and Śiva threw him into a cave. When Indra entered the cave there were four others who looked just like him and he then asked Śiva who they were. Śiva said that they were the former Indras who made the same mistake as he did. Indra then pleads with Śiva to release them and forgive them. Śiva then states that in some future time they would be born as five Pāṇḍava brothers and would marry a common wife. This would be Śrī, the consort of Viṣṇu, and Śiva says that he had the permission of Viṣṇu to bestow her on them.

This story appeals to Drupada. In order to understand why this is the case , we must understand his motivations. Drupada was once defeated by Arjuna on the command of his teacher Droṇa and as a result lost half his kingdom. So, he took a vow and offered sacrifices to gain a son that would kill Droṇa. Although he did not ask for a daughter in the Sanskrit epic he does receive one and he planned that she would be married to Arjuna. And he knew that Arjuna was the son of Indra. But when Vyāsa said that the other brothers too were former Indras born now as the Pāṇḍava brothers, he could not have asked for more—five Indras marrying his daughter!

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[4]   The Mahābhārata Sanskrit text is accessed from http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/mbs/mbs01187.htm (accessed on 09.11.2013).

Both stories have their internal rationalizations and offer different explanations. Which one to choose? This depends on one's internal motivations! Taking a contemporary analogy it is somewhat like the story in the film *Life of Pie*. Pie gives two stories for his rather miraculous survival at sea—a more fantastic one in which he spent an arduous time at sea with his unlikely companion—the Bengal tiger; and another that the insurance company can accept as the truth! So, when his Canadian journalist friend asked him as to which one was true, Pie simply says—you choose. The two stories of Vyas and Pie display a unique nature of the South Asian narrative telling that combines fantasy and fact in a seamless world of contradictions. The story of the Rāmāyaṇa deprived of its mystique and magic drably clothed in ethical imperatives is appealing to the Vedanticized middle class rightwing ideologues not because it is accurate but rather, because it is politically correct in the face of defending their religious and cultural superiority over that of others.

Just as Drupada, in his quest to regain his political domination, finds the second story of Vyāsa appealing, and just as the Japanese shipping company representatives find the second story of Pie more truthful because of the financial gain, the moralized and ethicized story of Rama must make sense to the rightwing middle class Hindu society in their quest to redeem their religious and cultural purity from the contaminations of the modernity wrought by colonialism, Islam, Christianity and the west. It is here that the rationale for the definition of what constitutes a religious text becomes clear! What seems clear though, is that neither Vyāsa nor Pie seem really interested in which story is really true!

It is therefore this double agenda of the Hindutva ideologues that enables them to wear the hats of both victim and the dominant in a society that is inscrutably complex. Given this complexity the issue of religious sentiment is never an easy one to deal with in the absence of political interests. What valorizes one's claim to be a victim of religious discrimination vis à vis offending their religious sentiment, is not what is offered in the Indian Penal Code as a protection but rather what political power one wields in society. It is this political power that the Hindutva ideologues can skillfully deploy to claim either victim or dominant status depending on the social context and political opportunities. By claiming to be victims of religious discrimination the rightwing student organization, through its involvement in the Ramanujan essay saga, effectively claimed the right to define Hindu texts.

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Food as a Measure of Complete Diplomacy: Balancing India-Africa Partnership through Accommodating Taste

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Abstract

Food builds stronger bonds between people and countries and offers an important setting to enhance diplomatic and trade ties. Advocates of food diplomacy concur that food can be used as a code for conveying information about social events and social relations based on the commonalities of the structure of each meal across culture. This paper argues that food is an experience, not only something we can enjoy, but something that we can share. The paper also explores how food fulfils a cultural and emotional gap and connects displaced and uprooted people to "left places". Furthermore the paper traces India's presence in Africa and examines how this has influenced its use of food as a foundation for public diplomacy programmes, to learn about different cultures and discuss important related issues such as nutrition, sustainability and food security. This paper therefore examines the nascent field of food diplomacy and suggests that through food, India has managed to bring awareness of the political situation in their adopted country by putting on events, performances and discussions as a way of expanding its engagement with different cultures. Additionally, this paper debates the act of winning hearts and minds through stomachs, and ways by which food can be used by a country to promote its national identity and encourage economic investment. This paper takes an anthropological observation in a contrapuntal modernity by asking how, why and when the food consumed in Durban in particular and KwaZulu-Natal in general has managed to arrive at a distinguishable taste; displaying characteristics of India and South Africa.

Key words: Food, Diplomacy, Partnership, Identity, Power, Culinary Tourism

Introduction

Food is always present in every society as a basic means of subsistence and it has become increasingly a common subject across history (Tannahill,

1988). Whilst the consumption of food is based on life sustenance, its symbolism and secondary meanings remain alive in every community (Mintz & Bois, 2002). Food is an universally vital part of our lives, representing the past, traditions, and culture by which a people self-identifies (Chapple-Sokol, 2013). As a result of the growth of eating out as a form of consumption and the market forces of globalization, food products and cuisines from all over the world have become more accessible. As such, public diplomacy and trade have taken an entirely new meaning from what it used to be particularly from the early ages of trade when voyages were undertaken for spice trade, but voyagers still carried dried food, as the local cuisines were looked upon with suspicion (Tannahill, 1988). From an economic point of view, nearly every person spends money on food within their locality. In an increasingly competitive world, every region or country is in constant search for a unique product to differentiate itself from other countries. Today, most countries are using local food or cuisines that are unique to an area as distinctive resources. Based on the opportunities of food diplomacy, there appears to be a growing interest in the promotion of culinary diplomacy in many parts of the world that are not traditionally known for fine cuisine or having a clear culinary identity (Fischler, 1988). Considering the uniqueness of Indian food from the rest of the world not only in taste but also in cooking methods, India has started to use food as a public diplomacy strategy as it reflects a perfect blend of various cultures and ages. Just like Indian culture, food in India has also been influenced by various civilizations, which have contributed their share in its overall development and the present form.

This paper will specifically examine India-Africa engagements and trade scenario. To fully understand the use of food as a form of complete diplomacy, we will discuss the importance of food and explore various approaches to diplomacy. Cognisant of the increasing presence of India in the African continent through bilateral and multilateral engagements, tourism as modern engine for development, growth and change is discussed. We shall argue on the use of soft power and cultural diplomacy by India through the lens of food and conviviality. We will further investigate how food can be utilised by various actors and elites as a form of cultural diplomacy particularly from the touristic perspective. We further discuss the role of culinary tourism in the light of increasing India-Africa relations and business opportunities created thereof. Since the subject of food is trans-disciplinary, our discussion explores different ways in which food can be used as a form of complete diplomacy.

India-Africa engagements

The end of the 20th Century witnessed a turn of events between India and Africa. Structural limitations, racial discrimination and decolonization were amongst the most notable achievements (Pham, 2011). Although India's foreign policy during much of the cold war did not have a significant direct impact on the unfolding of development in Africa, its political commitment to Non Aligned Movement (NAM) and its least rhetorical emphasis on South-

South co-operation, especially coupled with its consistent diplomatic support for African nationalist movements, left it well positioned to take up its engagements across the continent and forge new ties, as it has done in recent years (Pham, 2007). India began to view Africa through its strategic lens and realized that economic engagement with African countries could serve its national interests (Jagtiani, 2012). With the advancement of globalization and the advent emergence of India as one of the fast growing economies, advanced new directions and imperatives of India's international relations have emerged. As a result, its needs and priorities have continued to evolve. On the international arena, India has improved its influence over economic engagement in its quest to extend relations even to its neighbours. India has endeavoured to create and develop its relations with Africa based on common themes such as, the rich history, co-operation on political, economic and social development (Pham, 2011). As Dadwal (2011) notes that, India should make the most of the advantages it has over other countries, such as the traditional ties based on a similar colonial heritage, trade contacts since at least the medieval period, the goodwill that exists between India and African countries and a keenness to enhance level of relations. Therefore, to realize its dream of shifting from being recipient to a donor, India needs to continue to exert its influence on the global political scene.

India-Africa bilateral trade scenario

The trade between India and Africa has grown significantly. In the past few years a significant growth of US$25 billion was recorded. India remains a dominant player in most African economies with US$2 billion worth of credit lines extended to most African countries (Pham, 2011). Instead of only focusing on growth, India has concentrated on developing mutual relationship consistent with its Africa partnership policy. This mutual relationship is defined by Africa's growth in both markets and mineral resources. The Africa focus policy has enabled India to concentrate on expanding its economic and strategic diplomacy by encouraging Indian businesses to engage with Africa. In order to position India for market leadership, the country has become aware of the strategic importance of African languages that will help leverage business dealing with African countries particularly those that deal with India. The number of African entrepreneurs of Indian origin has continued to grow. The continued expansion of India-Africa ties has widened economic activities to include manufacturing, agriculture and tourism.

India's strategy of creating and building partnerships with Africa has helped to cement business relationships that can lead to a win-win situation as compared to other dominant economic players (Palit & Palit, 2011). India's dominance has not only been realized on the economic and political fronts, Nidān tourist numbers to African destinations, be it for leisure or business, have grown tremendously. Due to its presence in Africa, its foot prints can be seen in both culture and food. India's presence in Africa has been defined by

its emphasis on economic development, social justice and democratic tolerance (Bhatt, 2008). Whilst China has managed to aggressively engage Africa, this challenge has not gone without a fight from India. Looking at numbers, Africa becomes a focal point for collective bargaining, hence it continues to increase imports from India (Jagtiani, 2012). In West Africa, countries like Nigeria, Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana top the list of Indian imports. In North Africa there is Egypt whilst in the Southern Africa, South Africa and Angola account for the highest trade with India. In East Africa, Tanzania and Kenya have emerged as strategic partners due to large diaspora Indian presence and its proximity to Indian shores (Bhatt, 2008). Whist there has been a significant decline in trade between India and Central Africa (i.e. Democratic republic of Congo, Rwanda, Chad etc.), its trade engagement has widened. Africa enjoys sustained economic opportunities. India's trade relations with East Africa date prior to colonial period that is since the time of the Omani Sultans (Kumar, 2013). East Africa being close and easily accessible to India, it remains the preferred trading partner. The abundance of oil reserves in North Africa, trade relations with India will continue to ignite new horizons. Increased trade between Southern Africa and India is expected to grow due to its mineral wealth (Bhatt, 2008). As one of the fastest growing economies of the world, India is likely to depend on Africa in future for its energy requirements. However, whilst India has no coherent diplomatic strategy in Africa, its approach is similar to China in a way. Because of instability in African countries, India has to trade with care considering its future diplomatic ties with Africa. Even though there are many people of Indian descent, there is a disconnection between India and its diaspora Indians which tends to weaken its position and influence on the international scene.

Theoretical frameworks

Three theoretical approaches are crucial in this paper; Indians in Africa as an universal economic category, as a neutral product of food culture, and as active consumers who are a product of postmodernity or an advanced liberal government. Based on the assertion of Kniazeva and Venkatesh (2007) that postmodernism regards everyday life as a valuable site for expressions of cultural symbolism and urge researchers to turn to everyday practices for what they term guiding themes of life, we argue that identity is continuously shifting and is fragmented. Due to limited academic scholarship in food diplomacy, this paper discusses the historical importance of food, how India has penetrated Africa, and shows the link between food diplomacy (soft power), cultural diplomacy and public diplomacy. Various concepts are discussed and these form new groundwork for African scholarship. We link food consumption and postmodernism to cultural diplomacy, and identify food as one of the components of cultural diplomacy, implying that food is representative of culture (Fox, 2007). Food consumption and production reflect environmental and living conditions such as geography and climate, agricultural products, recipes, cooking methods and preservation (Harrington, 2005). Hence, most of the foods consumed in local Durban

restaurants have flair of both South African and Indian tastes. Therefore, this paper argues that there is no diplomacy that is complete without food. Food diplomacy can be used as a relationship builder; its applicability is diverse and wide-ranging. One of the dominant approaches in the social sciences used to explain food consumption is the cultural approach, with the others being the economic and the psychological.

Food theorists in the disciplines of anthropology, discursive psychology, and sociology have contributed significantly with their disciplinary perspectives on food consumption. The selection of certain food items is one way of maintaining social class stratification (*also see* Kumar, 2012) and maintaining upper-class distinctiveness (Bourdieu, 1984). Douglas (1975) examines the role of food as a code conveying information about social events and social relations and the commonalities of the structure of each meal across culture. Thus, food as a form of identity can differentiate people by displaying wealth and social standing (Fischler, 1988). Food semiology is discussed in the discipline of discursive psychology, particularly, examining how food and food preparation rituals of a given society represent a linguistic system, conveying social information that helps create and maintain its social identity (Barthes, 1997). Food theorists, however, have normally confined themselves to studying consumption patterns within structured environments like the home, family dinners, festivals and restaurants with hardly any reference to diplomacy (Beardsworth & Keil, 1997). Furthermore, motivation theories have tried to address individual travel needs and they conclude that travellers are motivated by a variety of purposes including relaxation, self-fulfilment, social interaction, shopping family bonds and wish fulfilment (Ryan, 1991).

Studying people's food-related activities is unique in that people leave their structured environments, where their demands and lifestyle prevent them from going through the normal eating rituals thus forcing them to make do with what is available. Therefore, the role of food alters in that consumption of food becomes a form of recreation as well as an important component of overall tourist activity and experience. Although the literature seems to support a connection between cultural diplomacy and gastronomy, little is known about its value in traditional gastronomic regions versus non-traditional locales (Fischler, 1988). Gastronomy is a science which is linked to the art of eating and drinking. Most research articles tend to use the terms "gastronomy and culinary" interchangeably. Variably, the meanings are different. On the one hand gastronomy has to do with eating and drinking to satisfy the palette of gourmets. On the other hand culinary has to do with the art of cooking and presenting food in a particular way that appeals to persons consuming it. Wolf (2006) arguably bungles these two concepts and describes them as a type of diplomacy that gives an opportunity for a memorable food and drink experiences which can contribute significantly to government-to-government relations. The failure to fully comprehend the complexity of gastronomic diplomacy has limited research to the extent that scientific researchers have failed to link cultural and behavioural food related

characteristics to product development and branding of a destination. Whilst some sociological research related to food consumption has dealt with the determination of interrelationships between food and cultures (Goody, 1982), food consumption as a means of social differentiation (Bourdieu, 1979), eating being influenced by social, environmental, and ecological conditions (Henderson, 2004), and how globalization has impacted on food consumption (Ritzer, 1993) few research works have focused on food diplomacy and its impact on international relations.

Linking the World Cultural Theory and Globalization to Tourism

Globalization has been attributed to the destruction of food related traditions like home cooking and individualized family restaurants while increasing nutritional issues and concerns such as balanced and healthy diet. The world cultural theory, one of the theories of interpreting globalization, defines globalization as "the diffusion of practices, values and technology that have an influence on people's lives worldwide" (Albrow, 1997) and "the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole" (Robertson, 1992). So, on the one hand, there is the proliferation of chain restaurants, pre-cooked and processed foods, foreign foods, and ethnic restaurants all over the world, resulting in a more 'globalized palate.' On the other hand, there is a considerable effort to re-establish and articulate the local food systems, resulting in the continuation or resurgence of the local cuisines (Henderson, 1998). Culinary tourism or food tourism is experiencing the food of the country, region or area, and is now considered a vital component of the tourism experience. Dining out is common among tourists and "food is believed to rank alongside climate, accommodation, and scenery" in importance to tourists (Cohen & Avieli, 2004). The theories of social differentiation examine how food is used as a means to maintain and establish hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, social distinction, and self-identity, thereby reinforcing symbolic boundaries and conveying social information. The cultural capital theory treats the physical necessity of eating as a cultural practice, and food as one of the cultural resources by which people maintain a symbolic distance, social stratification, and quite often even social exclusion. Although there are anecdotal references in the literature connecting food and tourism, tourism without food is incomplete. Food has been viewed as a necessary element of survival, and probably as a component of another attraction such as in food festivals, but has hardly been studied as an attraction or as a tourist recreational activity by itself (Long, 2004) researchers preferring to put more emphasis on culture and events.

The growth of culinary tourism is seen as an outcome of a trend where people spend less time cooking, but choose to pursue their interest in food as a part of leisure experience such as watching cooking shows, dining out and the like (du Rand, Heath, & Alberts, 2003). The culinary tourist is thus a special interest tourist whose interest in food is the primary reason influencing his travel behaviour and falls on the upper end of the food

tourism interest continuum. The aspect of culinary tourism is one where the itineraries chiefly include visiting restaurants, local food producers, and food markets (Kivela & Crotts, 2006). Variations of such culinary tours, for the more adventurous, may include cycling and walkabout gourmet explorations throughout the gourmet regions. Culinary tourism is viewed as a form of product differentiation used by destinations for competitive advantage. Differentiation is a business strategy aimed at creating real or imagined experiences (Kivela & Crotts, 2005). Culinary tourism experiences knit together the sense of a place and identity which are inherently linked to a destination's attractiveness. Gastronomic identity is used to create unique memorable experiences for guests which is linked to sensory meaning of a place (Harrington, 2005; Scarpato, 2002) and in many cases food is a defining social marker as it creates a symbol projecting an image or reinforcing self-image (Fischler, 1988). Culinary tourism is the hottest niche to emerge within the travel industry in years because dining is one of the best ways visitors can get to know a new and exotic locale. Local food is a fundamental component of a destination's attributes, adding to the range of attractions and the overall tourist experience (du Rand, Heath, & Alberts, 2003; Nummedal & Hall, 2006). Dining out is a growing form of leisure where meals are consumed not out of necessity but for pleasure, and the atmosphere and occasion are part of the leisure experience as much as the food itself. It encompasses cooking schools, cookbooks and kitchen gadget stores, culinary tours, culinary media and guidebooks, caterers, wineries, breweries, distilleries, food growers and manufacturers, culinary attractions and many more.

Essential Features of India's Food Fiplomacy in South Africa

India at independence in 1947 was left with a British colonial legacy that included deep ties to a number of East and Southern African countries within the Empire (Bhatt, 2008). To understand India-Africa relations, one has to recognise that South African Indians have an indentured history. They first arrived in South Africa as labourers on the sugar cane plantations. Ever since, South African Indians have established a strong Indian culture, values, beliefs, food and eating styles. Tracing the South African Indian culture back to the 1860's as one of the first immigrants to arrive in the present day KwaZulu-Natal helps us to understand the influence of Indian community on different cultural fronts. However, due to their colour, Indians like other black counterparts faced a number of struggles including discrimination. Their struggle for freedom can be traced back to the arrival of Mohandas Gandhi in 1893. Their historical struggles are well documented in history particularly through their well-known approaches such as "passive resistance" and *satyagraha*, Sanskrit for "truth and fairness". Notably, South Africa is home to over 1, 2 million people of Indian origin. As a result, Indian cultural influence is strongly felt particularly in Durban and Johannesburg. Not only has Indian culture permeated into South Africa, their customs and dress, .i.e. the "*sari*" can be seen across KwaZulu-Natal. Food as a dominant feature of Indians has influenced South African cuisine in a big way

particularly some notable delicacies such as *samosas, chilly bites, bunny chow, chakalaka, sambal, curried dishes, chutney, Bobotie*.

Some essential features of Indian cuisine can be noted in the use of spices in dishes such as curries, be they hot, mild or sweet. The most notable spices are the cassia, cumin, coriander, cardamom, cloves, chilies and cinnamon. As we have noted from the literature on Indian food in South Africa, the Zulu people in KwaZulu Natal embraced the Indian curry in their cookery as if it was their own. Ceremonial food, normally prepared for festive seasons uses expensive saffron to colour rice and the chicken or lamb is marinated in spicy yogurt mix with cardamom, cumin and cinnamon added to it. Rice which is a staple food in the Indian diet is sometimes prepared with tasty ingredients such as nuts, saffron, sultanas and lentils. Some common herbs and spices include, ground chilies, Cassia bark, Dhal, Turmeric, Paprika, Tikka masala, Garlic, Ginger, Oregano, and Pepper.

Sharma (2013:42) explains that a typical Indian meal:

"…includes rice, green lentil broth and red kidney beans (Rajmash) cooked in yoghurt. This is followed by Boor Ki Karhi and a dark lentil, along with poori or poltu. Lastly the cuisine ends with a dessert (meetha) usually sweet rice (meethe chawal), kheer (a dish made of rice and milk cooked together), thispole or jalebi. Vegetarians are offered matter paneer (green peas and cottage cheese) and non-vegetarians are offered with meat, chicken, etc".

A cursory look at menus in selected independent restaurants, hotels and events hosted by the Indian High Commissioner in Durban had a lasting impression on the different Indian cuisine in South Africa. The dinning etiquettes include being directed by the host to your sitting place. You never flatly refuse an invitation to dinner, and where you cannot make it, one should make a plausible excuse. Depending on the service style, food is served once, so that people are served at the same time. Due to religious reasons, pork (Muslims do not eat pork) and beef (Hindus do not eat beef) is sometimes absent from the menu and Haalal is specified in certain menu items. On the table, food is served according to level or hierarchy of importance. Traditionally, in home settings, men may not eat in the same room with women and men may be the ones to be served first. In diplomatic sitting arrangements, sitting is by position and status. The question of who is who is determined at the table. There is a certain hierarchy that is followed. Some important aspects on the table include the use of a left hand which is considered unclean. Eating is done by the use of a right hand, once food is served on your plate, it cannot be offered to somebody else. One cannot eat food from another person's plate. Leaving food on the plate is considered rude, if invited to an event, the host pays the bill for everyone. The service of food during an event varies depending on whether food is served on a buffet, a l'acarte or table d'hôte. Nevertheless the hierarchical order has to be observed during a meal service.

For example, *Paneer Channa Samosa* which is made out of phyllo pastry stuffed with potatoes, cottage cheese and chick peas flavoured with Indian herbs and spices can be served as a vegetarian appetizer. Similarly, variations of *samosas can be served as a starter such* the *samosa chaat, Hara Bara Vegetable Kabab.* Vegetable spring rolls can also be served as vegetarian starter, where baby marrows and cucumber are cut into dice, then tossed with coriander, mint and sweet chili sauce. The mixture is then rolled in basil leaf and spring roll wrapper. Non-vegetarian appetizers include *Keema samosa*, Chili *Chicken*, *Malai Jhinga*. In a diplomatic dining experience, each course may be separated by speeches, presentations, and or discussions. Because the gastronomic diplomacy is not only about eating, the number of courses to be eaten is of very important. For example, in a banquet, four to five courses can be eaten. For instance, after the starter, soups can be served as a second course. However, the order of speaking is maintained.

Soups vary from *Tomato Soup* which is a tangy medley of garden fresh tomatoes with a touch of garlic and cilantro to *Mulligatawny* which is India's national soup made of delicately spiced lentils garnished with rice and chicken. Some soups include *chicken soup* made of chicken stock infused with Indian flavors. Some of the salads include, baby marrow and corn salad with granadilla vinaigrette, beetroot, feta and chickpea salad, smoky paprika salmon with exotic tomato salad and savory cabbage salad.

There is no hard rule on the sequence of starters. In some cases, depending on the occasion, soups can be used as a starter followed by a sea food dish. Sea food dishes are prepared in many different ways, these include, gentle frying of spices before the addition of the main ingredients, such as in making a *Mango fish curry.* This type of dish is produced by marinating fish filet with lemon juice, adding Indian spices, pan fried and cooked in a cashew gravy with fresh mango puree. *Shrimps* can be roasted with fresh herbs, bell peppers, tomatoes, and onions. Other dishes include, *fish bobotie, wild mussels* with cider and chorizo and *mushroom korma*. There are a number of varieties of bread which can be served as an accompaniment to these dishes which include *Naan* which is soft, plain unleavened bread prepared in tandoor. This type of bread can also be flavoured with garlic, raisins, green chilies, Indian spices and or chilies.

Just before a main course, sorberts are served to cleanse the palate. Main courses tend to vary from chicken to lamb. *Rice* is the staple starch; it is usually served with curries and broths. There are a number of variations to rice which include, *Lemon Rice, Jeera Rice, Chicken Biryani, Lamb Biryani, goat biryani,*. Some other notable delicacies include *Tandoori Chicken, Chicken Hariyali,* and *Sheekh Kabab*. *Mixed grills* are popular, particularly the *Tandoori Mix Grill* which is combination sizzler of tandoori prepared chicken, seafood, lamb, and vegetables. One of the most important parts of the South African cuisine is the use *Chicken Curry* made from boneless chicken in an onion based curry with Indian spices. Different from chicken curry is the

Chicken Kurchan which is a shredded tandoori chicken sautéed with julienne bell peppers, onions, and tomatoes, cooked in creamy tomato gravy.

Food and Power Relations

Since the 1990's, the study of food has moved from the margins to the centre of intellectual discourse particularly in the English speaking world (Watson & Caldwell, 2005). The importance of food and commensality is deeply rooted in the history and tradition of diplomacy (Chapple-Sokol, 2013). Recent scholarly work demonstrates food's centrality in depictions of multiculturalism as enjoyable and enriching, but such assertions would have been inconceivable several decades ago. The popular literature views food consumption as a complex interplay of cultural economic, social, political and technological forces (Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007). As Reynolds (2010) argues that the power of prestige utilises food (and the act of dining) as a medium in which interactions can communicate and display power. Food is a significant means to penetrate into another culture as "…it allows an individual to experience the 'other' on a sensory level, and not just an intellectual one" (Long, 1989). Under the framework of the power of prestige, diplomatic ceremonies are used to cement political relationships (Roosen 1980) and as a mirror for reflecting political spheres of power struggle (Reynolds, 2010). Food is arguably, the most important power indicator of who is who in any meal-event as Chapple-Sokol explains:

Sharing a meal with someone invokes a whole range of subliminal interactions. The host or provider may be trying to alternatively impress, or satisfy, or comfort, or disparage (Chapple-Sokol, 2013:172).

This notion shows that food is neither just about eating, nor is it just a biological process that satisfies nutritional elements. Whilst the act of sharing and preparing food may be a basic necessity, it can also be an act of kindness that reminds us of how we are connected. Reynolds further elaborates on this issue by clarifying that:

Who is and who is not at the meal-event is an important power indicator. Who was invited signals who the host thought was worthy to attend, as well as those the host wishes to belittle by not inviting. Not attending can also signal that the guest wishes to snub the host, making a clear political signal: if agents of actors cannot break bread together then their relationship is certainly a terse one. What (and how much) is eaten is also another symbol that is highly significant when considering prestige. The food served at the meal-event can promote a national agenda or message. The desire to impress or dominate can also be expressed by the food served, with host nations serving either local or guest cuisine, to illustrate both the level of geniality and the power relationship at the meal-event (Reynolds, 2010:298).

Postmodern consumption of food is purely rational but it is largely a symbolic activity (Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007) for example, sitting, eating and

sharing a meal have become the most important diplomatic encounter, as Chapple-Sokol explains:

Underlying diplomatic signalling is an *assumption of intentionality* and the non-logocentric message of culinary diplomacy is no different. It serves as a powerful tool of communication that is made stronger precisely by the absence of words. Language, especially when written, is relatively unambiguous. Even body language tells an unequivocal story. Gestures of private culinary diplomacy, however, can be made as obviously or as ambiguously as a diplomat desires. Seating arrangements and other aspects of protocol point to varying levels of power, but they can do so subtly. A carefully constructed menu can send a message — both in what is included and what is left off (Chapple-Sokol, 2013:167).

Sitting arrangement, service and clearing of plates be it at the venue or table can signal power relations. Hence a meal shared with either enemies or friends may serve to reduce or increase individual differences. Food is the most intimate and mundane social life aspect. The above assertion indicates that food has become an universal medium that is central in different cultural contexts. The vocabulary of cooking and eating is used to help express identities hence symbols seem to be attached to particular foods, manufacturing, preparation methods and eating patterns of consumers (Kniazeva & Venkatesh, 2007). These practices though complex imply that these relationships, expectations and choices are negotiated, contested and they are often not equal. As Watson and Caldwell (2005) caution that a change in food practices threatens the notions of national identity hence across the world food is political, for example, people like Gandhi have used food to legitimise and engender their political endeavours.

The nexus of food and diplomacy was a common theme in early modern diplomatic advice literature (Cull, 2008). The art of entertaining foreign diplomats and envoys with one's national cuisine is as old as diplomacy itself, but as an institutionalized method to conduct diplomacy, it is still new and relatively untested (Chapple-Sokol, 2013). A diplomatic ceremony can be used as a form of prestige to enhance and illustrate power relationships between nations, elites and other actors (Morgenthau, 1985). Public diplomacy deals with plans and guidelines for dealing with all foreign affairs and monitoring foreign media, censoring and guiding domestic media. Public diplomacy is meant to exert influence on foreign governments "indirectly; that is, by appealing over the heads of those governments to the people with the influence upon them" (Chapple-Sokol, 2013:167). It focuses on the transmission of messages and values, and the exchange of ideas. It does so through advocacy, cultural diplomacy, cultural exchange, listening endeavours, and the field of international broadcasting, all of which contribute to a nation's "soft power" capabilities (Rockower, 2011). On the one hand, the relationship between public diplomacy and soft power is that public diplomacy helps transform soft power resources into tangible improvements in international image and attractiveness as being promoted

by its social, economic, and political developments (Rockower, 2011).On the other hand, the rich cultural heritage is expressed by applying a nation's cultural capital to appeal to a foreign nation's populace (Chapple-Sokol, 2013) thereby instilling interest and desire among foreigners to know the country better.

The concept of cultural diplomacy narrows an actor's attempt to manage the international environment through making its cultural resources and achievements known overseas and/or facilitating cultural transmission abroad (Cull,2008). When a nation-state decides to combine food with its public diplomacy strategy, the outcome is gastro-diplomacy.

During a meal-event, the hosts use symbolic acts as a method of showing power relationships by correctly communicating messages be they verbal or non-verbal. Every role player takes a certain position in line with their status and role. Throughout the meal, the host leads the proceedings except if delegated to somebody else. Depending on the type of occasion, desserts are served including, *Rasmalai* which is a Homemade cottage cheese dumplings soaked in sweetened milk and garnished with pistachio. Immaculate *barfi* (condensed milk squares), some other disserts include, *Mango Kulfi*, *PistaKulfi*, *Tutti Frutti*, *Gulab Jamun* (fried dough balls swimming in rosewater syrup), and *Kheer* (Rockower, 2011). Other sweets include chocolate orange cake, cheese cake, trifles, and jellies. The meal can end with savouries such as , tea and or coffee. The fact that the guest cannot leave the table before the host signifies the extent of power the host has over his/her guest.

Gastro-diplomacy as Form of Soft Power

In this paper we have pointed out the act of winning hearts and minds through stomachs and explored ways by which food can be used by a country to promote its national identity and encourage economic interests. As noted, when a nation-state decides to combine food with its public diplomacy strategy, the outcome is gastro-diplomacy. Gastro-diplomacy uses culinary delights to appeal to global appetites and thus helps raise a nation's brand awareness and reputation (Rockower, 2011). Whilst the concept is ancient, the terminology is relatively new. We suggest that food diplomacy, is "the use of food and cuisine as an instrument to create a cross-cultural understanding in the hope of improving interactions and cooperation" at a higher, government-to-government level (as opposed to government-to-the-public level). Although Food diplomacy does not constitute a clearly delineated and organisable category for research at the moment, we agree that it does constitute an abstract category which can define certain aspects of socio-economic and cultural relations. In this paper we took an anthropological approach to postmodernism by asking how, why and when the food consumed in Durban in particular and KwaZulu-Natal in general has managed to arrive at a distinguishable taste; displaying characteristics of India and South African flavours.

Whilst the simple answer is that the concept of food is universal and resonates with everyone, people are raised with different flavours, ingredients, and techniques, which in turn develop into tastes of that which is familiar, of that which we identify with home. The food prepared in India's diplomatic missions, not only is used a power factor, but it is also tool and source of identity for diaspora Indians. The power of food as a political tool is not different from other sorts of power considering its applicability to be used as a form hard power in embargos, food aid or trade and as soft power through social and cultural relations (Reynolds 2010). Reynolds, explanation of food shows that there is much more in dinners than a plate of food in front of you. Considering that most countries have branded themselves as a form of identity and food has become one of the core components for a destination's attractiveness, brands exhibit power in terms of what is being branded. From a tourism perspective, food has been used as a distinct competitive advantage. Not only does a nation brand attract tourists, it can be used for investment promotion. Despite the elaborate effort that goes into nation branding, brands never atrophy but they act as a purchase cue in any purchase decision. As we interrogate the historical and contemporary factors and processes that have promoted the formation of this kind of identity for both those involved and observers, we argue that diplomatic gastronomy via the status quo option seeks to keep the power levels stable, bringing an accurate representation of political standings to the dining experience (Reynolds, 2010). Bearing in mind that food consumption has become a recognisable and central dimension of many societies and even seen in quarters as 'the vanguard of history', it is crucial for us to understand this new form of modernity as a measure of complete diplomacy. India has always used food as a salient part of its cultural diplomacy strategy with its international campaigns on immaculate India in various festivals in American and South Africa in particular aimed at raising India's brand awareness, spur tourism and introduce global dinners to the authentic Indian palate (Rockower, 2011).

In this paper we have traced India's presence in Africa and examined how this has influenced its use of food as a foundation for public diplomacy programmemes, India has continued to learn about different cultures and engage on important related issues such as nutrition, sustainability and food security. Whilst the act of sharing and preparing food may be a basic necessity, we argue that it can also be an act of kindness that reminds us of how we are connected. The diplomatic food partnership initiatives pioneered by India can be viewed as "smart power" diplomacy, which embraces the use of a full range of diplomatic tools. By utilizing food, hospitality and the dining experience as ways to enhance formal diplomacy, the power of food as an experience can be illuminated (Remmington & Yuskel, 1998). As we examine the nascent field of food diplomacy, we have observed that through food, Indīans in South Africa have managed to bring awareness of the political situation by putting on events, performances and discussions as a way of expanding their engagement with different cultures. Hence, the idea of food

has facilitated communication in a geopolitical arena through its incredibly powerful and nonverbal means. Even long ago, culinary needs preceded diplomatic needs, the opening up of ancient trade routes and pathways eventually shaped the global political and economic landscape of today. Envoys relied on food and spices for currency as a means for trading, and gifts were used for strengthening relations with distant powers.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that food can be used as a perfect power vehicle to express the country's ideology, culture and symbolises society's identity. This paper has used various theoretical frameworks (i.e. Indians in Africa as an universal economistic category, as a neutral product of food culture, and as active consumers who are a product of postmodernity or an advanced state of liberal governmen) to support its argument that there is no complete diplomacy without food. To understand food consumption, the world cultural theory and cultural capital theory were discussed in the context of globalisation. Furthermore, the paper discussed public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy and food diplomacy in order to expose India-Africa bilateral and multilateral engagements. Various theoretical frameworks were applied in this article in order to represent the role of food in cultural diplomacy. Since the subject of food is wide and broad, different perspectives were interrogated. India's food diplomacy was discussed by paying particular attention to the essential features of Indian food in South Africa. Based on the outcomes of this paper, it can be concluded that most of the foods consumed in local Durban restaurants have flair of both South African and Indian tastes. Therefore, this paper has demonstrated that there is no diplomacy that is complete without food. The paper concludes that the use of food diplomacy as a relationship builder is diverse and its applicability is wide-ranging.

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