Nidān

International Journal for the Study of Hinduism

[illegible]

[illegible]

Nidan, Vol 21, 2009

Nidān

International Journal for the Study of Hinduism

Volume 21 December 2009
ISSN 1016-5320

Nidān
International Journal for the Study of Hinduism

Volume 21 December 2009
ISSN 1016-5320

Nidān is an international Journal which publishes contributions in the field of studies in Hinduism

Articles published in Nidān have abstracts reflected in Ultriche's International Periodicals Directory, New Jersey, USA, in Periodica Islamica, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia and in the Index to South African Periodicals

EDITORS

***Maheshvari Naidu** *** Usha Shukla**

University of KwaZulu-Natal

Nidan, Vol 21, 2009

Local Editorial Board
P. Pratap Kumar (University of KwaZulu Natal)
M. Clasquin (University of South Africa);
R. Mesthrie (University of Cape Town).

International Editorial Board
F. Clooney (Harvard University, USA); K. Jacobsen (University of Bergen, Norway); M. Bauman (Universität Luzern, Switzerland);
P. Bilimoria (Melbourne University, Australia);
Y. Sawai (Tenri University, Japan);
N. Hatti (Lund University, Sweden); R. Lamb (University of Hawaii, USA); K. Knott (University of Leeds, UK);
A. Rambachan (St. Olaf College, Minnesota, USA);
J. Schaller (Nazereth College, New York USA)

Correspondence Address:
The Editor/Managing Editor:
Maheshvari Naidu
Nidān c/o School of Anthropology, Gender and Historical Studies
Private Bag X54001, Durban, South Africa

Email: naiduu@ukzn.ac.za

ISSN 1016-5320
Copy Right Reserved: Nidān
Subscription rates: Africa R70-00
Other Countries: US$ 30

Criteria for Submission of Articles:

Articles should relate to the study of any aspect of Hinduism. As such, the study of Hinduism is broadly conceived to include, not merely the traditionally recognized areas within the discipline, but includes contributions from scholars in other fields who seek to bring their particular worldviews and theories into dialogue with Hindu studies.

Articles that explore issues of history, ecology, economics, politics, sociology, culture, education and psychology are welcomed.

Papers will be subject to evaluation by referees drawn from a pool of local and international scholars. The article itself should not exceed 6000 words.

Gender discrimination should be avoided, unless it is necessary for the sense intended.

The author's full name, address, qualifications and present position must be supplied on a separate page. Each paper must be accompanied by a signed declaration to the effect that the article is the original work of the author.

Articles must be submitted on a computer diskette/computer CD using an IBM or Macintosh compatible word processing programme. Articles should be saved as a Word Document. In addition three printed double spaced copies of the paper must be supplied.

Note that the publication of articles cannot be guaranteed. Further, an article, which is accepted for publication, maybe held over for a publication in a subsequent issue of the journal.

Nidān Volume 21, 2009

ARTICLES

An Inquiry into the Cultural and Anthropological Heritage of India

Vijoy S Sahay 8-24

The Arya Samaj and the Aftermath of Indenture in Natal and Trinidad

Paula Richman 25-55

Kabirdas and Bhakti Panthis in South Africa

Veena Lutchman 56-68

Issues in the Rama Story: Genesis, Impact and Resolution

Usha Shukla 69-91

The Hare Krishnas in Durban: Transmitting Religious Ideas in a Modern City

P. Pratap Kumar 92-109

The Rāmlīla/Ramdilla Jhandi

Indrani Rāmpersad 110-126

Foreign Religious Bodies: Constructing the Religious 'Other'

Maheshvari Naidu 127-148

Nidan, Vol 21, 2009

Nidān
International Journal for the Study of Hinduism

Volume 21 December 2009
ISSN 1016-5320

Nidan, Vol 21, 2009

An Inquiry into the Cultural and Anthropological Heritage of India

Vijoy S Sahay
Department of Anthropology and Sociology
University of Allahabad, India

Western anthropology owes to ancient Greece for initial anthropological ideas; however, few people know that as early as the sixth century B.C., when Pythagoras and his followers had recognized the *ordered nature* of society, the *Buddha* and his followers in India had already recognized the *scientific nature* of human mind *vis- a- vis* body. It is still not too late that Indian anthropology breaks the shackles of *colonial* or for that matter *postcolonial* anthropology, and establishes its own *identity* by exploring the anthropological elements in ancient Indian history, culture, and scriptures.

Anthropological thought began whenever it was that people *first* began to identify, differentiate, and reflect about the nature of society and the customs they or their neighbors followed. It is, generally, held that anthropology began during the mid 19th century, precisely, after the publication of *The Origin of Species* (1859) by Charles Darwin. Marvin Harris in his treatise

The Rise of Anthropological Theories (1968) traces its origin in the period of Enlightenment, whereas Annemarie De Waal Malefijt in the *Images of Man* (1974) and J. J. Honnigman in the *Development of Anthropological Ideas* (1976) seek the genesis of anthropology in the writings and philosophies of ancient Greece and Rome. Like most other social sciences, no doubt, anthropology developed in the west; however, its roots lie in the exhaustive literature pertaining to the *so called* 'exotic' or 'savage' people around the world explored by the travelers, missionaries, and the colonial administrators ever since the European colonization began on this planet. On the other hand, *India represents the greatest potential of anthropological researches in the world.* In terms of indigenous and tribal population it is only next to the continent of Africa; in terms of variety and antiquity of cultural traditions, it is next to none. Populations representing all cradles of culture and civilization are found here. Cultural traditions have been perpetuating in her population for over several thousand years. Only to explore the factors behind this ever-perpetuation of cultural traditions would throw altogether new anthropological light.

The *Buddha* in his teachings on *vipassana* has meticulously described the chain *of bio-psychological* reactions occurring in human body when our sense organs perceive any stimuli, and thus leads to our acts i.e. *karma.* His subtle explanation of relationship between *mind* and human *body* has been unparallel and

beyond contradiction by modern science. And the *Buddha* had only rediscovered it. The *Buddha's* teachings are but the simplified version of the *Geeta.* Ancient scriptures of India are brimming with such scientific explanations. This is only the tip of the iceberg. This paper is a humble attempt in this direction. It concludes with the assumption that India has immense potential to contribute to world anthropology. Instead of waiting for *a* William Jones, *a* Max Muller, or *a* James Prisep let Indian anthropologists come forward to unveil the hidden anthropological elements in the thoughts, writings, and philosophies of ancient India, her culture, and scriptures.

The Beginnings of Anthropology

There are three schools of thought with regard to the origin of the discipline. First, which is most commonly held is that "*anthropology is the child of Darwin.*" The exponents of this school suggest that after the publication of *The Origin of Species* (1859), the then social scientists borrowed the ideas from it, and applied them indiscriminately to the interpretation of the origin of society and culture in general, and social institutions in particular. Just like the biological evolution, the society and culture, and all the social institutions had also evolved from simple to complex forms, they argued. Resting upon the idea of '*natural selection*' and '*survival of the fittest*', some scholars even justified the menace of *slavery* and exploitation of the poor by the rich, and thereby, gave rise to the concept of '*Social Darwinism.*' This school firmly holds that the developments in biological science during the mid 19th century influenced the social science in general and anthropology in particular. It is, though, true that most of the publications of the mid 19th century anthropologists are post-Darwinian, such as, Henry Maine's *Ancient Law* (1861), Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877), Tylor's *Primitive Culture* (1871), McLennan's *Primitive Marriage* (1865) et cetera; however, it is also now debated whether during the mid 19th century, biological science influenced the social science, or it was vice *versa*. In *The Origin of Species* (1859), Darwin himself acknowledges his debt to Herbert Spencer and the 18th century economist Thomas Malthus; whose writings had influenced him most.

Marvin Harris in his treatise *The Rise of Anthropological Theories* (1968) traces its origin in the period of Enlightenment. To quote him, "The rise of anthropological theory began during the hallowed epoch in Western culture known as the Enlightenment- the period roughly coincident with the one hundred years from the writing of John Loche's *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) to the outbreak of French Revolution" (Harris 1968:8). He further adds, "...for us, all that is new in anthropological theory begins with the Enlightenment...the Enlightenment philosophers were able to identify the socio-cultural domain as a distinct field of enquiry..." (ibid).

Some other western scholars, such as, Annemarie De Waal Malefijt in the *Images of Man* (1974) and J. J. Honigmann in the *Development of Anthropological Ideas* (1976) seek the roots of anthropology in the writings of ancient Greeks philosophers. Their contention is that the Greek philosophers around 6th century BC were the *first* to discuss about society and culture in *naturalistic* form. Their interpretation about society was not embedded or rooted in mythology. It was devoid of supernatural elements; hence it was *natural,* if not scientific. Their ideas were the products of their *rationale*, not of superstition; hence not dogmatic. To quote Honigmann (1976:11), "The story of anthropological ideas in the Western world begins in the generally prosperous, intellectually fertile, and far from peaceful civilization of the Greek mainland..." Malefijt (1974:21) writes, "When people speak of the 'heritage of Greece and Rome' they usually consider philosophy or art, but rarely think of anthropology." She further adds, "The Greeks and the Romans possessed an incorrigible interest in themselves as human beings, and wished to understand themselves and their relationship to the universe" (*ibid*).

Anthropological Elements in Ancient India

I am neither a historian nor an Indologist. Also, my purpose is not to unnecessarily eulogize or glorify the ancient Indian history, culture and traditions. My sole aim in this paper has been to draw the attention of the

> fellow anthropologists to the fact that anthropology is though a western science; however, its roots are not exclusively western. My contention is that because the writings of most of the Greek and the Roman philosophers are preserved till date, and they have been well studied for centuries, therefore, we must not think that *naturalistic* and *scientific* thinking about society and culture exclusively began in Greece alone. No doubt that the ancient civilization of Greece was very '*prosperous and intellectually fertile*', however, Honigmann (1976:1) himself asserts, "earlier or equally early beliefs about society and culture could also be recovered from ancient Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Indian, and Chinese written sources..." For example, Henry F Lutz in his article entitled *"The Sumerian and Anthropology"* published in the 29th Volume of the American Anthropologist (1927:202-209) has suggested that "Sumerians apparently conceived of human society as evolving in stages, from hunting to pastoralism to grain agriculture" (quoted from Honigmann 1976:10).

My knowledge about ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia or China is too little to write anything. However, being an Indian, and having been in the profession of anthropology for over two and a half decades, it has always puzzled my mind that despite limitless potential for anthropological researches, why does India lag behind in theoretical contribution to world anthropology. Why all the theories and concepts in anthropology have emerged out of the study of the simple societies of the New World, Australia,

Africa, or the Pacific? I have earlier stated that in terms of the number of simple societies, India is only next to the continent of Africa; and in terms of variety and antiquity of cultural traditions, India is perhaps next to none. Ever since the above ideas entered into my mind I have been in search of anthropological elements in ancient history, culture, and scriptures of India. In 2003 I presented a paper relating to such theme in Singapore during the Forth International Convention of Asia Scholars entitled "*An Anthropologist Looks at History: A Reinterpretation of Ancient History and Culture of India*". The paper has been recently published in the *Dimensions of Researches in Indian Anthropology*, Volume II (Sahay 2005: 32-44).

Anthropology of the *Buddha*

My interest in the *Buddha* was just by chance. In 2001 I read some literature and underwent a 10-day course of *vipassana* meditation. Before that I had little knowledge about the *Buddha* and his teachings, least about *vipassana*. By the end of the course, being an anthropologist, I began to realize that the *Buddha's* teachings were very mundane, very worldly, devoid of any supernatural element, and far from being mysterious. His concept about human being and universe was very *natural*; rather his concept about human mind vis-à-vis body in relation to universe was very *scientific*.

The *Buddha* did not teach any religion or philosophy, or system of beliefs and rituals. He called his teaching **Dhamma** that is "*the law of nature*." It is wrongly translated in English as "religion." His teaching was not something that he had invented or that was divinely revealed to him. It was simply the truth, which by his own efforts he had succeeded in discovering, as many people before him had done, and as many people after him would do, thus he believed. Neither was he interested in establishing a sect or a personality cult with him as its center. His purpose was to show others how to liberate themselves from sufferings, not to turn them into blind devotees. He claimed no monopoly on the truth. He did not assert any special authority for his teaching- neither because of the faith that people had on him, nor because of the apparently *logical* nature of what he taught.

The highest authority is one's own experience of truth, he said. Let us examine his ideas about mind and matter.

On Matter vis-à-vis (Human) Body

According to the *Buddha*, "superficially, one can control the body: it moves and acts according to the conscious will. But on the other level, all the internal organs function beyond our control, without our knowledge. At a subtler level, experientially, we know nothing of the incessant *biochemical reactions* occurring within each *cell* of our *body*. But this is still not the ultimate reality of the *material* phenomena. Ultimately the seemingly solid body is composed of *subatomic particles* and *empty*

space… even these *subatomic particles* have no real *solidity*; the existence span of one of them is much less than a trillionth of a second. *Particles* continuously arise and vanish, passing into and out of existence, like a flow of *vibrations*. This is the ultimate reality of the *body*; rather, of all *matters*" (Hart, 1988:25-26). And the *Buddha* discovered the above scientific explanation of *matter*, and the *material universe* 2500 years ago; and that too not by the help of any instrument in any laboratory, but sheer by his curious mind and through meditation.

The *Buddha* found that "the entire *material universe* was composed of *particles*, called in Pali **kalapas**, or '*indivisible units*.' These units exhibit in endless variation the basic qualities of *matter* i.e. *mass*, *cohesion*, *temperature*, and *movement*. They combine to form structures, which seem to have some permanence. But actually these are all composed of miniscule **kalapas**, which are in a state of continuously arising and passing away. This is the ultimate reality of *matter*: a constant stream of waves or particles. This is the (human) *body* which we call '*myself*'" (ibid).

Modern scientists have also recognized and accepted the ultimate reality of the *material universe*. Out of curiosity they have investigated the *nature* of the *universe*, using their intellect and relying on *instruments* to verify their theories. In contrast the *Buddha* was surely motivated by his curiosity, but he used no instrument in his investigation other than his own mind and meditation.

On Mind

"As he examined the body, the *Buddha* also examined the mind and found that in broad, overall terms it consisted of four processes: *consciousness* (**vinnana**), *perception* (**sanna**), *sensation* (**vedana**), and *reaction* (**sankhara**)" (ibid).

According to the *Buddha*, the first process *consciousness* is the receiving part of the mind, the act of undifferentiated awareness or *cognition*. It simply registers the occurrence of the phenomenon, the reception of any input, physical or mental. It notes the raw data of experience without assigning labels or making value judgment. The second mental process is *perception*, the act of *recognition*. This part of the mind identifies whatever has been noted by the *consciousness*. It distinguishes, labels, and categorizes the incoming raw data and makes evaluations, positive or negative. The next process of the mind is *sensation*. Actually as soon as any input is received, sensation arises, a signal that something is happening. So long as the input is not evaluated, the *sensation* remains neutral. But once a value is attached to the incoming data, the *sensation* becomes pleasant or unpleasant, and thus *reaction* begins. If the *sensation* is pleasant, a wish forms to prolong and intensify the experience. If it is an unpleasant *sensation*, the wish is to stop it, to push it away. Thus mind reacts with liking or disliking.

For example, when the ear is functioning normally and one hears a sound, ***cognition*** is at work. When the sound is recognized as words, with positive or negative connotations, ***perception*** starts to function. Next ***sensation*** comes into play. If the words are praise, a pleasant *sensation* arises; if they are abuse, an unpleasant *sensation* arises. At once ***reaction*** takes place. Biologically, there are five sense organs, viz., eyes, ears, nose, tongue and skin. According to the *Buddha*, and the ancient Hindu scriptures, the sixth sense organ is the *mind* itself. Each sense organ has its own receptive feature to contact with, for example, eyes make contact with form of any object, ears with sound, nose with smell, tongue with taste, and skin with touch. The sixth sense organ i.e. *mind* makes contact with *thought*.

The same steps occur whenever any of the sense organs receives its respective input: *consciousness, perception, sensation, and reaction.* These four mental functions are even more fleeting than the ephemeral particles composing the material reality. Each moment that the senses come into contact with any object, the four mental processes occur with lightening rapidity, and repeat themselves with each subsequent moment of contact. So rapidly does this occur that one is unaware of what is happening?

Such subtle and scientific discovery of the functioning of human *mind* and *body* by the *Buddha* is no mean an achievement. The sophists in ancient Greece talked about

the '*summum bonum*' i.e. the highest good for all the members of the society. The *Buddha* talked about the '*nirwana*' i.e. liberation from the bondage by every individual; liberation from bondage means liberation from all human ills i.e. sufferings. *Nirwana* is not a post-death phenomenon, as laymen generally understand it. One cannot liberate himself from the bondages i.e. sufferings by chanting *mantras*, or devotion to any *guru* or deity, or sheer by penance; but one can do so only by experiencing the truth, the reality that takes place in him, his *mind* and *body*. One has to have insight into the nature of reality, a path of truth realization. The only way to experience the truth directly is to look within, to observe oneself. We must gain insight into our own *nature* in order to understand the nature of existence. Therefore, the path that the *Buddha* showed is a path of *introspection,* of *self-observation.* He said, **"Within this fathom long body, containing the mind with its perceptions, I make known the universe, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation"** (*Anguttara Nikaya IV v. 5 (45), Rohitassa Sutta. Also found in Samyutta Nikaya II. iii.6.* Quoted from William Hart, 1988:16). The entire universe and the laws of nature by which it works are to be experienced within self.

"Anthropological questions are timeless because they center on the universal concern to understand human existence and behavior" (Malefijt 1974: vii). It is needless to say that ancient philosophers and sages of India how much they concerned themselves with the understanding

of *human existence and behavior*. In this context I would only like to reiterate my earlier statement that **Western anthropology owes to ancient Greece and Rome for initial anthropological ideas; however, few people know that as early as the sixth century B.C., when Pythagoras and his followers had recognized the *ordered nature* of society, the *Buddha* and his followers in India had already recognized the *scientific nature* of human mind *vis-à-vis* body**.

In his presidential address at the Xth ICAES (1978) in New Delhi Vidyarthi had said "India's ancient scriptures like the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads,* the *Smritis,* the *Puranas* and the other great epics provide a sensitive insight into the social realities. Therefore, the *Indian ness* in social science has to emerge with a proper appraisal of these ancient texts, whose influences on the behavioural pattern of our countrymen cannot be neglected." He further added, "These ancient scriptures reflect the wisdom and provide guidelines for shaping the socio-culture life in India. The patterns of nature-man relationship, man-to-man relationship and man-to-spirit relationships are explained in great depth" (ibid).

I may be accused of and criticized for my blunt remark that unfortunately, by and large, the psyche of most of the Indian anthropologists suffer from preoccupation or complexity. Unless any social or cultural element of the glorious past of India is first recognized and brought to light by any foreigner, and that too by a westerner, the indigenous scholars dare not attempt to study it; rather they consider it as unprogressive, conservative, and orthodox, therefore, a tabooed subject of study. **Barring one exception, and that too in Claude Levi-Strauss, no anthropologist has ever dared to realize the anthropological importance in the message of the Buddha. One is advised to study the concluding chapter of the *Tristes Tropiques* of Claude Levi-Strauss (1970).** Throughout the journey of his life, Claude Levi-Strauss had not been able to find the solution of the problems (*the contradictions*) that he faced as an anthropologist, until he visited a Buddhist monastery in a village in the Chittagong hill tracts (now in Bangladesh) in September 1950.

In the serene atmosphere of the monastery as he entered, Claude Levi-Strauss (1970:395) realized, *"This great religion of not-knowingness is not based upon our incapacity to understand. It bears witness, rather, to our natural gifts, raising us to the point at which we discover truth...it has achieved something that, elsewhere, only Marxism has brought off: it has reconciled the problem of meta-physics with the problem of human behaviour... Between Marxist criticism which sets Man free from his first chains, and Buddhist criticism, which completes the liberation, there is neither opposition nor contradiction...Marxism and Buddhism are doing the same thing, but at a different level."*

On the basis of his pure and unadulterated message, I dare say that **the seeds of the cognitive science and the psychological**

school of anthropology were first sown by the Buddha, much over two thousand years, before any of its *assumed* exponents, like Margaret Mead (1928), or Freud (1913), or Hume (1757), or Locke (1690), or Bacon (1605), or any of the sophists of ancient Greece had done so. It is only the tip of the iceberg. I am sure that we can find numerous such examples spread in the ancient Indian scriptures and the teachings of the ancient sages of India.

The Buddha was a historical personality, beyond any doubt. He showed the path to achieve *nirvana.* Most people understand *nirvana* as a post-death phenomenon, which it is not. It is, in fact, *a state of human mind and existence*, when one feels completely free from all the human vices, while still alive. And this can be achieved by anyone by sincere and prolonged practice of v*ipassana*. *Vipassana* has no concern with any *tantra*, *mantra*, ritual, deity, god or goddess, or mythology. It is not embedded in occultism. *It is purely a method of understanding the bio-psychological dynamics occurring in human body through conscious and alert practice of respiration.* All human vices are bio-psychological phenomena that get manifested in different forms of '*sensations*.' Sensations are caused when our sense organs come in contact with their respective *stimuli*, such as eyes with a form, ear with sound, nose with smell, tongue with taste, and skin with touch. According to the ancient scriptures of India, and the Buddha, there is yet another sense organ, i.e. the mind of a person, which is stimulated by any thought or idea. *Any such stimuli cause certain bio-chemical change in human body; and such a change is reflected in different types of sensations, either gross or subtle.* Any sensation, whether gross or subtle, is always of temporary nature. Once through *vipassana* if one understands the '*temporary nature*' of all *sensations*, and learns to remain '*passive*' without *reacting* to them, he is able to overcome all human vices, and thereby achieves a 'state of mind', called *nirvana.* This is what the Buddha says. Pure message of the Buddha is as scientific as H_2O is equal to water. The Buddha discovered the scientific nature of human mind and behavior, not in a laboratory, but in the open air of nature through meditation and serious thought. I do not consider the Buddha as a religious leader of his time, but a cognitive scientist, a psychologist, a psychological anthropologist, a human biologist; and, above all, a reformist, he was.

Conclusion

The ideas of ancient Greeks and that of the ancient Indian sages, including the *Buddha*, differ in many respects. While the Greek philosophers emphasized upon the *nature* of *society*, the Indian thinkers and the *Buddha* emphasized upon the *nature* of *individual*. However, the common element in their ideas is that both presented *naturalistic* explanations of *society* and *individual*, respectively. Such emphasis upon *society* by the ancient Greeks and *individual* by the ancient Indians has been the product of their respective time and space. If we examine the history of ancient Greece we find that the city nations like the Athens and the Sparta were always at war. One King or the Noble would any time organize a bloody coup and the whole social fabric would abruptly change. The social system was never stable in Greece before the Christian era. The very existence of society and the social system was always at stake. No wonder that the Sophists thought more about *society* than about *individual*. And ultimately the threat of social disintegration was proved right in Greece and other ancient civilization. While in India, cultural traditions have still been perpetuating for over several thousand years in her present populations, the civilizations of ancient Greece, or for that matter Egypt, Mesopotamia or Rome exist only in the annals of history books, or in their ruins.

It was not so in case of India; rather it has never been so in spite of repeated foreign invasions from the very ancient times. The social, political, economic, religious, kinship, family, educational organizations et cetera, and all the related social institutions have been so deeply rooted and *institutionalized* ever since the known history of India, that there has never been any threat of social disintegration. The society and the social systems have remained always stable in India. Despite all its *menace* on ethical and moral grounds, the *caste system* has played a significant role in maintaining the social and cultural stability in India since time immemorial. This is perhaps one good reason that the Indian thinkers, instead of worrying about the *nature* of *society*, worried more about the *nature* of *individual.*

India's social and cultural stability itself is a matter of anthropological research. Since time immemorial the foreign invaders have entered into India, particularly from the northwest. The last were the Muslims to enter into India through this end. None of the invaders could destroy the social and cultural identity of this great land and civilization; rather they also became an integral part of the society. For example, the Muslims ruled over the land for over eight hundred years, yet they could not fully Islamize the whole nation. On the contrary if we examine the history of Islam, we find that wherever they have invaded the whole land was converted to Islam, subduing the indigenous social culture fabric. On the other hand the Indian caste system has made its impact even on the Muslims and the Christians as well. This has been perhaps because of the deep-rooted institutionalization of all the facets of social organization.

In the history of most nations we find that a change of the ruler brought subsequent change in society in general and social institutions in particular, and thereby, transforming the entire social fabric. But in case of India it has never been so. Because of the rigid *caste system*, the ordinary people had little to do with the change of the ruling class. The *caste system* was directly linked with the economy of the whole society. Therefore, in case of an invasion or war, only a particular section of people i.e. the *kshatriyas* were supposed to be concerned with. It was their duty to cross swords with the enemy or the invaders. The rest of the population lived their usual life. Therefore, a war or an invasion brought little change in social and economic life of the people in India. This is also one of the reasons of its social and cultural stability.

My aim in this paper is not merely to talk about the *naturalistic* or *scientific* explanations of the Buddha. This is merely a small step. I am sure that the Jain philosophers were also equally capable of *scientific* ideas. Though most of the ancient Indian scriptures carry supernatural elements, however, I am sure that be it the *Buddha*, or any of the *Tirthankaras* of the *Jains*, all derived inspiration and input from the earliest Indian sages and scriptures. It is an open and very fertile field of research for Indian anthropologists and other social scientists, so I think.

Professor L.P.Vidyarthi in his Presidential Address during the Xth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in 1978 had called upon the fellow scientists to discover the social and cultural elements in the ancient scriptures of India, and thereby, attempt to bring Indianness in social science in general and anthropology in particular. Little doubt, as an anthropologist, Professor Vidyarthi was far ahead of his time.

In the end I would like once again to quote Honigmann (1976:1), "Anthropological thought began whenever it was that people first began to reflect about the *nature* of *society* and the *customs* they or their neighbors followed." If it be the case then I would once again emphatically suggest that ancient Indian sages were *one* of the *earliest thinkers* on this planet about the very *nature* of society they lived in; and that notwithstanding the vicissitude of times and turmoil of ages, they laid down the foundations of such institutionalized social organizations and customs in India that even to this day has been perpetuating in her population. In order to carve out a respectful place in world anthropology, which is long overdue, I call upon the fellow anthropologists to pay serious attention to the study of history, culture, and scriptures of ancient India and discover new anthropological light.

Bibliography

Darwin, Charles. (1859) *The Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life*. London: John Murray.

Harris, Marvin. (1968) *The Rise of Anthropological Theory.* Thomas Y. Crowell Co. New York.

Hart, William. (1988) *The Art of Living: Vipassana Meditation.* Vipassana Research Institute, Igatpuri, India. American Anthropologist, 29: 312-320.

Honigmann, J.J. (1976) *The Development of Anthropological Ideas.* Homewood, IL: Dorsey.

Malefijt, Annemarie (1974) *Images of Man: A History of Anthropological Thought*. Scientific Book Agency: Calcutta.

Maine, Sir H.S. (1861) *Ancient Law: I'ts Connection With the Early History of Society, and Its Relation to Modern Idea,* London: John Murray.

Mc Lennan 1865 *Primitive Marrige: An Inquiry into the Origin of the Form of Capture in Marriage Ceremonies*. Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black.

Morgan, L. H. (1877) *Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery through Barbarism to Civilization.* Chicago Press: Chicago.

Sahay, Vijoy S. (2005) *Dimensions of Researches in Indian Anthropology*. Serials Publications: New Delhi.

Tylor, E.B. 1871 *Primitive Culture*. Sage: New York.

Vidyarthi, L. P. (1978) *Presidential Address, Xth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences,* New Delhi.

Nidan, Vol 21, 2009

The Arya Samaj and the Aftermath of Indenture in Natal and Trinidad

Paula Richman
Department of Religion,
Oberlin College, USA

Introduction

The Arya Samaj provided unique kinds of Hindu support to Indians who traveled overseas as indentured laborers between 1845 and 1916. The Arya Samaj, which Swami Dayananda Saraswati founded in 1875 to reform Hindu belief and practice in India, was the first Hindu organization to send reformers to indenture colonies.[i] Many historians of South Asia have studied the Arya Samaj in India (Jones 1976, Jordens 1978, Vable 1983, Llewellyn 1993, Gupta 2002, Hardiman 2007). In this article, I assess Samaj activities outside India in the first half of the 20th century among Indian ex-indentured labourers in Natal (today, part of KwaZulu Natal province, South Africa) and Trinidad (today, part of Trinidad and Tobago, Caribbean). In both places, the Samaj spearheaded efforts to unify Hindus, promote access to education, and establishing Samaj institutions.

Scholarship on the Arya Samaj in India has shown how the Arya Samaj reformed the practice of Hindus and drew clear boundaries between Hindus and "others"--Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs. My argument in this essay is two-fold: (1) that Hindus in each region--India, Natal, and Trinidad--understood "reform" in distinctive ways and (2) that in each region, the "other" wielded different powers and different *kinds* of power. The history of the Arya Samaj in India not only differed significantly from that outside India, the Samaj in Natal took a path that differed crucially from the one it took in Trinidad.

Essentially, I investigate how "reform" and the "other" were defined in each site, focusing on how three features of the Samaj--its Ten Principles, branch structure, and notion of membership--aided the Samaj to unify, educate, and work for the welfare of Hindus but simultaneously exacerbated hostility between the Samaj and other religious groups.

First, I assess how Arya Samajis [members of the Arya Sama] in India understood "reform" in a distinct way that differentiated it from other groups and explore why the Samaj targeted indenture colonies for proselytizing. Turning then to Natal, I analyze how Arya Samaj leaders encouraged exclusively Hindu festivals, sought to emphasize Hindi education without offending other Hindus, and founded institutions to serve multiple Hindu groups. Turning next to Trinidad, I investigate how Samaj leaders conveyed Indian grievances to the government, founded Hindu schools, and translated Sanskrit mantras. The conclusions reflect on the Arya Samaj in India, where Hindus constituted a majority, as opposed to the Samaj in Natal and Trinidad, where Hindus were a minority.

The Arya Samaj: India and Indenture Colonies

In India, the Arya Samaj proved particularly attractive to members of upwardly mobile jatis (subcastes), i.e. those who attained--or aspired to attain--middle-class status. The Samaj offered clearly articulated tenets, a network of local branches, and a notion of membership based neither on family nor caste ties but on adherence to set of principles. Its theology rested on two different pillars: the Arya Samai located their religious authority in the Vedas, the earliest strata of Hindu religious texts, yet interpreted the Vedas in light of Swami Saraswati's exegesis of its passages. Thus, adherents had recourse to an ancient text, but their leader guided them as they negotiated their way through daily decision-making in the radically changing world of their own day.

The Ten Principles of the Arya Samaj, finalized in 1877, presented a single, uniform, authoritative enumeration of core Samaj beliefs and values. The first five Principles explain the relations between God, the Vedas, truth, and dharma: (1) True knowledge comes from God; (2) God is unborn, infinite, unchanging, and worthy of worship; (3) The Vedas contain all true knowledge; (4) Arya Samajis should accept truth and renounce untruth; (5) Actions should be based on truth. The remaining five Principles specify ideal action for Arya Samajis: (6) They should strive to improve the world physically, spiritually, and socially; (7) They should treat people with love and justice; (8) They should dispel ignorance and spread knowledge; (9) They must always strive to make progress; (10) They are bound to obey social rules but free in individual matters (Yadav 1987:56). The Principles function some what like a creed, in that they concisely express Samaj teachings discussed at far greater length in Saraswati's lectures and books. Each Samaji knows the Principles he or she learns are the same ones that all Samajis learn. The Principles function as a model for succinct and memorable discourse, and enhance the ability of Arya Samajis to enter debates with Christians on equal terms.

The Samaj's network of branch associations also aided its rapid spread across large sections of northwest India, by rooting the Samaj in specific localities. Indian sampradayas (religious subgroups) and samajas (reform associations) had usually vested authority in a single guru, to whom disciples owed personal loyalty. In contrast, Saraswati established local branches of the Samaj in cities and many large towns, each with its own elected officers, whose duties were specified by role (e.g., president, secretary and treasurer). The branch organization functioned according to British legal requirements for representative bodies. Rather than submit to a single charismatic or hereditary leader, members vested with authority those whom they elected as their spokesmen, thus insuring that they had a voice in the public sphere of civil society.

The Arya Samaj's network of local branches helped to pioneer new ‘notions’ of belonging in the early 20th century. In India, a person had generally been considered a Hindu if born into a Hindu family (Sikand 2003:99-100). In contrast, the Arya Samaj propagated a more active notion of voluntary membership. To join, one had to embrace the Samaj's Ten Principles and enroll in a local branch of the Arya Samaj organization. And, while most Hindus did not proselytize, the Arya Samaj actively sought adherents, creating a special ritual called shuddhi (purification) to bring Hindus who had converted to Islam or Christianity back into the Hindu fold (Fischer-Tine 2000). The other major religions in India at that time all allowed conversion, so shuddhi brought the Samaj "equal opportunity" to convert. A network of local branches insured that wherever the Samaj attracted followers, a local branch could be founded, enhancing the opportunity for Samajis to gain leadership skills.

The Samaj's preaching that the ancient Vedas contained the wisdom to guide Hindus in the modern world attracted adherents who accepted Vedic authority but sought guidance in adapting to social changes taking place all around them. By anchoring their teachings in the Vedas, Samajis allied themselves with Vedas' prestige, since virtually all Hindus viewed the Vedas as authoritative. In addition, by rejecting the authority of other texts, (e.g. dharma-shastras, puranas), the Samaj could ignore passages in later texts that prohibited interactions between jatis that prevented people from attaining education and employed that led to upward mobility, a goal which many Arya Samajis sought.

The Arya Samaj did not, however, propagate the Vedas unmediated; they taught Vedic texts through the medium of Saraswati's detailed interpretations of specific passages. In his interpretations, he argued that the criticisms by Christian missionaries of "Hinduism" did not apply to the Vedas.[ii] For example, the Swami pointed out that the Vedas never mention worship of deities in the physical images, a practice which missionaries deemed "idolatry." Swami Saraswati exhorted Hindus to desist from puja (offerings to images of the divine), arguing that it was illogical to believe that the divine essence could be contained in a physical object (Sanskrit, murti) so puja was neither Vedic nor reasonable. He propagated the Vedic fire sacrifice called havan, instead, as the Arya Samaj ritual. Since it involved no images of the divine, the Swami claimed that content of the Vedas refuted Christian claims that Hindus were "idolaters."[iii]

Similarly, Saraswati rejected that notion that Vedic tradition was polytheistic. Rather than multiple anthropomorphic deities, the Vedas proclaimed the divine to be indivisible, eternal, and supreme, said Saraswati. The many deities mentioned in the Vedas he took as names of attributes of the one Absolute--so Christians were wrong to take them as evidence that Hindus as believed in many deities. The Swami also argued that since child marriage, prohibition of inter-dining, and denial of education for Shudras did not appear in the Vedas, they should be eschewed. In doing so, Swami urged Hindus to abandon practices that he saw as obstacles to the wellbeing of Hindu society.

Saraswati also condemned claims of brahminical superiority. Declaring that Brahmins were not necessary for conducting rituals, he urged Samajis to study Sanskrit so they could recite Vedas mantras to conduct the havan on their own.[iv] His other anti-exclusive innovation included education for upper-caste women and male and female Shudras, even though brahmanical treatises forbid women and Shudras to study Sanskrit. Earlier, Christian schools provided the only chance for low caste boys and girls to acquire education (and, hence, social mobility) but when the Arya Samaj founded a network of "Anglo-Vedic" schools, Hindu boys and girls from all four varnas in northwest India now had the option to attend non-Christian schools.[v] The schools played a crucial role in Arya Samaj efforts to unite Hindus into a group of "reformed," educated, accomplished people unhampered by caste restrictions.

Yet the aim of uniting all Hindus into a "reformed" group led to conflicts between the Arya Samaji and others within the Vedic fold. Swami Saraswati's attacks on greedy priests, ignorant pandits, and inauthentic texts won him many enemies in the larger Hindu community. His claim that only his Vedic interpretation was correct, his humiliation of Brahmin opponents in public debate, and his rejection of caste endogamy earned him animosity. And Saraswati's opponents soon responded in kind. An anti-Samaj backlash, under the banner of the Sanatan [eternal] Dharm, attacked his methods of exegesis and his claim that only Arya Samaj followed true Vedic tradition.

Swami Saraswati developed an even more contentious relationship with Christians in India, studying the techniques by which Christian missionaries attacked Hindu beliefs and fighting back in kind. He denigrated Christians as dangerous "foreigners" who sought to lead Hindus astray and suspected that lower-caste ex-Hindus converted to Christianity not because they found Christian tenets more convincing than Hindu ones but because by converting they gained access to Christian educational institutions and housing colonies (Jordens 1978: 163). Swami Saraswati often targeted Christian missionaries in public debates, vehemently rejecting their characterization of Hindu texts and launching his on assault on Christian texts. For example, he subjected the *Book of Revelations* to close analysis, then pronounced it full of barbarian superstitions, and declared himself appalled that Jesus would urge adherents to drink the blood and eat the flesh of their founder (Jones 1992). Clearly, he had mastered the missionary technique of reading an opponent's text in a hyper-literal manner.

Over time, as Gupta (2002) has shown, the Samaj ratcheted up its attacked on Muslims as well, who were labeled "foreigners" no matter how many centuries ago their ancestors came to India or converted to Islam. Towards the end of his life, Saraswati became increasingly hostile in his attacks, urging those who respected Vedic tradition, whether Samajis or not, to close ranks against Muslims.[vi] He exhorted Hindus to mobilize against them, especially in relation to the issue of whether Muslims should be allowed to butcher cows (Pandey 1983). He urged the elevation of Hindi, written in Sanskritic script, over and against Urdu, written in Persio-Arabic script). His stances reified boundaries between Hindus and Muslims; they also linked Hindi with Hindu nationalism.

The Arya Samaj's reform "package"--the Ten Principles, branch organizations, Vedic teaching transmitted with Saraswati's exegesis, rejection of brahminical privilege, and othering of Christians and Muslims--emerged at a particular historical moment in the northwest of India. Nonetheless, some of its features maintained their power to attract adherents beyond the regions of its origin. The Arya Samaj's portability was revealed when its missionaries went by sea to introduce it among Hindus who settled abroad after completing their terms of indenture. The Arya Samaj feared that overseas Hindus would fall prey to Christian conversion, so they ranked providing them with education and social support a high priority. When the Arya Samaj "package" was brought to ex-indentured laborers, however, certain elements proved more meaningful than others in new places and circumstances.

After slavery was abolished in 1938 throughout the British empire, a new system for meeting the demands of colonial planters for cheap labor developed, in which Indians (and

Chinese) were recruited to entered legal agreements (indentures) to work abroad for a five-year period. The first Indian indentured laborers arrived by ship in Trinidad in 1845 to carry out the work on sugarcane plantations previously performed by African slaves. They arrived in Natal in 1860, after British planters failed to get local Africans to work under the harsh conditions of the plantations. The majority of Indian recruits were landless agricultural laborers from famine-prone areas of India (today's Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in the north, Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh in the south) who usually hoped to return home with a substantial savings when their five-year contract ended. Despite their hopes, in each colony, most indentured laborers found that debts incurred for ship passage and paltry sums earned on the plantation led them to re-indenture for a second term. Later the British, to avoid paying the laborers' contractually guaranteed ship passage home, offered laborers who had worked multiple terms in Natal and Trinidad a small plot of local land if they forfeited their return passage home.

Many Indians accepted the offer, choosing to make use of local opportunities that could lead to upward economic and social mobility. By the time that the last ships of indentured laborers arrived in Natal in 1911 and Trinidad in 1916, Indians in each site had put down roots and begun raising native-born children. In Natal, many ex-indentured laborers shifted from plantations to urban areas, entering a wide range of employment such as working as clerks in businesses, railways, or municipal operations, running market gardens, hawking vegetables, serving as waiters in hotels, or becoming fisherfolk. In Trinidad, Indians could free themselves of the cycle of debt that subsistence agriculture in India and indenture abroad had entailed. Trinidad's fertile land and temperate climate allowed a year-round growing season so Indians could grow vegetables and raise animals that enabled them to feed their families well.

Professor Bhai Paramanand, the first Samaj overseas lecturer, visited Natal (1905) and Trinidad (1910) before indenture was abolished. A highly educated scholar and teacher, he haled from Panjab, an Arya Samaj stronghold. While Paramanand lectured about the Principles and havan, he also observed the circumstances and needs of Hindus in Natal and Trinidad, who had been cut off from their homeland, linguistic roots, and old support systems. His visits gave him first-hand knowledge of the harshness of indenture and the dearth of Hindu organizations and schools among ex-indentured laborers. The Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha, [Arya Samaj International League]) was established in 1909 to support Hindus living abroad.

Natal: Distinguishing Hindus, Emphasizing Hindi, Promoting Service

In Natal, two historical factors necessitated that Arya Samajis rethink aspects of their methods for bringing about "reform." First, of the 152,184 indentured Indians who traveled to Natal, approximately two-thirds of indentured laborers in Natal came from south India and spoke Tamil or Telugu (Younger 2010:126). The Hindi-speaking Indian community, the group with the greatest linguistic affinity for Arya Samaj preaching was a little less than one-third of the total. Second, Mohandas Gandhi had worked hard to unify Indian Muslims, Hindus, Christians, and Parsis from all classes in Natal to work for the betterment of Indians through the Natal Indian Congress (Gandhi 1950 [1928]; Younger 2001: 147). Some key Congress supporters were wealthy Muslim merchants influential in two major cities of Natal, Durban and Pietermartizburg and some of Gandhi's closest associates were Christians so denigration of Muslims or Christians was not acceptable. Indeed, Mohandas Gandhi rebuked Professor Paramanand for an anti-Muslim comment he made soon after arriving in Natal. Nor would a sole focus on advancing Hindi be suitable in Natal. In order to serve the overall goals of reform in a region where Indians were a vulnerable minority, the Samaj had to customize the Arya Samaj in a way that appealed to Hindus in general without offending any other group. Its preachers learned to emphasize the antiquity and loftiness of Vedic tradition in a way that enhanced knowledge about and respect for Hinduism without disparaging the religions or languages of other Indian.

When Paramanand arrived in Natal, he found the lack of clear boundaries between Hindus and Muslims unsettling: the vast majority of indentured laborers were Hindus, yet on plantations they joined Muslims in observing Muharram, during which Shi'ite Muslims commemorate the martyrdom of the Prophet's grandson, Husain, in 680 in Karbala. In Natal, Muharram involved elaborate ritual processions of tazziyas (replicas of the martyr's tomb) with dramatic enactments, stick-fighting, wrestling matches, special vows and prayers--accompanied by drumming--that passed through Durban's downtown and ended with immersion of tazziyas in the Umgeni River. Paramanand soon learned that plantation overseers allowed laborers to cease work for three days at Muharram but it was the only Indian holy day officially recognized on plantations.[vii] Since field laborers worked a grueling schedule of labor from sunrise to sunset six days a week, whether Hindu or Muslim, they all observed Muharram.

Goolam Vahed (2002), a social historian of Natal, has interpreted joint Indian observance of Muharram in greater Durban in light of the racial categories operative in Natal during and after indenture. Natal social classification ranked each person on a racial (and often economic) hierarchy with four separate and impermeable rungs: "Whites" were at the top, "Indians" next, then "Coloreds", and at the bottom "Blacks."[viii] Most Indians--whatever their religious affiliation, class, or Indian region of origin--were viewed as "Coolies" (those who perform grueling day labor) or "Samys" (a mockery of the "samy" suffix with which many south Indian names ended such as Krishnasamy or Ramasamy). This social ranking presented Indians as a homogeneous group, erasing the heterogeneity of Indian religions, languages, and class status. Because the government remained ignorant of differences among Indians, officials not only labeled Muharram "Coolie Christmas," they also defined as an Indian, rather than a Muslim, event.

Hindus and Muslims on plantations did not view joint participation in Muharram as a problem but Swami Shankaranand, the second Arya Samaj reformer who arrived in Natal in 1908, did. He was offended that the government officially recognized a Muslim but not a Hindu holy day, and petitioned the government to make Diwali, a festival celebrating King Ram's victory over Demon King Ravan, an official Hindu alternative to Muharram. In 1910, the government declared Diwali a public holiday for workers in railways and municipal offices, occupational sectors employing many Hindus (Kumar 2000: 22, Henning 1993: 78).[ix] The Swami also lectured Hindus to desist from observing Muharram. In addition, he initiated celebration of Ram Navami, Ram's birthday, that occurs in March/April, a season in the agricultural cycle in southern hemisphere more suitable for celebration because it occurs after the crops are harvested and the sugarcane crushed, when workers have more time to participate.[x]

Although the Arya Samaj rejects worship of divine images, it encourages Samajis to respect (not worship) cultural heroes such as King Ram and encourages approval of festivals as occasions for Hindus to reaffirm their unity and heritage (Vable 1983:42). Pandit Nardev Velalankar, an Arya Samaj historian, recounts how Swami Shankaranand created a public procession by Hindus to rival that of Muharram: he "studied the mind of the Hindus," and then "organised a procession of the chariot of Rama as a substitute" for Muharram (Vedalankar 1950:18). Since the Arya Samaj encourages local leadership, in 1910 the Swami asked that a Chariot Committee be formed to plan a procession to "take out the chariot out with all its grandeur and sanctity" for Ram

Navami. Deeming it an historical landmark, Vedalankar noted that "for the first time in its [Natal's] history hundreds of Hindus congregated and took part in this religious procession" (1950: 18).[xi]

In negotiating its stance toward Hindi in Natal, the Arya Samaj had to walk a fine line between showing concern to enhance the welfare of all Hindus in Natal and focusing on those who spoke Hindi. The Samaj recognized that the linguistic split between Hindi-speaking parents born in north India and Tamil- or Telugu-speaking parents born in south India was not conducive to uniting Hindus in Natal. To create a common space and organization that would bring together young men from both linguistic groups, Swami Paramanand established a Hindu Young Men's Association (patterned on the Young Men's Christian Association), in Pietermaritzburg.[xii] The Arya Samaj prized such organizations because they furnished members with communication and leadership skills useful in advancing their careers and while helping to consolidate their Hindu identity. This organization was intended to do so for Hindus speaking various Indian languages.

Since the Young Men's Hindu Association Samaj showed an overall commitment to Indian languages, Arya Samaj moved ahead to strengthen the language most central to them, Hindi. Swami Pandit Bhavani Dayal, the third Arya Samaj reformer from India who came to Natal, founded Hindi Pracharini Sabhas (organizations for teaching Hindi) in Durban, Verulam, Ladysmith, Newcastle and other towns.[xiii] He organized Hindi Literary Conference in 1916 and founded a weekly newspaper, titled "Hindi" which provided reading for newly literate Hindi-speakers. The newspaper advanced both Hindi literacy and the practice of reading (Velankar 1950: 25).[xiv] Hindi teaching in Natal ebbed and flowed until, in 1948, Pandit Nardev Vedalankar founded the Hindi Shiksha Sangh of South Africa, creating a uniform curriculum and exams to certify students as they attained greater fluency (Shukla 2002:119). Their studies taught them correct pronunciation for havan chants and key Hindi religious texts (e.g., *Ramcharitmanas*).

Ultimately, as might be expected, the message of the Arya Samaj proved much more attractive to its natural constituency, Hindi speakers, than to Tamil and Telugu speakers in Natal. What the Arya Samaj did share with Tamil speakers in Natal was a commitment to the concept of "reform." Within the Tamil community of Natal in 1937, Subramaniya Swamikal founded his own reform movement, called the Saiva Siddhanta Sangham, which standardized forms of congregational worship, clarified theological tenets, and renounced the practice of "idolatry," as the Arya Samaj had done. Younger (2010: 152). views Indians in South Africa as particularly open to the desire for religious reform in general, using the success of the Arya Samaj, the Saiva Siddhanta Sangham, The Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, the Divine Life Society, and Satya Sai Baba movement as examples of reform movements that put down roots there.

Both the Saiva Siddhanta Sangam and the Arya Samaj compiled and published a book of prayer to be used by members in all their local branches.[xv] Swamikal's followers use the prayer book weekly at their Sunday morning service, when each branch of the Sangam congregates for prayer (Younger 2010: 152) For the Arya Samaj, the parallel volume is *Aryan Prayer*, an often-reprinted volume of havan mantras, songs, and theological explanations.[xvi] The book's well-organized collection of prayers, still in print today, contains key mantras and readings that the Arya Samaj saw as central to Vedic heritage, and has served as a standard text for Samajis in South Africa for decades.

Besides schools, the Arya Samaj used public lectures to teach not only about the Ten Principles and the havan but more broadly on the cultural heritage of India. Due to the isolating circumstances of indenture and the paucity of trained priests, many Hindus had little systematic knowledge about their religious history and appreciated the chance to learn about the richness and antiquity of Indian culture, which the Samaj hoped would function as the impetus for a religious "awakening" among Natal Hindus. Whites in Natal often denigrated Hindus and sought to keep public religious discourse largely in the hands of Christians, but the Arya Samaj resourcefully used lectures to present Hindus as inheritors of an ancient and lofty religious tradition of which they should be proud.

The Arya Samaj in Natal prioritized outreach to Hindu women. For example, Sangitacharya Pandit Pravinsinghji, who had visited Natal in 1922, returned in 1927 to teach Hindi at the Shree Ramayana Sabha of Overport, a Durban suburb (Shukla 200: 128-129). In accordance with the Samaj's commitment to female education, the Pandit offered special Hindi classes just for girls (Vedalankar 1950: 28).[xvii] By setting apart special times for female classes, he quelled parental fears of boys and girls "mixing" while fostering literacy among Hindi-speaking girls. In addition, the Vedic Purohit Mandal, an academy for training Arya Samaj priests, ordained a number of women, a practice not found in most other Hindu groups.

In addition to Hindi schools, publications, and religious lectures, the Arya Samaj also created infrastructure to promote other aspects of Hindu welfare. Paramanand inspired the founding of the Hindu Seva [Service] Samaj in 1910 in Pretoria and the Arya Samaj built an Arya Benevolent Home for Orphans in Chatsworth, near the city of Durban, in 1918.[xviii] Its publishing program eventually developed into the Veda Niketan, which published books on Vedic tradition, prayer books, and histories of the Arya Samaj. By establishing schools, lectures, training organizations, and charitable institutions, the Arya Samaj represented Hinduism as responding, at least symbolically, to the needs of all Hindus in Natal, but its teaching and organizations catered primarily to the Hindi-speaking minority of Hindus.

Yet in today's KwaZulu Natal, the Arya Samaj now has a very limited role within the Hindu community. It exerts its strongest influence through its Hindi Shiksha Sangh, an organization that coordinates the teaching of Hindi by training teachers, providing teaching materials and administering yearly exams through which students can be certified with Hindi proficiency at different levels. In most other areas, Hindus identity themselves as members of more orthodox brahminical organizations of both south Indian and north Indian lineage or with "neo-Hindu" organizations of more recent origins (Ramakrishna Mission, Divine Life Society, ISKCON, and followers of Satya Sai Baba). In Natal, however, unlike in Trinidad, a large gap remains between Hindu organizations with links to north India such as the Arya Samaj and the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha and those linked to south India, such as the Saiva Siddhanta Sangha and the Sree Venkatesvara Devasthanam and Cultural Center. On the other hand, the competition with and animosity toward non-Hindus that the Samaj brought to Natal seemed to have intensified over the years.

Trinidad: Representing Indians, Creating Schools, Social Issues

Although the first Arya Samaj reformer visited Trinidad in 1910, the period of significant Samaj activity began with its formal incorporation in 1936 and lasted only until ca. 1952. While the distance by ship from India to Natal was a relatively modest one traversed by ships who plied the route from west India to the African coast for many centuries, the journey to the Caribbean was, in contrast, much longer and often more dangerous. Hence, ships from India traveled to the Caribbean less frequently, leading Trinidad to remain more isolated from direct Indian influence than Natal. Furthermore, while Natal hosted a series of Arya Samaj lecturers, visits from Samaj leaders to Trinidad were less frequent. Bhai Paramanand (who visited Natal in 1905) came to lecture in Trinidad in 1910, followed by other Arya Samaj lecturers, most notably Pandit Mehta Jaimini in 1928, but visits from Samaj leaders to Trinidad virtually ceased after 1936 for an extended period. The Samaj in Trinidad, therefore, took longer to gain momentum and retained it for a shorter period of time than in Natal.[xix]

Social and occupational conditions for Indians in Trinidad also differed significantly from those in Natal. Whites in Natal ranked "Indians" above "Africans," but in Trinidad, Whites ranked Creoles next, then people of African descent and finally people of Indian descent ranked lowest in the social hierarchy. Further, unlike in Natal, where the majority of indentured laborers came from south India, in Trinidad, only about 5,000 of the 143,000 indentured Indians came from South India (Jha 1985: 1). Thus, when Arya Samaj lecturers preached, they could be understood by the vast majority of Indians in Trinidad. And their rituals, at which Brahmin priests officiated, were the type that the Arya Samaj had condemned back in India. In Trinidad, when Arya Samaj preachers condemned the murtis and puja, they quickly alienated local Brahmin pandits who had long-established prestige among Hindus in south and central Trinidad.

From the start, the Arya Samaj found itself targeting two different Hindu constituencies, divided by geographical location and social ambitions. Unlike in Natal, where many ex-indentured Indians gained employment in the cosmopolitan city of Durban as intermediaries between colonial elites and Blacks, the vast majority of Indians came to Trinidad as indentured laborers to perform the labor that African slaves refused to perform once slavery ended. Later, after indenture ended, most Indians remained involved in agriculture in rural central and south Trinidad, speaking Bhojpuri at home and in the small villages they created.[xx] Living in fairly insular, rural, Indian enclaves, they had little role in the urban life centered on Trinidad's capital, Port of Spain.

The exception to this larger pattern was small group of Indian families lived in and around the region of Curepe in the northeast part of the island not far from Port of Spain. In contrast to Indians in southern Trinidad, they had gained significant social and economic mobility through education and/or employment in government service. Many already had some experience running associations connected with work or school. Eager to establish themselves in the Trinidad elite, they joined the Arya Samaj as intellectuals moving up in the world. Most did not identify with "old world" Hinduism which Christian teachers had taught them was idolatrous, polytheistic, and superstitious. They found the Arya Samaj Principles reasonable and appealing. In addition, they viewed the Samaj as a group that could articulate and attain redress for various forms of discrimination against Indians in Trinidad and represent them as forward-looking, resourceful people ready to help shape the future of the island.

The Arya Samaj wanted support from the Hindu population for its petitions to the government for social and economic change but it risked losing that support if it focused its energies on ending certain practices that uphold caste and gender hierarchy (such as child marriage). There was one concern, nonetheless, that both the southern Hindus and the urban ones shared and the Samaj focused the majority of its effort on this issue. Non-Indians in Trinidad looked down on Hindus as educationally backward, so education for their children ranked as a high priority for both Hindu groups.

In order to avoid the cost of building schools and paying teachers, the colonial government in Trinidad had agreed to offers from Christian missionaries of various denominations to provide education for children. The Canadian Presbyterian Mission, headed by Reverend John Morton, had been specifically charged by its denomination in Canada to educate children of Indian descent in Trinidad.[xxi] Christian education, which aided students in attaining economic mobility, was inextricably linked with proselytizing by Christian teachers. Although Indian boys could secure primary education, Forbes argues that "it was almost impossible to receive a secondary education without first converting to Christianity since all secondary schools but one were under denominational control" (1984: 29). In 1928, Pandit Mehta Jaimini, a respected judge in India and Arya Samaj reformer visited Trinidad and, in the process of presenting seventy-nine lectures, also encouraged Hindus to establish a Vedic mission school on the island. Despite a positive response, his plan did not come to fruition at this time.

Two years later in 1930, nineteen Hindu and Muslim parents protested to Sir Alfred Hollis, Governor of Trinidad and Tobago, that Christian graduates of the Chaguanas Canadian Mission School could immediately be promoted to Assistant or Head Teacher, but Hindu or Muslim graduates could not, unless they converted to Christianity. After withdrawing their children from the school, they attempted to enroll them elsewhere but were refused due to overcrowding. When they petitioned the government to take action against the overcrowding, their request was refused. The parents then founded a Hindu-Muslim School, the first full-curriculum school established by non-Christians in Trinidad. Sadly, with limited funds and few trained administrators, the school soon foundered, but experience convinced the parents to apply for government funding of the kind enjoyed by Christian schools. In 1934, seven of the parents were among the founding members of the Arya Samaj Association of Trinidad, which Forbes calls "the first effective Hindu pressure group in Trinidad" (1984: 14).

The Arya Samaj Association possessed the organizational characteristics that the government expected of a representative group. Earlier, when Hindus had petitioned for educational funding, the government demanded that the spoke for the entire

Hindu community. The Arya Samaj Association now served as an organizational base for the campaign to gain funding for schooling non-Christian Indian children. The Association provided members not only with advice setting up educational institutions but helped members learn the organization skills needed for the task.[xxii] The Arya Samaj Association based its procedures on those made available by the Arya Samaj International Aryan League, which guided Samaj branches in creating a constitution, setting up committees, following rules of order in meetings, and maintaining minutes (Forbes 1984: 96).

Although the Arya Samaj in India had taken a staunchly anti-Christian stance in India, ironically in Trinidad, some of the earliest members of the Arya Samaj were urbane Christians, who had converted to Christianity during their schooling. Using the social networks from conversion that they gained in school and employment, they aided the Samaj in gaining government funding for non-Christian education.[xxiii] Although they had technically "left" the Hindu fold, the Samaj's forward-looking professional attitude drew their contributions and revealed aspirations that both Christian and Non-Christian Indians shared: the desire to improve their children's lot in Trinidad. Fear of conversion had made many Hindu parents reluctant to send children to Christian schools; instead, they raised them to work on family lands in self-contained agricultural communities in the south or western coast. As a result, the majority of Hindu children remained illiterate in any language and knew little English (Tikasingh 1973: 329). The Samaj knew that Indians could not have political power in Trinidad without education.[xxiv]

After extended petitions and responses, in 1946 the National Education Board passed the "Resolution regarding Religious Education in the Schools," which enabled government funding to be made available to non-Christian schools. Inspired by Indian Independence in 1947, Arya Samaj-led Hindus in Trinidad, felt that the Hindu schools should be delayed no longer. In 1948, the

Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Trinidad was deemed qualified by the government to found and run educational institutions. Later, when the government finally established specific guidelines for approval of applications for government financial assistance to schools, the playing field was made more level and non-Christian Indian groups could apply for funding with a reasonable chance of success.

The assets of the Arya Samaj now became crucial. Since the government would reimburse religious groups for building costs and salaries only after schools were built and teachers hired, organizational capital and expertise proved crucial. First, a local census had to be carried out to insure that enough Hindu students lived in the area to qualify for government assistance to the school.[xxv] Next, to raise capital for construction, Arya Samaj members now committed themselves, for the first time in Trinidad, to regular financial contributions (Forbes 1984: 241). The experiences of the Samaj in accounting and record-keeping, aided in raising funds, and applying for government reimbursement. Conditions improved further when a Presbyterian, who consistently opposed government funding for non-Christian schools, was replaced by an Arya Samaj member on the Education Board.

In the early 1950s, the Samaj focused its energies almost entirely on building and supervising primary schools. By the end of 1952, The Arya Pratinidhi Sabha was running five Vedic schools.[xxvi] By the end of 1959, when the Arya Pratinidhi Samaj completed its ninth and last school, it had established one fifth of the total Hindu primary schools built, even though Samaj members constituted only about five percent of the Hindu population (Forbes 1984: 244). In addition to the physical presence of the Arya Samaj schools, their symbolic importance proved undeniable. People of Indian descent now had the educational institutions that enabled them to have a voice in the governing of Trinidad. Many Indians soon moved from agriculture into the professional classes.

In addition to access to education, the Samaj also spearheaded efforts to make Hindu traditions more egalitarian. For example, the Arya Samaj worked to legalize Hindu marriages. A marriage had been considered binding by Hindus if a Hindu priest officiated at the ceremony, but such a union had no legal status in Trinidad. Further, if one's marriage was not registered with the state, no legal option for divorce was available. The Samaj branches in the northern group wanted Hindus to have the same legal rights as other groups in Trinidad and, therefore, championed the registration of Hindu marriages with the state. Despite objections from Hindu pandits, especially in the south, who found abhorrent the idea that Hindu women could divorce and make claims on their ex-husband's land and wealth, the Samaj persevered. They initiated the signing of a document at each Samaj wedding which declared that both marital partners were entering wedlock of their own accord and with the approval of their parents. The Samaj also appointed the first Marriage Officers, who insured that marriage registration with the state.[xxvii]

In addition, in Trinidad the Arya Samaj helped to transform how religious rituals were understood, with particular emphasis on teaching practitioners the meaning of the mantras they recited. Before the Arya Samaj brought to the island its emphasis on Vedic fire ritual, most Hindus asked priests to perform rites of passage because but ordinary Hindus had very little, if any, idea what many of the prayers and mantras that they recited meant. When they introduced the Vedic havan to Trinidad, Arya Samaj preachers translated, for the first time, all of the mantras into Hindi and English so that each person would know exactly what was being said. For example, until the lectures of visiting preaching Pandit Jaimini, "the Vedas were not known to any but a few Trinidad Hindus and were never read in public ceremonies," states Forbes (1984: 57-58).

Despite, the achievements and attractions of the Arya Samaj, it had its greatest impact on Hindu life in Trinidad in the 1940s and early 50s. In 1950, two smaller Hindu associations that were rivals--the Hindu Sanatan Dharam Association (incorporated in 1932) and the Sanatan Dharam Board of Control (also incorporated in 1932) merged to become the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha. Together they pushed the Arya Samaj to the margins of Hindu life in Trinidad, where it remains today, with only a small number of adherents. In contrast, by end of the 1950s, The Sanatan Dharm Maha Sabha had extended their control over most of the Hindu temples on the island. They quickly also overtook the Arya Samaj in building Hindu schools and soon had the power to set Hindu curriculum in these schools across the island.

In direct opposition to the Arya Samaj, the Sanatan Dharm Maha Sabha focused their efforts on ritual worship of images of Krishna, Rama, Shiva, and various goddesses--both at home and in temples. At the same time, the Sabha also incorporated into its repertoire of rituals the Arya Samaj "Vedic jaggy" (yajna), which was performed along with, *not instead of*, other pujas. The Maha Sabha also popularized hoisting banners bearing the Sanskrit word "om," a religious symbol closely associated with the Arya Samaj, and it was embraced as a common way to indicate one's Hindu identity. In effect, puja and the Arya Samaj yagna were combined. The two kinds of rituals continue today in Trinidad. One could say that instead of defeating Arya Samaj ritual, brahmanical Hindus in Trinidad included its havan as one among their many rituals.

Conclusions

In addition, both in Trinidad and in Natal, more orthodox Hindu groups, each of which boasts a large number of people of Brahmin or putatively Brahmin origin, have adopted organizational elements and proselytizing techniques first introduced there by the Arya Samaj. In Trinidad, although the Samaj pioneered founding of Hindu schools, the Sanatan Dharma Maha Sabha now supervises a large network of Hindu schools across the island. In both Trinidad and Natal, Hindus have learned from the Arya Samaj how to gain public recognition for their religious tenets. Not only do they now publish their own written materials, but in both Trinidad and Natal, brahmanically-based Hindu groups have a notable presence on the airwaves, with their own radio stations.[xxviii] In a sense, the Arya Samaj mapped out a method for Hindus to establish themselves organizationally, philosophically, and publicly in Natal and Trinidad. That map has been more successful for groups other than the Arya Samaj, whose rigid ideas of what constitutes true practice have meant that it never enrolled more than a small proportion of the Hindu population in its branch organizations in India, Natal, and Trinidad.

Therefore, the Arya Samaj could be described as a counter-missionizing group, in that they entered into arenas where only Christian missionaries had been successful previously and provided Indians with a way to package and "brand" a Hinduism that enabled them to compete with Christians in public debates, schooling, and organization. After they laid out a pattern of organization by which to unite Hindus in indenture colonies, that pattern was then utilized by other Hindu groups. Most of those Hindu groups had learned that, despite their internal differences, they needed to band together in public in order to protect and promote the interests of Hindus in a land where they did not constitute the majority religion. Their minority status meant that they had an even greater need for a textual authority and an organizational infrastructure that could help them protect, promote, and earn respect for their own religious practices. They did so by establishing Hindu schools, championing Indian languages, promoting literacy among their adherents, making use of print to inform worshippers and train priest, and emphasizing Hindu unity to counteract Christian pressure to convert.

To make sense of the different histories of the Arya Samaj in India, Natal, and Trinidad, one might think of the three forms as bearing family resemblances to each other. In each of the three sites, certain tenets of the Samaj came to the fore due to the particular circumstances of Indians, and people of Indian descent, in that place. In their missions to ex-indentured laborers in Natal and Trinidad, Arya Samaj is pioneered successful Hindu support networks of types suited to local conditions. For that reason, even though certain Samaj tenets did not appeal to most ex-indentured laborers, Samaj techniques for identifying themselves with an ancient, distinct religious community, founding organizations, supporting educational institutions, refuting Christian attacks on Hindus, and using print and public lectures to publicize their ideas set models for later Hindu organizations in Natal and Trinidad. Indeed, except for the Arya Samaj rejection of image worship, the other elements could easily be incorporated into a more orthodox performance of Hindu rituals and that is what happened.

Yet, one major factor differentiated the Samaj in India from the Samaj in Natal and Trinidad. In India, the Samaj proclaimed itself the only true Vedic practice among a country in which Hindus formed the majority of the population. In the two indenture colonies of Natal and Trinidad, Hindus were a minority community. Thus, in addition to elements of reforming Vedic practice, the Samaj had to help Indians and people of Indian descent learn how to build associations through which members could seek to inform other groups of their views and fight to obtain education, legal protection, and self-respect. The Arya Samaj provided of overseas missions before any other Hindu groups but by the 1920s and 30s, other groups--especially Sanatan Dharm--sent their own preachers overseas. Although today, membership of the Arya Samaj in Natal and Trinidad is quite limited, its pioneering role in overseas missions should not be forgotten by historians.

---

[i] It is beyond the scope of this article to analyze the history of the Arya Samaj everywhere that indentured laborers settled. Kelly (1991) deals with the Samaj in Fiji; Younger (2008) surveys six Hindu communities that developed after indenture.

[ii] In many cases, he condemned the same practices (veneration of divine images, devotional rituals) as Christian missionaries with the crucial difference that, since such practices do not appear in the Vedas, he rejected them not authentically Hindu.

[iii] One of the most frequent and contemptuous adjectives that Christian missionaries applied to Hindus was that of "idolator." This term comes from the denunciation of image-worshippers in ancient Canaan, as recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures. By the late 1800s, the Vedic fire sacrifice (variously called homa, yagna, or havan) had fallen largely into disuse, except when performed by kings or wealth merchants. For an account of how a middle-class family in the Panjab enthusiastically embraced the fire sacrifice ritual, see Tandon (1961: 32-33), who describes the graduates of the local Arya Samaj college as "the backbone of the progressive section of the Punjabi Hindu community."

[iv] Although many "reform" movements during this period (e.g. the Brahmo Samaj, the Ramakrishna Mission) articulated the need for women's education, the Arya Samaj created schools for women with a thoroughness and commitment unmatched by any other reform movement in this period (Llewellyn 1998).

[v] Yet, in the Panjab, some of low-caste graduates of Arya Samaj educational institutions later became bitter when they encountered a "glass ceiling" that blocked their rise within the upper ranks of the Samaj. One such graduate born into the Chamar jati, Mangoo Ram of Jullunder, left the Samaj and founded a religious movement called Ad-Dharm (Juergensmeyer 1982: 37-41). In addition, women did not receive the same education as men. Studies for women emphasized home economics, sanitation, and moral instruction.

[vi] Sarasvati's relations with other religious groups were complex and ambivalent. For example, he criticized the reformist Brahmo Samaj for superficial knowledge of Hindu texts and use of English intellectual frameworks, but accused Sanatan Dharmis of purveying "superstition" by disseminating miraculous tales of gods and goddesses and performing puja (Jordens 1978: 78-83).

[vii] Many laborers came from parts of north India where Hindus and Muslims joined in the observance of each other's holy days, so when they took part in

Muharram in Natal they were following established custom. Even today some Hindus in Varanasai join in Muharram processions. In India the Arya Samaj campaigned to stop Hindu involvement in Muharram, as had Bal Gangadhar Tilak (Cashman 1975). Yet Hindus raised in south India had seldom been involved in Muharram before reaching Natal but they too joined the processions in Natal, as evidenced by the presence in legal documents on Muharram conflicts of people with south Indian names (Vahed 2002).

[viii] Also see Mohandas Gandhi's discussion (1983[1948]: 93), in his chapter "Some Experience," of Muslim merchants in Durban, who labeled themselves "Arabs."

[ix] . Unlike Muharram, whose date was determined by the lunar calendar, Diwali was determined by a mixed lunar/solar calendar. Whereas the season of Muharram changed annually, the season for Diwali was predictable: always October/November.

[x] It also focused on King Ram, but in India was celebrated less elaborately than Diwali (Richman 2009).

[xi] The festival, which highlighted the heritage of Hindus, was also designed to unify Hindus over and against Muslims. Just as many Hindu processions in India were deliberately routed in front of a Muslim mosque (Cashman 1975: 90-93), the procession in Natal passed directly in front of the Grey Street Mosque in downtown Durban at Muslim prayer time, often leading to conflicts. White officials had lumped Hindu and Muslim Indians together but the Arya Samaj highlighted divisions between them by simultaneously reifying boundaries and instigating rivalry between Hindus and Muslims.

[xii] Later, it was renamed the Aryan Youth League.

[xiii] Dayal had been born, unlike earlier Arya Samaj teachers, in Natal but went to India at age twelve and returned with to Natal after completing his education. Dayal differed from earlier Arya Samaj preachers because he remained in Natal for a much longer time and thus had a much deeper impact on the Hindi-speaking community there.

[xiv] Education in Natal and in Trinidad presents a stark contrast with India, where the British founded numerous schools and colleges. British investment in education was minimal in indenture colonies, whose laborers the British viewed as temporary residents.

[xv] Younger's interviews (2010:151) reveal that this group is not a branch of the Saiva Siddhanta school of South India but a separate movement founded in Durban in 1937.

[xvi] In 1954, an edition of 70,000 copies was published; in 1991, 10,000; in 2005, 10,000. The Veda Niketan of the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of South Africa, which publishes *Aryan Prayer* is located, fittingly, in the Swami Dayanand Building, Durban.

[xvii] Naidoo credits the Samaj with promoting women's education in South Africa more effectively than any other Hindu organization in the early 20th century (1992: 236-238).

[xviii] In addition to local associations, the Swami spearheaded a pan-Natal organization, the Hindu Maha Sabha, founded in 1912. The Hindu Maha Sabha of Natal, now in Durban, is separate from the Indian Maha Sabha, which was banned by Jawaharlal Nehru after Mohandas Gandhi's assassination. In South Africa, the Maha Sabha functions as an umbrella organization for various Hindu organizations in South Africa.

[xix] In Trinidad, where the Muslim observance had received the local name of "Hosay," Hindus on plantations also participated in Muharram. There, Hosay activities were a way for indentured laborers to express solidarity against repressive conditions on plantations (Korom 2003: 103-104). In 1884, the Muharram procession was banned by the police months in advance, because it "disturbed the peace." Muslims and Hindus took their tazziyas in procession toward the city of San Fernando, despite the prohibition. There they were blocked by armed battalions at the entrance to the city and violence broke out, during which nine people died and hundreds were wounded.

[xx] Bhojpuri was a tongue spoken by people in the eastern part of north India. It was one of the precursors to what later crystallized into the modern Hindi language. In Trinidad, Bhojpuri, the language from the region where the vast majority of Indian laborers from north India originated, became the lingua franca on plantations

[xxi] The Reverend trained an Indian catechist, who even wrote a "refutation" of Valmiki's *Ramayana*, in an attempt to attract Hindus to the church (Samaroo 1982: 96).

[xxii] Although Christian Indians learned how to run civic organizations in school debating societies or employment-related clubs, and many Muslims had worked together in mosque-based organizations, most Hindus in Trinidad had very limited experience with association-based representational groups until the late 1930s.

[xxiii] The power of a Christian affiliation becomes clear when one learns that even youth who did not actually convert to Christianity often adopted Christian names because it advanced one's social status and influence so significantly.

[xxiv] For many decades, virtually all the Trinidadians who excelled in island-wide exams and won scholarships to study abroad belonged to the Creole community.

[xxv] Government assistance in funding was available only if at least 120 students in an existing assisted school were not of that school's denomination

or there were a certain number of children in the locality who had no access to any school.

[xxvi] The Montrose Vedic School in Chaguanas, finished in 1952, was the first Hindu primary school in the colony; the same year, the Bholanatah Vedic primary school opened. The San Juan Branch of the Arya Samaj completed work (begun in 1948) on a school in memory of Mahatma Gandhi; the Seereeram Memorial Vedic School, named after an early Trinidadian Arya Samaj leader, opened within the Montrose Mandir. The St. Clements Vedic School near San Fernando also opened towards the end of 1952.

[xxvii] The Arya Samaj also appealed to non-Brahmin Hindus who had felt humiliated by Brahmin pandits in the past. Some Arya Samaj members were from Shudra families, and had left India at least partly to escape from the dehumanizing gestures of inferiority demanded from them by higher castes. This group found Samaj teaching more egalitarian than pandit-based Hinduism in Trinidad.

[xxviii] In both, Natal and Trinidad, an active Hindu Maha Sabha, each independent from the Hindu Maha Sabha of India function as an umbrella organization for many Hindu groups within the country.

Bibliography

Cashman, Richard I. (1975) *The Myth of the Lokamanya: Tilak and Mass Politics in Maharashtra.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fischer-Tine, Harald. "'Kindly elders of the Hindu biradri': the Arya Samaj's struggle for influence and its effect on Hindu-Muslim relations, 1880-1925." *In Gurus and Their Followers: New Religious Reform Movements in Colonial India*, edited by Anthony Copley. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, pp. 107-127.

Forbes, Richard Huntington. (1984) "Arya Samaj in Trinidad: A Historical Study of Hindu Organizational Process in Acculturative Conditions." Ph.D. University of Miami.

Gandhi, M[ohandas]. K. (1978) [1928]. *Satyagraha in South Africa. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House.*

__________________. (1983) [1948]. *Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth.* New York: Dover Publications.

Gupta, Charu. (2001) *Sexuality, Obscenity, Community: Women, Muslims, and the Hindu Public in Hindu India.* Ranikhet, Permanent Black.

Hardiman, David. (2007) "Purifying the nation: The Arya Samaj in Gujarat 1895-1930" in *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (44:1) 41-65.

Henning, C.G. (1993) *The Indentured Indian in Natal (1860-1917*). New Delhi: Promilla & Co.

Jha, J.C. (1985) "The Indian Heritage in Trinidad." In *Calcutta to Caroni*, 2nd. ed., 1-19. Edited by J. La Guerre. St. Augustine: University of the West Indies.

Jones, Kenneth. (1976) *Arya Dharm: Hindu Consciousness in 19th-Century Punjab.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

__________. (1992) "Swami Dayanada Saraswati's Critique of Christianity." In *Religious Controversy in British India: Dialogues in South Asian Languages*, edited by Kenneth W. Jones. Albany: State University Press of New York Press, pp. 52-74.

Jordens, J.T. F. (1978) *Dayananda Sarasvati: His Life and Ideas*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Juergensmeyer, Mark. (1982) *Religion as Social Vision: The Movement Against Untouchability in 20th-Century Punjab.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kelly, John. D. (1991) *A Politics of Virtue: Hinduism, Sexuality, and Countercolonial Discourse in Fiji.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

Korom, Frank J. (2003) *Hosay Trinidad: Muharram Performances in an Indo-Caribbean Diaspora.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 2003

Kumar, P. Pratap. (2000) *Hindus in South Africa: Their Traditions and Beliefs.* Durban: University of Durban-Westville.

Llewellyn, J.E. (1993) *The Arya Samaj as a Fundamentalist Movement: A Study in Comparative Fundamentalism.* Delhi: Manohar.

___________. (1998) *The Legacy of Women's Uplift in India: Contemporary Leaders in the Arya Samaj.* New Delhi: Sage.

Naidoo, Thillayvel. (1992) *The Arya Samaj Movement in South Africa.* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass.

Pandey, Gyan. (1983) "Rallying Round the Cow: Sectarian Strife in the Bhojpuri Region, c. 1888-1917." In *Subaltern Studies 2,* edited by Ranajit Guha. Delhi: Oxford University Press pp. 60-129.

Richman, Paula. (2008) "Ways of Celebrating Ram's Birth: Ramayana Week in Greater Durban." *Religions of South Asia* (2)2: 109-133.

Shukla, Usha Devi. (2002) *Ramacaritamanasa in South Africa.* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Sikand, Yoginder. (2003) "Arya *Shuddhi* and Muslim *Tabligh*: Muslim Reactions to Arya Samaj Proselytization (1923-1930). In *Religious Conversion in India: Modes, Motivations, and Meanings*, 98-118. (Eds.) Rowena Robinson and Sathianathan Clarke. Mumbai: Oxford University Press.

Tandon, Prakash. (1961) *Punjabi Century 1857-1947*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Tikasingh, Gerad I.M. (1973) "The Establishment of the Indians in Trinidad, 1870-1900." Ph.D. dissertation. St. Augustine: University of the West Indies.

Yadav, K.C. (1987) *The Autobiography of Dayanand Saraswati*, 3rd rev. ed. New Delhi: Manohar.

Vahed, Goolam. (2002) "Swami Shanderanand and the Conslidation of Hinduism in Natal, 1908-1914." *Journal for the Study of Religion,* 10(2): 3-35.

Vable, D. (1983) *The Arya Samaj: Hindu without Hinduism.* New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House.

Vedalankar, Nardev. (1950) *Religious Awakening in South Africa: (History of the Arya Samaj Movement in South Africa)* Natal: Arya Pratinidh Sabha.

Younger, Paul. (2010) *New Homelands: Hindu Communities in Mauritius, Guyana, Trinidad, South Africa, Fiji, and East Africa.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Kabirdas and Bhakti Panthis in South Africa

Veena Lutchman
School of Language, Literature & Linguistics,
University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

Kabirdas has been one of the more prolific saint poets in India and while he had written specifically for an Indian readership, his poetry reached South African shores with the arrival of Indians in South Africa as indentured labourers. This paper explores the philosophy behind the poetry of Kabirdas and attempts to capture the establishment of Kabir Panthis and other Bhakti panthis with a similar outlook to Kabirdas in South Africa.

Introduction

Kabir is considered one of the greatest religious leaders in medieval and present India who not only brought to Hindi poetry a different dimension, but shook the existing traditional religious thought and practices. Being such an enormous contributor to Indian history he's obviously been written about by many scholars and perhaps Basham description of him encapsulates the many descriptions of him. Basham describes him as a poor weaver in Varanasi, who taught the brotherhood of Hindu and Muslim alike in the fatherhood of God and opposed idolatry and the caste practices declaring that God was equally to be found in a temple and mosque (Basham, 1967: 481).

Using the phenomenological approach, this paper attempts to present a historical, political and literary description of the times of Kabirdas. Further, the historical impact of this period in South Africa is recorded with interviews with individuals who have carried on with traditions that were brought down to South Africa more than 145 years ago.

Background to Hindi Literature

Whist the exact date of Kabir's birth remains contested, there is a general consensus that Kabir was born in the fourteenth century considering the content of his literature. Since Kabir is regarded as a huge contributor to Hindi poetry a brief description of the division of Hindi literature would assist in placing him. Hindi literature has been divided into four eras of writing and they are:

Aadikaal (beginning period) 950 to 1350
Bhaktikaal (devotional period) 1350 – 1650
Ritikaal (period of adornment) 1650 – 1850
Adhunik kaal (modern) 1850 to date (Lutchman 1998: 13).

The Aadikaal of literature focused mainly on the heroic antics of historical persons and this reflective of the period of the history of India as this was the beginning of the Mughal invasion. Pertinent to this paper is the Bhaktikaal of writing. This period of writing is generally considered synonymous with the Muslim invasion and the conversion that went with it. It is also considered the golden period of Hindi literature. A galaxy of powerful devotional poets like Kabirdas, Nanak, Surdas, Tulsidas and Mirabai flourished during this period. These illustrious poets have not only crossed the boundaries of the Hindi-speaking areas, but have also gone far beyond India itself (Chatterji 1978: 492). The Ritikaal of writing basically moved away from the devotional focus of literature and a shift became visible in terms of content and style of writing. Whist the content focused on love, the writing style was borrowed from Sanskrit poetics.

The final period of writing of Hindi literature is synonymous with the British colonial rule in India, Indian independence and Hindi literature to date.

Kabir and Bhakti Literature

The Bhakti period of religious literature brought about a renaissance not only in the religious practices and belief systems in

India but it also contributed to the evolution of many of the Indian languages in India. From the perspective of religious literature, this period of writing has brought about a fair amount of controversy in terms of its origins. Some scholars maintain that this movement was intended to stall western and Islamic influences in the belief systems of the Indian people but others maintain that Bhakti as part of the Hindu faith goes as far back as the Gita where Bhakti Yoga is considered one of the three paths of God realization together with Gyan Yoga and Karma Yoga. Further there is evidence of the propagation of Bhakti principle in South India in the sixth century by the Alvars and the Saiva Nayanars with the intent of influencing the people through devotional songs (Handa 1978: 62).

It is widely accepted that Kabir's spiritual preceptor was Swami Ramananda. Ramanand was the religious revolutionary of the time largely because his approach in whom he accepted as his disciples. He accepted women and even those who belonged to the lower rung of the caste hierarchy as his disciples. It is believed that because he reconverted some Muslims, he suffered ex-communication by his own Guru. Thus it was left to Kabir to promote this movement for Hindu -Islam harmony further and this he did with eminent success. The Vedantic teaching of one atman Atman pervading all creation means that all men are equal spiritually was taken up by Kabir and compounding it with the Islamic ideals of monotheism and the brotherhood of man evolved a panth or sect which broke all barriers of caste, sex and religion (Ramakrishna 1990: 111).

This approach to religion clearly was very important for the political climate of India as it was during this time that Emperor Sikander Lodi was on Throne in Delhi and he was an oppressor and needless to say the people who were affected adversely the most by him were Hindus. The clash of the two faiths, Hinduism and Islam, inspired Hindu religious leaders to relook their approach to God and the spread of Sufism gave a clue. The teachings of Basaveswara, Namdev and Tukaram, Raghavananda and Ramananda of north India were attempts in the same direction. Thus the social and religious atmosphere needed a messenger like Kabirdas who was at once a bold revolutionary, spiritually illumined (ibid: 111).

However one needs to be mindful of Handa's comment that:
Even in the 7th and 8th centuries when the Alayars and the Nayanars began preaching, their approach to religion was egalitarian in the sense they rejected caste and all formal rituals. In fact that movement has been described as anti-structure. This fact is further high-lighted by certain features characterizing the religious and philosophical doctrine underlying the bhakti movement. All South Indian and North Indian Hindu saints and from the 7th century onwards as also the Muslim mystics who appeared on the scene later and who sang of Ram and Krishna, appeared to be converging on a common point, one immanent God and man's duty to surrender himself to Him (Handa 1978: 67).

The collection of Kabir's poems is famous by the name of 'Bijak' which has three parts: Sakhi, Ramaini and Sabad. Sakhi are couplets which give the principles of the Kabir sect and the remaining parts are made up of songs and hymns. (Vedalankaar: 2000, 415) Kabir was a gifted musician and his much of his songs are recorded in "Bijak". However some scholars believe that the aforementioned compilation might not contain only the works of Kabirdas; there might be inclusions from his disciples.

Kabir's Religious Beliefs

It has been established that Kabir was a devotee of Ramanand. From Ramananda he learned the fundamental principles of bhakti and the Hindu religion. His familiarity Vedanta, the Upnishads and other Hindu scriptures can also be ascribed to his association with Ramanand. However, Kabir's choice of approach to God was

Nirguna Brahma i.e. a formless God. From the Namadev and the Nath sects he learned a little bit of Yoga, equality between man and man in the sphere of religion and devotion, and the utter futility of rituals and ceremonial ostentation. The Sufi concept of God also influenced Kabir's conceptualization of God where the relationship between God and man was one of love, from the Vaishanvaites he picked up the doctrine of non- violence and complete surrender to God and embraced this in his faith. (Handa 1978: 82) Kabir's preceptor Ramanand was a devotee of Rama and in Kabir's principle of a formless God he refers to God as Rama, not the king of Ayodhya but as that all pervading, all embracing being.

Although Kabir is considered one of the greatest poets of Hindi literature, his writing style has come under scrutiny. Keay's writes that the "poetry of Kabir is rough and unpolished, and the style and language make it not always easy to understand, Words are loosely strung together with very little regard to grammatical accuracy, and the sentences are often elliptical and full of colloquialisms. The frequent play of words and the obscurity of similies used increase the difficulty". (Keay 2003: 31) Kabir's language has also been described as Saduhukri Hindi. This implies his usage of a language that is peripatetic and is used by unlettered poets who wish to versify. (Handa 1978: 89) The last observation is interesting largely because it is well known that Kabirdas did a great deal of travelling within India and the language that he picked up from different regions simply made his work accessible to people beyond a particular region.

In spite of the criticisms leveled against Kabirdas, he remains one of the greatest poets of Hindi literature and true religious and social reformer. Therefore it is worthy of mention that several of Kabirdas's compositions are found in the Guru Granth of the Sikhs, followers of Guru Nanak.

The following are a few of Kabir's compositions that illustrate his philosophy.

O man, apply thy heart to God.
Thou shall not obtain Him by artifice.
Put away covetousness and regard for what people say of thee.
Renounce lust, wrath and pride.
By the religious ceremonies of the Hindus, conceit is produced.
That if they join and worship a stone, they shall receive salvation
Saith Kabir, by serving Him I have obtained the Lord
By becoming simple in heart I have met my God (Singh 1999: 178)

The above composition is a distinct attack on idol worship and Kabir's belief in non-form worship. The religious reformer in Kabir is also visible in terms of the lack of simplicity that is observed in worship. This translation also alludes to Keay's criticism of Kabir being difficult to understand because of the variation in his language usage. Perhaps the best translation of Kabir's compositions, are the ones done by Rabindranath Tagore in his book 'Songs of Kabir". Tagore is credited with introducing Kabir to the west. This extremely popular composition is sung even today by great masters of Indian music.
O servant, where dost though seek Me?
Lo! I am beside thee.
I am neither in the temple nor in the mosque: I am neither in Kaaba nor in Kailash:
Neither am I in rites and ceremonies, nor in Yoga and renunciation.
If thou art a true seeker, thou shalt at once see Me: thou shalt meet Me in a moment of time.
Kabir says, "O Sadhu! God is the breath of all breath" (Tagore 1915: 1).

This composition clearly speaks of the principles of Islam and Hinduism that Kabir disagreed with and also alludes to the thinking that if God resides in temples and Mosques then who does the rest of the world belong to?

Kabir placed great emphasis on the preceptor. There are a number of tales surrounding how Kabir met his preceptor as he was a child of Muslim parents who were weavers and the preceptor he chose was a Brahmin. The following couplet illustrates Kabir's reverence for the preceptor.

I God and the Guru stand together, whom should one prostrate to? Prostrate to the guru as it is he who has revealed God to you. (Parkash: no date14)

Bhakti Panthis in South Africa

The intention of this paper is to highlight the existence in South Africa of Kabir Panthis and panthis of other movements during the Bhakti period that are not only contemporaries of Kabirdas but are also similar in their religious philosophy. The arrival of Indian in South Africa can be traced back to October 11, 1860. Kumar writes:

The first group of Indian came from Madras Province. During 1860 and 1866, about 6445 indentured labourers were brought to Natal. The emigration was stopped during 1866 and 1874 due to the ill treatment of labourers hired under the new system in Natal. When it was resumed in 1874, the immigration department placed advertisements in India to attract labourers. Among other things, they guaranteed that your religion will in no way be interfered with, and both Hindoos and Mahomedans are alike protected (Kumar 2000: 2).

This describes the religious context of the Indians who had come down as indentured labourers in South Africa. Although the first group of Indians came from Madras, the ones that had followed had come from Uttar Pradesh which is well known for the Bhakti period of literature.

Given that fact that at the time of writing this paper, people of Indian origin would have lived in South Africa for 149 years tracing the possible panthis of Kabir and his contemporaries who shared a similar religious philosophy, would understandably be a challenge. What emerged from my investigation is the existence of two groups of panthis.

Kabir Panthis

Well known priest Pt Pyarelall Raghubir emerged as a Kabir Panthi. In an interview with him, he revealed that his family was originally from Aajamgad Jila in Uttar Pradesh. His grandfather Ramdas was from India and he brought down the teachings of Kabir to South Africa. According to Pt Pyarelall there was no fixed organization for Kabir Panthis but it was not uncommon for the family to sit after dinner to recite the compositions of Kabirdas. Pt Pyarelall is at time of recording this interview 80 years old and what was fascinating about the conversation with him was the absolute ease with which he recited Kabir‘s composition from memory. Some of the people he recalls as Kabir Panthis are Lutchman Sadhu of 2nd River, Mayville which is currently a suburb of Durban and F. Ramlagan of Westville. What was significant of the manner in which death was received is that Kabir's songs were sung reminding mourners of the transient nature of life as Kabirdas preached. Music played a large part in the lives of Kabir Panthis. Pyarelall was very emotional when he recalled the struggles of the people of his generation and the generation before him, remembering that the majority of the people were illiterate but it was the oral tradition of sharing at family gatherings and gatherings of like- minded people that kept this culture alive[xxviiixxviiixxviii].

In another conversation with Batchee Lautan who is also 85 years old, he revealed that it was not uncommon for first and second generation Indians to gather around singing Santo Bhajans as this was not only the only entertainment that people had but it was the culture that they had brought down with them. Santo bhajans include the compositions of saint poets Kabirdas, Surdas, and Tulsidas [xxviii].

Sewnarayan Panthis.

Although the Bhakti period of literature discusses many religious leaders, very little information is available on Swami Shiv Narayan. However, there does exist, a Shiv Narayan Samaaj in Northdene Durban. Information on the said samaaj was provided by the Munshi Mahanth of the movement Brij Sewperdsadh.[xxviii] The Sewnarayan Samaaj was brought to South Africa by the indentured labourers and was established in 1900. Interestingly, Baba Khuda Bakus Raam who resided in Johannesburg was responsible for bringing the scriptural material to South Africa. Scripture of the Sewnarain panthis are written in Kaitee, a mixture of Sanskrit, Hindi and Gujarati largely done so to keep the information in it indiscernible to the British Raj.

Although born a Bakus Raam gravitated to the teachings of Swami Sewnarayan who lived in Chandrawar, Uttar Pradesh. The teachings of the Sewnarayan panth, is not very different to Kabirdas. There is a tremendous respect for women, to the extent that women were accepted into priesthood together with men long before this principle was adopted by other progressive movements in South Africa. They observe a strict code of conduct where prayers are to be done only after a bath, no shoes and belts are allowed. Ladies cover their heads during prayer. Criticial to these panthis was the issue of caste. The caste system is totally denounced and in South Africa people of different races are embraced provided they followed the code of conduct in terms of a vegetarian diet and upright hygienic life. Worship is non form although the shrine in the temple does have pictures of various Hindu deities but what was evident was that there were no idols. Whilst there is no idol worship, in the recitation of the prayers the divine trinity and other references to worship to a God with form is recited. The worship of the scripture Guru Anyaas is crucial to the Shiv Narayan Panthis as it depicts the teaching or the word of the Guru and is placed on a gaddi during the period of worship. During a funeral and memorial services the Sant Bilaas was read and is still read. An annual Pitra Paksh prayer is observed and members of the public are invited to be part of the prayer in remembrance of their ancestors, even if they have not met them. This prayer is called a bhandaar. What Sewpersadh stressed is that the focus of the movement was singing the divine name and meditation: rituals are not part of their approach to God.

Lautan of Benoni in his interview added to this information Although the panthis subscribed to non-form worship, the scripture is considered most important, and the scriptures are honoured as the authority of the movement. The Guru Anyaas is the scripture in totality and is divided into 3 parts, the Sant Bilaas being one of them.

After my conversation with Sewpersadh and Luatan, I came across an article titled *Social Practices of Bhakti in the Shiv Narayan Sampradaya by Maren Bellwinkel-Schempp.* She writes that amongst the Bhakti Sants, Swami Shivnarayan was a latecomer. Swami Shivnarayan (1716 -1790) was from Chandravar in Balliar District in eastern Uttar Pradesh. He founded a large nirgun bhakti sect of approximately 300,000 members. They were spread over eastern Uttar Pradesh, western Bihar, Nepal and Bengal. Many were recruited as indentured labourers from 1830s onwards. They migrated to Mauritius, South Africa and the Caribbean She also refers to the sect as a textual community. The most important book, the Guru Anyaas is also called the Guru Granth Sahib like the holy book of the Sikhs, and Gyan Dipak. The book is placed in the centre of the altar (gaddi) which is usually an elevated stool, sometimes under a canopy. The guru Anyaas is an iconic representation of God, the focus of devotion, and the basic text for preaching. Most of the members of the sect were illiterate which made oral transmission of its teachings especially important. Literacy, though much desired, never replaced the oral tradition. Schempp also alludes to the language of the text being described as Muriya or Kaithi. The second book of importance that she refers to is Sant Vilaas which is recited and preached upon death, Since death is considered to be the ultimate liberation of mankind from the cycle of birth and death, the procession to the grave is accompanied by music. Vasant Panchami, the spring festival is also important to the sect as it is the time of initiation. She goes on to say that there is no rough rhetoric as is present in the works of Kabirdas. The teachings of Shiv Narayan are rather moderate, inwardly oriented, Caste is not mentioned and Brahmanism is neither attacked nor ridiculed. However, Vishwa Mahant Sarju Das, claims that Swami Shivnarayan Das did want to abolish caste. Outward ritualism and the suppression through the caste system go together. Sant Dharm is inwardly oriented it does not need the veneration of idols and Bhakti as loving devotion must be seen as directed towards one's family members (Horstmann 2006: 15-26).

Conclusion

Although the people of Indian origin in South Africa have left the Indian soil for over a hundred years, it is amazing that they were able to keep a culture that was brought down by their forefathers. The Shiv Narayan sect is visible in most parts of the Indian diaspora and perhaps the same might apply to the Kabirdas sect. Like many ancient cultures of the world, much of the culture was passed on by unlettered individuals and groups. However, the political situation in South Africa during the time of Indian indenture and thereafter obviously did not help the maintenance of these oral traditions. Today few people in South Africa, even those involved in literature in some way, are familiar with great writers like Kabirdas. Fortunately though, many neo-Hindu religious refer often to such great literary giants and perhaps the names and works of such great might remain outside India through these references.

Bibligraphy

Basham A.L. (1967) *The Wonder That was India*: Fontana, Sidgwick and Jackson.

Lutchman, V. (1998) Hindi Colonial Protest Poetry and South African anti-apartheid Poetry: A Comparative Study, unpublished D.Litt dissertation, University of Durban- Westville.

Chatterji S.N. (1978) (Ed), *The Cultural Heritage of India*, Calcutta: The Ramakrishna Institute of Culture.

Handa R.L. (1978) *History of Hindi Language and Literature, Bombay*: Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan.

Sri Ramakrisna Math, Saints and Mystics, (1990) The President, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras.

Vedalankar, N. (Ed), (2000) *Shastra Navanitam, A Concise Study of Hindu Scriptures*, Ved Niketan.

Singh, C. and Nath, P. (1999) *Hinduism*, India: Crest Publishing House.

Keay, F.E. (2003) *History of Hindi Literature*, Delhi: Rupa Co.

Rabindranath, Tagore. (1915) *Songs of Kabir*, New York: The Macmillan Company.

Kumar, P.P. (2000) *Hindus in South Africa - Their Traditions and Belief,* The University of Durban-Westville: Durban.

Horstmann, M. (Ed.) (2006) *Bhakti in Current Research*, New Delhi: Manohar.

Dhirendra, V. (Ed.) (2006) *Hindi Sahitya Kosh Part 2,* Varanasi: Gyanmandal Limited.

Parkash, A. (Ed.) (no date) *Kabir Dohavali*, Jolandar City: Amit Pocket Books.

Nidan, Vol 21, 2009

Issues In The Rama Story: Genesis, Impact And Resolution

Usha Shukla
School of Language, Literature & Linguistics,
University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

The *ur* text of the Rama Story, the Srimad Valmiki Ramayana, and Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas are the two authoritative tellings, with a multiplicity of variants of all ages, lands, languages and cultures influenced by India. The Rama story tells about a lofty, sublime protagonist Who is an incarnation of God and protector of humanity. Endowed with attributes rare amongst created beings (Valmiki-Balakanda, 1: 8-19) He and His story give rise to various issues voiced within the Ramayana and by agencies outside it. Responses and solutions have been recorded within the Ramayana tradition upholding the Divinity of Sri Rama. However, some issues and tellings raise concerns as to their place within the tradition. The writer presents a brief review of the origin of the Rama Ethos, the raising and addressing of issues, as well as their impact on the tradition and Rama-devotees.
(N.B. Rcm = Ramcharitmanas)

Sri Rama and Ramayana

The Ramayana is the life, journey or story of Rama, Prince of Ayodhya, Incarnation of Vishnu and protector of Dharma. Both writers of the authoritative versions, Valmiki and Tulsidas, assert the above facts in the Srimad Valmiki Ramayana and the Ramcharitmanas respectively. It is necessary to have a clear understanding of how the creators of the two epic tellings of the Rama story, the characters in them and devotees perceive the personality of Sri Rama. This may aid in the understanding of the everlasting appeal of the Ramayana and Sri Rama to people of all lands, cultures and religions who embrace them as their own, and assert this, as Paula Richman (2001:21) does:

> Who has authority over the Ramayana tradition? No single group ever has complete authority over what can and cannot be said about Rama's story. No single group ever should.

The Valmiki Ramayana and Ramcharitmanas, as well as other tellings of Rama's story, attest to the extraordinary personality of Rama. Valmiki questions Narada about the possible existence of a man with desirable attributes, about whom he could write an epic. Narada's description of Rama, born in the Ikshvaku dynasty approximates a Being of Divine provenance. The extraordinary nature of Sri Rama is described thus later:

> Sri Rama whose strength is virtue, and who is possessed of extraordinary lustre, is the root of the tree of humanity; while other men are flowers and fruits, leaves and boughs (Valmiki-Ayodhyakanada 33.15).

To dissuade Ravana from his planned abduction of Sita, Maricha declares:

> Rama is virtue incarnate, pious and of unfailing prowess. He is the ruler of the entire humanity (even) as Indra is ruler of gods (Valmiki-Aranyakanda 37.13).

Tulsidas is reported in the Bhaktamal as having been devoted entirely to Sri Rama, son of Dasharatha and King of Ayodhya. He swooned when informed that Rama was Vishnu in human form, and declared upon regaining his consciousness:

> If He is God, wonderful! if king of the earth, good fortune. All Tulsi desires is lifelong love of His feet (Vyas 2005:33).

Similar love and devotion to the feet of Lord Rama are expressed by Ahalya after transformation from stone to flesh:

> I only crave that my mind may ever continue to enjoy the love of the dust of your feet even as the bee sucks the honey from the lotus (Rcm-Balakanda 210.3).

Tulsidas affirms Rama's divinity again and again emphasizing that Rama's name alone counteracts the ills of Kaliyuga. Mcfie (1930: XV) provides a very accurate portrait of Tulsidas's Rama thus:
In the eyes of Tulsidas God is not a remote, passionless Being, devoid of all attributes and impossible to define; but a God to whom men pray and who hears their prayers. He has appeared in human form as Rama. He is full of sympathy. He loves those who worship him. And He is pictured as no other God has ever been pictured in Hinduism, as one who loves righteousness and mercy. Best of all, He is not only pure Himself, He demands purity in those who are devoted to Him.

The origin of the Rama story is traced to the Vedas. Tribhuwan Singh (1976: 67) states, "The 10th Mandala of the Rg Veda mentions Ikshvaku, Dasharatha, Rama, Janaka, Sita etc. – there is no clear indication of their mutual relationship". Over the centuries and even the millennia, 'Valmiki's Maryada Purusha' made way for the 'Divine Philosopher King' of Kamban and Ezhuthachhan. For Kabir and Tyagaraja who followed them, Rama was an "abstract ideal" (Khare in Goswami and Bharali 2005: 2).

As to the question whether the Ramayana is a mere story or poetry or an allegorical narrative, or a chunk of history elaborated as a narrative of a nation, the answer from Khare (op cit: 2) is "Ramayana is all these, and perhaps more". The same question was put to Professor Rambachan, who after much deliberation concluded, "No, it is much more" (2002: 11). We have to appreciate the fact that whilst Tulsidas proposes perceiving Rama as a God of love, the Ramayana itself is a "living text and tradition" nourished by Hindu communities throughout the ages (Rambachan 2002: 11).

The Ramayana was conferred immortality by Brahma's boon to Valmiki: "As long as the mountains stand and the rivers flow on the earth, so long shall the story of the Ramayana be propagated in the world" (Valmiki-Balakanda 2, 36-37). Tulsidas believed "Infinite is Sri Hari and infinite are His stories, each saint sings and hears them in divergent ways" (Rcm-Balakanda 139.3). Consequently the Ramayana appears in many new forms today, with Ramanand Sagar's serial "Ramayan" considered the third authoritative telling of the story of Rama (Richman 2001: 9).

The Ramayana began its outward journey from India around the 2nd century AC, travelling to the countries of South Asia in the form of Srimad Valmiki Ramayana. The Ramayana reincarnated in many forms in these countries, becoming an important part of South Asian culture. Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas became the treasured property of the people of the Hindi-speaking area, while its influence spread throughout India. Devotion to Rama had existed long before Tulsidas: indeed even Tulsidas was an exponent of Ramayana based on Valmiki and Adhyatma Ramayana, before he produced Ramcharitmanas. His Ramcharitmanas became the popular Ramayana, and the Indians who travelled to the colonies as indentured labourers took along the Ramcharitmanas too. It attained the status of scripture for all the Hindi speakers, and in Fiji even acquired government approval as a holy text (Richman 2001: 348). The Ramcharitmanas helped to spread the Rama Ethos, or Rama Principle, as Sri Sathya Sai Baba calls it, in the diaspora.

In the diaspora Rama was not just God but a fellow traveller in the vicissitudes of life, and the Ramayana became the means of fighting colonialism and the oppressive indenture system, particularly in Fiji. With the dawn of the twentieth century and the rise of social consciousness Rama's story provided the basis to negotiate social, political and economic rights. Tulsidas's quatrain which states "Of glory, poetry and affluence that alone is blessed which, like the celestial river (Ganga) is conducive to the good of all" (Rcm-Balakanda 13.5) provided a theoretical basis for the social relevance of the Ramcharitmanas, as well as the impetus to promote the good of all. Social realism thus found place in the Ramcharitmanas to the same extent that devotion to Sri Rama did, because, at least to Tulsidas, both were accessible to all.

Issues in the Ramayana have been part of the Rama story since His birth. His Divine nature and attributes are a point of dissension in some sectarian doctrines although Valmiki himself states
"Mother Kausalya gave birth to a highly blessed son named Sri Rama, who was the Lord of the Universe (Valmiki-Balakanda 18.10).

Tulsidas introduces Sri Rama at His birth as the "benefactor" of Kausalya (Kausalya hitakari) (Rcm-Balakanda 192.1). Kausalya rejoiced in both versions as the mother of the Infinite appearing in this finite world as her child.

Issues in the Rama Story

When an epic proclaims that the protagonist is an incarnation or descent of the Supreme Lord of the universe, then issues, questions, dissensions, doubts and even skepticism are bound to arise. These questions assume various forms and proportions, and a tradition of stating and resolving these evolved, within limits of propriety applicable to a work of scripture. Questioning Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas does not push the questioner outside the devotional tradition (Richman 2001: 13). Richman continues that although the questions rarely express lack of faith in Lord Rama and Tulsidas, the keenness and range of the questions demonstrate the importance of questioning, which ultimately strengthens devotion to Lord Rama.

Questioning the Ramayana is thus not a hostile activity, or meant to undermine, mock or trivialize any aspect of the story or characters. Oppositional tellings may also be found to be in sympathy with characters deemed to be part of the "other", such as Meghnad, Vali and even Ravana. Class,caste and gender issues, morality, the unifying and conscientizing process of Ramayana and voices asserting individuals (e.g. Sita in Sundarakanda of Valmiki) all constitute legitimate questioning.

The body of questions or issues that developed through interactions between the exponent (kathakar) and audience of Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas is characterized as *shankavali* or String of Doubts. Words such as *shanka, samshaya, sandeha, shaka* are used to denote this urge to know by questioning or seeking clarity; and the solutions are called *samadhan*. The exponent called his audience "premis" or lovers, and thus Linda Hess aptly calls these *shankas* "Lovers' Doubts" (in Richman 2001: 27).

It would be useful to reflect on the origins of the practice of questioning, doubting or dissenting with regard to the Ramayana. It is not the Ramayana alone that has been told and retold in so many voices over the millennia. The other major Hindu Epic Mahabharata has also generated many new tellings that attempt to make the story "modern" or "credible" e.g. "Mahagatha" by Sitesh 'Alok', "Main Bhishma Bol Raha Hoon" by Bhagavati Sharan Mishra and "Draupadi" by Pratibha Rai. The Rg Veda (10th Mandala, Sukta 121) asks 'Kasmai devaya havisa vidhema' – to which God shall I pray? The Gita commences with the question 'Mamakah pandavascaiva kimakurvata sanjaya' – What did my sons and the sons of Pandu do? Even the Upanishads have a "Prashna" (question) Upanishad, which opens with the stating of six questions to be answered. The Srimad Valmiki Ramayana opens with Sage Valmiki asking Narada "Who can possibly be full of virtues in this world at present? Amartya Sen (2006: xi) places the subject of doubts, argumentativeness etc. in perspective: "These doubts (in the Rigveda) from the 2nd millennium BCE would recur again and again in India's long argumentative history, along with a great many other questions about epistemology and ethics. They survive side by side with intense religious beliefs and deeply respectful faith and devotion".

Before looking at questioning in the Ramcharitmanas it would be appropriate to examine one of the earlier questioners of the Rama ethos, in the early Bhakti period (1375 – 1700). The story of Rama and widespread devotion to Him as descent of the Supreme characterized the Bhakti period, but a question raised by the poet saint Kabir required reconsideration of the approach to Sri Rama: The question is related to Kabir's statement:

The son of Dasaratha is extolled by the three worlds; but the secret of Rama's name is something else (Shastri 1989: 21).

Kabir urged the people to revere the transcendental Rama (the other) instead of the Prince of Ayodhya. His clear belief according to Shukdev Singh (1987: 13) is "that God divided into names such as Allah, Rama, Karima, Hari, Hazarath, is in reality one and the same. Kabir's motivation of the people towards looking for the "real" Rama was in order to make people seek out the substance behind the shadow (Sitaram 1998: 71).

Kabir (1398-1518) and Tulsidas (1532-1623) were disciples of the Ramananda sampradaya (sect). There is no fundamental difference in the two saints' approaches; the matter is of degree of emphasis. Kabir identified with the masses (Singh 1987: 13) and he "firmly established the principle of one omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient Divine" (Sitaram 1998: 72). This Supreme Being was Kabir's Rama. This "nirguna" or attributeless Brahman of Kabir was without face or forehead, neither shapely nor unshapely, and subtler than the fragrance of a flower (Jain 1959: 9).

Tulsidas, whose approach to religion and philosophy was one of inclusiveness, conciliation and coordination, provided an elaborate response to the nature of Rama as both attributeless Brahman and the Prince of Ayodhya. In one of the four dialogues constituting the framework of the Ramcharitmanas, sages Yajnavalkya and Bharadwaja discuss the issue. Tulsidas's "central" question, in the words of Bharadwaja addressed to sage Yajnavalkya is whether Lord Siva meditates upon the same Rama who killed Ravana or some other (Rcm-Balakanda 45.4 – 46).

Tulsidas has clearly and emphatically portrayed the human Rama and his "exploits" on the one hand and the Transcendental, Supreme Exemplar of Propriety – Parabrahma Maryada Purushottam Sri Rama on the other – and the answer, given throughout Ramcharitmanas is YES. Rama is God, in human form, playing a role (*lila*) for the welfare of the world, for which He was born.

The Indian tradition of questioning and argumentativeness generally provides the solutions as well. Hence many of the crucial issues are raised and resolved within the Ramayana (especially the authoritative versions). This seems to be aimed at providing parameters to the process, or tradition of questioning. Indeed, there is also clear urging in the scriptures against doubting, as the Bhagavad Gita (4: 40) warns;
He who lacks discrimination, is devoid of faith, and is at the same time possessed by doubt is lost to the spiritual path.

An even stronger prohibition is placed on doubting in the Ramcharitmanas. Lord Siva explains patiently to Parvati the tragic consequences of doubting the Divinity of Sri Rama, and urges her to desist from entertaining further questions. He tells her: Thus assured in your heart, discard all doubt and adore Sri Rama's feet (Rcm-Balakanda 115).

A positive aspect of the system permitting the discussion of the seeming contradictions and inconsistencies in Ramayana is that it may promote faith. Arun (2009: 272) draws the lesson from the narrative of Siva and Parvati that "Devotion becomes firm with the advent of reverence, and true reverence is born from doubt. From doubt to devotion or faith: this is the royal road to reach God". Sathya Sai Baba who oft proclaims that he has come to inculcate faith in God, also states that he has come to "repair the ancient highway to God". Therefore, if doubt concerns a problem which impedes development of devotion, then it must be removed. This is the purpose of the tradition of questioning of Ramayanas.

The Shankavalis

The Shankavalis (string of doubts) refer to the collections of doubts on the Ramcharitmanas and their solutions. The Kathakars (exponents) of the Ramcharitmanas were often asked to explain or clarify points on the text. Many of these were of a technical nature – e.g. How could Vibhishana rule for a kalpa (a period of time not yet elapsed) or where would Lakshmana be standing if he picked up the earth in his hands? These and others were often answered with further, sometimes puzzling answers, but the questioner and audience accepted the explanation.

Since the early 19th century, there developed a number of Shankavalis dealing with important issues of Ramayana. The earliest was of Vandan Pathak (1815-1909) called Manas Shankavali. Babu Jangbahadur Sinha's Manas Shanka Mochan appeared *circa* 1899. The Manas Shanka Samadhan of Jayram Das "Din" was published by Gita Press, Gorakhpur, in 1942. Pandit Ramkumar Das's collection of over 400 Shankas (doubts) was published at different times between 1962 and 1987 from Ayodhya and Madhya Pradesh (Linda Hess in Richman 2001: 28).

The doubts or questions in the approximately 800 *shankas* hitherto collected contain questions of all types, technical, philological, hierarchical, religious and concerned with the divinity and the moral quality of the Acts of Sri Rama. Some of them deal with the killing of Vali, the execution of Sambuka, the banishment of Sita, these being the more controversial acts of Rama. Of the 39 Shankas in the Manas Shanka Samadhan of Jayram Das "Din", the following appear in the list questioning Rama's action:

- The secrets of Rama's hunting deer (p.31)
- The propriety of Rama's wielding of a bow and killing Rakshasas during exile (p.70)
- The reason for Sri Rama's partiality towards Sugriva and Vibhishan (p.115)
- A frequently raised issue of the Ramcharitmanas – the question of "Drum, Rustic, Shudra, Animal and Women" also appears.

Linda Hess (in Richman 2001: 46-47) points out that since the Shanka Samadhans are contributed by Brahmin men, the structures of male Brahmin authority are maintained. Even the majority of the questioners are high-caste men hence the Shankavali is a bounded system. Only Sati/Parvati in the Ramcharitmanas is a female doubter: she is depicted as an indefatigable doubter and questioner. The questions in the Shankavalis are generally conservative; nevertheless they indicate the desire to know how they should relate to the text. The doubters are urged to cultivate devotion to God, although not all scholars are interested in "rhapsodic" descriptions of the love of God, giving much attention to worldly matters as well (Hess-op cit: 47).

Ramayana Variations - Ancient and Modern

Since the beginning of the second millennium the Rama Ethos spread to South and South-East Asia, and emerged in new tellings reflecting the local religious and cultural circumstances. Within India, Ramayanas appeared in all the regional languages, as well as Sanskrit and Prakrit. The process of writing variants of the Rama story is continued in many tellings focusing on specific aspects of the Rama story. A few of the early tellings of the Rama story after Valmiki are:

- Kalidas's Raghuvamshamahakavyam
- Bhavabhuti's Uttara Ramcharit
- Anandaramayana
- Adhyatmaramayana
- Kamba Ramayana (Iramavataram - Tamil)
- Ranganatha & Bhaskararamayana (Telugu)
- Kritiwasa Ramayana (Bangla)

Many more Ramayanas appeared in the 20th Century. The Ramayana Kalpavriksham of Sri Vishwanatha Satyanarayana, the celebrated scholar-poet, is based on the ideals of family stability and marital fidelity (Katre in Goswami & Bharali 2005: 4). Maithilisharan Gupta's epic "Saket" (1964) uses the notion of "neglect" of certain characters of the Rama story to paint a picture of Urmilla pining for Lakshman. However, it is said that Gupta wrote Ramakatha under the guise of doing justice to the character of Urmilla, "the neglected woman" of Indian literature. Gupta, a staunch Rama devotee, therefore wrote his epic Saket portraying Urmilla in every mood as the loving, weeping wife of Lakshmana, and proud daughter-in-law of the Raghu dynasty. Gupta attains his goals of telling Rama's and Urmilla's stories.

Ramayana tellings that depict the divinity and glory of Sri Rama are discussed in this section. Tellings that seem either to be opposed to the Rama ethos, or detract from the majesty and divinity of Sri Rama will be discussed later, when dealing with specific doubts, in order to show how in attempting to make the Ramayana doctrinally acceptable or non-controversial in terms of modern values, authors undermine or even trivialize the Rama story. In this part of the paper I would like to introduce a new vision of Rama Katha and consider a work and personality that bring Sri Rama and His story to contemporary man in a powerful, persuasive way that soothes the soul. I speak of the Rama Katha Rasa Vahini (The Sweet Story of Rama's Glory) by Sri Sathya Sai Baba. The Ramayana tradition is bounded by the acceptance of the divinity of Sri Rama and the tenets of morality and propriety in thought, word and deed. A completely new element, as far as Ramayana tellings is concerned, and reinforced by the faith of millions, is introduced in Rama Katha Rasa Vahini – the "author" being the protagonist as well. Sri Sathya Sai Baba proclaims Himself to be Rama, Krishna, Siva and all names and forms of the Supreme, come to promote satya, dharma, ahimsa, shanti, prema (truth, righteousness, non-violence, peace, love) and restore the world to the era of peace, godliness, prosperity and happiness. The rationale for including this work in this discussion is to try to extend the parameters of the Ramayana tradition. Of course, this inquiry will follow the rules of the tradition and see where the Rama Katha Rasa Vahini and the authoritative Ramayanas concur on issues, and if there is a variance, to discover why. Katre in Goswami and Bharali (2005:5) encapsulates the relevant features of Rama Katha Rasa Vahini thus: "It brings the essence of Srimad Valmiki Ramayana and Adhyatma Ramayana, as well as incidents from Kalidasa's Raghuvamsa, Padmapurana and Anandaramayana as well as folk versions together. Baba's Rama knows His Divine Nature and asserts it at appropriate times, as well as reveals it to other people". Katre concludes that "Rama Katha Rasa Vahini leads the devotee to the realm of Atmarama – the Ultimate soul".

Sri Sathya Sai Baba sets the tone for the study of the Rama Katha Rasa Vahini thus:

Do not look upon Rama as a scion of the solar dynasty, or as the sovereign of the kingdom of Ayodhya, or as the son of Emperor Dasaratha. These correlates are but accessory and accidental (Sai Baba Part I, Undated: 3).

Baba thus exhorts us to look into principles, values and ethical qualities of the story and the protagonist. It is the story of Baba Himself, told by Him for the benefit of the devotees. This puts it in a category by itself. This story which reached millions of Sai Baba devotees throughout the world in the latter half of the twentieth century, producing a Rama ethos or principle discernible in the work of the devotees in every sphere of human upliftment. Thus through its impact this Ramayana variant seems to be akin to a new foundational Ramayana, heralding the era of God's love and peace on earth at a crucial time. The Ramayana story is the life and acts of God in human form: the Rama Katha Rasa Vahini is the story of the Divine by the Divine in human form. Jack Shemesh, devotee of Shri Sathya Sai Baba, writes:

The Lord manifests in human form within the material level of creation to demonstrate that His glory is beyond good and evil. Through the illusion that good and evil exist, He reflects their opposite forces of influence in each other as a drama instigated to exhibit the need for God's presence (Shemesh 1993: 43).

Shemesh has concisely stated the nature and purpose of Baba as well as His Rama Katha Rasa Vahini. Another devotee Krishna Nandan Sinha explains the cosmic nature of Sai Baba, the Avatara, thus:

Sai Baba is verily the Christ that came again as prophesied by Jesus Himself……He is also Rama, Krishna, Buddha and others, the very quintessence of divinity, in fact the one God who is omnipresent (Sinha 1996: 128).

Prof. N Kasturi, long time devotee, sevaka (servant) and editor of the "Sanathan Sarathi" adds:

Sai Rama has recapitulated herein, in His own simple, sweet and sustaining style, His own divine career as Rama! What great good fortune, this, to have in our hands, to inscribe on our minds, to imprint on our hearts this Divine Narrative (Sai Baba Part I, Undated: iii).

(NB. It must be noted that the author remains distinct from the characters of the Rama Katha Rasa Vahini).

The Rama Katha Rasa Vahini is in prose of a quality that is as appealing as the sweetest poetry. It is divided into two parts, and 32 chapters covering 756 pages of engrossing narrative. Sri Sathya Sai Baba has used appropriate titles for the chapters, such as "Sita Insists and Wins", "The Wily Villain", "Ten Heads Roll".

As remarked above, Sri Sathya Sai Baba has recapitulated the story of His own career: the telling is thus free-flowing, inspiring with its tone of certainty and credibility. The motives and reasons are stated as matter of fact, necessary or inevitable, e.g. the killing of Khara, Dushana and their 14000 soldiers by an act of hypnotism, whereby the Rakshasas mistook one another for Rama, putting one another to death in a short time. Acknowledging this feat as unprecedented, the ascetics of Panchavati declared that "Rama was the Almighty Providence who had come to wipe out from the face of the earth the entire race of ogres or Rakshasas, and thereby ensure the peace and prosperity of mankind (Sai Baba Part II, Undated: 37).

Valmiki's Ramayana is described as the Book about Sita (Sitayascha yam charitam mahat), and is pervaded from beginning to end with Karuna Rasa (pathos). In Rama Katha Rasa Vahini, however, there is no emotion. Sri Rama divides the empire amongst the sons of the four brothers, grants boons to his faithful followers from the forests of the South, and takes leave after blessing those who visit Ayodhya and bathe in the Sarayu River.

The Rama Katha Rasa Vahini introduces a new dimension in Ramayana studies. Sri Sathya Sai Baba wrote the story of Rama as a "lived experience", generating love and devotion for the protagonist Sri Rama, His Consort Sita and all the virtuous characters of the story. As a figure loved, revered and worshipped as God, Sai Baba and His Rama Katha Rasa Vahini stand at a point in human experience which could only be the harbinger of a new era of spiritual development.

Ramayanas that raise doubts through their approach to issues

In this section, we shall have a brief glimpse at two works. The first is Ramayan Ka Vastavik Swarup (True form of Ramayana). This 1984 publication is largely oppositional in its approach. The other work, the Satya Ramayana (True Ramayana) is a 1995 work of fiction as the publishers describe it, yet the title is the True Ramayana and claims to be based on history, archaeology and geography. This Ramayana, too, could be classified as oppositional in that in his desire to present a rational, scientific and probable Ramayana story, the author Prof. Kanungo makes it highly improbable. Neither of these works on Rama's story inspires the kind of faith and acceptance as the traditionally accepted versions.

Whilst the writer is of the view that Rama and Ramayana belong to all, it must also be accepted that they are invaluable springs of spirituality, closely associated with the hearts and souls of hundreds of millions of people. Any attempt to meliorate the personality and story must not detract from the aims and objectives of the story – the inculcation of virtues, of strength in adversity, of sacrifice in the line of duty, and of love and compassion for all. Any work created as a companion or complement of the Rama story must subscribe to the principles of Dharma (righteousness), Maryada (decorum, propriety), Manavata (humanity) and Satyam (truth).

The "Ramayan Ka Vastavik Swarup" contains narratives on Ramayana through an oracle Brahmachari Krishnadutt who describes aspects of Ramayana occurring 850000 years ago. The oracle of the "Ramayan Ka Vastavik Swarup" projects a Rama and

Ramayana stripped of divinity and spiritual appeal, through the following:

- Firstly it states that Renakethu and Swati were two avaricious Brahmins bribed to subvert the story and characters of the Ramayana.
- The above Brahmins erred in showing Sri Rama as an incarnation of the Supreme. (The doctrine of Incarnation (Avatara) is opposed by the sect who published the work.)
- Sri Rama used to worship the Supreme Lord through all the mandatory rituals; thus portraying Sri Rama as an 'avatara' is indicative of ignorance. (page 10)
- Medical procedures were carried out for the birth of Rama and his brothers. The oracle himself was the 84 year Ayurvedic doctor in attendance 850682 years ago (pp 17-18)

Kanungo's Satya Ramayana "sanitizes" Rama Katha with the intention of enhancing Sri Rama's Divinity and the infallibility of His ethical and dharmik actions. Some of these innovations are:

- Bhavabhuti, a Nambudri Brahmin, interpolated the banishment of Sita after being bribed by Thomas who came to preach Christianity in India. (piii)
- Vali did not wish to fight Sugriva. Sri Rama reconciled the two brothers. Vali travelled to Bali and established his rule there (p366)
- This telling of Ramakatha does not show Ravana harbouring lust for Sita. She was also the granddaughter of his brother Kubera. Revenge against Rama for the injury and affront to Shurpanakha was his goal (p322-323).
- The writer alleges that Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas was corrupted by pundits who, after Tulsidas's death, translated it into Awadhi and Braj; and following Bhavabhuti, attributed anti-women attitudes against Tulsidas in "dhol gawar shudra pashu nari".

Satya Ramayana detracts from the Ramakatha tradition by idealizing and romanticizing it, sometimes in fantastic ways, losing the essence of Rama, Protector of Dharma.

The above works have been mentioned for their attempts at promoting specific points of view which detract from the image of Sri Rama – His divinity in the case of one and His ability to perform His duties in the other.

Understanding some of the issues of the Rama Story

The Rama story has spread throughout the world, and the questions associated with it accompanied it. In the Diaspora, as indeed even in India, issues of caste, gender relations and abuse, political freedom etc. are leading topics of concern. Devotees and non-devotees are often confronted by issues in Ramayana which are difficult, if not impossible to reconcile with the noble personality of Rama and the loftiness and sublimity of His story. It is for this reason that writers of Ramkatha, e.g. Prof. Kanungo who wrote Satya Ramayana, expunge the episode mentioning "dhol gawar" as an interpolation by nefarious pandits. This line is "Drum, rustic, shudra, animal, woman – one has the right to beat all these" (Rcm-Sundarakanda 58-3). Does this mean that Tulsidas had a bad attitude towards women and shudras (Hess in Richman 2001: 26). This is the basis for great condemnation of Tulsidas, who introduces Rama as God and advocates cruelty to the vulnerable parts of His creation, the rustic or illiterate, the low-born, animals and women, giving rise to interminable debates

The issue of the Drum & Rustic has to be seen in the wider context of the closing portion of Sundarakanda of Ramcharitmanas from doha (couplet) 57. Tulsidas describes Sagar, the ocean as jada (crass), and puts the disputed words into his mouth. In time this began to take the form of Tulsidas's belief, whereas it is merely the cringing self defence of a defeated villainous character. Sri

Rama's threat to dry up the ocean had the effect of making it loquacious. Janardan Dutta Shukla (1973: 84) states that these words of a crass villain uttered upon defeat in self defence are totally unacceptable. If the words of this ignoramus were acceptable, why did Sri Rama not act upon them? Goswami Tulsidas has not displayed sentiments of cruelty towards the weak and vulnerable, and women in any of his works. We need to accept that he was recording the thinking of a foolish, uneducated entity and not his own feelings.

The killing of the shudra Shambuka is in Srimad Valmiki Ramayana, but not in the Ramcharitmanas. Much has been written about Sri Rama's commitment to dharma as duty and the welfare of the subjects. His reign, characterized as Ramrajya, was for the maximum satisfaction and security of his subjects – this is called Lokaradhana or Prajaranjan (the happiness of the people). Hence when his courtier Bhadra reported that the subjects are concerned about the impact on family life of the continued presence of Sita as his wife after she had been in the custody of Ravana, Sri Rama parted with Sita to keep the citizens happy. The fact that there was an understanding between them is another issue. For the average reader the killing of Shambuka by Sri Rama leaves a question mark on the operation of dharma. For the devotee of Sri Rama, the oft quoted lines of Sri Sathya Sai Baba apply: "for the believer no explanation is necessary, for the sceptic no amount of evidence is enough".

Why did Sri Rama Himself carry out the killing, even if we accept that Shambuka had transgressed the laws of the land by carrying out ascetic practices forbidden to people of his caste, resulting in the untimely death of a Brahmin child. We further have to inquire whether Sri Rama is satisfied with this law. A further point that arises is whether Sri Rama had become captive to human fallibilities, manipulated to legislate in favour of Brahmins and others of higher castes- something which probably left Sri Rama unhappy, yet bound by his oath of office. If Shambuka had to undergo a trial for causing the death of the Brahmin's son, it would have been extremely difficult to provide a causal link between his austerities and the death of that child. Sri Rama's mind was also probably preoccupied with these thoughts as he approached Shambuka suspended upside down, face downwards, doing penance to achieve the status of Indra.

Upon enquiry Shambuka tersely stated that he was doing penance for personal advancement, although Sri Rama spoke to him with all the courtesies. Sri Rama's subsequent act of decapitating Shambuka and the arrival of the gods including Agni and Indra were simultaneous. The gods heaped praise on Sri Rama for his valorous act, and offered Him a boon. Sri Rama asked that the Brahmin child be brought to life, since he died untimely "through my misdeeds" (Valmiki Uttarakanda 76.11). Two facets of this statement of Rama require reflection: He talks about "my misdeeds" (mamapcharad) being responsible for the child's death: He also asks for a boon for the restoration of life to the child; not relying on an automatic revivification pursuant to the death of Shambuka. But the gods convince Rama that the child regained life at the moment he killed Shambuka. The gods then talk about Agastya and his twelve year long penance of sleeping on water, and proceed to felicitate Agastya. When left alone with him, Agastya also praises Sri Rama for having killed Shambuka, and acknowledges Sri Rama as Narayana. Shambuka must have been a very powerful person to contend with, in view of the fact that Sri Rama is praised for killing him. As stated above this episode of the Ramayana raises many questions. An explanation is required for the fact that Rama, the mighty Emperor, and not one of his officials, carried out the execution of Shambuka. He acted as God and took the life He had given to Shambuka. This is reinforced by Agastya's hailing Him as Narayana. The killing of Shambuka demonstrates the "complexity of moral decisions in life without which the epic would have been puerile and artistically unsatisfactory" (Bhattacharji 2003: 138).

The banishment of Sita is not discussed in Tulsidas's Ramcharitmanas, but it is in his Gitavali, Vinaypatrika and Dohavali as well as Valmiki Ramayana. Nevertheless, Valmiki, Sri Sathya Sai Baba and some other Ramayanas state that the banishment of Sita was done according to a Divine Plan known to her and Sri Rama. Vyas (2005: 53) asks us to consider these deeper metaphysical features, and not be a slave to a dwarf mentality, unwilling to accept that Sita did go to the forest, as the unfolding of a Cosmic Plan. Vyas says:

The truth is that where this incident has given supreme wholeness to her (Sita's) character and accorded her the highest dignity as a woman; it also proved Sri Rama to be the most exemplary king, supreme sacrificer, monogamist and spiritually immersed personality. People must see sacrifice as something glorious, not tainted. Sri Rama had said that he would feel no pain to sacrifice even Sita in the line of duty (Vyas 2005: 53).

Equivocal situations exist in Ramayana; the moral choice itself is equivocal (Bhattacharji 2003: 138). Whatever we may decide about questioning the Ramayana, it is inevitable that the values of the Ramayana will come to the forefront. One probably needs to be a Rama to be the Protagonist of an epic blessed to be on the lips of men "as long as the mountains stand and rivers flow".

Bibliography

Arun, Rajendra. (2009) *Taju Sansay Bhaju Ram*, Delhi: Prabhat Paperbacks.

Bhattacharji, Sukumari. (2003) Validity of the Ramayana Values, in Vivekananda Kendra Patrika (Epic Imprints), Vol. 32, No.1, Chennai: Vivekananda Kendra Prakashan Trust.

Hess, Linda. (2001) "Lovers' Doubts: Questioning of the Tulsi Ramayan" in Richman, P – Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Jain, Mahendrakumar. (1959) *Kabir Dohavali*, Madras: Dakshin Bharat Hindi Prachar Sabha.

Kanungo, G B. (1995) *Satya Ramayan*, New Delhi: Hindi Book Centre.

Katre, Dinkar Vithal. (2005) Many Ramayanas, So Many Ramas in Goswami, M & Bharali, B (ed.) *The Ramayana: Life and Culture,* Guwahati: Asom Kalatirtha.

Kesari, A & Devicharan "Devesh" (ed.) (1984) Ramayana Ka Vastavik Swarup, Delhi, Vaidika Anusandhana Samiti (Regd), Lajpatnagar.

McFie, J M. (1930) *The Ramayana of Tulsidas or The Bible of North India,* London, T & T Clark.

Nagar, Amrit Lal. (1992) Manas Ka Hans, New Delhi: Rajpal & Sons.

Rambhachan, A. (2002) "Is the RamayanaTrue? Re-envisioning the Meaning & Relevance of a Sacred Text", (Keynote Address – 18th International Ramayana Conference 7/09/2002), Minnesota, St Olaf College- Dept. of Religion.

Richman, Paula. (2001) *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Sai Baba. (Undated) *Rama Katha Rasa Vahini I & II, Prasanthi Nilayam*, Sri Sathya Sai Books & Publications Trust.

Sen, Amartya. (2006) *The Argumentative Indian*, London: Penguin Books.

Shastri, Acharya Gangasharan. (1989) *Bijak Tika Manorama*, Varanasi: Kabir Vani Prakashan Kendra.

Shemesh, Jack. (1993) *When God Walks the Earth*, Bangalore, Jack Shemesh.

Shukla, Janardana Dutta. (1973) *Manas Chatusshati*, Muzaffarnagar: Tulsi Jayanti Samiti.

Singh, Shukdev: (1987) Vivekdas (ed. Kabir Sahitya ki Prasangikta), Varanasi, Kabir Vani Prakashan Kendra.

Singh, Tribhuwan. (1976) *Tulsi Sandarbha Aur Samiksha*, Varanasi: Tulsi Shodh Sansthan.

Sinha, Krishna Nandan. (1996) *Sai Baba: The Rose Fire of Heaven*, New Delhi: Sterling Paper Backs.

Sitaram, R. (1998) “The Rise of Bhakti Literature in the Hindi Language in the Medieval Era” in ‘*Nidan*’ 10.

Tulsidas, Goswami. (1968) *Ramcharitmanas*, Gorakhpur: Gita Press.

Valmiki. (2001) *Srimad Valmiki-Ramayana*, Gorakhpur: Gita Press.

Vyasa. (1995) *Srimad Bhagavad Gita*, Gorakhpur: Gita Press.

Vyas, LP. (2005) Vishwa Hindi Darshan, (27)3, Delhi: Vishwa Sahitya Sanskriti Sansthan.

The Hare Krishnas in Durban: Transmitting Religious Ideas in a Modern City

P. Pratap Kumar
School of Religion,
University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

Introduction

Conventional methods of transmitting religious ideas require a number of social factors. An extended family structure, social and cultural homogeneity and religious institutional structures are some of the necessary factors to ensure a sustained transmission of religious ideas from one generation to the next. When such support structures fail to survive in a modern society, especially in the context of migrations and re-settlements in places far away from their original homeland, new strategies need to be invented.

I turn my attention to the most ordinary religious event that occurs every year in the city of Durban in KwaZulu Natal with a great deal of fanfare, the *Festival of Chariots*. My intention is to see how religious ideas are played out in the course of organized and religiously intended festivals and ceremonies, and how they shape or reshape the social and cultural landscape. It is also my intention to find out if the transmission of religious ideas is linked to matters other than spiritual or religious. Since the transmission of religious ideas is seen as serving religious growth, my concern is whether religious acts are also about organizing ones social and cultural world.

Much research already exists concerning the role of religion in social and cultural organization. I, therefore, want to concern myself with the aspect of the implications of the social and cultural role of religion. Put differently, what happens when the transmission of religious ideas is prohibited or hampered by external forces; and what do people do to ensure their religious ideas are transmitted without hindrance? Why is it that, religious processions which are used as vehicles of religious ideas, more often than not inaugurated by secular or civil authorities? There is certainly no special salvific gain for religious people to have their acts inaugurated or even attended by civil authorities. So, why then is their presence needed at a seemingly religious act? Let me turn to the procession itself.

Background to Festival of Chariots

The city of Durban has a strong population of Hindus (estimated around 600 000) who are more or less 5th generation immigrants. They consider themselves South Africans first and Indians second. However, their Hindu identity seems very strong attested by the number of Hindu temples and shrines that have been built during the last century and a half throughout South Africa. The festivals and ceremonies associated with many local temples in Durban alone can testify to their presence. Many of those festivals have even acquired the status of being recognized by the city for tourism purposes. The Festival of Chariots is certainly one of them.

What began in the 16th century Bengal as Caitanya movement and became popularized by Swami Prabhupada in the modern West as the Hare Krishna movement (officially known as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness—ISKCON) arrived in South Africa in the early 1970s. Soon, the followers established a vibrant following throughout the country and especially in Durban. In the 1980s they built a temple on a massive scale in the Indian township of Chatsworth. It gradually became the centre of their activities and the national headquarters. In the last 18 years the followers have begun an innovative way to spread their message in Durban. A festival of chariots, akin to the one that is held in India in the famous temple town of Puri, is held every year on the beachfront in

Durban. It was held initially during the Christmas time and was changed to the Easter season since 1999 (Kumar 2000: 182). The festival received tremendous support from both, the local public as well as the municipal authorities and the tourism authorities. The local print media profiles it as a major tourism event. Hundreds of wealthy devotees offer help both in kind and in cash to organize the event.

The selection of the beach front during the Easter season beginning on Good Friday is interesting. The beach front becomes the hive of many sporting activities sponsored by a major cell phone industry in the country. The television coverage on these events is extensive. Right in the middle of these 'material' activities, the ISKCON locates its festival of chariots in an effort to bring to people what they call Krishna Consciousness. It boldly advertises on the bill boards, the focus of their festival. On the one banner is printed-Yoga, Mantra, Astrology and philosophy. On the other side of banner it states-food, fashion, Vedic art and meditation. The classical and the ancient on the one side, the modern and contemporary on the other side seem to indicate their ability to make themselves relevant to the contemporary society. It is a blend that reflects in their opening dance performances which includes the classical Indian dance form with the modern fusion dance and the African rhythm. Various stalls are set up to cover a range of activities from spiritual aspects to material products-stalls for meditation, arts on Krishna, question and answer sessions, devotional music stall, stalls for food and drinks, eastern wear (dress), gifts and souvenirs, Krishna Seva stall (service to Krishna) and free food service-all of these are seemingly put together to produce a heightened consciousness of Krishna. The sacred chant of "Hare Krishna and Hare Rama" is boldly announced on the banners at the entrance and it is chanted continuously to the accompanying music relayed on public address system.

The festival begins on Good Friday evening with the gathering of some of the high ranking monks of ISKCON from around the world. Their spiritual addresses are followed by a politician's (the local Minister of Arts and Culture, see picture 6) speech in which he strongly identifies himself as a follower of the movement. Amidst various activities and celebrations, the crowds that are continuously 'pouring' in are entertained. Some are hard core devotees, some are visitors, some are tourists who happen to be on the beach and some are homeless people who come for the sake of free food. Everyone is encouraged to partake in the free food offered in the name of Krishna.

On the following Saturday, the procession carrying the chariot of Krishna begins at the City Hall with the City Manger opening the event. The procession's route is marked out and the local police and the traffic department are on hand to ensure that the procession proceeds smoothly. The chariot is decorated with the symbols associated with Krishna worship and the image of Swami Prabhupada is seated in the chariot. Singers and dancers accompanied by hundreds of devotees pull the chariot along the streets of the city in the demarcated route. Ahead of the main chariot is a smaller cart carrying the image of Lord Chaitanya, who began the movement of Krishna devotion in Bengal back in the 16th century.

The chariot eventually is carried to the main festival location on the beach front where various activities, such as singing the music of the Hare Krishnas, sale of books and food, free distribution of food (*prasad*). On the stage the main programme of activities are conducted with speeches and dance programmes. These programmes continue through the 3 days beginning from Good Friday to Easter Sunday. It is attended not only by the high ranking monks of the ISKCON from around the world, but also by many local dignitaries including politicians. The highlight of the inauguration of the festival is the speech by the local minister of Arts and Culture.

Setting the Festival Boundaries in the Centre of City

The festival procession from the City Hall to the beach front passing through the centre of town accompanied by not only the Hare Krishna monks and devotees singing the sacred chants, but also the many local civic authorities and on-lookers and tourists that happen to be there creates an interesting scenario for our analysis. One way to interpret the route map of the festival is to suggest that the festival of chariot's procession turns the ordinary centre of city into a sacred route through which devotees pass through to reach the festival destination where sacred acts are performed by the monks to celebrate the salvific acts of Krishna and his consort Radha. It is meant to heighten the consciousness of Krishna. In the case of the festival processions in Norway, Jacobsen (2006) suggested that such processions in the diaspora locations indeed create new sacred spaces challenging the old notions of sacred places being fixed permanently in the land of its origin.

One of the common explanations of the function of Hindu processions in India is that they are statements of devotion that make a claim on territory, the gods circle their realm, which also means that the site of the procession is the borderline of their area and is public space that no single deity can claim. In the diaspora, certainly the processions do make sacred the larger surroundings of the temple. But they also raise interesting questions about territorial claims and public space in pluralistic societies. In the diaspora in Norway, processions make Norwegian space Hindu and Hinduism a Norwegian religion in particular ways. (Jacobsen 2006: 165)

In other words, sacred space may be construed as dynamic and ever changing. This may apply to the Durban festival of chariots as well. Thus, the ordinary streets in the city centre are turned into sacred route for the festival of chariots to proceed. The performance of the city manager in inaugurating the procession is indeed a sacred act turning him into the role of ritual officiant. In other words, the sacred steps into the secular path halting the ordinary life while the festival procession moves forward uninterrupted. For this uninterrupted sacred procession to continue, the city manager, the local police and all the other officials involved temporarily function as ritual officiants, albeit without being ritually installed for the purpose.

Nevertheless, such sacralization of the mundane and the secular is only one of the ways to provide religious explanations of the social transformations that happen during such events. Seen from a different perspective, the festival itself seems to have been transformed into a public event that had to conform to secular norms. By locating it at the beach front, the festival officials have allowed it to become an event that has many secular roles to perform. To begin with, it creates a contrast between the ordinary beach activities such as surfing and other water sports and the idealized spiritual activities that the devotees at the festival perform, such as singing of sacred chants in an effort to generate a sense of Krishna consciousness. The carrying of the procession does require specific permission of civic authorities such as the city manager, the local police and the consent of the local businesses for the temporary disruption that it causes to their business. Of course, the civic authorities et al., give their permission or consent in view of the larger benefit that it brings to the city in the form of increased number of tourists and business opportunities. Approximately more than a 100 000 people pass through the festival arena during the three day period. The festival is participated by not only devotees and monks but ordinary tourists, and other beach goers who happen to be on the beach and even partake of the food that is offered by the festival organizers as sacred food (*prasad*). Feeding the poor may have a religious intention but it certainly helps the local homeless people during the three days of the festival. While the festival organizers may claim that more than 100 000 people have attended their festival, it is hard to ignore the fact that many of them are there for various other reasons than what the organizers anticipated, viz., to gain Krishna consciousness. Instead, some are there, especially the homeless, to have some food, and others are there to enjoy the cultural dances and other entertainment activities and a chance to buy eastern garments and to eat vegetarian pizza. The speeches are not only intended to deliver spiritual messages, but equally importantly to emphasize the good work that the ISKCON as an organization is doing in the city and why it deserves the support of the public.

Books, Food and Feeding the Poor

Most visible to anyone who is present at the festival venue is the roaring business that goes on in the book stalls and the food stalls and the enormous lines of people waiting to receive free food that is offered by the organization as part of Krishna's *prasad*. The book store is filled with literature mostly produced by Swami Prabhupada in his life time. The most popular one is his translation of the Gita. Glossy covered books and most persuasive sales women do appeal to the devotees who are willing to buy with a view of supporting the organization. While most are happy to browse, a handful of devotees do purchase the easy to understand literature produced by the ISKCON monks. They are certainly a very useful tool to transmit their ideas to the public, most of who are already seemingly in consort with those messages. ISKCON has its own publishing industry that publishes and distributes its literature throughout the world. It raises a huge amount of funding to sustain its various activities through a large network of international organizations.

Govinda's restaurant of ISKCON is busy with the sale of vegetarian snacks, pizzas, and meals cooked according to the rules and recipes approved by the ISKCON spiritual practice. Most of these were personally approved by Swami Prabhupada-including the restrictions such as not eating of garlic and onion. Food is an important aspect of the ISKCON spiritual practice and certainly dominates their life style. When an individual converts to the ISKCON practice, they are initially encouraged to give up non-vegetarian foods and once they are initiated into the tradition, they are required to avoid eating certain foods during certain seasons. All of these food related restrictions set them apart from the rest of the society including even from many Hindus who eat non-vegetarian foods. It is certainly one thing that strikes as an important phenomenon at the festival of chariots.

The feeding of the poor, known as Food for Life Programme, is another important phenomenon that one notices at the festival. It is food offered to Krishna and distributed to people as spiritual nourishment. Although intended for the poor, almost all the visitors to the festival do take part in the free meal. Whether they believe in the ISKCON's religious views or not, the people who participate in the communal meal certainly appreciate it as it is tasty and free! The books and the food are a most important means of transmitting ISKCON religious ideas. They are certainly very effective in drawing large crowds to the venue.

Music, Bhajans and Discourses

The Hare Krishnas are well known for their chantings to the tune of music on the street corners of the city centre. Since the successful organization of the festival of chariots, the focus seems to have shifted from street corners to the annual festival event where their special genre of music and *bhajans* are performed. It certainly creates the atmosphere for the festival and attracts crowds to gather around the stage where the performances are held. While such music and *bhajans* generally attract devotees and non-devotees alike, the more seriously inclined attend the special discourses delivered by specialists and monks who are more direct about the

ISKCON's core message. These are specially structured to instruct lay devotees and the new comers in the teachings of Swami Prabhupada and the message of Krishna consciousness.

Sacralizing and Secularizing of the Festival

To suggest that the ISKCON as an organization is only concerned about the spiritual message that they wish to spread through the festival activities is to ignore their obvious strategic plan to place their organization at the centre of Durban's social and cultural life. Spreading the message of any religious organization is not only driven by its spiritual quest but equally importantly by its desire to increase the membership and the following and a commitment to their doctrines and rituals. As historians and social scientists we do not have any way 'knowing' the benefits of these doctrines beyond our world, but we certainly can see the social and cultural benefits to both the followers and the organizations concerned. Whether it is the creation of their identity or establishing their organizational strength in the face of other religions and denominations, they are certainly the most visible goals of religious institutions that we can study. In the case of ISKCON, they certainly became a very successful organization since they had begun the festival of chariots 18 years ago. Compared with the other Hindu organizations, they are certainly most visible and popular, and with well-oiled machinery their fundraising is one of the most efficient ones. From the sale of their books to securing sponsorships for their ritual activities-all the fundraising activities demonstrate the organization's social strengths. Whether they are in spiritual business or some other secular pursuit, the challenges for them to survive as an organization are the same. Their internal politics and power strategies conjure up an organization's will to survive in a modern world.

One then has to pay close attention to not only their stated spiritual goals but also the events as they unfold at the festival. Notice, for instance, the contrasting slogans that are highlighted on the banners-on one side a banner highlights the four goals of the festival, viz., food, fashion, Vedic art and meditation; on the other side another banner highlights the more spiritual ideals of the festival, viz., yoga, mantra, astrology and philosophy. The festival seems to cater to both the material and the spiritual needs of people. When such efforts are made to combine the material and the spiritual, our explanations of the festival of chariots must take into account both the aspects. Nevertheless, whether or not the spiritual goals have been achieved is hard to tell as they are not available to us as scholars for our scrutiny. But the material goals can be quite obviously studied as they are observable by us. Given the popularity they have achieved in Durban city, the ISKCON has certainly become well established and their identity as a unique organization with a unique philosophy of life is also well known. The *sari* clad women and *dhoti* wearing men with cymbals in their hands are hard to be ignored in a procession that goes through the centre of the city.

They might be spreading their unique message of Krishna consciousness. But it is hard to miss the markings of Indian cultural symbols in the form of Indian dress, music, the images of idols, the chariots decked with garlands of marigold and so on. For in the eyes of ordinary people that is what makes an impact. It is the spectacle of cultural images that catch the attention of the person on the beach; it is the entertaining dances on the stage that draws the crowds; it is the Indian *briyani* and thick lentil soup and the sweet *suji* (made of fine wheat grain) that seems to bring in streams of people to enjoy and be entertained. There is the hope among the organizers and the monks that at least a handful of those who come would be transformed and become interested in the ISKCON message. Thus, the festival might have been meant to change the hearts and minds of thousands of Durbanites and scores of tourists that visit the beach during Easter season, but whether or not a person really finds liberation through these events is hard to tell.

What is available for our scrutiny is the evidence before us, viz., how many are listening to the discourses and how many are there to watch the spectacle and while they are at it have a plate of good vegetarian meal. The long term impact of a sustained increase in the following of the Hare Krishnas is certainly a testimony to their growth as a community in Durban. This is measurable both from their regular membership as well as informal attendance at the temple or at the festival of chariots.[xxviii]

Given the amount of time and resources invested in the festival of chariots by the ISKCON, it is understandable that they wish to create awareness about their religious beliefs and thereby increase their following. Whether this amounts to their spiritual quest or not, it certainly enables their organization to grow in numbers and in the last couple of decades it has grown significantly in their presence in Durban. This is evident from the large number of sponsorships and assistance in human and other material resources from the local Indian community.

Numbers Matter for Religious Organizations

From a one man's journey to the West, the ISKCON has become a massive human organization with substantially large financial resources to reckon with. By their regular chanting campaigns throughout the world they have made substantial gains in the number of followers. The use of festival of chariots has certainly become an important means to enhance both social popularity and also to increase the number of their following in Durban. They do not use the strategy of standing in street corners and singing or chanting the name of Krishna any more, but coupled with occasional processions in different parts of Durban such as Phoenix and Chatsworth areas where there are also temples, they have settled with the festival of chariots as an important means to mobilize the local population to give them social support for their existence. In this effort, what is important is that they have managed to enlist even the local civic authorities and politicians. And the authorities have given them their religious platform to come and address their religious gathering at the festival. Of course, the politicians gain popularity too by coming to address a religious gathering as there is a ready made audience for their political rhetoric. They make great use of such occasions to inform the audience about what their political organization is doing for their well-being. This symbiosis is important between the politicians who give protection to cultural and religious institutions in lieu of their support at the polling booths and religious organizations that need such support for their organizational success in spreading their religious message.[xxviii] This is a classic strategy in society that the social scientists have identified as the mutual support that exists between the king and the priest, state and the church, religious and the secular.[xxviii]

For this classic strategy to work, what seems to matter is the number of followers that a religious organization can muster in order to be socially and politically relevant or important. Whether or not a religious organization openly supports a political organization, there exists an expectation on the part of both to be useful to each other. The fact that they had invited the political leader who heads the Minority Front party which is exclusively Indian in its membership gives away the reason why they had given him the platform to speak. Minority Front party's main concern has been the protection of Indian cultural and social rights. It is in this that the ISKCON seems to find a mutual friend as they need someone to back their religious organizational network.

Increasing the number of followers and keeping good contact with the relevant politicians and civic authorities is a trusted strategy for support in times of social and religious conflict. ISKCON has not yet faced a serious social or religious conflict in Durban, but they did elsewhere in UK and other European cities. There were certainly minor stand-offs between the ISKCON and some

Pentecostal Churches in the predominantly lower middle class Indian township of Phoenix. A few years ago I witnessed in the Phoenix area, when the Hare Krishna festival procession was going through the centre of the township, the local Pentecostal church also took out a procession in the opposite direction and the two passed each other in the town centre with both sides loudly singing or chanting their respective religious songs. The recent civil case brought by a local Church leader against the Durban city council alleging discrimination that the city council gave away the land to a local Hindu temple's use when the church has been using it for many years and has been paying rent to the council,[xxviii] is cause for concern between religious institutions about the potential for religious conflict in Durban. As it is the Christian and Muslim denominations have been constantly criticized by Hindu organizations for their conversion strategies and the inroads that they have made in the Hindu community. The fact that the Hare Krishnas have a vigorous campaign strategy to spread their religious message through regular temple and community activities such as Food for Life programme is certainly something that the Christian and the Islamic organizations take note of. The presence of white and African followers in ISKCON is an important leverage to attract non-Indian followers to their religious organization. In addition to a white Hare Krishna monk as the head of the Durban temple, there is a good presence of African-American monks and local African young followers at the temple. Notwithstanding their religious work, these are certainly important noticeable strategies for the successful survival of ISKCON as an important religious organization.

Why the Hare Krishnas Matter in Durban

Generally in South Africa (and this applies naturally to Durban city) Christians are considered to be in majority. With rise of Pentecostalism among the Indian community in recent years, there is a general fear among the Hindus that more and more of their followers are being converted to Christianity. Christian preachers often come under attack by Hindu religious leaders for their aggressive conversion campaign. Added to this is the role played by the Islamic Propagation Centre in Durban in distributing controversial videos denigrating Hinduism. With the general decline of Hindu society's economic status in many predominantly Indian townships such as Chatsworth, Merebank, Phoenix, Verulam and Tongaat, Hindu leaders fear that the economic needs of the people coupled with many social problems such as drugs, alcohol and family violence might lead them to fall prey to the attractive promises by the Christian preachers and Islamic organizations. Whether or not there is substance to these fears, in the face of significant growth in the Pentecostal Christianity the Hindu reactions are of significance. Already many Hindu organizations such as the Divine Life Society, the Ramakrishna Centre, the Arya Pratinidhi Sabha and many others in Durban have programmes for poverty alleviation among African communities. Both the general public and the Hindu religious organizations seem to function under the assumption that poverty is more prevalent among the African communities, perhaps neglecting the Indian poor in their very neighbourhood. No wonder, the Pentecostal preachers have moved in to make a 'difference'. The Hare Krishnas, though they certainly take their Food for Life Programme to the predominantly African populations, their religious activities are so vigorously organized to cater to the Indian community that they make a strong presence among the Indians and as such can be seen as a force to combat conversion problem within the Hindu community. By claiming greater orthodoxy when compared to the other Hindu organizations, the Hare Krishnas are able to convince average lay Hindus that their branch of Hinduism is a better option even compared to other Hindu organizations. Especially with their emphasis on vegetarian food and strict life style, they tend to appeal to many Hindus. Even though the other neo-Hindu organizations also emphasize vegetarianism, the ISKCON campaign on vegetarianism is certainly more aggressive. They are particularly successful among the youth with their weekly visits to local university campuses where they regularly organize discourses and religious classes and distribute food freely to students. Given the competition that exists both within the Hindu fold as well as in the Indian community in general, the Hare Krishnas have for the last couple of decades mattered in a serious way in that they have managed to make Hinduism attractive both philosophically as well as ritualistically. Their theory of salvation and their philosophy of Krishna consciousness and their ability to appropriate structures and methods of operation makes them far more successful and appealing to the Indian community and perhaps to a certain extent to other communities as well. Their monks are better educated in their religious teachings and are able to effectively covey their message and are also able to debate on controversial issues whether within the Hindu society or outside. They are more frequently invited to debates on religious issues on television talk shows. They have much more categorical views than their counterparts in other Hindu organizations. Perhaps many non-Hindus know about them better than the other Hindu organizations. All of these features make them a very important force within the Hindu society and as such they are able to make themselves matter within the larger society.

From the profile that I have provided here of the Hare Krishnas it is clear that not only they matter but it appears that religion itself matters in society. Not necessarily because religion has provided us with all the answers, but very importantly it has served an important function in that it helps shape ones social and cultural identity and at the same time provides hope in times of crisis. Above all, it is perhaps the single most force that can either build or destroy a society's fabric simply because its adherents attach so much trans-empirical importance to it. There is no doubt in the mind of any serious follower of ISKCON that their scheme or theory of salvation is far more superior to that of any other one. With such strong conviction about their religious belief, it has the potential for triggering a conflict. Fortunately, their general indifference to material goals of life has made them socially indifferent despite their very successful religious organization. In other words, their organizational success is by no means seen as a threat to any other community and this I would attribute to their outward monk like appearance with Indian clothing, heads shaven with a tuft of hair and so on. But appearances could be deceptive. Given their strong convictions about their beliefs, and the uncompromising religious stand that they would take vis a vis other religions and even other denominations within Hinduism, they have the potential to stand up to any external threat to their religious identity. Observing the Hare Krishnas, the simplest thing (and yet beset with serious consequences) that one could say in general is that religion is perhaps the only social world view that has the potential to make people to be convinced of its views so strongly, but at the same time it is the only one that bases those convictions on another worldly phenomenon that ordinary people have no access to. It is not so much the convictions that people have that can create problems in social networks, but it is the fact that those convictions are based on something that is not available to public scrutiny. So, does religion matter? Yes, more so in matters of conflicting situations.

In conclusion, it would seem therefore that the ISKCON with its deep conviction about their religious faith might honestly feel that their religious philosophy (Krishna Consciousness) should be spread among all and enable others to follow their path. But this spiritual journey (*yatra*) cannot happen unless they can enlist the secular authorities and popular support. By providing a spiritual message mixed with entertainment, food and other material attractions, they seem to have a successful recipe to attract outsiders in to their fold. The positioning of the two banners at the entrance of the festival grounds, with their double message viz., the material goals and the spiritual goals, is not without intention. The festival of chariots that moves through the city centre not only has a sacralizing effect but also turns the festival into a secular celebration. It is in their ability to garner the support of the civic society that they find the festival of chariots making an impact on the society at large. It is a strategy that has worked for them and seems to be a time-tested means to spread Krishna Consciousness.

Bibliography

Bruce, Steve. (1992) *Religion and Modernization.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Davie, Grace. (2000) *Religion in Modern Europe: A Memory Mutates.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jacobsen, K. A (2006). "Hindu Processions, Diaspora and Religious Pluralism" in *Religious Pluralism in the Diaspora*, edited by P. Pratap Kumar, Leiden: Brill, pp. 163-174.

Kumar, P. Pratap. (2000) *Hindus in South Africa: Their Traditions and Beliefs.* Durban: University of Durban-Westville.

Martikainen, Tuomas (2006). "Immigrant Settlement and Religious Organisation: The Case of Finland" in *Religious Pluralism in the Diaspora*, edited by P. Pratap Kumar, Leiden: Brill, pp. 335-352.

Martin, David. (1978) *A General Theory of Secularisation*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1978.

Martin, David. (1995) "Sociology, Religion and Secularization: an Orientation" in *Religion*, 25: 295-303.

Mines, Mattison and Vijaya Lakshmi Gourishankar, "Individuality, Achievement and the Institutional Big-man: Putting the Individual Back into Conceptualisations of Indian Society" unpublished essay, Santa Barbara: University of California.

Smith, Brian K (1994). *Classifying the Universe: the Ancient Indian Varna System and the Origins of Caste*. Oxford University Press.

The Rāmlīla/Ramdilla[xxviii] Jhandi

Indrani Rāmpersad
University of Trinidad and Tobago,
Trinidad

Rāmlīla/Rāmdilla

Rāmlīla, also spelt as Rāmleela, is also pronounced as Rāmdilla – a vernacular term which has come to signify the indentured diasporic experience, for example, of rupture, change, reconstruction and new realities. Rāmlīla is traditionally a ten-day ritual folk performance enacting the major events in the life of Śri Rām and as told in the Rāmcharitmānas. In Trinidad, the traditional style of performance is the open air or maidan style, though in recent years the manch or stage style is making an appearance.

Rāmlīla performers are traditionally bhaktā-s and amateurs who perform with "faith" or "bhakti" rather than "professional skills". The traditional audiences come to "hear" the holy verses of the text, and "see" and "get Darshan[xxviii]" from the deities. This ten-day performance is held during the nine-day Nawrātri Festival in Sept/October, and on the tenth day of Vijaya Dashami, the effigy of Rawan is burnt, culminating in an epiphanic perception for many. This performance is also equated with a Mahā-Yajña[xxviii] and used to be an important pilgrimage event for indentured Indians who walked miles, across plantation estates, to participate in this event, once per year.

The Jhandi

The Jhandi has evolved as a very visible and strong symbol of Indian identity in the West India diaspora and is central to Puja. It is a yantra of protection and the axis mundi that anchors "religious man" (Eliade 1959:12) in his sacred reality, sacred center, and cosmos. It is a ritually consecrated bamboo pole with a brightly colored flag, (mostly triangular, rarely square) flying atop; usually with the picture or line drawing of the devata or devi that was worshipped; sometimes containing other decorative and auspicious marks; with a langote[xxviii] tied at the fifth node from the base of the bamboo. The Jhandi is ritually planted in the earth in the Northeast corner of the boundary of the homestead, or sometimes the East, after Puja. This sacred spot of the jhandī-s is simply referred to as "by the jhandī-s;" it is the spot where a portable bedi[xxviii] is sometimes located after use. Sacred trees, plants etc are located here, and small household mandir-s usually evolves over time, in this space. This spot of the Jhandī-s may therefore appropriately be called the "Jhandi Bedi."

The Jhandi has the powers of a yantra with the tantric powers for healing, harmony, and protection from the three-fold sufferings – *adhyatmic* (suffering that affects the body and mind), *adhibhautic* (suffering caused by other living beings) and *adhidaivic* (suffering caused by tangible and intangible forces in nature).[xxviii]

It is also the axis mundi that reanimates Mt Meru, the mythical center of the earth, connecting it with earth, the upper regions and the lower regions. It helps to locate the individual in his earthly space within the cosmos.

It seems that the jhandi is a cognate of the ancient Vedic Yūpa or sacrificial pole, the Dhwaj associated with Indra and Śiva (Woodward 2006:95), and the Jarjara pole of the performance area (Lidova 1996: Ch 1).

The Jhandi is primarily a unique signifier of indentured diasporic identity and associated with deep religious rituals. In the Rāmlīla Ground[xxviii] in the West Indies, the jhandi continues its association with Puja and Yajña.

On the Rāmlīla Ground, look for the tallest bamboo pole with a flag flying from it and it is likely to be the ritually installed Jhandi. The area immediately surrounding the Jhandi is the bedi which is located either on the ground, or on a raised \wooden platform. Here will be located sacred objects of worship like the Rāmcharitmānas, holy pictures and murtis[xxviii]. This bedi might be in the middle of the Ground or sometimes in the East or North East. Performers circumambulate[xxviii] this bedi and Jhandi during the daily Puja and arti rite to begin and end the Lila. This circumambulation is still known by a few elders as "parivartan", "parikrama" and "pradakshina" but the majority now speak of it as "making a rounds."[xxviii]

The Jhandi in West Indian diasporic space

Driving, especially through the rural areas of Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname, one cannot help but marvel at the sight of multicolored jhandī-s in all stages of existence – some of freshly cut bamboo poles showing green sprigs atop and with brightly colored cotton cloth flags, not yet worn out by nature; some whose poles are now brown, flying color-faded flags with fading pictures or drawings; some with bending bamboo poles and worn flags on their way down to join Mother earth[xxviii] There are also the few tall jhandī-s with the entire length of the bamboo covered in white cotton cloth and flying a white flag – the signature of the Kabir Panth Hindu sect.[xxviii] In Trinidad one is also likely to see very large square flags in the colors white, green, yellow and brown, flying on poles but these are from the African traditional religion of Orisha[xxviii] and are located at their worship centers. They, like Jhandī-s, represent divinities, but unlike jhandī-s they are not planted after a ceremony like a Puja.

It is interesting that in the West Indies and the West Indian diaspora in New York and Europe that descendants of indentured Indians (who call themselves "Indians" instead of the hyphenated titles given by academics like "East Indians" or "Indo-Trinidadians) refer to "Puja" by other words like "wuk/work,"[xxviii] "Jhandi"[xxviii] and "prayers."[xxviii]

In Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, if the pandit-s perform pujā-s at homes, then jhandī-s are planted in front of the house and preserved for one year.[xxviii] In Trinidad, Hindu families had at least one annual Puja which usually took place on a Saturday (Vertovec, 2000:114) and this is when the Jhandi is 'reactivated'.

While, in India[xxviii], jhandī-s are found prominently at crossroads, mandirs and in the yards of a few homes just as they are in Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname, they are not as ubiquitous and colorful as we find in the West Indies. Here, the Jhandi has become a unique signifier of Hindu identity – social and spiritual.[xxviii]For the indentured Indians re-locating the "self" in West Indian space, the Rāmlīla space mapped the geography of India with its grand narrative of the Rāmcharitmānas, providing a liminal space of healing and resolution.
The first jhandī-s could very well have been planted in Trinidad as early as the first year of arrival because Brahmins[xxviii] were present, yajmān-s[xxviii] were present, and there was the need for the jahajee, as "religious man" (Eliade 1959) to live in consecrated space. The sanctifying of space through Pujā-s and Jhandī-s is an annual ritual in Hindu folk culture back in UP/Bihar as it is here in the West Indies.

The first ritual street procession of Hosay in December 1846[xxviii], indicates an early expression of this "religious self,"

claim to cultural space, community spirit, and organizational skills. It is not untenable, therefore, that the indentured Indians would have wanted to sanctify their space and establish their sacred realities and channels for access to sacred power, as soon as they entered the then alien space of Trinidad, given the trauma of their journey and the whole chaotic quality of their new and alien space.
While the barrack[xxviii] space would have been borrowed space, the Indians would have still consecrated it because "religious man" needs to live in consecrated space and establish his spiritual identity.

Once they left the barracks for new settlements, this was opportunity for further consolidation of identity. This was new (not "bounded"[xxviii] space) that they now owned and where they were free, for the first time in their indentureship. Many for the first time in their lives would own land – but this was not just land, it was Mother Earth or Dharti Mata.[xxviii]

Jhandī-s would flourish as Indian communities took root, as they acquired land and built homes, and as they became more economically stable – all factors facilitating the unique evolution of the Jhandi as West Indian identity. This stage would have started around 1871 when Indians started new settlements and had more freedom (Vertovec 2000:76).

The Bedi

Puja is performed on a bedi on which miniature Jhandī-s are hoisted. The bedi is earth that has been ritually converted into mandala[xxviii] space where the micro-cosmic, meso-cosmic, and macro-cosmic regions of heaven, earth and temple/body, respectively (Singh 1993:239-250) intersect, where humans and divinities intersect, and wherein healing powers reside.

The bedi is a paradigm of Hindu cosmogony showing how the universe has a center as its navel, spreading out in all directions from that center (Eliade 1959:44). One prayer for installing a Jhandi at the main door of a new home says: *"Here, in this space on Mother Earth, I construct this building which is like the center of the globe and which is the spring of prosperity and river of wealth."*[xxviii] In Trinidad, a red Jhandi is still customarily flown from the middle of the roof of a building under construction, even if the builders no longer understand the meaning.

Traditionally, the bedi was on bare earth that was ritually demarcated into a mandala through abstract, geometric lines. On top of this the pandit would locate a kund or specially constructed receptacle for hawan (making sacred offerings to the Holy Fire or Agni). Today this kund is made of materials available in the West Indies, like aluminum, whereas copper etc are the preferred materials, and specific measurements are largely ignored.

The ancient Vedic hawan kund used to be dug into the earth or built with bricks according to mathematical formulae. The tradition of building a bedi or Yajña kund to specifications is hardly observed nowadays, being replaced by commercial replicas. The structure of the traditional Yajña kund regenerates time with each of the 360 bricks and reanimates Prajapati (the cosmic god who brought about creation, time and space), thereby reinforcing the sanctity of the world (Eliade 1959:74). The hawan kund and the bedi have similar roles and functions in sacralizing space and to some extent, time; this function gets diluted when traditional knowledge is lost, especially in the diasporic situation.

The Maha-Bedi of the ancient Vedic Yajna space (Woodard 2006) is sacred, sacrificial space that is replicated in the open air Rāmlīla Ground. This Ground is consecrated in a ritual called "tying the Ground," equivalent to converting it into a mandala just as the pandit does with the bedi for Puja.

Small jhandī-s are ritually installed on the bedi during Puja, at the end of which a special, tall, Jhandi is hoisted in northeastern or eastern side of the homestead of the yajmān. Since the Rāmlīla Ground is a bedi, the Jhandi will therefore occupy as ritually important a position as it does in Puja. It is helpful now to review the tradition of Puja and Yajña and their relationship to the Jhandi in Trinidad.

Puja, Yajña, and Rāmlīla as Mahā-Yajña

A Puja is ritual worship to a deity in a tangible form and is very popular in bhakti worship. In some parts of the indentured diaspora in the West Indies and its offshoots in New York and Europe, "Puja" is known by the synonyms of "wuk/work,"[xxviii] "Jhandi"[xxviii] and "prayers."[xxviii]

There are as many types of pujā-s, nowadays, as there are deities and the wishes of the yajmān. Individuals choose the type of Puja they wish to perform based on a personal need and the advice of their spiritual advisor (pandiṭ or guru). While there is usually some material goal as the objective, the Puja is geared at creating auspiciousness in time and space so that the material goal might be achieved. Puja is an act of bhakti and propitiation for a desired end or "phal śruti". It entails making ceremonial vows (sankalpa) for fulfilling social needs, giving charity and sharing in ritual meals.[xxviii] Of the several steps in performing a Puja in Trinidad, the hoisting of the Jhandi, at the end, is the culminating event denoting victory to the deity worshipped and victory to the yajmān for successful conduct of the ritual. The connotation of victory with the Jhandi dates back to Vedic times when the Yajur Veda declared that nature portrays the greatness of God much like flags and symbols portray the greatness of earthly kings.[xxviii] Puja is a personal ritual that may be done individually or in conjunction with a pandit. It is usually performed before a murti[xxviii] or picture, using tangible sacred items, but may also be mental.

The Trinidad Yajña, on the other hand, is more of a community event hosted by a main patron or yajmān, and where a Vyas[xxviii] expounds from one of the sacred texts. In this situation, the yajmān-s, are known as "shrotra"[xxviii]. A "ground" Puja is performed in this type of Yajña. This Puja takes place on the ground, lower than the seat of the Vyas, and is performed by a pandit with the yajmān-s or shrotrā-s in attendance. After yajnā-s and pujā-s there is ritual feasting. Whereas pujā-s may be conducted over a few hours, yajnā-s, are customarily conducted over longer periods. In the past they ran from nine to thirty days, nowadays they run from one to nine days. There is an obvious similarity with the Rāmlīla running for ten days.

The concept of the Vedic Yajña incorporates self-sacrifice, surrender and service with the ritual centered on Agni, the sacred Fire, and called agnihotra. The word "hawan" then eclipsed "agnihotra", and was overtaken by the "puja" of the later bhakti period in India. Yajñas are also associated with domestic rites called Mahā Yajñas,[xxviii] but these do not refer to theatre (Lidova 1996:38). The term Mahā-Yajña also refers to a grand Yajña performed on special occasions like a community prayer for peace, rains, etc. It is in the latter sense, that Rāmlīla is called a Mahā-Yajña in Trinidad. In ancient Sanskrit theatre it was called a Naţya Yajña (Mehta 1999:64). The Nāţyaśāstra states, "This pūjā for deities of the stage is similar to the yajna" (Lidova 1996:37; Ch 1).

As a Mahā-Yajña or Nāţya Yajña, it is no surprise that Puja and the Jhandi would have a significant role in the ritual consecration of the Rāmlīla performance space.

In Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname, the Rāmlīla performance begins and ends with a short Puja and arti, daily. A full Puja, on the day before or on the first day of the Lila, consecrates the Ground, treating it just like the Puja bedi, with the hoisting of a Jhandi just like in a domestic Puja. The procedure of circumambulating the Ground, as one does a sacred object like a murti or a mandir, signifies the level of sacredness associated with the Rāmlīla Ground and the activity taking place therein – the Yajña, that it is.

At the start of a Puja or Yajña the yajmān makes a sankalpa or vow that establishes his/her identity and intent in time and space, using detailed cosmic and ritual time, genealogical data[xxviii] and geographical details[xxviii] like Mother Earth, region, name of country, and village that is almost like the virtual experience of a Google Earth search precisely zeroing in on some geographical location.

The raksha[xxviii] or rakhi is an initial rite in puja that has the protective function of a yantra when the pandit blesses it and ties it on the wrist[xxviii] of the yajmān, generating a re-birth in spirituality, a renewal, a re-connection with the source, and a new creation. The Jhandī-s on the Rāmlīla Ground, have a visual and ritual similarity with those of the Nawgraha Puja which it would be helpful to now describe.

Nawgraha Puja

A Nawgraha Puja is performed in all Trinidad pujā-s. Its purpose is to propitiate the nine planets that influence human life. In this puja, nine miniature jhandī-s, are planted on the bedi, recreating the Hindu cosmic layout. Vāhinī Māyawatti[xxviii] shows the relationship between the "grahas", their energies, direction, color and presiding deity. [xxviii]The tallest Jhandi on the bedi is the red[xxviii] one planted in the middle of the bedi. It represents Surya, the Sun,[xxviii] and because of its central positioning it also represents the cosmic pillar, or axis mundi, symbolic of mythical Mount Meru at the center of creation. The sun is also associated with the Surya Dynasty of Sri Rām (incarnation of Viśnu) and other great kings like Harischandra and Bhaghiratha who is said to have brought the Ganga down to earth from Mount Meru.

Additionally, eight smaller jhandī-s surround the perimeter of the bedi, recreating the extent of the cosmos," and completing the paradigmatic model of Hindu cosmogony (Rasmussen 2008). Pictorially, the dozens of the colored flags flying on high bamboo poles on the perimeter of Rāmlīla Ground conjure up images of eight colored Nawgraha jhandī-s on the perimeter of the Puja bedi. Technically, though, they are not Jhandī-s because they are not similarly consecrated. However, they do conjure up some cosmological relevance by demarcating[xxviii] the Ground. During the Rāmlīla period, the Ground has the qualities of a spiritually activated bedi, upon which the Yajña of the Lila takes place. At the end of the Lila, a special Puja is performed for ritually releasing or visarjan of the divinities that were initially welcomed to reside in the Ground at the start of the Lila. This de-sacralizes the Ground returning it to public space and is the final step in any Puja.

Jhandi and Yajñashala or Yajñamandap

Ancient Yajñashalā-s or Yajñamandap-s, are open air structures with raised pillars and a roof, under which Yajña was performed. The structures are decorated with lots of colored flags and flowers which are decorative rather than sacral as in the later evolution of the Puja (Lidova 1996: Ch. 1).
When one enters the Rāmlīla Ground the eye is immediately drawn to the multicolored flags flying on tall poles on the perimeter of the Ground, with a canopy of rows and rows of

small multicolored pennants stringed together and radiating from a central pole in the middle of the Rāmlīla Ground, creating a roof over the Rāmlīla Ground. These pennants[xxviii] were previously made of cotton cloth, like those of the Jhandī-s, but nowadays they are more readily available in plastic, already stringed.[xxviii] Perhaps there is some connection between the open air Rāmlīla performance as Mahā-Yajña and the traditional open air Yajña-mandap as the site of that Yajña.

In today's yajnā-s in Trinidad, it is still customary to plant two consecrated jhandī-s at the entry of the public road that leads to the Yajñamandap, the latter being either in public space or at the home of the yajmān. This roadway is then decorated with multitudes of other unconsecrated jhandī-s much like one sees on the perimeter of the Rāmlīla Ground. Similar flags adorn the public road leading to the Rāmlīla Ground.

The Jhandi in Performance: The Jarjara Pole

The Jarjara pole is a property of the Sanskrit Nāṭya or dramatic performance, symbolizing Indra's banner and weapon for protecting the Nāṭya from rakshasā-s and all obstacles. According to oral tradition, Indra had destroyed the rakshasa-s who came to disrupt the first nāṭya that was performed because they did not like their negative portrayal. The Jarjara remained on the stage throughout the performance and was later presented to the troupe as a gift from Indra. The ceremony for ritually installing the Jarjara pole is called the "Jarjara-moksha" and it marks the start of the performance (Mehta 1999:233-234). The pole is planted in the mythical and actual center of the performance area, which "is identified with the deity Brahma (who stands for totality in the *Nāṭyaśāstra* mythology)" (Baumer and Brandon 1993:53). This center is also called the Brahma mandala. Before the performance starts, the *sūtradhāra* offers flowers at this central point, bows to Brahma and touches the ground three times with his hands (Mehta 1999:234).

One of the sacred objects in the Chau performance of Bihar, Bengal and Orissa is a sanctified bamboo pole with 13 joints.[xxviii] The Jarjara pole was a bamboo pole with five nodes. A white (color of Brahma) cloth covered the first top node, a blue (Rudra) the second node, a yellow (Visnu) the third, a red (Skanda) the fourth, and a variegated cloth for the fifth node [Mehta 1999:233]. Lidova (1996:43-47) makes a connection between the dhvaja or Shiva's banner and the Jarjara pole and sees a relationship between the Jarjara, the Vedic yūpa and the dhwaja. The Trinidad Jhandi seems to be an obvious cognate in this family of axis mundis. In Trinidad, the Jhandi shares the protective function of the Jarjara pole; it is still traditional for a Puja Jhandi to have at least five joints; and there are colored flags flying from the Jhandi poles. The number "five" seems to be significant in this ritual, with some pandits linking it to the five natural elements, which explains the traditional knowledge of allowing a Jhandi to self-erode. The red Hanumān Jhandi is the dominant Jhandi of Rāmlīla Grounds in Trinidad. In the Rāmcharitmānas, Hanumān is the skillful warrior, of whom the rakshasā-s, were scared. His dhwaja flies high as a standard of ancient Indian warfare on the chariot of Krśṇa as he preached the Bhagavad Gīta to Arjuna. In the Rāmlīla Ground, Hanumān replaces Indra as the protector of the performance.

Conclusion

Rāmlīla space and Puja/Yajña space share the similarity of being mandalā-s with the Jhandi as a yantra and axis mundi. The Rāmlīla Jhandi shares much of the esoteric meaning of the Puja Jhandi. It signifies the Rāmlīla performance as a Mahā-Yajña taking place on consecrated ground, a mahā-bedi. The Rāmlīla Jhandi helps people to reconnect with the sacred, annually, and in a public way, re-affirming a social and spiritual identity. In this space, where the memory of India is mapped on to Trinidad soil, the Jhandi stands as a unique indentured diasporic symbol signifying a unique West Indian experience and identity with people struggling to "be themselves" amidst rapid creolization.[xxviii]

The jhandi is a ubiquitous colorful symbol of Indian indentured diasporic identity in the West Indies. Its consecrated bamboo poles fly colorful flags, planted, after puja, on consecrated earth.

The jhandi has a prominent presence in Rāmlīla performance space which is equated with a Mahā-Yajña telling the story of Sri Rām, according to the Rāmcharitmānas.[xxviii]

This tradition came to the West Indies during mid 19th century colonial indentureship. It is today performed in Trinidad, Guyana and Suriname.

This paper explores the deeper meanings of the Puja Jhandi and attempts to show similarities between the Puja Jhandi in ritual space and the Rāmlīla jhandi in sacred performance space.

---

[1] A Puja is ritual worship to a deity in a tangible form and is very popular in bhakti worship. There are daily pujā-s and special pujā-s. Some are performed individually, some community wide. Some are done in homes and mandirs, some in public spaces like the seaside and in the case of Rāmlīla, in community space. In Trinidad the earliest type of puja seems to have been to Hanumān-ji and a red flag on a jhanda was raised in his honor at the end of the puja.

[2] Hanumān-Ji is the devotee par excellence in Hindu culture. Instead of choosing to return with Rām to His heavenly abode, Hanumān-ji expressed his desire to remain on earth as long as

devotees recited the name of Rām . Sita gave him this blessing, making devotion to Hanumān-ji very popular.

[3] [4] Trinidad is part of the two-island nation of Trinidad and Tobago situated in the West Indies or Caribbean. Indentured Indians came here between 1845 and 1917 to meet the labor needs of the British colonial plantocracy.

[5] 'Seeing' in Rāmlīla indicates an aesthetic process that makes the devotee/seer a "rasika' i.e. connoisseur of the art-form with required skills for appreciating the rasā-s or aesthetic emotions of the art-form.

[6] [7] [8] Guyana is situated in the South American continent but shares a common colonial history with the West Indies, and so is historically and culturally considered part of the West Indies. Indentured Indian migrated between 1838 and 1917 to Guyana, then called British Guiana.

[9] Between 1873 and 1916 indentured Indian Indians went to Suriname, under Dutch colonialism.

[10] Nawgraha = the nine cosmic influences on human life on earth.

Bibliography

Baumer Rachel Van M and James R Brandon. (1993) *Sanskrit Drama in Performance.* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.

Brereton, Bridget. (1996) *An Introduction to the History of Trinidad and Tobago.* Oxford: Heinemann Education Publishers.

Eliade, Mircea. (1959) *The Sacred & the Profance.* NY: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.

Gerrit de Kruijf, Johannes. (2006) *Guyana Junction Globalisation, Localisation, and the Production of East Indianness.* Amsterdam : Rozenberg Publishers.

Lidova, Natalia. (1996) (Reprint). *Drama and Ritual of Early Hinduism.* Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited.

Lutgendorf, Philip. (1991) *The Life of a Text, Performing the Rām caritmanas of Tulsidas.* California: University of California Press.

Mangru, Basdeo. (1987) *Benevolent Neutrality.* England: Hansib Publications Limited.

Mayer, Adrian C. (1961) *Peasants in the Pacific: A Study of Fiji Indian Rural Society*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Mehta, Tarla. Revised Edition (1999) *Sanskrit Play Production in Ancient India*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Private Limited.

Ministerie an Onderwijs, Wetenschap en Cultuur, Afdeling Cultuurstudies (1987) *Sanskriti ki Baten. Bijdragen tot de kennis van de Hindostaanse Cultuur in Suriname*. Paramaribo: Raghoebier R.

Misir, Prem. (2006) *Cultural Identity and Creolization in National Unity.* The Multiethnic Caribbean. NY: University Press of America, Inc.

Nationaal Ramlila Committee. (1977) *Ramlila verhaal en program 1977.* Paramaribo.

Rasmussen, Mark. "The Symbolic Significance of the Ritual Placement of Jhandi in Hinduism: the Axis Mundi in the Caribbean Hindu diaspora." Unpublished Paper. Unpublished Paper. Email Dated 04/05/08

Ryan, Selwyn. (1999) *The Jhandi and the Cross: The Clash of Cultures in Post-Creole Trinidad and Tobago*. Trinidad: Institute of Social and Economic Research, University of the West Indies.

Taylor, Patrick. (2001) *Dance: Religion, Identity and Cultural Difference in the Caribbean*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

The Sanskar Vidhi. Reprint (2002) English Translation by Acharya Vaidyanath Shastri. New Delhi: Sarvadeshik Arya Pratinidhi Sabha.

Thomasson, Frank. (2009) *A History of Theatre in Guyana, 1800 – 2000.* London & Hertfordshire : Hansib Publications.

Tinker, Hugh. (1993) *A New System of Slavery: The Export of Indian Labour overseas 1830-1920*, 2nd edition. London: Hansib Publishing Ltd.

Vedic Upaasnaa (1986) Revised Edition. Trinidad: The Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Trinidad (Inc.).

Vertovec, Steven. (2000) *The Hindu Diaspora, Comparitive Patterns*. London: Routledge.

Walcott, Derek. (1992) *The Antilles, Fragments of Epic Memory.* NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Woodard, Roger D. (2006) Indo-European Sacred Space, Vedic and Roman Cult. Illinois: The Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois.

Singh, Rana P.B. (1993) "Cosmic Layout of the Hindu Sacred City, Varanasi (Benares)." Arch & Comport./Arch. & Behav. (9)2: 239-250.

http://prabhuguptara.blogspot.com/2006/07/update-on-indo-caribbean-custom-of.html
http://www.boloji.com/dances/00109.htm. Accessed Nov. 7, 2009.

http://www.yogamag.net/archives/1996/bmar96/tantric.shtml. Accessed Nov. 5, 2009

http://www.boloji.com/dances/00109.htm. Accessed Nov. 7, 2009.

Foreign Religious Bodies: Constructing the Religious 'Other'

Maheshvari Naidu
School of Anthropology, Gender and Historical Studies
University of KwaZulu Natal, South Africa

Introduction

This is an exploratory paper that probes the relationship between segments of the local Hindu population and small groups of Hindu transnational migrant workers, based in the predominantly Indian suburb of Reservoir Hills, Durban, in KwaZulu Natal. The paper suggests that a process of *othering* takes place where the local Hindus *construct* the trans-migrant Hindus as 'foreign'. Using the ethnographic spatial locale of Reservoir Hills, it attempts to probe the modes through which this plastic *othering* happens, suggesting that the notion of 'gaze' may offer a means to reveal this process. The paper also suggests that structural-hole theory can assist in understanding how the migrants may inadvertently participate in allowing themselves to be 'othered'. The paper argues that that while religion functions as a form of social capital *within* transnational communities, such cohesive ties within particular Hindu migrant communities simultaneously act to also retard "connectivity and relationships" (Gargiulo and Benassi 2000: 183), even between members of the same religious group (but who exist outside of the immediate transnational community).

Contextualizing the Study

The paper is a follow up to other studies (see Naidu 2008; Naidu 2009b and Naidu 2010 forthcoming) on particular transnationalised cultural specificities of Indian and Pakistani migrant communities. The earlier study (Naidu 2008) narrowed the gaze on the transnationalised lives of migrant Hindu workers in their attempt to articulate their sense of being Hindu in a transnational context. The notion of *transnational* is understood broadly, as involving porous 'flows' that are exchanged through networks of institutions, ideas, and through the networks of highly mobile individuals. The paper argued that individuals of Hindu transnationals, who were predominantly Gujarati-speaking migrants from Surat, and who worked as "hair-cutters" in salons owned by transnationals, were to be understood within a wider discourse of commoditized labour, and against a paradigm of "mobilities" (Urry 2007). The paper unveiled that the Hindu transnational workers could be perceived as commodities positioned in global consumption, in a world where labour had become increasingly (and internationally) mobile and flexible. The paper revealed that their flexible and mobile context as migrant labourers compelled them to make their religion equally portable and flexible.

A parallel study with particular small groups of Indian/Pakistani (Hindu and Muslim) transnationals (Naidu 2010 forthcoming) threw the research net further and wider, showing how these groups of migrants networked through the latitudinal nodes and ties of both relatives and acquaintances to establish themselves within particular suburban enclaves for varying lengths of time. The paper used the notion of 'network' and 'knowing' (Urry 2007) as analytic lenses to understand some networked aspects of the transnationalised lives of migrant workers concentrated in the particular spatial coordinates of Reservoir Hills.

A third study (Naidu 2009b) sought to show that the migrants coped with the sense of heightened dislocation from the families and familiar socio-cultural spaces back in the sending society, by constructing or seamlessly entering networks of friends and acquaintances with other migrant workers from India or Bangladesh, working in salons and restaurants. These networks were seen as helping to build cohesive ties of heightened connectivity. The paper argued that religion, worship and participation and sharing in religious activities and festivals with other migrants in the receiving homeland, is to be construed as a form of social capital that the migrant workers tap into, to connect with one another.

Although not a focal point for my earlier research scrutiny, ethnographic snapshots gained through participant observation and in depth interviews (Naidu 2009b; Naidu 2010) revealed that cohesive ties are also able to act as a source of rigidity that "hinders" "relationships" outside of the immediate transnational community (Gargiulo and Benassi 2000: 183). The earlier studies did not probe directly with the *local* Hindus regarding the mutually perceived alterities. However, it was clear from the many casual responses to certain questions that the local Indians (many of whom were Hindus) found and experienced the migrants as being "different" from them (Naidu 2009b). While not overtly xenophobic or discernibly resentful, indeed they spoke highly of the migrants working in the salons and and so called ethnic restaurants, the local Indians referred to the fact that, "the migrants seem to keep to themselves", and "were comfortable *that* way". This was in turn borne out by the migrants who told me that they were "comfortable" and "fine" socialising amongst themselves. My observations from the numerous visits to several research sites over a fifteen month period, bore out the assertion that the migrant and local encounters all seemed to occur within the context of salons, or service in restaurants (see Naidu 2008).

This is the point of insertion for this particular study, which seeks to probe how the transnational migrant Hindu workers are constructed as 'foreign'. We work through the notion of 'gaze', and attempt to probe how the transnational groups appear to be relativised, and focus specifically on the dynamics between the local and transnational category of Hindus. To this end interviews and participant observation with twelve (newly arrived) purposively sampled Hindu trans-migrants (over and above an initial fifteen participants from the earlier studies), were carried out. These participants were in the age group of 22-35, and most were unmarried and had traveled without the supporting entourage of their immediate family. Interviews were also carried out with approximately 55 local Hindus across both genders and across a spectrum of class categories, with ages ranging from 22-65 years. A further large group of randomly sampled 110 local Hindus, of various linguistic categories and denominational groups, were surveyed with a questionnaire designed to cohere a broad sense of how the local Hindus perceived the transnational Hindu workers. None of the trans-migrants indicated, or were observed as belonging to any particular religious body, religious network or weekly prayer group. However, most of the migrant participants were Gujarati-speaking Hindus that were from the North Indian state of Gujarat, and many of them attended the local and accessibly placed *Mandir* or temple that was located in the area. Several of the local Hindus that patronised this temple, as well as the temple priest were also interviewed.

Transnationalism as a social morphology (Vervotec 2003) can be seen as evolving increasingly finer grained scholarship, and Voigt-Graf (2004) points out that there are particular typologies of transnational flows. The very visual evidence that there are numerous small enclaves of transnational migrant workers scattered throughout the suburbs of Durban, bears out the assertion that the 'transnational' does not necessarily signify large numbers of individuals. Additionally, the migrants in this study were not assembled into any large international or national congregational body attached to the homeland or sending society. The literature on transnationalism shows that for transnationals, religious networks often serve as networks of recruitment into civic or political engagement. This type of large scale organized transnational religious activity (amongst Asians practicing Hinduism or Islam) has been captured in many studies (See Williams 1998, "Asian Indian and Pakistani Religions in the United States"; Kurien 2001, "Religion, ethnicity, and politics: Hindus and Muslim Indian immigrants"; Levitt 2004, "Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging: The Institutional Character of Transnational Religious Life"). However, the migrants' transnational religious practices in *this* study are not to be understood in organizational terms, as articulating their religious worldview through large religious organizations. The paper holds that migrants' transnational religious practices, are also frequently enacted *outside* of organized settings. The transnational workers in this study also did not have any affiliations with large national or international religious bodies. But in so far as they were *practicing Hindus* and saw themselves as *being Hindu*, their religious beliefs and practices were *necessarily* involved (Gardner and Grillo 2002).

Religion itself is not a fixed set of elements; beliefs, rituals, practices etc., but a dynamic matrix and web of shared meanings used in diverse ways, in diverse contexts (Gardner 1995) and more increasingly, in the transnational spaces that are culturally foreign to newly arriving trans-migrants. For the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, religion was a distinctive part of the cultural system. Religion was "a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms through which we are said to "communicate, perpetuate, and develop" our "knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz 1966: 89).

If we are to go along with Levitt's contention that transnational migrants use religion and religious icons and sacred spaces and acts to mark and to delineate a "cartography of belonging" (2003: 861), we see that transnationals may well use participation in religious practices to communicate, perpetuate, and develop their ideas and attitudes about themselves, in a bid to re-territorialize themselves in the receiving country. However, what was clear from observing and speaking with the migrant workers was that, this sharing of religious time and religious space was articulated *with* (exclusively) and *amongst* (exclusively) *other* transnationals.

Othering: Hindu and *Hindu*

The issue of 'othering' was a focal topic for the sociologist Edward Said, rendered classical in the far reaching and discipline transcending work, "Orientalism". For Said, the 'other' was essentialised and indeed constructed and invented within the geo-political framework of colonialism, and rendered in representation and discourse, as the colonised and inferior 'other' (Seidman and Alexander 2001: 29), in counterpoint to the valorised cultural values of the civilised and superior Occident or West. 'Othering' is a kind of objectification and is part and parcel of the socially constructed world that we inhabit and hinges on what Said refers to as "positional superiority" (Said in Seidman and Alexander 2001: 425). In his work "Social Constructionism and Social Theory", Stephen Turner points out that thinkers such as Berger and Luckmann, popularized (the then) new terms of discussion, contained in such phrases as the "social construction of reality". Says Turner (1991: 22);

> *Berger and Luckmann substituted ... a particular kind of 'construction' story in which the reproduction of social ideologies, artistic and evaluative ideas, and the like could be*

explained. They saw these as cases of the individual 'taking over the world in which others already live' ... The generic process that they sought to explain was the 'objectification' of the social world that individuals 'take over'."

In what can be perceived as a sort of modern day exercise of the neo-colonial imaginary, the local Hindus were also constructing and 'inventing' an identity for the migrant Hindus. Responses from the two streams of data gathering, the interviews as well as the survey, revealed that the local Hindus felt that *their* religious identity was *hard earned* in a diasporic context. Many alluded to how difficult it must have been in the early indentured years to assert a Hindu identity. And although these Hindu participants were randomly sampled and the sample was not culled from the followers of only religious organisations, all informants were proudly vocal about their Hindu identity. While the respondents did not baldly claim superiority over the migrant Hindus, an element of positionality could be discerned in their frequent and oblique allusions to their diasporic status, and "their being Hindu" and not "losing their religion" even "after over a hundred years". The local Hindus claimed that this made them somewhat "*different*" from the migrant Hindus.

Interestingly most of the informants concurred that India could be acknowledged as their spiritual homeland. These informants agreed that many learned Hindu saints and preachers from India had visited South Africa, bringing across with them "a wealth of spiritual insights" and "authentic religious teachings" to the benefit of the South African Hindus. However, the migrant Hindus were not refracted through the same kind of lens. The migrants were *not viewed* as bringing across Hindu insights and practices that the local Hindus wished to learn from.

While the locals did not appear to view the religion as being different, the migrants were thought of as differently practicing

Hinduism. It was quite often opaque as to what they meant by this, considering that in more instances than not, the locals did not know much about *how* the migrants practiced Hinduism. None of the locals had observed rituals or any religious festivals with the migrants, in the migrants' homes. Yet the migrants described (see Naidu 2008) that they offered daily worship at the "prayer lamp", that they attended domestic rituals like the *Katha* at the homes of other Hindu migrants or distant relatives, and described observing the festival of *Diwali* amongst other migrant friends in South Africa. These 'acts' and 'observances' of Hinduism, were certainly not alien or foreign to the local Hindus.

The migrants in this study were seen to have migrated to this country for economic and labour reasons. They were not recruited by large multinationals or wooed and headhunted by companies for perceived skills of specialist labour. Instead they belonged to migratory 'flows' that have been classified in transnational literature as individualised migration (see Portes 2001; Voigt-Graf 2004; Vervotec 2003, 2009). As such their own efforts at 'networking' and 'knowing' (see Naidu 2010) facilitated their movement into the country, as well as to into opportunities of work contexts in salons and the so called ethnic restaurants. While the local Indians, Hindu and other, appeared to appreciate the hairstyling and culinary skills, they appeared to perceive the groups of migrants as being very transitory on the local social and cultural landscape. This 'fleeting visibility' appeared to extend to how the local Hindus perceived the migrant Hindus, as being also equally transient. One may cautiously offer that the local Hindu community appeared to not to invite the transnational Hindus to share religious or ritual space with them as they thought of the migrants as 'merely passing' through the local religious or cultural landscape. However, while it was true that many migrants returned to India after a few months or a year or two, it was also the case that more that half of the 27 migrant Hindus interviewed had been in the country (and many in Reservoir Hills) for more than three years. The perception on the part of the local Hindus however, of the migrant Hindus 'not really being there' feeds into a Foucauldian "technology of invisibility" (Foucault 1977: 67). And the gaze of seeing something that is perhaps not *really there* renders what *is* there, invisible.

The Gaze and Construction of Other Bodies

The notion of 'gaze' in the social sciences, within the intellectual traditions of postmodern social theory has been popularised most in large part by the work of Michel Foucault (1977) and the 'medical gaze' and Jacques Lacan's (1977) work on the 'mirror stage gaze'. The 'gaze' according to Foucault (1977; 1980) is concerned with the gathering of information which works to inform and create discourse on (that particular) subject. On the part of the local Hindus, the sustained refrain was that "the Hindu transnationals look different". Many informants even claimed that they could "spot a foreigner" before he "even opened his mouth". They claimed that this was obvious as they "dressed differently" and tried to look very "hip" and modern", and because "they tried so hard" the locals claimed, they "gave themselves away". Many informants also commented on the salon workers attempting to don trendy looking garments and hairstyles which were perceived as not always becoming, or fetching (on them). While referred to mainly in visual terms, this 'difference' appeared to be constructed through multiples layers, for the local Hindu participants also mentioned that the migrants "always spoke to other migrants in their own language" or "slipped in and out of their native language". They maintained that this reinforced the fact that the migrants were different from them.

Some of the local informants who encountered the migrants attending the temple admitted that were impressed by their (the migrants') ensuring that they maintained their "spiritual culture" while "away from home". The local Hindu individuals told me that they had "no problems" with "them" (migrants) attending the temple and many of the local elders at the Mandir were observed as comfortably talking in the Gujarati language with the men. The presiding priest, while speaking in complimentary terms of the migrants' patronage of the temple, however, revealed that he did not offer them any special spiritual counselling. It appeared that the transnationals visiting the temple, had not approached him in that vein, nor had it occurred to the priest to offer such pastoral counsel.
Additionally, none of the local Hindus spoken to had invited any of the transnationals to their homes for a social visit, or to attend a religious observance of any kind. This was also borne out by the migrants. Only one(!) claimed to have had South African Indian (Hindu) friends. However, he had never visited the friend(s) at home, or met the rest of the family.

Some of the middle-aged Hindu women being interviewed, in subsequent meetings and having grown more accustomed to me as someone 'doing research' confided, that they too could tell "who was from India" and "who was not". They appeared to indicated a level of religio-cultural discordance between themselves and the migrant Hindus, which they were not comfortable in fully admitting, except with the by now common recourse to "different". They claimed that the migrants looked "a bit different", and many giggled that these were the men that they sometimes went to for their facials and their waxing needs. As such they thought it decidedly odd to socialise with the men beyond this kind of consumerist terms.

The 'construction' of the body becomes discernable, when it draws attention by *appearing* to 'deviate' from other bodies.

This so called 'deviation' was not experienced by any stretch of the imagination as *hostile* by the locals, however it was nevertheless perceived and experienced as 'real' on the part of the locals. Reading between the lines of their responses, it served to erect, a measure of distance between them and the trans-migrants that even the commonality of (Hindu) religion could not bridge.

The local Hindus felt that there were certain cultural taboos and associated food taboos that the migrants must follow. Many participants also articulated that "of course it was **one** Hinduism", but in the same breath felt that the migrants would want to perform domestic rituals and observe festivals like Diwali, "in their own way". However, interviews with the Hindu migrants revealed that in a bid to re-territorialise in the receiving country, they had successfully rendered their religion, flexible (see Naidu 2008). As such certain religious restrictions around food, and the time devoted to observing rituals such as the *Katha* and festivals such as *Diwali*, were plastically shaped around the demands of work and the local context.

Avtar Brah (1996: 118) writes that 'difference' as an example of social relation, refers to the "interweaving of shared collective narratives within feelings in a community" even if these narratives about the identity of the 'other' is 'imagined' or constructed outside of actual face to face encounters. Brah (1996: 123) notes that identities are inscribed through experiences culturally constructed through social relations and as such identities are closely connected with experience, subjectivity and social relations. Such constructions of difference posit and position boundaries and gates between groups that come to be signified as 'different'.

The idea of the migrants "looking different" can be understood by the 'fact' that the body comes to be subjectively signified through the gaze with such narratives coming to be ascribed and appended to the individuals. However, what is to be borne in mind is that this signification of body has nothing to do with the ontology of the body in itself, but rather with particular epistemic conditions, or our particular *ways of knowing*, that cohere around the body (Colebrook 2000: 80). The 'body' in its various refracted understandings as social body, religious body and discursive body, is itself conceived as a site of social grounding on which social and cultural processes are inscribed. Colebrook (2000: 76-77) maintains that thinking about the body beyond sameness and difference allows us to see that the body is an effect of representation, in other words it is never seen *bare* or, *as is*.

Allowing 'Othering'- Structural Hole Theory

The responses of many of the Hindu migrant participants also revealed, that aside from the language barrier, they found it, "very difficult" to make friends with the local Hindu Indians. This was also true of their interactions with (older) local Hindus who spoke Gujarati or Hindi fluently. Many of these locals were observed as striking up a conversation with migrant workers in the course of their casual labour exchanges. However, these were within the context and space of the service rendered.

Many migrants referred to the locals as being "a bit stubborn" or "not very friendly". Even the migrants who spoke of the salon customers and restaurant patrons as "friendly" claimed that they could not *actually make friends* with them *outside* of the salon or restaurant. At the time I remember highlighting in my field notes that the migrants 'appeared fairly dismissive', and 'not overly concerned about the how the locals interacted with them'. Dahinden (2005: 200) mentions that the phenomenon of ethnic homogeneity in social networks is well known. I would like to suggest that part of the reason for a dismissive and an almost disposal attitude towards the experienced alterity on the part of the migrants, was that they felt fully supported within the cohesive (migrant) networks that they had inserted themselves into, and lived through. The migrants were observed as being completely and comfortably embraced within their various linked networks and articulated that they had "family" in South Africa, alluding to the *fictive* yet very *real* kinship networks that they lived and articulated all aspects of their transnationalised lives through, *with other transnationals*. Karen Leonard (2007: 52) spells out that, unlike cosmopolitans who move freely and comfortably between cultural worlds, transnationals are people who build encapsulated cultural worlds around themselves, most typically worlds circumscribed by interpersonal ties. Leonard states that in contemporary times people can be dispersed, although this may not necessarily equate to being or experiencing themselves as being alienated from their homes. She explains that the "otherness of the host society can be bridged by a continuing connection with, and sense of one's own society" (Leonard: 120) in groups referred to as cliques. A *clique* is an exclusive group of people who share interests, views, patterns of behavior, or ethnicity, or as in this instance, transnational status.

Gargiulo and Benassi (2000: 184) point out that, individuals of an intimately knitted network are in a position to trust each other to honour various kinds of obligations. However, the amount of social capital available to an actor is not merely a function of the closure of the network surrounding him, but also the amount of structural holes in the network that allows brokerage with other outsider communities in the work and social environments. For networks function to develop social constraint, and so direct information (and other) flows in the building of, as well as the maintaining of social capital.

Social capital, as a sociological concept, has emerged as something of a trendy label in the social sciences. Portes (2000) points out that the original theoretical development of the concept of 'social capital' by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and the American sociologist James Coleman centered on *individuals* or *small groups* as the units of analysis, and on the benefits accruing to individuals *because of their ties* with others. These theorists defined social capital in terms of a *resource* to which an individual has access to, and is able to use for his or her benefit. Simply put, social capital is a reference to the resource embedded in the connections (of goodwill that can be called upon) *within* and *between* social networks. For a community, frequent cooperation by its members leads to tighter social linkages and increased trust in one another, described as one of participation and trust. The concept of social capital is thus further encapsulated in networks, norms, and according to Farr, in the aspect of 'trust'. For Farr, networks are dense and valuable, norms pervade the networks and social relations and trust is construed as psychologically complex.

The migrants cope with the sense of heightened dislocation from the families and familiar socio-cultural spaces back in the sending society, by constructing or seamlessly entering networks of friends and acquaintances with other migrant workers from India and Bangladesh (see Naidu 2009b). These networks help build cohesive ties of heightened connectivity. Religion, worship, participation and sharing in religious activities and festivals with other migrants in the receiving homeland, is to be construed as a form of social capital that the migrant workers tap into, to connect with one another. This is amply demonstrated by their descriptions and narratives of sharing ritual observances and festival times, with other migrants (see Naidu 2009b).

However, structural-hole theory holds that (transnational) actors are in a better position to gain from their interactions with others if they are connected to those others, *who are not themselves connected*, in other words who do not know each other. The lack of connections among those others, are the *structural holes*. However, my experience with the migrant Hindus revealed that all of them had mutual migrant friends that cut across the social and work domains of their lives, and served to even bridge and cement these domains, thus constraining them from experiencing the need to attempt to forge meaningful ties with the *local Hindus*. Thus, while they felt and spoke of a need to attend worship at a temple, they did not experience a likewise need to socialise with or share spiritual and religious and ritual space and time with local Hindus. This sort of ritual and religious sharing, as in the observances of the *Katha* and *Diwali* etc, they articulated *with and amongst other transnational Hindus.*

One can note the availability of informal pockets of support structures that exist outside of large institutional religious networks, by looking inside smaller enclaves or groups of people who share religious space or religious time. Thus the members of a small knitted network trust each other to honour various obligations across the domains of work and their social lives. These kinds of ties are important for the benefits they offer to individuals, as revealed by the ethnographic narratives of the participants (see Naidu 2009b; 2010 forthcoming). Religion is thus a social capital and 'resource' that inheres in the social network, tying and connecting focal transnational actors to other actors.

The transnational actor's opportunities are constrained if there are no structural holes, or put another way, when there are no gaps that need to be filled by local friends and acquaintances from the host country. When the connections (opportunities with outsider friends and acquaintances) are surrounded by structural holes, and the transnational *actor is not* surrounded by structural holes there is what is referred to as 'structural autonomy', for the actor. However, in clear illustration of their tightly networked connectivity, many of the Hindu transnational workers at the salon work space of *Al Noor*, (the initial research site) are linked or 'tied' to the transnational workers at restaurants, for example, *My Diner*, (another research site) and with some of the workers at (the third site) *Omair Salon*. The network dualities of brokerage and closure are seen as the imperative mechanisms by which social networks constitute social capital. Thus, while the transnational enclaves appeared to exhibit intense local connectivity, they simultaneously lacked the external linkages (with the locals) needed to compete beyond certain contexts of social and even work opportunities, in the wider knowledge economy (Meagher 2005: 218), as well as in the wider cultural life of the suburban space they inhabited.

It appeared that networks were vital to the social lives of the migrants. It also appeared that these networks (with other migrant friends, families and acquaintances) functioned as a kind of 'social glue' and worked to bring the migrants together to share time in a common articulation of religious beliefs and practices (among other social practices). These observances of rituals and festivals, and communal worship emerge as crucial transnational socio-religious enactments, enhancing group collectivity and cohesiveness.

Conclusion:
Changing the Lens on the Gaze and Creating those (Structural) Holes!

As a concluding note that may be critiqued as being culpable of moving the paper out of the space of description, to that of prescription, I would like to turn again to the methodological concept of *darshan* (see Naidu 2009a). While anthropological research, like many other types of research, is meant to be cautious to not conflate the research agenda of knowledge gathering with that of activism, the anthropologist is also aware of the powerful applied and contemporary contexts of such research. Participatory modes of contemporary inquiry such as those embraced within the concept of 'Action Research' moves knowledge gathering out of its so called 'ivory tower' location into the space of very pragmatic, real and pressing contemporary concerns.

It is in such a vein that I turn to the simple yet compelling methodological tool of *darshan* which can be used by anthropologists working in applied contexts, and action research practitioners looking to broker a marriage between theory and practice in the communities they are working with. It is a methodological tool for the researcher who chooses to work within particular communities that construct and project identities of difference. Such a tool is meant for the researcher who wishes to use insights gained about members of those communities, to broker bridges of relationship between 'non-seeing' communities, or in more extreme cases, communities in conflict. Groups often mobiles the concept of difference when "addressing the genealogies of its collective experience", and yet both "difference and commonality are relational signs" (Brah 1996: 117).

The sample groups in this study are relatively small and are not claimed as being a generic profile of local and migrant Hindu relationships. However, the numbers are sufficient for an exploratory study that points the imperative of more sustained work with larger numbers of individuals across a greater number of migrant and local Hindu groups and communities. While the tenor of the interaction between the local and migrant individuals is not hostile it is not very socially friendly either. The locals are not resentful as the migrant labour and skills are found to be convenient. But the local 'gaze' (that constructs difference) renders the migrant Hindus as fairly invisible on the relgio-cultural landscape of the suburban spaces inhabited by both groups.

Uttara Coorlawala has worked with methodology praxis of *darshan* (sight or seeing) developed within feminist film theory of deconstructing the 'gaze' and uniquely applying it to read *abhinaya,* which she describes as the performer-audience relationship (or seer and seen) in Indian classical dance (Coorlawala 1996). *Darshan* while being subjective 'seeing' is also heightened personal awareness, with the potential for transformative experience (of the so called 'other'). Coorlawala sought to decontextualised *darshan* outside of its matrix of religious and theistic embeddedness and proffered an alternative model to Kaplan's model of the domineering gaze, with a new way of seeing that sought to suffer *less objectification* and *more identification* with that which was gazed upon, without recourse to simple essentialistic collapse. She reminds us that a *darshan* model has less hegemonic implications for the viewer in this context the local Hindu gaze on the transnational migrants (Coorlawala 1996: 23).
She states that examining "another way of looking may yield fascinating connections and insights". This may be of course limited as the two different perspectives, from different individuals, in this instance the local Hindus and the migrant Hindus, have each their "socio-cultural orientations" which must also be factored in. However, what I proposed with *darshan* model of seeing is a *consideration* of a particular way of perceiving, that allows for a greater subject-object

rapprochement when gazing upon that which we end up refracting as foreign bodies.

For the Foucauldian gaze, 'the visible' is what is 'seen', while the invisible is the practices involved in the making visible of, that which is not visible (Crossley 1993: 401). The local gaze constructs the Hindu migrants as invisible, through refracting them as being 'different'. Accordingly such invisibility confers a level of non-relationship on the part of the local Hindus. This is evident in the way the local Hindus and the transnationals, perceive each other, and describe each other to me.

Coorlawala points out that the 'looker' who aligns with the dominating gaze which criticizes and separates, is unlikely to experience 'transformation' (Coorlawala 1996: 23/24), or to use perhaps less salvific terms, unlikely to experience a relationship with the perceived 'other'. This sort of 'masculine' gaze forgets that on some level we are embedded in relationships of many kinds, with many kinds of (religious) so called others. A *darshan* model of seeing affords us, very possibly, the conceptual resources for acknowledging and valuing a self that is both separate in its own and cultural individuality, and also connected to other individual cultural selves. In this way, dominant stereotyping can be disrupted and destabilized for the looker, creating the space for alternate frameworks of understanding that can broker *possible* relationships.

Bibliography

Bourdieu, Pierre. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Brah, Avtar. (1996) *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*, London: Routledge.

Foucault, M. (1996). The return of morality. In S. Lotringer (Ed.), *Foucault Live: Collected Interviews 1961-1984*. New York: Semiotext(e).

Foucault, Michel. (1977) *Discipline and Punish.* Trans A Sheridan New York: Random House. 2nd Edition

Foucault, Michel. (1980) *Power/Knowledge.* (Ed.) Colin Gordon, New York: Pantheon Books.

Foucault, Michel. (1982) "The Subject and Power". *Critical Inquiry* 8, 4, pp. 777-795.

Dahinden J. (2005) "Contesting transnationalism? Lessons from the study of Albanian migration networks from former Yugoslavia". *Global Network,* 5, 2, pp. 191-208.

Gardner, K. (1995) *Global Migrants, Local Lives.* Oxford, England: Clarendon Press.

Gardner, K. and Grillo, R. (2002) "Transnational households and Ritual: An Overview. *Global Networks,* 2, 3, pp. 179-190.

Geertz, C. (1966) "Religion as a Cultural System", In: Banton M. ed., *Anthropological Approaches to the study of Religion.* London: Tavistock.

Leonard, Karen. (2001) "Finding one's own Place: Asian Landscapes Re-visioned in Rural California In *Culture Power Place, Explorations in Critical Anthropology* (Ed.) Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, USA: Duke University Press, pp 118-136.

Kelly, J D. (2003) "Time and the Global: Against the Homogenous, Empty Communities in Contemporary Social Theory", In: Birgit Meyer and Peter Geschiere eds., *Globalisation and Identity: Dialectics of Flow and Closure*. Oxford UK: Blackwell.

Kurien, P. (2001) "Religion, ethnicity, and politics: Hindus and Muslim Indian immigrants in the United States" in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24, pp. 263-93.

Gargiulo M. and Benassi, M. (2000) "Trapped in Your Own Net? Network Cohesion, Structural Holes, and the Adaptation of Social Capital', *Organisation Science* 11, 2, pp. 184.

Levitt, P. (2003) "You Know, Abraham Was Really the First Immigrant: Religion and Transnational Migration" in *International Migration Review* 37, p 3.

Levitt, P. (2004) "Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging: The Institutional Character of Transnational Religious Life" in *Sociology of Religion* 65, 1, pp. 1-18.

Naidu, Maheshvari. (2008) "The Global Mobile Subject: Hinduism and Transnationalising Religion" in *Nidan*, 20, pp.16-32.

Naidu, Maheshvari. (2009a) "Seeing (Through) the Gaze: Marking Religious and Cultural Differences onto Muslim Female Bodies" in *JSR*, 22, pp. 23-42.

Naidu, Maheshvari. (2009b) "Belief across Borders: Religion as Networked Social Capital" in *Dharma*, 34, 4, forthcoming.

Naidu, Maheshvari. (2010) "Tied' to Each Other: Gazing on Networked Connectivity and Closure - Transnationalised Work and Workers" in Special Volume of *The Anthropologist,* forthcoming.

Portes, A. (2000) "The Two Meanings of Social Capital" in *Sociological Forum* 15, 1.

Portes, A. (2001) Introduction: the debates and significance of immigrant transnationalism *Global Networks* 1, 3, pp. 181-193.

Turner, Stephen. (1991) "Social Constructionism and Social Theory Sociological Theory", 9, 1, pp. 22-33.

Vertovec, S. (2003) "Migration and Other Modes of Transnationalism: Towards Conceptual Cross-Fertilization" in *International Migration Review* 37, 3 641-665.

Vertovec, S. (2009) *Transnationalism*. New York: Routledge.

Voigt-Graf, C. (2004) "Towards a Geography of transnational spaces: Indian transnational communities in Australia" in *Global Networks* 4, 1, pp. 25-49.

Williams, B. (1998) "Asian Indian and Pakistani Religions in the United States" in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 558, pp. 178-195.

Urry, John. (2007) Mobilities. London: Routledge.