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Diaspora and difference: problems in studying South Asian religious communities in Australasia in the transnational and globalising contexts

Purushottama Bilimoria
Deakin University, Australia

Abstract

In this paper I wish to raise and discuss some methodological and epistemological issues on my decade-long study of Hinduism in Australia. I am taking this occasion as an opportunity to reflect on my own work in the area – and of others too in Australia and New Zealand – after having just spent a year studying, among other things, Hindus in the Greater Atlanta metropolis.

One important context in which I wish to proceed with these reflections is the phenomenon of transnationalism and globalization which is having such an unprecedented impact on contemporary life almost anywhere. Those communities and national-sources that have been part of the migratory circuit over the past two centuries at least have begun to experience a particular type of migratory anomie and identity dislocation as a result of the sheer pressures of post-industrial economy and market-place life-style and other challenges of fast-track modernity now upon them. But globalization undoubtedly has brought along other benefits and opened up resources, access, and facilities that only one generation back would have been undreamt of, and this has heralded the phenomenon often referred to as transnationalism or, in more pedestrian terms, as long distance communications and interaction transcending the boundaries of nation-states and regional-local isolationism. To begin with, I wish to set some structure to my discussion here. I will first present a summary of the Hindu disapora and Hinduism in Australia.

The three phases of Hindu migration

Phase 1: Immigration from Punjab and Northwest Frontiers of India

I will have to speak of Sikhs and Punjabi- Muslim migration as well in tandem as they all came under the category of 'Hindoos' and are seen to

share some aspects of Hindu culture in broad terms or interactively. They were also Sri Lankan Singhala and Tamil temporary workers, one of the earliest non-European migrant groups in Australia (and New Zealand also for that matter).

The earliest phase of Indian migration to *terra australis* comprised people from the Punjab and North-west Frontier regions soon after the settlement during late 18th century, when trade between Australian colonies and British India also commenced (1792 onwards), and with opening up of the outback in the early 19th century colony states of the vast continent of Australia (the country was not federated into a single nation-state as yet, or not until 1901); so the first Hindus in Australia were Punjabi Hindus and a handful also from Chotanagpur region, who were brought out as agricultural labourers working on banana and sugarcane plantations, mostly around the East Coast of Australia where they settled in good numbers with their sponsored sons. Since wives or women were allowed to accompany the men or even join them until a long later, many Punjabis saved up money and returned to the subcontinent. The large pool of Indian labourers became available to work in the distant colonies (South and East Africa, West Indies, Trinidad, Fiji and so on)? Due to two factors— I) abolition of slavery; 2) more significantly, changes in land tenure instigated by the imperial British regime created a surplus of labour among the disenfranchised, landless class, especially in the rich agrarian regions of the Punjab. Consistent with utilitarian-modernist economic principle of moving supply into the space where the demand is felt, the landless with agricultural experience were scuttled off, like many banished Ramas, to the labour intensive fields in the colonies, and Australia vied for its share in this way as part and player in the spread of the British Empire. But there had to be political trade-offs and agreements or negotiations at least between the respective colonial governments and the British Imperial Office to facilitate the translation of an economic imperative (need of labour power) into actual movement of people (most often voluntary, but occasionally with deceptive allurements), thus creating an early model of transnational banishment , or 'coolie transnationalism', akin to the migratory habits of birds as they flock between hemispheres with the change of seasons.

Some of the Punjabi labour force was dispersed to supplement demand in another growth area, namely, exploration of the hinterland for which skilled camera drivers and entire caravan complete with cooks, laundarymen, fodder makers, and so on, were needed. A few went on to set up their trading and business enterprises, such as hawking, peddling, carting deliveries and supplies across the arid terrain, or taking up casual jobs in urban areas; others moved on to become diggers in mines, domestic

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servants, farmers in their own right (as did the Woolgoolga Sikhs), or merchants (as did Hindu Sindhis). There were anti-Asiatic tirades and open protests by local workers against threatening competition of coloured labour and the ensuing lowering of wage scales. The official response (in both the sending and receiving countries) was to enact a series of prohibitions on continuing Indian coolie labour influx, except for the occasional itinerant visitor, culminating in the infamous 1901 Immigration Restriction Act that heralded the so-called the 'Australia white-as-snow Policy'. There are some deplorable and wonderful stories from this phase which I could narrate but for lack of time. In passing though, the accounts about the tensions between the Hindu and Muslim coolie workers, as the Hindus refused to eat with or food prepared by Muslims anxious that the carnivorous habits of the latter would pollute the ritual purity requirements of the former. The report also chided at the "niggardliness" of the hawkers and "the wretched manner in which Hindus and Mahometans live" only to hoard a "pile" (of money) to take back to their own country. While they begged for tea and tobacco, they were less frugal with drinks, under whose influence "they seem either horribly dangerous or irredeemably nasty" [7]. These constitute early signs of public reaction to the presence of Hindus circa 1890s and set the stage for stereotypes about Indians, their "heathen" ways, and attendant effects of "colour", idolatrous and caste practices of Hindus. In the 1930s, newspaper accounts traded incentives against extreme Hindu trouble-maker for the Empire, in the person of M.K. Gandhi, 'the little man in loin-cloth' and alleged child-sacrifices and exaggerated incidents of *suttee (sati)* in India, a stark reminder of which was the strange practice of burning the dead or cremation continued by local Sikhs and Hindus.

The Indians failed to bring out their family members, especially women, in large numbers, in part because the inter-war years experienced economic conditions in Australia, and besides, surplus labour and refugees from war-torn Europe and United Kingdom outstripped the competing Asian labour supply. A prominent Hindu activist, Totaram Sanadhya, who noted the absence of any collective sense of identity among the scattered Hindus, was himself greeted in a Sydney hotel with this proclaim: "All black, you have got no soap?". While the Sikh community in North-east Australia survived and have remained settled in farming communities over three to four generations now (erecting the first Sikh *gurdwara* in Australia), other Indian groups elsewhere dispersed either by returning to the homeland or marrying into Aboriginal communities, or where possible assimilating entirely into the Anglo communities (a task much easier for Anglo-Indians or Eurasians than for Hindus and turbaned Sikhs). Only the handful of the more enterprising and lucrative survived, invoking their status as British subjects and involving roving Imperial conference delegates, such as the

eminent Hindu diplomat, Srinivasa Sastri visiting in mid-1920s, in conjunction with sympathetic church bodies, or through battles in court, to gain a few entitlements and residents' rights. Indians came out better in this struggle than did the non-resident Chinese, not to speak of the native Aboriginal people, who hardly featured even as decent human beings in the eyes of the predominantly Protestant Australians.

Homogenising Transnationalism

An even more decisive form of transnationalism in the diaspora context emerges with the second phase of Indian migration that follows in the wake of the abolition of the racially exclusivist 'white Australia' policy in the mid-1960s. But the imperatives for opening up the doors of immigration were again economic and to some extent political. 'Populate or perish' was a common motto with the close of World War II, but this was not to be sacrificed at the cost of homogenisation. So an assimilationist policy was devised which made a subtle demand on the incoming diverse religious, cultural and class or caste groupings to undergo cultural assimilation into what was broadly conceived as 'Royal Britannia' Australia. Still, the non-white potential immigrants were viewed with suspicion and therefore kept at bay. However, in the face of mounting international (including vociferous official Asian) criticism, the adoption of multiracial migration policies in other English-speaking Western countries, and the dire shortage of skilled and occupational labour force in Australia, forced the country to open its doors within certain restrictive categories to Asian immigrants, Indians included. With the adoption of the official 'multicultural' mandate the rhetoric changed from the erstwhile assimilationist policy to one of *integration*. Migration remained by and large an issue of the preservation of national homogeniety through appropriate selection of migrants, a way to expand and develop the nation on the lines of racial and cultural purity (Humphrey 1998:5), which was echoed in the remark of the then minister of immigration, Arthur Calwell, to the effect that 'Two Wongs don't make a White!' Homogenisation is a form of maintaining control by hegemonic forces. Culture and race, then, remained as markers of social differentiation, if not discrimination. 'For both.' as Michael Humphrey comments, 'are indicators of social position and cultural capital, while the individual act of migration itself, from the perspective of the host society, is still interpreted as a tacit acknowledgment of the superiority of the new over the old society and ways. A recent national inquiry into Australian immigration policy revealed how little the underling premises of social and political integration had changed. An official report, entitled 'Immigration: a commitment to Australia,' suggested that far too many migrants demonstrated their lack of allegiance to Australia by failing to take out citizenship... Immigration

policy sought permanent settlers who would express their gratitude for selection by quickly becoming naturalised Australians and learning English. Becoming part of the same linguistic community was seen as essential for social membership in the Australian national community'. (Ibid: 7)

Not all cultural capital are easily convertible, especially the deficiency in English language, overseas qualifications and education, social knowledge, and religious and moral predilections, which are re-configured as *ethnic* baggage and negotiated on the basis of ethnicity rather than class or equal claims by bona fide citizens of political and civil rights. This becomes a problem for pluralism. The construction of ethnicity under the multicultural banner is as problematic as the notion of an authentic voice speaking for others, as Gayatri Spivak reminds is. Caught in this tension, some migrant groups set about the task of reinterpreting and re-evaluating their own tradition, or look to the 'homeland' for cultural authenticity as vehicles for asserting their identity and control over their trajectory. A few opt for a more transient and middle position in re-assessing their location that erodes all differences and yet count on them for their alienness, leaving open the possibility of return migration or shifting to another destination, so as to maintain access to parallel social worlds in other places.   I will illustrate these processes and tensions by recapping the immigration and settlement trend under this phase of transnational diaspora experience, from 1950s to the early 1990s.

Phase 2: Post-colonial professional Hindu

By the 1950s the migrant community from the subcontinent was just too sporadic and scattered for a sense of ethnic-religious identity to grow. The 1954 census recorded 2647 Indians in the vast nation.   With the end of World War II and the subcontinental Independence, immigration to Australia was open only for those with over 50% European blood. The late 1950s saw a slight increase in the number of Hindus opting for Australia rather than for England, United States and Canada. What attracted most was certainly not the promises of an open environment where religious aspirations could be freely pursued. Instead, for many modern secular Hindus, the sixth continent appealed as a safe refuge from the religious orthodoxies and caste-ridden life back in the subcontinent. When packing their tin-chests, the emigrants asked: "What can we leave behind?" It might occur to them later that they have left behind some important ingredient of their identity, and so re-tracing the steps along the transnational conduit travered became an imported cultural issue.

After 1965, when the "white Australia" policy was officially dropped, the reception of immigrants changed, although reservations about admitting people with "different standards of living, tradition and culture" did persist. The overall image of Australia too had changed dramatically, from an open rural land to an industrializing, developing nation with professional opportunities. Thus while the 1961 Census recorded a total of 4047 Indians, by 1971 there were 22 930. The number nearly doubled in the 1980s reaching 41 730 by 1981, and some 50,000 in 1986. By 1991 the India-born population in Australia was 61 602, and by 1996 close to one lakh (100,000). The figures of course include people of a wider religious orientation and also of European descent born in India [13]. However, 15% of India-born Australians in the 1996 Census are shown as Hindus (two-thirds being Christians, 6% Sikhs and the rest registered an assortment of faiths or no-faith, or Parsis, and Jains). And they make up 31% of all Hindus in Australia, i.e. 20,927 of a total of 67,270.

The transnational conduit I refer to however is not confined exclusively to the bilateral travel between India and Australia; the conduit extends to other countries besides India. Professional Hindus were also drawn from Sri Lanka, with increasing numbers arriving from other parts of the world, who dispora scholars have called 'twice migrants', and even 'thrice' in some cases, where the temporary immigrant has moved from one country to another, usually over a period of two to three generations, as for example with East African Indians fleeing to Britain during the Idi Amin coup, and later moving to Canada, U.S. Australia and New Zealand. (see Bhachu, 1985). Thus Hindus living in other former colonies began to migrate to Australia as well: from Malaysia and Singapore, Fiji, Mauritius, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, the southern and eastern African states, and most recently Hong Kong. Two recent Fijian-led military coups in the late 1980s, exacerbated by a maverick ousting of Indian-led government just this year, and political upheavals in Sri Lanka and some African states, increased the number of Hindus seeking to leave their adopted homes, and many looked transnationally to Australia. In New Zealand, for instance, Indian Fijians (the majority of whom are Hindus and Sikhs) constitute the largest single group of ethnic South Asians in that (former) dominion, and exploiting the trans-Tasman arrangement, they periodically visit and even simply relocate to Australia as bona-fide Australian residents (without having to suffer the long delays in processing visa applications to Australia as experienced by their subcontinental Indian and African counterparts). There are some 40,000 to 45,000 Indian Fijians in Australia presently.

For all Indians in Australia, taking for now the 1986 census as exemplary, 21.5 thousand identified as Hindus (which includes European converts to

Hinduism). The break-down of overseas Hindus by country of birth was given as the following: India 35.7%; Fiji 21.5%; Sri Lanka 11.0%; Malaysia 7.1%, U.K. 4.3%, South Africa 3.8%, New Zealand 2.5%, other 14.1% (this comprised Hindus from other states of Africa, Southeast Asia, North America, Europe and the Arab regions). 74% of overseas-born Hindus arrived between 1967 and 1976. Among Australian-born Hindus 28% indicated Indian ancestry; 25% reported British ancestry, 12.2% with Australian ancestry, and the rest other ancestry. [14] By March 1998, there are some 75,000 Hindus in Australia, 20% of whom are Australia-born; and by early 2000, an estimate was made of around 82,000 Hindus (which is about as large as the otherwise more professionally and academically visible or politically effective Jewish diaspora in Australia).

The educational profile is considerably and visibly high. 21% of Hindus have at least a bachelor degree and a further 12% have graduate qualifications. Hindu men have a higher level of education than women; but more Hindu women have university degrees than the Australian Ms Average. Indian and Sri Lankan born immigrants rank highly in post-secondary education after Jewish and Chinese groups. But Hindus do badly in skilled vocational qualifications, largely because of their concentration in academic and professional sectors. They exhibit high levels of motivation, much due to the postcolonial legacy to "succeed where the master once had ruled", backed by a heritage of traditional learning. The second or third generation Hindus go on to universities, but do not opt to become doctors, psychiatrists, surgeons, academics, and engineers with the same earnestness as their parents did. Perhaps this is a sign of the *post*-postcolonial reversal.

These *subcontinental* Hindus, or India direct migrants, arrived with their cultural, linguistic and religious links with India or Sri Lanka still intact. Hence the birth-place of the parents of all Australian resident Hindus in 1996 census is 43% for India (while, recall, only 35% have come directly from India). Hindus from Fiji, as part of the secondary Indian migrants, made up 15,409 of the approximately 46,000 non-India born from a total of 67,270 Hindus (which has increased considerably following the recent events in that former Pacific paradise). These disparate Hindus, like all earlier South Asian immigrants, had utilised the educational system for training in skills and achieving social and economic mobility, and so they came with more money too and quickly found themselves in well-salaried positions, choosing to live in select manicured suburbs or housing colonies. The contribution of Hindus from these regions toward forging a distinctive religious identity in Australia cannot be overlooked. I will come to a special kind of inward-looking transnationalism at work in this particular 'twice-thrice' migrant group.

Phase 3: Chain migration

Since the immigration policies favoured and restricted migration of skilled and professionally accomplished or promising persons in response to labour-market and economic factors, desirous unskilled persons, including spouses, children and relatives, of the settled residents, had to rely on the slow success of family reunification (or reunion) and sponsorship provisions. In twenty or thirty years time this has led to a phenomenon characterised as 'chain migration', which has brought in lesser skilled, as well as unskilled and dependent relations, plus hordes of temporary stayers, especially students and causal workers. Even if some of these new arrivals have skills and training, up to higher degrees in a number of cases, their qualifications may not be recognised in Australia or they may fail to obtain gainful employment in their fields. Thus a prominent taxi rank in a suburb of Sydney is known as the "PhD Taxi Rank" (Voigt-Graf, 2000 draft), because the cab-drivers are community-sponsored academics from an agricultural university in the Punjab on extended leave, who were at one time in great demand in the Australia labour force, but whose qualifications have not earned them equivalent jobs in Australia, and they are waiting to become full Australian residents (as their old jobs in the Punjab might have dried up by now).   This kind of transnational migration reduces both the careers and self-worth or dignity of the migrant who came in good faith. But this also creates a to-and-fro movement of temporary visitors, and casual or short-term workers, along side the increasing number of students from India who are attracted by the lower fees in Australian institutions (compared to the U.K. or the U.S), and who are allowed to hold part-time employment which is some cases matures into full-employment upon graduation, enabling them to apply for and obtain resident without having to return back home. But some see themselves as temporary residents only and have their gaze fixed on moving to the United States where the occupational and earning prospects are higher. This involves them in a secondary transnational movement. (I discovered indeed Australian Indians have been relocating to places like Atlanta and Silicon Valley in the West Coast, and doing rather well: a Jain couple in particular, winning prices and accolades for their entrepreneurial skills.)

But what drives on one extreme the restrictive skilled, professional migration policy and the reunion provisions that sets up chain migration, abetted by temporary and student residents, have all to do with national economic motivations of the day or era. Transnational migration is best means of de-proletarialisation of the labour force, by introducing an element of competition (or as some would say, cheapening of labour

power), and diffusing of a sense of working class identity and solidarity, for the migrant worker does not see himself or herself as being rooted in the conventional working class ethos but would rather move up the ladder, and to outer-lying gentrified suburbs from inner city areas, as quickly as he has 'made a few good bucks'. And here the religious identity kicks in or props up an escape route from a particular kind of alienation in mainstream culture, especially at the early and settling-in stages of the migration experience. The religious world view in so far as it brings with it a cultural imaginary of difference (however vague its self articulation) and reinforces a sense of worth of the otherwise marooned or alienated 'atomist' monad that one becomes in this transnational migration process, religion and transnationalism go hand-in-hand to bolster a portmanteau identity, a sense of being both here and there, from which comes the idea of hybridity (that modern expatriate Indian writers, like Rushdie have exploited to the hilt in their novels).

In a short span of time, Hindus have rather successfully organised themselves and drawing on their own professional skills, bureaucratic contacts, and business dealings, moved towards building spectacular Hindu temples to their gods in various parts of Australia. But again, the emulation is transnational in two directions: the U.S. for the initial inspiration and model, India for the resources, template, *silpi* skills, shipment of the stone-cast gods and the ritual process of installation and sanctification of the divine spaces within the walls of the *templum* or *oikos*. It is significant to note that after a period of gestation the amorphous collective perceives the need for a firm Hindu cultural base and temples. Imagining the temple presents a pre-text for the coming together of Hindus in the diaspora. As a signifier for prescribed ritual and interiorized practices the temple enables greater confidence in one's practices. As a permanent presence, the temple makes the Hindu identity publicly visible. It also provides a matrix for ironing out differences and tensions among the different sectarian and regional groups, or alternatively to bolster political interests of their respective home-based movements. But internal divisions remain, and fractured groups shift to other sites, adding yet one more temple as indeed the gods were added in ancient times to the 3,333.5 strong pantheon. Nevertheless, with at least two temples in every major city and a community or *bhajan-mandali* in each remote town, Hindus can now readily seek out their fellow affiliates, share auspicious events and ceremonies, call on kindred souls to help with wedding arrangements, and organize *baal-vikas* so that their children could learn a smattering of the home-spoken lingua and tracts from mythological and moral doctrines (i.e. Krishna's life, karma, rebirth, and Ayodhya). They may even seek advice on the proper execution of the final rites for one of their deceased, and

witness the same, albeit under the closed canopy veiling the rapid snatch by the smokeless electric *Yama*. (There is however a lobby calling for a return to the erstwhile ghee-fired eucalyptus-pyre, but for stringent health regulations.)

To recap a little, much of the 20th century Hindu migration elicits radically different perceptions and response to the challenges that previously faced the 19th century counterparts. Both internal and external factors have contributed to the change and continuity, paving a way for a distinctive religio-ethnic identity to emerge. The diversity of regional, linguistic, and historical backgrounds of Hindus, of course, adds to the complexity of the baggage each group carries with it to a distant shore. The migrants from India and of South Asian descent, or ascent, who would otherwise call themselves Vaishnavas, Saivas, Saktas, Lingayats, bhaktas, or Vedantins, readily identify themselves as "Hindus". (Thanks to the British colonialists who transformed the Persian appellation for people beyond the Sind range.) These "Hindu" migrants in recent years have borne the burden of preserving their respective traditions, and participating on platforms of multiculturalism, or inter- faith meetings, but they are usually unaware of the subtle game of 'authentication by ethnicity' which whitewashes or marginalises their real political status and equal treatment as citizens of a civil society (which Australia of course cannot claim to be until it is able to deal with the rights and reconciliation issues in respect of the native Aborigines, who have hardly been players in or beneficiaries of the multicultural paradigm).

In any event, unlike western religions, Hinduisms' *absences* are said to preclude fixed doctrines, tight-knit structures, hierarchical governance, and rigid organizational base with ecclesiastical control, etc. Nevertheless, the monotheistic model provided by the Semitic trinity has captured the imagination of modern Hindu leaders, seeking to score political gains in India, and moral and material support in the wider diaspora. In Australia that impact is increasingly evident, while it tends also to eclipse the humble beginnings of a more diffused communitarian base aimed at continuing Hindu practices and culture locally.

There are certain sentiments that can be more readily exploited. For instance, some members of the Hindu community are anxious that the larger temple complexes have become routinely ritualistic and impersonal, neglectful of diasporic needs, in particular education in the vernaculars and transmission of values, Hindu mores and customs to the younger generation. This is, however, not true of all local Hindu temples. Nonetheless, it is in this absent space that not only radical Tamil groups

(with probable long distance connections to the liberation struggle in Sri Lanka), but also Hindu organizations, such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), occasionally with the Rasthriya Swayam-Sevak Sangh (RRS) (or its representative in Australia, Hindu Rasthriya Sewak-Sangh), and even the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) step in with promises to promote just such causes they too claim to stand for. The sway towards the Hindu Right is likely also to bring Hinduism into a somewhat more confrontational stance with the larger host society or its more liberal platforms. Indeed, alliances have already been drawn in the politically-hot centre of Australia between a largely white-collar Hindu group and the family of the present Prime Minister of Australia, who is one of the more conservative leaders in the Western world, presently on the warpath to abolish native entitlements for the Aborigines across a number of sensitive areas. Hindu 'fundamentalism' – if one may be permitted to use this term here – is an adjunct transnational phenomenon with global pretensions, as it seeks affirmation of the superiority or primacy of Hinduism over other religions extant in India, while denying Muslims claim even to being authentic Indians on the grounds that Muslims do not affirm India to be their *pitrabhumi* and *devabhumi* (Fatherland and Holy Land respectively) even though it is the common *janmabhumi* (land of birth). Paradoxically, second and third generation offspring of Indian immigrants who can demonstrate an inherited Hindu background or heritage, and re-affirms this sentiment in his own 'faith orientation' then he or she is more likely to be considered an 'Indian' than a fellow Muslim born and raised up in India. (The official categories of NRI and PIO have been in part created and liberalised for overseas persons of Indian descent precisely for this reason.) In any case, North Indian Hindus in Australia have growing links with the Hindu Right, which is also a cause of tension and split among the Hindus. Anti-Muslim sentiments exist among the Hindus, although not expressed in public. Just as at one time forums for interreligious interactions were being hogged by radical Sikh elements, nowadays representatives from Hindu groups earnestly attempt to foster "dialogue", so as to stamp their own authority on all things Hindu (or even Indian) and to underscore the pragmatic affinities between Hinduism and Judaeo-Christianity against the alleged heterodoxy of Islam. *Such is the price for global interreligiosity or "radical a-pluralism"!* [19]

Globalisation has many faces, but the process that is relevant to our primary discussion describes the rapid movement and mobility of personal and social space made possible by the new technologies of space travel, time traversing, long distance communications, and the deregulation of market that leads to the expansion of transnational corporations (TNCs), and 'interconnected flows of capital, information and people' (Voigt-Graf). A

different kind of operation of labour flow emerges as well, as transnational forces locate and shift the centres of their technological and capital intensive activities. Today it is Hong Kong, tomorrow it could be Sydney, and another day Atlanta in Georgia, or Toronto. The settled diasporas as ethnic transnational communities are reconstellated simultaneously within a local and global context, as newer frontiers of professional, business, and social networks open up, or connections with enterprises and relatives back home are enhanced by the new technologies in place. The most recent group to have become transnational migrants under this globalisation trend have been the computer wizkids from Karnataka. As we know Bangalore took the lead in transforming itself into a major info-tech city and teaming up with TNCs, software and IT industries in Silicon Valley and other parts of North America (gradually saturating some sectors of this industry in the global arena). Software and IT specialists from this region (and lately from Hyderabad, Maharashtra and Gujarat) have been in much demand outside of India. Australia too was not to be left behind in this race and since the late 1980s has permitted a slow but steady stream of IT graduates and professionals to service its own needs. All the major cities in Australia have up to or over 2,000 Kannadigas gainfully employed in this sector of the industry. This is close-knit cohesive group and they frequent the Hindu temples in larger numbers than do their north Indian counterparts (with comparable educational and urban background). This shows that social networks are important for maintaining a sense of belonging and identity in the local context as well.

Certainly globalisation has led to the diversification of migration pattern. However, unlike the earlier Indian migrants and in stark contrast to the Indian Fijians, the Kannadigas are not typical glocal residents, for they maintain rather strong links with their home city and parent companies they may have come through (or remain professionally connected to as part of the global TNCs that brought them here in the first place); and they visit or travel to India more frequently than other Indian settlers do, reinforcing the close links and obligations across the Indian Ocean. Some work hard and save up earnestly so that they can return and live more comfortably in their favourite home city. In addition they have close connections with the professional diaspora in the United States, where most of their contemporaries or cyber-cousins have relocated, and where they themselves would prefer to be as the vocational returns and earning capacities are deemed to be much higher than in Australia, the lower cost of living and a slower pace of life notwithstanding. Work assignments may take them for short periods to adjacent Asian countries as well. Like the icons of the Hindu pantheon, these are your transnational settlers-in-transit, equipped with triband cellular phones and internet-on-the-run, subjecting themselves

to more frequent relocation than was the case even with the twice migrated groups. Theirs is not an experience of diasporic dislocation as these are already well-trained global or multi-transnational citizens, the veritable products and harbingers of ISD-globacity.

Curiously also, both the transnational groups have had a peculiar re-enculturation impact on secondary Indian migrants, particularly the Fijian Indians. Since Fijian Indians with their business and local trading skills have set up large numbers of Indian spice, clothing, jewellery and video outlet shops, the social contact with India direct migrants and temporary residents (IT workers, students and visitors) have increased, with the consequence that the faded memory of the forebearers' homeland of India becomes more accessible imaginary (imagined home country), and they are also drawn into the religious and social and cultural activities of the transnational Indians whose sole endeavour seems to be to bring India little by little in all its facets to this country. Fiji Hindus never managed to construct such grandiose temples as have appeared in the Australian landscape, complete with the elaborate ritual practices enacted by sectarian priests brought out from India (another important transnational import). While in Fiji the concern was with retaining the *political* identity of a racially or ethnically distinct Indian group – which is more under threat presently than ever before – but in Australia the same group is exposed to a different kind of postcolonial discourse, where cultural capital, morality of *dharma*, and religious identity are at premium as vehicles for retaining Indianness. They further seek out their own kindred in terms of regional, linguistic and caste groupins, which was comparatively less diverse and sophisticated in Fiji, the Gujaratis or 'Bombayites' being the only Indians who seemed closely connected with India (being of course much later émigrés). Last but least, Fiji Hindus in Australia are also drawn into *sanghas* or religious congregations in worship of various popular and even unheard of gods and gurus, the most prominent of the latter being Sri Sathya Sai Baba, the enigmatic local preceptor known for his miracles and significant social reform activities, but whose globalising skills from a remote *ashram* location in Andhra Pradesh and intermittently in the outskirts of Bangalore, are underestimated. More to the point, Fiji Indian Hindus find themselves travelling to India more frequently as a result of these encounters and exposures than might otherwise have been the case. Whenever I land in Bangalore airport *en route* to my own Sanskrit teacher's base, I am always intrigued to find a fresh large group of jetlagged Indians from New Zealand and Australia on their way to Puttaparthi. Upon closer look a good number of them turn out to be of Fijian Indian origin. *Twice-over transnationalism is also a form of return to the long discarded imagined homeland, in a metonymic spiritual sense.*

Remarks on promises of globalisation: the Appadurai thesis and its problem.

On the use of the term 'diaspora', Gayatri Spivak thinks the term is unhelpful, and would rather speak of 'expatriate' in the context of the South Asian migration. In a way, Spivak is right, the majority of the people of Indian origin settled in the 'new world' are expatriates, i.e. first generation ethnic Indians, followed by 'twice-migrated' people of Indian origin from former colonies or India's neighbourhood, and after that the second-third generations – not-born-of-the-homeland-soil –who only marginally retain even their 'diasporic' identity, in the South Asian group at least. So it is inappropriate to ascribe a discursive space to a group as though their homeland is somewhere messianically in the future, when they should be confronted with their colonial past pushing into the postcolonial zone, and be responsible to political agenda still at hand: i.e. not letting the global agenda of development and rampant capitalism from stifling the less educated and privileged, or become oblivious to the erosion of social justice back home.

Arjun Appadurai (1997) on the other hand argues that the primary identity is diasporic since the immigrants in question wanted to leave India anyway and merge their identity not as a 'resident alien' but as hyphenated, transnational, postnational American (he is writing in America on the Indian American), who only catches glimpses of her/his life in the dissimulating mirror held up by the rustic tribes that flood his neighbourhood or work-place and claim him as their very own. This scenario creates ambivalence in the disaporic citizen of the new world. But Indians are a heterogenous people and as I have been at pains to show their own pattern of migration and settlement, location, dislocation and relocation has been varied, more so in the Australian context than in the North American context, and so Appadurai's thesis has to be modified to account for the heterogeneity and variation in the experience in question.

Again, if Appadurai is right the race is on to join the modern in 'self-exile', where a home-nation de-formed (perhaps also a reformed long distance nationalism minus the state), is the postcolonial diasporic condition. But how systematically and not just systemically organised, consciously planned and productive the race is in terms of culturalist and re-localisation movements is something I am less sanguine about than Appadurai is (p. 13). How self conscious are they about identity, culture, and heritage that is not tied to commercial, consumption and monetary mobilisation, where the suffering, identity crisis, gender-based abuse, discriminatory experience of

each and every member is taken seriously, dealt with through cultural and political institutions constructed by the groups itself, remain to be seen. My findings in Australia, on this score, have been mixed. Appadurai argues that globalization is 'itself a deeply historical, uneven, and even *localizing* process'. (p17). He welcomes heterogeneity that does not require any longer strict adherence to the liberal social contract of the modern West; rather there is greater role to be played by culturism (modern ethnic movements) and imagination even in a world of schizoid rootlessness and alienation. Postindustrial cultural productions have entered a postnostalgic phase (p. 31); and furthermore, it is terms like the 'image, the imagined, the imaginary' that 'direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: *the imagination as a social proctice*. (p. 31). Granted, the globalisation of culture involves the use of variety of instruments of homogenisation – armament, advertising campaigns, language hegemonies, and clothing styles. But these are also weapons of cannibalisation and false reproductions. Nevertheless, Appadurai has stop-gap explanatory devices to circumvent such threatening counter-examples and has confidence in the dynamics of benign global cultural flow even within the optic fibrous corridors of the narrow specialisation in single-state hi-tech and financial sectors that may profoundly determine 'the shape that ethnoscapes, ideoscapes, and mediascapes may take'. (p. 47)

At the risk of being a heretic to this post-anthropological drive against othering, I believe Appadurai's thesis is skimpy as it is prescriptive rather than descriptive. The overwhelming and numbing effects of the imbalances in power-knowledge relations and social control exercised via superstructures of production by hard-core engineers, money-launders, or culture-blind imaginers is legion. One need no longer appeal to Felix Marx Guttari or Madhusudana Foucault to drive this point. No diasporic community that I have studied actually lives up to these expectations of the new global cultural economy, not even the Kannadigas in Sydney and Melbourne, and if they do, the political edge of nation-building to which they might have been committed had they stayed behind has all but been blunted.

And so how deep really is or can be the 'ethnoscape' or 'ethnic implosion' cut into in the distance regions of the globe when the inner imagined world (intimate dealings and family detours) is disjunctively or sparing filled with the same ethnic stock, not even the hybrid hyphernates?; it is, isn't it being in a situation of peripheral actors in relative constructs or 'perspectival set of landscapes' comprising mediascape, technoscape, distancescape, and ideoscape (ibid p 33)? I am intrigued as to how fashionable diaspora studies can smooth over very complex sociology and psychology of dislocation, the

anomie or dis-affect of displacement, and the trauma of not-belonging (even if one wanted to not-belong any longer because of rigid caste and class and gender aligned conflicts or family pressures to remain locked in the same fold.). It is instructive to pour through the files of organisations across the country like Apna Ghar, Hum Tumare Hai, Raksha, and the umbrella organisation Tapestry, to see the cases of battered Indian women and children who fall victims to discarded arranged marriages, second –third marriages in non-recognition of earlier religious marriages, and domestic violence born out of workplace frustration, maladjustments, and a sense of failure in the Land of Promisory Opportunities. When I stood in the pew at the First India Baptist church in Atlanta and imagined feeling the hands of the pastor and elders run over the heads of innocent 10-to-14 year olds, praying intensely with all the southern evangelical hype for their salvation, against the temptations in the wretched world outside, I began to count the number of psychoanalytic or related therapy sessions these to-be-adults would be need in order to work through the heavy dosage of localised global culture. And I do not feel any less for Hindu kids who end up in holy summer camps run by long distance Hindu primordialists and neo-nationalist groups eager, nay desperate, to enlist the patronage of the rich and expansive Hindu expatriate/diaspora communities across the globe: bring it all back home, babe; or paint it saffron; don't paint it black; and make sure the *langhoti* does not fray in the wind of changes.

Conclusion

Some of the issues for an analysis of transnational diaspora that I have looked at, following my discussion of the methodological difficulties encountered in such a study, have been the following;
•   How is a tradition like Hinduism with its own unique cultural practices, and moral beliefs "transplanted/translated/transcreated" in a new transnational, settings?
•   How in turn is the local host country, its geography, cultural landscape, economic character, and symbols, transformed by an ethnic-religious group's need for and negotiated acquisition of social, ritual and cultural (perhaps even political) space?

How do the adherents cope with, and survive and stake or strengthen further claims in the imaginary of the new space?

I showed that Indian/Hindu immigration was a mixture of banished Ramas, "coolie" recruits, domestic servants, farm-hands and plantation labourers, to

camel-drivers and hawkers. Estranged from their families, a good few eventually left for their homeland. The ethnic-religious identity also came to prevail among the few Indians. Thus, a Hindu-merchant, Shri Pammamull, who came from the Sind region as an opal polisher, gradually built a family opal trade that has prosperously continued with his third to fourth generation descendants, who too remain as devoutly Hindus, contributing generously to Hindu-Indian causes [8]. The 20th century Hindu migration elicits radically different perceptions and response to the challenges that previously faced the 19th century counterparts. Both internal and external factors have contributed to the change and continuity, paving a way for a distinctive religio-ethnic identity to emerge. The closing decades of the 20th century, continuing into the 21st century, has witnesses a more globalised and globalising pattern in the Hindu diasporic experience. Here the local and global seem to be in tension, although some theorists are sanguine about the symbiosis of the two spatial directions when the chips (blue-chips) are down. While there is greater freedom of movement and mobility, and ease of transnational communication or connectivity, there are threats to the stability of the migrant communities' long term presence and identity, as any number of globalising forces vie for control and a stake in their high profile achievements, from TNCs eager to pouch the high achievers to extreme religious forces, Hindu, Tamil (and Sikh) conglomerates operating in the diaspora eager to enlist, fleech or embroil their own kind to long distance struggles and fights in or for the homeland. *Only a simulacrum of identity remains as a residue of this dissimulation.*

In the broader Australian society, the Hindu temple, along with the smoke from the Arya Samaji fire-oblation, symbolizes the struggles of a multicultural and ethnically plural ethos. The resulting interaction of cultures and fusion of discordant horizons promises to produce a society that is critically tolerant, more enlightened, artistic and truly democratic. Or so it is hoped by some leaders of the nation [20]. Religious diversity is a reality that Australia can no longer ignore, despite the anxiety to preserve the homogenising hegemony of Anglo-Celtic identity against the challenges of transnational pluralism, and especially of globalisation which threatens to bring about radical changes in shorter span of time than piecemeal social engineering accomplished over a century or two, for better or for worse. But globalisation, unlike earlier transnational transactions and transcreations does not augur good news for the expatriate/diaspora communities, for the universalism and sheer speed of capital or monetary motivated changes will surely wash away all local cultural capital and location of dignified social and religious presence. *Religion in self-exile, as with Tibetan Buddhism and its temporal seat, may well be the fate of religion in the ISD-globacity and trans-colonial times. Om-en.*

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1. In 1996 I published a book on *Hindus and Sikhs in Australia A religious community Profile* (Canberra: Bureau of Immigration and Multicultural and Population Research, Government of Australia, , 1996); in 1997 John Hinnells included my chapter on 'The Australian South Asia Diaspora' in his newly revised, edited and reworked, *A New Handbook of Living Religions* (Oxford/Cambridge, M.A.: Blackwell Publishers, 1997, Penguin 1999; pp. 728-755). Unmarked references to sources and information are from these works.
Since then the data from the 1996 Australian Census has been trickling in and I am making an effort to incorporate this data into my on-going narratives. Some discussions in this article have been drawn from the version published, 'The Making of the Hindu in Australia – A Diasporic Narrative', T S Rukmini (ed.) *Hindu Diaspora Global Perspectives*. Chair of Hindu Studies, Concordia University, Montreal, 1999.

2. P. Bilimoria, *Hinduism in Australia Mandala for the Gods* (Melbourne: Spectrum with Deakin University Press, 1988a), note 4-6, and pp. 16-17. Historians of South-east Asia disclaim any evidence that suggest that Indian contact went further, or to the Austral continent, in ancient times.

3. A.T. Yarwood, *Attitudes to Non-European Immigration Problems in Australian History* (Melbourne: Cassell, 1968) p. 12; see also Marie de Lepervenche, *Indians in a White Australia An account of race, class and Indian immigration in eastern Australia.* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, , 1984) p 36; see also R. Jayaraman, "Indians" in James Jupp (ed.) *The Australian People An Encyclopedia of the Nation, Its People, and Their Origins.* (Sydney: Angus Robertson, 1988) pp. 542-545. p. 542

4. M. Willard, *History of the White Australia Policy to 1920.* (Melbourne University Press, 1923, 2nd edn. 1967), p 4. Further discussion in P.Bilimoria and R. Ganguly-Scrase, *Indians in Victoria (Australia)* (Melbourne: Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission and Deakin University, 1988b), pp. 18-32.

5. Jayaraman (op cit); Willard, p. 7; Bilimoria *et al*, 1988b, (op cit).

6. Ernstine Hill, *The Great Australian Loneliness* (London: Jarrolds, 1937) p. 281

7. 'Australian News', May 1 1893

8. Pammamull family archives (personal access). Compares with Watammull in Honolulu, who are also renown for their patronage of Indian culture in the diaspora.

9. Presbyterian Minister's defence in 1901 of "the noble ideal of a White Australia - snow-white Australia if you will" (in Bilimoria, 1988b, p. 33). And, Alfred Deakin, later Premier of Australia (after whom my University is named), who had visited India and was a spiritualist by persuasion, although he gave exemptions to Indian travellers and students; see also Alfred Deakin, *Temple and Tomb in India,* (Melbourne: Melville, Mullen & Slade, 1893); and Allan Walker, *Plan for a Christian Australia* (Melbourne: Methodist Church of Australia, 1955) outlines history of this movement and its persistence in the church, especially the Methodists.

10. de Lepervenche (op cit) pp 66-69.

11. Bilimoria et al (1988b) pp. 27-30.

12. ibid.

13. Extracted from 1991 Census of Population and Housing, State Comparison series ABS Catalogue No. 2731.0 and other comparable catalogues on birth by country, languages, etc.

14. Bilimoria 1988b, pp. 78-86.

15. Bilimoria, 1988a, p.59-60.

16. 1996 figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census Profile.

17. Bilimoria, 1988a, p.59-60.fg

18. "Hinduism Today", June 1991, p.4. and Prem K. Misra, "Report on Proposed Sri Vishvanath Temple at 201 Eagleview Road, Minto, N.S.W." (Parmarth Educational Centre, Indian [Hindu] Heritage Research Foundation, 1990).

19. I have discussed the situation with Hindu-Christian dialogue earlier in my report in *Hindu-Christian Studies,* vol 7, 1994, pp. 31-18; also in my article, "A problem for radical (onto-theos) pluralism,", in *Sophia,* vol 30

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The Impact of the Hindu Festival of Ram Navmi on the Cultural Identity of Hindu Married Women in the South African Diaspora

Sheila Chirkut (PhD, Post-Doctoral Fellow)
Gender Studies Programme
School of Anthropology, Gender and Historical Studies
University of KwaZulu-Natal
Professor R. Sitaram (Retd)
School of Language, Literature and Linguistics
Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Abstract

Hindus constitute a minority that makes up the diverse South African population. One of the challenges faced by Hindus is the question of preserving their cultural identity, which they perceive as an important component of their existence. Cultural identity has been defined by combining many identity patterns such as dress, language, food, religion and culture that are fast disappearing due to educational, political, economic and social influences. Hindu married women are traditionally perceived as "cultural custodians" who maintain the value system in their families. Hence Hindu women are faced with the challenge to embrace other cultures and at the same time to maintain their Hindu identity. The pertinence of the cultural and religious lives of Hindu married women is expressed through the observance of religio-cultural festivals with particular reference to the Ram Navmi festival. This paper attempts to illustrate that a critical study of the Ram Navmi festival reveals that down the ages, Hindu married women have used it as instruments to maintain their cultural identity and to uphold the Hindu religio-cultural value system.

Introduction

Hindus make up the minority in South Africa's multicultural population. They have their own way of expressing their religio-cultural and socio-cultural beliefs, customs and traditions in the form of festivals such as the *Ram Navmi*[1] festival to maintain their cultural identity. My attention in

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[1] Lord Rama's birthday. This marks the end of the Ramayana Week.

this paper is focused on the awareness of working Hindu married women and how they represent themselves during the major Hindu festival of Ram Navmi and maintain their cultural identity. Cultural identity in this sense encompasses religion, culture and traditions.

My preliminary interviews revealed that perceptions of dress, food, language, religion and culture amongst others combine to make up the identity patterns of Hindu married women. But these are fast disappearing because westernisation and modernisation have led to the adoption of western values by Hindu married women. Interaction of Hindus with people of other cultures has resulted in changes and modifications to tradition. Hindu women are traditionally perceived as "cultural custodians" who maintain the Hindu value system in their families. Thus Hindu married women are faced with the challenge to maintain their Hindu identity. Given the identity discourse, this paper seeks to highlight how the religio-cultural festival of Ram Navmi, even though it has undergone several changes and adaptations in its observance and celebration, plays a pivotal role in the preservation of the cultural identity of Hindu women. The legends and myths associated with Ram Navmi bear high moral significance and form the basis of Hinduism.

Many writers (Duley and Edwards, 1986; Mohanlal, 1998; Mukhopadhayay, 1995; Sweetman, 1995) claim that Hindu religion and culture are intertwined, interdependent and inseparable. Mukhopadhayay (1995) further explains that assumptions about culture and gender are rooted in religious concerns and focus on cultural practices such as religio-cultural functions, which reinforce the power of men by appealing to tradition. Thus this study further explores how power relations in patriarchal Hinduism is exercised during the Ram Navmi festival and provide explanations for the changing identities of Hindu married women.

The Coming of Indians to South Africa

Many of the colonial era Hindu immigrants, who arrived nearly 145 years ago, were illiterate in the western sense and coming from small villages, brought with them to the South African Diaspora knowledge of their religio-cultural practices and festivals that were prevailing in their villages. Faced by various forces of westernisation, in order to resist total acculturation, the loyal Hindus rigidly practised their religio-cultural tenets by observing and celebrating festivals. Govender (2004) emphasizes that the earliest indentured labourers who travelled on the S.S. Truro, arrived in South Africa in 1860 with no books. Govender

further explains that those who commissioned the S.S. Truro were not interested in providing for the knowledge and culture of the indentured labourers.

The indentured Indians were a highly heterogeneous population. The majority of them were either Hindi[2] speaking Hindus from the Northern Provinces of India who emigrated through the port of Calcutta or they were Tamil[3] and Telugu[4] speaking Hindus from the Southern Provinces who came by way of Madras (Chirkut, 1993). From 1875 onwards, a second stream of immigrants, the 'Passenger Indians' or traders followed the indentured labourers. The passenger Indians were predominantly Gujarati[5] speaking Hindus and Gujarati/Urdu[6] speaking Muslims mainly from Bombay and Surat in Western India.

Ram Navmi: Legends, Traditions and Rituals

Ram Navmi celebrates the birth of Lord *Rama*[7] on the ninth day of the bright fortnight in the month of *Chaitra* (March/April) of the Hindu calendar, which falls in the spring season in India. It was on this day that *Lord Vishnu*[8] is believed to have incarnated as Rama through his mother *Kaushalya*. As the legend goes, Lord Vishnu incarnated as the 7th *avatar*[9] as Lord Rama to destroy the demon King *Ravana*. Ravana was very powerful and his tyranny knew no bounds. Sages were not able to perform their rituals under his reign (www.webonautics.com 2004). Ram Navmi is one of the most important festivals for the *Vaishnavites* (worshippers of Lord Vishnu). Hindus believe that on this day, Rama fulfils the wishes of all those who worship him. This day is celebrated throughout the Hindu world when special services in temples are offered and the *Ramayana*[10] is read with great reverence.

There are many rituals that are observed during the Ram Navmi festival. In the states of *Bihar* and *Uttar Pradesh* (North India), early morning rituals

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[2] One of the four main languages brought to South Africa by the indentured labourers from North India.

[3] Tamil is one of the languages spoken by South Indians.

[4] One of the four main languages brought to South Africa by the South Indian Hindus.

[5] Gujarati is one of the languages spoken by Hindus who came from Western India.

[6] Urdu is related to Hindi but with many Persian words. Mainly spoken by Muslims.

[7] Traditionally the 7th incarnation of God Vishnu. The hero of the Ramayana.

[8] One of the great Deities of Hinduism – believed to be the Preserver..

[9] The descent of a Deity on earth in bodily form.

[10] A Hindu scripture. The story of Lord Rama.

mark the celebration. It entails a h*avan*[11], the chanting of *mantras*[12] and offerings of fruit, milk, sweetmeats and flowers. Temples dedicated to Rama are beautifully decorated and the image of Rama is adorned with rich clothes and jewels (www.indiaparenting.com, 2004). Stories from the Ramayana are read at joyous public gatherings and *satsangs*[13]. Though the public worship of Rama is of recent origin, his worship in the home dates back to the pre-Christian era (Kuppusami, 1982). Most Hindus observe a strict fast during Ram Navmi.

Ayodhya (kingdom of Rama in North India) is said to be the birthplace of Rama and is the focus of the birth celebrations with great pomp and glory. A huge Ram Navmi fair is held for two days in Ayodhya, which draws a massive crowd of dedicated devotees. In Ayodhya, *ratha yatras* or chariot processions of Rama, his wife *Sita*[14], brother *Lakshmana*[15] and his devotee *Hanuman*[16] are taken out from the many temples. Hanuman is worshipped for his unflinching devotion to Rama and his worship forms an important part of the Ram Navmi celebrations (Penney, 1997). As Rama is believed to have been born at midday in India, at all Vaishnavite temples, as the sun rises, a coconut is placed in a cradle and at midday, the priest announces the birth of Rama. Devotees sing devotional songs in praise of Rama and rock his image in cradles to celebrate his birth (Ganeri, 1997). Prayer meetings are held for nine successive days preceding the observance of Ram Navmi.

In South India, this festival is celebrated for nine days as the wedding of Rama and his consort Sita. Devotees sing and chant the name of Lord Rama. They have a highly colourful ceremony to mark the wedding celebration (www.webonautics.com. 2004).

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This section presents data from in-depth interviews with working Hindu married women in the Stanger area of KwaZulu-Natal that has a predominantly Indian population. This investigation is also guided by qualitative research methodology. Weedon (1987) argues that poststructuralist theory provides a suitable framework to understand and

[11] Havan involves the offerings of grains, ghee and petals into the fire to convey prayers to ward off evil.
[12] The sacred utterances of the Lord's name.
[13] Regular congregational worship that involves prayers, songs and readings.
[14] Lord Rama'a wife. Heroine of the Ramayana.
[15] Lord Rama's half brother.
[16] The Hindu monkey God. Most faithful devotee of Lord Rama.

analyse the impact of culture on the cultural identity of Hindu married women. It offers mechanisms of gender, gender roles and power relations in culture such as when observing the Ram Navmi festival, and its impact on the cultural identity of Hindu women.

Twenty-four working Hindu married women, in the age range of twenty five to sixty years in the research made up a purposeful sample as they were particularly selected for inclusion in the study. Through their narratives they provided detailed reflections of their beliefs and the significance of the myths and rituals associated with the Ram Navmi festival in relation to their Hindu identity.

Data was collected through in-depth/face-to-face interviews and non-verbal communication, focus group discussions and participant observation. Data gathered through in-depth interviews can be representative of the greater population of Hindu women in South African diaspora so that conclusions can be drawn from that population (Rudestam and Newton, 1992). The interviews, which consisted of open-ended questions, were conducted in English. The interviews took approximately one to one and half hours, were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed *verbatim* and checked for accuracy. Analysis and interpretations were done to the major themes and patterns in the study.

Ram Navmi Festival: Discussion of Findings

The festival of Ram Navmi finds a place in the folklore, social, religious and cultural life of Hindus in South Africa. Ram Navmi has a rich oral tradition and has been handed down through the generations. The indigenous knowledge and oral tradition associated with Ram Navmi has impacted on the cultural identity of Hindus with particular reference to Hindu married women. Ram Navmi commemorates the birth anniversary of Lord Rama, the hero of the epic Ramayana, on the ninth day of the bright fortnight in the month of Chaitra (April/May). The Sanskrit word Navmi means nine and indicates the ninth day in the Hindu month. Lord Rama is believed to be the seventh incarnation of Lord Vishnu and is one of the most popularly worshipped deities by the Hindu diaspora. Hindus revere Rama as a personification of all that is good and great in human behaviour and Ram Navmi offers all Hindus an opportunity to absorb at least some of the ideals and spirit enshrined in the life of Rama.

According to Kumar's (2000) study, in South Africa, the Ram Navmi festival has greater popularity among the North Indian community (Hindi

and Gujarati speaking Hindus) than among the South Indian community. He says that Tamils and Telugus do not tend to celebrate the festival with the same amount of enthusiasm as the North Indians. Kumar further explains that the reasons for the relatively less popularity of the festival among Tamilians and Telugus lie in their Indian origin rather than inside South Africa. Kumar feels that the underlying theme of the festival of Ram Navmi is traditionally associated with the hero of the Ramayana, Rama who is seen as the Aryan hero, avenging the abduction of his wife Sita by King Ravana.

Another significant factor is that the Tamil community in South India is largely *Saivite* (worshippers of Lord Shiva) in their religious orientation. Ram Navmi, being a Vaishnavite (worshippers of Lord Vishnu) festival, South Indians do not consider it very significant. Kumar says that this holds true of the South African situation. The study revealed that most Hindus of all the linguistic groups celebrate the Ram Navmi festival together at the local temples (Vide: list of temples in the reference). In the Stanger area, as indicated by the interviewees, Ram Navmi is celebrated as a private (family) and a public (temple) function. This concurs with Prabhakaran's (1994) study that in South Africa, Ram Navmi is a family and community event. It would be appropriate to mention that the Ram Navmi festival is celebrated with great enthusiasm and devotion by the Neo-Hindu Movements such as the Ramakrishna Movement, Divine Life Society and Sathya Sai Organisations. Being a participant observer, I witnessed the presence of people from all the Hindu linguistic groups at the celebration.

The following are some of the general perceptions and experiences of the interviewees.

Interviewee A relates:
> Ram Navmi is an important festival for us Hindus because we believe that Lord Rama incarnated on earth to destroy evil. The story of the Ramayana is all about Rama's life as an ideal Hindu. As much as I do my Ram Navmi prayers at home, I also like to go to the temple function on the days I can to listen to the discourses about the significance that lie behind the myths and legends of the Ramayana.

Interviewee B's interests in the festival is as follows:
> The way the rituals are observed at the temple, especially the birth of Lord Rama on the tenth day is very symbolic and special. According to my observations, this ritual is not performed in many

temples. The temple function, which includes the havan, the devotional songs, listening to the heroic deeds of Rama, lends meaning and reflection to one's life. It makes me think of my life as a Hindu and some of my joys and sorrows.

The above passages indicate that the pillars of the Hindu religion as we know it now are probably the world's great epics – the Ramayana and the *Mahabharata*[17]. Passed down from generation to generation over the centuries in Hindu society, these stories of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata have moulded and guided people of the Hindu religion even to the present day (Bhopal, 1997). The findings revealed that at the home level, Ram Navmi is observed by the family in a simple manner and is of a religious nature. The ritual involves the decoration of the shrine, adorning the images of Lord Rama, his wife Sita, brother Lakshmana and his devotee, Hanuman. Prayers in praise of Lord Rama are offered at the shrine on the first eight days. On the ninth day prayers are rendered with offerings of fruit, milk and sweetmeats. The rituals as well as the cooking of the *prasadam*[18] (sweetmeats) are all undertaken mostly by the women in the household.

In the Stanger area, the nine days Ram Navmi is celebrated with much religious fervour at the local temples (Vide: list of temples in the reference). Many of the interviewees cannot attend the function at the temple on all the nine evenings but try to be present particularly on the ninth evening. On this day, many Hindus observe a fast until midnight while many devotees fast for the whole nine days. Kuppusami (1983) explains that fasting is when an individual abstains from taking any form of nourishment for a limited period (normally twenty four hours) for religious reasons, but takes water only. However, on fast days items like fresh fruit and milk are allowed. For the majority of the women in the study (as well as men) fasting means abstaining from meat. The celebration for the nine days entails *havan* and chanting of the Vedic *mantras* that are conducted by the temple priest who is a male. In traditional Hinduism, the role of the priest is usually assigned to males only. Here we see this gendered role of priesthood clearly demonstrated. However, we now have women priests in the Neo-Hinduism, with particular reference to the *Arya Samaj*[19] group. The temple is beautifully decorated (by the women who are members of the temple group). The women also perform the cleaning and dressing of images of the deities

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[17] The great Hindu epic. The Gita is a small part of the Mahabharata.

[18] Consecrated food offered to the Deity.

[19] A Reformed Hinduistic Movement, founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875 in India.

with rich clothes and jewels. I observed devotees praying with offerings of fruit, milk and sweetmeats, which are offered to all those present as *prasadam* at the end of the function. The temple function begins at six o'clock in the evening and terminates at about ten o'clock in the evening. Devotional songs are rendered and special discourses on topics from the Ramayana are delivered and discussed by learned speakers over the nine-day period. These speakers constitute both males and females. This fact signifies that the community at large now acknowledges women as upstanding pillars of Hindu society in a religio-cultural context. It is believed that Rama incarnated to destroy evil and protect the weak. Ram Navmi is therefore, as the interviewees indicated, a special reminder of the noble ideals for which Rama stood and which Hindus are encouraged to identify with.

As a participant observer, I was fascinated by the unflinching devotion of some of the devotees who kept awake the whole of the eighth night in anticipation of the birth of Rama the next day. Rama is believed to have been born at midday. As the sun rose, a coconut was placed in a cradle and at midday, the priest announced the birth of Rama. *Havan* was performed and devotees sang in praise of Rama and rocked the cradle to celebrate his birth. The priest performed the peace chant by sprinkling consecrated water. *Prasadam* of sweets and fruit was given to the people attending the *puja*[20]. This unique ritual is not fully observed in South Africa (only in most temples in North India) but as indicated by the interviewees and as a participant observer, I witnessed this age-old tradition.

One of the rituals that is performed in North India but not performed in the South African context is the chariot procession of Rama, Sita, Lakshmana and Hanuman. In the course of their continued existence as Kumar (2000) says, many rituals in South Africa have been simplified or modified. Perhaps the chariot procession was not seen as being relevant.

In South India, the ninth day of Ram Navmi is the glorious celebration of the wedding of Rama and Sita that takes place in all the temples. This specific religio-cultural activity was not familiar to the South Indians (Tamil and Telugu speaking) interviewees in Stanger as indicated by many of the interviewees. However, similar modes of worship and the celebration of the Ram Navmi festival were reported by all the interviewees in the study.

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[20] Worship (ritual service) to a Deity and/or its visible image in an atmosphere of devotion

Ram Navmi is identified with the myths in the epic, the Ramayana that focuses on the close companionship and joyful togetherness of Rama and Sita. During the celebration, Rama and Sita are presented as an ideal couple, each projected as an ideal man and woman respectively.

Interviewee C expresses her interpretations of the Rama-Sita relationship:

> Rama is the hero in the Ramayana, but we must not forget that Sita is the heroine. Ram Navmi makes me think and reflect on the character of Sita as an ideal wife who accompanies her husband on his fourteen-year banishment into the forest. During Ram Navmi, we women are encouraged through the stories in the Ramayana to portray Sita-like characteristics.

Similar sentiments echoed by Interviewee D, lends a gendered perspective:

> I always believed Sita, the heroine in the Ramayana should be admired not only for her traits as a dutiful wife but also for her steadfastness and moral strength in standing up to the demands of her family and society. Her role towards the end of the story can be seen as a deviation from her traditional role, when she is rejected by Rama, she does not beg Rama to take her back but leaves with dignity.

The above passages offer two differing views of the characteristics of an ideal Hindu woman. Firstly, Sita is glorified as the devoted wife of Rama, unswerving in her loyalty when she accompanies Rama into the forest when he was exiled for fourteen years. This focuses on the notion that a woman's place is always with her husband. In other words, Sita is portrayed as the symbol of an ideal wife fulfilling tradition and expectations of an ideal Hindu married woman. This can be seen as feminine loyalty and the demonstration of the virtues to one's husband. From another perspective it can be seen that Sita fought for her right to be with her husband in exile.

Secondly, in view of contemporary interpretation of the Ramayana (Kishwar, 1998), Sita is held up as an example for not being a weak and submissive woman. This analysis is derived from the episode when Sita is kidnapped by the demon King Ravana and kept at his palace. The story reaches a climax when, after rescuing Sita, Rama questions her fidelity,

compelling Sita to prove her chastity by going through the *agnipariksha*[21] from which she emerges unscathed. This test fails to erase the suspicion from Rama's mind that is influenced by his subjects. Rama banishes a pregnant Sita, who refuses to subject herself to the indignity of a second agnipariksha. Kishwar (1998:5), articulates, "Her (Sita) rejection of him (Rama) is held up as an example of supreme dignity. By this act she emerges triumphant and supreme, she leaves a permanent stigma on Rama's name". Sita figures here as a departure from traditional Hindu norms and can be seen as a woman who is capable of shaping her own destiny. She also sets a high ideal for women's dignity, by rejecting Ravana's importunities as well as Rama's demand for proof of purity. This, however, does not affect her virtue and love for Rama. Sita's final choice can also be seen as an indictment of a society that makes excessive demands on women.

The above analysis of Sita's character provides implicit assumptions of the developments of present day Hindu women in a patriarchal Hindu society. Mohanlal's (1998) study reveals that Hindu women are expected to model themselves on Sita whose main role in the Ramayana is to be seen and not heard. It is about time that the "other" Sita should be given prominence in the one who did not even grant the mighty Ravana even one single glance, and who rejected her beloved Rama forever, by choosing death to dishonour, a dishonour that was perpetrated by a highly placed scholar/Ravana, and bandied about by illiterate commoners. Therefore we see that although the interviewees view Sita as a role model, they also acknowledge her strength in adversity when Rama rejected her. In other words, Sita becomes a modern day symbol of hope and courage to all Hindu women, including single female parents.

Lastly, the interpretation of the character of Sita demonstrates the accepted general notion of Hindu women who are deeply- rooted in their religio-cultural traditions, but at the same time accommodates the ideology of an independent, capable and self-sufficient Hindu woman. In this latter respect Sita will increasingly become a role model for Hindu women. My assumption is that although the story of Rama and Sita has been told for centuries, their morals are still relevant in present-day debates and discussions. Literature reviewed on Hindu women and culture in the South African context did not reveal similar findings related to Ram Navmi festival. These findings will contribute to the growing body of literature on Hindu women and their identification with Sita as a role model.

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[21] Fire test.

Ram Navmi Festival: Changes in Religio-Cultural Practices

Discussion with the interviewees concerning the changes in the old worship patterns of Ram Navmi celebrations reveals a gap between the North and South Indian communities in the Stanger area. The Hindi and Gujarati interviewees recalled Ram Navmi more as a home based festival that was celebrated on the ninth day and not continuously over the nine-day period. Many remembered attending the celebration at the local temple or hall on the final ninth day.

A more significant factor to remember is that the Tamil and Telugu speaking Hindus in South Africa are largely Saivites in their religious orientation and that Ram Navmi is a Vaishnavite festival. However, the narratives of the Tamil and Telugu women in the study gave the indication that the majority of Hindus in the Stanger area celebrate this festival together at the temples. Many of the interviewees suggested that the combining of the traditions of the Ram Navmi festival under one religious institution and celebrating it together with all the linguistic groups (as is done presently) is an attempt by Hindus in the Stanger area to achieve consensus and unity.

Conclusion

Industrialisation and modernisation bring in betterment of lifestyle but on the other hand they can lead to the erosion of traditional knowledge and cultural practices. However, the study revealed that working Hindu married women in the Stanger area are preserving the basic traditions and rituals when celebrating the festival of Ram Navmi but with simplification, changes and modifications that have taken place over the years due to social, educational, political and economic influences.

The women in the study primarily view Sita as a devoted and dutiful wife who accompanies her husband into the forest, which conveys the notion that a wife's place is beside her husband. On the other hand, the findings of the study also revealed that Sita is also viewed as a strong and steadfast woman when her husband Rama required her to undergo another fire test. She did not beg Rama to take her back and in this way she sets a high ideal for women's dignity with which many Hindu women identify. When analysing the contemporary interpretation of the Ramayana, Sita is portrayed as a role model for the traditional Hindu woman and also accommodates the ideology of independence and self-sufficiency for the modern Hindu woman.

Thus the Ram Navmi festival reflects the Hindu woman's harmony with Rama and Sita whose manifestations have a purpose to fulfil and an ideal to be perceived which has impacted on Hindu women to preserve their cultural identity.

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Temples Included in the Study

1. Shri Sanathan Mundal.
   Greyridge Drive, Stanger Heights, Stanger.

2. Stanger Siva Temple.
   Temple Grove, Dawnside, Stanger.

HALTING LANGUAGE SHIFT : HINDI IN SOUTH AFRICA

Usha Shukla
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Abstract

The Ramacharitamanas and the Hindi Language took their journey simultaneously from India to South Africa along with the indentured Indian labourers who were recruited to work on the sugarcane plantations in KwaZulu- Natal. Hindi was the mother tongue of just under 50% of the Indians who came to South Africa between 1860 and 1911. Due to the dominance of English and Afrikaans, Hindi has now ceased to be the mother tongue of the descendents of these people. This paper aims to identity some of the factors that contributed to language shift and its reversal amongst Hindi speakers. In the past few years there is visible interest amongst Hindi speakers to read and understand the original Ramacharitamanas text, while they rely on the readily available English translations when necessary for a more profound experience of it.

Introduction

The Ramayana of Tulasidas (Ramacharitamanas) is a religious text of Hindi speaking Hindus. It is couched in Awadhi, a dialect of Hindi. The indentured Indians from North India came largely from the Uttar Pradesh and Bihar provinces which fall within the Hindi Speaking Belt. Hindi dialects widely spoken in India and brought to South Africa were Bhojpuri, Awadhi and Braj. Of these, Bhojpuri was the most popular, although both Awadhi and Braj were understood by the indentured Indians from North India. The Ramacharitamanas has been, since 1860, a text revered as scripture amongst Hindi speaking Hindus in South Africa. Religion and religious texts had a profound impact on the lives of these culturally conservative indentured labourers. Research completed by Shukla (1989 and 1993) on the Ramacharitamanas in South Africa and in the Hindi Diaspora (Trinidad and Mauritius, in particular) highlights the significance of the Ramacharitamanas to the lives of these people, in general, and to their language, more

specifically, for over a century and a half. As a Hindi text the Ramacharitamanas contributed to Hindi learning amongst the labourers, aiding language maintenance and delaying language shift. Especially in the last decade, it has once again been a factor in reversing language shift to a significant degree. In an earlier paper on 'Hindi in South Africa', the writer contends, that "while Hindi no more enjoys 'mother tongue' status among the Hindis in South Africa its 'impending death' may be seen as a premature alarm if not a false one" (Shukla 1996:17). After initiatives to consciously promote Hindi by the Hindi Shiksha Sangh of South Africa and the launch of the only Hindi radio station in the country, as well as widespread efforts to disseminate the teachings of the Ramacharitamanas, the erosion of Hindi has been further delayed.

Methodology

The writer has conducted ethnographic research in the late 1980s and early 1990s on the impact of the Ramacharitamanas in South Africa. The empirical research conducted by during this period included a questionnaire survey and formal and informal interviews. The questionnaires helped determine the level of Hindi amongst Hindi speakers of diverse age and occupational groups, as well as their knowledge of the Ramacharitamanas.

The formal interviews were especially designed to gather information from second generation Hindi speakers about knowledge of both the Hindi language and the Ramacharitamanas amongst their parents and other elder family members. The informal interviews were also used to verify the information received from the questionnaires and formal interviews.

The writer also used the participant observer method at religious gatherings, the Hindi Shiksha Sangh, and family religious rituals and ceremonies to determine the extent of the use of Hindi in the family and community.

Information was also gathered from secondary sources as well as from socio-linguistic research in Hindi (Mesthrie 1985), Tamil (Murugan 1994), Gujarati (Desai 1992) and Telugu (Prabhakaran 1992).

While much of the discussion that continues falls within the theoretical framework of a socio-linguistic nature, this article focuses on the symbiosis of the Ramacharitamanas and Hindi. In poetic parlance the romance between Hindi and the Ramacharitamanas is similar to that of the flower and its

fragrance or the necklace and its gold; they cannot be separated. I liken the beautiful and profound English and other language translations of the Ramacharitamanas to beautiful and magnificent artificial jewellery; they are beautiful but not the classic original.

Mesthrie (1985) has very comprehensively researched and documented the socio-historical and socio-linguistic aspects of Hindi in his thesis titled "A history of the Bhojpuri (or Hindi) Language in South Africa". My own major research initiative in this area is "Ramacaritamanasa in South Africa" (2002) which deals with the perceptions of the Ramacharitamanas amongst Hindi speaking South Africans. I have used information liberally from both texts (with due acknowledgement) to help establish the role of the Ramacharitamanas in maintaining Hindi and in decelerating language shift amongst Hindi speakers. More importantly, I examine recent events and document their role in aiding language shift reversal.

In addition to the Ramacharitamanas's impact on the revival of interest in Hindi, one sees a parallel contribution by Hindvani, the only Hindi radio station in South Africa. This is a project of the Hindi Shiksha Sangh of South Africa aimed at reviving the waning use of Hindi as a medium of communication. These will be discussed in a later section.

Hindi in South Africa

For the past 147 years Hindi has existed in South Africa as the mother tongue of a sizeable number of people of Indian origin and it continues to have cultural and religious significance for them. Hindi in this context refers to Kariboli Hindi, that is, standard literary Hindi. The indentured Indians spoke mainly Bhojpuri, some Awadhi, or a combination of these. These are dialects of Hindi and their speakers are referred to as Hindi speakers. This is a diglossic situation as defined by Ferguson (cited in Murugan 1994:12 and Desai 1992:25) who states that in a community the speakers use two or more varieties of the same language under different conditions. Wardhaugh (1986:88) concurs with Ferguson, adding that a bilingual community uses the highly codified 'high' variety in certain situations, and the 'low' colloquial variety in others. 'High' Hindi would be the Hindi used in temples, public functions, religious occasions and pathashalas (vernacular schools); Bhojpuri on the other hand has always remained the 'low' variety which was and still is confined to use in the home, the larger family and among friends (Shukla 1996:17).

In the early days of indenture the communal 'barrack' style of living had its natural disadvantages. However, from a linguistic perspective, communal living aided the maintenance and study of Hindi since people who share a common mother tongue and who live and work together communicate in that tongue. Mesthrie (1991:64) alludes to how children of immigrants shed their variations of dialect, facilitating the emergence of South African Bhojpuri. This writer in an earlier study pointed out those Hindi speakers did initiate language learning of the 'high' variety (Hindi) during the early years of indenture (Shukla 1996:17). Hindi speakers strove ceaselessly to acquire knowledge. The medium of instruction and learning may have been Bhojpuri initially, but this was to change through the institutionalization of language learning, first informally and then formally. Barz (1980:4) states quite correctly that Hindi and Bhojpuri are closely related dialects and speakers of either are intelligible to each other. Hence this situation of diglossia obtained for more than a century.

The dominance of English and Afrikaans, the "languages of power", has had an emasculating effect on all the minority Indian languages in the country; these include Hindi, Gujarati, Tamil, Telugu and Urdu. This is generally the case with all minority languages of transplanted communities worldwide. For over a century Hindi speakers maintained Hindi as their mother tongue, but they also strove untiringly to master English, the language of wider communication. Hindi speakers thus became bilingual. According to Uriel Weinreich (1968:1, cited in Prabhakaran 1996:47), bilingualism is "the practice of alternately using two languages, and the person involved, bilingual"; while William Mackey (1970:555 cited in Prabhakaran 1996:47) defines it as the "alternate use of two or more languages by the same individual". For a number of decades this bilingualism (Hindi and English) continued amongst Hindi speakers, and even today there is a percentage, although very small, of Hindi and/or Bhojpuri speakers who communicate in both languages. It is known that such situations arise when individuals in different speech communities depend on each other for political, economic, social and cultural support (Prabhakaran 1996:47).

With regard to the diglossic situation of Hindi and its dialects, as well as the plight of minority languages in a plural society, Desai and Maharaj (2007:78) comment:

It is not surprising that the two processes described by
Singaravelou in the West Indies' diaspora occurred in South Africa
as well: "homogenization" (the dialects disappeared to the
advantage of the main vernaculars viz. Hindi, Tamil) and linguistic
"erosion" (decline of the vernaculars vis-à-vis the languages of the
dominant colonial powers).

Research has shown that Hindi was understood and spoken widely for about
a century in South Africa notwithstanding the sharp decline in the last two
and a half decades in the use of Hindi as the mother tongue; the last five
years have witnessed a resurgent interest in the Ramacharitamanas and
related Hindi literature.

Desai and Maharaj (2007:78) cite Singaravelou (1987:117) who suggests
that "for transplanted people, intellectual culture and traditions need a
written support for surviving".

There is historical evidence that the Indian immigrants who arrived in
Durban in 1860 left their abodes in search of a better life. With regard to
migration the two main "push factors" were poverty and the pernicious caste
system; the "pull factors" were the prospects of a more comfortable life,
increase in income and freedom from debt. They were immediately set in a
plural society of diverse cultures and languages. Their employers spoke
English, the Africans spoke mainly Zulu in Natal, and Tamil, Telugu, Urdu
and later Gujarati were spoken by fellow Indians. Indians also learned basic
Zulu or its pidgin Fanakalo to communicate with Zulu speakers in Natal.

The symbiosis of Hindi and the Ramacharitamanas of Tulasidasa is crucial
to understanding the history of Hindi in South Africa. Many of the Hindi
speaking indentured Indians brought along copies of the Ramacharitamanas
while some carried the Bhagavadgita and other scriptures as well. While
they were unlettered they were most definitely not unfamiliar with their
religion and culture (Sitaram 1987:116). I have noted elsewhere (Shukla
2002:103):

Hindu culture is a rich culture and its inherent strength has helped
Hindus in India to withstand the onslaughts of time. Even in the
19th century the majority of the Hindus in India were unlettered,
yet Hinduism survived, and this can only be attributed to the oral
tradition which has preserved this religio-cultural heritage of the

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Hindus. History has evinced that by virtue of this oral tradition and also through literature Hindus carried with them their profound religious and cultural traditions to whichever part of the world they have settled; hence it is not surprising that Hinduism has flourished in the diaspora, South Africa being no exception.

Interviews conducted with older generation South African Hindi speakers in Natal provided insights into the status of Hindi and the perceptions of the Ramacharitamanas amongst the indentured Indians who came to South Africa since 1860. An interviewee, Pandit Ramnath Ramlakhan Maharajh, nostalgically spoke of his father's experiences as an indentured labourer. Shukla (2002:121) records:

The early indentured labourers were keen to learn more about the Ramayana which they viewed as scripture. The labourers were allocated a certain amount of work for the day. There was one Pandit Ramlakhan Tewari who would, on his own volition, begin his day at 3 o'clock in the morning and, being hard-working, work quickly to complete his day's work, return home, take a bath and revel in his Ramayana. He lived at Renishaw in the Scottburgh area and his daily routine influenced a number of indentured labourers to imitate him. Thus Ramayana reading became a daily event and the knowledge and understanding gained from these recitals only helped to strengthen deep devotion in the people.

The significance of the reading of the Ramayana (i.e. the Ramcharitamanasa of Tulasidas) has been found among Hindi speakers in the early days of indenture. As an additional benefit, the Hindi language retained its currency in the form of the Awadhi of the Ramcharitamanas and the spoken Bhojpuri.

There is a general consensus among many people about the importance of Ramayana reading in the community in the early days and this is supported by those whom I interviewed. Interviews conducted with Mr. Sewcharan Andhee (Verulam), Mr. Willie Beharie (Springfield), Pandit Krishna Lalla Maharaj (Reservoir Hills), Mrs Lallee Shukla (Clare Estate), Mrs Rampyari Singh (Stanger), Mrs Hindevi Maharaj (Chatsworth), amongst others, confirmed that Ramayana reading was a part of the regular lifestyle of Hindi speaking indentured Indians, similar in many ways to the experiences of Pandit Ramlakhan Tewari.

Initially, few men and far fewer women were literate in Hindi. The few Brahmins who were literate in Hindi and had knowledge of the Ramacharitamanas helped to change the traditional way in which education was viewed by Hindi speakers. Due to communal living as barrack dwellers, and a sense of identity as a homogenous cultural group in a foreign land, caste barriers began to crumble. With no formal education and only a basic knowledge of the script, a large number of these labourers developed their literary skills; those who knew, said the interviewees, eagerly helped others with their reading and writing skills, irrespective of caste.

Initially, basic Hindi teaching and learning, as well as Ramayana reading, were limited to the home. But as news spread that someone with knowledge of the language was willing to impart the little they knew, informal *pathasalas* emerged. Sitaram (1987:116) points out that "the teachers were unfamiliar with grammar and literature yet to keep their religion and culture alive they made great efforts to educate themselves and others. The efforts and contributions of those *pathashala* teachers are truly laudable".

Rambiritch (1960:67) notes that over the decades the temples that became distinctive features in those communities also served as religious and vernacular schools. As the number of Indians and Indian settlements increased, so did the number of vernacular schools. Fishman (1972:3) believes that "the mother tongue is an important aspect of the soul," and this was reflected in the actions of these Hindi speakers. In later years when Gandhi was in South Africa, his views on mother tongue usage were supported by the publication of the newspaper "The Indian Opinion" with writings in Gujarati, Tamil and Hindi. Gandhi documents his strong views on the use of English instead of the mother tongue in his autobiography:

It has always been my conviction that Indian parents who train their children to think and talk in English from their infancy betray their children and their country. They deprive them of the spiritual and social heritage of the nation, and render them to that extent unfit for the service of the country. Having these convictions, I made a point of always talking to my children in Gujarati. Polak never liked this. He thought I was spoiling their future. He contended, with all the vigour and love at his command, that, if children were to learn a universal language like English from their infancy, they would easily gain considerable advantage over others in the race of life. He failed to convince me. ......This happened

about twenty years ago, and my convictions have only deepened with experience (1996:261).

Most interviewees highlighted the phenomenon of people getting together in the evenings or even Sundays to learn to read and write Hindi, relate and hear scriptural stories, and reminisce about the motherland. These were the subjects that were closest and dearest to the hearts of the people. There was no other form of entertainment or diversion after the day's toil, so gathering together in this manner was relished and joyously anticipated (Shukla 2002:109).

As Indians became more settled and widespread in South Africa, the single-teacher institutions and simple temples developed into larger institutions and larger temples to serve the language and religio-cultural needs of Hindi speaking communities. One notes the symbiosis of language and religion and culture, each keeping the interest in the other alive and vibrant. Even today the descendants of Hindi speaking immigrants continue to preserve their Hindu identity, despite language shift due to the dominance of English.

A steady stream of scholars and preachers who visited South Africa in the first half of the 20th century stressed the need for mother tongue education and inspired the Indians to maintain their identity by preserving their language, religion and culture. Shukla (1996:18) writes

A case in point is Pt. Bhawani Dayal whose aim was to spread the message of the Arya Samaj, yet he gave impetus to the propagation of Hindi education successfully. But the champion amongst those who championed the cause of Hindi in South Africa was none other than the man with vision, Pt. Nardev Vedalankar, who, through his great contribution towards the upliftment of Hindi education in South Africa has found a niche in the annals of History in the country. Pt. Vedalankar founded the Hindi Shiksha Sangh of South Africa in 1948 with a few people who were dedicated to the Hindi cause. Within 10 years 14 institutions were affiliated to the Hindi Shiksha Sangh and over a thousand pupils were receiving organized education in Hindi.

The Hindi Shiksha Sangh of South Africa has been the only non-governmental organization in the country that has continued to help maintain and preserve the Hindi language and literature for the past sixty

years. The former University of Durban-Westville offered Hindi for thirty years at graduate and post-graduate level. That was the golden era of Hindi education in South Africa when students began to graduate with Masters and Doctorate degrees. This was short lived as those in authority saw fit to close the Department of Indian Languages claiming that the languages were no more financially viable. For about two decades Hindi, together with other Indian languages, has been taught in government schools; however the number of students matriculating in Hindi is negligible.

It has been recorded that "until the 1970's the majority of the Indians still maintained their own languages at home. According to the 1986 *South African Statistics* only 31.79 percent of Indians spoke English at home in 1970 when 32 percent of the Indian population were Hindi speaking" (Shukla 2002:119).

Hindi has now lost its mother tongue status in South Africa. In fact, it is rare to find a home in which Hindi is spoken daily. Mesthrie, commenting on the decline of Bhojpuri, the dialect of Hindi that was the mother tongue until the 1970s, writes

> What is thought of as an ethnic language becomes eventually functionally limited, overridden by English influence in structure and vocabulary, and as Haugen (1973:563) puts it, "doomed to wither on the vine" (Mesthrie 1985:163).

The Role of the Ramacharitamanas in the Maintenance of Hindi

As stated earlier, the Ramacharitamanas is religious scripture written in a Hindi dialect, Awadhi. It was the most popular scripture that was read, recited and enacted amongst the Hindi speaking immigrants. The Mahabharata and Bhagavadgita were as dear to them as the Ramacharitamanas (often called Tulasi Ramayana or simply Ramayana). However, the reason for the Hindi Ramayana's popularity was that it was couched in the language of the people. Most people understood the Ramacharitamanas as it was popularized by the poet Tulasidasa himself. Tulasidasa had travelled northern India in the late 16th and early 17th centuries disseminating the teachings of Ramacharitamanas. By virtue of the powerful oral tradition the Rama story, together with Hindu values and life's purpose and message, was passed on to the following generations in

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South Africa through the medium of Hindi. A large number of verses were memorized by ordinary people and it is perhaps in this form that the Ramacharitamanas was brought to South Africa in the hearts and minds of the Hindi speaking immigrants. The book form of the text perhaps arrived later as its relevance and popularity continued to grow and as immigrants began to pursue their reading of the text under some dedicated local teachers as mentioned earlier.

What is the impact of the Ramacharitamanas on the language of a people who view it as a sacred text as well as lofty literature? The Ramacharitamanas is a text that has provided, and continues to provide, guidance, solace and inspiration for the descendants of these indentured labourers who considered the Ramacharitamanas and the name of Rama as their spiritual wealth. In an era where reading material was scarce, given their particular circumstances, the Ramacharitamanas was used both as a religious and language text. When the religious views of a people are couched in a text that is also esteemed highly from a literary perspective, one need hardly elaborate on the value of the Ramacharitamanas in language acquisition and retention. The Ramacharitamanas has thus played an invaluable role in ensuring the religious, cultural and linguistic continuity of the Hindi speaking South Africans.

My earlier findings with regard to the role and impact of the Ramacharitamanas on Hindi and the religio-cultural lives of the indentured Indians and their descendants encapsulate the reasons for language maintenance:

> The Ramacharitamanas continued to be friend, philosopher and guide to the Hindis as they progressed over the decades in social, economic and educational spheres. Socio-economic stability became conducive to religio-cultural pursuits. The learning of Hindi and study of the Ramacharitamanas became beneficiaries of this progress. In a way the circle is now complete; whereas in the beginning the oral tradition kept interest in the Ramacharitamanas alive among the Hindi people now Hindi literate people are becoming votaries of the Ramacharitamanas (Shukla 2002:200).

Language is the vehicle of culture and this symbiosis is still evident. Brown is correct in his view that "language and culture are so intricately interwoven

that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture". He also believes that:

> Language and culture are inseparable and that maintenance of language is vital for the maintenance of culture in any linguistic set up. As a result of the complex relationship between language and culture, societies tend to maintain their language in such a way so as to retain their culture. (Brown 1980:124, cited in Naidoo 2006:10).

An interviewee, Mrs Rampyari Singh who was extremely well versed in Hindi, described how she had learnt Hindi through the Ramacharitamanas from both her parents. She had spent the better part of her childhood in Bozama near Stanger where she and her mother taught many women to read Hindi using the Ramacharitamanas as the text book. Mr. Sewcharan Andhee of Verulam, Mr. Willie Beharie, as well as Mr. L T Maharaj, who spent their childhood in Springfield also indicated that "the Ramcharitamanas itself served as a textbook in the very early days when suitable books were not available for the purpose of Hindi teaching" (Shukla 2002:119).

The symbiotic relationship between the Ramcharitamanas and Hindi can be further illustrated by the activities of the Shree Ramayan Sabha (SRS) of Overport in Durban. Since its inception in 1911 the Sabha has been propagating the Ramcharitamanas and Hindi, with each one sustaining the other. Reading the Ramcharitamanas and Hindi classes has continued since 1911 to present day. The whole process of education, both religious and secular had its roots in the Ramcharitamanas (Shukla 2002:129).

A number of further examples can be cited, but from the above it becomes amply clear that the Ramacharitamanas's role in the maintenance of Hindi up until the 1980's is significant.

Language Shift

In his highly acclaimed research Mesthrie explains that one of the causes of language erosion or death involves the abandonment of one's language in favour of another:

> Case histories of language shift suggest that.....languages on their way to extinction are first used in a near-diglossic situation with the dominant language to which they eventually lose out. The dominant language is one of wider currency, necessary for communication with a larger society than that represented by the dominated language, or is one which is recognizes (tacitly or overtly) as the medium for upward mobility. The functions fulfilled by the dominated language become progressively fewer, with the home being the last domain in which it persists. Children, however, begin using the new language first among themselves, and then to their parents or grandparents as soon as the linguistic competence of their elders permits it (1985:247-248).

Aitchison(1991:198) says "Typically, a younger generation will learn an 'old' language from their parents as a mother tongue, but will be exposed from a young age to another more fashionable and socially useful language at school. Edwards (1985:50) also claims that "Language Shift often reflects pragmatic desires for social mobility and an improved standard of living......The most familiar process by which death occurs is lack of transmission of an original language from parents to children"

The greatest fear amongst people and especially those who tirelessly devote their energy to language maintenance and preservation is the gradual 'death' of their mother tongue. The older interviewees especially, spoke with concern and great disappointment at the loss of the language (Hindi/Bhojpuri) as the medium of communication and were unanimous in laying blame for this on 'westernization'. Since language is described as the vehicle of culture their concern for the eventual loss of their Hindu value system and identity cannot be over-emphasized. Ramphal (in Arkin, Magyar, Pillay 1989:77) says, "The schools established by the whites had a westernizing influence on the children as they came into direct contact with western values during their most formative years and were prepared for integration into the economy of the whites".

About language loss and identity loss, Singh (2007, unpublished paper) opines:

> Language erosion occurs when individuals and eventually the population group from which they come, tend to increasingly communicate in the dominant language at the expense of their

own. This growing tendency simultaneously erodes into the conventional and customary practices of the group – giving rise to new forms of communication and social practices. It radically alters their identities from what they were to what they begin to adopt socially and linguistically – leading to identity loss.

Singh calls this process 'lingocide', which he defines as "a gradual process of avoidance by the affected ethnic group and of wanton and deliberate erosion of a language in favour of the language/s of domination by hegemonic forces" (Ibid.)

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In this regard Fishman writes:

Most immigrants become bilingual (i.e. English displaces the hitherto exclusive use of their mother tongue in certain kinds of interactions) much before they embark on de-ethnization or seriously contemplate the possibility of bi-culturalism. On the other hand, marginal but yet functional ethnicity lingers on (and is transmitted via English) long after the ethnic mother tongue becomes substantially dormant or is completely lost (Fishman 1966:399 cited in Desai 1992:75).

In the case of Hindi total language shift has not yet occurred even though the process has begun. Mesthrie (1985), delineates the factors that contributed to language maintenance and language shift. The Hindu religion and culture; the efforts of religious and cultural organizations, especially the Hindi Shiksha Sangh of South Africa and its exclusively Hindi radio station, Hindvani; Hindi films, Hindi music and the Ramacharitamanas and related texts (Hanuman Chalisa) will halt the complete language shift process. There is an increasing number of students of the Hindi Shiksha Sangh of South Africa studying Hindi at 10 different levels including Teaching Method. Hindvani has a wide listenership and even some National Brand Products were advertised in Hindi in June 2007. Hoffmann (1991:186) makes the pertinent point of complete shift involving a change from one language to another or incomplete shift where "the members of the community maintain some degree of proficiency in the language, because they continue to use it for certain functions" which fits the Hindi paradigm in South Africa. Thus, although functionally limited, and restricted to the religio-cultural domain, Hindi has escaped language death.

Towards Language Shift Reversal

Joshua Fishman proposes an eight-stage model for reversing language shift. The first four stages which are pertinent to Hindi in South Africa are as follows:

1 Acquisition of the language by adults, who may effectively act as language apprentices (recommended where most of the remaining speakers of the language are elderly and socially isolated from other speakers of the language).
2 Create a socially integrated population of active speakers of the language, thereby creating a community of people who use the language frequently (at this stage it is usually best to concentrate mainly on the spoken language rather than the written language).
3 In localities where there are a reasonable number of people habitually using the language, encourage the informal use of the language among people of all age groups and within families and bolster its daily use through the establishment of local neighbourhood institutions in which the language is encouraged, protected and (in certain contexts at least) used exclusively. (At this stage it may be useful for speakers to be aware of the personal advantages of being bilingual).
4 In areas where oral competence in the language has been achieved in all age groups encourage literacy in the language but in a way that does not depend upon assistance from (or goodwill of) the state education system. (Fishman : http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Revising_Language_Shift)

Stage one i.e. acquisition of the language by adults, has been underway well before the inception of the Hindi Shiksha Sangh 60 years ago. The Sangh was established to provide formal Hindi education to people whose mother tongue was Hindi; they could not read and write the language and were not exposed to formal Hindi grammar and literature. Literally thousands of people have received formal Hindi education for the past sixty years. This contributed to language maintenance; however due to the dislocation of communities through the Group Areas Act, the dominance of English as the language of opportunity and empowerment, amongst others, the student numbers at the Sangh's affiliated schools began to decline and language shift

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became apparent. Formal English education in western oriented schools was also a contributing factor to language loss.

The Hindi Shiksha Sangh's role was to change. It was no more simply the provider of formal Hindi education, but slowly assumed the role of preserver and protector of Hindi. Understanding that the mother tongue is crucial to one's identity and informs one's decisions in life, the officials of the Hindi Shiksha Sangh, in recent years, have embarked on active and conscious promotion of the Hindi language. In 1998 the Hindi Shiksha Sangh launched 'Hindvani', the first Hindi radio station in Durban. The influence of Hindvani on Hindi speaking people is both significant and timeous. Radio is a powerful medium for educating, entertaining, inspiring and informing listeners about community, religious and cultural events, national and international news, and other aspects of life. To inject vitality into Hindi communication Hindvani actively promotes the Ramcharitamanas, Hanuman Chalisa and other religious texts. The presenters use both Hindi and English in their programmes and play popular, devotional, folk, as well as local Hindi music to entertain their listeners. The huge response of the public to the phone-in programmes bears testimony to the impact of the radio station on the listeners. The Sangh's public events like the Sportsdays, Bhangra dance evenings with Hindvani's broadcasts attract thousands of people. One senses the excitement that Hindvani is creating amongst Hindi speakers. Listeners of all ages from all linguistic and religious groups participate in the programmes. Even academic programmes, aimed at Hindi language learning, are proving popular. But perhaps the success of Hindvani and the Hindi Shiksha Sangh is seen in the steady increase in student numbers over the recent years. In informal interviews with both Hindvani listeners and Sanghs's students the following responses were elicited for the question *What is your impression of Hindvani?*

I love the music;
It is very entertaining;
My wife is in touch with what's going on in the community;
I love the religious programmes and music;
The music rocks;
I am now learning Hindi at the Sangh;
I've enrolled for Hindi classes. I want to volunteer as a Hindvani presenter;
I listen to Hindvani while I do my housework and sewing;
It is my constant companion;
My Hindi is improving all the time;

The talks on the scriptures i.e. Ramayana and Bhagavadgita and the devotional music are beautiful;
We are grateful to the scholars and priests who enlighten us on religion, especially on the significance of rituals and our fasts and festivals.

While the above twelve responses are by no means adequate with regard to conclusive proof of Hindvani's impact on the Hindi language, they are indicative of a positive influence. The Hindi community's response to Hindvani, as well as the dedication of the officials of the Hindi Shiksha Sangh and of the radio presenters to Hindi language and religio-cultural promotion, has helped Hindvani secure license renewals to operate for the past ten years; this is no small feat, especially given that the radio presenters are volunteers with no remuneration. All these are eloquent of the community's desire and concerted efforts to reverse language shift.

The Hindi Shiksha Sangh turns sixty and Hindvani ten in 2008. The Sangh is presently engaged in preparations for the anniversary celebrations; these include a Hindi language conference, a Hindi eistoddfod, a Hindi essay writing competition, Hindi debates, and the re-launch of a Hindi-English newsletter, amongst other events. The affiliates of the Hindi Shiksha Sangh and other religio-cultural institutions will participate in and contribute to this milestone in the Sangh's history.

Hence, a positive trend is becoming discernible. Educated, professional people who are heading religio-cultural institutions are becoming increasingly aware of the need to know the mother-tongue, and are making efforts to address the situation. Thus, desire to read and understand the Ramacharitamanas, as well as participate meaningfully in religio-cultural life, is fuelling interest in Hindi.

The history of the Ramacharitamanas is as old as indenture in South Africa. As noted before, in the early days of indenture, in addition to being scripture to the Hindi speakers, the Ramacharitamanas was used as a text book for reading and writing in Hindi; today people are learning Hindi to be able to read the Ramacharitamanas. An interesting case in point is that of the Sydenham Sanathan Dharam Vishnu Mandil (SSDVM), a religious organization in Sydenham (Durban) which has planned a recital and discourse on the Kishkindhakanda, a chapter of the Ramacharitamanas over three days from 23 to 25 November 2007. The organization's latest consignment of 170 copies of Ramacharitamanas that arrived from India less

than two months ago is now completely sold out. (Interviewee:Usha Maharaj). This indicates that enthusiastic interest in the Ramacharitamanas and Hindi still exists today.

The Hindi word *sabha* means group. Ramayana Sabhas are groups of people getting together to read and discuss the Ramayana i.e. the Ramacharitamanas. These Sabhas were a powerful vehicle for the dissemination of religio-philosophical knowledge, as well as for Hindi language learning and teaching. The Sabhas had, under very trying conditions, built schools, many of which became state schools. The SRS Primary School in Overport, Durban, began as a Ramayana Sabha. It was called Shree Ramayan Sabha, hence the name SRS Primary School. In my earlier study (Shukla 2002:200) I found that "The Ramayana Sabhas, both formal and informal, became the conduits for the transmission of the lessons of the Ramacharitamanas and the conveyance of spiritual sustenance" and of Hindi education.

With the gradual loss of Hindi as mother tongue, there was a corresponding decline in numbers at the Ramayana Sabhas. However, in 1978, a Ramayana 'lunch-time' study group was started in the Durban city centre by Dharamchand Ramkisson, Harry Nepal and Robert Ramharrak. In an interview with Mr. Ramkisson I gathered the following information about the recently formed Ramayana Mandalees. The word *Mandalee* also means group.

On a visit to India in 1972 Mr. Ramkisson was inspired by a Hindi academic at Banaras Hindu University who was lecturing on the Ayodhyakanda (Chapter two) of the Ramacharitamanas. He realized that the Ramacharitamanas is much more than a religious story. On returning to Durban he began studying the text more closely. He decided to complete a BA degree with Hindi as a major subject at the University of Durban Westville; he then studied the text more profoundly while completing the Honours degree in Hindi in 1977 in which the Ramacharitamanas constituted a whole paper.

Equipped with a greater knowledge of the text, Mr. Ramkisson of Clare Estate with two men from Duffs Road initiated the Ramayana study group which immediately attracted workers in the city from Inanda, Sea Cow Lake, Kenville, Sydenham, Reservoir Hills, Phoenix and Chatsworth. As news of this study group spread by word of mouth, complete strangers would show up and join the group. Occasionally a visitor to Durban from Pretoria or

Johannesburg would make an appearance. About 15 to 20 people attended regularly. This group focused on the Ramacharitamanas as a philosophico-theological document which was a departure from the purely ritualistic-devotional approach of the past. This is a healthy sign which indicates that people are now prepared to engage the text critically.

The off–shoot of this humble group which never lacked readers of the original Hindi text, was the formation of Mandalees or groups in other areas. Initially, groups met in different homes for recitals and discussions; Dharam Ramkisson was generally present to discourse on the text at all these venues which ranged from Durban to as far off as Stanger. As interest grew, larger venues became necessary. Today, in Durban alone, there are five Ramayana Mandalees in Redfern, Rydalvale, Newlands, Duffs Road and Reservoir Hills which have increased membership from twenty to close on two hundred. Four of the Mandalees meet weekly on Saturdays on a rotational basis. The Reservoir Hills Ramayana Mandalee meets on a Sunday. When there are five Saturdays in a month, which occurs about four times a year, the day is dedicated to the recitation and discourse of Sundarakanda, another chapter of the Ramacharitamanas. Although copies of the Ramacharitamanas are available in English translation and transliteration form, one of the requirements of the Mandalees is recitation of the Ramacharitamanas in the original form; only those who read Hindi are allowed to lead the recitals. This has encouraged members to become literate in Hindi. Saturday recitations begin at 8 o'clock in the morning with prayer and rituals. The congregation breaks for lunch at noon after which recital and explanation continues until 6 pm. These sessions are well attended with an average of a hundred devotees on every occasion. These Mandalees are now being invited by temple organizations to provide the same service- Saptah Mandir in Reservoir Hills, Riverdenee Hindu Dharma Sabha and the Sydenham Sanathan DharamVishnu Mandil, to name a few. Radio Hindvani advertises these as community events regularly. Other groups that are not part of the Mandalees also meet regularly e.g. women's group meets every Tuesday at the Seva Samaj Temple in Reservoir Hills for the same purpose.

Another recent phenomenon is the recitation of the Hanuman Chalisa, also written by Tulasidasa, poet of the Ramacharitamanas. The exploits of Hanuman, a devotee of Lord Rama who is the central divine figure of the Ramacharitamanas, has also been written in Hindi in forty couplets. The Hanuman Chalisa has become the most popular prayer of Hindi speaking Hindus not only in South Africa, but world wide. It is recited by many on a

daily basis or on Tuesday, a day dedicated to Hanuman worship. When Hindus congregate, recitation of the Hanuman Chalisa is a common feature. It is pleasing that the youth have adopted this mode of prayer as well and are always eager to participate in a Hanuman Chalisa recital. What has become a popular event all over South Africa is the recitation of the Hanuman Chalisa 108 times; this takes the better part of a day. The Hanuman Chalisa has broken linguistic barriers and is extremely popular amongst Gujarati speaking Hindus. These recitations are advertised on Hindvani so that the public would attend. The Hanuman Chalisa and the Ramacharitamanas are also breaching language barriers through the membership of spiritual organizations such as the Ramakrishna Centre of South Africa, the Divine Life Society of South Africa, Satya Sai Organization etc.

Conclusion

In the light of the information presented with regard to the Hindi Shiksha Sangh and Hindvani, and the popularity of the Ramacharitamanas and the Hanuman Chalisa, there seems to be adequate evidence of language shift reversal. Fishman's guides listed above for reversing language shift are clearly operational in South Africa with regard to Hindi. Adults are studying Hindi with a view to communicate in it and/or to read and understand the Ramacharitamanas. Millions of Hindi speaking Hindus all over the world have already committed the Hanuman Chalisa to memory; regular recitation has helped to memorize it and not knowing the Hindi script is not a deterrent. It becomes clear that while Hindi is not used as the mother tongue of people of Hindi speaking origin in South Africa anymore, its use has shifted to the religio-cultural domain.

A number of people are engaged in language acquisition and are making a conscious effort to actively communicate in Hindi; Hindvani is consistently under public scrutiny and this can be easily verified. The Ramacharitamanas and the Hanuman Chalisa will ensure the use of Hindi for a long time in the future. The language is being used often and non-governmental organizations have undertaken the responsibility of preserving the language. The popularity of Hindi films and Hindi film songs is aiding the process. Television channels in Hindi have captured the minds and hearts of Hindi speakers of all age groups and renewed interest in the language is becoming apparent.

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While the state provides for Hindi education in schools, the treatment of the subject is often described as tokenism; it is not an examination subject and may be offered as an examination subject for matriculation only. It is hardly possible that Hindi would ever be spoken in the workplace or in government. The only other ray of hope in South Africa that would give substance to Fishman's view is that there is the possibility of teaching Hindi at tertiary institutions; efforts to reintroduce Hindi at the University of KwaZulu-Natal are being made.

Mesthrie (1985:247-249) outlines a few case histories with regard to dying languages before characterizing Bhojpuri or Hindi as such. He draws attention to Swadesh (1948) who researched the extinction of Yahi, an Amerindian language whose last survivor and speaker Ishi spoke the language faultlessly and made him understood in English towards the end of his life. Mesthrie also draws attention to the "semi-speakers" of Gaelic. He cites Dorian who uses the term 'semi-speakers' for "those who have had insufficient exposure to the home language, and who, despite being far more competent in the dominant language, continue using the home language in an imperfect way." There is a percentage of both males and females who may be characterized in this way as 'semi-speakers' in South Africa, many of whom still use Hindi and/or Bhojpuri in their simplest form while using English in formal arenas.

With the influence of community organizations and renewed interest in religion and culture, the possibility of making a far greater difference to reversing language shift in the case of Hindi in South Africa could be realized.

> The story of the Ramayana will continue to be popular in the world so long as the mountains stand and the rivers flow on the surface of the earth.
> (Valmiki Ramayana, Balakanda 36/37)

This prognostication seems to be working in favour of Hindi as well for it seems that the story of the Ramayana as told by Tulasidasa in Hindi in the Ramacharitamanas will ensure the existence of Hindi as long as the mountains and rivers remain on earth. While this might sound presumptuous it would appear that Hindi will be used in South Africa as long as the religio-cultural life of Hindi speaking Hindus remains vibrant and intact.

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Taking your God into the Classroom, Religious Education and Religion
Education:
The Westville Hindu School as an Alternate Model of Education

Maheshvari Naidu
Anthropology
University of KwaZulu Natal

Abstract

This article seeks to revisit the RE or Religion Education policy that has
been the focus of much robust and sustained discussion in South Africa
since 1993 and which was eventually published in August 2003 and meant
to be implemented in the year 2005. The article explores the context for the
establishing of a particular religious school, the private Westville Hindu
Primary School as a model of religious education against the background of
religion education in public schools. The paper examines the rationale
behind the initiation of such a school and the response on the part of the
parents and young learners. It probes the need and meaningfulness for such a
school in light of the position papers and present inclusion of the study of
religion in South African state schools.

A note on Methodology

The fieldwork for this paper was itself based at the Westville Hindu School
where interviews were conducted amongst the principal, staff, parents and
learners. Questionnaires were also handed out. These questionnaires were
drawn up for the parents to answer anonymously, although many chose to
volunteer their names on the sheet. The school was visited between the
months of September and November 2006 and again in the months of March
and April 2007. These visits provided a window into the education offered
here as well allowing me to observe directly how the learners responded to
this particular learning environment.

The research questions that guided this study lent themselves to an
explorative qualitative study. Even though questionnaires were used the
research was of a qualitative nature as a more *emic* or insider perspective
was sought. To facilitate this, unstructured interviews or interviews as

conversations were conducted and allowed for greater empathetic rapport with the respondents. Having first established a sense of familiarity, the children were also interviewed, again following the approach of interviews as conversations. These conversations allowed a greater level of sensitivity and insight given the fact that these were young learners between the ages of six and nine years.

The school is small. This mirrors another religious school like the Christian based Kainon Primary on the other side of Westville, which is also small with a total student population of sixty five, from grades 1 to 7. The learner population at Westville Hindu School is approximately forty comprising grade 0 to grade 4. The school is set around small but pleasant grounds that double up as the space for school sporting activities. At the time of the research there were forty learners at Westville Hindu School. As some of them were siblings these children came from approximately thirty six families. Of the thirty six questionnaires given out, thirty responses were collected. Twelve parents were interviewed as well as twelve children. The parents were representative of the different linguistic groups and seemed to come from diverse educational backgrounds, although most appeared to be professionals of one sort or another. The learners were also from either Hindi or Tamil speaking homes. However, these learners were not necessarily the children of the parents interviewed and were drawn randomly from grades one to four.

Education and the New South Africa

There are indeed numerous reasons that South Africans may claim as being proud to be associated with South Africa, not the least of which is its post-apartheid constitution and its apparent progressive and enlightened position on several aspects of South African life. The process leading to the adoption of this constitution, given the climate of a newly established democracy, was relatively inclusive and consultative, entrenching the several inalienable rights of all the country's citizens, including the right and access to education. Many academics working within Religion Studies research, (as well many of the lay public) believed strongly that a post-apartheid system of education should be inclusive and indeed sensitive of the religious cultures of all South African citizens. The previous model of Religion education had been not so much education in as much as it was religious (Christian) instruction. Because of this there was also some concern that the new South African government, in its bid to discard all vestiges of the

apartheid government, would also dispense with religion, used as it was as one of the segregating apparatus of the previous state.

In line with the agenda of social transition to democracy, education is now purported to be free from the theocratic model of a Christian creationist bias associated with the previous apartheid government. The inclusion of teaching religion as opposed to Christianity in schools, some years later, allayed the minds of those who feared the end of religion in a new South Africa. And the adoption of a co-operative model of religion education was intended to further define the relationship between religion and the state as being separate constitutionally, yet where there could be a kind of "synergy between the two" (Kumar: 2006:284).

However, that being said the nature and shape of this religion education model and indeed the *actual* relationship of synergy between state and religion in terms of how much the state ought to circumscribe the orientation and content and aim of the religion education programme, was to be at the centre of much robust debate that involved the various categories of stakeholders, academics, representatives of various faith organizations and the parents of the learners who were meant to be the new recipients of the programme on religion education. This listing is further stratified into the categories of academics informed by their understanding of religion as a social scientific enterprise open to inquiry and those academics who themselves were informed by particular absolutistic and theistic (notably Christian theological) understandings of religion who saw religion as not being open to any sort of critical interrogation. There were also religious representatives and parents positioned at various points in their acceptance of a multi faith religion education programme. The landscape of participants involved in the discussions was thus diverse and varied. All of this was legitimately premised on the concern of what exactly the South African child attending school was going to be taught and was going to learn *in* the religion class. The possible options for a religion education model that could be chartered were a single religion approach, a parallel single religion approach or a multi- religion approach.

Understandably much of the debate was fore-grounded in the painful political history of South Africa and informing much of the discussion for certain categories of academic as well as lay participants was the strong historical reality that South African children in the mainstream apartheid educational system had been the recipients of a set of state sponsored

philosophies that wrapped around the single faith Christian educational models. Manila Soni-Amin (2001) points out that education had been used as a kind of tool by successive governments (not least of which South African) to produce and perpetuate a certain kind of adult (ibid.). Particular constructions of knowledge were indeed essentialized and institutionalized into teaching subjects (Willansky: 1998:158).

While it is not in the scope of this paper to offer a detailed analysis of the politics of representation of state and individual configured in the construction of school, educational models and subjects, suffice it to point out that these are already contested intellectual spaces, further charged emotionally given the South African political context. In Soni-Amin's opinion it was the education ministries and departments of education who decided what people in specific societies should learn in a given context, i.e., through the media of the institutionalized subject areas that Willansky refers to. This is clearly evidenced in the educational models constructed during the years of apartheid. In his article entitled 'Learning to Divide the World: Education at Empire's End', Willansky (1998) discusses how we have inherited an imperialistic construction of discrete pockets of knowledge that come to be recognized as discrete subjects. These institutionalized 'pockets' of knowledge in turn reflected particular constructions of social reality. Schools in turn emerge as powerful media in perpetuating these constructions of social reality. Schools as institutionalized media and the articulating limbs of early educational models were instrumental in perpetuating notions of religious alterity by positioning Bible Studies or Scripture Classes as legitimate areas of knowledge to be studied while completely ignoring the existence of other religions.

Alterity is the notion of otherness that informed so much of early popular as well as intellectual imperial constructions of understanding about cultural communities perceived as being different from the European communities. Much of early anthropological work on religions further reified this sense of the other in religious terms as evidenced in the works of the so called paternal figures in anthropology, Tylor, Morgan and Frazer et al. This religious alterity was posited around the premise that the *other*, by now exoticised cultures was not (Christian) God fearing, or put otherwise, God accepting people. Thus the local people's religious worldviews were ignored as a kind of non religion, first in the recorded transactions of the imperial and religious scribes of the empire and later by the recorded intellectual transactions of the imperial ethnographers. Many of these *discovered* people

were the local inhabitants of the so called newly discovered continents of the Americas and of course Africa. Chidester (1996, 1998) locates this ignoring in what he terms as a denial, or a discovery of an "absence". In his discussion of the early settlers' colonization of South Africa he shows that the new immigrant communities discovered that the local inhabitants had no god and deduced that religion as such was absent. He refers to the history of understanding of religion in South Africa as a discovery of absence going back to the sixteen hundreds (ibid. 1996: 8), thus "configuring a discourse of denial". This "horrible history" (ibid, 1998: 8) and 'denial' (Chidester, 1996: 11) acted as a kind of assertion that people were found in Africa and indeed South Africa who did not have any religion.

This is the horrible history as Chidester puts it of the term religion in the context of the early colonial contact. Later followed the so called discovery of what can only be described as an extremely narrow understanding of religion given the generic name of Bantu religion. What emerges from an understanding is an understanding of no religion, to a myopic and equally problematic grasp of the religion/s of the other, as a kind of homogenous religion (ibid.,: 12)[1].

RE Policy and Religion Education in the New South Africa

In the wake of the new constitution proclaiming the acceptance and safeguard of all the religions in South Africa some years later is the RE policy document which prefaces itself with an articulation of what it refers to as the *spirit* of the policy. Janet Stonier (1998: 93-115) gives what she calls a personal account of the process of devising the new policy. This account clearly reveals the complicated process of selecting the committee and the actual task of recommending policy changes (ibid: 98-99). Several individual draft proposals were submitted highlighting the different perspectives from which the various committee members were coming from and further underpinning the fact that these differences themselves mirrored the contested areas in the broader South African society. Stonier comments that most of the drafts were in turn abandoned and the group proceeded with an unpacking of the "legal framework, the history, international experience" and perhaps most vitally, just how the terms *religion* and *religious* were

[1] See Chidester, D. *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in South Africa*, (1996) for a discussion regarding the portrayal of the homogenous religion of the African, generically termed and understood as the Bantu religion.

attempted to be understood. (ibid: 101). Thus the process of drafting a policy on religion education in schools was long and understandably fraught with many considerations given the sensitive nature of religion within the public learning space of the classroom where "diversity is an essential feature" (Bakker: 1998:34).

The policy document (August 2003) has clearly adopted a multi-religion approach that articulates a wish to embrace this spirit of diversity in the country and by extension within the classroom. The single-tradition option, itself an expression of a previous Christian dominated apartheid government, and the parallel single-tradition model, as being a kind of "religious apartheid" (Chidester: 2002) are both abandoned as legitimate educational options for a new South Africa. The document goes on to state that the policy for the role of religion in education is driven by the dual mandate of celebrating diversity and building national unity. To this end the policy document distances itself from any possibility of religious discrimination or religious coercion in its programme and details the rationale behind the inclusion of (multi) religion education at (public) schools in these words:

> When we provide our pupils with educationally sound programmes, they will gain a deeper and broader understanding of the life orientations, worldviews, cultural practices, and ethical resources of humanity. As they develop creative and critical abilities for thinking about religion and religions, pupils will also develop the capacities for mutual recognition, respect for diversity, reduced prejudice, and increased civil toleration that are necessary for citizens to live together in a democratic society.

Stonier refers to the process of drafting the policy and refers to the tensions amongst the committee between the options of religious education and religion education (1998: 101) and states that a middle ground of sorts was reached that was sensitive to both these approaches and the particular curricular ethos a school may choose to adopt. The Religion Education policy in fact does recognize that there may be other models of private school education and makes allowance for independent schools such as the Westville Hindu School.

The policy regarding such private schools reads;

Citizens do have the right, at their own expense, to establish independent schools, including religious schools, as long as they avoid racial discrimination, register with the state, and maintain standards that are not inferior to the standards of comparable public schools.

There is an important clause that

... in maintaining the curriculum standards with respect to Religion Education,.. independent schools ... with a recognised religious character are required to achieve the minimum outcomes for Religion Education.

The policy goes on to spell these outcomes as;

Religion Education is a curricular programme with clear and age-appropriate educational aims and objectives, for teaching and learning about religion, religions, and religious diversity in South Africa and the world. The study of religion must serve recognisable educational goals that are consistent with the aims and outcomes of other learning areas ...

The policy however appears to make a clear distinction between studying religion as opposed to doing religion by adding that;

It is a programme for studying about religion, in all its many forms, as an important dimension of human experience and a significant subject field in the school curriculum.

This sense of the recognition of religion as a social institution interacting with other institutions and with meaningfulness for a large community of believers is recognised by many. Says Boyer (2002: 517),

While no school should impose religious belief or practice, I believe that it's simply impossible to be a well educated person without learning about how religion has, throughout history, consequentially shaped the human story in every culture ... sacred texts of all the great religions should be introduced to students with reverence and intellectual insight.

This bone of contention regarding the duality between the teaching *about* religion as opposed to the teaching *of* religion is not a new dispute in international discussions and developments regarding religion education. While the former is seen as the domain of universities as spaces of intellectual inquiry and now schools as opportunities for learning and sharing of information about diverse people and belief systems, the latter is meant to be the domain of the home and faith communities that the learner may belong to. Chidester (1994:59) points to some landmark American cases from the years 1948-1963, where Bible reading, prescribed prayers etc. were recognized as religious instruction, the legitimate domain of home, and thus prohibited in the schools. Some of early history of the tussle between teaching about and teaching of can also be traced in the early 70s deliberations on infringement of first amendment cases brought before the American courts that deliberated on the crucial distinction of teaching about and teaching of religion. These deliberations are meant to be seen in the context of governmental neutrality with regard to religion curricular in the schools (Michaelson:1977:296) with the American Supreme courts ruling that the objective study of religion is constitutional (Huntsberry:19 :733), thus acknowledging the importance of learning about religion as an integral part pf the education process. We are informed that in other parts of the world religion and education in publicly funded schools show much diversity in terms of public policy (Chidester et al: 1994:66) with countries opting for either multi-tradition models (Thailand and Japan) or single tradition approaches (Malaysia). Britain is seen as one of the countries that set a innovative trend for countries like Canada, New Zealand, Australia and the USA for their religion education programmes (ibid:52)[2].

Westville Hindu School

One particular kind of school is the faith school or so called parochial school, which is a label for an independent school that teaches conventional education in line with the department of education as well as teaching religious education. Thus there are the added subjects with religious content that is meant to also reflect the personal or confessional aspect of the student and parent community. The principal of the Westville Hindu School was quick to point out that in most instances (although not all) such schools are

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[2] Chidester et al. (1994:72-92) have also a comprehensive chapter on the African developments in Religion Education detailing the various policy and educational models adopted by the different African countries, the different kinds of educational models and various kinds of schools.

also affiliated to a particular denominational community. However, Westville Hindu School, although a religious school taking a single-tradition approach, has no affiliation with a congregational community in that there is no weekly gathering of a particular congregation to offer worship as is the case for a school like the Kainon New Church School, also in the Westville area and where the learners and the larger context of their families gather for weekly worship in the school chapel.

The Westville Hindu Primary School teaches Hindu religion alongside the usual curriculum of subjects. Their study of the Hindu teachings is articulated through the doing of the religion. By this I mean that there is a weekly Friday morning fire ritual or *yajna,* daily prayers rendered often in Sanskrit and the observances of the various festivals throughout the year. There is also a particular Hindu ethos that is pervasive throughout the teaching of even the so called secular subjects of Science and History etc. What emerged in my research, through the questionnaires as well as the interviews, is that this is the rationale on the part of the principal in establishing the school, that is to say the teaching *of* religion, in this case a single faith tradition of Hinduism. It is also the thinking on which the parents of the learners have based their decision for their choice of school.

In one of the interviews with me the principal explains that the school was borne out of what he felt was the need for a school that provided a holistic education. The principal states that he felt the need "to contribute something to the community" and be involved in teaching that he believed was relevant to the needs of his community. He explains that he felt that there was a gap in the education system for children and the parents of children who needed the religio-linguistic needs of their children met. The principal also communicated emphatically that he wanted to leave the students in no doubt as to the importance of such subjects (Indian music, dance, languages) alongside the more conventional subjects such as mathematics and sciences. This in his opinion was more holistic, to include traditional art forms and religion within the actual curriculum. It was believed that somehow the students perceived extra-curricular as exactly that, as extra and optional and on some level not as important as the main subjects.

Some of the subjects referred to by the principal such as Indian languages, Indian dance forms, Yoga and Indian music are perhaps not very contentious in themselves. They are legitimate areas of study of what one would normally categorize as extra-curricular. It is the teaching of religion that is

the issue. The teaching of religion at Westville Hindu as a private school is the prerogative of the designers of the school curriculum with the RE policy having made provision for such an educational space. One asks though as to what place the teaching about religion in a *school* context, private or otherwise holds for the much talked about multi-cultural multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-et al South African society post apartheid?

The Parents' Response

Almost all of the parents who responded to my questions about the relevance of a school like the Westville Hindu School stated that they chose a school where their child could *engage* in their religion as well learn about it. The same passionate sentiment surfaced repeatedly in the responses of the parents that were interviewed as well as the parents who answered the questionnaire. They claimed that they had opted for a Hindu school because they wanted their children to more than merely learn about religion, their own included. They articulated an awareness that their children were indeed living in a multicultural world and were surrounded by children of other faiths. They all voiced that they did not have any problems with their children being exposed to other religions. This they claimed was not the reason that they had opted to not send their children to the state schools but rather the need for their children to be more directly involved in their own religion.

All the parents were happy that Hindu festivals such as *Diwali, Krishnaasthamee, Raksha Bandhan* etc. were celebrated at the Westville School. They pointed out that it was an added bonus that their children could learn in a meaningful school context about the significance of these festivals as well as celebrate them with their own age peers. They felt that this was an organic carry over and an organic way to teach the children in their movement from school to home and back to school again. Baker et al. in their study of personal responses to curricula, talk about pedagogies that may be more culturally relevant or responsive. The pedagogical approach at Westville Hindu School like other faith schools necessarily oriented themselves from particular religio-cultural perspectives which appear to overarch the standardized curriculum spelled out by the department of education. One suggests that quite possibly this is in turn perceived by the parents here as being a culturally responsive pedagogy. Baker et al. claim that while paying heed to curriculum content, culturally relevant teaching

includes particular learning contexts (amongst other things), that are culture specific (ibid: 2005).

Similar sentiments were shared regarding Westville's curriculum of Indian dance and music and yoga. Parents believed that by incorporating these subjects into the formal curriculum emphasized to the children that these subjects were also important and meaningfully belonged alongside the conventional offerings of English and Mathematics.

It emerged that the children came from homes where the native languages of Hindi or Tamil, were spoken in varying degree, and in some homes not at all. However, all parents, even those who were not able to sustain the use of their indigenous languages at home wanted their children to learn, or at least be exposed to their so called mother tongue. This did not appear to be something of an anomalous situation to these latter parents. Clearly they felt strongly that their children should maintain a connection with their linguistic roots. In this regard school was not so much an extension of the home environment as it may have been with other aspects of Hindu beliefs and ritual behaviour, but a learning context were the child could become familiar with the linguistic heritage of the family's religio-cultural roots.

Some of the parents that I interviewed indicated that they did adhere to a particular sectarian form of Hinduism, and did belong to a religious community of followers.

	YES	NO
Are you a follower of particular Hindu sect?	18	12

Most did not feel that it was a problem that the school itself did not follow their sectarian teachings. Two parents felt that it would have been good if the school was a school in their own sect but did not experience any reservations with this not being the case. One parent, a Sai Baba follower added that there were the *balvika* classes (children's religious classes) that his child also went to.

The table of quantifiable responses below gives an indication of the sentiments of the parents in choosing the school. Note especially the response to the question on how they felt about their children learning about other religions.

	VERY WELL	AVERAGE	POORLY	NO DIFFERENTLY
How does your child respond to attending a Hindu school?	27	3	0	0

	YES	NO	N/A
Main reason for choosing school the Hindu/ Indian cultural content?	29	1	0

	COMFORTABLE	UNCOMFORTABLE
How do you feel about your child learning about other religions?	30	0

	YES	NO	NOT CONSIDERED IT
Is your child disadvantaged if not exposed to learning faiths?	0	25	5

The parents were asked how they felt about their children being exposed predominantly to one religion, and whether they (the parents) felt they were going to be disadvantaged in comparison with the other children in the system of public education. Twenty-five out of thirty respondents from the questionnaires and ten of the twelve interviewees claimed that they were completely at ease with their children learning about religions other than Hinduism. Five parents articulated that they had not given this issue much thought prior to me speaking them. However, none of the parents said that they felt that their children would be disadvantaged by not learning about the other world religions. The parents had no problem with their children

learning about other religions and yet did not think that their children stood to lose much if they did not learn about those religions. They pointed out that the exposure to Hindu teachings and beliefs as a way of life helped build the value systems of the children that in turn taught respect and tolerance towards other religions.

This understanding further expressed itself as acceptance of the other faiths as also being authentic and legitimate. This was perhaps the meaning behind the parents' response that they had no problem with their children being exposed to and learning about the other religions. It is also paradoxically the meaning behind them not having a problem with the children *not* being exposed to the other religions. They believed that Hinduism has, as a necessary adjunct, the respect and acceptance of the other faiths. Of course this did not mean that, given the choice they would send their children to a Christian or any other parochial school. They worked from an understanding of their own faith. However, unlike perhaps the parents at other parochial schools, they did not subscribe to beliefs claiming truth exclusively for their own religion.

The Children's Responses

The children that spoke to me were all randomly chosen and all unanimously claimed to enjoy attending Westville Hindu School. While they did not say as much their responses to certain questions showed that they appreciated the small classes and felt that the teacher and his or her resources were readily available to them

They all said that they enjoyed the dance or music classes immensely. The children also spoke of enjoying the yoga classes. Two learners claimed that this was sometimes difficult but they tried hard and managed to cope. Like for children at the public schools, sport here was also a firm favourite among all the youngsters.

It was clear from the children's tone and verbal responses that they experienced the celebration of various festivals and school as being great fun. Interestingly it emerged that most of the children did not think it unusual that they were learning about, or doing subjects relating to Hinduism at their school. Most felt that this was the norm and seemed comfortable with this. A few of the older children that I spoke to appeared to be aware that their school was 'somewhat' different from the other schools.

They, however, felt that their school was special. The (older) children were unsure of how to respond to the question as to whether religion should be taught at home or at school but repeated that "it was nice to have *Diwali* and *Raksha bandhan* at school too". This was meant to mean, in addition to celebrating these festivals within the spaces of their own homes.

Quantifiable responses from the 12 children interviewed:

	LIKE IT	DON'T LIKE IT	ITS OKAY
What do you think of school?	10	0	2

	DANCE or MUSIC	YOGA	INDIAN LANGUAGES
Do you like these classes?	12	12	9

	MATHS	ENGLISH	HISTORY	SPORTS
Do you enjoy these classes?	8	12	8	12

	YES	NO	A LITTLE	DON'T KNOW
Is your school different from other schools?	8	0	2	2

	HOME	SCHOOL	BOTH	DON'T KNOW

Should you learn about Hinduism at home or at school?	1	2	4	5

	ENJOY THEM	FUN	NOT ENJOY	BORING
What do you think of the Hindu festivals celebrated at school	12	12	0	0

The Place of Religious Education Schools in the New South Africa

Both categories of respondents, the parents and the learners, appeared to respond positively to the school and its vision of an alternate educational model that incorporated basic Hindu teachings and subjects relating to Indian culture. Most parents seemed highly enthusiastic that their children were also learning their religion at a formal environment such as a school as opposed to only at home.

However, the thrust of the religion education programme, as enunciated in the policy is that there must be designed outcomes to achieve what is termed 'religious literacy'. The document talks about a civic understanding referring to an educational understanding as opposed to a confessional understanding of religion. The document articulates that:

> Confessional or sectarian forms of religious instruction in public schools are inappropriate for a religiously diverse and democratic society.

The document is also quick to clarify its stance lest it drew criticism of attempting to do away with a theistic worldview altogether and declares:

> We have chosen this approach as we are not a secular nation: the Preamble to the Constitution implores God to Bless Africa, and our inspiring national anthem opens with the words "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika".

What emerged from the responses of the parents, however, *is* their desire to have their children grow up and learn in a strong (Hindu) religious school environment. They viewed this kind of schooling as imperative to nurturing strong, and what they perceived to be morally upright, respectful and tolerant individuals. Many parents voiced a deep concern for what they perceived to be the lack of moral values at the state schools. They felt that this was not the case at Westville Hindu School. One parent pointed out to me that the greeting adopted by his school was *namaste*. He explained that this in Sanskrit translated to, *"I bow down to your inner self*," and said that this was so much more meaningful than the greeting of 'good morning' used in the other English medium public schools. The parent added that the student is taught to greet the teachers as well as each other in this manner and felt that this further inculcated the attitude of humility and learning in the young child, in his opinion an important element of the right attitude befitting a student as described in the religious texts. Most parents referred, although in not so many words, to this approach to education. The parent further stated that, to the child, a lot of this was possibly unconscious, that the child may not even be aware of it but that he or she was being groomed subconsciously to be humble and respectful.

They also understood morals and values as being universally true for everybody, everywhere, and at all times. The parents wanted their children to be aware of their religious identity and become conversant with their cultural traditions and system of morals and values. Likewise the religion education document stresses that there must be a link to morals and values in the religion education programme. However, it also points out that these values are not only encompassed within the various religions and that they can exist *outside* of the religious doctrines and body of religious belief systems. Most of the parents of the Westville Hindu School felt, however, that morality and values stemmed directly from religion, although not necessarily their own exclusively. This is perhaps a large oversimplification even as various global processes such as urbanization and secularization

move people towards alternate humanistic worldviews in ordering their understanding of right and wrong, good and bad, and *where* these so called values come from. Being taught other religions as in the case of the RE programme would of course have organically introduced, even very young learners to ideas of cultural relativism and whether in fact values and morals are attached to religions or only their particular religion. It would have also led them to seminal thinkers in history who have sought to investigate the relationship between religion and morality. While this is perhaps a logical overflow from a multi-religion programme it is perhaps usually more akin to an opening up the proverbial can of worms as far as a single-faith religious school is concerned.

The document, while stressing the imperative of developing the moral fibre of the learner and nurturing respect within a multi-religious and multicultural landscape, also stresses some seemingly market related outcomes. The policy likens the educational outcomes of religion education to similar outcomes in the domain of say literature and mathematics. The policy asserts that:

> Like basic educational skills such as reading comprehension or writing ability, these styles of thinking are transferable skills that are potentially relevant to any occupation or role in life. They represent purely educational grounds for developing a programme in Religion Education.

The value of this kind of religious education at Westville Hindu School, in the opinion of the parents, did not translate to skills that the child could potentially use in the labour market. One adds that this school catered to the teaching of only junior primary grades and consequently the issue of testable outcomes was not relevant as formal examinations begin in the later grades. Outcomes for subjects such as Indian music and dance were also seen in non quantifiable terms.

Is there then a place for a religious education school like Westville Hindu School in the new South Africa? The answer to that is as complex as is the question of the very nature of the relationship of state to religion. South Africa is still fraught with various considerations as the processes of urbanization, secularization and religious pluralism continue to transform the way both secular societies and faith communities choose to configure

themselves.[3] In the context of Westville Hindu School there is quite obviously a need and demand for this particular Hindu religious curricular within the context of a multi-religious country. The fact is communicated by the parents and their very presence at the school validates this. However, it is perhaps telling that it is a small school with space for additional children. Notwithstanding the publicity the school has received in Hindu religious media, the numbers remain small. The principal also communicates that he feels that they do not receive the full support of the community, meaning that many Hindus do indeed opt for the public schools or other kinds of private schools. In the view of the principal, in a province of a large population of Hindus there is a demand for a Hindu religious school, but the demand relative to the number of Hindu participants is small.

In revisiting the response from both the learners and parents it appears that the Westville Hindu School does satisfy their needs for a viable alternative to the state schools. The school appears to meet their need for *their* particular understanding of a holistic education. It may well be that certain configurations of religious education schools have a legitimate space in the new South Africa. If designed within the confines of the criteria spelled out by the RE policy document, the religious education schools that are private are an exercise in personal prerogative, on the part of the parents of the learners here. However, such schools need to dynamically respond to the challenges of the rapidly secularizing, previously religious society, rather than insulate themselves, and offer clichéd arguments of wishing to preserve and protect their own religious identity against the 'onslaught' of multiculturalism (http://www.acdp.org.za/other/Curriculum2005.htm) as some religious groups have put it. The Westville Hindu School however, does not position itself as offering religious teachings that privilege Hinduism as having exclusive claim to truth. As discussed earlier it attempts to position itself as cutting across sectarian boundaries. As such there is recognition for the plurality within Hinduism itself.

In the context of religion in schools it comes down to whether a parent would wish for their child to be taught *about* religion or *of* religion and whether the child should be taught about only her/his religion, or of many religions. Assuming that the parent is sensitive to the challenges of a diversity of religio-cultural traditions in South Africa, the next question a parent would have to grapple with is whether their child is more likely to

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[3] See Kumar (2006) for a discussion of these processes as they relate to South African society.

grow into a respectful, tolerant, open minded individual (articulated in the RE policy) given the inherently small 0.5% religion education share of the overall curricular in a public school, or whether he/she is better nurtured as a tolerant individual in a private religious school where all of the teaching is from the standpoint of religion as a system of beliefs, morals and codes of behaviour. Perhaps Hinduism and Hindu schools are somewhat better positioned to teach respect and acceptance of the other faiths in multi-religious South African society given that the religion itself is premised on the understanding that all religions are valid soteriological paths to truth.

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Appendix 1: Interview as Conversation: A Sampling of interview questions put to the principal

Q: How is the teaching of Hinduism integrated into the curriculum?

A: The school refers to itself as a one stop shop in the sense that the parents need not take their children around to other learning centers for traditional arts such as Indian dance and music, Indian languages etc after and beyond the school hours. This is put forward as being more convenient, and of course there are less cost implications for the parents themselves if this is included in the overall fees. More importantly it is felt that it is imperative to fully integrate vital learning areas like Indian dance and music within the educational curriculum.

Q: What is your sense of education in the conventional schools?
A: Just that it is not holistic in the sense that it does not cater for the other needs of the child. Parents believe that the so-called mother tongue [native language] of the child must be learnt by the child so that the language itself does not die out. They also feel that it is important for the child to be made aware of his or her rich linguistic roots. Here the children learn about and practice their religion as well.

Q: Education in this country has been used in the past to indoctrinate people. What would you say to critics who might want to say that you are indoctrinating the children into one kind of Hinduism?

A: As an academic myself, I understand the idea of indoctrination. That is not what we do here. These are children coming from practicing Hindu homes of parents who themselves belong to different sects or branches of Hinduism. We do not teach any sectional Hinduism but the broad tenets that cut across the different branches. The parents are very much aware of this. In this way this school is fairly unique. In all my research of religious schools in India and elsewhere I have personally not come across a school structured the way this school is. We are proud of the fact that we do not teach any one strand or sect of Hinduism. In this way I think we are fully aware of and able to cater to the character of Hinduism in South Africa. We teach the broad tenets of Hinduism.

Q: In your opinion are the children coming out of your school better behaved than those from a conventional school?

A: Most of the disciplinary problems, the kind that you might be meaning are experienced at a high school level, in this country at least. We are a junior primary school. However, because we do have small classes and individual attention, and we expose the children to the ancient religious and moral teachings of respecting the elders, teachers and each other, I think our children are well behaved and courteous and polite.

Q: Are there any problems that might be unique to a school teaching through a single faith approach?

A: We do struggle somewhat without the full support of the community. Even though we wish to remain small and intimate, we have space for more children.

Q: By exposing the children to only one faith are we restricting their ability to question and challenge? Should Hindu children go to a Hindu School? Would children be more open-minded and tolerant in the conventional schools?

A: Personally I don't feel that is the case. Here they learn about their faith and that of their parents. This Hinduism itself teaches tolerance and acceptance and indeed respect of other religions. Hinduism is all embracing. This is the first thing the children learn. Knowing their own faith allows them to answer any challenges that they might encounter regarding their religious identity and their place in this country. We do cover some of the other main religions in our weekly Life Orientation lessons. Here the children are taught about the other religions and about some of the festivals and customs. However it is the basic and embracing spirit of Hinduism that permeates all our teaching here.

Q: How are the children themselves responding to the instruction in religion?

A: Oh they seem to really enjoy it. In some ways it may be an extension of what they are doing at home. I think it is good for them to see it integrated into the other learning areas. They then see it as an important part of their education as whole individuals.

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Q: How will they cope in a society that is selling itself with a multicultural and multi-faith image?

A: That would be a challenge for all children. We believe that our children here are better equipped as they have a strong foundation in their own faith. They understand themselves and will thus be able to articulate their own religious identity amidst the many other religious identities that exist in this multi-faith and multi-cultural country of ours.

Q: Do you see yourself as being an extension of the kind of teachings the children are already exposed to at home?

A: Yes and no. Some of the teachings may be what the children are exposed to directly at home. But we are also non-sectarian and take a middle path through the basic and all encompassing teachings of Hinduism.

Q: What do you believe is the aim of education?

A: Education is about equipping the child with a strong sense of self in relation to the other. The child needs to be made aware of who he is and through this understanding begins to understand the workings of the world be it the sciences or mathematics and the rest of it. He also needs to be made aware that he is an important part of the important whole, that is, society. In this strong world of individuality there is also dividuality or the collective whole. Hindu teachings stress this thereby helping to create people more compassionate to their fellow humans.

Appendix 2: A Copy of some of the interview questions taken by the children

What do you like best about the school?

What are you favourite subjects?

How do you find the Yoga exercises?

Do you think your school is different from other schools?

Do you think you need to learn about religion at home or at school? Why?

Do you recall the ceremony when you started school? What does this ceremony mean?

What do you think of the religion education classes? Are they important? Are they interesting? Explain.

How are religious rituals or festivals celebrated at schools? Why is it only at this school?
What do you think about this?

Would you like to continue into high school here? Why?

What do you think of schools where these subjects are not offered?

Why do you think your parents chose this kind of school?

_____

NB: These are guides to questions. The questions were necessarily modified depending on the age of the child being interviewed.

Appendix 3: A Copy of the Questionnaire taken by the parents of the students

Why did you choose a Hindu School for your son or daughter?

_____

Are you a follower of any particular stream of Hinduism e.g. Arya Samaj, Hare Krishna etc?

_____

What is your opinion of conventional schools?

_____

How do you think your child responds to a Hindu School?

_____

What do you feel should be the aim of education?

_____

Do you feel that you child is disadvantaged if she/he is not exposed to learning about other faiths. Please explain.

_____

Appendix A

Four possible models for structuring the relationship between religion and the state:

Taken from the National Policy on Religion Education published 4 August 2003

A *theocratic* model identifies the state with one particular religion or religious grouping. In some cases, this model has resulted in a situation in which the state and religion become indistinguishable. In a religiously diverse society such as South Africa, this model clearly would be inappropriate.

A *repressionist* model is based on the premise that the state should act to suppress religion. In such a model, the state would operate to marginalise or eliminate religion from public life. In a religiously active society such as South Africa, any constitutional model based on state hostility towards religion would be unthinkable. We reject both the theocratic model of the religious state, such as the 'Christian-National' state in our own history that tried to impose religion in public institutions, as well as any repressionist model that would adopt a hostile stance towards religion.

A modern secular state, which is neither religious nor anti-religious, in principle adopts a position of impartiality towards all religions and other worldviews. A *separationist* model for the secular state represents an attempt to completely divorce the religious and secular spheres of a society.

In a *co-operative* model, both the principle of legal separation and the possibility of creative interaction are affirmed. Separate spheres for religion and the state are established by the Constitution, but there is scope for interaction between the two. While ensuring the protection of citizens from religious discrimination or coercion, this model encourages an ongoing dialogue between religious groups and the state in areas of common interest and concern. Even in such exchanges, however, religious individuals and groups must be assured of their freedom from any state interference with regard to freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief, and opinion.

Appendix B

Excerpt from the Policy on Religion and Education

Religion Education forms one part of the Life Orientation Learning Area of the National Curriculum Statement. This Learning Area has five broad Outcomes:

- Health Promotion
- Social Development
- Personal Development
- Physical Development and Movement, and
- An Orientation to the World of Work (Senior phase only).

Religion Education is contained within *Outcome 2*, in relation to Social Development, which requires that: *The learner will be able to demonstrate an understanding of and commitment to constitutional rights and responsibilities, and to show an understanding of diverse cultures and religions.*

The *Assessment Standards* for this part of the Learning Area are as follows:

Grade	We know this when the learner:
Grade R	Identifies and names symbols linked to own religion.
Grade 1	Matches symbols associated with a range of religions in South Africa.
Grade 2	Describes important days from diverse religions.
Grade 3	Discusses diet, clothing and decorations in a variety of religions.
Grade 4	Discusses significant places and buildings in a variety of religions.
Grade 5	Discusses festivals and customs from a variety of religions.
Grade 6	Discusses the dignity of the person in a variety of religions.
Grade 7	Explains the role of oral traditions and scriptures in a range of the world's religions.
Grade 8	Discusses the contributions of organisations from various religions to social development.
Grade 9	Reflects on and discusses the contributions of various religions in promoting peace.

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Appendix C

South African Constitution

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, was approved by the Constitutional Court (CC) on 4 December 1996 and took effect on 4 February 1997.

Excerpted from Chapter Two Bill of Rights Clause on Education

29. Education

1. Everyone has the right
   a. to a basic education, including adult basic education; and
   b. to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible.
2. Everyone has the right to receive education in the official language or languages of their choice in public educational institutions where that education is reasonably practicable. In order to ensure the effective access to, and implementation of, this right, the state must consider all reasonable educational alternatives, including single medium institutions, taking into account
   a. equity;
   b. practicability; and
   c. the need to redress the results of past racially discriminatory laws and practices.
3. Everyone has the right to establish and maintain, at their own expense, independent educational institutions that
   a. do not discriminate on the basis of race;
   b. are registered with the state; and
   c. maintain standards that are not inferior to standards at comparable public educational institutions.

Subsection (3) does not preclude state subsidies for independent educational institutions.

European Colonies and the Emergence of Hinduism in Southern and East Africa[1]

P. Pratap Kumar
School of Religion and Theology
Howard College
University of KwaZulu Natal

Abstract

The relationship between European colonies and the emergence of non-indigenous religions in Africa has been documented before. In this essay, I will describe the colonial context in which Hindu religious traditions became entrenched in Southern and East African countries. I will pay more attention to South African context and make additional comments on East African context. The nature of Hinduism and the nature of social structure that emerged within the Hindu society in South Africa and East Africa need to be explained in the colonial context.

The European colonies initially used a system of labour based on "slavery." By 1833, the system of slavery was abolished in the colonies. However, in much of East Africa, it was abolished only after 1873 (e.g., Zanzibar). At the same time by the mid 19th century, the British Empire grew enormously thereby requiring labour force to work on the plantations in the colonies. In view of the abolition of slavery, the colonies had to use a different system of labour which became common in South American colonies. This new system of labour came to be known as the "indenture system."

South Africa: Background

After many discussions both in Natal and India as well as in England, and after passing many laws, particularly the laws 13, 14 and 15 of 1859 which laid down rules of the Indenture system to be applied in Natal, the first group of Indian workers arrived in Natal on October 11, 1860. The first group came from the 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 illtreatment of labourers hired under the new system in Natal.

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[1] Some of the material in this essay has been adapted from my previous book *Hindus in South Africa: Their Traditions and Beliefs.* (Durban: University of Durban-Westville, 2000).

When it was resumed in 1874, the immigration department in Natal placed advertisements in India to attract labourers. Among other things, they guaranteed that "[y]our religion will in no way be interferred with, and both Hindoos and Mahomedans (*sic*) are alike protected." The advertisement also states that there were already more than five thousand Indians in Natal thus pointing to the fact that a community of Indians had already begun to develop in South Africa. There were two major ports in India from where indentured Indians were shipped—the Madras port which sent mainly Tamil- and Telugu-speaking people; and the Calcutta port which sent mainly Hindi-speaking people. The passenger Indians or traders largely came from Gujarat and Bombay.

As indentured labourers became free, some of them were re-hired into the indenture system and others freed themselves. Among those who became free of the indenture system, some moved into rural areas to pursue market gardening and selling fruits and vegetables, while others pursued all vocations that were available to survive in the alien land.

Duirng 1874 and 1911, nearly 146,000 new immigrants of Indian origin came to Natal in 364 ships. It was during this period many "free passenger" Indians also arrived there. They were mostly traders holding British passports and entered Natal at their own expense. Most of them came from Gujarat and a significant number of them belonged to the Muslim religious background. Thus by this time, i.e., during 1874 and 1911, we have three distinct categories of Indians within South Africa—those who were still under the indenture system; those who became free of indenture system and took up special services, and those who came as free passengers or what Maureen Swan (1985) calls 'the merchant class.' The Indian merchants began trading and supplying groceries and other items to Indians and Blacks.

The period between 1900 and 1910 is quite crucial for our understanding of the Hindu presence in South Africa. In 1903, the first Indian newspaper called *Indian Opinion* was started by Gandhi in both Gujarati and English. In 1904, the Arya Samaj was formed, in 1905 Prof. Bhai Paramanand of the Arya Samaj visited South Africa, in the same year the Pretoria Tamil Leauge; in 1907 the Surat Hindu Association; in 1909 the Young Men's Hindu Association; and in 1910 the Pretoria Hindu Seva Samaj and the New Castle Tamil Association were formed. The arrival of Arya Samaj in South Africa intiated a division between those Hindus who observed their religion by practicing rituals in temples (Sanatanists) and those who followed the view of Arya Samaj in rejecting the worship of images in the temples and shrines. This distinction, however, was mainly in the case of Hindi speaking Hindus and did not affect the South Indian Hindus.

The year 1911 hearalded a new phase of experience for the Indians when all the colonies joined as the Union of South Africa. It put an end to Indian immigration to South Africa. From now on the question is not so much about the immigration of Indian but their repatriation. While the South African government viewed it as repatriation, the Indians took it as expatriation signaling their determination to stay in South Africa. In light of this situation, many new organizations and groups supporting the Indian cause came into existence. In 1911, the Colonial Born Indian Association and the South African Indian Committee were formed. In 1910, Prof. G. Gokhale of the Indian National Congress introduced a resolution in the Imperial Legislative Council, which sought the prohibition of future indenture immigration to Natal. In 1912, Prof. Ghokale visited South Africa at the invitation of Gandhi. And in 1913, the Indian immigration was finally ended. On October 29, 1913, Gandhi led what was called the "Great March" to oppose the £3 tax. After a great deal of political involvement, Gandhi finally left to India on July 18,1914. In a sense, the period after 1911 resulted in greater determination among Hindus in South Africa to invest in cultural and religious institutions in order to perpetuate their worldviews to the next generation. In other words, it was an important shift in their thinking i.e., it was a shift from being an immigrant to a settled community which thinks about the maintenance of their worldviews for the sake of the next generation. The official end of Indian immigration to South Africa and the shift in their consciousness of being settled has direct implications for the extent to which they began to emerge as a religious community as opposed to a mere indentured labour group. Notwithstanding the political problems that they would be facing in the years to come to gain South African citizenship, this was the beginning of moving away from immigrant consciousness to settled community consciousness which indeed was essential for their determination to invest in their religious and cultural heritage.

Disintegration of Caste as a Social System among South African Hindus

From the above description, it becomes obvious that two types of immigrants that now settled in South Africa—the first group were the indentured labourers, who did not enjoy much education and predominantly shared a village culture and the belief systems based on the village agrarian society. The other group of "passenger Indians" mainly came from urban areas and shared largely the Brahmanical world view. The ship lists from the Madras port for the initial period between 1860 and 1877 do not give us any details regarding the castes of Indians. Up to 1877 all Hindus coming from Madras were listed under the generic term "Gentoo." From 1878 onwards only did the ship lists from Madras contain details of castes. Therefore, it is not easy to find out exactly which caste groups came from South India during the early part of the immigration.

On the other hand, the ship lists from the Calcutta port give details of castes. However, most of the last names of the South Indian groups do indicate their caste background. Both in the case of North Indian groups and the South Indian groups, there seems to have been some mobility in terms of their caste background. Often the documents of individuals reflect caste names that do not match with their family names. For instance, in one of the documents a person is listed as belonging to Vanniya caste which is a non-brahmanical caste. But the same person has a last name "Iyer" which is a specific brahmanical caste name from South India. Such anomalies, however, need to be carefully investigated and studied by social scientists to see whether caste changes have occurred in the host society. Such investigation would help us understand how social mobility might have occurred among the South African Indians.

In general, the Madras group was constituted by 12% Muslims; 5% Christians; some Pillais (Traders), and the remaining were labourers of lower social rank. The Calcutta group was constituted by 5.5% Rajputs; others were either from the Lohar caste (Blacksmith) or Koris (Weavers) or some other lower rank. The first group, i.e., the Madras group comprised not so much of agricultural labourers as mechanics, household servants, gardeners, traders, carpenters, barbers, accountants, and grooms. Thus, the Indian community which eventually settled in South Africa may be divided along cultural lines into North Indians and South Indians.

The disappearance of caste among most South African Hindus has to do not only with the inadequate numbers in any given caste grouping for the caste structures to be maintained but equally importantly it has to do with the manner in which workers were allocated to different employers without regard to caste or language backgrounds. When the Indian labourers arrived in South Africa, they were allocated to different employers, some in the sugarcane industry, some in the railways, and so on. The employers then took them away to their respective locations of work. So, there was little opportunity to the newly arrived workers to remain in homogenous groups based on caste[2] and language

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[2] The use of caste names such as Naidoo, Reddy, Singh and so on by a vast number of Hindus in South Africa, however, needs explanation. In the process of homogenization of groups in to various linguistic groups, a large number of Hindus seem to have consciously acquired caste names as last names. Acquiring a caste name as a last name was a way of social upward mobility among most Hindus in South Africa. The fact that during the initial period most of them were dispersed in various areas often without communication with their families and caste groups made it also possible for people to acquire new caste status in places where their original identity was unknown to the people in the area. Thus when we speak of the disappearance of caste as a social unit among Hindus, one has to bear in mind that caste as a functional unit did not survive with all its social and cultural rules, but a sense of caste awareness survived. It means that caste as a socially functioning unit has no relevance among Hindus in South Africa, but through acquisition of caste names many seem

as they were randomly allocated to the employers based on their physical abilities. It was only after the workers freed themselves from the indenture system that they seem to have regrouped to a certain extent along linguistic and broad cultural lines. Although there seems to be no documentation on which linguistic group went to which area after freeing themselves from the indenture system, some indirect evidence could be proffered to show that a significant number of families coming from the same language group could have gone to the same area. For instance, some areas, such as Verulam and Tongaat in the north coast mostly Tamil- and Telugu-speaking people seem to have settled. A survey of the area shows that the background of the early temples in those areas reflects a South Indian culture. Stanger area also in the north coast is populated predominantly by Hindi speakers

Although linguistically speaking there are several groups (e.g., Hindi- and Gujarati-speaking people in the North Indian group; Tamil- and Telugu-speaking people in the South Indian group), in general all North Indians share a similar cultural milieu, while all South Indians share a similar cultural milieu. This trend may be identified in the observance of festivals. One could notice distinct South Indian and North Indian architectural styles in temple building. Mikula et al. (1982) note those distinct architectural backgrounds.

The disappearance of caste as a basic unit of social hierarchy among South African Hindus has led inevitably to a certain homogenization of cultural groups along linguistic lines. The present Hindu community in South Africa may be treated largely as belonging to four language groups. These are— i) Tamils, ii) Telugus, iii) Hindis and iv) Gujaratis. There seems to be a greater awareness of their respective languages and traditions at the present time than it was during their initial period. And, therefore, the linguistic group identities seem to be becoming reified. Nowbath (1960) points out that at one time during the earlier period the North Indian groups were unaware of the fact that the Telugus and the Tamils were distinct groups in terms of their language and culture. Nevertheless, it must be noted that over the years there was a great deal of assimilation process between the Tamils and the Telugus, more from the side of the Telugus than perhaps from the side of Tamils. In other words, a great many Telugus appropriated the Tamil culture and tended to identify themselves with the Tamil society. This trend may be clearly noticed both among the Reddy community and the Naidoo community who seem to have come largely

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to have moved upward on the social ladder. Although they did not practice caste rules, they wanted others to think that they come from respectable castes and hence socially equal. In other words, no one wanted to be identified with their original caste background if it was considered socially inferior. They new that their social status in relation to marital alliances is important. Simply put, they seem to have wanted a higher social status without the rules of the caste system.

from the Tamil-speaking regions in India. But those who came from the interior regions of Andhra seem to have greater awareness of their being Telugu-speaking and it is these groups that are more actively involved in the Andhra Maha Sabhas. In other words, South Indian groups became homogenized as Tamils and Telugus while the North Indian groups became homogenized as Hindis. Gujaratis have generally maintained a sense of distinct linguistic community and did not become integrated with the Hindi speakers. This homogenization among South Indians and North Indians based on broad linguistic affinities resulted in the non-viability of caste among these groups with the exception of Gujarati community which maintained caste identity due to their continued contact with their Indian counterparts for business purposes. With the disappearance of caste, the system of dowry also disappeared among Hindus in South Africa, again with some exception in the case of the Gujaratis. In other words, marital alliances are usually maintained among cognate groups among South Indians (Tamil and Telugu) and North Indians (Hindi speaking groups). These fundamental changes in the Hindu society in South Africa can only be attributable to the peculiar circumstances that existed in the colonies and the social backgrounds of immigrant groups.

The Nature of Hinduism that emerged in South Africa

The nature of Hinduism in South Africa is marked by three important features—in the case of South Indian traditions it is marked by belief systems that exited in the 19th century Indian villages; in the case of the Hindi speakers there were two features—the Sanatana (traditional) ritual practices based on temple worship and the Arya Samajists, who denounced temple based ritual worship.

Temple building is perhaps the earliest indication of the kind of Hinduism that had emerged in South Africa. Hindus built a wide variety of temples mainly in Natal region in the beginning and in later years throughout the country. Some of the earliest temples date back to the later part of the 19th century. The initial temple activity was mainly among the indenture labourers in Natal and they were predominantly of South Indian background. Two types of temples were built—South Indian style and the North Indian style. They are distinguished by the shrine (cella), the tower (Sikhara) and the flag post (kodi). The North Indian temples are relatively much simpler and plain in design whereas the South Indian ones are elablorately decorated as noted by Mikula et al. (1982).

From a denominational point of view, there are three types of temples: Shaiva, Vaishnava and Amman (Mother/Goddess) temples. Often these different denominations could be found in the same temple complex and the deities belonging to different branches are also found in the same complex. It reflects the inclusive tendency of the early Indian settlers in an effort to create a unified

understanding of Hinduism in the diaspora. One finds that the worship or ritual patterns reflect a mixture of brahmanical and non-brahmanical elements. The earlier ritual patterns were mostly non-brahmanical whereas in more recent years since about two decades brahmanical elements have become more pronounced with the arrival of the priests from Srilanka in the 1990s. Generally, when the term "brahmin" is used there is no caste reference to it in South Africa. It simply refers to some one who is a priest and may have belonged to any caste or language. Over the years of adaptations, many changes in ritual procedures and rules have occurred. Either due to a lack of expertise or due to other social considerations such as their initial non-Brahmanical rural background, most rituals have been simplified. Prohibition of lighting of camphor inside the temple, breaking the coconut outside the temple, etc., for example, reflect the adjustments that they had to make in their worship patterns. Even the occurrence of religious ceremonies and festival celebrations have been moved to week-ends and the religious calendar is adjusted accordingly with greater flexibility in terms of auspicious times. Observance of Parattasi (fasting during the months of September and October), performance of Kavadi ritual, Firewalking ritual are among the most important ones among the South Indian Hindus whereas Diwali is much more popular among the North Indian Hindus although it has now been declared as pan-Hindu festival with greater inter-denominational interaction during the festival celebration. Among the North Indian Hindus, the recitation of Hanuman Chalisa during the festival of Ramnavami is very common.

In the face of the existence of the Arya Samaj, the distinction between the Sanatana Hindus and the Arya Samajists is very important as mentioned above. The Arya Samaj had arrived in South Africa in the early twentieth century with the arrival of an Arya Samaj leader, Bhai Paramanand in 1905. He was followed by Swami Shankaranand in 1908 and Pandit Bhavani Dayal Sanyasi in 1912.

In subsequent decades, many other Hindu denominations had emerged among the South African Hindus. Prominent among them were, the Saiva Siddhanta Sangam, the Ramakrishna Centre, the Divine Life Society, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) popularly known as the Hare Krishnas, the Satya Sai group among many other smaller groups. With the re-establishment of ties with India since 1994, many religious leaders and intellectuals have brought different Hindu influences to South Africa in recent years.

The above description of the nature of Hindu rituals and denominations that had emerged in South Africa need to be seen in the context of the homogenization process that occurred among the various Hindu groups. The homogenization of social groups inevitably led to the homogenization of

cultural and religious practices and belief systems. This meant, the beliefs and practices that the immigrant groups brought with them have been reshaped and in a sense were reinvented in their colonial existence. The adjustments in ritual procedures such as not breaking coconuts inside the temple or shrine and observing all communal rituals and practices on Sundays reflect not only their inability to ignore or bypass the colonial restrictions but also their ability to reinvent their traditions in the new land.

East African Hindus

Although some Hindus had already been in East Africa due to the Islamic colonization of East Africa under the Sultan of Oman, with the proliferation of European colonies in Africa, the need for cheap labour was the context in which Indians were brought to provide such services. Additionally, merchant Indians mainly from Gujarat were allowed to trade and in a sense they became the mediators between the colonial administrators and the native people (commonly known as the buffer zone).

The trade relations between India and East Africa go back to very early centuries (9th —10th centuries). For instance, iron-working in East Africa came through the Indian trade orbit. Some of the trading kingdoms included the Cholas in South East India, Sri Vijaya of Sumatra, Gujaratis of Cambay and Bahmanis of the Deccan from the 9th to the 14th centuries. Slave trade also flourished during this period when East African slaves were taken to India and China. Marco Polo refers to ships from Malabar Coast to Madagascar and Zanzibar. The North-east monsoons facilitated the ships to travel in 20 days. During this period, Mombasa was also an important port.

The first colony of Indians in East Africa appeared at Aden and Muscat by the 18th century. In 1811, Captain Suree mentions that Hindu traders held the best part of the trade. Even though the trade was said to be dominated by the Muslim traders, the Hindu/Banian traders were said to be resilient. Kenneth Ingham notes that Sayyid Said of Zanzibar allowed both Hindus and Mulsim Banians to trade in East Africa (Ingham 1965: 58). When Sultan Said moved his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar, many Hindu traders followed him. The key post of Customs Master was in fact held by a Hindu. It was indeed the Customs Master who was the real power. Hindus were also key advisors to the Sultan. The Commercial Treaty between the Sultan and the British in 1839 gave Hindu traders greater security and trading advantage. By the mid 19th century 6000 Indians were counted in East Africa. With the British gradually gaining upper hand in trading, the Indians felt better protected under the British Consul in Zanzibar. The Indians looked upon the British as their protectors and friends (Beachey 1996: 365).

Many Hindus were complicit in the slave trade of East Africa. But unlike the British, the Hindus and Muslims recognized the practice of slave trading as legal. The abolition of slave trade in 1833 did not affect the British India and only after 1843 slavery in British India ended. Even then in East Africa many Indian traders openly held slaves and often gave up British protection in the interest of slave holding (Beachey 1996: 367).

The arrival of the Punjabis in East Africa was due to their recruitment in 1895 to what was called "East Africa Rifles" as part of the East African Defense, i.e., the Zanzibar Sultans under the protection of the British used the Punjabi regiments to protect their territories. In 1901, the Railways brought 2000 Indians to East Africa. Most of the clerical posts in the Railways were held by the Parsees, maintenance services were held by the Punjabis and the ex-Indentured Indians took up shop-keeping. From 1870s onwards there was a large flow of Free Indian immigration to East Africa. By 1911 there were nearly 2000 Indians in Uganda, 11000 in East African Protectorate, between 4000 and 10000 in Zanzibar. Indians in East Africa were mainly involved in commercial activities and did not go into agricultural activities (Beachey 1996: 370-71). However, Ingham points out that when the commercial class Indians tried to acquire agricultural lands, the government prevented them, especially in the cooler parts of the Protectorate. (Ingham 1996: 211-12). Harlow et al. (1965:214) notes that the Indian farming was only on small scale level and not suitable from a commercial point of view.

Under the British control in East Africa, many Indian associations emerged and played key role in politics. For instance, the role played by the Indian Association of Dar es Salaam in the debate on Unification of East African Territories, the Kampala Indian Association in recognizing the British administration in Uganda are some examples of their involvement in political life of East Africa. By 1912-13 the Indian population surpassed the white community in aggregate wealth and this led to the discrimination against the Indians by the government. In 1903, Sir Charles Eliot, the new commissioner to East Africa, issued an order to the Land Office not to issue land grants except small plots to Indians (Harlow et al. 1965: 271). Low and Smith (1976: 468) in their study pointed out that whereas Indians did very well in trading during Omani rule in Zanzibar due to the enlightened policy of the Sultan Sayyid Said, during the Imperial Government the Indian trading was controlled. Nevertheless, by 1920s Asian/Indian business capital and enterprise represented an important factor in the economy of East Africa. There was a steady flow of Indians into East Africa until 1944 when it was begun to be restricted. By 1948 there were 87000 in Kenya, 35000 in Uganda, 46000 in Tanganyika, 16000 in Zanzibar. By the end of the colonial period Asian population in East Africa was in the region of 350 000 in East Africa against a total population of 25 million (Low and Smith 1976: 484).

The Indian population through education and economic status gradually became more and more urbanized. Change of dress code, food habits, language (fluency in English and Swahili) is very visible. However, as they settled down in the adopted land, a greater consciousness of the country of origin began to emerge. This has gradually led to their isolation as a distinct racial and cultural group in East Africa. Low and Smith attribute this to their religious and communal traditions which tended to emphasize close-knit communities and not entering into partnerships with other communities in the development of the society (Low and Smith 1976: 485). Although in the aftermath of World War II Africans and Asians collaborated in politics with the Government of India taking a pro-African policy, the growing African nationalism in 1950s overshadowed the African and Asian collaboration and the future prospects of the Asians in East Africa became uncertain. Under the subsequent dictatorial regimes in East Africa, many Indians left and settled in various western countries. For instance, in Zanzibar presently there are only around 75 families left, who belong to Hinduism of Gujarati background among a total population of 1 million.

The Nature of Hinduism in East Africa

The Hindus in Zanzibar generally belonged to two groupings—the Sanatana Hindus associated with the Shree Shiva Shakti Mandir and the Arya Samaj Hindus. Whereas the Shree Shiva Shakti Mandir presently is almost desolate with not many devotees to patronize it, the Arya Samaj building is more or less dilapidated. The only country in East Africa that still has a reasonable size of Indian population is Kenya (about 65000 of whom majority are Hindus). It includes both first and second generation Indians.

In Kenya, the bulk of the Hindu population belongs to the Sanatana Hindu Temple in Nairobi. The other significant groups are Arya Samajists, Brahma Kumaris and the followers of Swami Narayana sect. There are two Swami Narayana temples in Nairobi, one is older and the other is recently built. Majority Hindus are Hindi or Gujarati speakers or generally North Indians. They generally follow Brahmanical rituals. There is a Sri Venkateswara temple which caters to the South Indian Hindus but is predominantly North Indian in its membership. The Hindus in Kenya have strong links with India and its culture. The presence of Hindutva/RSS in Kenya is quite visible. Some temples are often visited by Hindutva leaders from India. Many of them have business links with not only India, but also with Mauritius, South Africa and other diaspora elsewhere. The Hindu Council of Kenya is very well organized and structured. They are a part of the Hindu Council of Africa. The Hindu Council

of Kenya has endowed a chair in Hindu Studies at the University of Nairobi[3]. The Hindu Council participates in various inter-faith conversations with other religious groups and many prominent Hindus are involved in the political life of Kenya.

The presence of the distinction between traditionalists (Sanatana) and Arya Samajists in East Africa (as seen in South Africa) is again the result of the internal struggles that Hindus underwent to re-express their religious identities within the context of colonial rule. In East Africa, unlike in the case of South Africa, however, majority of the immigrants are commercial classes and predominantly of Gujarati background. And this explains the Brahmanical elements in the case of traditionalists (Sanatana) as well as the Arya Samajists. Both in South Africa and in East Africa, the Arya Samajists were against any form of rituals associated with the idols and imagery. They only upheld theism based on Vedic tradition.

Conclusions

The above narrative illustrates the background of Hindus who came to Africa (South Africa as well as East Africa) and the nature of Hinduism that was brought to the colonies. The nature of immigration more or less determined the nature of Hindu practices in the colonies. In South Africa, for instance, since most Hindus came from villages in India, the religious practices such as Mariamman worship, Parattasi in the case of South Indians and Hanuman worship in the case of Hindi speakers became very dominant and visible markers of religious expression among Hindus. The Sanskritic forms of Hinduism located between the polarities of Sanatana and Arya Samaj forms of Hinduism relate to the distinctions made during the 19th century colonial India and found expressions in South Africa as well as East Africa. In a sense, therefore, the history of the colonies in Africa and the history of Hinduism in Africa are closely intertwined and the expressions of Hinduism in these lands tell both the history of colonial immigration patterns as well as the travails and frustrations of Hindus in establishing their religious and cultural institutions in a foreign land. The loss or gradual modifications of many traditions also are attributable to the colonial background against which the Hindu communities had to make adjustments for their respective traditions. In general in the context of colonial Hindu immigrations to Africa, the following points could be made—

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[3] The Hindu Studies Chair was maintained for only a few years and it now is defunct due to lack of patronage as well as due to a lack of students who are interested in Hindu studies.

1. Immigrants were from rural non-Brahmanical cultural milieu. They built non-Brahmanical temples in the beginning and added some Brahmanical elements and temples with Brahminical gods.
2. Homogenization of linguistic groups as South Indian and North Indian, and Gujarati with some specific status as merchant class has occurred. This led to the disappearance of caste as an institution, but caste consciousness in the early periods remained and is visible in the last names of people.
3. South Indians were more conspicuous in temple building in the initial phase and the passenger Indians began to build temples only in the middle or later part of the 20th century.
4. preservation of many village based non-Brahmanical deity festivals— Mariamman prayers or Porridge prayers, Kavadi, Parratasi are the more dominant features of Hinduism in South Africa
5. In East Africa, the central feature is the division between traditionalists and the Arya Samajists (but both belonging to the Brahmanical milieu) and the absence of much non-Brahmanical elements such as the ones present in South Africa. The division between Sanatanists and Arya Samajists is also evident in South Africa.

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Indian ethics: Classical Traditions and Contemporary Challenges. Vol. 1.
Edited by Purshottama Bilimoria, Joseph Prabhu and Renuka Sharma.
Aldershot, Hampshire (UK): Ashgate, 2007. pp. 431+

Review Essay by P. Pratap Kumar (University of KwaZulu Natal)

The above volume on Indian Ethics is one of the most comprehensive
statements on discussions on ethics as outlined in the Indian classical
thinking as well as contemporary intellectual reflections in Indian society. It
presents a comprehensive overview of recent scholarship on Indian ethics
but also firmly locates the discourse on Indian ethics in the context of both
western philosophy as well as modern society. In this regard, the
introduction by the editors of the volume is of tremendous use to senior
scholars and students alike. To review a volume such as this which covers
almost every possible topic related to ethics is not an easy task. To begin
with it may be useful to provide a sketchy summary of each author's
contribution to the discourse on Indian ethics. The essays are divided into
three sections—Early Indian ethics, Buddhist and Jain materials, and modern
thinkers. The first section draws materials from early classical textual
sources.

In his essay Mohanty (58-78) using Kant as a backdrop for his reflections on
Dharma as a moral concept, makes the following points—1. that "an
important strand in Hindu thinking is Kantian"; 2. and that Dharma is not
theologically grounded; 3. that it is based on rules of grammar i.e.,
imperative sentences (p. 77); 4. that not all moral theories in India are
monistic and the "ethics of virtue of antiquity was pluralistic"; 5. that
"Hindu ethics is concerned with Sittlichkeit" rather than Moralität; 6 finally
he rejects ascribing the authority for morality to God. (pp. 64-65).

BK Matilal (79-102) agrees with Mohanty that the Dharma theory of ethic is
not based on the authority of God nor on the basis of Vedas. It is rather
based on a rational basis because caste-dharma "unquestionably had a moral
dimension since it legitimized social inequality." (87).

Daya Krishna's essay (103-116) unpacks the difficulties in explaining the
meaning of *puruṣārthas* (artha, dharma, kāma and mokṣa) either in their
wider or narrower sense. In agreement with Prof. K.J. Shah, he seems to

indicate that these goals need to be seen as interactional and not as hierarchical. He says that "the independent seeking of any value which is different from these is an illusion, except in an instrumental sense." (115)

Laurie Patton's essay (117-148) focuses on daily events as the basis of ethics thereby finding some correspondence between western thinking in the personage of Levinas and the Vedas in so far as the Vedas emphasize the concrete realities of daily life around the sacrificial system.

There is a general agreement in the volume that Indian ethics and especially the one based on Yoga is consequentialist theory of ethics. Roy W Perret (149-160) demonstrates how Sāṃkhya-Yoga subscribes to consequentialist theory of ethics by emphasizing that the ethical actions are meant to promote the supreme good of liberation and contextualizes his discussion within the other philosophical systems of India. While Perret's view of Sāṃkhya -Yoga ethics is based on what Ian Whicher calls "isolationstic, one-sided reading"of Yoga Sūtra and its commentary by Vyāsa, Whicher in his essay (161-170) refutes the dominant scholarly view that Yoga subscribes to a radical separation of spirit and matter in its pursuit of ultimate good of liberation. "I am suggesting that yoga does not destroy or anesthetize our feelings and emotions thereby encouraging neglect and indifference toward others. On the contrary, the process of 'cessation' (nirodha) stabilizes and makes one steadfast toward a life of compassion, discernment, and service informed by a 'seeing' that is able to understand (literally meaning 'to stand among, hence observe') –and is in touch with –the needs of others." (p. 167)

P. Bilimoria pays attention to the various nuances of the theory of karma in dealing with the problem of evil. The theoretical problems of karma as a viable basis for moral actions is amply emphasized in his attempt to show, against the backdrop of Mīmāṃsa philosophy, that God has no place in the theory of karma as the world "come about as a result of the merits and demerits, the good and bad action of human beings". (187) If God "depends on the law of karma to provide moral regulative order to the world…such a God cannot be said to be complete with the first order Truth". He, therefore, raises the rhetorical question –"Is karma a convenient fiction?" (188)

While the essays thus far dealt with some main stream issues of classical Indian materials—such as the issue of Dharma and Karma as moral concepts, Maria Heim (191-210) shifts the focus to more practical issue of gift giving (Dāna). She underscores the idea of gift giving in the Indian

tradition as being based on the idea of 'esteem' rather than on pity as viewed in the western tradition. She says, "That esteem is at the heart of gift giving explains why reciprocity and gratitude do not figure in the morality of *dāna*. Dāna depicts a particular human relationship that is to be free of the gnaw of obligation and return. It esteem is the principal sentiment in giving, then gift is *not* conceived in terms of mutuality and balance in human relations, for esteem is unidirectional and hierarchical." (197) She, however, cautions that the ideology of Dāna (gift) "may perhaps never be entirely isolated from power, status and economic interest". (204).

The section two turns its attention to materials from Jainism and Buddhism. Chapple (217-228) finds commonalities between contemporary cosmology and Jaina worldview. He finds potential in Jainism for developing ecological ethic. He, nevertheless, cautions about the variance between theory and practice. He asks—"How many Jaina industries contribute to air pollution or forest destruction or result in water pollution?" (226). De Silva (229-246), in his essay, provides a useful comparative perspective of Buddhist ethics and Kantian deontological ethics and Mill's Utilitarian ethics. Buddhist ethics being consequentialist and teleological in its frame work, it blends ethics of care and ethics of rights (239) on the one hand, "transformation of the individual instead of searching for a moral calculus for society." (236).

Damien Keown (247-268) attempts to develop a basis for human rights discussion in Buddhism. He finds that the Buddhist doctrine of relational origination or dependent origination is not sufficient to establish a theory of ethics. He suggests, "Instead the most promising approach is the one which locates human rights and dignity within a comprehensive account of human goodness, and which sees basic rights and freedoms as integrally related to human flourishing and self-realization. This is because the source of human dignity in Buddhism lies nowhere else than in the literally infinite capacity of human nature for participation in goodness." (262-3) This goodness, according to Keown, is rooted in the twin axes, viz., knowledge (prajña) and moral concern (karuṇa). (267)

Garfield's essay (269-282) turns its attention to examining the relevance of Buddhism to modern liberal democracy. He argues that there may not be compatibility between Buddhism and liberal democracy as the two focus on different things—Buddhism being concerned with goodness and liberal democracy with procedures. Nevertheless, the two provide a basis for

"social goods and values a political system ought to reflect and encourage." (274)

In line with the earlier essays which viewed Buddhist ethics from the standpoint of consequentialism, Mark Siderits (283-296) unpacks the reductionism of Buddhism in order to locate the structure of Buddhist ethics. Buddhism reduces everything to conventional reality which ultimately has no meaning. From the stand point of this reductionism in Buddhism, telling truth, for instance, has no bearing on the cessation of suffering. He suggests that Buddhism teaches or inculcates the habit of truth-telling and such moral values in an audience that has cognitive limitations. "To the very different audience of committed practitioners who have embarked on the path to nirvana, on the other hand, it is explained that such virtues are of merely instrumental value." (294) This is why he describes Buddhist ethics as aretaic or indirect consequentialism.

Sridhar and Bilimoria (297-328) in their essay turn their attention to ecological and environmental issues. They reviewed the Brahmanical literature of both classical and medieval periods with a view to outline their attitude to animals. Their review also covers the Jaina and Buddhist materials and closes with some reflections on contemporary ethical views on ecology and environment.

Bhikhu Parekh (337-350) on the other hand examines the Hindu view of tolerance towards other religious beliefs. His point of departure is "Hinduism refers to a religion, whereas what Hindus share in common is a civilization of which religion is a part. Hinduism implies that all Hindus share or expected to share a common body of beliefs and practices, and that is clearly not the case." (338) He, therefore, rejects the term Hinduism for purposes of developing a Hindu theory of tolerance. He suggests that Hindu pluralism is 'antipathetic' towards religions that make perfectionist and exclusivist claims. He, however, suggests that the Hindu theory of tolerance can provide both positive and negative insights. He, therefore, recommends that it is better to stress moral rather than creedal aspects of religion; individual uniqueness than quasi-deterministic doctrine of karma. (341-349)

Chapple's second essay (351-362) examines the two primary ethical values that contributed to the moral universe of the Hindus, viz., renunciation and this worldly activity and sees Ramakrishna and Gandhi in modern India as representatives of these two models.

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By critically revisiting the Weberian reading of the Indian tradition, Mehta (363-376) argues that not only does Weber find no correlation between ethical intentions and the structures of the society, but also that the ethical and soteriological commandments in India are deeply relativized. Rather than the organic character of society, he says, it is the commitment to plurality of values and the tension that it generates is what seems to be the core of Indian society.

Rajendra Prasad's essay (377-394) examines the current practice of concession to underprivileged in India using the ethical category of retributive justice. He concludes that the current practice may "generate a reactive attitude of counter-revenge." He thinks that creation of a moral climate in which those who were wronged and need compensation and those who perpetrated the wrong in the past may find sympathy for each other.

Joseph Prabhu (395-410) outlines Gandhi's key ideas in the sphere of ethics, religion, politics and economics and he situates them in the context of subtle economic imperialism in the guise of globalization of economies. He argues that Gandhi's relevance today lies in claiming autonomy and self control in the face of economic imperialism.

Final essay by Stephen Philips (411-420) examines Aurobindo's ethical skepticism and locates it in what he calls "mystic experientialism". According to Philips, Aurobindo's ethical skepticism stems from both the experience of Brahman as well as his teachings on Yoga.

Some Key Issues

Reviewing a volume that has a varied focus in each of the essays is difficult enough. But the comprehensiveness with which the editors covered a range of issues on Indian ethics makes it even more difficult to do justice to critically review the volume and provide an assessment. Each of the essays deserves full attention in discussion. However, in a broad sweep such as this, it is perhaps useful to find some key issues overall and provide some reflection on them.

First and foremost in my view is that this volume clarifies to the readers, especially those who are non-specialists on Indian materials that Indian ethics does not necessarily depend on a belief God. This is an extremely

valuable insight brought out both by Mohanty, Matilal and Bilimoria, and is indeed what distinguishes Indian ethics from ethical theories drawn from Judeo-Christian and other theistic materials.

Second important issue that this volume highlighted is that Indian ethics in most instances may be covered under the rubric of "consequentialist" theory of ethics. However, the volume clarifies the important difference between the Sāṃkhya-Yoga based consequentialism and Buddhist consequentialism. Whereas Sāṃkhya-Yoga consequentialism leads to the isolation of the spirit, the Buddhist consequentialism or rather the indirect consequentialism means that moral deeds have only instrumental value and have no ultimate bearing on cessation of suffering or attainment of nirvana.

Third key issue is relativism. As pointed out by Parekh ["For Hindus difference is the central feature of human life as well as its organizing principle" (342)] and Mehta [when he points up the Weberian emphasis on Svadharma rather than on Dharma in general and the consequent "relativizing of all ethical commandments" (375)], the central problem of Indian ethics seems to be that the dharma rules based on one's caste as well as one's doctrinal view relativizes ethical imperatives. While Parekh sees it as something that instills tolerance in the Indian psyche towards other religious views, albeit that it encourages social hierarchy, in the view of Mehta and true to Weber's thinking such conflicting ethical imperatives based on Svadharma might indeed be at the root of the structure of Indian society. As Mehta says, "[A]n axiological thesis about plurality of values, each with their own lawful autonomy and irreconcilable commitments, was the normative correlate for a social structure, where each caste, in some sense, represented a different value." (375). This indeed is what he calls "the ethical irrationality of the world".

Fourth, the issue is whether ethical actions have any fundamental relationship to salvation. It was already clear in the case of Buddhism that ethical values have only instrumental value and hence no bearing really on the ultimate goal of nirvana or even cessation of suffering. In the Brahamanical Hindu view too, if Karma based individual continually returns to Saṃsāra existence, the question needs to be asked whether Karma based ethics, be it Svadharma or Sādharaṇa Dharma, has any ultimate implications for one's salvation. Or else, what is the reason for Indian thinkers to find a way out of this circular Saṃsāra conundrum through other means such as Knowledge or Devotion. Even when Karma Mārga is given as another

option, it is qualified quickly by what Gita calls, total detachment which begs the question whether the ethical action in itself has any bearing on salvation. The inherent difficulties in pursuing *puruṣārthas* as an ultimate value system are pointed out by Daya Krishna.

Fifth, Indian ethical system based on Svadharma worldview is inherently hierarchical as already pointed out by Parekh. It is brought home more pointedly in the essay of Maria Heim on Dāna (gift). Unlike the western notion of gift giving which is based on reciprocity, the Indian Brahmanically structured ideology of Dāna is based on the esteem of the recipient rather than the giver and the recipient is under no obligation to return the favour. It underscores the absence of gratitude in the hierarchical value system of the Brahmin. In a sense, then the ideology of Brahmanical worldview is what has shaped the discourse on Indian ethics.

In my view, these above key issues form part of the presuppositions to understand Indian ethics. Absence of God as a necessary party in ethical pursuit, consequential nature of ethical actions, deeply relativized ethical value systems, the tenuous relationship of ethical actions to salvation and the inherently hierarchical character of the ethical systems of India are some of the features that characterize the discourse on Indian ethics. The volume under review has brought out all these and more pertinent issues to the attention of scholars. It is a valuable resource to both specialists in Indian ethics as well as comparativists. For advanced students it is certainly an extremely valuable reader in Indian ethics.

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. Papers should be prefaced by an abstract of approximately 100 words, setting out the gist of the paper. The article itself should not exceed 6000 words.

Gender discrimination should be avoided, unless it is necessary for the sense intended. Notes should be rendered at the end of the paper and not as footnotes.

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.

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