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Introduction: Contemporary Expressions of Hinduism in the Indian Diaspora of North America and the Caribbean

Priyanka Ramlakhan, Prea Persaud

Throughout its long history, Hindu traditions have continuously experienced periods of renewal and revisioning according to shifting historical and social contexts. The articulation of Hinduism by its adherents has been immensely underscored by Indian migration, ethnicity and issues of authenticity and identity. It is for these reasons this two-part special issue of Nidan focuses extensively on the themes of migration and identity in the Indian diaspora. Part one of this volume focuses primarily on Hinduism in North America, with attention also to the Caribbean.

Indians first arrived in the Caribbean in 1838 after the abolition of slavery, because of pressure from the Indian government, as an alternative workforce on sugar and coconut plantations, and most chose to stay after the end of their labor contracts. By the time the indentureship system was abolished in 1917, over half a million Indians had emigrated to the Caribbean. Dislocated Indians reorganized their religious communities through memories of practices from their South Asian homeland, while developing innovative practices adapted to the circumstances of plantation life. Early Hinduism of the Caribbean was constructed through the social and political hegemony of colonialism. From the mid-twentieth century, it experienced ongoing periods of revitalization and reform. In the Caribbean, the expression of Hindu-ness is often synonymous with being Indian. Today, in its multivalent form, Indo-Caribbean Hinduism is characterized as an ethnic religion with distinctive traditions that are even replicated in its own diasporic migration patterns observed in parts of North America and Europe. (Vertovec 2000 and Younger 2009).

The history of Indians in the United States, however, takes on a very different trajectory from that of the Caribbean. Since the nineteenth century, Hindu concepts have influenced American culture. After 1965, relaxed immigration laws led to a large influx of Indians to the U.S. By this time, the U.S. was already experiencing its third wave of Indian gurus who transplanted Hindu-inspired practices which contributed to guru-led organizations and temple construction. Unlike the Caribbean where the majority of migrants were from the working class, the Indians that came to the U.S. were generally well educated and categorized as skilled labor (Kurien 2007). As a result, the temples they developed reflected their communities' greater comparative wealth, their desire to recreate the temples of India, and their ability to travel back and forth to India (see Waghorne 2004; Forsthoefel and Humes 2005; Narayanan 2006). In contrast, the Hindu

community in the Caribbean modified their temples to better combat the missionary efforts of the Presbyterian church (Prorok 1991). Although their temples were usually smaller than those in the U.S., a great number of them were built throughout the Caribbean, particularly in Trinidad and Guyana where most Indians lived. The desire to form a cohesive community that would reflect the needs of Indians in the Caribbean also meant that religious differences in the Caribbean were superseded by ethnicity. Hindus and Muslims formed organizations and political parties to represent all Indians whereas in the U.S. Indians formed separate religious communities.

Despite these differences in their early history, both groups illustrate the complex ways in which Indian migrants have untangled and managed their hyphenated identities. The papers in this issue illustrate that while we often talk about an Indian or Hindu diaspora in the singular, the diaspora is fractured, consisting of multiple migrations, identities, and group affiliations. As Prema Kurien (2007) has argued, the drawback of the multiculturalism narrative in the Americas is that it privileges the voice of one group as *the* voice of a religious tradition and/or culture despite the diversity that exists within that tradition. What the following articles in the present volume reveal is that the Hindu diaspora is multilayered and while shifting identities, the reproduction of religious practices, and questions of authenticity and authority are common themes. Each group addresses these issues in different and nuanced ways.

In the first article of this issue, "Meat-Filled Samosas, the American Legal System, and Multiculturalism," Rita Biagoli reviews a 2009 legal case in which *Moghul Express*, a restaurant in New Jersey, was sued for giving a group of vegetarians a tray of meat-filled samosas. In their case, the plaintiffs, Durgesh Gupta and fifteen other vegetarians, requested that the restaurant pay for a trip to India so that they may cleanse themselves in the Ganges. The court was left to decide whether this was a reasonable request as dictated by the standard procedures of "Hinduism." As such, the court had to navigate both the various understandings of "Hinduism" as well as define the necessary purification practices. Although there have been several court cases in which a concise definition of "Hinduism" was needed in order to make a judgement, as Biagoli points out, what makes this case unique is that it was a conflict between two groups of Indo-Americans. As such, it reveals the fractured nature of the Indian community in the U.S. and the multiple variants of Hinduism present even within a minority population.

The fear of the U.S as a corrupting force that threatens the erasure of one's identity is also explored in Ashlee Andrews' article on shrine care among Bengali women in the Chicago, Illinois. In "Making Homes in the American World: Bengali Hindu Women's Transformations to Home Shrine Care Traditions in the U.S.," Andrews explains that shrine care is a form of domestic caretaking that is seen as part of a women's duty and essential to the Bengali identity. The lack of home shrine care

may be seen as a loss of tradition important to the Bengali identity but Andrews argues that while there is a loss, these losses are chosen by the women in order to make the most out of their American world while also maintaining Bengali traditions. Instead of viewing women as caught between two forces they have no control over, that of a new American identity and the traditions of their homeland, Andrews recognizes the agency of women to reinterpret and transform their traditions. By using the philosophies of Rammahon Roy and Vivekananda to support their modified views on the importance of shrine care, the women embody a progressive middle-class Hindu Bengali identity that works to connect them to their roots rather than simply making Hinduism digestible to non-Hindus/Indians.

The roles Roy and Vivekananda play in the Bengali community is also reflected in the growing influence of gurus in the diaspora. As Varun Khanna illustrates in "Swami Chinmayananda, Hinduism, and the Diaspora Configuration: Identifying the effects of a Modern Advaita Vedantin on the Hindu Diaspora in North America," the teaching of gurus can often define the identity of Hindu communities in the diaspora. Khanna examines the intellectual enterprise of Chinmayananda and how his revisioning of the role of the guru impacted the self-identity of his American followers. According to Khanna, Chinmayananda's teachings exemplified a synthesis of antiquity and modernity, as it blended Sankara's Advaita Vedanta and Vivekananda's scientific and rational envisioning of Hinduism. Khanna carefully dismantles the perceived relationship between the Chinmaya Mission and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and other Hindu nationalist groups, by arguing that Chinmayananda intended to propagate a "Hindu identity rooted in scripture." Even though some North American chapters promote sentiments of Hindu nationalism, Khanna maintains that the curriculum taught through the Bal Vihar, a children's educational program, "is not political in nature." As there are more than fifty chapters of the Chinmaya Mission in the U.S. alone, Khanna's study offers much needed attention to Chinmayananda's interpretation of Hinduism and its diasporic significance.

In the final article, Prea Persaud shifts the focus from the U.S. to Trinidad to illustrate the ways in which Indo-Trinidadians have transformed the landscape from secular to sacred. In "From Kala Pani to Gangadhaara: Sacred Space and the Trauma of Indentureship in Trinidad," Persaud describes the Indo-Trinidadian celebration of Gangadhaara, an annual river festival, in which devotees play homage to their ancestors while worshipping the inherent sacredness of Trinidad's landscape. Persaud argues that the festival's history and material culture highlights the pivotal role the trauma of indentureship plays in the formation of the Indo-Caribbean identity. Like the other authors, Persaud highlights the fractured nature of the diaspora by noting the tension between Indo-Caribbeans and Indians from India who do not share the communal memory of indentureship. It is this shared experience which, according to Persaud, both unites Indo-

Caribbeans and separates them from the larger Caribbean community and the East Indian population.

Together these articles generate theoretical questions about the shifting nature of diasporic identity and how it is mediated through ethnicity, multicultural societies, and migration patterns. How do communities invoke Hinduism as a solution to social issues in multicultural nations, or conversely, in defense of civil and religious rights? Are there strands of Hinduism more suited to the modernity and morality of contemporary living? How does gender, nationhood and memory reconfigure patterns of religious behavior? What is the grammar and performative acts Hindus engage in the articulation of their tradition? Finally, to what extent do they align their multiple identities with the imaginaire of the Indian homeland? Contributors of this volume illumine the complexity of these issues through critical and methodologically sound examinations of each locale and their respective traditions. Importantly, neither the geo-specific locale nor the Indian homeland are privileged as singular sites of experience. Each paper demonstrates that, religion in its performative context, is produced through social and political responses to issues of ethics, gender politics, collective memory, and tensions between the religious and secular in multi-religious nations. Thus, the category of diasporic Hinduism, is both an interpretive and elastic one. Its mixed metaphors of interpretation produce many Hinduisms replete with alternative possibilities of thinking through the social dimensions of lived religion.

In this special volume of *Nidan*, we are also pleased to include two book reviews by Narasingha P. Sil and Dan Heifetz. The first selection, authored by Michael J. Altman, is entitled *Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu: American Representations of India, 1721-1893*, and problematizes the term "Hindu," while grounding it within American religious history. As Heifetz points out, Altman's text is a valuable companion for both South Asianists and students of Hinduism and American religion. In the next selection, Sil reviews *Ritual Innovation: Strategic Interventions in South Asian Religion*, an anthology edited by Brian Pennington and Amy Allocco. This timely volume expertly weaves in a theoretically and methodologically rich engagement on the implications of politics, gender negotiations, and transnational settings in the field of ritual performance. In keeping with our theme on migration, identity and ethnicity in Indian diaspora, there is no doubt readers will find these texts helpful for further interrogation on the impact of migration, identity, and ethnicity—all themes this volume seeks to explore.

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Making Homes In the American World: Bengali Hindu Women's Transformations to Home Shrine Care Traditions in the U.S.

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Abstract

In this article, I utilize ethnographic interviews I completed with first- and second-generation immigrant Bengali American Hindu women living in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois to examine how and why the women I worked with have transformed their maternal predecessors' home shrine practices. While a growing body of scholarship has thoughtfully valued Hindu women as innovative agents of cultural transmission both within the space of domestic rituals practiced in India, and the public Hindu temples and organizations in the U.S., little attention has been paid to American Hindu women's agency and ritual creativity as they engage in the intertwined processes of cultural transmission and transformation within their domestic rituals. I argue for a valuing of these women's transformations to this women-centered tradition not only as an expression of agency, but also a means of homemaking in the U.S., through which women create meaningful and sustainable Bengali Hindu traditions and negotiate the roles and realms they are expected to inhabit as women.

Keywords: Hindu women; Bengali; home ritual; American Hinduism

Introduction

I parked my car outside Sita's house on a cold December morning, and she met me at the door. She invited me into her sprawling home in the affluent suburbs of Indianapolis, and offered me snacks and tea that she had purchased from a local Indian grocery store as we sat down in her living room. Sita and I had first connected via email after I had contacted the Bengali Association of Indiana (BAI) inquiring if any members might be interested in assisting me with my dissertation research exploring Bengali American Hindu women's home shrine care practices in the U.S. Sita had promptly responded to my inquiry via email as the general secretary of the BAI, describing herself as the 'quintessential Bengali woman' and eager to share with me her devotion to the traditions of her family. Soon after my arrival that morning, she brought me to the second floor of her home to show me her shrine room—a closet in her children's play room that she and her husband had the builder

design specifically as a shrine room. 'We actually had him write 'prayer room' on the blueprint!' Sita proudly proclaimed. In expanding on the topic, she reflected that her shrine illustrated how far she and her husband had come since they had moved to the U.S. When she arrived in the U.S., soon after her marriage, they had little money to spare, and she could only afford to utilize a cardboard moving box to house her deities in their small apartment. Now that they had achieved financial stability and success in their careers, she could give her deities a proper home in this closet-turned-shrine room. I asked Sita how long and how often she and her husband spent time in their home shrine. She clarified that her husband wasn't really interested in *pūjā*, and so he spent no time at the shrine. In Sita's words, the shrine room was 'really just for me'. However, her husband understood how important her time at the shrine was to her as a means of connecting her to her 'truest self.' She counted herself as lucky because he shared in domestic responsibilities. He would ready her two children each morning so that she had time for her shrine care and *pūjā* before she rushed to work at the local school district, where she served as a high-level administrator. His support made her shrine care practice possible. Still, her busy schedule at work and at home meant that on most work days she could only afford time at the shrine in the mornings. This was a significant change from how her mother and paternal grandmother back home in Kolkata cared for their shrine deities. Both women would spend at least an hour both morning and night performing *pūjā*, and frequently spent hours preparing elaborate meals for the shrine deities. Although Sita offered food, care and worship to her shrine deities daily, her practice was comparatively brief and rarely involved time-consuming food preparations. These were simply the adjustments necessary to make her life as a working Bengali American mother possible in the U.S.

In this article, I utilize ethnographic interviews I completed with first- and second-generation immigrant Bengali American Hindu women living in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois to examine how and why the women I worked with have, like Sita, transformed their maternal predecessors' home shrine practices.¹ Care for and worship of the deities housed in the domestic shrine not only mimic domestic caretaking labor, but are also believed to ensure the welfare of the human family. Because Hindu and Bengali culture normatively imagine women as natural caretakers responsible for the welfare of both home and family, domestic shrine care rituals have been historically characterized as a 'woman's duty' and assimilated with women's other domestic duties and labor (Ghosh 1995). Therefore, all the women I interviewed in the U.S. learned how to care for their shrine and worship the forms of divinity within it by watching the rituals of the women in their families. However, my conversations with first and second-generation women in the U.S. revealed that women had made changes to their maternal predecessors' home shrine care practices as they built their lives as Bengali Americans. Most women had

¹ I will utilize the term 'maternal predecessors' to refer to the female family members from whom women learned shrine care. This term is inclusive of mothers, grandmothers, aunts, and mothers-in-law.

significantly shortened the length and frequency of their practices. Although there were a few exceptions, most women in the U.S. had also rejected their maternal predecessors' characterization of home shrine care as a 'woman's duty' or a necessary means of caring for the family; the three women who had most dramatically shortened their mothers' practice, two of whom had abandoned it altogether, explained that home shrine care actually interfered with their ability to ensure their families' welfare because the rituals demanded time and labor that could be spent on practical forms of caretaking like taking children to soccer practice or helping them with their homework. For most of the women I interviewed in the U.S., home shrine care was, above all else, a means of connecting to and transmitting the Bengali Hindu identity from which they often felt disconnected as immigrants, and which, as Sita so powerfully put it, was equivalent with their 'truest self'.

I argue for a valuing of these women's transformations to this women-centered tradition not only as an expression of agency, but also a means of homemaking in the U.S., through which women create meaningful and sustainable Bengali Hindu traditions and negotiate the roles and realms they are expected to inhabit as women. Here, my notion of religious homemaking is guided substantially by the theory of religion that Thomas Tweed presents in *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion*. A scholar of immigrant religiosity whose work has focused largely upon the rituals of Cuban-American Catholic immigrants, Tweed highlights the movement of people and, therefore, religious traditions across space, as well as the dynamic transformations people make to these traditions in response to each new context. Additionally, he suggests that religions enable this very process of movement and transformation by helping people to both cross terrestrial, corporeal and cosmic boundaries, as well as dwell and make homes in the worlds they create amidst this crossing:

Religions, in other words, involve finding one's place and moving through space. We can understand religions as always-contested and ever-changing maps that orient devotees as they move spatially and temporally. Religions are partial, tentative and continually redrawn sketches of where we are, where we've been, and where we're going (2006: 74).

As the above statement relates, Tweed envisions religious homemaking as two-pronged process: first as a mode through which we may remain connected to and express identities evocative of 'where we've been'; and second, as the making of meaning and identity in relationship to 'where we are and where we are going,' work that involves the remaking of traditions to be meaningful and sustainable in new contexts.

The women I worked with in the U.S. all but explicitly articulated Tweed's notion of homemaking as the strategy and hope guiding both their lives in the U.S. and their

remaking of home shrine care. Women told me they sought to make the most of the social and material opportunities of America (i.e. 'where we are and where we are going'), while remaining connected to and transmitting to the next generation the Bengali Hindu traditions of their natal households (i.e. 'where we've been'). The transformations women have made to the shape and function of home shrine care are an extension of and facilitate this ongoing, strategic homemaking work. To examine ritual transformations as homemaking is also conceptually powerful in ways that Tweed's theory does not directly discuss, but which are extremely relevant to understanding how and why Bengali American women transform their home shrine care practices. 'Homemaking' calls our attention to the gendered labor and identity that both Bengali and American culture have expected women to perform and embody as 'homemakers', as well as the particularly important role that immigrant women have played as the transmitters of ethno-religious traditions across geographic space and generational time. Indeed, Stephen Vertovec (2000) has suggested that Hindu traditions are primarily maintained in diasporic spaces by immigrant Hindu women through their domestic rituals (Vertovec 2000: 95). Bengali Hindu American women's home shrine care traditions are informed by both the feminization of domestic caretaking labor, as well as the assumption that immigrant women have a special ability and responsibility to maintain Bengali Hindu identity through domestic rituals. By focusing this study upon how and why women *transform* home shrine care rituals, and valuing these transformations as a mode of homemaking and a form of agency, the research I present below values the agency and creativity Bengali Hindu women express as they remake traditions in their American homes, and challenges limiting imaginaries of women's cultural labor at home to be a passive and unquestioned reproduction of traditions and gendered labor.

The emphasis I place on valuing women's ritual transformations as a form of agency that allows them to construct meaningful lives and negotiate the roles and realms expected of them is very much inspired by the work of scholars like Tracy Pintchman (2007), Mary Elizabeth Hancock (1999), Anne Mackenzie Pearson (1996) and Beatrix Hauser (2012). These scholars' ethnographic studies of Hindu women's rituals in India similarly frame women as agents who innovate and interpret rituals in ways that enable their strategic negotiation of the work, roles and realms they are expected to inhabit as women. In valuing transformation as a mode of transnational cultural maintenance, I am also guided by the wealth of scholarship examining American Hinduisms, which focuses upon public Hindu temples and American Hindu organizations as spaces where Hindu immigrants remake and reinterpret Hinduism to be more accessible, sustainable and meaningful in the geographic, social and political context of the United States (Eck 2001; Dempsey 2006, Narayanan 2006, Sutherland 2003; Kurien 2007). These studies also importantly emphasized the agency of diasporic subjects as they remake their traditions in response to their transformed context, rather than producing an imagining of immigrants as, in Stephen Vertovec's words, 'passive objects of social change' (Vertovec 2000: 20).

Yet, the attention this body of scholarship pays to the agency of immigrants within temple communities and public Hindu organizations is accompanied by a dearth of ethnographic explorations of American Hindu women's domestic traditions and, by extension, a lack of attention paid to the creative agency women express through their home rituals. The research I present below seeks to begin to fill this existing lacuna in the study of Hindu traditions in the U.S., and to value the extremely important role that Hindu American women play at home in the remaking and transmission of traditions in their American worlds.

Homemaking: Taking the Best of Both Worlds

Between Fall 2014 and Summer 2015, I interviewed seventeen first- and second-generation immigrant Bengali American Hindu women living in the suburbs of Chicago, Illinois. I first contacted most of these women by attending events held by the Bengali Association of Greater Chicago (BAGC). The women I met through these events were either first-generation immigrants who had immigrated to the U.S. in the 1980's when their husbands moved to the U.S. for school or work, or their American-born daughters. Thanks to the efficient networking of one of my participants named Kani, I also met several older women who no longer regularly attend BAGC events, and whom I would not have otherwise come to know. I met Kani after her nephew, a well-known Bengali-American scholar that I had reached out to for assistance with my dissertation research, had connected us over email. Kani and the Bengali women she introduced me to had immigrated to the U.S. in the late 1960's with when their husbands came to pursue careers in engineering, medicine or Academia. I interviewed each woman in person, many over the course of multiple meetings, and primarily in the intimacy of their homes where I could see their home shrines.

In each of my interviews with first-generation women, our discussions would turn to the topic of raising children in the U.S. Multiple women mentioned their concern that their children would be uncomfortable in or unfamiliar with India—not knowing things like how to hail a taxi, barter at the market, or withstand the humidity of summer monsoon—and would lack the kind of regular exposure to Bengali culture that their families in India had, and which made the maintenance of such traditions across generations easier; Bengali language, food, and literature were aspects of culture mentioned specifically in reference to this concern. Most women also discussed their regret that their children, and themselves, lived so far from their extended families in India. Finally, each of these mothers spoke about the often-difficult work of bridging cultural differences with their own children, who were growing up and learning social norms in a far different social context than they had decades ago in India. Reflecting on these concerns, every first-generation woman I spoke with shared their hope that their children would remain connected to their Bengali heritage and identity by speaking Bengali, participating in activities with an

Indian or Bengali association, or through domestic practices like shrine care (not every woman mentioned this specifically) or the preparation of Bengali foods. Yet, when women spoke about the difficulties of cross-cultural parenting, or their concerns about their children's ability to maintain their Bengaliness, they were also quick to share their belief that life in the U.S. offered their children, and especially their daughters, career and educational opportunities, freedom and safety that they themselves had found inaccessible or unavailable in their youth in India. As much as they wanted their children to remain connected to their Bengali heritage, they also wanted them to make the most of what the U.S. offers; the lure of better opportunities for their children in employment, education and socio-economic standing were, after all, what had led most families I worked with to move to and remain in the U.S.

For example, first-generation immigrant Mira, a homemaker, mother of two children and wife of BAGC's primary priest, reflected that, in her opinion, her eighteen-year-old daughter, Radha, had far greater opportunities than she had herself because Radha had grown up in the United States. Specifically, she mentioned the comparative freedom and safety that life in the U.S. offered to Radha. In her estimation, which she based on her own experiences growing up in India, women in India could not travel freely or pursue careers and opportunities that they desired either because they were unsafe in doing so or because their extended families and local communities would criticize their free movement and pursuit of careers as 'improper.' Indeed, every mother of daughters mentioned physical safety and social freedom as two notable benefits that life in the U.S. offered for their daughters. These mothers further suggested that the safety and social freedom of the U.S. meant that their American daughters had greater acceptance and social support to pursue careers, as well as far greater and more varied career opportunities at the executive level, than they might have had in India. Medha, a retired GE executive and mother of a daughter, cited her own career path in the U.S. as an example of this. She believed that while she would have been able to pursue some career opportunities as a teacher in India, she did not believe that she could have had so many opportunities at the executive level in the corporate world had she stayed in India. Finally, three different mothers of daughters told me that because their daughters had grown up in a context where, in their view, girls' and women's independence and free movement was a far greater norm than in India, they believed their daughters were better prepared for roles of leadership and for pleasurable life experiences like travel, which demanded confident independence. Kani shared with gleaming pride that her daughter had traveled to Afghanistan and reflected that because she had grown up in a context in which everyone felt it their responsibility to know and manage where and when a young woman moved, she would never have had the confidence or fearlessness to travel so freely as her daughter. Whether these comparisons of India and the U.S. reflect the full reality of the comparative social and economic environments of these two countries, they reflect first-generation women's comparisons of their *own* experiences and

opportunities as women in India with those of their daughters in the U.S. Guided by this belief in the unique opportunities their children had growing up in the U.S., nearly every mother mentioned her hope that her children would be able to turn these unique opportunities into successful careers.

All four second-generation women I interviewed similarly reflected that they believed that they had social and material advantages that their family members and friends in India did not have. Each of these women described themselves as ambitious and career-oriented, and spoke at length about their desired career paths, understanding their careers as central to their identity. These young women also suggested that their ambitions and drive were at least partially informed by their recognition that being educated and working in the U.S. offered them special career opportunities and broader social.

Importantly, these second-generation women coupled discussions of their ambition to make the most of the social and material opportunities of the U.S. with passionate reflections on the value of Bengali culture and their hope to remain connected to their Bengali and Hindu traditions and identity. All four women passionately detailed their great pride in the beauty and richness of Bengali culture—art, literature, dance, food, and clothing—and community, and described their Bengali heritage as a source of personal pleasure, pride, and identity. Radha described herself as ‘lucky’ to have a cultural heritage that made beautiful clothing and dance a regular part of her life. In our interview, she pulled out each of her favorite *śārīs* and *sālowar kāmij* and showed me pictures of the outfits she had worn at previous BAGC *pūjās*. She spoke passionately about how she understood these material forms of her culture as a privilege that she felt her non-Indian friends both lacked and desired for themselves. Each second-generation woman had also trained in classical Indian dance forms as young girls, and three of them commented in our conversations on the pleasure they felt practicing Indian dance both for the beauty of the form and for the way that it connected them to their cultural identity. Finally, each of these women characterized the BAGC community as a ‘second’ or ‘extended’ family, and suggested that the relationships they shared with their Bengali friends were deeper than what they observed their non-immigrant friends sharing with each other. Exemplifying this idea, twenty-six-year-old Deepa shared a story of a recent evening when her life-long friends from BAGC came over to stay at her apartment for the night. Her white roommate had offered for them to take over the living room and sleep there, but Deepa explained to her roommate that it was quite normal for them to sleep like sisters all on the same bed and insisted that they would pile onto her own bed for the evening. Her roommate was touched by the kind of companionship and intimacy that Deepa knew with her Bengali girlfriends, and which she told Deepa she had never known with her own friends. Deepa cited this story to explain that she felt that her Bengali community gave her something special that made her life better and which she perceived as often out of reach for her friends outside of her Bengali and Indian immigrant community.

This was not the only instance in which a woman suggested that her Bengali particularity served as a social advantage. In fact, all four second-generation women characterized their Bengali heritage as a social asset, and shared stories of instances in which their white friends had expressed not only a value for their Bengali culture, but even a jealousy for their Bengali cultural heritage both for the beauty and the sense of identity that their culture offered them. Here, I am reminded of Prema Kurien's observation that the norms of American multiculturalism value ethnic particularity in such a way that it encourages Hindu immigrants to both maintain and cultivate their ethnicity as a social asset (Kurien 2007: 5). While discourses of American multiculturalism problematically ignore how Protestant, white middle-class Americans are not 'culture-less' but, rather, represent the dominant American culture, these women's reflections suggest that, much as Kurien observes is made possible by American multiculturalism, the second-generation women I interviewed have experienced their Bengali Hindu particularity as a valuable resource.²

In brief, women of both generations expressed a desire to make the most of the opportunities and material privileges that life in the U.S. offered them, especially as women, while maintaining their connection to their Bengali identity and community, recognizing them as important to their personal identity and even a source of social advantage. In several interviews, when women of both generations discussed this desire for themselves and their families, they used the phrase 'taking the best of both worlds' to describe it. 'Taking the best of both worlds' was both a goal that women desired for themselves and their families, as well as a strategy for women's Bengali-American homemaking.³ In what follows, I examine how women's remaking and repurposing of home shrine care in the U.S. are guided by and help fulfill this desired and strategic homemaking to 'take the best' of Bengali and American culture. Much as Tweed suggests is characteristic of religious homemaking, women's transformations to home shrine care are instrumental in helping them to make homes in the U.S. expressive of their identity as Bengalis, and which legitimate their pursuit of the social and economic advantages innate to their American world. By reshaping home shrine care to be sustainable given the higher burden of

² There are obvious class dynamics at work in these women's experiences of their Bengali particularity being a resource valued by their non-immigrant, white friends and neighbors. Their families reproduce a specifically middle-class Bengali particularity, which, as with broader middle-class American culture, values education and 'hard work' as the means of socio-economic upward mobility, and appropriately expresses that upward mobility through the consumption of middle-class goods. While I did not interview any working-class immigrant Bengali women, I wonder if Bengali or Hindu particularity might function less as a social asset within working-class immigrant communities.

³ In the immigrant communities she worked with in California, Prema Kurien similarly heard immigrants reflect on their desire and strategy 'to maintain a balance between Westernization and Indianness, drawing the best from each tradition' (Kurien 2007: 81). She further contends that, as an immigrant group, Hindu Americans are lauded for their ability to enact this balancing act. In this way, 'taking the best of both worlds' may function within the broader American Hindu immigrant community as a hoped-for outcome and strategy of making homes in the U.S.

domestic labor placed on women in the U.S., and for some women the demands of their career-oriented work, women can pursue their goal of helping themselves and their children to 'make the most' of the American world while maintaining a sustainable and meaningful Bengali Hindu tradition.

Making Homes and Remaking Womanhood Through Ritual Adaptation

Sita's description of her reason for maintaining a shrine offers a poignant account of how shrine care can function for a Bengali American woman as a means of maintaining her Bengali Hindu traditions and identity in the U.S.:

For me, the number one thing is tradition, you know. Having grown...you know...there are many of my friends who don't even bother. They think it's.... for me *it's what I was ever since I was born*. So, you could say that it's tradition...*It is what I am*. (my emphasis)

Here, Sita powerfully equivocates shrine care with her identity. She elucidates the importance of both her Bengali and Hindu identity as her essential self, but also of shrine care as the means through which she maintains and connects to this essential self. Later, Sita also told me that her shrine care rituals helped her to feel connected to her family in Kolkata because these rituals had been so much a part of her family's everyday habitus. Similarly, Deepa, an ambitious and motivated second-generation immigrant in her mid-twenties who maintains a small shrine in her apartment in downtown Chicago, described her shrine care rituals as a 'habit' she learned from the everyday routine of her parents' household and which, as a result, reminds her both of her familial roots and her Bengali identity. When I asked Deepa if she thought she would always maintain a shrine in her home, her emphatic answer was, 'Definitely, yes. It is a part of my identity.'

When I spoke with Deepa's mother, Rama, about her own shrine care practices, which were far more detailed than Deepa's, Rama told me that she had been practicing shrine care since her immigration to the U.S. in the late 1960's in part because it was her mother's tradition and connected her, and her American-born daughters, to their familial and Bengali Hindu traditions. Rama also noted how pleased she was that Deepa maintained a shrine because it assured her that Deepa knew and was maintaining her Bengali Hindu traditions as an American. Most first-generation women similarly shared that they practiced home *pūjā* not only for their own benefit of connecting to their Bengali Hindu familial traditions, but also to teach these traditions, and the Bengali Hindu identity they communicated, to their children. Tarani, an extremely gregarious and outgoing dance teacher in her late forties who moved to the U.S. with her parents in the mid 1970's, was a notable exception regarding this matter. Tarani's husband, John, is a white Methodist from the Midwest, and they have intentionally created a household culture in which their

children feel free to decide what aspects of their parents' respective religious and cultural identities to practice and identify with. She has never asked her children to assist in or even watch her shrine care and *pūjā*, and so neither of her children regularly practice any form of *pūjā* at home. In the light of this, Tarani described the brief time she spent at her home shrine each week as 'just for me', as a means of connecting her to her natal family and her Bengali identity. Importantly, Tarani told me that while she was confident that her children had cultivated a pride for and awareness of their Bengali heritage having seen her own pride, Tarani's elder sister remained concerned that Tarani's children would lose touch with their Bengali Hindu heritage if they were not taught home shrine care.

In response to my question of when and why they had decided to have a home shrine, several women remarked with surprise that it had never occurred to them *not* to have a shrine and that they couldn't imagine life without some form of domestic shrine care and worship; it was simply a part of their habitus and everyday identity as Bengalis and as Hindus. Home shrine care enables immigrant women to, in some sense, bring their natal families with them to the U.S., and to embrace and transmit to the next generation the specifically Hindu Bengali traditions so essential to their individual and familial identity. In these ways, home shrine care is a means of expressing, connecting to, and maintaining the 'best of' their Bengali Hindu heritage. However, maintenance of these familial and ethno-religious traditions is most certainly not equivalent with *reproduction*, but, rather, depends upon transformation.

Indeed, as each of the women I discussed above described the importance of home shrine care to their Bengali Hindu identity, they also detailed the many ways in which they had chosen to make changes to the shape of shrine care to both 'make the most' of the advantages of America and to sustain a pleasurable tradition. For example, Tarani does not have time to perform the kinds of hour-long *pūjās* she grew up watching her mother perform each morning and night, and she does not offer foods, gifts or *mantras* the way she observed her mother so regularly give. She is simply too busy with her full-time career as a dance teacher, which she described as both deeply pleasurable and important to her identity, to perform such detailed *pūjās*. If she has the time, she will, after showering in the morning, sit in front of her shrine and meditate; on her busiest days, Tarani simply lights a candle and performs *pranām* to the shrine before leaving for the day. Even Rama, whose *pūjā* was the most detailed of any woman I interviewed in the U.S., told me that she could not prepare intricate meals and sit at the shrine for long periods of time as she had witnessed her mother and grandmother doing in her youth. Rama explained that the labor of her part-time career, mothering her two children, and volunteering as a member of BAGC leadership prohibited her from having time for labor intensive shrine care practices each day. Deepa's practice is even shorter and more infrequent than her mother's. She does not do *pūjā* each day because she simply cannot find the time with her current working schedule. A few times a week

when she finds the time, she will offer clean water and a small bit of food—usually M&Ms because she likes them—before the shrine, say a quick prayer lasting only 30 seconds or a minute, and end her *pūjā* by consuming the *prasād*. In brief, while most of the women I interviewed in the U.S. had a shrine in their home and practiced some form of worship and maintenance, as these examples relate, the women I spoke with had intentionally limited the scope of their home shrine care practices in comparison with their maternal predecessors, frequently to enable their pursuit of careers and completion of labor outside the home.

Here, I recall women's desire to make the most of the social and material opportunities of America, a desire that first and second-generation women both defined largely in terms of their own or their children's pursuit of extra-domestic careers. As detailed above, women of both generations suggested that this was a desire more easily fulfilled in the U.S. because, in their estimation, women enjoyed greater social freedom and safety, and improved education in the U.S. First-generation mothers' redistribution of time at the home shrine to the extra-domestic labor of transporting their children to and from extracurricular activities was motivated largely by their desire to ensure that their children, and especially their daughters, could make the most of the social freedom and material opportunities the U.S. had to offer. Similarly, every second-generation woman, and a few first-generation women for whom their career ambitions were a primary desire in their lives, were clear that they had very intentionally transformed the shape of their shrine care from their maternal predecessors' practices in large part so that they could have time in the day to devote to their full-time careers and career-oriented identities, which women frequently characterized as divergent from what was broadly expected of women in India, or more particularly the Bengali housewife.

In discussing the impact of extra-domestic labor and careers upon the shape of their practice, women often brought up the impact of the broader labor economies of the U.S. in determining the time they could devote to home shrine care. As Hilary Standing's (1991) ethnographic work illuminated two decades ago, middle-class women in Kolkata have also begun to join the paid work-force since the 1970's. Middle-class women in Kolkata also face pressures to raise successful and well-rounded children, particularly given the growing competitiveness of private schools and employment in international industries, and are expected to do so without much assistance from male family members.⁴ Henrike Donner's (2008) research with middle class women in Kolkata depicts a reality similar to that of American mothers in which mothers' days are filled with transporting their children to and from school, private tutors, and extra-curricular activities. However, working middle-class mothers in the U.S. face even more acute time-commitments given the general lack of assistance they receive with *domestic* labor in comparison with their middle-class

⁴ For more on the expectations particular to Bengali middle-class women in Kolkata, see Henrike Donner's *Domestic Goddesses: Maternity, Globalization and Middle-Class Identity in Contemporary India*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008.

relatives in Kolkata. Most middle-class households in Kolkata can and do employ individuals to help with domestic labor such as food preparation, laundry and house cleaning, leaving far more time for women to give to the time-consuming work of childrearing. Such paid labor is far more expensive in the U.S. and no woman I spoke with employed anyone for this purpose. With this comparison in mind, I surmise that middle-class women in the U.S. carry an even heavier burden of domestic labor and childrearing than their middle-class relatives in India. Krishnendu Ray's (2004) ethnographic research amongst women in Kolkata and Chicago's Bengali American Hindu community supports this argument. Ray found that even when husbands begin to share in domestic labor, helping with tasks like laundry, house cleaning, and grocery shopping, women in the U.S. still spend more time on domestic labor and childrearing than women of equivalent socio-economic status in Kolkata.⁵ This reality determines, in part, the time that women must devote to home shrine care practices. In my own research, even women like Sita whose husband assisted in cooking and household maintenance and attended their children's extra-curricular activities, or Rama, who told me that her family shared in shrine care maintenance and domestic chores, noted that they felt that the time they could commit to caring for and worshipping at their home shrines was significantly limited in comparison to the time that their mothers had to commit to shrine care in India. Their families were simply too busy *outside* the home, and they had too much to do *at home*. In this way, women's remaking of the shape of home shrine care to be shorter, more infrequent is a negotiation with the broader labor economies of the U.S. both for women who work outside the home and those who do not.

Because shrine care is a form of gendered labor, it is also a space where women may negotiate the other forms of labor and duties expected of them by their families. After all, Bengali families have historically categorized home shrine care as a 'woman's duty', assimilated with their broader responsibility over the family and home. Accordingly, I observed that the shape of a woman's shrine care also depends upon household labor divides, and that transformations to the length and frequency of shrine care enabled women to negotiate and sometimes resist unequal gendered labor divides and notions of feminine duty that they found to be unsustainable. In households where there was a more equitable division of labor in which women were assisted by their children and husbands in the everyday tasks of domestic caretaking and childcare, women tended to have a longer, more detailed shrine care practice. The women in the U.S. who had maintained their mothers' or in-laws' traditions with the greatest depth of time and frequency either did not work outside of the home or noted having a very supportive spouse that helped with childcare. Conversely, the four women who had either completely abandoned home shrine care or had most significantly reduced the length and frequency of their maternal

⁵ Of course, here I am speaking only of women from the upper-middle class in India and the U.S. and not comparing the experiences of, for example, a working-class Indian woman with those of a U.S. woman of significant means—where it is likely that a working-class Indian woman bears the greatest burden of labor.

predecessor's practice were the women whose husbands cited Hindu and Bengali gender norms to argue for their wives' sole maintenance of domestic duties. Two of these women did not work outside the home but had such extensive domestic duties that they were expected to maintain by their husbands, that they had long-ago stopped caring for the home shrine; both described this decision as a form of resistance to the uneven labor divides in their household. Moreover, each of these four women had reinterpreted shrine care to be a hindrance to rather than an expression of motherly care and feminine duty. In doing so, they could argue for the necessity of giving up shrine care to make more time in the day to devote to caring for the physical needs of their families, and ensuring their children made the most of their American context.⁶

Thus, transforming the length and frequency of home shrine care rituals, and separating it from the concept of 'feminine duty' not only enables women's pursuit of extra-domestic careers and identities—what they identify as the 'best of the American culture'—but also facilitates women to negotiate, and sometimes challenge, the duties and labor that are normatively expected of Bengali women. In fact, Tarani all but explicitly expressed this very idea as she reflected on what guided her to shorten her daily practice in contrast to her mother's rituals. For Tarani, limiting the length and frequency of shrine care not only helped her to have more time each day to devote to the pursuit of her chosen career, but it also assisted her development of a career-oriented identity and facilitated her challenging of the gender roles and labor that she saw was expected of her mother and grandmother as Bengali women. I find a desire that Tarani evokes echoed in the hope that mothers like Mira expressed for their daughters. They spoke of their daughters' free movement and success in spaces and work that were largely outside the home, and, thus, beyond what was deemed 'proper' for Bengali women, and what had been deemed proper for themselves as young women. Because home shrine care is considered a normative part of Bengali women's domestic labor and religious duty, the remaking of home shrine care practices also facilitates a negotiation with normative Bengali womanhood and the roles, realms and labor associated with it. This is a remaking that women choose and see as uniquely possible to in the U.S. and apart from their in-laws and extended family in India.

Through women's transformations to home shrine care, they make homes as Bengali Americans— homes expressive of their identity as Bengalis, and which legitimate their pursuit of the social and economic advantages of the U.S., and their negotiations with Bengali womanhood. In the introduction to *Women's Lives*,

⁶ Contrary to Padma Rangaswamy's (2000) research with Indian immigrants in Chicago, the women I worked with did not describe their extra-domestic labor or their careers as an extension of their broader feminine duties and homemaking. Instead, careers and extra-domestic labor were described as separate from, and for some conflicting with their duties as women or as homemakers. Importantly, women's reframing home shrine care as separated from their feminine duty was helpful for some women's negotiation of this conflict.

Women's Rituals in the Hindu Tradition, Tracy Pintchman urges scholars of Hindu women's rituals to 'attend fully to women's ritual creativity and to the religious concerns of women beyond the sphere of conventional domesticity' (Pintchman 2007:14). While a growing body of scholarship has thoughtfully valued Hindu women as innovative agents of cultural transmission both within the space of domestic rituals practiced in India, and the public Hindu temples and organizations in the U.S., little attention has been paid to American Hindu women's agency and ritual creativity as they engage in the intertwined processes of cultural transmission and transformation within their domestic rituals. In describing these Bengali Hindu American women's transformations to home shrine care, I hope to have called scholarly attention to the need to attend to the thoughtful and innovative work Hindu immigrant women perform as they transmit, reinterpret and adapt their domestic traditions in the U.S.

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Meat-Filled Samosas, the American Legal System, and Multiculturalism¹*Rita S. Biagioli**University of Chicago*rbiagioli@uchicago.edu*Abstract*

In 2009, Moghul Express, a restaurant in New Jersey, served Durgesh Gupta and fifteen other vegetarians a tray of meat samosas. In a case called Gupta vs. Asha Enterprises, Gupta has since sued, hoping that the restaurant will be forced to pay for the sixteen diners to travel to India to cleanse themselves in the Ganges. Gupta unknowingly thrust the American legal system into the position of mediating not only between citizens, but between representatives of divergent Indian traditions: vegetarians and non-vegetarians. This scenario illustrates that even within a diaspora, factions mirroring those back home can form, but in their new home, both parties have novel avenues to agency. It was up to the court to decide whether, by the dictates of "Hinduism," a trip to India was necessary for a full cleanse, thus attempting to standardize "Hinduism" from among multiple sets of overlapping and incongruous belief systems. In this way, America as a liberal democracy has been sanctioned to dictate exactly what Hinduism is and how it could or perhaps should be understood in multicultural contexts.

KeyWords: Hinduism, multiculturalism, purification, samosa, vegetarianism, Moghul, cultural conflict, legal system, diaspora

In 2009, Moghul Express, a restaurant in Edison, NJ, unintentionally sold a group of sixteen Hindu vegetarians a tray of meat-filled samosas. These Hindus then sued the restaurant for the funds to travel to India to purify their souls by bathing in the Ganges. While a trial court dismissed the case (Gupta v. Asha Enterprises), an appellate court determined that there had indeed been a breach of warranty in this scenario and that the plaintiffs should be compensated. The appellate court sent this case back to trial court to determine exactly what the reparation for these damages should be. As of now, the case has not been tried again. Through filing this case, the plaintiffs have forced the American court to determine what constitutes an appropriate reparation within Hinduism, thus delineating which purity practices are considered necessary within Hinduism in its American context. Moreover, this case necessitates that the secular court mediate between an instance

¹ Many thanks to Noah Mamis for his thoughts on the work in the following pages and to an anonymous reviewer for helping me to articulate my thoughts and arguments more clearly.

of Indian-American (and/or Hindu-American) sub-cultures colliding within one larger Indian culture within America, thus setting up a new mode and mitigation method for internal cultural conflicts to be resolved by a non-Indian and non-Hindu court in a multicultural society. In this case, while the first two parties' cultural values overlap to a significant extent, these two parties' values, belonging to groups of Indian origin, constitute a small segment of the third party's multicultural perspective, which seeks to encompass and arbitrate the rights of all Americans.

Throughout this article, I take an ethnographic approach, examining news sources and articles as evidence of different strains of public opinion. Additionally, because I do not necessarily know whether the owners of Moghul Express are Hindu or not, but since it is indicated that they are Indian-American, I attempt to use language that acknowledges both the possibility that they are Hindu and the possibility that they are not. To that end, I take Hinduism, in its many instantiations, as a cultural tradition that is practiced and which is evolving in both its Indian and American contexts, with the acknowledgement that these two contexts are interrelated and connected. Finally, I refer to American secularism, which I see as America's attempt to impartially incorporate and acknowledge the many facets of its multicultural society. American culture includes Indian-American culture and Hindu-American culture, but these two threads are a small part of the broader fabric of American culture.

Legal Precedent and Other Related Examples

While this case of the samosas requires the American court system to deliberate between two groups of Indian-Americans, most previous court cases pertaining to Hindus or other Indian-Americans have resulted from conflict between Hindu or other Indian-American communities and larger secular American culture, education, or corporations. For example, in 2002, McDonald's awarded ten million dollars to Hindus and other vegetarian groups because of advertising stating that its fries were vegetarian when they contained traces of beef flavoring. Suhag Shukla, legal counsel for the Hindu American Foundation (HAF), told CNN that she believes that the McDonald's case might have been more compelling than the samosa case because the McDonalds' case included blatant and repeated false advertisement rather than a singular— and unintentional— offense. Shukla and the HAF were not formally involved in either of these cases, but the HAF does often play a role in legal cases advocating for Hindu rights in America.

The Hindu American Foundation has fought several battles related to Hindu rights in America. Judging by some of their initiatives, it appears that they intend to help non-Hindu Americans see Hinduism as Hindus might see it, and in doing so, they attempt to uncover behavior or trends popular among Americans (likely Hindu and non-Hindu) which might be offensive to some groups of Hindus. One of their most

prominent contentions is that yoga has been co-opted by the American populace and is utterly detached from its Hindu roots (Hindu American Foundation, accessed 2018). The HAF has started somewhat of a media sensation over this issue, including obtaining coverage by the New York Times in 2010 (Vitello 2010). While this is not a legal case, the HAF has certainly made the case that yoga *is* Hindu, and that many Hindus are against their traditions morphing into secularized work out routines. This claiming of one's own religious principles—deeming yoga as Hindu and never *not* Hindu—contrasts with the samosa case, wherein a secular court, must decide appropriate reparation for the spiritual injuries accrued in the incident. While in the first case a Hindu rights organization attempts to establish what is part and parcel Hindu and what is not, in the second case, a secular court is delineating Hindu rights and, implicitly, what purification practices are appropriate in Hinduism.

One important moment in the legal history of Hindus in America occurred in 2005 when Hindus, Muslims, and Jews sued the state of California for the portrayal of these religions in its textbooks. Hindus from the Vedic Foundation and the Hindu Education Foundation proposed hundreds of changes to the textbooks, but several other Hindu organizations representing *dalits*, secularism, Tamils, etc., objected to the changes, claiming that these alterations were one-sided and did not reflect the history (or histories) of all Hindus. This case perhaps most strongly corresponds to *Gupta v. Asha Enterprises*, since this case illustrated the fact that Hinduism is not a centralized religion with one unified history, but is rather comprised of overlapping sets of practices and traditions. America is a multicultural and multi-religious nation, but so is India. Moreover, within Hinduism there are numerous subcultures and threads of thought and practice, some of which cohere and some of which don't (Golden 2006). Representing Hinduism as Hindus see it is more complicated than it might initially seem: there are many different groups of Hindus.

If one takes HAF's perspective as representing one specific group of Hindus, one can see the conflict that arises between this group and 1) other Hindus who do not fall into this group and 2) non-Hindus in America. In addition to objections from other Hindu groups, Michael Witzel, a Sanskrit professor at Harvard, along with 47 other scholars signed a petition for the potential changes to be publicly debated so that scholars could provide their input. Witzel's letter to the state of California called the Vedic Foundation and the Hindu Education Foundation "politically-minded revisionists," which betrays his preference for university scholarship, itself the reflection of a specifically Western way of understanding the world. Partha Chatterjee contends that Western history writing stems from a "rationalist historiography" in which one searches for the "truth" rather than accepting that multiple truths can be true at one time, as is often seen in Hindu texts. Indian history is traditionally *puranic*, and cosmology and history are not separated. This juxtaposition mirrors the struggle related to delineating Hindu history in text books: should it be written in a way that seeks to unearth all evidence pointing towards one multifaceted truth— a model common in Western scholarship and in the American legal system— or should it be written as one prominent American Hindu

group themselves might write it, from their own perspective, as one Hindu truth, potentially among many? This position is what Witzel claims is revisionist and self-serving, due to it being situated within its own perspective (Chatterjee 1993).

For better or worse, after hours of public deliberation, the state of California ultimately sided with Witzel and rejected several of the Hindu groups' changes regarding monotheism, women's rights, caste, and migration theories, all of which represent major points of tension between scholars of Hinduism (a group which itself includes Hindus) and the Hindu groups mentioned above. In this way, I contend that the state chose to privilege a Western brand of historiography (which many Hindus do endorse) over a traditionally Hindu one, though the subject was Hindu history. This serves as one prior instance of an American court attempting to delineate a "correct" view from among diverse contemporary and historical perspectives on Hindu history when many versions of "correct" might exist due to different culturally-situated perspectives.²

In the case detailed above, the court ruling privileged a rationalist historiography over at least one Hindu group's telling of its religion's history. Whether this is "right" or not, it shows a leaning towards advocating for one school of epistemology over another. More broadly at play is the issue of non-Hindus or non-Indians potentially having a different perspective on Hindu or Indian content than would Hindus or Indians— in America or otherwise. For example, in 2012, Jay Leno joked that the Golden Temple in Amritsar, arguably the holiest site for Sikhs, was akin to Mitt Romney's vacation home. While this example does not expressly deal with Hindus, it does reflect the continuation of a broader Indian-American concern with the way that non-Indian-Americans see their traditions. To an American, Leno's joke implied that the Golden Temple is a luxurious and grand location, and that Mitt Romney is excessively wealthy; the entire premise of the joke was based on hyperbole. However, Leno deeply offended the Sikh community by even insinuating that a place of worship could be a vacation home. Many Sikhs took this statement as a devaluation of their practices, beliefs, and ways of life, when Leno was most likely attempting to insult Romney, not Sikhs (Kumar, 2012).

Given the above evidence regarding the multiplicity of Hinduism as well as the cultural implications of perceived slander for Indians in America, it is somewhat ironic that the plaintiffs are leaving the American secular court to decide what reparation is appropriate for spiritual injury sustained for eating meat-filled samosas. *Gupta v. Asha Enterprises* is unique in that it uses the American legal system to mediate and mitigate cross-cultural conflicts internal to the Indian-American community.

² HAF later sued to stop the printing of the new textbooks, the case was dismissed and the scholarly corrections maintained.

The Case Details and Legal Proceedings

On August 10, 2009, Durgesh Gupta and Sharad Agarwal walked into Moghul Express in Edison, New Jersey, and ordered a tray of vegetarian samosas, making it abundantly clear that the samosas were for a group of strict vegetarians. The restaurant explained that they did not even serve meat-filled samosas, and, at the time of pick up, again assured Gupta and Agarwal that their tray labeled "VEG samosas" did in fact contain vegetarian samosas. Upon eating the samosas, some of the sixteen attendees became worried that the samosas contained meat, and as a result, called Moghul Express, which once again insisted that they do not make meat samosas. When Gupta returned the remaining samosas to Moghul Express, employees of the restaurant finally told him that yes, these were in fact meat-filled samosas. Moghul Express then provided Gupta et al. with a tray of truly vegetarian samosas at no cost. Meat-filled samosas appear nowhere on Moghul Express's menu.

Gupta et al. then sued Asha Industries (Moghul Express) on four counts: product liability, consumer fraud, negligent infliction of emotional distress and negligence resulting in spiritual injury, and breach of warranty. Gupta et al. hoped to force Moghul Express to pay for a trip to India wherein Gupta et al. could cleanse their souls by bathing in the Ganges. Though the trial court dismissed the case on all four counts, an appellate court ruled on July 18, 2011 to uphold only the first three of these dismissals. Both courts concluded that the Product Liability Act (PLA) of New Jersey was not violated because the samosas were still fit for consumption; there was no defect. The trial court judge simply dismissed the charge of consumer fraud, but the judges in the appellate court agreed that the restaurant's insistence that these were vegetarian samosas likely violated the New Jersey Consumer Fraud Act (CFA). However, the plaintiffs sustained no ascertainable damages on this account by way of money or property. This sets a precedent often at issue in the courts and particularly in this case: though all the charges the plaintiff makes against the defendant might be well founded, the defendant still prevails due to the letter of the law. In other words, there are no reparations to be made for given injustices under this law. Additionally, both courts ultimately determined that there was no legal precedent for the plaintiffs' claims of negligent infliction of emotional distress and negligence resulting in spiritual injury (Murphy, 2011; Lexology 2011; Superior Court of New Jersey 2011).

However, the appeals court did conclude that Moghul Express breached its express warranty of fitness of the samosas sold to the plaintiffs. Because the restaurant assured these specific patrons so many times that the samosas were vegetarian and that they did not make meat-filled samosas, the court concluded that the plaintiffs presented *prima facie* evidence of a warranty. Under the Uniform Commercial Code (UCC), the plaintiffs did in fact sustain emotional and spiritual injury as the result of a warranty violation and this served as consequential damages. Thus, the appellate court upheld its precedent that difficulty in calculating these damages does not

constitute grounds for dismissal of the plaintiff's claim. However, in order for this claim to be valid, the plaintiffs have to prove that the damages, resulting in necessary soul-cleansing in the Ganges where it begins in Hardiwar, India, were reasonably foreseeable. In this case, the court recognizes that it has no information regarding whether these damages were reasonably foreseeable to the defendant, and, as a result, this claim must again go to trial (Murphy, 2011; Lexology 2011; Superior Court of New Jersey 2011). What will perhaps be at issue going forward is what it means for a reparation to be reasonably foreseeable.

It is likely that Moghul Express owners and employees know that one can bathe in the Ganges to purify herself, but would they know that this is necessary for this group of Hindus eating the samosas they prepared? To this end, there is a fine line between what someone might know is a possible reparation versus what someone might know is a necessary one. Even to assume knowledge of what was likely known, in this case, is to presume a certain level of cultural knowledge within a group—a determination that would be difficult for the American court in general and perhaps even members of that particular group to make without more data. Moreover, is it the place of the secular American court to determine what Indian-Americans likely know or do not know about Hinduism?

Many Hinduisms or Many Hindus?

Likely without knowing it, by attempting to inquire whether purification in India is a "reasonably foreseeable" consequence of eating meat-filled samosas when one is a strict Hindu vegetarian, the appellate court has created the potential for numerous difficulties in assessing Hindu culture in America and has unintentionally situated itself as a party to determine what constitutes purification in "Hinduism." The quotes I have placed around "Hinduism" are to indicate that there is no singular Hinduism, but rather there are many Hinduisms that exist in concert and contradiction with each other. While other religions may be constituted by groups practicing and/or advocating variants on tradition, the standard of the Judeo-Christian belief system is that to be a member of a given religion, one adheres to the stipulations put forth in each holy text. Though there is a wide range of variation in interpreting these texts, the text is still one's primary focus, and belief in some set of statutes is often requisite. Hinduism does not have one such text, but rather, thousands which are regionally and historically diverse, and which often contradict other texts and even themselves internally. No one text prescribes any doctrine of Hinduism, let alone Hinduism itself. It is imperative to understand the networks of traditions which fall under the category of "Hinduism" as overlapping frameworks within a larger cultural context. Thus, it would be relatively impossible for anyone to determine what is reasonably foreseeable purification for any unspecified Hindu in an unspecified location.

There are two ways the court could have addressed this issue. First, the court could attempt to determine what "Hinduism" calls for in this circumstance. However, in a footnote, the appellate court ruling for this case states that "At present, it does not appear that resolution of the issues in this case will implicate religious doctrine or ministerial functions or result in regulatory entanglement in church matters, and that it can be determined by use of neutral principles." This assumption illustrates the ignorance of the court regarding the exact details of Hinduism. There are few absolutes in Hinduism as a larger whole, and while one can make certain assumptions about what might be reasonably foreseeable, to determine if purification in India is or is not an appropriate compensation for this breach of warranty is to hand down a judgment about exactly what constitutes this facet of Hinduism, and, specifically, this facet of Hinduism as it is practiced *in America*. Such a proceeding would almost certainly "result in regulatory entanglement in church matters," in so far as any Hindu vegetarian accidentally served meat could sue for a trip to India if his or her brand of Hinduism necessarily calls for this reparation. By treating Hinduism as a monolith, the court would unintentionally group numerous diverse cultural practices and standards under one umbrella.

The statement submitted by the plaintiffs to the court does not clarify much except their express position:

Hindu vegetarians believe that if they eat meat, they become involved in the sinful cycle of inflicting pain, injury and death on God's creatures, and that it affects the karma and dharma, or purity of the soul. Hindu scriptures teach that the souls of those who eat meat can never go to God after death, which is the ultimate goal for Hindus. The Hindu religion does not excuse accidental consumption of meat products. One who commits the religious violation of eating meat, knowingly or unknowingly, is required to participate in a religious ceremony at a site located along the Ganges River in Haridwar, Utteranchal, India, to purify himself.

The first sentence here is true enough, even though it generalizes its conclusions to Hindu vegetarians overall. The second sentence however, is mystifying: first, to what Hindu scriptures does this passage refer? Despite the ambiguity in this statement, Hindu scriptures are so numerous that it is likely that one could find a Hindu scripture that would attest to this. Moreover, in Hinduism, practice often takes significant precedence over text. In a country with a low literacy rate, it is unlikely (and has been illustrated many times) that what is written in a text, likely read only by Brahmins, is an appropriate indication of how Hindus really practice and the implications of those practices. Second, "can never go to God after death" is a confusing statement. Even if some text were to say that Hindus who eat meat could not go to God after death, it is still unclear first, who or what that God is, and second, what it would mean to go to God after death. Whoever wrote this likely intended to simplify the Hindu concept of "God" which is inherently varied, numerous, and singular at the same time, to suit an American audience.

Additionally, in this passage, the entire process of reincarnation is oversimplified to resemble an afterlife that would be more fathomable for adherents of Judeo-Christian faiths. Finally, the above passage states that Hindus who eat meat must be purified in Haridwar, as if this is a readily available and universally accepted fact. While purification in the Ganges is quite common and encouraged in many Hindu texts, it is by no means the only method of purification for all Hindu vegetarians. The passage provided by the plaintiffs, above all, oversimplifies the tenets of Hinduism for an American audience to make a given case, and thus obscures information about the multitudinous nature of Hinduism in India and in the American diaspora which is decidedly necessary for the court ruling. All the above passage does is offer an ambiguous and largely unverifiable version of Hinduism explained in Judeo-Christian-oriented terms.

Despite the group's portrayal of Hinduism as a singular and unified belief system, different members of the Hindu community at large have been quoted by the media with varying opinions. Pradip (Peter) Kothari, president of the Indo-American Cultural Society in Edison, went as far as to state that "This is a hypocrisy of religion and a hypocrisy of the law. They can go to a temple here and ask God for forgiveness." What is striking about this comment is that Kothari sees the actions of these Hindus as a manipulation of the legal system to their own advantage. Kothari continues: "These people should be treated like criminals. When they're putting out this lawsuit, they're committing a sin. They're going to punish this small business owner by putting him out of business? That would make them happy?" Kothari implies that this law suit costs more than it is worth. He further insinuates that going to the Ganges is perhaps the highest form of purification, but not necessarily the only way to achieve the status of purity (Soto 2011; India Mainly, accessed 2018).

Conversely, Mehul Thakkar, of the Yogi Divine Society, a group adhering to Swaminarayan's teachings, notes: "If you follow the scriptures, it's definitely a huge cost. If they are very strict about it, there definitely is a fee involved," implying that perhaps the plaintiffs should indeed be compensated with travel to India. While one source states that Thakkar's group, those Hindus who are Swaminarayan, are not involved in this trial, another source claims that the plaintiffs indeed practice Swaminarayan Hinduism (Jardon 2011). This leads us to the second way the court could handle this case: rather than attempting to differentiate between many different Hinduisms to determine a ruling appropriate for Hinduism at large in America, the court could instead delineate the practices and traditions of *these* Hindus and use their values as the only relevant criteria on which to judge.

Even if the plaintiffs do practice Swaminarayan Hinduism, the two main texts of Swaminarayan Hinduism make no mention of how one should purify him or herself after unintentionally eating meat. Though other Hindu traditions may not focus on text, adherents of the Swaminarayan movement are devoted to reading Swaminarayan texts in Gujarati. The first important text for Swaminarayan Hinduism

is the Shikshapatri (translating to “teaching text”), and the second is the Vachanamrut. The Vachanamrut, which details conversations with Swaminarayan himself, remains quiet on the entire issue of vegetarianism. The Shikshapatri, however, which is a prescriptive text written by Swaminarayan to his devotees, orders that “One shall never eat meat, even in a moment of extreme necessity,” (Digital Shikshapatri, accessed 2018). While evidence from this text does establish a precedent for the importance of vegetarianism in Swaminarayan Hinduism, it also illustrates that, if the plaintiffs are Swaminarayan Hindus, their intended actions directly violate the prescription of their own text. Moreover, and more importantly, there is nothing in the Shikshapatri about the necessity of purification in the Ganges for the specific offense of eating meat or otherwise, nor is there any scholarly material to that effect (Williams 1992). There are likely many more Swaminarayan texts, and Swaminarayan Hindus also accept the teachings of additional Hindu texts, but the primary two Swaminarayan texts fall silent on the issue at hand. If a court were to determine an appropriate compensation based specifically on the textual tradition of Swaminarayan Hinduism (as it might for another religious group), visiting the Ganges would likely go unmentioned.

This potential approach seems just as ineffective as does making a judgment for Hinduism at large. Taken to its logical end, ruling based on this group of Hindus could lead to ruling based on individuals and individual religious and/or cultural beliefs. In *Habits of the Heart*, Bellah et al. discuss a woman named Sheila who practices “Sheilism”— a religion she has founded and delineated on her own and which reflects her own personal spiritual beliefs, and of which she is the only practitioner. Bellah et al. further explain that personal religion has become more and more popular in recent American history, particularly deriving from the Enlightenment and from Protestant norms (Bellah et al. 2007: 221). Given that everyone holds his or her own beliefs within a cultural, religious, and social milieu, it would be meaningless to have a legal system which adjudicates based on one’s personal belief or, more likely, personal preference. On the other hand, if the legislative system cannot accommodate the needs and rights of each individual citizen, what relevance does it have at all?

Through this discussion, it has become clear that there might not be such a thing as a reasonably foreseeable consequence and reparation for anyone regarding emotional and spiritual injury. It is impossible to divine from any person or group what an appropriate compensation would be for any given religious damages unless one is significantly familiar with the specifics of a group’s traditions, and, even then, differences regarding consistency of group members’ expectations would likely present themselves. Does this mean, however, that the offending party, Moghul Express, should award these Hindus nothing for their grievances?

In *On Toleration*, Michael Walzer discusses six cross-cutting themes of toleration, including religion. He explains that religious groups not only want tolerance from the government as a group, but also crave religious liberties outside the house of worship, or a more intangible “church,” (Walzer 1997). When asking for

compensation for their spiritual injuries, the plaintiffs in this case certainly expect governmental toleration in the secular sphere, or perhaps more accurately, in spaces where the secular and cultural/religious spheres blur together. These two modes of toleration for religious groups— as an isolated religious group and as religious individuals in society— are not necessarily antithetical, nor logically mutually acceptable in all situations.

In *Yoder v. Wisconsin*, the Supreme Court had to decide whether it would privilege religion or secular moral considerations, and ultimately decided that to force Amish children to go to secular school might instigate the end of the Amish way of life (Justia, accessed 2018). This decision upheld the Free Exercise Clause and privileged religious freedom, even in secular contexts. One could also consider *Burwell vs. Hobby Lobby* another instance of this: in this case, the Supreme Court ruled that Hobby Lobby did not have to ensure access to contraceptives for its employees due to the corporation's religious stance (Justia, accessed 2018). In this instance, again, religious freedom prevails, in a secular space, even when the entity possessing said religious stance is an organization rather than a person.

However, in *Employment Division Oregon Department of Human Resources v. Smith*, the court ruled that religious peyote use was still unacceptable, because the law against peyote use did not discriminate against a religious group specifically (Justia, accessed 2018). Though these cases are about disputes between the government and specific religious parties rather than between one offended religious party and one offender, they still apply to the current legal precedent regarding religious practice: its legal protection is largely secluded to religious places, organizations, etc. For religious principles or the beliefs that one holds to prosper and prevail in stated secular spaces is unusual, though perhaps becoming more common. Because the plaintiffs in the samosa case are requesting compensation for specific spiritual needs, they are asking the court to decide whether (unintentionally) facilitating or causing violation of a religious precedent for purification in a secular space should constitute legal action. Though this might seem clear— that others' religious preferences should be respected— what constitutes respect and reparation is potentially unclear both to those involved in the dispute and those mediating it. In other words: the secular American court must adjudicate regarding an in-group (Indian-American or Hindu-American, a sliver of the broader American community) conflict while acting as an out-group, and must apply a precedent established via previously through examining in-group/out-group conflicts.

When Cultures Collide Internally and Externally

By bringing this case into court, the Hindu vegetarian plaintiffs have asked the court to negotiate a cultural and religious distinction and point of contention within the scope of their own community. The court is not mitigating between a religious group

and a secular group per se, but rather between two different groups of Indians. To this extent, the plaintiffs are using a secular legal system (to which they legally belong) to resolve colliding views of how Indian-Americans understand Hindu (American) religiosity. As is noted above, Hindu culture is vast and while one person or group may desire to bathe in the Ganges as a means of purification, another person or group might just go to temple and ask a priest to initiate purification rites. I would assume that, in the eyes of the secular court, everyone involved in this scenario is an Indian/Hindu-American, and thus belongs to the same culture. It is possible for the court to then conclude that the damage caused by eating meat samosas was in fact reasonably foreseeable. Though many more complexities and nuances in Hindu dietary patterns can be observed, we can roughly divide Hindus into two groups: the vegetarians and the non-vegetarians. These two groups are ideologically divergent and occasionally degrading of each other. The conflict at play, then, is one of doctrinal, historical, and traditional significance and differences reaching far beyond a breach of warranty and a necessary reparation. In effect, whether or not the court recognizes it, this case represents a struggle internal to the politics of the larger Indian-American and Hindu-American communities. To some extent, the court must mediate between these two groups without necessarily fully understanding all the complex differences between these two groups; fully understanding this distinction would take a great deal of study, and it is not clear that the court fully considered the differences at play. Even if the court were to know that these multiple groups existed, fairly adjudicating between them, using all available information, would be difficult. For example, Muslims traditionally eat meat while many Hindus traditionally do not. To juxtapose a group that eats meat samosas with a group that does not might evoke (though does not necessarily evoke) an acknowledgement of long-running animosity between these two groups. Significantly more research on the court's part would be necessary to determine whether this dynamic is at play, such that they could most appropriately adjudicate what each group likely knows, but also the circumstances under which they came to know and internalize that information.

Negligence of the fact that this conflict might reach beyond its manifest samosa-concerned boundaries could create an external instance of cultures colliding: the American secular court as it interacts with Indian-Americans. First, while the letter of the law may rule in favor of the plaintiffs regarding the warranty, no one has examined what a guarantee really means in this context. Moghul Express eventually admitted that someone else *had* ordered meat-filled samosas at the same time as the plaintiffs' vegetarian order was placed, and said person had a samosa in the car only to find that it was vegetarian, and thus, that person had subsequently returned the entire tray. Moghul Express immediately made an additional order of vegetarian samosas to serve to the plaintiffs, all the while insisting to the plaintiffs that their samosas were in fact vegetarian. They knew their mistake, knew they had to remedy the situation, and still insisted that the samosas were in fact vegetarian *and* that

they did not even serve meat samosas, even though they obviously had.³ Had the court understood the potentially negligible value of Moghul Express's guarantee, perhaps it never would have upheld a breach of warranty.

Another point of cultural confusion could likely lie in Hinduism's inherent orthopraxy. The court has ruled that it is difficult to determine the correct compensation for emotional and spiritual injury in this case, but also stated that this does not mean it should not attempt to evaluate what would be appropriate compensation. However, to the plaintiffs, it is obvious what appropriate compensation would be: the means to perform certain actions. While in a non-Hindu context, spiritual damage might never be mentally overcome, and physical damage can be repaid (e.g. providing an additional tray of *vegetarian* samosas), in Hinduism and in Indian culture, one often need only perform the correct actions, such as bathing in the Ganges, to overcome trauma or pollution. Though the court sees it fit to estimate an appropriate reparation in a non-Hindu or secular context, for the plaintiffs, it is more than clear that a given action and procedure would be the only remedy to the problem at hand; the court's job is to facilitate the performance of that action and procedure. To that end, it is up to the court to decide whether what it would normally consider repatriation— in a secular context— is appropriate, or to determine whether a repatriation specific to these plaintiffs is reasonable, given that the offense was so grand for them but would not be for most Americans.

Conclusion

Through analysis of the issue at hand, we have seen that determining whether the plaintiffs' demands were reasonably foreseeable is extremely difficult. It is both problematic to attempt to assess what "Hinduism" would prescribe in this case, given its multiplicity, and to determine what a specific group of Hindus would prescribe, given a dearth of textual precedent and due to differing opinions even within smaller groups. Moreover, for the consequences of eating meat-filled samosas to be reasonably foreseeable, the employees of Moghul Express would have had to know that its customers were in fact Hindus (and not just vegetarians), and perhaps what type of Hindus they were. They would also have to have had significant familiarity with stipulations for purification in larger "Hinduism" and/or for smaller groups of Hindus.

³ Given the name Moghul Express, it is likely that this restaurant does in fact focus on non-vegetarian food and that the plaintiffs were able to recognize this. The Moghuls, whose empire expanded across India, were Muslims and the type of food they brought with them is characterized by dishes like biryani, which combines rice and meat. This name likely signaled to the plaintiffs the type of food this restaurant served. It is possible that, underlying discussions regarding the meaning of purification in Hinduism, there is a subtle tension at play between Hindu and Muslim traditions. Thanks to P. Pratap Kumar for his thoughts on framing this issue.

This circumstance forces the court to act as a secular party mitigating a Hindu-American in-group conflict and to determine what is a legally admissible version of the stipulations of Hinduism or, for that matter, to determine the process for determining stipulations of any religion. This is inherently complicated because the court is not equipped to delineate what Hinduism is and to understand in-group cultural conflicts. In broader American culture, as examples above have shown, there is still a significant amount ambiguity in Hinduism and Hindus when negotiating conflicts between Hindu/Indian culture and non-Hindu American culture; it is naïve to presume that a secular court could reasonably see all of the *internal* cultural issues at hand— such as unstated cultural conflicts originating in India and brought to America, which have rearranged themselves to take shape in the form of novel means of negotiation. It remains to be seen whether the court will determine the necessity for a trip to India to have been reasonably foreseeable, and, moreover, to determine what exactly *was* reasonably foreseeable in this scenario. Regardless of what the court decides, we can predict an imminent backlash from some Hindu group, which would further illustrate the difficulties inherent in the secular American legal system mediating in-group culturally and religiously centered conflicts.

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Swami Chinmayananda, Hinduism, and Diaspora Configurations: Identifying the effects of a modern *advaita-vedāntin* on the Hindu diaspora in North America

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Abstract

There has been surprisingly little academic work done on the influential 20th Century philosopher of *advaita-vedānta* and globally recognized Hindu *guru*, Swami Chinmayananda (1916-1993), considering that he is acknowledged as a credible author among the Hindu community, being honored with the “Hindu Renaissance Award” for the year of 1992 by *Hinduism Today* magazine, being chosen to represent Hinduism at the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1993 (the 100th anniversary of Swami Vivekananda’s historic talks at the same conference), and even being hailed by some as the “second Vivekananda”. In this paper, I identify in a preliminary way the effects of Chinmayananda’s teachings about Hinduism on the Hindu diaspora in North America, the home of the western headquarters of his international spiritual organization, Chinmaya Mission. Here, I trace the genealogy of Chinmayananda’s ideas back through modernizers of Advaita philosophy such as Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) to the chief systematizer of *advaita-vedānta*, Śaṅkara (788-820 CE), in order to bring to light some of the observable impacts of Chinmayananda’s teachings and actions on certain elements of the Hindu diaspora, while locating Chinmayananda and his work within the ongoing dialogue regarding Hinduism. It will be seen that although Chinmayananda shares some features with other international Hindu teachers of his times, he does not fit into the stereotypical image of a “modern *guru*” as described by David Smith and Lola Williamson. This difference will mark the start of a new wave of contemporary *gurus*, whose lineages share Chinmayananda as one of the central nodes. I conclude that Swami Chinmayananda’s voice must not be lost within the dialogue about Hinduism, for his work has helped to shape the discussion about Hinduism as it stands today.

Keywords: Hinduism, Advaita, Vedānta, Chinmayananda, Science, Modernity, Diaspora

There has been surprisingly little academic work done on the influential 20th Century philosopher of *advaita-vedānta* and globally recognized Hindu *guru*, Swami Chinmayananda (1916-1993). In this paper, I identify in a preliminary way the effects of Chinmayananda's teachings about Hinduism on the Hindu diaspora in North America, the home of the western headquarters of his international spiritual organization, Chinmaya Mission. Throughout the paper I trace the genealogy of Chinmayananda's ideas back through modernizers of Advaita philosophy such as Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) to the chief systematizer of *advaita-vedānta*, Śaṅkara (788-820 CE), in order to bring to light some of the observable impacts of Chinmayananda's teachings and actions on certain elements of the Hindu diaspora, while locating Chinmayananda and his work within the ongoing dialogue regarding Hinduism.¹

There are three larger strands of research into which I attempt to fit this paper: Hinduism and science, Hinduism and modernity, and Hinduism and diaspora configurations. I will be assessing Chinmayananda's position within the frameworks of these three broad areas. I argue through this paper that to understand the contours of Hinduism today, one must engage with Chinmayananda's understanding of it, for his work has helped to shape the Hinduism that is known today, particularly by the Hindu diaspora. I have centered my diaspora analysis on North America, but the trends analyzed here are broadly applicable to Hindu groups in other parts of the world as well.

Chinmayananda, "Hinduism", and Science

The dialogue between Hinduism and Science did not arise in an unprecedented manner in the time of Chinmayananda. There is a long historical continuity connecting Chinmayananda, Vivekananda, and others to the West with respect to this dialogue. It is most important to note at the outset that this dialogue arose as a subset of the overarching need to validate Hindu thought through the lens of the dominant paradigms in society, which was a reaction against criticisms that were perceived as "attacks on Hinduism" by the proponents of Hinduism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We see clear examples of these attacks in books like James Kennedy's *Christianity and the Religions of India* from 1874, in which he presents lengthy arguments about why "Hindooism" is inferior to Christianity, claiming, among other things, that "Hindooism" is ahistorical, unscientific, fanciful, idolatrous, polytheistic, of human (and not divine) origin, and confusing.² Responses to

1 This paper forms part of a larger work, following an introduction to Swami Chinmayananda (1916-1993) as a 20th century philosopher and Hindu *guru*, a first of its kind, as well as an intellectual biography of Chinmayananda.β

2 Cf. *Christianity and the Religions of India* (1874) by James Kennedy, specifically the essay entitled "Hindooism Contrasted with Christianity", pg. 158-208.

this criticism used the same language, in its opposite form, calling Hinduism historical, scientific, divine, monotheistic, and straightforward. One example is Swami Vivekananda's claim to and expansion upon Darwin's evolution theory as belonging to ancient India.³ More examples will be seen later in this paper.

At that time, as Dermot Killingley (2003) lucidly explains, due to advances in communication technologies, such as the printing press, telegraph, etc., Hindu texts that were otherwise nearly inaccessible became available publicly in book form. This opened these texts and their philosophies to criticism from sources other than traditional Sanskrit scholars. As a result, the new "foreign" attacks on certain Hindu positions like image-worship and the status of women were considered attacks on Hinduism itself. These attacks could only be parried with either proper justification of these beliefs and practices, or a conscious distancing of "true Hinduism" from the questionable practices, or by proving that the attackers were misrepresenting the practices. Killingley writes:

Moreover, the dominance of Enlightenment ideas in the arena of public debate, together with widely held assumptions of Christian and British superiority, meant that the resulting body of Hindu apologetic was presented in terms of Western ideas of reason and morality which were assumed to be common to all civilized people (Killingley 2003: 512-513).

The influence of the Enlightenment paradigm on Hindu apologetic works is clearly a mark of modernity, wherein the frameworks of reason, logic, science, egalitarianism, masculinity, etc. are of paramount importance.

Since Swami Vivekananda was a strong influence on Swami Chinmayananda, it is pertinent to understand how Vivekananda responded to criticisms of Hinduism with the above analysis in mind. One of the ways in which Vivekananda created a vision of Hinduism acceptable to the Western educated mind was by calling Hinduism "scientific". This would mean, according to the ideas that were in vogue at his time, that Hinduism was a system of thought that was logical, rational, and reproducible. In his speech called "Reason and Religion" delivered in London in 1896, for example, he describes the shortcomings of "religion" as compared to "science", and how reason must be the measuring rod for religion. Ultimately, he establishes the superiority of "Vedanta" (by which he means *advaita-vedānta*), on the basis of reason alone.⁴ As Ann Gleig and Lola Williamson observe, "Incorporating numerous Western values such as rationality, ethics, and tolerance, Vivekananda framed Hinduism as universal and scientific, and thus a viable choice for modern Western people" (2013: 5). Chinmayananda would later pick up on this strand of thinking and expand upon it. The

3 Cf. Dermot Killingley's chapter entitled "Vivekananda's Western Message from the East" in *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernization of Hinduism*, edited by William Radice, especially pg. 153-156.

4 Cf. Swami Vivekananda, "Reason and Religion", in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda, Volume 1*.

idea that religion should be subject to reasoning, and that one should not enter religion blindly, but should judge it against one's own reasoning capacity, can be found in numerous works by Chinmayananda, such as the section called "Sans Faith, Sans Prejudice" in his commentary on the *Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad*.⁵ Gleig and Williamson continue:

Following Vivekananda, the majority of second-wave gurus also promoted an essentially modernized and Westernized vision of Hinduism, which placed a universal mystical experience at the core of all religions and offered meditation techniques as scientific tools for accessing higher states of consciousness (2013: 5).

But between Vivekananda and Chinmayananda came many proponents of *advaita vedānta* and many scientists, who changed or enhanced the way both were viewed. An obvious example is Swami Sivananda (1887-1963), whose 296 books expounding on a variety of topics, including commentaries on the Upaniṣads, already assimilated and used the scientific language popularized by Vivekananda and helped to propagate it, along with new syntheses of concepts related to Yoga. He was responsible for ordaining Swami Chinmayananda into the *sannyāsa* order. Another example is Ramana Maharshi (1879-1950), a well-known teacher of *advaita vedānta*, who had written new texts in Sanskrit that influenced Swami Chinmayananda, such as *Saddarśanam* ("Vision of Truth") and *Upadeśa Sāra* ("Essence of the Instruction [of *advaita vedānta*]").⁶ Finally there was Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950), a famous mystic who had at first been imprisoned by the British for "advocating terrorism and violence", but then changed course for a more spiritual direction, and subsequently taught and wrote extensively about Yoga and the Bhagavad Gītā.⁷ Scientists, too, were numerous. Perhaps the most famous of them was Albert Einstein (1879-1955), whose well-known theories of relativity and the relationship between matter and energy significantly impacted the fields of science.

By the time Chinmayananda entered this debate, the atom bomb had been invented and used, mechanized flight was common, telephones were ubiquitous, and quantum physics was a recognized field for research. So Chinmayananda had many new challenges to face and connections to make. Nobody took the debate quite as far as Chinmayananda, who seemed to focus on the "scientific" nature of the Upaniṣads as the main reason why readers and listeners should study them.

But Chinmayananda was not only part of the trend that wanted to show how scientific *advaita vedānta* was. He found himself inextricably linked with the ancient lineage of Śaṅkara, and therefore was thrust into a battle between the traditional and

5 Chinmayananda, *Discourses on Īśāvāsya Upaniṣad* (2007), pg. 6-7.

6 Both of these texts have commentaries published by Chinmaya Mission.

7 There is clear evidence that Chinmayananda read the works of all the teachers mentioned here. Cf. Nancy Patchen's *Journey of a Master* (2006), pg. 30-31.

the modern. He knew that there was a debate raging around him about how scientific Hinduism was, but at the same time, he also wanted to maintain continuity with his lineage's greatest figure, Śaṅkara, whose contribution to *advaita vedānta* had been recognized as by far the most important. This continuity was important to maintain because doing so would not only connect his audiences to a tradition, it would also give more weight to his own arguments when viewed from the perspective of a traditionalist, whose views also had to be taken into consideration.

In order to connect Śaṅkara's views with the argument that *advaita vedānta* (and by extension, Hinduism) is scientific, Chinmayananda makes the case for a revealed scripture, the Upaniṣads, being able to stand up to scientific scrutiny once revealed. Therefore, he is able to maintain the belief in the non-human origin of the Upaniṣads, but also propagate the view that the teachings of the Upaniṣads are scientific. Scholars like David Smith are then able to comment, "More than any other religion, Hinduism welcomes science with open arms, and asserts its own scientific truth" (Smith 2003: 201). It must be noted here that were it not for the efforts of Chinmayananda and his predecessors, this type of statement could not be made in the first place.

We must also note, however, that Chinmayananda was not interested in making wild claims about what constituted the science of the ancient ṛṣṣ. He made it absolutely clear that according to him, the science of the ṛṣṣ was about the realm of the experiencer alone. He did not lay claim to ancient Hindus having modern technology.⁸ However, today, certain elements of the viewpoint that Hinduism is "scientific" are being re-presented by modern Hindu apologetics, claiming that ancient Hindu society was an ancient version of the modern West. That is, that ancient Hindus had better versions of everything the modern West values today, including science and technology.⁹ This is obviously an echo of the above comment about the "defense" of Hinduism from "foreign" attackers. But proving this was never Chinmayananda's intent. In fact, he very clearly says in one of his talks on the Bhagavad Gītā:

8 One may compare this with another strand of thought, starting with Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883), the founder of the Arya Samaj, who believed that modern technological advances were known to the ancient Aryans, the people of the Vedic Age. As J. T. F. Jordens writes in his book *Dayananda Saraswati: His Life and Ideas*, according to Dayananda, in the "Golden Age" of the Vedic civilization, "the kings were wise, and knew the secrets of missiles and fire-arms. They had a superior knowledge of medical science, and travelled across the continents by mechanically propelled airships and boats" (1978: 124). (Cf. Jordens, *Dayananda Saraswati: His Life and Ideas*, 1978.)

9 As a small but telling example, consider the argument that ancient Hindus had better flying machines than modern airplanes, based on the account that Ravana, the villain of the Ramayana, travels in something called the *puṣpaka-vimāna*, a flying vehicle that moves at the speed of the mind, and can expand and contract in size depending on the number of passengers. To see examples of such arguments, one only needs to go as far as the Indian Science Congress held in January of 2015, in which a paper entitled "Ancient Indian Aviation Technology" was presented. The author of the paper reportedly stated, "The Vedic or rather ancient Indian definition of an aeroplane was a vehicle which travels through the air from one country to another country, from one continent to

Krishna is a myth. Admitted. Rama is a myth. There is no historical evidence. Think, my dear! It is not necessary that he must be a historical figure. Rishis who wrote Ramayana and Bhagavata were not historians. Don't expect them to write history for you. That was not their job. They were great rishis, mystics. Their anxiety was only to communicate to you this mysticism of life. Whether Rama lived or not is immaterial... How can you prove that it is historical? It is not. It is called symbolic life. Such a literature is called mysticism. But it has got all bits of historical facts, geographical position, and that is the style of all classical literature... But to recognize it or try to do the experiment and to prove that "Rama lived, and therefore religion is right"; "Rama did not live, and therefore religion is absurd"; you are not understanding religion at all. It doesn't matter whether Rama lived or not.¹⁰

This very distinctly sets Chinmayananda apart from the famous agitations in Ayodhya in December 1992 that eventually resulted in the death of nearly 2,000 people and the destruction of the Babri Mosque by volunteers of right-wing Hindu nationalist groups claiming that the site of the mosque was the historical birthplace of Rama. Chinmayananda would have called such agitations foolish, for they placed too much importance on the historicity of Rama, a fact that Chinmayananda was not interested in proving. In this way, he stepped away from the excessively reactionary form of Hindu political discourse. His philosophy was "mystical", by his own claims, and the science of the *śāstras* was not physical, it was spiritual. Regarding Hinduism and claims to its historicity, the above remark by Chinmayananda shifts him somewhat out of the mold of the above noted Hindu apologetic discourse, providing an original way of responding to criticisms leveled at Hindu scripture for its ahistorical nature. It also sets Chinmayananda's teachings apart from contemporary claims that make ancient Hinduism look like a mirror of the modern West, which brings us to the next topic, Hinduism and modernity.

Chinmayananda, Hinduism, and Modernity

Chinmayananda was thrown into the turmoil of national struggle in India and subsequently international representation of Hinduism as a modern *guru*, so we must contextualize him to understand his perspective and the changes he brought to the ongoing dialogue between Hinduism and modernity.

another continent, from one planet to another planet... In those days aeroplanes were huge in size, and could move left, right, as well as backwards, unlike modern planes which only fly forward." Source: <http://goo.gl/a1LGrF> (Accessed 27 June 2018).

10 FAQs with Swami Chinmayananda at Guelph, Canada, in 1987. DVD.

Chinmayananda's technique of teaching *advaita veānta* with his head bowed to tradition on one hand, and within his arguments updating what he thought were outdated norms in the teaching on the other hand was his special forte. He negotiated the currents of these two forces, building respect and a significant name for himself with both, even being hailed by some as the "second Vivekananda". As the well-known journalist Pritish Nandy says in his interview of Swami Chinmayananda in Calcutta in 1981:

A distinguished scholar, an ardent teacher and a compulsive globetrotter, the Swami is today held to be one of the few serious and credible missionaries that Hinduism has to offer. His missions are all over the world. So are his devotees and students. And they are growing at a rate which will soon, perhaps, make Swami Chinmayananda numero uno in the glittering pantheon of gurus, rishis, bhagavans and babas who hold sway over India's millions and many abroad. In many ways, this is the best thing that could have happened to Hinduism. For the Swami is no quack healer or fast-buck merchant. He offers no miracles to lure the gullible. He makes no predictions, reads no fortunes and sings paeans to no politician. He makes no claims to being a God, except for argument's sake; nor does he offer you, for a fee, the quick route to nirvana. He simply teaches.¹¹

Chinmayananda entered the milieu of *gurus* in India as a Swami in the 1950s, and sought to reform the teaching of Hinduism, as Vivekananda had done half a century earlier, to suit his times. But what was the context of this reform? As David Smith writes:

Modernity is the Enlightenment project, with its certainties of reason and progress; it is the detraditionalizing of the traditions which preceded it. According to Charles Taylor, as summarized by Felski, modernity is 'a general philosophical distinction between traditional societies, which are structured around the omnipresence of divine authority, and a modern secularized universe predicated upon an individuated and self-conscious subjectivity' (Felski, *Sources of the Self*, 1995: 12) (Smith 2003: 7).

The context of Hinduism with respect to the dialogue regarding modernity is a complex one. To broaden the point, I made in the section about Hinduism and science, it is not only the case that Hindu apologetic discourse used Western values to defend Hindu beliefs and practices by claiming that the beliefs in question were more Western than (and therefore superior to) the West according to its own values, but "Hinduism" as a unified concept was defined by the body of Hindu apologetic in relation to the West.

11 Pritish Nandy's interview of Swami Chinmayananda, published in 1981. <http://prish-nandy.com/downloads/Sunday%20Cover%20Story%2020-12-81.pdf>

This “Hinduism” was interpreted and formulated in opposition to Western constructs of “the superior West versus the inferior Indian”. As Richard King puts it, “The Westerner, presupposed as the normative paradigm in such analysis, tends to be idealized as modern, egalitarian, civilized, secular, rational and male. In contrast, the Indian is often represented as tied to tradition, primitive, hierarchical, uncivilized, religious, irrational and effeminate” (1999: 112). In response to this Western critique’s formulation of “Hinduism” and the stereotypical “Indian”, India is defined as “non-West”, rather than just as “Indian”. In other words, the Indian response to the Western critique is to build upon the “Hinduism” that reflects the core values of the stereotypical Western society as presented by Western Orientalists, but is superior to the West in terms of those very same values. Hence, we find a Hinduism that is “more modern” than the modern West, “more egalitarian” than the egalitarian West, as well as more civilized, more secular (that is, less ritualistic), more rational, and more masculine. Vivekananda, in presenting Hinduism to the West, presents Hinduism in exactly this way. Echoes of this argument, therefore, can be found in Chinmayananda as well.

By the time Chinmayananda entered the scene, the term “Hinduism” and its unified roots in ancient history had gained traction, and was used by Chinmayananda to promote *advaita vedānta* as the essence or culmination of Hinduism, just as Vivekananda had done before him. He developed this vision even further than Vivekananda, and due to his popularity and that of *advaita vedānta*, this development led him to be invited to give his now well-known talk called “Planet in Crisis” in 1992 at the United Nations.¹² This Hinduism, argues Chinmayananda in his talk, could be used as a force for peace in the world if only modern man could understand its core, *vedānta*. His argument for the spread of this “modernized” Hinduism can be quintessentially demonstrated by the way he represents the notion of caste and the way he talks about modern *gurus*, both of which I shall now examine.

Chinmayananda and Caste

Chinmayananda’s commentary on the *Maniṣā Pañcakam*, a text attributed to Śaṅkara, serves as an example of his view that *advaita vedānta* was radical with respect to caste even in the times of Śaṅkara. The story is that once, while Śaṅkara was returning from a bath in the Ganges River, an outcaste *cāṇḍāla*¹³ was blocking his path. He told the *cāṇḍāla* to move out of his way, and the *cāṇḍāla* responded by questioning Śaṅkara’s own philosophy of non-duality, asking to whom Śaṅkara was referring when he asked him to get out of the way. Was it the body he saw before him, which performed the same functions as his own body? Or was it the

12 The video of this talk can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OUg3UiiikVI> (Accessed 27 June 2018)

13 The word *cāṇḍāla* refers to a person that deals with the disposal of corpses, who is considered to be “untouchable”.

ātman, the self, which was the same in both bodies? Śaṅkara promptly fell at the *cāṇḍāla*'s feet and proclaimed him as a master and his *guru*.¹⁴ This story serves as an example, according to Chinmayananda, of how *advaita vedānta* (as the "true" version of Hinduism) transcends caste boundaries and can therefore serve as the egalitarian core of all religion for modern times.¹⁵ In the interview with Pritish Nandy, too, Chinmayananda maintains that "Hinduism is the religion for our times".¹⁶

Chinmayananda promotes, in other words, a modernist version of Hinduism in the form of *advaita vedānta*, focused on the ideals of modernism. With this in mind, and in the light of the prior discussion on Hinduism in the context of, or in opposition to, modernity, we see Chinmayananda's interpretation of Hinduism's views on caste:

Now, religion has got two aspects. One is the philosophical depth of religion. And the other is the superficial, the ritualistic, the social discipline. The social discipline aspect of religion will be always reflecting the social conditions where it was born... But the depth of philosophy in it will be universally applicable... Caste-*ism* is the evil in our society today, but caste? You can't remove it! It is a scientific classification of human personality.¹⁷

Here Chinmayananda attempts to update the notion of caste by creating a distinction between caste and "caste-ism", the former being a classification of human personality and the latter being a system of oppression based on this classification, including restrictions on marriage and social mobility between castes. In this way, Chinmayananda can be seen as a product of the ongoing narrative of a "non-Western" Hinduism, by rejecting caste-ism, but surprisingly, his "innovation" in the field is to bow his head to the tradition by accepting the existence of caste. His way of dealing with caste appears to militate against modern theorizations of caste, which identify a single entity called "caste", including all the elements of what he calls "caste-ism." As Lola Williamson aptly describes, "Such is the case with the idea of 'natural religion' based on rationality. It begins with Enlightenment ideas in Europe and America, travels to India through the British, becomes part of the Hindu Renaissance, and then returns to America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the teachings of Hindu gurus" (2010: 23).

14 Chinmayananda, *Maniṣā Pañcakam* (2012), pg. 18-19.

15 Chinmayananda, *Maniṣā Pañcakam* (2012), pg. 6.

16 <http://prishnandy.com/downloads/Sunday%20Cover%20Story%2020-12-81.pdf> (Accessed 27 June 2018)

17 Australian Interview of Swami Chinmayananda in 1984:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OrxGTXadYpE> (Accessed 27 June 2018)

Chinmayananda and Gurus

In the same book, Williamson's study of the emergence of the trend of Hindu *gurus* going to Western countries to teach in the 1960s and 1970s that helped to develop the "New Age" movement will help shed light on Chinmayananda's stance on modern *gurus*. Williamson writes about a category called "Neo-Hinduism", which she contrasts with traditional Hinduism in many ways. Neo-Hinduism, she says, arose in repudiation of some of the customs of traditional Hinduism and instead of the ritual and mythological aspects (including the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*), emphasized the philosophical aspect of Hinduism, focusing on the Upaniṣads as its chief source. "Although there was much trial and error throughout the nineteenth century as Hindu intellectuals reformed and redefined their religion, Vivekananda's interpretation of Vedanta as an experiential and universal religion is probably the most widely accepted version of Neo-Hinduism today" (2010: 18).

Chinmayananda, too, as an inheritor of this way of thinking, promotes an anti-ritual (or one could say, post-ritual) stance. In his introduction to the *Maniṣā Pañcakam*, he describes the "cultural break-up" of the "nation". He explains that the Indian culture became decadent over time, where "Orthodox Hinduism" became excessively ritualistic, and the sacrifices and ceremonies that could be afforded by the rich were not inspiring to the masses anymore.

But while Chinmayananda, like Vivekananda, promoted the Upaniṣads and their role in forming a "philosophical" religion that could be the underlying basis for all religions, he was nonetheless sure to emphasize the epics that were important to "traditional Hinduism". Chinmayananda authored, for example, two important texts for children called *Bala Bhagavatam* and *Bala Ramayana* (first edition 1968), which are abridged versions of the *Bhagavata Purana* and the *Ramayana*, respectively. These are texts that, according to Williamson, would be interesting only to traditional Hinduism, and downplayed by modern (Neo) Hinduism, but Chinmayananda attempts to engage with both, even relatively early on in his career. Having inherited the Neo-Hinduism of Vivekananda, he chose to update it by integrating a version of the ancient texts central to traditional Hinduism into the Hinduism that he taught as well. Thus, he maintained continuity with traditional Hinduism by connecting his audiences with Hinduism's so-called epic past while attempting to push them forward into modernity.

Chinmayananda's overt stance on modern *gurus* is also revealing. Chinmayananda contrasts ritualistic religion as taught by various *gurus* in India with knowledge-based religion in his interview with Pritish Nandy. Nandy makes the claim that teachings by these *gurus* who preach a ritualistic way of life are in fact promoting a lower level of consciousness. While Chinmayananda initially defends the *gurus*, praising them for bringing solace to the masses that worship them, and even wishing there were more such *gurus*, which is initially in striking contrast to the attempt to distance

“true Hinduism” from practices that are different from *vedāntic* Hinduism, he later concedes and paints a hierarchy of growth for seekers within the Hindu fold from *gurus* that promote ritualistic practices to those who promote spiritual knowledge, and finally to those who can teach the ancient *śāstrās* in their original form.¹⁸

Chinmayananda presents the hierarchy in such a manner that ultimately *vedānta* is the highest level in that hierarchy. But he also expands the now-established version of Neo-Vedanta to include traditional forms of “gurudom”, as he calls it, as well. In so doing, he updates the version of Hinduism that has been taught over the course of the twentieth century. He begins to accept once again different forms of Hinduism and finds a novel way to bring them into the fold of the version of Hinduism that he promotes. This is, in a way, part of the ongoing trend of portraying *vedānta* as the epitome of religious achievement, à la Vivekananda, but it has antecedents in Śaṅkara, whose arguments on behalf of *advaita vedānta* were meant specifically to defeat other systems of thought, and Chinmayananda uses both to make his point and starts to include various forms of “traditional Hinduism” that were lost to “Neo-Hinduism” for nearly a century. By doing this, Chinmayananda seems to be creating a new category of Hinduism, or at least an updated version of “Neo-Hinduism”.

Another example is Chinmayananda’s view on psychic powers (*siddhis*). According to David Smith, *gurus* claim some general characteristics, including spiritual powers. He says that “Gurus are commonly held to have special powers. They may flaunt these powers, or leave it to their disciples to spread their fame. At the least, the guru will claim to be able to read the thoughts of his disciples”.¹⁹ Here, notwithstanding Smith’s analysis, Chinmayananda insists that powers are not at all interesting to a student of *advaita vedānta*. According to him, the spiritual aspirant of *advaita vedānta* must be interested in knowing *brahman*, and therefore powers of the mind are not interesting to him or her, even if present, because *brahman* is beyond the mind. His appeal as a *guru* is in turn enhanced by actively engaging with modernity, in this case by rejecting the importance of the supernatural for the sake of what is perceived to be logic and reason. This helped to make him an internationally popular and influential figure in “modern” times, which leads us to the next topic of discussion.

18 <http://prishnandy.com/downloads/Sunday%20Cover%20Story%2020-12-81.pdf> (Accessed 27 June 2018)

19 (Smith 2003: 172). Let me make a note here that Smith, in his book, while mentioning a number of influential *gurus* of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, conspicuously fails to name Chinmayananda as one, though he does mention Chinmayananda once in passing in the context of his involvement in the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP). Having dealt with this issue earlier and the misunderstanding concerning Chinmayananda’s role that seems to underlie it, in this paper we aim to provide an entry point to the study of Chinmayananda as an influential teacher of *advaita vedānta*.

Chinmayananda, Hinduism, and Diaspora Configurations

Chinmayananda is an important figure for engagement with diaspora Hinduism as I shall now attempt to show by providing a framework for this topic. For this section, I will focus on the USA as an example of the ongoing narrative of diaspora Hinduism, and attempt to contextualize Chinmayananda in this narrative, assessing his entry into the diaspora and the impact of his teachings on it as well.

Of course, it must first be noted that any attempt to essentialize Hinduism by claiming that there is one thing that is common to all Hindus is generally untenable. For every claim made about the essence of Hinduism, there is a “Hindu” belief that contradicts that claim. As a result, even the mention of a “diaspora”, which is predicated on an essentialist assumption that “India” (or for some Orientalist authors and nationalist Hindus, “*Bhārat*”) is considered a homeland or a “motherland” (“*Bhārat Mātā*”) by all Hindus, whether inside or outside of India, can be seen as another example of the dominant Orientalist lens through which Hinduism has been studied, whose idea of a diaspora is gained from the dispersion of Jews from Israel.²⁰ We find in the case of Hinduism, however, that there are Hindus who, for whatever reason, consider themselves to be “Hindu” without having any connection to India as the homeland.²¹ In fact, many new Hindu pilgrimage sites, in the form of temples, can be found all over the world.²²

It can be said, however, that India is nevertheless the home for most of the Hindu population in the world, is host to most Hindu pilgrimage sites globally, and is also the origin for much of the Hindu population outside of India, whether in the current generation or in generations before, and as such is still a kind of “homeland” for Hindus. As Sandhya Shukla explains in her article entitled “South Asian Migration to the United States”, due to the “brain drain” of South Asian migrants to the USA, where there was opportunity for highly skilled workers, there was an economic lack felt in the developing nations of South Asia. This flight of skilled labor from these countries “was the source of some anxiety for developing nations in terms of perceived effects and also in the way that this confounded post-colonial nationalisms that rested on ideas of autonomy and strength in the face of richer and dominant countries like Britain and the United States” (2013: 172). Thus, the category of the

20 Even here, there is debate. Some Jewish scholars may not agree that “diaspora Judaism” holds much meaning, for “Israel” may be a philosophical concept, independent of the state of Israel. The difference between these two is even built into the Hebrew language, with the term *‘Ereṣ Yisrā’el* meaning the “Land of Israel”, and the term *Medīnat Yisrā’el* meaning the “State of Israel”. Cf. Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin, “Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity”, in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 19, No. 4, pg. 693-725.

21 For example, Tulsi Gabbard, the first Hindu member of the United States Congress, is of Samoan and Euro-American descent, with no ancestry in India. Such examples are numerous.

22 There are over 100 Hindu temples in the United States alone, which serve as nodes of Hindu worship and pilgrimage. See a list of Hindu temples in the USA here: <http://www.hindutemples.us> (Accessed 27 June 2018)

non-resident Indian, or “NRI”, was born, at first created to address economic disparity caused by the migration of skilled labor away from the homeland to a foreign land. In time, however, “the figure of the NRI conjured complex, and reciprocal, desires of migrant Indians for their homeland, and the homeland nation-state’s claim on peoples outside its borders” (Shukla 2013: 172). Many migrant Hindu people in the USA, then, with the term “NRI” applied to them, experience an affinity for India as the “Hindu homeland”.

This does not imply a unified Hindu identity, as I discussed above, since “Hinduism” is a term that incorporates several distinct views of the world and sets of rituals. But when Hindus do not live in a Hindu-majority nation, then the effect is something like the clumping together of oil molecules when a drop of oil is dropped into a glass of water. Even though the oil molecules may not initially have been so determined to stick together, due to the polar nature of water, the non-polar oil molecules are forced to clump together. Similarly, in America, due to the pressure of a paradigmatically Christian-dominated society, Hindus, who otherwise may not have had the need to define themselves in India, suddenly feel the need to be able to describe themselves using Christian categories, facing questions such as, “What is your Bible?” or “Who is your Jesus?” As van der Veer aptly puts it, “The construction of a unified Hindu entity is of utmost importance for Hindus who live outside India. They need a Hinduism that can be explained to outsiders as a respectable religion, that can be taught to their children in religious education, and that can form the basis for collective action” (1993: 42).

Thus, versions of Hinduism are born, needing to be unified for their very survival, rather than for removing a colonial force from a nation. But these two drivers are not unrelated. The initial purpose of unifying Hinduism, from the Hindu perspective, was to move against a colonial oppressor. But the organizations that were the products of this drive, such as the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP), an organization that Chinmayananda was a co-founder of, whose original purpose was to unite Hindus under a single umbrella banner, were also effective at promoting an ideology that would, ultimately, be helpful for Hindus in the diaspora to define themselves in relation to the dominant culture. Here, van der Veer notes, “The VHP provides such a religious ideology, and it is thus not surprising that it has already gained great support among Indians in Britain, the United States, the Caribbean, Fiji, Holland [sic]. In an ironic twist of history, orientalism is now brought by Indians to Indians living in the West” (1993: 42-43).

Later, Chinmayananda distanced himself from the VHP in India itself. In an interview with the scholar Lise McKean, he said, “After I started the VHP, I returned to my own mission as spiritual teacher of Vedanta.” (1996: 102) Thus his spiritual organization, the Chinmaya Mission, remained distinct from the VHP. When the VHP expanded to the USA and other countries outside of India, the Chinmaya Mission nevertheless maintained its distance from organizations that it considered “political”,

including the VHP. But in one important respect, the Chinmaya Mission seeks exactly what the VHP desires: it attempts to give Hindus a recognizable identity to hold on to, especially in the face of an “other” that, through its own lens, interrogates the very essence of Hinduism, triggering a self-interrogation within the mind of the Hindu through that very lens as well. Both organizations can be described, according to John Zavos, as global Hindu organizations “invoking an image of global Hinduism: a transnational consciousness which binds Hindus around the world to one articulated form of identity” (2013: 314-315).

There is a significant difference between these two organizations, however. The Chinmaya Mission bases its ideology on knowledge of the Upaniṣads and the Bhagavad Gītā and Chinmayananda’s commentaries on these as well as his other works, being an organization formed to propagate the teachings of *advaita vedānta*, specifically in the lineage of Śaṅkara.²³ The VHP, on the other hand, is not an organization born of any lineage or tradition, and therefore propagates only a generic “Hindu” identity, loosely based on the writings of Vivekananda, but sharing ideology with other Hindu nationalist groups.²⁴ As a result, the Chinmaya Mission is able to propagate a Hindu identity that is rooted in scripture, but need not necessarily be geared towards a nationalist agenda, whereas the VHP is dependent upon a nationalist sentiment tied to India.

23 It is useful to note here Lola Williamson’s helpful analysis of the Neo-Hindu movement with respect to its teaching conventions. She writes, “When Neo-Hindus needed a vehicle to spread their philosophy, they looked to Christian missionaries as their model... Neo-Hindus often held social gatherings for youth and organized conferences for adults. They also held regular congregational worship services in a manner like Christian services, complete with prayers, hymns, and sermons. When Hindu gurus came to the United States, they simply continued to use these forms already familiar to Americans. They would, though, eventually add another ingredient that they learned from American institutions, and that was to charge fees for the classes, conferences, and social gatherings. Paying fees seemed appropriate to Americans since they did not see themselves as receiving religious instruction, but instruction in universal principles and ‘techniques.’” (2010: 19.) This is quite similar to the Chinmaya Mission model, which teaches children in a “Sunday school” format, called “Bala Vihar”. There are class sessions, which run simultaneously as adult study groups (for parents of the children), before or after which there is a congregation where there is usually a sermon-style talk by the resident *ācārya*, or teacher, followed by a collective prayer service. There is a fee for enrolling a child in Bala Vihar, but all youth groups, adult study groups, and public discourses, are free.

24 Here we say “loosely” because, as Tapan Raychaudhuri writes in his chapter entitled “Swami Vivekananda’s Construction of Hinduism” in the book *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernization of Hinduism*: “Swami Vivekananda represents the high noon of a Hindu revival, both in popular perception and serious historical literature. Expectedly, in the VHP’s 1993 celebration of the centenary of the Chicago Congress of Religions where Vivekananda made his debut, they claimed the Patriot-Prophet as one of their own. Amiya P. Sen’s study of the Hindu revival published in the same year, a work of scholarly and analytical excellence, confirms this received perception... I draw upon the same material... and arrive at a very different conclusion, that the Hindu revival, a phenomenon I would prefer to describe as the Hindu reaction, was at best peripheral and for the most part antagonistic to Vivekananda’s concerns. His role and his personality were misinterpreted in his own time for identifiable reasons. The persistence of that misreading is, however, less justified.” (1998: 1)

It is not without significance that the Chinmaya Mission, founded by Chinmayananda in 1953, would come to compete with the VHP, co-founded by Chinmayananda, to develop the ideology with which Hindus could define themselves in the diaspora. Like a boomerang, the VHP, initially encouraged by Chinmayananda and others to perform the task of unifying Hindus on spiritual grounds, would ultimately turn around to attempt to “reclaim” India for the “Hindu majority”, a political agenda, and this would result in Chinmayananda avoiding association with the VHP, along with similar organizations in India, like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), etc., on the grounds that his mission was spiritual and not political.

But the impact of Chinmayananda’s teachings was not insignificant in the diaspora in North America. His organization, the Chinmaya Mission, has at least 50 centers across the USA and Canada, with thousands of members.²⁵ Each center is home to a Sunday school for children called “Bala Vihar”, whose curriculum is standardized, and is used by other temple organizations across North America as well. I will take this opportunity to expand upon the curriculum of the Bala Vihar program to show its spiritual content and that there is no observable driving political agenda. While there may be elements in the organization that promote their own political agenda, as is inevitable everywhere, the content itself is spiritual in nature.

Each Chinmaya Mission center is known as a “School of Vedantic Studies”. It is host to a Bala Vihar, whose mission statement is “To help children learn values with fun, to delight like the moon and shine like the sun”.²⁶ The broader mission statement of Chinmaya Mission is “To provide to individuals, from any background, the wisdom of Vedanta and the practical means for spiritual growth and happiness, enabling them to become positive contributors to society”.²⁷ Chinmayananda says about the Bala Vihar programs:

Children are not vessels to be filled, but lamps to be lit. The seed of spiritual values should be sown in young hearts, and the conditions made favourable for sprouting and steady growth through proper control and discipline. It must be cared for with the warmth of love and affection, and such a tree shall blossom forth flowers of brotherhood, universal love, peace, bliss, beauty, and Perfection.²⁸

On the Chinmaya Mission website, the description of Bala Vihar is:

Bala Vihar is a weekly gathering of children, between the ages of five to fifteen years that takes place in Chinmaya Mission Centres or in private

²⁵ <http://www.chinmayamission.org> (Accessed 27 June 2018)

²⁶ <http://www.chinmayamission.com/what-we-do/activities/balvihar/> (Accessed 27 June 2018)

²⁷ <http://www.chinmayamission.org/aboutus.php> (Accessed 27 June 2018)

²⁸ <http://www.chinmayamission.com/what-we-do/activities/balvihar/> (Accessed 27 June 2018)

homes, under the supervision of trained [volunteer] teachers. The aim of Bala Vihar is to help children bloom, grow, and inculcate values through fun-filled activities. Bala Vihar enhances the overall development of the personality of a child at all levels — physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual.²⁹

The curriculum for Bala Vihar is usually split by grade in school (provided there are enough children, though grades may be combined with each other for practical purposes) and centers are encouraged to follow a standard curriculum, but may adjust it depending on the individual needs of the center. A typical curriculum includes (the following is a list of books and topics from the curriculum of Chinmaya Mission Houston, as an example, and descriptions are adapted from the Chinmaya Mission Houston website):³⁰

1. KG: *Alphabet Safari* – Teach values like aspiration, brotherhood, etc., through animal stories and hands-on activities.
2. Grade 1: *Bala Ramayana* – Inspire children and enhance their imagination through the events and stories of Lord Rāma’s journey in the *Rāmāyaṇa*.
3. Grade 2: *Sri Hanuman the Super Superman* – Learn from Hanumān values like courage, etc.
4. Grade 3: *Bāla Bhāgavatam* – Through stories of different *avatāras* of Lord Viṣṇu, children learn to own up to their actions. They learn to ask only for what they need, not necessarily for what they desire.
5. Grade 4: *Kṛṣṇa, Kṛṣṇa Everywhere* – Encourage children to learn about sharing and self-discipline through stories of Lord Kṛṣṇa. They learn to introspect and record their observations regularly.
6. Grade 4: *My Twenty-Four Teachers* – Children will learn to develop reverence for teachers throughout nature. Story of Dattātreya.
7. Grade 5: *Symbolism in Hinduism* – Explain the importance of symbols. The deities are symbols of the one Omnipresent Lord. These symbols teach us to live a life of harmony, fulfillment, and happiness.
8. Grade 6: *India, the Sacred Land* – Energize children about the rich heritage of India. Saints and sages, our treasure, made this land sacred and contributed to its success.
9. Grade 7: *P. O. Box Mr. God (Rāmacaritamānasa)* – Invite children to find the Omnipresent God and His address. Then they learn that each one of us is His address and we can find Him within us, if we learn to live a life of noble values.
10. Grade 7: *Key to Success (Rāmacaritamānasa)* – Challenge children to learn to achieve success in the world by living a life rich in values. Emphasize how a disciplined mind enjoys happiness and peace.

29 <http://www.chinmayamission.com/what-we-do/activities/balvihar/> (Accessed 27 June 2018)

30 <http://www.chinmayahouston.org/pdfs/bvbooks/ScienceOfLiving-FINAL.pdf> (Accessed 27 June 2018)

11. Grade 8: *Yato Dharmah Tato Jayaḥ* - The text dives deep into what is Dharma, how to live by Dharma, along with the story of the *Mahābhārata*. The goal of life and how we are the architect of our own future is explained through the Law of Karma.
12. Grade 9: *Hindu Culture* – Accomplish the goal of life by following the Hindu values. Learn to live a stress-free life by applying the message of the Upaniṣads.
13. Grades 10 and 11: *Bhagavad Gītā* – Absorb the message of the Gītā through flowcharts and other unique techniques, in a logical sequence. The text used in this class is *The Holy Geeta* by Swami Chinmayananda.
14. Grade 12: *Self-Unfoldment* – Realize your inner potential and transform your life through the fundamentals of Vedānta.

The content of the curriculum, as can be seen, is not political in nature, but seeks to instill values and a spiritual thirst in the student. Thus, as we have stated before, Chinmayananda's and Chinmaya Mission's agenda appears to be a spiritual one.³¹

The impact of Swami Chinmayananda is not just limited to centers. The Chinmaya Mission is also the only official Hindu religious endorsing agent for board certified chaplains in the USA, according to the US Department of Defense.³² Additionally, Chinmayananda's impact can be seen on other sections of the diaspora as well. His first initiate, Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1930-2015),³³ started an offshoot organization called the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, whose western headquarters in Saylorsburg, Pennsylvania is also a popular retreat center for Hindus in America. All of Dayananda's disciples, too, are products in some way of Chinmayananda's teachings, through whom they can be said to relate to the Śaṅkara lineage.³⁴

While many aspects of the Orientalists' approach to Hinduism have shaped the way Hindus see themselves, to the extent of "creating Hinduism" as a unified entity, there are some effects of the intersection between Christian Orientalism and Hindu self-portrayal that can be seen as progressive, characterized by the move to become a Hindu chaplain.

With the above analyses performed, about Chinmayananda, Hinduism, and Science, modernity, and the diaspora, Chinmayananda's place in the ongoing narrative about

31 Whether this material can be politicized or not is not the objective of this analysis, but rather it is to show that the curriculum itself, if taught according to the syllabus, is spiritual and not political in nature.

32 <http://prhome.defense.gov/RFM/MPP/AFCB/Endorsements.aspx> (Accessed 27 June 2018)

33 Not to be confused, of course, with Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) of the Arya Samaj.

34 This includes Anantanand Rambachan, a well-known Hindu author and Professor of Religion at St. Olaf College in Minnesota, and Shama Mehta, the first board certified Hindu chaplain of Indian descent in Michigan. In the case of Shama Mehta, it is interesting to note the turn towards chaplaincy as a Hindu.

Hindu diaspora configurations cannot be ignored. I have argued that Chinmayananda's efforts as a Hindu philosopher and mystic *guru* over much of the second half of the 20th century have been in the direction of modernizing, promoting, and mainstreaming a unified Hinduism with its culmination in *advaita vedānta*. His understanding of modernity, science, and contemporary societal needs helped to shape his vision of Hinduism, and this vision has played a crucial role in the development of Hinduism and the Hindu identity in the Hindu diaspora, particularly in North America. This paper sets the groundwork for engaging more with Swami Chinmayananda, and articulating better the contours, complexities, and boundaries of Hinduism as it is understood today.

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From Kala Pani to Gangadhaara: Sacred Space and the Trauma of Indentureship in Trinidad

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*"The SS Ganga carried Jahaajees,
The Jahaajee toted jaa'jee bundals
In the jaahajee bundals hid lotas
In the bottom of the lotas
Swam drops of Ganga
The drops of Ganga were seeds
In the seeds slept a civilization.
Born on the Ganga"
- Ravindranath Maharaj (Raviji)*

Abstract

The Gangadhaara¹ Festival, the brainchild of Ravindranath Maharaj (Raviji), a Hindu activist in Trinidad, is the yearly celebration of Ganga Ma, the goddess associated with the Ganges River. Although Raviji's temple, the Hindu Prachar Kendra (Kendra), organizes the event, their name is absent from signage, emphasizing the collaborative aspect of the festival. This celebration is the joint effort of many local temples and is for the entire Indo-Trinidadian community, not just the Kendra's members. As such the festival works to unite the Hindu community and introduce a pilgrimage aspect to their established religious practices. Envisioned as a pilgrimage through the waters of the Marianne River, the Gangadhaara festival both sacralizes the landscape of Trinidad and connects participants to their ancestors who were indentured laborers. In the retelling of their own history, Indo-Trinidadians describe the journey to the island as one sanctioned by the gods. The resilience of the laborers and their ability to conquer the land further indicates the specialness of Trinidad. In this article, I argue that although the Gangadhaara festival outwardly focuses on environmental issues, it serves an additional purpose

¹ Throughout this article, I used the most common localized spelling of terms except when directly quoting from a text that uses an alternative spelling. The term Gangadhaara is pronounced with either a long "a" (dhaaraa) or a short one (dhara). The two have different meanings—dhaaraa (long "a" – dhāra) means steady, continuous stream, as in when you pour water from a vessel). Dhara on the other hand means one who wears. Ganga Dhara refers to Shiva who wears literally Ganga in the locks of his hair, whereas Gangā Dhāra would refer to the stream of Ganga, as in a river stream. My interlocutors seem to use the two terms interchangeably but for the purposes of this article I have chosen to use the long "a" spelling, because it is the spelling that appeared on the 2017 flyers and to keep the emphasis on the river Ganga.

by embodying the journey of the indentured laborers. By enacting their ancestors' journey across the *Kala Pani*, or black waters, the offerings at Gangadhaara become an act of remembrance and a way for Indo-Trinidadian Hindus to cope with the transgenerational trauma of indentureship.

Keywords: indentureship, Trinidad, Caribbean, Indo-Caribbean, Hinduism, diaspora, pilgrimage

Historical Context

Between the years 1838 and 1917, approximately half a million Indians were brought to the Caribbean through the indentured labor trade, a system put into place after the dismantling of slavery in order to provide a cheap labor force on the plantations (Vertovec 2000, Munasinghe 2001, Younger 2009). 144,000 of those laborers were brought to the twin island of Trinidad and Tobago. Although indentureship was not the same as slavery and plantation owners gained support for the system in England by producing narratives which presented it as a better system than slavery (Wahab 2007), it did share some similarities including restricted movement on plantations and the poor treatment of workers (Tata and Evans 1989: 26). Despite the difficulty of life on the plantations, Indians worked to maintain their cultural and religious traditions. Initially a disorganized group, Indo-Trinidadians soon united their community, using a remembered Hinduism as a platform upon which they could carve out a separate space for themselves within the larger society. They created religious schools, modeled their temples after Presbyterian churches, developed Hindu organizations, and advocated for Indo-Trinidadians at all levels of the government. Having developed their own form of Hinduism which reflects the restrictions of plantation life, the tensions with the Afro-Caribbean community, and the influence of both the Presbyterian Church and Arya Samaj missionaries, present-day Indo-Trinidadians are unwilling to abandon their practices for those that do not seem to reflect their hyphenated identities.² Yet, because they also wish to distinguish themselves from other groups in the Caribbean, they still turn to India to authenticate their beliefs and practices. The result is a version of Hinduism that emerges from the particularities of the Caribbean and, India, the land of their ancestors. The Gangadhaara festival illustrates how Indo-Trinidadians negotiate their hyphenated identities while working to transform the landscape of Trinidad from secular to sacred. The popularity of the Gangadhaara festival and the attention it receives from local governmental representatives further demonstrates the success of the Hindu community in creating a distinct space for themselves.

² See Munasinghe 2001 and Persaud 2015.

Site Description and History

The Gangadhaara Festival also referred to as a *teerath* or pilgrimage³, takes place in the Marianne River, near the 18 ³/₄ post to Blanchisseuse, not far from two of Trinidad's most popular beaches – Maracas Beach and Las Cuevas Beach.⁴ The drive along the beaches offers spectacular views of the ocean and extravagant beach houses, but soon the mountain and the darkness of the jungle takes over. The journey through the jungle is steep and curvy but yellow *jhandis*⁵ line the route, leading eventually to an opening where the festival is taking place. Emerging from the darkness and stillness of the jungle, the noise, movement, and color of the site is jolting. Parking is limited and taxis, or vans, line the small parking space. Piling out of the taxis are various temple groups, all dressed in yellow,⁶ carrying their fruit offerings and yellow buttercup flowers in their *thalis* or metal trays. The river, hidden by the overgrowth, cannot be seen from the parking area. To get to the waters' edge, one must walk down the pathway leading from the cliff to where the water reveals itself. Near the entrance to the pathway down to the river, a tent and platform has been set up where devotees have been chanting each chapter of the *Bhagavad Gita* since 6 am when the first devotees began arriving. Above the pathway leading to the river, there is a large banner welcoming devotees to the 24th Gangadhaara with the theme this year being the Hindu Home. At 9 am, people are already leaving, having completed their offerings, but most people will stay through the festival's duration. By 3 pm, hundreds will have visited the site, leaving thousands of yellow buttercups and boats made from coconut husks in the water as evidence of their participation.

The Gangadhaara site was, at first, a place only imagined by one man, Ravindranath Maharaj or as he is better known, Raviji. Raviji explained to me that he would often have unsettling dreams of a place he did not know. When his daughter was leaving to go abroad to school, he decided to take her around Trinidad to see its historical sites and beauty in case she did not return to the island. As they made their way through the mountains, he came upon a large silk cotton tree⁷ with one of its branches hovering over the road. Upon the branch was a snake which frightened his wife so much she insisted they return home. The image and a nagging feeling though

³ Throughout the article, I use the terms "festival," "celebration," and "pilgrimage" interchangeably to describe Gangadhara because each of those terms are used by the devotees themselves.

⁴ I participated in the Gangadhara festival of 2017 which was the 24th year of the official celebration.

⁵ In Trinidad, *jhandis*, triangular flags on bamboo which symbolize various deities, are planted outside homes and temples after one performs a *puja* or worship. They are also often used to direct people to a *yagna*, a multi night devotional, or religious event. For more information on the role *jhandis* play in Hinduism in the Caribbean, see Persaud 2016.

⁶ In Hinduism, certain colors are used to represent different deities. Red is said to be the color of Hanuman and yellow the color of Ganga Ma.

⁷ Silk cotton trees, also known as *jumbie* or spirit trees (scientific name: *ceiba pentandra*) are part of Trinidadian folklore which marks them as otherworldly and associates with the spirits of the dead. See Bissessarsingh 2014.

would not leave his mind and he later returned alone to explore the area. During his exploration, he came to a clearing in the dense foliage and experienced a sense of *déjà vu*. This was the place in his dreams. As he traveled down the river, he stumbled upon a *lingam*-shaped stone which he would eventually place in a natural cave-like indentation in the rocks. Raviji's dream and the discovery of the *lingam* confirmed the significance of the location, but the decision to celebrate Gangadhaara there was a mixture of Raviji's memories and his experiences in India. He reminisces that when he was a boy in Trinidad, his grandmother would conduct rituals in the water to Mother Ganga. Later, during his time in India, he also observed the worship of Ganga and the pilgrimage many would make to the riverbank to conduct rituals. Although Hindus in Trinidad would visit rivers and beaches during festivals and auspicious days, Raviji was overwhelmed by the magnitude of Ganga Ma's worship in India. He yearned for a place in Trinidad where devotees all over the island could come and be unified in worship. He noted that in Trinidad "while *Kartik Nahan*⁸ is celebrated on the Manzanilla Beach and rivers are utilized for different pujas, there was no river where the idea of Ganga is developed to show the culture and tradition of the Ganga Dhaaraa Teerath" (*Ganga Dhaaraa* 2013). For Raviji, this location on the Marianne River could then become a place to create a pilgrimage within Trinidad. Describing Gangadhaara as a "brand name," Raviji explains that he chose the tale of *Ganga Dashahara*⁹ because it is a story that resonates with the people of Trinidad and the worship of water is a unifying feature of all religious traditions.

The story associated with the name Gangadhaara is said to have been taken from the *Puranas* (*Ganga Dhaaraa* 2013).¹⁰ In it, a King named Sagar of Ayodhya conducted Ashvamedha Yagna, a ritual with a horse that is used to prove the king's sovereignty, 99 times. In accordance with the ritual, after the rites were performed, the horse was left to wander for a year through various kingdoms. On each occasion, the horse returned to Sagar's kingdom without being challenged by another king. On the 100th time, however, Lord Indra, fearing that the King would soon become more powerful than him, kidnapped the horse and hid it in the ashram of the great sage Kapila. King Sagar then sent his sons to search for the horse and return it to the palace. When his sons found the horse in the ashram, they accused Kapila of stealing the horse and attacked him. With his divine power, Kapila burned the men to ashes. The princes then became restless ghosts because their last rites had not been performed. Several years later the grandson of Sagar, now a king himself, learned of the incident and approached Kapila in search of a way to liberate

⁸ *Kartik Nahan*, typically seen as the last auspicious festival in the Hindu calendar, is the celebration of the full moon in November which ends the Hindu month of *Kartik*.

⁹ Here Raviji makes a distinction between the story of Ganga's descent onto earth, *Ganga Dashahara*, and the location where one memorializes her arrival, *Gangadhara*.

¹⁰ The *Puranas* are often cited as a source for celebrations, rituals, and the origin of stories regardless of whether such story exists in the texts. Although exact source of the story remained ambiguous, the choice the *Puranas* indicates the desire to demonstrate that the celebration is an ancient one.

the souls of his uncles. Kapila told him that they will achieve salvation if their ashes are washed by the waters of the Ganga. Despite his fervent pleas, the King was unable to convince Ganga to come to earth. It was not until his grandson, King Bhagiratha, after praying to Lord Brahma for over 1,000 years, is granted a wish that Lord Shiva is convinced to aid in Ganga's descent to earth. To reduce Ganga's powerful force enough to flow down to earth, Ganga Ma first descended on top of Shiva's hair and then traveled through his matted locks. As a result, Lord Shiva also became known as Gangadhaara, "He who holds Ganga in his matted locks."

Although Raviji took members of his temple, The Hindu Prachar Kendra (Kendra), to visit the river in the early 90s, the first official celebration of Gangadhaara occurred in 1995 when the site was sacralized with the dust of 2,000 sacred sites and rivers in India.¹¹ It is important to note that while this official ceremony took place in 1995, the site was already regarded as sacred by devotees. The burying of the dust from India only worked to intensify the site's inherent sacrality. The year 1995 was chosen to begin the pilgrimage because it marked the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the first ship of indentured laborers to Trinidad.¹² During this official celebration, the Kendra intentionally broadened the celebration beyond its own temple community to include the other temples and religious organizations in Trinidad. At the site, the Kendra's name is markedly absent from any signage to be inclusive although Gitaji, the Kendra's present leader, makes announcements during the festival and directs the major activities.

In the early years of the pilgrimage, Raviji notes that he faced three types of criticism. The first happened while he was presenting at a conference at the University of the West Indies. An African guy, Ravii remembers, questioned his right to rename that portion of the river, Gangadhaara. Raviji, taken back by the question, said that he responded with the first thing that came to his mind without extensive thought. He asked the man what the name of the river was. When the man replied, "the Marianne River," Raviji asked him who named it as such. "What's in a name," Raviji responded. "Marianne, you accept that name. That wasn't its original name. The colonizers renamed it and you have no objection, why would you have an objection to us renaming it?" Raviji went on to tell me that the river could have multiple names, each group could call it whatever they wish, without the names being in conflict. The second criticism the Kendra faced was the assumption that the group was practicing *obeah*, a label often used to describe anything people consider "black magic."¹³ Raviji explains that "In those days, Hinduism didn't have a public persona," meaning that Hindus performed their worship privately and in temples and that there was less of an understanding among the public about what

¹¹ The dust was buried in at a place called the *prayag*, where two rivers converged to form one. See *Ganga Dhaaraa Teerath* 2014

¹² The first ship to Trinidad, *Fatel Razack*, landed in the Gulf of Paria on May 30, 1845 with 227 immigrants.

¹³ For more information on the history of *obeah* in Trinidad, see Crosson 2015.

Hindu worship looked like among devotees. Raviji asserts that he is “challenging the landscape,” and people were, at first, fearful of the flowers they saw flowing down the river, because they connected it with *obeah* practices. The last criticism the Kendra faced concerned their destruction of the landscape to improve access to the river. Raviji freely admits that this was wrong and a product of their own ignorance. They took in the criticism and, since then, the festival has had an ecological focus. Devotees are encouraged to limit their trash, hold on to any plastic bags, and to bring items which are biodegradable. Despite these early objections, the festival soon became popular among Indo-Trinidadian Hindus, even inspiring other temples to create their own Gangadhaara celebrations modeled after the Kendra’s festival.

The pilgrimage consists of walking in the river to visit various *ghaats*¹⁴ or stations both in the river and on the river’s banks. At the water’s edge is the first *ghaat* dedicated to Lord Ganesh. Devotees line up to make their offerings as a *pundit*,¹⁵ or priest, guides them through the rituals. In accordance with the pilgrimage’s ecological focus, the *ghaats* and all the other structures are temporary to avoid damaging the natural environment. Verses about the importance of land and nature from various religious texts line the river’s pathway, reminding devotees to be environmentally conscious. Each *ghaat* along the river is headed by a different pundit and temples arrange in advance for taxis to bring their members to the festival. One devotee explains that for her and her temple friends, the trip to the festival is just like a beach *lime*¹⁶ – everyone gathers early with their supplies and the intention is to spend the day worshipping with each other. Although most devotees start at the Ganesh *ghaat* and make their way down the river, stopping at each *ghaat* along the way, Raviji encourages us to begin at the end to avoid the long lines. At each *ghaat*, devotees sing songs and mantras are recited loudly. At the Hanuman *ghaat*, devotees are dressed in red, not yellow, and sing the *Hanuman Chalisa*, a devotional song dedicated to Hanuman, repeatedly. The sounds of their combined voices and the vibration of the drums reverberate long after one has walked past the *ghaat*. The *Ardhanareshwar*, the half male half female form of the Hindu god Shiva, *ghaat* stands well above the water on a firm and steady rock. This *ghaat* is the one visited by those who wish to have a happy and fulfilling relationship. Its placement on such a large and stable rock is no coincidence as it symbolizes the kind of foundation one needs for a successful marriage. The *ghaat* immediately following is also purposeful. The *Mundan Sanskar ghaat* is where the heads of babies are shaved in accordance with Hindu rites of passage. Further down the river, there are two more *ghaats* dedicated to the *lingam*, a column-shaped

¹⁴ *Ghaat* is typically translated as a set of stone steps leading to a river, such as the famous *ghaats* of Varanasi, but here it is used to refer to the various stations or stops along the river, each containing a different deity.

¹⁵ *Pundits* in Trinidad are ritual specialists who also engaged in philosophical discussions of religious texts with the congregation. They are often male, but there are also female pundits called *panditas*.

¹⁶ A slang word meaning “get-together,” usually consists of food, drink, and music.

representation of Shiva. The first is hidden within an indentation in the rocks and above it is a set of stairs that leads to a smaller *lingam* and a sign noting that this *ghaat* was installed by a Kali temple. Aneela, who has been a member of the Kendra since she was a child, tells me later that the installation of this *lingam* and sign was upsetting to some members of the Kendra as it went against the desire not to damage the location by creating any permanent structures. Since the festival is supposed to be inclusive, though, the Kali devotees were allowed to keep their structure. Raviji has named the other *lingam ghaat Trinnaadeeshwar*¹⁷ Mahadeo, or the Lord of Trinidad, Lord Shiva. He found the natural *lingam* shaped rock during his initial exploration of the area and it confirmed his intuition that this site was the correct one to begin the festival.

Raviji tells me that the *ghaats* are decided by three interrelated factors: (1) the needs of the community, (2) intuition, and (3) the desires of the people. The *Mundan Sanskaar ghaat* was deemed necessary as a way of keeping Hindu rites of passage alive within the community and to give people a place to perform them. The newly shaved babies and newlyweds later visit the Tulsidas¹⁸ *ghaat* where they are blessed by Swami Prakashananda, the leader of the Chinmaya Mission in Trinidad, one of the Kendra's most influential supporters and collaborators. The Tulsidas *ghaat* is also where Swami Prakashananda gives a brief address to devotees near the end of the festival. In his discourse, he reminds devotees that water is a physical manifestation of God's love. He explains that we must sensitize people to the ways in which we are polluting God's love – "God is giving us love and we are giving hate in return," he states. He ends by asserting that the Gangadhaara Festival should serve as a reminder of our obligation to the land.

After Swami Prakashananda's address and before the final part of the festival, devotees are encouraged to make offerings to their ancestors. Holding a few blades of *kush grass*¹⁹ in their hands, they allow the river's waters to flow through their fingers back to the river. The act is reminiscent of the *Pitr Paksha*²⁰ rituals which usually take place in September and a reminder of the story of Gangadhaara in which Ganga was asked to come to earth to release the ancestor ghosts of the king. The last part of the festival is a tribute to Ganga Ma herself, the focus of the celebration. Holding a locally made mud *murti* of Ganga on his shoulders, a devotee makes his way from the Tulsidas *ghaat*, past each of the *ghaats*, down to the

¹⁷ Raviji states that "Trinnaad" means three sounds (tri = three, naad = sound). The three sounds being "Om Namah Shivaya," the mantra for Shiva. It is no coincidence that "Trinnaad" sounds like "Trinidad." Raviji purposely uses the term to mean both the country and god.

¹⁸ Tulsidas, the author of the *Ramcharitmanas*, is often described as the "Father of Caribbean Hinduism" because of the significant role the *Ramcharitmanas* plays in Caribbean Hinduism. See Singh 2011.

¹⁹ Hindus consider *kush* grass to be sacred and it is often used in religious rituals.

²⁰ *Pitra Paskha* is a 15-day period that usually occurs in September before *Nauratri* celebrations. During this time period, devotees remember their ancestors and usually make offerings to them in the form of a mixture of water, black till, and white rice.

deepest part of the water, just past the *Trinnaadeeshwar lingam*. As he makes his way through the waters, a large group of devotees follows, singing along and occasionally throwing flowers onto the *murti*. At each *ghaat*, the person carrying the *murti* stops so that the devotees at that *ghaat* and the *pundit* can make their offerings to Ganga Ma. When he finally reaches the end, several women take Ganga Ma in a yellow sari where she is covered with yellow buttercup flowers. With a resounding, "Jai Ganga Ma" or victory to Mother Ganga, Geetaji gives the women the signal to release the sari with Ganga Ma and the hundreds of buttercups into the water. Devotees quickly place their coconut husks with their lit camphors into the water to trail after the sari and to travel back down the river. With this ritual, the festival officially comes to an end.

Creating Religious Spaces and Marking Differences

My interlocutors commonly referred to Gangadhaara as a "festival" or simply as Gangadhaara but it is more formally called a "*teerath*" on flyers and on the signage at the site itself. The reason for this is twofold. First, Raviji intentionally uses Hindi and Sanskrit terms to encourage their use among Indo-Trinidadian Hindus. He and Geetaji, the current leader of the Kendra, regularly insert Hindi and Sanskrit words into their religious discourses and as part of the activities at the *mandir*.²¹ The deliberate use of the term "*teerath*," even if different from the more standard spelling of *tirtha* (Eck 1981), encourages a familiarity with a language lost among most Indo-Trinidadians. Despite their use of Hindi and Sanskrit terms, the Kendra often uses alternative spellings, indicating that while they do want to increase familiarity of Indian languages, their focus is on largely introducing Hindu concepts using specific language. The choice of the term "*teerath*" as opposed to another term related to festivals or celebrations therefore is purposeful. In her article dissecting the term, Diana Eck writes: "A *tirtha* is a 'crossing place,' a 'ford,' where one may cross over to the far shore of a river or to the far shore of the worlds of heaven. Hence, *tirtha* has come to refer to these places of pilgrimage, where the crossing might be safely made" (Eck 1981: 323). *Teerath*, then, refers to those places of crossing where the stories of the gods and indeed the gods themselves become embodied in the geography.

It is this notion of pilgrimage that Raviji is most interested in developing in Trinidad. While it would have been possible to create a temple on the site and have services there regularly, Raviji wanted to create a pilgrimage site in Trinidad much like those in India. The *ghaats*, therefore, are set far enough apart from each other that devotees must wade through the water to visit each of them.²² The pilgrimage,

²¹ Temples are more often referred to as "mandirs" in Trinidad. The terms are generally interchangeable.

²² In an interview with the Trinidad Express, Raviji states: "Here people come from far and wide to make offerings and prayers and seating isn't provided so as to allow the pilgrimage to flow freely

however, begins long before devotees enter the river. The location of the site on the Marianne River is about an hour's drive away from the Kendra and South Trinidad where most Indo-Trinidadians live. Raviji jokingly remarked that "Indians have a problem traveling to that East/West corridor" and that the trip to Gangadhaara requires them to get out of their comfort zone and engage more with the larger Trinidadian landscape. Hence, the drive itself becomes a pilgrimage to the pilgrimage, yellow *jhandis* leading the way and preparing one to fully participate in the rituals. The fact that most attendees travel in groups, usually in vans organized by various temples, allows for devotees to bond and ensures that the experience is communal. Discussions about the purity of the water is absent from the narratives surrounding Gangadhaara and attendees are generally less motivated by the prospect of individual healing. Rather the goal is to nurture a group consciousness – to participate in Gangadhaara is to strengthen one's identity with the larger community of Indo-Trinidadian Hindus.

Although Raviji and others make references to the indentured laborers who came to the Caribbean, a point I will return to later, he does not pretend that Gangadhaara is not a created tradition. Indeed, like the *Pichakaree* competition²³ which he also developed, he sees the creation of traditions like Gangadhaara as necessary for the preservation of Hinduism in the Caribbean. He states:

I never thought we mustn't preserve, but I could not think only about preserve when I was taught that there is a trinity that inspires us in the way we must view the world and how we negotiate the space and how we create the space. And that is Brahma, which is creativity, Vishnu which is stability, and Shiva which is change or transformation or destruction. But we had in our society destruction operating and we worship Shiva strongly all night jagaran and everything, strong. Vishnu, the society was having a stability of its own but Brahma we not worshipping, and I saw it clearly what was happening. What are we creating in this country as Hindus? And not only that. We have to be able to be stable, we have to preserve, and we also have to continue creating. It is a responsibility. But we won't go into that. But part of it is because a traditional society gets scared of its own self [...]. The culture we are so sacred of it to touch it, to manipulate it, the culture manipulates us and we have to be able to manipulate it to keep in line with Sanatan Dharma aspirations of the people (Patasar 2015).

through the river rather than stagnate in any one spot. People will sometimes complain about standing for a long time but it's really a confession about how one performs a penance. This festival is structured in such a way that people must stand and wait and tussle a bit within themselves in order to present their love, their prayer" (*Ganga Dhaaraa Teerath* 2014).

²³ *Pichakaree*, named after the device used to the pitch colored powder during Holi celebrations, is a musical form invented by Raviji. Like chutney, *pichakaree* combines English and Hindi verses, but the songs are focused on themes specific to the Indian and Hindu community. The *Pichakaree* competition is hosted by the Hindu Prachar Kendra and held during Holi celebrations. See Patasar 2016.

For Raviji, then, the continued success of the Hindu community in Trinidad does not depend on digging through the archives to try to save “lost traditions,” however one may define that. Instead, the Indo-Trinidadian Hindu community needs to adapt to the current generation and mold and reshape its practices and tradition to better represent the present society. To avoid doing so is to put the religion at risk of being forgotten by the younger generation or, worse, being erased by those who want to dismiss part of the identity of Indo-Trinidadians. This is not to say that Raviji completely invents new modes of worship. Rather he intentionally incorporates traditions and rituals in Gangadhaara that he thinks have been forgotten or neglected. The *Mundan Sanskar ghaat* is an example of his attempts to re-inspire Indo-Trinidadian Hindus to participate in traditional rites of passage. For him, the flexibility within Hinduism means that the preservation of traditions and the creation of new rituals need not be oppositional but in fact can nurture each other. One can participate in a pilgrimage and rituals much like those he witnessed in India and perhaps like those his ancestors participated in, while at the same time introducing a new ecological focus that speaks to the current concerns of Indo-Trinidadians. The focus on the environment is an interesting aspect of Gangadhaara because while it is often of interest to the newspapers that cover the event, for many of the middle age and elderly Indo-Trinidadians this emphasis is insignificant since it only confirms their belief that Hinduism has always been environmentally friendly. The signs displayed at the site, taken from various religious texts, echo these ideas – protecting the environment, they imply, has always been a part of Hindu tradition. This too seems to be intentional – a way for Raviji and the organizing committee to present Hinduism as both old and new. For them, a return to their religious roots is, in fact, the most progressive thing Hindus can do.

Chosen Trauma and Triumphant Heroes

The role Gangadhaara plays within the larger community, however, is more complicated than the fact that it operates as a pilgrimage site. Its popularity is tied to the type of memory performance in which it engages. Raviji authenticates the sites by citing his own memories and dreams, but Gangadhaara is validated in a second way that I would argue has been more vital to its success in the larger Trinidadian community. Raviji notes that he knew there was something special about the site he chose to conduct the Gangadhaara festival because, when they were preparing the site for the first Gangadhaara, they found artifacts, such as broken *diyas* or small clay lamps used in Hindu rituals and celebrations. The location of the artifacts indicated that they had been left by indentured laborers. Later during the first Gangadhaara, a man came up to the Raviji and told him that he remembered coming to this same place to conduct *puja* or worship when he was a young boy. “We are worshipping in the same river that our forefathers worshipped in,” Raviji told me emphatically. As I previously noted, the Gangadhaara festival and Raviji in general play with this idea of transforming old traditions into a new

form. Gangadhaara is new in that the festival did not exist in Trinidad before Raviji introduced it, but the idea of an elaborate river festival or ritual is not a new concept.²⁴ Indeed, Raviji acknowledges that one of the reasons he established the festival was because of a strong memory of his grandmother performing rituals on the bank of a river. For him and others who attend the festival, the power of the site, then, lies in its connection to their ancestors.

The Gangadhaara festival displays this focus on ancestors, who are always envisioned as the indentured laborers who came to the Caribbean and does not refer to previous generations in India, in several ways. First, the symbol for the festival is a boat with a single sail, in front of a large sun. The boat's mast and sail resemble a *jhandi* flag which is used in Hindu rituals in Trinidad and planted outside of Hindu homes as a marker of their identity. Secondly, a ritual is performed for the ancestors towards the end of the festival. Although there is time set aside for the worship of ancestors in the Hindu calendar in Trinidad, incorporating a smaller version of the ritual at Gangadhaara works to encourage devotees to include ancestor worship in all their ceremonies. Lastly, Geetaji and other religious leaders make explicit references to *jahajis* during the festival. *Jahaji*, meaning ship traveler, refers to the indentured laborers who traveled to the Caribbean together. Separated from their family and homeland, the men and women who traveled on the same boat often grew as close as family members. Indo-Trinidadians will refer to *jahaji bhai*, the brotherhood of the boat, during cultural shows and events, particularly during Indian Arrival Day celebrations.²⁵ One play for Indian Arrival Day 2017, appropriately titled *Jahaji Bhai*, tells the imagined story of two of the last families to arrive in Trinidad before the end of indentureship and the friendship they developed, eventually leading to the marriage of their children to each other. For Indo-Trinidadians, then, the experience of indentureship bonds Indo-Caribbeans together in a way that can never be experienced outside of the community.

In one of his articles on Gangadhaara, Raviji notes that in their journey to Trinidad, indentured laborers brought with them the waters of the Ganga to purify the land of Trinidad and claim it as their own. Nowhere in this narrative is the notion that the laborers may have dreamed one day of returning to India. In the tale that Raviji tells and that of numerous Indian Arrival Day shows, the laborers were destined for Trinidad. It is not a sacred land separated from India, but a land with its own inherent sacrality that helped Indians to survive and flourish. Raviji writes:

Little did the colonial masters know, that their slave boats were sailing, not the seven seas, but the Ganga and they were transporting to the West Indies, not mere chattel, but the Hindu Currybean;

²⁴ See McLean 2008 and Sinha 2014.

²⁵ A national holiday in Trinidad celebrating the arrival of Indians to the Caribbean and their contributions to the nation. See Harlan 2013.

The SS Ganga carried Jahaajees,
The Jahaajee toted jaa'jee bundals
In the jaahajee bundals hid lotas
In the bottom of the lotas
Swam drops of Ganga
The drops of Ganga were seeds
In the seeds slept a civilization.
Born on the Ganga

Ganga had come down
From Swarga Loka
To Shiva's jatta
To Paataal Loka
To revive ashes
As Sagar's children

When they woke up
They were
Barefooted Jahaajees
Standing on one leg

Bhagirathi at sunrise
Lifting lota to charway
Ganga on Patal

Lotas never dried
But flow daily
As Ganga Dhaaraa
In Blanchimalayas

The three peaks of La Trinity
Spread their aasana
On Shiva's Trishool
And Chant
The sacred Tri Ninaad
"Om Namah Shivaayaa"

The lotaa is still shining
Handed down by Bhagirathi
Over generations
Rise daily to the heavens
To pour Ganga Dhaaraa
On Shiva Jatta (Maharaj 2004).

In this poem, Raviji refers to the indentured laborers as “Sagar’s children” and likens Blanchisseuse to the Himalayas, creating a cognate – “Blanchimalayas.” The indentured laborers have become part of the story of Ganga’s descent – their ancestors are revived by her presence on earth but the imagery of the *lota* or container which laborers carried to the Caribbean also implies that they aided in her journey. The laborers sacralize the landscape by sneaking in the waters of the Ganga to Trinidad but the country’s landscape reveals its inherent specialness. The three mountain ranges which protect Trinidad from hurricanes, for example, are understood to be the three peaks of Shiva’s *trishool* or trident-like weapon. In a separate conversation with me, Raviji explains that in one his other dreams, he clearly saw the Hindu god Ganesh fitting within the shape of Trinidad. “Like India is the land of Durga,” he explains, “Trinidad is the land of Ganesh.” He sends me a picture of a cast he had made in which the ears, trunk, and belly of Ganesh all make up important landmarks in Trinidad. And Ganesh’s broken tusk? That, of course, is Tobago, the second island which makes the country of Trinidad and Tobago. Hence Trinidad is a scared land, consecrated by the arrival of the indentured laborers, and continually blessed by religious practices of Indo-Trinidadians today.

One way to understand this focus on indentureship, which I argue is foundational to the Indo-Trinidadian identity, is through what Catarina Kinnvall, building on the work on Vamik Volkan, refers to as “chosen trauma.” “A chosen trauma,” she defines,

describes the mental recollection of a calamity that once befell a group’s ancestors, and includes information, fantasized expectations, intense feelings and defenses against unacceptable thought. The term ‘chosen’ does not refer to an instrumentally calculated choice. Rather, it reflects how a large group unconsciously defines its identity by the transgenerational transmission of injured selves infused with the memory of the ancestors’ trauma (Volkan, 1997:48). A chosen trauma is often used to interpret new traumas. Thus, it relies on previously experienced (real or imagined) rage and humiliation associated with victimization in the case of the chosen trauma, which is validated in a new context (Kinnvall 2002: 86).

For Indo-Trinidadians, indentureship is their chosen trauma through which they navigate their social experiences. The trauma of indentureship is aptly illustrated by another Indian Arrival Day play, titled *Takdir*. Based on the work of Shamshu Deen, a genealogist and author who has spent years tracing the family lineages of Indo-Trinidadians, the play tells the true story of a couple separated by indentureship but, by a miraculous twist of fate, eventually reunite on a plantation in Trinidad. Unlike the previously mentioned play, *Jahaji Bhai*, which is often humorous and makes light of the suffering indentured laborers faced, *Takdir* attempts to illustrate the harsh reality of indentureship – the lies and deception Indians encountered, the destruction of the Indian family, the hard work on the plantations, the mistreatment by the overseers, and the abuse of women. The play

is framed by another tale, a grandmother telling the story of her parents to her two granddaughters, one of whom seems to want to deny her “Indianness” by refusing to call her grandmother *aaji*, the *Bhojpuri* word for one’s paternal grandmother.

The embarrassment this girl feels is also expressed by Indo-Guyanese author, Elizabeth Jaikaran, in her article, “The Indo-Caribbean Experience: Now and Then.” Jaikaran writes of the shame associated with not knowing one’s past: “It is a shame that we don’t understand Tamil or know whether we’re from, UP or MP. It is a shame that we’ve developed this hybrid culture, gleaned from traditions all over the world, thus losing the clarity that comes with having a single heritage” (Jaikaran 2015: n.p.). She argues that it is this shame which produces the trauma from which Indo-Caribbeans continue to seek healing:

This is a trauma that our parents have inherited from the first indentured laborers and one that keeps re-emerging, for this is how trauma operates. Its head bobbing up and down amongst the waves, re-appearing to remind you that it is still there. Trauma begins when the first Indian laborers were forced to forget their native tongues, and re-emerges when the Indo-Caribbean were ostracized for not retaining those very dialects. Trauma begins when your colonizers use your ancestral grandmother as a sex slave, and re-emerges generations later when the Indo-Caribbean standard of feminine beauty becomes characterized by how Indian a woman doesn’t look (Jaikaran 2015: n.p.).

For Jaikaran, the effects of indentureship are psychological – it has led Indo-Caribbeans to constantly deny a part of their history and therefore their identity.

Takdir was created to commemorate and celebrate the arrival of the last ship to Trinidad in 1917. Although it may seem odd to use the word “celebrate” to talk about indentureship, the term “celebration” is used by the producer to highlight the triumph of the indentured laborers. For Indo-Trinidadians, the hardships which their ancestors endured deserves to be remembered because, despite their struggles and opposition from the larger society, they were able to obtain success in their new home. Again, it is important to emphasize that Indo-Trinidadians view their ancestors’ arrival in the Caribbean as divine destiny. At one point in the play, as the waters the laborers traveled on became turbulent, the image of Hanuman appears to lead the ship to safety, further underlining the point that their arrival in the Caribbean was no coincidence. At the end of the play, the granddaughter who was hesitant about her identity, enthusiastically embraces her “Indianness,” calling her grandmother *aaji* and requesting more stories about their family’s history. This is how Jaikaran ends her article as well – she dismisses the shame she is supposed to feel to embrace the hybridity of her identity. She writes: “I do not find shame in my double diaspora. To do so—to reject being Indian or of Indo-Caribbean heritage—would be to renounce those who came before me and endured largely untold pain.” In both the narrative of the play and Jaikaran’s article, then, Indo-

Trinidadians overcome their shame by taking greater pride in their hyphenated identity.

By remembering their ancestors, participants in the Gangadhaara festival renew their bonds with each other, and subtly reenact their ancestors' journey across the *Kala Pani* or the black waters. The shared experience works to mark their community as separate from the larger community in a similar way that indentureship bonded Indo-Caribbeans. Christopher Paul Johnson notes that "diasporic religions are memory performances of place, staged in a space; rather than repeat "tradition," they create new identifications and social affiliations because the memory of the homeland is transformed as it is rebuilt, through bricolage, in the spaces of emigration" (Johnson 2007:14). The pilgrimage of Gangadhaara provides an example of this transformation of memories and shifting of homelands. For Indo-Trinidadians, Gangadhaara provides a way for Indo-Trinidadians to claim Trinidad, not India, as their homeland. By remembering the trauma of indentureship and using the memories of their ancestors to anchor their religious practices, the traditions of Hinduism begin to take a slightly different form in the Caribbean. In their celebration of Ganga's descent, they simultaneously pay homage to an ancient river festival while adapting the rituals and pilgrimage to the context of Trinidad.

Conclusion

The materials of the Gangadhaara festival – the *ghaats*, the signage, the yellow sari which holds a biodegradable mud statue of Ganga Ma, the coconut husks, and yellow flowers all work to embody not only Ganga's descent to Trinidad, but they also allow for Indo-Trinidadians to physically manifest their memories of their ancestors. Participating and performing rituals in Gangadhaara help devotees to cope with the transgenerational trauma of indentureship which has become foundational to the Indo-Trinidadian identity. By analyzing the materiality, history, and performance of the festival, we can better understand how Indo-Trinidadians understand their own history and how diasporic groups draw fluid boundaries between themselves and other groups. While scholarship on diasporic religions can tend to emphasize a yearning for the homeland, for Indo-Trinidadians, while India maintains some type of authority, their identity is centered on the narrative of indentureship which allows them to claim Trinidad as the homeland while still preserving a distinctiveness from the larger community. Rather than always looking back at places of origin, then, we might want to pay more attention to the ways in which the current locations of diasporic communities are envisioned as new homelands.

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Book Review

Altman, Michael J. *Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu: American Representations of India, 1721-1893*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. xxii+177. Price: \$34.95 (Hardcover)

Scholars working on Hindu traditions in the United States often train primarily as South Asianists rather than as Americanists, but Michael J. Altman's *Heathen, Hindoo, Hindu: American Representations of India, 1721-1893* shows that there is merit in the other approach as well. Altman engages concepts and categories like "Hindu" and its archaic variants that are of central importance to South Asianists, but does it in a way that is rigorously grounded in American religious history. The result is a study of American Orientalism that will be of interest to anyone whose work engages with Hinduism in the popular imagination or as a critical term in scholarly discourse in the United States.

Altman notes that conversations about Hinduism in the United States often start with Swami Vivekananda's participation in the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893. But Vivekananda was not some thunderbolt that came out of nowhere, jolting conversations about Hindu traditions to life. In fact, rumblings had been heard for over a century. Altman's book is a helpful corrective in that it traces the conversation about Hindu traditions right up to this point, providing a genealogy for the concept of Hinduism as Americans understand it in the process. This genealogy traces the "emergence" of Hinduism, or the way in which Hinduism became "conceivable" to Americans. Part of this process is recognizing that Hinduism is not some sort of stable construct, but rather a much more unstable signifier. "Hinduism" and "the religion of the Hindus" might mean different things, as might the titular Heathen, Hindoo, and Hindu. Moreover, the meanings of each term may change according to context. But in all cases, Altman notes that the emergence of these terms is closely tied to a need for an other against which American identity might be articulated.

The material that will likely be most novel to readers of this journal is found in the first and third chapters. Chapter one deals with the earliest stages of American discourse on Indian religion. This discourse starts with by-and-large uninformed work, such as Cotton Mather's *India Christiana* (1721), which advocated for missionary work among the undifferentiated "Heathens" of India and the East India Marine Society of Salem's collection of material curiosities representing a "mystic East." Things change somewhat in the late 18th Century, when Hannah Adams and Joseph Priestly encounter British Orientalist work and inaugurate the project of comparative religion; both privilege Christianity, although Adams generally presents a more sympathetic view of the "Hindoo system" as a partial revelation. Chapter three is focused on the representations of Hindus in educational material geared

toward children (schoolbooks) and adults (*Harper's Magazine*) toward the mid-19th Century. The focus on education here and especially the situation of Hindus in a hierarchical racial and civilizational taxonomy allows Altman to make a particularly strong case for the invocation of Hindus as an other against which Americans may define themselves.

The cases presented in the second and fourth chapters will likely be more familiar, but Altman offers a fresh perspective. Chapter two deals with Rammohan Roy, but focuses in particular on the role of his thought in debates among conservative Evangelicals and liberal Unitarians in the early 19th Century. Here we see that Roy's work, rather than being engaged on its own terms, is drawn into an American Christian theological debate. The Unitarians projected their own theological project, especially the rejection of the Christian notion of the trinity, onto Roy's *advaita*, viewing him as a champion of a truer, purer, more modern religion than Trinitarian Christianity and going so far to label him a Christian and defending him from conservative Christian critiques. Chapter four deals with Transcendentalism—a topic that has received inadequate attention from scholars of Hindu traditions. Inspired in part by the Unitarian reception of Roy, Emerson and the Transcendentalists who followed him evinced a familiar dichotomy between a material West and a spiritual East, and aspired to integrate the two.

The last two chapters cover topics that are again familiar to South Asianists: the Theosophical Society and the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions. But situated in the narrative that Altman has built over the previous four chapters, they look quite different. The theme of comparison emerges again in theosophy, but as a tool for finding perennial truths. The East/West dichotomy also surfaces in a different light: Western materialism is to be discarded (rather than integrated with Eastern spirituality) in favor of a primordial, universal wisdom that still exists in India. Finally, all the discourses about religion in general and Indian religion in particular come together in Altman's closing chapter on the World's Parliament of Religions. The event itself is a product of more than a century of debate about what it means for religion to be modern, the place of Christianity in the world, the practice of religious comparison, the search for a perennial religious truth, and the dichotomy between the material West and the spiritual East. This is the stage that has been set for Vivekananda in 1893, and his reception at this event must be understood in this context.

Altman ends with an epilogue, much of which is focused on future vectors of research that scholars of American religion might pursue in light of his research. But Altman's work points the way toward fruitful lines of inquiry for South Asianists as well. For example, considering Altman's genealogy, how might the American conception of the term "Hindu" inflect the experience of Hindu Americans when they begin arriving in the mid-1960s? How has it affected the popular reception of postural yoga, neo-Tantra, and Hindu gurus, both among participants and critics?

How might it affect international relations between India and the United States? Certainly, the generic concept of Orientalism has been applied to these questions, but Altman's genealogy offers a set of tools more tailored to the American context as it is deeply rooted in American religious history.

In addition to its significance for South Asianists' research, I was struck by how useful this book would be for teaching a course on Hinduism in the United States. This is partly because especially in the earlier chapters, Altman brings together historical information that would be hard to find elsewhere. Even in the later chapters on the Theosophical Society and the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions, these cases are situated in his genealogical narrative in ways that breathe new meaning into these well-studied cases. Not only would this work add historical depth to classroom discussions, it would also provide students with a good foundation for more nuanced uses of terminology.

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Book Review

Pennington, Brian K. & Allocco, Amy L. (eds.) *Ritual Innovation: Strategic Interventions in South Asian Religion*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018. Pp. xiv + 294. Price: \$ 95.00 (Hardcover).

Pennington and Allocco's edited anthology is a timely production on a well-furrowed theme: ritual's (standing for cultural and religious) immutability and innovation (standing for volatility and malleability or mutability). The contributors adopt a methodology that goes beyond ritual's diachronic (evolutionary) change *a la* the Oxford anthropologist Edward Tylor as well as the functionalist approach to rituals spearheaded by Bronislaw Malinowski and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown who argued for ritual's resilience and stability. At the same time the book under review, while recognizing the theory of ritual change adumbrated by the Chicago anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who found the functionalists relied on well-integrated societies with a stable equilibrium but neglected the "disruptive, disintegrative, and psychologically disturbing aspects of ritual" (3), yet follows Catherine Bell's theory that sees "ritual as a type of social strategy" (4). Viewed thus, the contributors to the *Ritual Innovation* address "the mechanisms, means, and strategies that analysis of change and development in ritual practices makes visible" (5).

Indeed, this anthology, in four parts— "Ritual Innovation and Political Power," "Ritual and the Economies of Caste and Class," "Ritual and the Negotiation of Gender," and "Ritual Innovation in Contemporary Transnational Contexts"—with a total of 14 chapters, is rigorously researched and generally well-written. Three articles on Nepal deal with public festivals such as the coronation ceremony [*rājyābhīṣeka*], the Bhoṭo Jātrā, and the Indra Jātrā illustrating the mutability and adaptability of traditional politico-religious rituals over time. Of the two studies of the holy places of north India, Kedarnath and Uttarakāśī, the former provides a graphic description of the devotees of an aniconic representation of shaft-like (actually not shaft-like but, as per photo of the deity on p. 72, resembling the hump of a bull) form of Śiva *liṅga* being massaged by the eager devotees and pilgrims [*yātrīs*] with clarified butter [*ghee*] for the pleasure of the ithyphallic [*ūrdhaliṅga*] great god [*Mahādevā*] and, by the same token, for the privilege of being intimate with their deity. The latter study, on the other hand, provides a quasi-touristic description of Gaḍvāl [Garhwal] region of the Uttarakhand (literally, "Northern Quarters") State, and the story of a woman popularly called the *bua* (that is, "parental aunt," known personally to the author) transiting from a hapless widow to a popular healer and seer, thus demonstrating the triumph of gender power of enterprise and ingenuity.

The regional background for two studies on ritual innovation comprises the south Indian states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala celebrating the "flower-shower" festival in honor of the popular local "lotus-eyed" goddess at the former state and the forty-

one-day pilgrimage to the shrine of a bachelor god born mythologically of Śiva and Viṣṇu (in the guise of an enchantress [*mohini*]).

The article providing a textual analysis of ritual renunciation and innovation, traditionally believed to be rejected by the anti-ritualist Advaita Vedāntist Śaṅkarācārya, interprets his reformulation of Vedic rituals “in new, dialogic forms of embodied practice” (11). Another article traces specific innovations in two types of ancestor worship recorded in the *Gr̥hyasūtras* (rules of domestic rites)—the *anvaṣṭakya* (seasonal rites) and the *śrāddha* (ceremonial homage to dead ancestors)—that resulted eventually, in the loss of priestly chores by the Brāhmins to the householders albeit their gaining honorific status as guests to be feasted and gifted, thereby retaining their centrality in the ritual life in South Asia (124).

Four articles deal with women’s enterprise and leadership in religious rituals. The article on the women of Ahmedabad belonging to the Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇava sect discusses how the upper-class women have created their personal world for a kind of gender clubbability. Another article deals with the ritual Updhān Fasts performed by Gujarati and Marwari Svetāmbar Mūrtipūjak Jain young and unmarried women of Pune in Maharashtra. This ritual fasting is described as “a kind of temporary nunhood” with a view to using it “as a leverage in their own marriage arrangements by positioning themselves as potential nuns...if dissatisfied with their marriage arrangements” (191). The third article describes the household *pūjā* or *vrata* performed by the upper-class Hindu women in the diaspora (in the present case the Hindu Canadians) and concludes such diasporic ritual acts lead to an intimate connection with the divine, thereby facilitating life events (254). The fourth article discusses the free-wheeling *vratas* [devotional fasts] by Indo-Canadian women performed at home with a view to be intimate with the divine in a private and personal prayer “without any sense...[of] practicing something which has no meaning,” albeit ensuring “some kind of calmness” (253).

The remaining two articles, one dealing with dissemination of the Vedic messages through dance as deritualized but innovative practice and the other describing the traditional marital ritual (in the context of the Tamils of southern India in Canada) customized to accommodate marriage of Hindu and Muslim gay couples as well as polyamorous couples by a Malaysian Tamil academician who moonlights as an openminded Hindu priest, as reported by his coauthor.

All the chapters of Pennington-Allocco anthology are, *mutatis mutandis*, duly researched and deftly written and all of them are squarely based on the belief, clearly articulated in the Introduction, that “Ritual...is inescapably and unmistakably political” (9). While this unabashedly Foucauldian perspective of organized religions and religious rituals is legitimate, it yet appears suspiciously reductionist.

No doubt the readers get detailed *testis oculis* accounts of various rituals, but these are purveyed—with some exceptions apart—more as a variety of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque than as religious festivals having a theological and/or spiritual core. Also, the contents of this anthology do not seem to do justice to the title that promises to deal with South Asia as they exclude a large chunk of regions in India such as West Bengal, the entire Northeastern region, the central part of Uttarpradeś, and Central India. While we read about the rituals of the urban areas, there are no significant discussions of various *vratas* of the rural South Asia nor of those major festivals/rituals such as the Dīpāvalī, Durgā Pūjā, Gaṇeś Pūjā, Holi, or Caḍak Pūjā [Hook-swinging festival], to name a select few.

Another disappointing lacuna of the chapters of this collection is their almost total avoidance of any questioning or critical examination of the various activities and behaviors of the participants of rituals. In total conformity with the Geertzian “thick description,” as it were, of the behaviors of devotees and participants that sometimes, and in one glaring instance, in particular, could be construed by any observer as unnecessarily circumspect at best or conceitedly cautious, at worst, the author appears to be a mere passive observer of activities without venturing any critical analysis. Let me cite the ritual of *ghī māliś* (massage with clarified butter) of the Śiva *liṅga* (stressed as *liṅgaṁ* to Sanskritize as well as divinize it), that is, the phallic representation of Lord Siva (one of the Hindu trinity) (see also Sreenivasrao Vepachedu, “Shiva Linga,” August 1996 vepachedu.org/linga.htm accessed 3/31/2018). The author does acknowledge that this wacky ritual is inexplicable as even the “*tīrth purohita*” [temple priests] are “nervous because they cannot offer textual proof when they are asked for justification” and concludes that this problem is a “marker of the lower traditional and educational status often accorded to mountain residents by visitors from other parts of India” (78). He never probes the origins of this ritual of religious massage nor its implications except that the devotees make a beeline for their turn to have a *darśan* [holy gaze] and a special *pūjā* (75), that is, “massage the *liṅga* vigorously with *ghī* while the *purohit* recited a mantra... “Save me, lord of Parvati! O Shiva, you destroy all *pāpa*” (77). This ritual flies flat over the *Liṅga Purāna*’s description of the *Śivaliṅga* as “*gandha-varṇa-rasahīnaṁ śabda-sparśādi-varjitam*” [devoid of smell, color, taste, hearing or touch] (cited in www.templepurohit.com [accessed 4/3/2018]. Emphasis added). He could have benefitted by a comparison with the ritual clay-bathing [*mṛttikāsnāna*] of a real-life royal’s *membrum virile* [*medhraka*] (21).

The two densely researched and well-crafted studies on the *Bhoto* and on Indra (mentioned earlier), while claiming to have mined the relevant Sanskrit texts as sources yet display remarkable imperviousness to orthography in respect of a major terminology. Both authors use the word *yātrā* [travel, pilgrimage, or open-air opera, or festive celebration] as *jātrā*. In *Devanāgarī* (or *Devnāgrī*) script, both *bargīya* Ja (palatal) and *ontostho* ya (semivowel but often sounding as ja) are listed (see also, in this context, London swaminathan [*sic*], “Mystery of ‘J’ and ‘Y’ in Literature [Article

1697], March 7, 2015 <https://tamilandvedas.com/tag/ja-and-ya-in-indian-languages/> [accessed 2/27/2018]). In respect of the *Bhoto* and Indra ritual festival the semivowel ought to have been the right choice as the palatal renders the word meaningless. Admittedly, both authors use Nepali *Bhāṣā* orthography, but neither appear to use Nepali sources in *Devanāgarī*. They ought to have made their choice of *jātrā* clear in a note. Otherwise, the book under review, purportedly meant to be used as a college text, may mislead the first-time students of Hindu culture and religion.

Nevertheless, this anthology does merit serious scholarly attention for some helpful studies such as the one on coronation ceremony (ritual) of Nepalese royalty that mines the relevant Sanskrit texts and concludes that “The coronation rituals are richly symbolic, connecting the worldly with the transcendental and kingship with the people, landscape, flora, and fauna” (2). Two chapters stand by themselves as they are text-based discourses rather than field-research based accounts. The one on *Advaita Vedānta* deftly and persuasively distinguishes “ritual” from “ritualized practice” with a view to positing that the Śāṅkarite *Advaita* admonitions, especially in the Master’s *Upadeśasāhasrī* [A Thousand Teachings], against Vedic ritualism for the attainment of higher spiritual truths constitute *eo ipso* a ritualized practice (92-93, 104). The other discusses the rituals of *anvaṣṭakya* [seasonal offerings to the ancestors] and *śrāddha* [monthly offerings to the ancestors] based on the *Śrautasūtras* and the *Gr̥hyasūtras*.

The three chapters on the *pūccorital vilā* [flower-shower festival] of Chennai, the “kitty party” of the Puṣṭimārg Vaiṣṇava women of Ahmedabad, and the Updhān fasts of the Gujarati- and Marwari-speaking Śvetāmbar Mūrtipūjak Jain laywomen in Pune, illustrating female concerns and aspirations, contrast conveniently with the chapter on the annual pilgrimage to the mountain temple of Ayappaṇ in Kerala, illustrating male anxieties and aspirations.

Two studies in particular provide interesting information that do not seem to chime with the theme of ritual innovation, though arguably, they constitute scholarly contributions to Hindu religion: the one on the transformation of an obscure village widow known as the *buā* into a resourceful and powerful urban prophet and healer, and the other on a dance performance in Chicago by Indian dancers titled “The Universal Truth” that explicated the messages of the Vedas and the *Bhāgavadgītā* to the audience. The *buā*’s odyssey is neither unique nor exemplary, it being a commonplace phenomenon in India (vide, *inter alia*, the works of Meena Khandelwal, Julia Leslie, Catherine Ojha, Lynn Denton, Anne Feldhaus, and Lisa Hallstrom). The Indian dance show in Chicago was primarily an entertainment and not a heuristic device for education in the Hindu scriptures. The audience watched it as they do in India for aesthetic enjoyment rather than for spiritual enlightenment. Admittedly, the performers purveyed their fare in a novel way, but their primary concern, in my experience, was for publicity and profit. Thus, such a dance

performance may be innovative at best but not a ritual of any kind. To expect a dance to become a medium of learning about the arcana of the *Saṃhitās* is the same as trying to learn about the Hindu epics and other texts through colorful internet cartoons.

The last chapter, the one on the marriage of Hindu and Muslim gay and polyamorous couples, is somewhat problematic to comment upon as it is a *non-sequitur* in view of the materials of the thirteen other chapters. This reviewer would like to confess to his reluctance as he feels like an etic, a cultural outsider, as it were, with respect to the subject matter of this chapter. He is reminded of David Haberman's caution that academic theorizing of rituals by the etic scholars is radically different from the participants as the scholars theorize while the participants act. Hence any attempt to comment on chapter 14 by this reviewer would likely be an exercise in *ignotum per ignotius*.

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