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**Global Reconstruction of Hinduism: A Case Study of Sri Lankan
Tamils in Canada**

Submitted as partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Ph D degree

In

Religious Studies

Faculty of Arts, Department of Classics and Religious Studies

University of Ottawa

2001

Radhika Sekar



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Abstract

The main hypothesis of this dissertation is that the emergence, development, and subsequent spread of modern Hinduism, beginning from the late 18th century India, are products of an ongoing process of globalization. The Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora in Canada is an example of the larger historical process of a globalization of Hinduism. It is therefore argued that any analysis of contemporary socio-religious change must be undertaken within the broader parameters of globalization theory.

The discussion begins with an examination of the social and historical contexts that led to the emergence of Hinduism as a “religion” in the modern sense of the term, and surveys its spread and development in the global diaspora. It is proposed that such factors as population size, ethnic composition, and density, along with socio-political and technological developments at universal and particular levels, each have played prominent roles in the reconstruction of Hinduism in minority situations. This assumption is illustrated with a case study of Sri Lankan Tamils in Canada.

The globalising processes of Sri Lankan Tamils began at the end of the 17th century when Ceylon came under Portuguese rule. The introduction of modern institutions under subsequent Dutch and British rule escalated the process, bringing about socio-religious changes that led to the current political situation. Consequently, Sri Lankan Tamils began arriving in Canada in the 1980s as refugees. The majority settled in Toronto and Montreal where they soon began reconstructing their religious institutions and temples. Three particular religious institutions, the Ganesha Temple in Toronto, the Thirumurukan Temple in Montreal and the Hindu Temple of Ottawa- Carleton, are examined in order to determine how Tamils are reconstructing Hinduism as a minority religion in Canada under global conditions. Results based on field data show the occurrence of “glocalization”, that is the simultaneous globalization of local forms of Hinduism and the localization of global Hinduism.

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Finally, this dissertation is dedicated to all those women, whose dreams of scholastic achievements are held back by cultural inequity.

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Introduction : Globalization and Religion. Some Theoretical Perspectives

In 1995, the Hindu world was regaled by a strange phenomenon. Suddenly and miraculously, or so it seemed, *murthis* (images) of Lord Ganesha began drinking milk!

The miracle first occurred in New Delhi when a Hindu, dreaming that the deity was thirsty, rushed to a nearby temple and held a spoonful of milk up to the temple's *murthi*. To his utter surprise, the milk disappeared. News of the event spread rapidly, sending Hindus in droves to temples everywhere. Apart from those in India, temples in London, Hong Kong, Nairobi, Copenhagen, Toronto, and Edmonton reported large crowds. In most cases, the *murthis* drank the milk that was offered them.

The phenomenon lasted all of five days, after which it stopped just as mysteriously as it had begun. Sceptics attempted a scientific explanation for the phenomenon but the devout insisted that it was a divine miracle sent to renew their faith in the presence of God and divine power (*Hinduism Today* July/August 1998:7).

Apart from the supernatural, the "milk miracle" illustrates several realities of the contemporary life. First, there is the speed and range of modern telecommunication, which broadcast the event almost instantaneously. Second, the presence of Hindu institutions in places as remote (from India) as Denmark and Canada, points to the extent that Hindus have migrated in the past few centuries. There are now permanent minority populations in various parts of the world and, thanks to improved telecommunication and transportation, people in these remote lands are able to maintain constant and direct contact with family and friends at "home" and with counterparts settled in other locations. Purushottama Bilimoria (2000) aptly describes this trans-national phenomenon

as the “long distance communications and interaction transcending the boundaries of nations, states, regional and local isolationism”. Third, the combined effects of advanced communications and trans-nationalism/globalization have considerably reduced social barriers and increased inter-cultural interactions. Major international networks like the CNN telecast the event and even American newspapers like the Washington Post featured it in their columns. Thus, news of the event reached not only Hindus but also a wider global audience and Diaspora institutions like the Abhirami Amman Temple near Copenhagen drew many curious European visitors. Several of them reportedly have since become disciples of the *upasaki* (shaman)¹ who resides there.

The result of this increased interaction between dissimilar groups has its natural outcome in the subsequent exchange and appropriation of ideas and images, sometimes with bizarre results! Lord Ganesha is now ubiquitous as a good-luck deity on par with other lucky charms like a rabbit’s foot, a four-leaf clover, and a leprechaun. Hindu deities have been used to advertise Agfa scanner copiers, and Madonna sporting a *bindi* as she gyrates to Sanskrit mantras. Even the popular television series, *Xena: Warrior Princess*, borrows familiar themes and characters from Hindu mythology. Correspondingly, Hindu swamis now keep in touch with their disciples through e-mail, a great many Diaspora temples have web sites and pizzas have become a staple in the diet of the urban middle-class Indian.

The world is rapidly becoming a global village in such a term that even exceeds Marshall McLuhan’s (1960) expectations. This compression of the world naturally has its effect on social change, the way identities are reconstructed in global society, and

¹ The *upasaki* came to Denmark as a refugee from Sri Lanka and is believed to fall into trance states during which the goddess Abhirami possesses her. It was during such a possession that the goddess asked those

consequently on the role that religion plays in the increasingly complex dynamics of global society. Contributing to an understanding of the latter is the main aim of this dissertation.

The fate of religion under globalization has not received the attention that it deserves, and so far only Peter Beyer (1994) focuses directly on the subject. Religion in traditional societies provides the framework for all social institutions (like politics, economics, and education). Under conditions of modernity however, these activities become detached from the religious matrix and reorganize as separate systems-independent of religion. Religion too is faced with a new context in modern times and globalization adds further constraints (which will be discussed presently) to its situation. However, since religion has not decreased either under modernity or globalization, it is reasonable to assume that it too has adopted new strategies for survival. These strategies are of interest here and are pursued through:

- a) Examining the changes that occur in the role of religion- in this case Hinduism -under globalization; and
- b) Exploring how minorities, in this case the Sri Lankan Hindus - or Tamils as they prefer to be known- in Canada reconstruct their religious institutions under contemporary conditions.

This is not, however, to be yet another essay on adaptive strategies, transplant models, or the assimilation of minorities settling in alien societies. Such a clement approach while valid up to a point, does not account sufficiently for the complexities and mercurial environment of today's global situation. The assignment calls for the multifarious approach of globalization theory.

present to build a temple in Denmark. (*Hinduism Today*, December 1998)

Globalization Theory and Theoretical Perspectives

Erla Zwingle (1999:12) describes the contemporary situation as a “world wide reformation of culture, a tectonic shift of habits and dreams called in the curious argot of social scientists *globalization*”. The term *globalization* has become a fashionable buzzword used to explain everything and anything from bomb blasts in Cape Town to the presence of tropical fruit in Canadian supermarkets. The essence of the theory however is that “increasingly, there is a common social environment shared by all people on earth and this globalization conditions a great deal of what happens here, including how we form theories about it” (Beyer 1994:7). Accordingly, in order to understand contemporary social change we must go beyond local or even national factors and set our analysis in a global context (Beyer 1994:1).

Globalization theory is a reformulation of the modernization discussions generated in the 1960s. The basic modernization thesis is that radical changes over the past few centuries transformed the traditional hierarchically rooted social structures of Western Europe into ones differentiated according to function. Quintessentially post-traditional, these modern institutions undercut all previous criteria based on hereditary status, thereby bringing about a new type of social culture (Giddens 1991:215). Globalization theory extends this position by adding that the subsequent spread of these modern institutions under European colonial expansion to other parts of the world has resulted in the transformation of the entire global culture.

It may be argued that chains of commerce have interconnected the world since the distant past (Abu-Lughod 1989). The difference in the contemporary situation is the growing awareness of the world as a single social system, an organic unit produced by

the interactions between various sub-units (such as ethnics, nation-states, and organisations) that exist within it (Beyer 1994:14). In other words, it is seen not as a mere collection of “particular” cultures interacting and adjusting to each other, but as a new and distinct universe within which forms these “particular” cultures. Such a perspective changes the way we analyse social change. Where earlier modernization theories measure societies by western standards, under which countries of the Third World are seen as latecomers to the world-system, globalization theory treats all societies as equal partners.

There are several variants to the theory, each reflecting the interests and concerns of particular discussants². The ideas of Roland Robertson (1992) and Peter Beyer (1994)

² Three representative discussants are Immanuel Wallerstein, John W Meyer and Niklas Luhmann. Following are their basic arguments as presented by Beyer (1994)

The key argument in Wallerstein's world-systems analysis is that the European world economy created its own geographic divisions- core, peripheral, and semi-peripheral, which conditions how political units are formed. Conflicts between these divisions determine the position of states and ethnic groups in the world-system of labour. These conflicts, although political in form and cultural in expression, are economic in origin. Inherent contradictions in the capitalist mode- chiefly the need to expand in order to maintain profit margins- makes it necessary to reinvest and seek new economic opportunities. Western economic markets therefore are characterized by boom and bust cycles. Ongoing, incomplete processes, they result in open-ended relationships that are either discordant or antithetical. This approach predicts the world in terms of recurrent cycles of crises, which ultimately ends in the world capitalist system succumbing to its own contradictions, or inability to stabilize, at which point an entirely different and more or less defined socialist state would take over.

John Meyer accepts many of Wallerstein's ideas, especially with regard to the structure of the world economy. His world -systems model however gives primacy to the nation-state. World polity operates parallel to world economy and to a significant degree independent of it. Nation-states are thus conditioned by the world economy but also condition it. World polity is linked to the rise and expansion of the Western commodity market, but also operates, to restructure and alter this economy, resulting consequently in the transformation of social life. A central idea of Meyer's theory is the notion of value creation through collective authority. Meyer builds on this macro-phenomenological orientation, by focusing on the modern tendency towards sociological institutionalism. He argues that many features of the contemporary nation-state derive from worldwide models constructed and propagated through global associational processes. These models and the purposes they reflect (e.g. equality, socio-economic progress, human development) are highly rationalized, articulated and often surprisingly “consensual”. In other words, worldwide models specify and legitimate agendas for local action, more so in the post-war years. World or global society is stateless, nevertheless shapes the structures and policies of nation states and other national and local features in all aspects of social life. It is inevitable therefore that the structures of all societies, even those that are ‘newly’ discovered, that come in contact with global society, will institutionalize according to world-wide models. This institutionalization of world-models accounts for structural similarities, amidst the diversity in resources and traditions.

are of relevance for the analysis of religion, while Arjuna Appadurai (1996) offers a useful framework for understanding societal change under global conditions.

Classical sociological theory establishes that in traditional hierarchically stratified systems, membership is ascribed by birth and individual identity is closely connected to the collective. These traditional affixations however are disadvantaged under modern conditions where social institutions are re-organized according to functional differentiation. More options become available to the individual and with it the increased potential to develop more identities. Ethnic and hereditary statuses no longer remain self-evident and a gap develops between personal and collective identities.

According to Robertson, globalization introduces further complications to this shift from *gemeinschaft* to *gesellschaft*. Under global conditions both individuals and societies are set in a worldwide system of societies where they encounter different forms of the *good life* (i.e. ways of constructing national identity) that compels them to re-define identities at both individual and at collective levels in *relation* to other societies in the global arena (Robertson 1992:13). This *relativization*, according to Robertson, encourages cultural homogenisation, which particular groups wishing to preserve their cultural characteristics are forced to resist by accentuating their differences. Thus, on the

Luhmann approaches the problem from the opposite end, providing thereby an alternative to the classical way of looking at things. He focuses on the socio-structural as opposed to the cultural roots of the problem, and perceives society as a social system based on meaningful communication. From this perspective, the contemporary global social system becomes a single society since, empirically, meaningful communications exist and take place around the globe. In a very broad sense, the boundaries of society are reached only when communication ceases to occur. Thus distinct 'societies', emerge only when there is discontinuity in communication between groups of actors. The issue thus changes from one of integration to that of differentiation, which is not how the global society holds together but how it is internally divided. Luhmann characterizes modernity as a quantitative increase in differentiation, (that is an increase in the division of labour, differentiation of functional subsystems and/or a shift in dominance of one subsystem over others). For Luhmann, the shift is from stratified differentiation to the dominance of functional differentiation. Where previously traditional stratified systems (nobility, merchants and peasants) dominated, in modernity under globalization, functional systems such as political, economic, scientific,

one hand, globalization creates a universal context while on the other hand it also encourages diversity. Bourricaud observes that in the compressed environment of globalization groups and individuals are increasingly constrained into facing each other in what he calls an "open ensemble of interlocutors and partners" (cited in Robertson 1992: 101). Under globalization *universal* images percolate down to individual and groups levels, and simultaneously *particular* ideas are spread universally. Thus, Robertson (1992:100) refers to "*the interpenetration of the universalization of particularism and the particularisation of universalism.*"

In the rapidly changing situation of globalization, neither the *universal* nor the *particulars* remain constant and tensions between the two pressures are constantly re-negotiated. The ideational and practical interaction between individual and collective actors on the global scene produce endless possibilities to the way identities may be constructed.

Robertson's perusal of religion's response to globalization is essentially political. The traditionally close tie between religion and particular cultures encourages the formulation of national and personal identities. This trend is illustrated by the rise of fundamentalist religious movements around the world and even when these movements do not organize globally, they arise, according to Robertson in response to *relativising* constraints introduced by globalization.

Peter Beyer (1994) also begins by pointing out the historical closeness between religion and ethno-cultural *particularisms*. He argues that the fate of these (i.e. ethno cultural *particularisms*) will tell us a lot about the fate of religion in a global society.

educational, religious etc. have emerged. The trend from stratified to functional differentiation and the consequent adaptive shift results in globalization (Beyer 1994: 15-41).

Religion flourishes in the hierarchically stratified atmosphere of traditional societies where it generally provides the supporting framework for other institutions such as politics, economics, and education. Under modernity, these social institutions become *dis-embedded* (to use Giddens' [1991] term) from the socio-religious matrix and, faced with a new context, adapt new strategies along functional lines. Thus discharged from its role as the locus of social institutions, religions, or more concretely religious people, are also constrained to adopt new courses.

The re-organisation of religion, according to Beyer occurs in two ways. First, religion attaches itself to culture, and second, it becomes identified with ethnicity. In addition, as Beyer points out, religion is also a specific way of communicating and has the capacity of becoming a locus of an institutional system like politics, law, economics etc. Thus, under global conditions religion may manifest both as a cultural *particularism* identified with particular ethnic groups and as a global *universal*, forming the locus of a set of beliefs and practices. Based on this hypothesis, Beyer advocates that the analyses of religion under globalization proceed along a double track, one following its similarities and identification with group culture and the other its form as an institutional system (Beyer 1994:67).

Although Robertson's analysis of religion is ultimately political, his ideas help us understand the vast and inherent variety that is found amongst minority institutions in Diaspora communities. To take the example that is central to this dissertation, the Tamils are a homogenous group in terms of religion and language. The predominant majorities are *Shaivas* largely from the *vellalar* caste. Ritual practises and beliefs are rooted in the

*Shaiva agamas*³ and they share both an immigration history and a strong commitment to the preservation of the Tamil language. Yet, the institutions that they develop vary from location to location. The Sri Ganesha Temple in Toronto focuses entirely on religious services and more recently on an increasingly political role in the Tamil community of Toronto. The Thirumurukan Temple in Montreal has been developed as a community temple that propagates Tamil culture, and carefully avoids the intrusion of politics. Tamils in Ottawa, on the other hand feel that they are too few to warrant a separate temple. They therefore use the facilities of the Hindu Temple of Ottawa-Carleton, which is a "joint-temple", built by a larger Hindu community. The emphasis of this institution however leans towards the Sanskrit and Vedic traditions rather than the Tamil and agamic, and consequently they are compelled to compromise on many of their practices. However, in Edmonton where Tamils are too few in number, they have united with other South Indians to form a "joint temple". Since their joint venture is with other South Indian groups who share similar cultural traditions, they do not have to concede major practices. Thus, although all groups involved insist that they are practising a particularly universal *Hinduism*, the actual way in which Hinduism is practised is *particularized* at each location.

A main problem in the study of religions, especially Hinduism, has always been the necessity to reconcile what Robert Redfield (1956:42-53) referred to as the *Great Tradition* and the *Little Tradition*. Scholars have assured us that the two were "mutually necessary conditions of each other's existence" (Marriot 1955:191), complexes which are "complementary, each serving a differing religious purpose"(Mandelbaum 1964:11).

³ Agama, that which has "come down". Benjamin Walker defines it as a "tradition or spiritual teaching associated with the *avaidika* or 'non Vedic' doctrines of Hinduism (Volume 2, 1983:10).

The issue is especially complicated in the case of *Hinduism*, which seems to include practices that fall neither under “Traditions” nor can only be classified under a third category of “Tribalism”.

Frykenberg (1989: 29)⁴ who elaborates the problem concludes that unless by “Hindu”, one means nothing more nor less, than “Indian”, there is no such a thing as a religion called “Hinduism”. He points to the foreign origins of the term “Hindu”, (from the Sanskrit *sindhu*),⁵ a derivative of the Persian dialect, that was used in reference to the people who lived along the banks of the great river Indus. Later the term was extended to include the whole sub-continent and, still later under Islamic rule, was used to differentiate the non-Muslim populations from the Muslim. British administrators were the first to use it in the sense of a religious category when faced with the task of classifying the large majority population who were not Muslim, Christian, or Parsi. (It must be pointed out here that the numerous Hindu castes, such as Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs seemed sufficiently similar to these administrators to be included under one heading).

The argument continues by suggesting that European Orientalists applied the term “Hinduism” as a general heading for the study of all Indian religions in the 18th century, (Frykenberg 1989:29). These Orientalists were engaged in the reconstruction of, to use A. L. Basham’s title, *The Wonder That Was India!* In the process, they uncovered deep philosophical traditions rooted in classical Sanskrit texts. Scholars like Sir William

⁴ Also see: Stietencron (1995), Thapar (1989), Fitzgerald (1990 & 1997), Chatterjee (1992).

⁵Stietencron (1995) however recalls Alexander Dow’s explanation of the term being derived from Indu (moon) a reference to the descendants of the lunar race of kings. Also, see P. J Marshall (1970:114).

Jones⁶ translated these texts into English and his translations generally depicted India's past in glorious terms. Subsequently, they were appropriated by natives (most notably Rammohan Roy, Dayananda Saraswati, and Swami Vivekananda) to counter missionary criticisms against Hindu practices and beliefs and out of these discussions *Hinduism* emerged as a single unified system.

Timothy Fitzgerald (1997:91) takes the discussion a step further by arguing that the modern concept of "religion" is itself a Western invention that cannot rightly be applied to Eastern cultures. Thus, according to him, "Hinduism" as a world religion category is a fallacy and the term religion is "virtually useless as a cross-cultural analytical tool".

Gabriela Ferro-Luzzi (1989:187-195) while agreeing that the term Hinduism is both imposed by and based on Western concepts, argues that it is not however necessary to abandon the term altogether. She advocates a polythetic-prototype approach in which concepts need not have a commonality or clear-cut boundaries but may be held together by a network of similarities that overlap and criss-cross as a method of consolidating the inherent diversities.

Beyer's (1994) approach that views religion as manifesting both a universal and a socio-cultural particularism that offers us a further way of looking at the issue. When religion no longer forms the matrix of society, it reorganizes along institutional lines. However, at the same time, it continues in its local versions. The form that the institutional version takes is reified and connections with previous socio-cultural contexts are underplayed. The focus is directed on those elements that can be presented as

⁶ Sir William Jones (1746-1794), brilliant pioneer of Asian studies, and founder of the Asiatic Society, arrived in Calcutta in 1784 to serve as a judge of the supreme court.

universals. Beyer illustrates this thesis by showing how the modern concept of *religion* developed in Western Europe with the rise of the modern nation state during the Reformation and post- Reformation eras. This led to the subsequent differentiation of Christianity and its systemic reconstruction according to modern ideas of what *religion* should be (Beyer 1998b: 151-172). The concept then spread to other parts of the world under European expansion along with other modern institutions. Since the idea originated in Western Europe, Christianity became the model of what a religion should look like. The development of the various Eastern *isms* in the 18th and 19th centuries as a result of European interest and intervention, were thus conditioned by the need to respond to this Abrahamic model.

Beyer's thesis posits that:

central to contemporary notion of "religion" and "religions" has been the gradual development of a differentiated global social system for religion that manifests itself in a plurality of mutually distinguished religions. What counts as religion within this globalized system, and the globalized cultural model for what constitutes a religion, are products of a highly selective historical process (1998b: 151).

In the case of *Hinduism*, the reconstruction began in the 18th century. When the British took over India, they adapted the existing administrative framework of the Mughals to meet their interests. In this, they were no different from their predecessors. The essential difference between them and previous rulers lay in the institutions that they introduced. The Mughals overlaid an imperial civil administration over existing traditional ones, without changing the traditional structures of authority. The modern secular institutions introduced by the British, however, proved intrusive, and gradually undermined the indigenous traditional structures, which had been rooted in religious

custom. The introduction of secular governance and modern organisation transformed these traditional structures into modern functional terms.

In India, the introduction of British modern institutions, such as a judiciary, secular workplace and an economic system, were focused on British rather than local community interests supported by a religious framework, led to the gradual decrease in the traditional authority of religion and its recognition as a separate and distinct form of activity. No longer, the locus of society, religion had to be reconstructed in keeping with the socio-political environment of the times. In this re-construction, Orientalist scholars, certain British policies and missionary criticism played significant roles. Nevertheless, they were secondary to the native appropriation and use of modern ideas. Oriental scholarship with its Christian bias found and helped identify the Vedas, Upanishads, and Epics as the Hindu sacred scriptures, thus furnishing Hinduism with a written authority parallel to the Abrahamic religious traditions. Correspondingly, the English judiciary system helped define Hindu religious law. At all stages, Europeans and the Indian elite combined to further their agendas. The incorporation of Indians into colonial administration along “ethno-religious” lines further intensified the logic of identifying religions along systemic lines.

Despite the efforts of great figures like Swami Vivekananda, Hinduism did not emerge as a single unified system, but has proceeded along various lines. Local religious practices continued, but were re-interpreted according to and conditioned by modern standards of what religion should look like. The reconstruction that took place was as much designed to identify “religion” for the natives as for outsiders. Beyer (1998c:164) describes the process as being like “pouring old wine into new wineskins”. *Hinduism*

emerged as a comprehensive system replete with sacred and authoritative texts, originating in a hoary tradition. Whatever the arguments against the use of the term may be, there is no doubt that for several millions of middle class Hindus, Hinduism today is a social reality.

This sort of analysis is possible for other religions as well, where the challenge for a religious system is to identify and reconstruct itself according to global modalities. Beyer's (1994:7-9) thesis presents us with a novel approach to understanding the emergence of non-western religions. Rather than attempting to fit Hinduism into a western notion of religion, it would be more fruitful to re-direct the discussion towards understanding the social and historical contexts under which Hinduism emerged as a universal system and how the Western concept of "religion" determined the social reality to which we now refer.

While this approach does not bring us any closer to defining Hinduism in any conclusive way, it does eliminate the need to do so by allowing us to view Hinduism as a two-fold phenomenon whose relationship is based on an inter-dependence rather than a hierarchy of forms. In the global arena Hinduism takes on an identifiable systemic structure, similar to other world religions, while at the particular level it remains regional, linguistic, and culturally diverse.

This brings us to yet another aspect peculiar to modern globality: the fluidity of modern "identity". We are now in an age when it is possible not only to hold several positions in the social sphere, for example, be a student, mother, work in an office, *and* be a volunteer of some sort, but to possess several nationalities. The plight of Tinku Varadarajan is a case in point. Varadarajan is a British born Indian journalist, who now

lives in New York, where he is a green card holder, but travels back and forth to India where he is regarded as an NRI (Non Resident Indian). Recently, he was accosted in an elevator in New York by a woman with broad “Germanic” features and asked, non too politely, to “go home to where you came from”, thus throwing poor Varadarjan into a crisis of identity! (*India Abroad*: March 8, 1999:10)

Over the last century or two the frequency and intensity of cultural interaction around the globe has increased to such an extent that identities can become what Appadurai calls “schizophrenic” (Appadurai 1996:29). He argues that the homogenisation argument becomes either a discussion on “Americanisation”, or “commoditization” and very often the two arguments are closely linked. What the two arguments neglect to consider is the “indigenization”, that is the natural assimilation of various trends, ideas, and images that takes place, thereby missing a significant component of modern social interaction (Appadurai 1996:32). He proposes therefore, that contemporary global society be looked at as a “landscape” consisting of five irregular patterns that are fluid and swayed by:

historical, linguistic, and political situated-ness of different sorts of actors, nation-states, multinationals, Diasporas as well as sub national groupings and movements (whether religious, political or economic), and even face to face groups, such as villages, neighbourhoods and families. (Appadurai 1996: 33)

For Appadurai, “ethnoscapes” are produced by the flow of people: tourists, immigrants, refugees, who constitute the shifting landscape. “Technoscape” refers to the technology and communication produced by multinational and national corporations and government agencies. “Financescape” is the rapid flow of money in the currency and stock exchanges. “Mediascapes” are the images of information produced by newspapers,

films, and television. Finally, “ideoscapes” are linked to state or counter-state movement propaganda (Appadurai 1996). Thus, the cultural shape of the landscape will alter with changes in global migration, politics, economics, technology, and social policy. According to Appadurai, we need nothing short of a human version of the “chaos theory” for looking at and predicting global cultural interactions (Appadurai 1996:295). He suggests therefore, not unlike Beyer, that we should focus on “why” these complex overlapping pieces constitute a stable system, rather than on “how” they do so. His model looks beyond the immediate observable circumstances to the historical processes that helped produce these circumstances and can be applied to the study of religion and religious institutions in Diaspora.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to conceptualise globalization theory with a concrete example. By using the Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora in Canada, I intend to show that the reconstruction of minority Hindu institutions is a current stage or moment in the larger historical process of a worldwide construction of Hinduism. The reason that the Tamils are in Canada, the manner in which they reconstruct their religious practises, and the forms and internal structures of their institutions are all products of a continuing process of contemporary globalization. The Tamils are however, not an isolated Hindu group. They are part of a worldwide Hindu Diaspora and therefore, the analysis has to be set within a global context. I begin therefore by discussing the rise of global Hinduism after the 18th century, and survey its subsequent spread under colonialism. The thesis then focuses on the particular situation of the Sri Lankan Tamils, the historical

background leading to their current location, and the reconstruction of a global Tamil Diaspora. I then describe and analyse three particular local religious institutions and the communities who use the facilities of those sites, before synthesizing the whole inquiry.

Methodology

The majority of Tamils arrived in Canada as refugees in the aftermath of the 1984 crisis in Sri Lanka. Within two decades, they have managed to re-establish their social and religious institutions with considerable success. Part of this success is due to a shared culture and language and the fact that “home” is no longer accessible to them. That they arrived with many of their social contacts intact to a political environment that encourages multiculturalism has also facilitated their settlement.

Tamils are however, not the only people whose experiences reflect the global situation. Any one of a number of ethnic groups would have served just as well. They were chosen for this study for various practical reasons. They have a strong presence in Canada. The majority is conveniently concentrated in the Toronto and Montreal areas where they form cohesive groups. They have already established several temples in both cities, which offer the opportunity for comparison. My own ethno-linguistic background is Tamil and I have a working knowledge of the language and an insider’s understanding of Tamil culture.

The study of any cultural group is not easy and no single person can understand or account for every aspect of a group’s behaviour. The personal biases of the researcher—in this case the dispositions imposed by my Indian-ness, Tamil-ness and Brahman upbringing—is bound to tinge the interpretations in some form or other. I have, however, attempted to present the material as objectively as possible and may add that, in the

process, learnt as much about myself, as about the Sri Lankan Tamils. As part of the Hindu community, I also had to be all the more careful to observe the rules of propriety and protocol at these institutions. My continued good standing in the Hindu community demanded this behaviour.

The idea was to understand the reconstruction of Hinduism by Tamils. Therefore, the research was guided by two measures: how do Tamils *do* religion and how do they *think* about it. The study therefore departs from the traditional ways of studying religion in that it does not rely on texts that tell us what they *ought* to be doing and thinking. I rely on oral tradition, the experiences, and explanations of various sources, amongst both the laity and the priesthood, on my own personal observations at the three sites, and most importantly on the accounts of participants themselves. Together these present a picture of how Tamils actually *do* Hinduism at these three sites.

Although the Tamils see themselves primarily as Hindus, they actually practice Tamil *Shaivism*. They believe in the sanctity of Vedic scriptures yet are unfamiliar with classical Sanskrit texts such as the Upanishads, Bhagavad-Gita, or even the Ramayana. On the other hand, they have a high literacy in Tamil far above the literary standards that Hindus from other linguistic regions display in their mother tongues. Since they have all been schooled in Sri Lanka, where religious education and education in their mother tongue is compulsory until the secondary stage, they are well versed in their own Tamil epics and scriptures like the *Periya Puranam* and *Tirukural*. As they are mainly from *Vellalar* castes, the focus of their practises is on agamic ritual centred on images rather than on the Vedic fire rites. Although uneasy with the Great /Little Traditions classification, and the classical/folk distinctions, because of their hierarchical

implications, in the absence of a more suitable system of differentiation I have been constrained to use them. I also use the *vedic/agamic* distinction on occasion.

Along with participant observation, extensive interviews with temple officials, community elders, lay devotees and priests, I also conducted qualitative interviews at each of the three sites based on a questionnaire (see appendix). An equal number of male and female participants, who are over 20 years in age, and, who had spent at least 3 years in Canada, were selected for these interviews.⁷

Although the primary sites were the Sri Ganesha Temple in Toronto, the Thirumurukan in Montreal, and the Hindu Temple of Ottawa-Carleton, I also visited several Tamil temples in other parts of the world. These included the Sri Murukan Temple in London (England), Ganesha and the Kamadchi Amman temples in Hamm (Germany) and also several temples that are recognized as South Indian temples in Durban (South Africa). Tamil migrant workers, who had been brought to South Africa in the early 20th century to work in colonial plantations, built these latter institutions. They provide a useful basis of comparison. There are no Tamil temples in the United States of America but several prominent South Indian temples have emerged in the past two decades of which I visited: the Vallabha Ganapati Temple in New York, Sri Venketsevara Temple in Pittsburg and the Lakshmi Temple in Boston. Besides these, I am also familiar with the great temples of South India.

Literary Sources

The sources of information can be split into four categories: a) theoretical and methodological tools, b) postcolonial deconstruction of Hinduism, c) Hindu Diaspora and

d) data relating to Sri Lankan Tamils. In the first category I relied on the classical texts of sociological /anthropological theory and methods and more specifically on the ideas of Geertz (1963; 1977), Anderson (1981), Mol (1985), Driedger (1989) Reitz(1980) and Giddens (1990). I derived my ideas on globalization theory mainly from Robertson (1992) and Beyer (1994, 1998a;b; c).

Postcolonial deconstruction has become a popular scholarly past time and therefore there are abundant discussions in this area. Sontheimer and Kulke (1989), Thapar (1989), Chakravarthi (1989), Fitzgerald (1990 & 1997), Frykenberg (1989) Prashar (1992) are among the main contributors concerned with Hinduism. The classical works of Sir Percival Spear on Indian history and de Bary's *Sources of Indian Tradition* (1963) are indispensable sources for India's colonial history. .

As far as materials on Hindus in Diaspora are concerned, data is still sketchy, with some parts of the Diaspora more amply covered than others. The settlement of Hindus in Great Britain is well documented in Burghart (1987), which contains the work of such well-known scholars as Kim Knott and David Bowen. Additional sources were Brown (1980), Vertovec (1996; 1993a; b; 1992), Barot (1993), and Ballard (1994).

Steven Vertovec's work on Indians in the Caribbean (1989), and Morton Klass's (1996) on Hindus in Trinidad were useful sources to the understanding of Hindus in the West Indian Diaspora. Two recently published books, both dealing with South Africa, by Pratap Kumar (2000) and Alleyn Diesel with Patrick Maxwell (2000) were very useful. Bhana and Younger's chapters in *Hinduism in Diaspora* (1999) supplemented the data on Africa. For Malaysia, I relied on K.Ramanathan (1999) and D. Mearns (1995).

⁷ Detailed discussion of method in Chapter 5

Purushottama Bilimoria's discussion of "Hindus in Australia" (1999) and unpublished manuscripts that he sent me, were of great help for Australia. For Europe, I have relied primarily on Martin Baumann's survey of Hindus in Europe (1999; 1998; 1995) and Elizabeth Asa Hole's (1999) works on Sweden. I have also been in email contact with a Tamil source in Finland.

In Canada, other than Harold Coward (1999) who focuses on Western Canada and is directed more towards theological concerns, I am not aware of any other published accounts except my own (Sekar 1999). I rely therefore on unpublished manuscripts gathered at various conferences on Hindu Diaspora studies in Toronto and Montreal. For statistical data, however Statistics Canada records are impeccable. For the United States, the work of Fenton (1988), and Richard Brady Williams (1988) were useful additions to my own observations.

Although a great deal is available on Sri Lanka's colonial and modern history, the focus of this literature is largely political and sociological. For information on the colonial period, I relied on Arasaratnam (1994), de Silva (1972; 1991). *Caste in Tamil Culture: the Religious Foundations of Sudra Domination in Tamil Sri Lanka*, by Bryan Pfaffenberger (1982), was the only work that I discovered, that discusses religion in Jaffna in any detail. Christopher McDowell's (1997) socio-political study of Sri Lankan refugees in Switzerland offered some useful statistics and background information on Tamil refugees in Europe. However, the bulk of my data had to be gleaned from Pfaffenberger (1982) and a collection of essays: *Sri Lankan Tamils: Ethnicity and Identity* (1994) edited by Pfaffenberger and Manogaran.

Overview

The material is divided into six chapters:

Chapter 1 addresses the question: *Does Hinduism really exist?* It discusses the emergence and development of Hinduism as a single religious rubric.

Chapter 2 follows the trail of Hindu migration from the 19th century to the current Diaspora in Canada.

Chapter 3 focuses on the Tamils, their origins on the island, the evolution of Tamil identity, Tamil Hinduism, and an overview of the Tamil Diaspora.

Chapter 4 discusses the reconstruction of Hinduism at three temple sites: Sri Ganesha (Toronto), Thirumurukan (Montreal), and the Hindu Temple of Ottawa-Carleton.

Chapter 5 submits the main empirical data gathered for this thesis. It presents the fieldwork data gathered at the three sites.

Chapter 6 synthesizes the inquiry and attempts to put everything in perspective.

Chapter One: “New Clothes for Ancient Gods”; the Invention of Modern Hinduism

The selfhood of India is so capacious. So elastic, that it accommodates 1 billion kinds of differences. It agrees with its billion selves to call all of them “Indian” (Salman Rushdie, 1997:24)

Seventy four percent of India’s population, now estimated at a little over a billion, define themselves as Hindu and a further three million or so are dispersed around the world. Yet, despite these numbers it is almost impossible to define “Hinduism” with any precision.

In 1893, Swami Vivekananda declared to the World Conference of Religions in Chicago: “Three religions have come down to us from times prehistoric: Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and Judaism.” For him the religion of the Hindus was a unitary system strongly rooted in the Vedas (Vivekananda 1990: 185).

Yet, recent postcolonial scholars of Hinduism question the whole idea of *Hinduism*. Frykenberg (1989:29) asserts that: “unless by *Hindu* one means nothing more nor less, than *Indian*, there is no such a thing as a religion called *Hinduism*”. The hundreds of ethnically, ideologically, and ritually distinct communities in India can only be described according to him as a “living mosaic of discontinuities”. Vasudha Dalmia (1996: 20) validates this view by pointing out that: “if at all unity existed in the Hindu religions of the pre-nationalist era, it was within the various denominations or *sampradays* of the Vaisnavas, Saivas, Saktas etc”. She adds that like regional and status stratification, religious differentiation too was and still is a prominent way of social diversification.

The Indian Constitution, however, subsumes all religions that originated in India under the term *Hindu*. Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and any one of the Vedic and post-Vedic

Brahmanical religions or spiritual paths as well as the practitioners of various tribal religions were all included under this one comprehensive term. In 1995, the Supreme Court of India accepted the following description based on Indian nationalist and freedom fighter Bal Gangadhar Tilak's definition as "adequate and satisfactory".

Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence; recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are diverse; and the realisation of the truth that the number of Gods to be worshipped is large, that indeed is the distinguishing feature of the Hindu religion. (*Hinduism Today* 1998: 8)

Modern introductory texts always begin the discussion on Hinduism with the invasion of Aryan tribes from the steppes of central Russia, around 1500 BCE (Hopkin 1971, Klostermeyer 1989, Kinsley 1993). The Aryans were pastoral nomads but also skilled in warfare. Thus they easily subjugated the "dark", "snub nosed" agriculturists – identified with the Dasyus of the Rig-Veda – native to the sub-continent (Hopkin: 1971:10; Griffith 1976: 34, 214). The conquerors then spread east and south into the peninsular, so that by 800 BCE the entire subcontinent had come under the dominant influence of an Aryan civilization. This theory has, however, generated recent controversy with the revisionists, who are out to show that the Vedic civilization was indigenous, while the orthodox insist that India has always been a receptacle for foreign invasion. It is unlikely that we will ever have a conclusive answer to this largely academic question. However, the topic has assumed contemporary political overtones.

The chronological development of Hinduism follows along classic lines that always begin in a Vedic period. Monier Williams (1990:2), an Orientalist of the previous century recognized three stages of development: *Vedism*, *Brahmanism* and *Hinduism* (1990: 2). A hundred years later, David Kinsley (1993) continues to evoke this model. His classification has five stages: a formative period (2500-800 BCE), followed by a

speculative period, (800-400 BCE), the epic and classical periods (400 BCE- 600 C E), during which the bhakti cults became prominent, the medieval era (600-1800), and finally in the Modern/ Current era. Practices not founded in Vedic tradition are denigrated as non-Vedic, non-Brahmannic, populist or folk.

Another obvious problem with this model apart from its “classical” Sanskrit is its gives primacy to Brahman orthodoxy, and denigrates the practices of the majority non Brahman masses.

Post colonial scholars now argue that the term Hinduism was first used by western scholars as a conceptual device for the handling of certain philosophies, religious and theological ideas and that it is was only in the 19th century that the term Hinduism became applied exclusively to the living religions that are based on Epic, Puranic and sectarian Agama and Tantric texts (Frykenberg 1989: 32). The strong influence of neo-Vedantic movements in the late 19th and 20th centuries, as well as the growing awareness of the continuity of certain elements in the tradition had an impact on the scholarly terminology so that by the 20th century, the term Hinduism encompassed all the indigenous religions of India. Distinctions were made between a Vedic religion and Hinduism, and Brahmanism was placed between them. Sanskrit culture was accepted as the classical tradition and other non-Sanskrit elements were explained away as “folk” traditions or local variations that became incorporated into the main classical stream in what Anthropologist M.Srinivas called a Sanskritization process.

Srinivas’s concept of “spread” identified four types of Hinduism. An “All Indian Hinduism,” “Peninsular Hinduism”, “Regional Hinduism” and finally purely “Local Hinduism” (Srinivas1980:214). “All India Hinduism” which he placed at the top of the

list, refers to a classical Hinduism based on Sanskrit texts and Brahman orthodoxy. At the other end of the pole is “Local Hinduism” which refers to folk traditions and elements incorporated from the non-Sanskritic culture indigenous to the local area. Thus as non Sanskrit peoples become influenced by Sanskrit cultures they become incorporated into the system and are “Sanskritized”. This in his view explains the enormous variations found within the system called Hinduism. While agreeing that there are problems with the Sanskritization theory, Gabriela Ferro-Luzzi (1989) advocates a “polythetic-prototype” approach to explain the variations. The polythetic -prototype model does not rely on clear cut boundaries or commonalities. Concepts and practices are held together by a network of similarities that overlap and criss-cross as a method of consolidating the inherent diversities (1989:187-195).

Ferro-Luzzi’ s approach may allow us to retain the term Hinduism but it does not offer any real solutions or tell us why these variations exist at all. On the other hand, Beyer’s suggests that the root of the issue lies in the historical and social context in which contemporary forms of religion emerged.

The concept of religion emerged in 17th century Europe where it was first differentiated as a distinct form of activity and developed as a system. The subsequent spread of this concept under colonialism encouraged the identification and therefore emergence of a number of world religions in different parts of the world. With the introduction of modern institutions by colonial regimes, these religions developed along similar, but not identical, lines as the western European religious system and are now part of a global system for religions. Thus: What counts as religion within this globalizing

system and the globalized cultural model for what constitutes a religion are both the product of a highly selective historical process (1998b: 152).

As mentioned earlier, this model has come under severe criticism in recent decades by postcolonial scholars like Ronald Frykenberg⁸ who argue that it is based entirely on “classical” Sanskrit texts and Brahmannical orthodoxy. The term used by Europeans for the population of the Indian Sub-continent was *gentoo* (Portuguese *gentio* that means heathen), which the British administrators substituted for “Hindoo” without changing its implication.

It is also pointed out that when Orientalist scholars began using the term “Hinduism”, they were not describing a single classical system or culture. The term represented a conceptual device for the handling of certain philosophies, religious and theological ideas (Frykenberg 1989: 32). In the 19th century it was applied only to the living religions based on Epic, Puranic and sectarian Agama and Tantric texts. At first distinctions were made between Vedic religion and Hinduism. Brahmanism was placed between them. The strong influence of neo-Vedantic movements in the late 19th and 20th centuries, however, as well as the growing awareness of the continuity of certain elements in the tradition, had an impact on the scholarly terminology. By the 20th century, according to Frykenberg (1989:13), Hinduism had gradually come to encompass all the religions of India.

The accounts of Megasthenes (3BCE), Chinese travellers Fa-Hsien (4CE) and Hsuan Tsang (7CE), and the Persian traveller Albiruni (15CE) seem to validate this view. They name two major groups, *Brahmanas* and *Sramanas*, whom they refer to as a

⁸ Also see: Shulman (1989), Sontheimer and Kulke (1989), Thapar (1989), Fitzgerald (1990 & 1997), Chatterjee (1992).

category distinct from the common people. There is no mention of a Hindu religion or Hinduism. The actual nature of belief in deity was left ambiguous and the focus of worship was the sacrificial ritual. *Brahmanism* came closest to having a sub-continental identity largely through its ritual and the use of Sanskrit, although it was prevalent among only a smaller section of people (Thapar, 1989: 212).⁹

Convincing as these arguments are, they do not solve any problems but merely create a bigger one. Gabriella Ferro-Luzzi (1989:187-195) agrees that the term *Hinduism* is both imposed by and based on Western concepts, but, does not think it is not necessary to abandon the term altogether. She advocates a polythetic- prototype approach in which concepts need not have a commonality or clear cut boundaries but may be held together by a network of similarities that overlap and criss-cross, as a method of consolidating the inherent diversities. It has been suggested that the term "Hindu Studies" replace "Hinduism", and M. Srinivas (1989:214) used the concept of "spread" in his analysis of Hinduism. He split Hinduism into "All Indian Hinduism," "Peninsular Hinduism", "Regional Hinduism" and finally purely "Local Hinduism". These solutions however still fail to tackle the problem, but merely replace the existing word with different terms. They do not address the issue as to *why* these variations exist in the first place. On the other hand, Beyer's approach helps us unravel the issue by providing us with a new way

⁹ Heinrich Stietencron (1995:68-70) points out that passages in the Puranas and Agamas explicitly refer to Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva as being the same. Also, some temples contain images of both Siva and Vishnu, and various kings are ascribed to have built and endowed temples to very different gods. However he argues that these evidences are not adequate proof, and all too often gives rise to misleading conclusions. He suggests that the textual passages must be interpreted within the wider context of the *tirmurti* concept as part of a cosmological speculation in which Brahma, Vishnu, and Siva are used in terms of the functions they represent in the manifested universe. The texts are actually pointing to a being higher than them. Vaisnava and Shaiva texts make it perfectly clear who is the supreme god by adding a qualifying term when they speak of the supreme- as Parama Shiva in the case of Shaivas and Maha Vishnu in the case of Vaishnavas. The chief god in the rival religion is not denied his existence but is discreetly shown to be inferior by his inclusion as a lesser deity. This technique of subordination also accounts for the presence of

of looking at the problem. According to him the root of the problem lies in the historical and social context in which contemporary forms of religion emerged. The concept of religion emerged in 17th century Europe where it was first differentiated as a distinct form of activity and developed as a system. The subsequent spread of this concept under colonialism encouraged the identification and therefore emergence of a number of world religions in different parts of the world. With the introduction of modern institutions by colonial regimes, these religions developed along similar, but not identical, lines as the western European religious system and are now part of a global system for religions. Thus:

What counts as religion within this globalizing system and the globalized cultural model for what constitutes a religion are both the product of a highly selective historical process (Beyer 1998b: 151)

A brief summary of his argument is as follows: The modern concept of religion and world religions first developed, according to Beyer, within context of the social changes that occurred in Europe during the Reformation and post-Reformation period. The differentiation of specialized institutions for what we call religion, is not, Beyer argues, a novelty of the modern era¹⁰. What is also not new is the idea of religion as a separate form of activity or that there are several ways of “doing” religion. What the modern Western situation added to these traits was the “mutual differentiation of several functionally defined social systems,” like law, polity, economy, science and religion, “at roughly the same time” (Beyer 1998b: 153). With the shift from hierarchical stratification to functional differentiation, religion also is reconstructed and separates from other social

several gods in one temple, and the fact that kings sponsored several gods was in keeping with the royal duties of supporting the *dharma* of ‘all’ his subjects.

¹⁰ He points to the shamans, priests, temples and monastic orders as numerous examples of this phenomena (1998b: 153)

domains while remaining interdependent with them. The fate of religion in this functionally systemic form remains, according to Beyer, uncertain. As with the historical processes of modernization and globalization themselves, “no outcome is either necessary or impossible”(Beyer 1998b: 153).

Beyer then notes that Western Christianity has gone through several phases in its development as a functional system. In this the early Christian movements, particularly the Episcopal and monastic traditions that predated the modernizing centuries, played a significant role by helping to create the social context in which other sub-systems could develop. The church remained relatively independent of the increasingly fractionalized political power, and in the Middle Ages became and remained the only social structure that overarched the whole of Western Europe. Under these circumstances, it was able to enhance its own functional differentiation in a society differentiated by social status. Beyer points to the Greco-Roman intellectual and legal traditions in the monasteries, cathedral schools and eventually universities, the development of canon law that provided the model for secular law, the encouragement of “individual consciousness” through the confessional procedure (Beyer 1998b: 154). It was within this context that, as Beyer observes, the European state system, expansion of the legal system, and the eventual expansion of the capitalist economy and modern sciences emerged. These have all become the dominant systems of modern and now global society. The rising power of the political states and the multi-functionality of the church resulted in a situation that initiated the movement for freedom from ecclesiastical control. The result was Reformation, in which religious institutions gradually lost their previous dominance and multifunctional roles. Religious identity thus became subordinate to its political identity.

It was in this atmosphere that we see the rise of the modern concept of religion and religions. Beyer (1998b:155) notes:

Much as the state became a common political form which could only exist concretely as a plurality of state, so European observers, beginning in the 17th century, began to think of religion as a generic form for which there were a plurality of concrete manifestations: not simply Protestant and Catholic, for these were versions of Christianity; but in the light of the beginning parallel expansion of European power to all corners of the world, also other religions, initially Islam and Judaism and “paganism”; and then in the 18th and 19th centuries other world religions.

He adds that this recognition did not indicate a tolerance of other religions or an acceptance of religious diversity. European religious conflict was predicated on an intolerant “exclusivism” and this conditioned the possibility of seeing other religions as “discrete and mutually exclusive systems of practice and beliefs” (Beyer 1998b: 155). Beyer (1998b:155) stresses that this *reification* (that is conceiving of religion as external) of religion is not only due to internal religious conflicts but is also a result of the development of other systems- like economics, political, educational and so on- that emerged increasingly independent of religion.

With the increasing tendency towards a clear differentiation between religion and politics/law, religious and state identity, in the 19th and 20th centuries, all religious beliefs and practices have become voluntary. The broader secularization of other systems for health, education, art, has led to the even stronger organisation of religion. These two centuries were times of successful European expansion to all parts of the world - the pinnacle of European ascendancy. Colonialism was largely the progressive spread of European based and controlled functional institutions to the rest of the world. Initially imposed on non-Westerners, by the latter half of the 19th century, native cultures who appropriating these institutions and re-interpreting them had begun adopting them to their

own purposes. Most evident is the worldwide appropriation of the nation-state. But, the modern concept of *religion* was also taken over and the putative model was Western Christianity. Beyer stresses however that although Christianity offers the model of what a religion should look like this model was not meekly imitated by non-Christian cultures. It merely conditioned the responses that these cultures made as they re-organized along institutional lines.

In Hinduism's case, its reconstruction began in the 18th century. When the British took over India, they adapted the existing administrative framework of the Mughals to meet their interests. In this they were no different from their predecessors. The essential difference between them and previous rulers lay in the institutions that they introduced. The Mughals overlaid an imperial civil administration over existing traditional ones, without changing the traditional structures of authority. The modern secular institutions introduced by the British, however, proved intrusive, and gradually undermined the indigenous traditional structures, which had been rooted in religious custom. The introduction of secular governance and modern organisation transformed the traditional structures that were previously based on hierarchical statuses ascribed by birth, into modern institutions organized according to function. Religion lost its previous powers of endorsement under these new conditions and had to be reconstructed within the new social context along functional lines.

In India, the differentiation of religion was initiated by the introduction of British modern institutions, that led to the gradual decrease in the traditional authority of religion and consequently to its recognition as a separate and distinct form of activity. No longer,

the locus of society religion had to be reconstructed in keeping with the socio-political environment of the times.

In this re-construction, Oriental scholars, British policies, and missionary criticism played significant roles. They, however, were secondary to the native appropriation and use of modern ideas. Oriental scholarship with its Christian bias, found and helped identify the Vedas, Upanishads and Epics as the Hindu sacred scriptures, thus furnishing Hinduism with a written authority, parallel to the Abrahamic religious traditions. Correspondingly the English judiciary system helped define Hindu religious law. The incorporation of Indians into colonial administration along "ethno-religious" lines further intensified the logic of identifying religions along systemic lines.

Despite the efforts of figures like Swami Vivekananda, Hinduism did not emerge as a single unified system, but has proceeded along various lines. Local religious practices continued, but were re-interpreted according to and conditioned by modern standards of what religion should look like. The reconstruction that took place was as much designed to identify "religion" for the natives as for outsiders. Beyer (1998c: 164) describes the process as to some extent being like "pouring old wine into new wineskins. Hinduism emerged as a comprehensive system replete with sacred and authoritative texts, originating in a hoary tradition. Whatever the arguments against the use of the term may be, there is no doubt that for many millions of middle class Hindus, Hinduism today is a social reality.

I shall now proceed to discuss the historical processes that led to the emergence and development of modern global Hinduism in more detail.

India before the British

When Babur descended into northern India in 1517, he found a weakened region still recovering from the Turkish raids of the 15th century. The Delhi Kingdom had become little more than a chiefdom and prosperity had departed to the more stable kingdoms of Bengal, and the Deccan. He therefore established his Mughal Empire quite easily and began building a civil administrative structure. By the 17th century this administrative framework expanded into the Deccan and parts of South India.

The earliest intermediaries between the Europeans and Indians were Indian merchants who were attracted to the European trading companies in the scattered seacoast settlements. The diary account of Ananda Ranga Pillai (1709–61) indicates that these native merchants pursued traditional occupations in relative indifference to the religious or regional origins of their rulers. Pillai was a chief agent for the French colony of Pondicherry and his diary reveals a total lack of national consciousness or political loyalty to any local native ruler. His hereditary occupation was trade and he entered into a symbiotic relationship with the French. He seems to have ardently supported the empire building ambitions of his sponsor, General Dupleix whose “courage, character, bearing, greatness of mind, and skill in the battle field” he greatly admired and preferred to the rule of the Maratha’s or Muslim potentates then contending for power in South India. It is clear that he regarded Dupleix not as a foreigner but simply as an individual with whom he enjoyed a profitable connection (de Bary 1963: 4).

Percival Spear also comments at some length on this lack of national consciousness (1981:108-110). He argues that British successes in India had as much to do with this lack of national consciousness as with their superior resources and

organisation. There was no concept of the balance-of-power and stable statehood. Instead, there was the tradition of overlord-ship that continued from the ancient system of *Chakravarthi raja* down to the days of the Mughals. Indians always submitted to a leader who made good his claims to supremacy, and when the Mughal Empire fell, local rulers either made a bid for the empire or sought favour from a new supremacy that arose. There was no concept of unity. Every ruler with promise thought of himself as a potential empire builder.

According to Spear, at the time, "the horizontal divisions of caste and the vertical divisions of religion were more important than race" (1981: 110). Although tribalism was important, it rarely deepened into nationalism on account of two factors, caste division and geographical barriers. The Rajputs, for example, remained an aristocracy divided by clan spirit because they could not unite physically or psychically with their neighbours. Some castes like the Nairs and Namudris of Malabar had both race and religion in their favour, but the feeling of caste superiority and separateness prevented a unity that could have led to the emergence of a Malabar Empire (Spear 1981:110).

When in 1761, the Mughal Empire finally collapsed; the English became the dominant power in India. Although they were not responsible for the overthrow of the Mughals, they stepped into their empty political shoes region by region. Until then, India's first prolonged contact with a European power had been with the Portuguese. Vasco da Gama arrived in Malabar in 1448, and within 50 years Portuguese settlements were established in Goa. Large groups of settlers, the *Casados*, had accompanied General Albuquerque (1510). Encouraged to take local wives, they established themselves as landlords, and in larger cities settled as artisans and traders (Harrison 1975:337-338).

However, except for a few conversions among the natives, their presence did not disturb the basic order of Indian society. The Portuguese culture was also inextricably mixed with religion and therefore quite similar to the Indo-Islamic culture that it encountered.

But with the British it was a different story. Their arrival in India in the 18th century coincided with the dominance of a new era in Western civilisation. Changes in Europe had replaced older traditional institutions with modern ones. Unlike the Mughals and the Portuguese who adopted India as their homeland, the primary purpose of British occupancy remained economic. They viewed India as a resource to be exploited to provide wealth for Britain. To this end they adopted the administrative structure left by the Mughals to facilitate their economic purpose, introduced modern systems of communication, a secular work force and English education.

Unlike previous rulers, the British did not impose their religion in India, and their secular institutions were not compulsory. But these institutions proved so intrusive that they could not be avoided. Through English education, Indians were offered an unprecedented opportunity to improve their economic positions without having to abandon their religion. It became simply a matter of career choice, which even the most orthodox could support. But through English education they became exposed to modern ideas that were gradually appropriated and these eventually changed their outlook.

Introduction of a Judiciary System

One of the first innovations that the British introduced was a judiciary system for natives. Early officers of the East India Company were merchants and their early settlements were no more than small pieces of land allotted to them by native rulers. But

with time, these holdings expanded, and the Company found that it was exercising administrative authority over vast areas of land in various parts of the country. With this administrative responsibility came added judicial accountability. To cover Company disputes the Charter of Charles II sanctioned English courts in 1661. This was followed by the Charter of George I in 1726, which authorized courts in the three towns of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta.

The Company was at first silent about their jurisdiction over native inhabitants. It was the natives themselves who began resorting to these courts for settlement of civil disputes. At first these courts were inclined to apply English law to them. By 1772 the number of native plaintiffs had increased to such an extent that it was decided to establish civil and criminal native courts in each district. The civil courts had jurisdiction over all civil disputes involving property, inheritance, marriage, debts, and contracts. The relevance of this plan was that it explicitly maintained the rights of Muslim and Hindu communities to apply their own religious laws in the matters of inheritance, marriage and other religious institutions. It laid the foundation for the differentiation of personal and other matters. Hindu and Muslim religious systems regulated virtually every aspect of human behaviour. So a distinction had to be made between civil cases, which could easily be accommodated under British law, and personal issues that could not (Parasher 1992: 64).

Until then, there had been no sense of an activity separate from religion. Religion provided the framework for all social institutions, be it social, economic or political. Social roles were defined by a hierarchical system based on birth and legitimized by religious sanction. Religion thus was the social order. Previous, Muslim rulers had left

their Hindu subjects free to follow their own social values and had not imposed Islamic law except in certain matters, the logic being that since the king was not a Hindu, he was not obliged to ensure that the Hindu populace, followed their *dharma*.

Since there was no clear difference between civil and personal issues in either Hindu or Muslim religious systems, the British had to create the distinction. This they did on the basis of the English system that divided ecclesiastical and temporal matters. In England matters concerning marriage and divorce, testaments, religious worship, excommunication and other “religious” matters were under the jurisdiction of the Bishop’s courts governed by ecclesiastical law (Prasher 1992: 61-62). Accordingly, native civil courts in India were given jurisdiction over civil disputes involving property, inheritance, marriage, debts, and contracts for their respective religious communities.

The first judges of these courts were mere company administrators with no legal training or knowledge of native laws. They therefore resorted to Muslim *quazis* and Hindu *pundits* to interpret Islamic and Hindu laws. The closest concept to religion in Hindu thought is *dharma* (Frykenberg 1989: 29-49), which Hindus also interpret as law. The term however, has a wide range of connotations, from personal duty to rules of righteousness to cosmic law. According to the classical *caturvarna* (fourfold classification) system, a person’s *dharma* at any given time was based on his class, occupation and stage of life. Each stage had certain specific goals, a householder’s for example being the pursuit of *artha* and *kama*, that is the pursuit of social and material activity. Dharma also included *jati* obligations, personal sacraments and propitiatory rites to ancestors, family and *jati* deities.

The *pundits*, however, considered the extensive *dharmaśāstra* texts to be the best parallel to the ecclesiastical laws of the English. The *dharmaśāstras* describe three sources of *dharma*: the Vedas, the *smritis*, and the *sadācāra* (good customs). The Vedas, or *śruti*, are the revealed texts, while *smṛiti*, best translated as “memory”, is the second source of *dharma* and based on traditions. They encompass the *dharmaśūtras* and *dharmaśāstra* treatises. *Sadācāra* signifies the orientation of religious life toward attaining spiritual merit, and refers to the practices of people who are well versed in the Vedas, and considered virtuous because their conduct conforms to its teachings (Prasher 1992:46-54).

Since not all Vedic statements related to rules of conduct, the rules of *dharma* were further divided into enforceable and unenforceable rules. Even these rules however were insufficient to regulate all aspects of a changing society and the *dharmaśūtras* were written to define and preserve Vedic culture against contrary practices of some segments, probably the native tribes. The *dharmaśūtras* differed from earlier Vedic texts in that they went into greater detail to formulate rules to define social relationships and regulate activities within the social classes or *varṇas*. Prasher states that this may be considered as the beginnings of legislation in the Hindu system, although it was not described or understood by the authors in this way. Over time, the study of *dharma* became important, and came to be studied in special schools, and the treatises so produced were called the *dharmaśāstras* (Prasher 1992: 46-54)

The authors of the *dharmaśāstras* were not just elaborating *śruti*, but were providing rules of conduct for their contemporary society. In doing so they also incorporated some of the local and popular customs not found in the Vedas. An example

of this can be seen in the elaboration of the *caturvarna*, four -fold, classification of society. The conception of this classification is found in the Rig-Veda, and the authors utilised this to incorporate various existing *jatis* into the system. There are only four *varnas*, yet innumerable *jatis* so the authors explained the existence of so many castes as arising from the mixture of castes, and the downgrading of higher castes for not following proper *dharma* (Prasher 1992: 46:54). Thus *Brahmannical* theory provided a hierarchy for the simultaneous existence of autonomous groups. While authors would have been confronted with a variety of customs, their prime purpose was to maintain the fourfold system, and therefore could not have included customs that opposed the *dharma* that they wished to uphold.

It is important to note that there was never any confusion in the minds of Indians as to the human origins of the *dharmasastras*. The treatises themselves were mutable and continually adapted to contemporary situations. Yet the new legal system now had the effect of making them sacrosanct, giving rise to the impression that Hindu law is an immutable expression of divine will. Moreover, it has led to a paradoxical situation where personal laws were made personal only through legislative recognition that they were religious! Decisions as to why some practices, such as *sati*, divorce, were now considered religious and therefore could not be amended, while others that had been equally religious, for example inheritance and adoption, were now rendered non-religious and therefore amenable, were arbitrary and not clearly explained.

The *dharmasastras* also divide the population into a variety of communities determined by location, occupation, and caste, but not by common religious identity. Village authority was represented by the *grama-sangha*, *mahajan* or *pancakula*. That is,

the village committee made up of prominent elders of all castes upheld the customary law that was the *grama-dharma* (Thapar, 1989:221-222). In urban areas, craftsmen formed *srenis* (guilds), which became the nucleus of their communities. These guilds framed their own laws to which even the king had to conform. Thapar observes that, sometimes these *srenis* evolved into *jatis*, becoming endogamous units that united profession and kinship with castes of different creeds. But they maintained their own separate religious identities. The king was obliged in this system to uphold *jati dharma* and the dharma of the territory.

While *jati* is ascribed at birth, it has always been far more flexible and multifaceted than generally portrayed. *Jati* members often pursued other occupations. Some also had multiple occupations.¹¹ Yet, they continued to belong to the *jati* in which they were born and remained subject to its rules, even ostracised for violating *jati dharma*. *Varna* is also set by birth, but represents one's ritual status. It was fixed and could not be changed or upgraded, and defined the boundaries of social interaction. For example, one could work alongside members of a different *jatis* or *varnas*, but this did not necessarily imply that one could accept food or drink from them.

The new judiciary system gradually undermined the traditional authority of the *jatis*. Initially there was some recognition of caste organisation, but people were allowed to appeal decisions made by caste and village councils to ordinary courts, especially when it involved property. Soon questions of assault and rape were also taken up before the magistrate, and fewer and fewer cases were referred to the *grama-sangha* or *jati* elders. The Caste Disabilities Removal Act of 1850 allowed individuals to convert to

other religions without fear of forfeiting their personal property. It also legalized marriages between Brahmans and lower castes. In 1876, the colonial regime passed further legislation that took away the authority of a caste to void marriages or prevent widows from remarrying (Ghurye 1959:270-273),

Sudhir Chandra (1995: 155-175) writes that the British Indian legal system not only dealt a fatal blow to the integrity of the caste system but also introduced a foreign element into how justice was to be dispensed. Whereas previously, cases were settled individually according to the merits of each position, now Hindus had to prove legitimacy based on the authority of a written text. *Dharma* (moral duty) that governed all aspects of human behaviour was becoming less and less a matter of public morality and more and more a matter of personal behaviour. It was replaced in the public domain by secular law. Although customs still influenced ones *dharma* in personal matters the increasing invasiveness of the judiciary was making it increasingly difficult to enforce it. The differentiation of religion as a separate type of activity also encouraged the dichotomy in the two areas of behaviour. Although *dharma* was still considered sacred, it receded along with religion into the background. In addition, Hindu movements like the Brahmo Samaj and the Bombay Prarthana Samaj aimed at “liberating religion” from caste and shifting the focus of religion towards the spirituality of the *Vedas* (Chandra 1995: 285). Caste identity, however, did not disappear all together, and exerts a considerable influence even today. However, it became less and less an integral part of religion and as its public influence receded, there was a growing disregard of caste observances especially amongst the emerging urban educated classes. There was a gradual shift in

¹¹ M. Srinivas in his study of village society found for example that the toddy man not only tapped toddy, but also sold it. Shepherds tended sheep and made blankets and even Brahmans pursued

emphasis from ritual to a personal relationship between god and devotee as the monotheistic concept of god gained increasing acceptance.

Furthermore, with its decline, the traditional role of the temple, which gave form to the caste system, also declined. Temples had always represented the economic and political power of the region through a system of ritual endowments for the distribution of wealth and legitimization of power. In most situations it was the local landlord or wealthy traders who built and supported the temples and temples therefore served as “banks” for exchanging wealth in the broadest sense of the term (Younger 1995:150, Appadurai 1981).

The colonial administrators were quick to realise the significant role that the temple played in the economic network of Hindu communities. Here again the British Government facilitated the rise of a centralised system that led to what Frykenberg (borrowing from Thapar) refers to as “syndicated” Hinduism (1989:35). Orientalist scholars had begun the collection of artefacts, information, and surveys, and in 1817 the State assumed formal responsibility for cataloguing and preserving the “grand legacies of India’s past”(1989:35-36). Under this guise the Government of Madras took over the running of temples, thereby achieving full control of its revenues. To facilitate the process they integrated the religious life of South India by centralising all local institutions into one huge overarching system of legitimization and control, thereby becoming directly responsible for the daily exercise of Hinduism (1989: 45, Appadurai 1981). All ceremonies conducted at temples big or small, ancient or new came under the direct management of the imperial state. Not only did the state take control of the revenues, but it also enforced local customs and practices, streamlining the administration

agriculture(1980:2-3).

and running them with the mercantile and military acumen that was characteristic of their administration. Temples were enlarged and renovated, festivities were organized with British efficiency, and hospitality services were provided for pilgrims (Frykenberg 1989:35).

To facilitate its supervision, the British Government required personnel, both Indian and English, military and civilian, in its service, to attend all festivals. It also commandeered labourers, hired coolies, and to assure the accuracy of its information, supported special schools and employed a great many *dvija* (twice born) officials, who served as *munshis*, *pundits*, *shastris*, *vakils*, and translators. These native scholars, along with many local British authorities established a tradition of learning and scholarship (Frykenberg 1989:36)

Eventually, when the extent of state involvement was discovered, it sent shock waves throughout India and England. Christian missionaries were horrified and formed the Anti-Idolatry Connexion League to lobby against such involvement in violation of the state's "religious neutrality" policy (Frykenberg 1989:37). At the same time liberals in England attacked it on grounds that it amounted to gross interference with native customs and institutions.

Frykenberg notes that, interestingly the natives themselves never attacked the policy until they were goaded into doing so by the virulent anti-Hindu rhetoric of the missionaries. Nevertheless, the Government managed to drag its feet and by the time the Non-Interference by Government Act was past in 1863, 30 years had elapsed. By then a new "Hindu" public had begun to emerge, consisting of non-official, professional elite who knew their rights and were able to effectively use litigation to further consolidate a

modern *Hinduism*. All sorts of issues pertaining to the *Hindu* religion, or *Hinduism* as it was now becoming referred to were settled through courts.

In 1927, the Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowments Board and Administrative Department was created. By then, Hinduism had developed into a religion based on classical Sanskrit texts and Brahmannical orthodoxy. As Frykenberg wryly observes, all that remained to develop was the concept of “majority” and “majority community” for it to become consolidated in the popular mind (1989: 38). The emerging public media accomplished this task.

The introduction of modern technology was also having an effect on the way Hindu's were practising their religion. Improved transportation, a network of roads and railways connecting various centres, improved facilities for travellers, encouraged Hindus to go on pilgrimage beyond their local areas, even to remote spots that were previously unapproachable. Hindus developed an awareness of life beyond their local orbits, bringing previously distant groups and sects into closer proximity. An upshot of this was the general expansion of the Hindu horizon.

Influence and Interaction with Colonial Scholarship and Missionary Critique

Prior to the Orientalists, no serious attempts had been made to study Indian history. But India was not unknown to Europe. In the post- Renaissance period, knowledge of India grew with the visits of merchants, ambassadors and missionaries from various parts of Europe to the sub-continent. The accounts of visitors like Sir Thomas Roe (1615-19 spent in India) and Francois Bernier in 1668 became the basic source of information on India for the Europeans. Dryden's popular drama *Aurengzebe*

(1675) was based on images re-enforced by the translated narratives of the two French scholars Tavernier and Bernier (Wilhelm & Rawlinson 1975:472). European travellers usually took the same view about “Gentoos” that the Muslims did, viewing them as degraded and superstitious. A Dutchman named Abraham Roger translated the works of Hindi poet Bhartihari into English but it excited little interest (Wilhelm 1975: 472).

Warren Hastings initiated the first serious study in the 18th century primarily to familiarize the officers of the East India Company with the customs of natives under its governance. But, the growing British expansion soon made it obvious that specialists were needed to codify and systematize these legal systems. This brought a new class of administrators to India, men of learning like Sir William Jones who became keenly interested in the culture of the sub-continent. They began to study the classical languages and the culture of the people they governed with a new curiosity. This interest led to the birth of the study of Indology with the founding of the Asiatic Society in 1784.

The significant discovery of the Orientalists was the relationship between Sanskrit and certain Indo European languages. India’s ancient past became seen as a lost wing of early European culture (Thapar 1978:2). They painstakingly pieced together India’s past, from passing references in texts both religious and secular, from a few dramas, engravings on rocks and pillars, and the records of foreign travellers, like the Greeks, Chinese pilgrims and the Arab traveller Albiruni (15th century). In their enthusiasm, the Orientalists tended to glorify India’s past. Whether to avoid offending the *brahman pundits* on whom they relied, or for lack of interest, the scholarship tended to gloss over the unpleasant aspects of Indian culture (Chakravarthi 1989:40). In 1785 Charles Wilkins published a translation of the Bhagavad Gita, and a few years later Jones published his

famous version of the *Code of Manu*. This was followed in 1789 his translation of Kalidasa's¹² masterpiece *Shakuntalam*, which greatly impressed the Western world. (Wilhelm & Rawlinson 1975: 473).

The next step in the reconstruction of India's "glorious past" was its transformation into an "Aryan past". In this, the German philologist, Friedrich Max Muller, (1823-1900), more than anyone else, was responsible. From his research in comparative philology, Muller focused on the term *arya* (noble), used in common Indian parlance, and extended it to apply to the unknown people who "spoke the assumed Indo-European original language common to all members of this language group" (Chakravarthi 1989: 42). Later emphasis shifted from language to race, and these Aryans were depicted as the "true ancestors" of the Indians. Muller then established the connection between these Aryans, who in their primitive glory had composed the Vedas, with the Aryans who originated in the steppes of central Russia.

Under Muller, the term Aryan acquired such a range of normative connotations that it left a permanent impress upon the collective consciousness of the upper strata of Indian society. The core of Muller's work was the compilation of the full text of the Vedas, which he considered the Bible of the Aryans- the "only natural basis of Indian history" (Chakravarthi 1989: 44). It was according to him the root and source of the religion, law and philosophy of India.

The first important history of India however did not come from the Orientalists. In 1817 John Mill published his *History of India*. For Mill the value of culture lay in the degree to which it contributed to the furtherance of rationalism and individualism (Chakravarthi 1989: 44). He found the Hindu civilisation seriously wanting in both these

¹² Kalidasa was a Sanskrit dramatist who lived sometime between 350-600 CE.

categories. Awareness of India's "glorious" past through Oriental scholarship was thus countered by an equally strong negative perception of the "barbaric side" of Hindu practices especially pertaining to women. Methodically gathering data to show that the Hindu civilisation had been crude from the very beginning he focused on the barbaric practises of Hindus especially pertaining to women. Such views were encouraged by administrators like Macaulay and Bentinck who held that the "effeminacy of Hindu men" made them unfit to rule themselves. By thus denigrating the natives and certifying them as a frail, cowardly, soft-bodied race, they justified British Rule on grounds of moral superiority.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Indian spirit had been crushed by colonialism and her self esteem was at its lowest ever. The researches and writings of European scholars in the nineteenth century therefore proved a valuable tool to the attempts of native writers in their efforts to boost morale. The theory of shared roots that hinged on the antiquity of Sanskrit, gave cultural nationalists a sense of "national identity" suggesting too that Indians shared a common ancestry with their rulers. Reformers and later nationalists adeptly used both these components to their purpose.

The "Aryan factor" was also employed to inspire renewed vigour in a defeated people that had been branded effete. A nation wide movement began, using heroes from legend and epic, reminding Indians that they were joint inheritors of a glorious past. A spate of writings emerged in the nineteenth century that popularised legendary heroes from the past. Aryan became synonymous with *Kshatriya*, and *Kshatriya* values of chivalry. Furthermore, it brought all high caste Hindus together under a shared ancestry, which promoted for the first time a sense of nationhood.

Spear (1981) divides the emergence of Indian institutions from this point on into two streams: the secular that moved towards nationhood and self-rule and on the other that focused on reconstructing the religion. Reactions to missionary attack on Hindu practices generated varied reactions amongst English educated Hindus. Some saw truth in some of the accusations especially pertaining to practices like *sati* and realised the need for reform. Others rejected their Hindu heritage and became the Anglicised Indians that Macaulay intended them to become. A few converted to Christianity, while others clung stubbornly to orthodoxy.

Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833) distinguished between the virtues and errors of both systems, and while challenging Hindu orthodoxy also vigorously defended Hinduism against Christian criticism. A Bengali *Brahman*, fluent in English, Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit, and well read in both Hindu and Christian scripture, Roy was instrumental in convincing the British to abolish the practice of *sati*. In his campaign he had to convince not only the British government but also ultra orthodox Hindus who opposed reform.

Interestingly, he sought validation in scripture, adopting the British strategy of marshalling *shastric* texts to show that *sati* was not a required practice. In a pamphlet titled *A Conference between an Advocate for and an Opponent to the Practice of Sati* (1815) he set out to prove that none of the prescriptive texts made *sati* compulsory. Resorting to the neutrality of the Upanishads, which he claimed made no distinction between female and male spirituality. While there was doubt that *pativrata* (devotion to husband) was the ideal of womanhood according to *shastra*, referring to Orientalist reference to the learned women sages of the Vedas; Gargi and Maitreyi, he argued that

women in ancient India were educated and encouraged in pursuing the highest spiritual potential. The significance of Roy's handling of this issue, was his use of the *shastras* as authoritative texts parallel to the Bible or Koran, which reflects the extent to which the idea had already become appropriated and applied as sacred law (Chakravarthi: 1989:33).

In his response to missionary attacks on idolatry he singled out from the Vedas, those passages that came closest to the doctrine of monotheism to prove that Hindus too believed in a single God. Fellow Hindus who were grappling with what they now saw as the "superstition" of their system eagerly appropriated these ideas. Furthermore, in recovering those portions that focused on faith in a Supreme Being, he attempted to prove that idolatry was an excrescence, and not an essential part of Hindu religion (de Bary 1963:21).

While Roy attempted to reconcile eastern and western perspectives, Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) the founder of the Arya Samaj, vigorously rejected everything Western (ibid: 76). A forceful speaker and prolific writer he undertook to revive the ancient religion of the Aryans, which he considered the most "authentic". He rejected idol worship, polytheism and all texts that came everything after the Rig Veda- the *shastras*, *puranas*, fought superstition, child marriage and advocated women's education, a single national language and the study of Sanskrit.

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) represented a third response. Brought up by a rational father, and a traditional mother, Vivekananda faced many of the dilemmas that plagued the average English-educated Indian of his time. His English education made him familiar with the works of western philosophers like John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, David Hume, and George W.F. Hegel, and he never fully reconciled to the idea

of idolatry. However, the influence of his mother prevented him from rejecting it outright. So he reinterpreted it in a way that brought it in harmony with modern ideas by arguing that even the *shastras* describe idol worship as a useful tool, the lowest of all forms of worship, meant for people who had difficulty grasping the abstract concept of a formless divinity. "The idol conjures up the mental idea and vice versa, and is therefore useful to those who need it" (Vivekananda 1990:214).

Spear noted that none of these organisations triggered a mass movement. The *Brahmos* were too "eclectic", the Arya Samaj was too "regionally temperamental" and the Ramakrishna Mission (founded by Swami Vivekananda), became too "absorbed in the individual"! (Spear 1981:165). Nevertheless, the transformation of Indian society was in process and these movements reflect the direction in which it was moving. At first changes were limited to a very small circle, but the introduction of English education and the invention of the printing press among other things, ensured their wider dispersion.

Introduction of English Education and Modern Technology

No single act of British policy has had a more lasting influence on the evolution of modern India than the introduction of English education. When English replaced Persian as the language of government business and the higher courts. As Spear states: "at a stroke therefore its knowledge became necessary for all who would have relations with the government" (1981:162). The East India Company had sponsored Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit studies. But, when the British became the paramount power in India, these languages lost their public appeal. Indians themselves began to realise that knowledge of English was essential. Missionary schools had already been established at the primary level and these were now extended to secondary and matriculation levels.

In 1834 Thomas Babington Macaulay introduced a secular English education, arguing that it was in the best interest of Indians to learn English: He announced:

In India, English is spoken by the ruling class. It is spoken by the higher class of natives at the seats of government. It is likely to become the language of commerce throughout the seas of the East. It is the language of two great European communities that are arising, the one in the south of Africa, the other in Australia, communities which are every year becoming more important and more closely connected to the Indian empire. Whether we look at the intrinsic value of our literature, or at the particular situation of this country, we shall see that the strongest reason to think that, of all foreign tongues, the English tongue is that which would be most useful to our native subjects (cited in de Bary 1963: 46).

The Hindu College (Calcutta) had already been established in 1816 and an older elite were gradually being replaced by a new class of English educated elite who, influenced by the secular spirit of English education gradually dropped their traditional attachments and embraced western ideas. Some of the more affluent Indians even sent their sons abroad to schools like Eaton and Harrow and later Oxford and Cambridge. What was lacking in the early days, however, was a social class that could act as a carrier of the new ideas. When English education was introduced, it generated just such a new middle class of English educated Indians around governmental activity and other professions such as teachers, lawyers, doctors, and technicians who became the carriers of western knowledge and the modern institutions that came with it.

The ideas that this new English educated middle class imbibed from English literature were attitudes of nationalism, civil liberties and constitutional self-government.

Spear notes:

No one could be around the Englishman at the time or read Shakespeare (prescribed reading in college) without catching the infection of nationalism. In addition, the new class was prone to it, as it were, because of an emotional void created by the increasing scepticism towards traditional cults (1981:166).

In the past the arrogance of the ruler had been accepted as natural and British pride had been accepted on the same basis. However, these attitudes did not agree with the new ideas of equality and democratic rights. The new class began to feel inferior, not as clients to patrons but as “Indians to Europeans” (Spear 1981:167). The discovery of Orientalist reconstruction of their “glorious past” was a great morale booster and came at an opportune time.

The period of the late 19th century and early 20th century was one of lively encounters between religious leaders, nationalists and their western counterparts (Metcalf 1992:230). The middle class now possessed a common language and a common attitude. They could therefore take on an all-India view in a way that was not possible to any other middle class Indian in previous generations. Its cohesion was encouraged as much by nationalist leaders as with the government which they now began seeing as “foreign”. The government policy of granting concessions according to group representation further encouraged them to re-define themselves. With the colonial expropriation of civic institutions, only religious or domestic sites were available for the re-working of these communities. Associations were formed and spokesmen emerged to define matters of doctrine, worship, and customs that set the limits of their groups. The printing press greatly facilitated their efforts and much of the debate was carried out in the printed media. The polemic created a new arena in Indian social life and the new type of leadership that understood and utilised British institutions.

There is little doubt that the presentation of Hinduism as a unitary system based on *vedantic* philosophy was the vision of an educated elite, mainly from Bengal. But this ideal gained wider appeal and support from expanding middle classes who were drawn into the struggle for national freedom. The Orientalists had already undertaken the translation of the “holy” scriptures. Thanks to the printing press, these were now freely available to lay Hindus who would previously not have had access to them. Religious

figures like Swami Vivekananda published prolifically in English and addressed the English educated class on a variety of topics both religious and social. The idea of nationhood and national unity had already taken root and was a preoccupation of both religious and political leaders of the time. This preoccupation is reflected in Vivekananda's address to a meeting of students in Madras in 1872:

The problems of India are more complicated than those of any other country. Here are a people of diverse races speaking a conglomeration of languages and following customs of utmost diversity. The one common ground we have is our sound traditions, our religions. There must be the recognition of one religion throughout the length and breadth of this land...the unification of religion therefore is the first step in the building up of future India. The dualists, the qualified monists, monists, Saivas, Vaisnavas etc. must give up all their little quarrels and differences which are really condemned by our scriptures and forbidden by our forefathers...The future of India depends entirely upon all its people working together with one will. Power is gained only through the concentrated will of a group of people (Vivekananda1990: 60-61,63.).

The very assumption of a unified religion called *Hinduism* as a rarefied unity was the product of colonial history. But as Chakravarti (1989:29) argues, it was not just a case of Orientalists constructing a religion for Hindus. Hindus were not passive beneficiaries of Western civilisation. They did not function within a political vacuum, but actively collaborated in the process, consciously selecting particular elements from the embryonic data that validated their own political and social needs and concerns. In their early excitement of discovery, Orientalists presented an exaggerated view of an India of "past glory" rooted in an Aryan heritage. Evangelists and administrators had a vested

interest in justifying colonialism by presenting the barbaric side of India. Nationalists were engaged in creating a new self-image intended to re-vitalise and unite a diverse people towards nationhood and independence. Along with this new national consciousness was constructed “brick by brick” a modern religious system called Hinduism (Chakravathi 1989: 28).

The early emphasis on Vedic sources had its impact not only on a scholarly terminology of the times but on the interpreters of religion as well. Thapar (1989) describes the model that emerged as a “brahman-dominated religion” which included a variety of sects in a somewhat paternalistic pattern. It was within this framework that Hindu leaders like Roy, Dayananda, Vivekananda, and later Gandhi (1869-1948), Radhakrishnan (1888- 1975) and millions of English educated middle class Hindus learned to view their religion. The idea is now so deeply embedded in the consciousness of the middle class Hindu, that any suggestions contradicting its reality would be futile.

The Constitution of India follows the trend set by British administrators and subsumes under the term “Hindu,” the followers of all religions, which originated on Indian soil. According to this document,

Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, all those who adhere to anyone of the Vedic and post-Vedic Brahmannical religions or spiritual paths to perfection, as well as all practitioners of folk religions and various tribal religions are assembled under the one comprehensive term “Hindu” (Dalmia 1996:20).

Dalmia observes that few urban Indians or Hindus would doubt this unchanging essence of their religion, which is regarded as going back in a mono-linear process to the ancient Aryans and the sacred Vedas. Such a view is based on tradition- a construction that she states is neither fictitious nor entirely true, but constantly being selected and modified in response to social change and to visions of the future (1996: 21).

There is another side to this story of the reconstruction of Hinduism and this concerns the several million Hindus settled in a worldwide Diaspora that was also a direct product of colonialism and globalization. The focus from hereon, is on *Hinduism's avatar* in these alien lands, where it has developed as a minority religion. Under such circumstances religion loses its insouciance and practises become a matter of conscious effort. Beliefs are examined, reinterpreted, and editorialised according to current and local norms of acceptance. Hindus are brought into sharper awareness of the cultural diversities in their ranks as they find themselves grouped together once again by "outsiders" who are unaware of the differences. The reflexivity, increased proximity with other Hindu groups as well as other minority groups, the minority situation itself, and the socio-political atmosphere of the alien environment determine how religion will be reconstructed in the new situation.

The study of Hindu Diaspora has largely been carried out through comparative studies that view these communities as "transplant communities"(Fenton 1988, Narayanan 1992). Communities are generally examined within the context of their location and changes are referred to and compared to an "older tradition". Such an approach emphasises the preservation or propagation of group heritage despite its alien relocation, focusing on the degree to which assimilation has occurred. Such models are based on the assumption that the "heritage location" remains fixed and unchanged, and overlooks the special circumstances of modern globality. Using the globalization perspective discussed in the introduction, the next chapter will discuss the development of Hinduism on alien soil.

Chapter Two: “Lord Murukan comes to Washington”: An Overview of the Global Diaspora

Our country was founded on a great tradition of religious liberty, which helps to unite our nation of diverse faiths and creeds and gives us a common ground for tolerance, healing, and understanding. This celebration is a reminder of the ways that God's blessings can be used to fulfil our obligation to help others. – President Clinton. (*Hinduism Today*, 1999:28).

Between May 29 and 31, 1999, over 4000 Hindus converged upon the quiet suburb of Lanham, Maryland. They had come to install Lord Murukan in his newest residence. Described as the first “traditional temple dedicated to the deity in the USA”, the temple stands on 11.5 acres of prime land adjacent to the Washington Beltway (*Hinduism Today* 1999: 28). Built in the Chola style, the beautifully adorned *murthi* of Lord Murukan stands an imposing 7.25 feet tall. He is flanked on either side by equally magnificent *murthis* of his consorts Valli and Devayani (*Hinduism Today* 1999:28). President Clinton congratulated the Hindu community on their “beautiful new temple” which he wrote, “stands as evidence of the faith and vision of your community, that enduring faith binds members of a congregation together in fellowship and prayer. The Sri Murugan Temple¹³ is the latest addition to the increasing numbers of *gopurams* and *shikaras* that dot the landscape in what is now referred to as the Hindu Diaspora.

The word “Diaspora” (Greek dispersion) was constructed to describe the identity of the Jews who were dispersed from Palestine. They roamed for several centuries homeless “ in the amorphous collective of a domineering secular Western borrowed space, bidding time for when a return to the promised homeland could become a reality and not just a passing dream”(Bilimoria 2000:3). In this original context, the term is associated with enslavement, exile, and loneliness, insinuating therefore a people

compelled to scatter as a result of traumatic historical event, but compulsion or forced migration is not always an issue in Diasporas, therefore the term does not appropriately describe all peoples who have been dislocated from their real or imagined homeland base. It becomes even more obscured when applied to what Robin Cohen terms the “Diaspora of a Diaspora,”(1992) and Bachu (1985) refers to as “twice migrants”. Yet, the word is applied equally to groups who migrate voluntarily as well as those who seek asylum from political tensions in their homelands. More recently, it includes any ethnic, linguistic, national, or religious minorities settled outside their homeland in a culturally different society. Not entirely satisfied with the term I nevertheless got stuck with it for want of a more suitable alternative.

In this chapter, I survey the Hindu Diaspora, discussing its emergence and the institutional reconstruction of Hinduism in its various locations and through the course of history. I wish to point out that the reconstruction of Hinduism is not a mere mechanical transplant of culture from a fixed home environment to some other stable situation. Rather, an ongoing process is fluid and elusive. Under globalization, both “Home” and “home away from Home” environments are in a constant state of flux, assailed as it were by the relentless dynamics of the global political economy. These assaults influence the reconstruction of Hinduism at both venues, and as conditions for growth so utterly different and varied, the Hindu Diaspora is not the same thing in any two places. Apart from external pressures created by the global condition, internal pressures related to such demographic factors as population size, density, composition, and inter-group relationships are also crucial to the form institutions take at any given point.

¹³ The temple committee spell it this way.

The Hindu Diaspora

Hindu Diaspora refers to the approximately 10 million Hindus now living outside India. Bilimoria (1995) classifies these into two groups: those born in the modern state of India before migrating to other places; and those of ethnic Indian origin whose forbears left India during the colonial era, but who have over the generations retained linguistic and cultural links with historic India.

Migration has always been the key element in the spread of Hinduism. Until the 1974 Africanization policies in Uganda and Kenya and the more recent civil war in Sri Lanka, these migrations have been motivated by the needs of an increasingly global economy. The first wave of South Asian mass migration occurred in the late 19th century. With the British abolition of slavery in 1807, then plantations in the New World were faced with acute labour shortages. India then became the main supplier of manpower to the British Empire and migrant labourers were transported to work on plantations in the Far East, Africa, and the West Indies. Later, as the administrative machinery expanded, they were needed for construction of the railway and telegraph systems that were essential to link the trade centres of the British Empire, and to serve in administrative and security positions. Another smaller group of businessmen- referred to as "passenger Indians"- saw the economic benefits of migrating and ventured out as independent traders or professionals.

The transportation of migrant labour came to halt in the early 20th century due to political reasons that varied according to location and which I will discuss separately when I discuss each area individually. The mass migration of South Asians resumed, however, in the 1960s, but this time both the destination and the status of the groups who

emigrated were vastly different. Apart from an initial period when labour was required for service industries in the United Kingdom, this time it was students, professionals, and quasi-professionals, who migrated, and they travelled towards the industrial centres of the Western world. The formation of South Asian Diaspora and more specifically the Hindu Diaspora must therefore be looked at in two phases: dispersion under colonialism and the current dispersion.

Migration History

Hindu migration is by no means a modern phenomenon. The spread of Indic cultures across Southeast Asia dates back to the fifth century CE. However, little is known of the dispersion of these early settlements. Suvarnabhumi (Sumatra) is mentioned in the *Jataka* tales and *Mahavamsa*, and the oldest positive evidence of Indian presence in the Far East is the Sanskrit inscription of Vocanh, in Annam, dating back to 200 CE (Coomaraswamy 1965:156). The greater part of the area that was accessible by sea had been more or less “Hinduized”, and rulers with Indian names ending in the patronymic *varman* and using an Indian alphabet established kingdoms in Campa, Cambodia, Sumatra and even Borneo. Apart from these archaeological evidences, little else is known of the dispersion of these early settlements.

A thriving Indian community of Hindu and Muslim traders was established in 1402 CE under the Malacca Sultanate (1402-1511) in Malaysia. The Hindus, called Chitties by the local population, had their ties with India severed over the years and intermarried locally. Subsequently, they adopted Malay customs such as language, dress, and cuisine, but have clung tenaciously to their Shaivism, which still sets them apart from

the Malays (Mearns 1995:27).

Dispersion under colonialism

With mounting pressure from religious groups and liberals in England, Britain finally abolished the slave trade in 1807, and slavery in 1833. This brought on a severe shortage of labour on plantations across the world. Some emancipated slaves continued to work under the same conditions as their forebears but for a nominal wage, but large numbers of freed slaves in the Caribbean areas of Trinidad, Jamaica and British Guiana, moved away from the plantations. Determined to maintain profits, estate owners sought alternative sources of cheap labour. They re-instituted the indentured labour system that had preceded slavery, and workers were sought, initially in Portugal, China, and Africa. Ultimately South Asia- that is India- became the primary supplier of “coolies” (indentured labourers) to plantations in the West Indies, Fiji, and South Africa.

The clerical staffs were mainly middle class, Tamils, Sri Lankans, Malayalis, Goans, Punjabis or Bengalis. Sikhs and Ghurkhas were employed in the British army or police services. However, the bulk of Indians who emigrated under colonialism were indentured labourers from the lower castes. Mauritius received the first indentured Indians in 1834, British Guiana (now Guyana) in 1838, Trinidad in 1845, South Africa in 1860, Dutch Guiana (now Surinam) in 1873, Fiji in 1879, and East Africa in 1896 (Vertovec 1989:160).

“Hindoo” migrant workers were also recruited to Canada and Australia in the early 20th century. The first batch of “Hindoos” who arrived in Canada in 1904 was actually a group of Sikh Jats. They met with intense local hostility, so much so that

tough regulations were introduced that put an end to Indian immigration by 1909 (Johnston 1984:5-6).¹⁴ In 1915, immigration rules were relaxed to allow the repatriation of families. However, very few families came, and the majority of Indian immigrants returned to India. The handful that did stay drifted towards farming, the lumber industry, or the warmer climes of California. In 1920, Census records show a total East Indian population of 1700 (Johnston 1984:7).

Immigration to Australia was also very sporadic and scattered. The first group to arrive consisted of tribal folk from the Chotanagpur region. Subsequent shipments included, Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims from Sindh, Punjab, and the Frontier Provinces. In 1901 the Immigration Restriction Act, which heralded the “white Australia policy” effectively put a stop to further Indian immigration. In 1911, records show 3698 “Hindoos” in Australia, the majority of whom, according to Bilimoria, were Hindu. However, they were scattered over the continent and therefore did not develop a sense of community. Most returned to India upon retirement and the few who stayed on, married local white or aboriginal women (Bilimoria 1998; 2000).

A few Sikhs migrated into California, but the United States imposed similar restriction on Oriental immigration to that of Canada. An immigration Act of 1917 restricted Indian immigration and in 1924 an amendment was passed that barred them all together. The estimated population of Indian immigrants to the United States before 1964 was around 6,400, almost all Sikh (Williams 1988:14). Since hardly any Hindus immigrated to Canada and America during this period, no Hindu Diaspora emerged.

¹⁴ New regulations made it mandatory that all Indian immigrants travel to Canada by continuous passage. At the same time, shipping companies were discretely instructed not to provide the service. In addition, the disembarking fee was raised to \$250 for Indians and \$500 for Chinese, which they had to have with them before landing (Johnstone 1984: 9).

Hindu immigrants to the other parts of the Empire were in a sense more fortunate. In many instances, local governments wished to establish stable labour forces and offered attractive incentives to encourage Indian immigrants to settle permanently. In Trinidad, crown lands were made available to them and in Africa; they were guaranteed that their religion would not be interfered with (Kumar 2000:2).

Labourers were recruited from two ports, Madras in the south and Calcutta in the east. Migrants from Madras were mainly Tamil and Telugu and those from Calcutta were Hindi speaking. Pratap Kumar suggests that although the ship lists for Madras in the initial period of immigration (1860- 1877) listed immigrants under the generic name “gentoo”, it would be safe to assume that they were mainly lower castes, since it is unlikely that South Indian *Brahmans* and higher castes would involve themselves in menial labour. He also notes that lists from Calcutta gave caste details, but often caste names do not match the family names, implying either error or mobility in terms of caste. A similar situation seems to have occurred in Malaysia, and it is suggested that it may be an indication that in the absence of priests, these persons took on that function. This would explain how a person listed as from the Vanniya caste, would “acquire” the *Brahman* surname Iyer (Ramanathan 1997). Surendra Bhana (1997), however, observes, that the Natal Government had instructed their agents not to send *Brahmans*, who were considered “poor workers”. There was also a fear that they would assume leadership and polarize Hindu action. The few who did manage to “sneak through” were from the north Indian sub-caste of Maharaj.

Seventy five percent of immigrants opted to stay on in Africa when the terms of their indentureship expired. By 1910, the total Indian population in what is now South

Africa was 150,000 strong. Once freed, the Indians took up farming, other occupations, and trade. The merchant class that consisted mainly of Gujaratis, the majority of whom were Muslim, had already set up businesses. Once freed, some labourers moved to the urban areas and soon a large Indian population was established in Natal. The merchant class began moving into the urban areas and their economic interests clashed with the colonists. Anti-Indian feelings became conspicuous and in 1875, legislation to repatriate migrants was passed. Those who elected to stay faced penalties of 3 pounds, and an annual poll tax of 1 pound per person. Rules in the Cape Colony and the Transvaal were not so oppressive. It is not possible to go into the full political details of this period here and, to cut a long and convoluted story short, when the Union of South Africa was founded in 1911 Indian immigration was halted. The question then became one of expatriation rather than repatriation and it was only in 1961 that Indians in South Africa were granted citizenship (Motwani 1989: 15-33).

The majority of immigrants who went to Malaysia and other regions in South East Asia were from South India. K. Ramanathan (1999:81) estimates that Indians make up 8% of Malaysia's 20 million population. Of these, 82% is Hindu and of these 80% are Tamils who follow Tamil Shaivism. He suggests that the majority were from low pariah castes, although several members of the prosperous Chettiar caste also travelled to Malaysia in pursuit of trade and to set up banking. Only 8% of the total Hindu population of the Malaysian peninsula are North Indian; nevertheless, they form a cohesive community. North Indians generally came to serve in the civil service or police force, and stayed on as shop owners, traders, and security guards. They settled mostly in

the urban areas, and consisted of four linguistic groups: Punjabis, Gujaratis, Sindhis, and Bengalis.

Between 1845 and 1917, over 40,000 Indians came to Trinidad. Migration of indentured Indians to Trinidad was similar to the pattern of migration to Africa, but here they were recruited mainly from Calcutta. The majorities therefore were from the rural areas of Bhojpur (Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Bengal). The few Tamils, or “Madrassis” as they were called, were from the urban vicinity of Madras. Migration from this area was terminated in 1870 as estate owners complained of their “filthy habits and troublesome nature”(Klass 1991:161). Since the “Madrassis” were few in number, they more or less assimilated with the black population, although the worship of the goddess Mari Amman persists.¹⁵

The fact of common disembarkation in Calcutta did not mean that the north Indians were a homogenous group. Steven Vertovec lists eight main languages: Bengali, Punjabi, Hindi, Bihari, Oriya, Gujarati, Telugu, and Tamil, besides a number of regional dialects. From this “Babel”, a common lingua franca was evolved called “plantation Hindi”, which has Bhojpuri as its base (1989: 9). Today’s Trinidadian Hindi that survives among the older generation is the resultant creolised Bhojpuri.

Immigrants to the Caribbean also opted to settle in the new country. Towards the end of the century, Crown lands were made available to them for lease or purchase. Many availed themselves of this opportunity and settled here with their families. By maintaining strict rules of endogamy, they were able to remain a distinct community (Deen 1994:8). Eventually, through their successful shift into independent cane farming,

Indians in Trinidad became an important component of the island's economic structure by the turn of the century (Vertovec 1989:161).

Turning now to the "passenger Indians" who emigrated to East Africa and the Far East, they consisted mainly of *bania* (trading) castes and professionals. The Gujarati majorities went to Africa and Chettiars from Tamil Nadu to South East Asia. There were also Sindhi and Punjabi traders in these groups.

In the 1880's the British took over present day, Uganda and Kenya and employment opportunities opened for Indians familiar with the workings of the British colonial administration. Consequently, families from many different parts of the west coast of India went to East Africa. By the turn of the century, significant numbers of Goan Christians, Bohra Muslims, Jains, and Gujarati's were employed in East Africa. Just before the end of the century, the British changed the ethnic mix by bringing in Punjabi labourers to work on the coastal railway up to Lake Victoria. While most of the first wave of labourers went back, Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus from Punjab and Gujarat recognised the economic opportunities of settling in East Africa and stayed on. English educated Tamils, Malayalees, Goans, and Bengalis, travelled abroad as petty administrators in Empire services. Sikhs and Ghurkhas mostly served in the British army or colonial police (Younger 2000:368).

Post-colonial Dispersion

Between 1939 and 1945, the transportation of "coolies" came to a complete halt all over the world as the world plunged into World War II. By its end, there had been a

¹⁵ According to Paul Younger, 'Madrassis' practice their cultic religion in semi-secrecy, and priestesses officiate as mediums, often go into trances and become possessed by various deities. (Oral presentation at

gradual shift in social ideology and European powers were forced by growing native pressures to relinquish their Empires. Human loss in Europe during the war years had produced acute labour shortages in Europe and once again, Third World met these manpower needs of the global economy. This time, however, the migration was towards the industrial centres in the western world and these émigrés were vastly different from the previous unskilled, uneducated, rural migrants of the previous dispersion. These were English educated middle class professionals and quasi-professionals. Britain and Holland were the only exceptions to this.

In the 1950's, acute labour shortages and an open system of immigration from Commonwealth countries encouraged a first wave of immigrants from India and the Caribbean to work in British factories and its health and transport industries. By the end of the 1950s, there were approximately 70,000 Indians in Britain. The 1962 Commonwealth Immigration Act restricted entry of Asians who did not hold British passports and entry was further controlled in 1968 with the passing of the grand-parental clause, intended to disenfranchise East African Indians holding British passports. However, with the Africanization policies in East Africa, which reached its peak in Uganda in 1972, when General Idi Amin ordered all South Asians holding British passports to quit the country, Britain was obliged to accept them as refugees. Of approximately 307,000 Hindus living in Britain in 1977, 70% were Gujarati in origin, 15% Punjabi and the remaining 15% from other regions of India (Burghart 1987:8, also Thomas 1993:182). In addition, in Britain, there is a large "forgotten" population of Hindus from the Caribbean (Vertovec 1993a).

Immigrants from India also headed towards the other English speaking countries of the Western world. Canada's immigration policies remained restrictive to non-European immigration until 1951. At that time in the interest of forging good relationships with the newly independent Commonwealth countries of South Asia, it accepted a token number of non-sponsored immigrants. Annual quotas of 150, 100 and 50 were set up for India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka respectively but these extended only to elderly parents, spouses, and children under 21. In 1957, immigration policies were relaxed a bit but it was only in 1967 under the new atmosphere of multiculturalism that South Asians were placed on the same footing with other immigrants.

These second groups of immigrants from India were not only different from the earlier Sikh migrants, but also fared considerably better. Although they were not homogenous, they all had high levels of English education and training and had arrived in response to the Canadian economy's need for professionals and quasi professionals.

By the end of the 1970's, the economy's needs changed once more and the need was in the high tech industry and for skilled labour. Consequently, immigration rules changed to reflect this shift. By then too, political upheavals in Uganda and Kenya had brought large groups of Indians as refugees from East Africa to Canadian shores. Large Gujarati and Punjabi populations who were not necessarily English educated, now dominated the ethnic composition, which so far had been diverse. 1984 brought a further group of refugees this time from Sri Lanka, and again transformed the ethnic mix.

Census data indicate that the Hindu population increased from 69,505 in 1981 to 157,010 in 1991. The religion question was not asked in 1996, however the overall South Asian population increased to 670,590 in 1996 from a previous 250,000 in 1991. Data of

1996 also indicate the linguistic dominance of Punjabi (although the majority of these are Sikhs), Tamil, Gujarati, and Hindi. The Tamils are mostly from Sri Lanka, and the Gujarati and Punjabi groups consist of “twice migrated” immigrants from East Africa or Britain.

Table 1. Population by Selected Religions for 1981 and 1991

Population	1981	1991
Canada	24,083,495	26,994,045
Islam	98,165	253,260
Sikh	67,715	147,440
Hindu	69,505	157,010

Derived from Table 3, Population by Selected Religions for Canada 1981-1991 20% Sample (Statistics Canada, 1993)

In the United States, the Immigration and Nationality Reform Act in 1965 established an annual quota of immigrant visa allocation. Indian Asians came under the 3rd and 6th categories designated by the State Department, which includes members of professions of exceptional ability, and workers in skilled and unskilled occupations where there was a labour shortage (Williams 1988:16). Of the 46,000 employed immigrants from India in 1974, 16,000 were engineers, 4,000 were scientists, and 7,000 were physicians or surgeons. By 1985, however, the recession of 1980's led to layoffs in high paying jobs and restrictions in various professional fields. The records of the United States Bureau of Census for 1998 shows a population of 815,447 immigrants from India and a further 10,970 from Sri Lanka (United States Census Bureau 1998: Table 3). Since the United States Census Bureau does not collect data according to religion, the Hindu population of the United States can only be approximated.¹⁶

¹⁶ I approached several American scholars through the RISA website and they estimated the Hindu population to be anywhere between 850,000 to 1 million.

According to Williams (1988:33), the primary linguistic groups amongst the Asian Indians, as they are referred to in the United States, are Gujarati, Punjabi, Telugu, Bengali, and Malayalee. He does not however, specify the basis of this assumption and in my opinion except for the large Gujarati and Punjabi presence, the Telugu, Bengali, and Malayalam groups are probably the most energetic, and therefore most prominent. In the United States linguistic associations like the Bengali, Malayalee, and Telugu, Marathi, associations hold highly publicized (in Indian newspapers and magazine) conferences each year in various cities. These conferences focus on social and cultural connections and issues. Religion is not a major focus of these associations, but other organisations like the Vaishya Association and Veerashaiva Association are based either on caste or religious affiliations.

The 1960s also saw a shift in Australia's discriminatory immigration policies. The 1954 census recorded 2,647 Indians. At the end of World War II, immigration to Australia was open only for those with over 50% European blood, thus only Anglo Indians or Eurasians emigrated there. A slightly relaxed reunification arrangements and temporary visa regulations also allowed merchants, travellers and students. It was not until the 1970s that the "White Australia" policy was officially dropped. Like Canada, Australia's pressing need was for qualified professionals. By 1971, 22,930 Indians had immigrated there and this figure doubled by 1981 to 41,730 and by 1986 the number had risen to 50,000. By 1991, the India-born population was at 61,602. Indians also came to Australia from other neighbouring countries in South Asia, such as Malaysia, Singapore, Fiji, Mauritius, Hong Kong, South, and East Africa. Sri Lankan refugees began arriving

since 1984, and 1996 figures showed a total South Asian population of 1 million. Bilimoria estimates that 31% of these are Hindu (Bilimoria, 1998).

The story of Hindu immigration to Europe varies according to country and has been well documented by Baumann (1998)(See Table 2). A brief overview suggests that the Netherlands received immigrants from its former Dutch colony Surinam as early as the 1950's and more recently from Sri Lanka. Indian professionals were drawn to Germany since the 1950's, and Germany too accepted large numbers of Sri Lankan refugees in the 1980s. France's Diaspora was initiated by refugees from Uganda but now has a large Sri Lankan Tamil population. Sweden too accepted refugees from Uganda in 1972 and Sri Lankan after 1984. Other Nordic and East European countries had negligibly small populations of Hindus, which have increased with the arrival of Sri Lankan Tamils.

Table 2. Asian Hindus in European Countries in late 1990's

Country	Hindu Population	Total Population
Great Britain	550,000	58 Million
France	50,000	58 Million
Germany	70,000	82 Million
Netherlands	100,000	15 Million
Switzerland	30,000	7 Million
Denmark	8000	5 Million
Portugal	8000	10 Million
Finland	500	5 Million
Sweden	5000	9 Million

Martin Baumann 1998:9)

Hinduism in Diaspora

In order to preserve their distinct traditions in minority situations, Hindus develop institutions to serve social, educational, and sometimes even political needs. Each of these institutions reflects the contemporary needs and aspirations of the groups who support it. Consequently, therefore as the needs and interests of the population change, institutions too change to meet the new requirements. Thus, the character of institutions depends on such factors as size, ethnic composition, migration history, socio-economic factors, and current global and local legal political environments.

The data is once again discussed under two headings: colonial Diaspora, which looks at Hinduism established by groups who migrated under colonialism and post-colonial Diaspora, that includes the reconstruction Hinduism by those who migrated since the 1960s. The earlier group of Hindus were essentially uneducated and from the lower castes/classes. They would therefore have had little knowledge of the intellectual Hinduism depicted in neo-Vedantic philosophy. Few *Brahmans* emigrated in this period and those that did were from the Mahajan caste. The religious practices of these immigrants therefore would have been a variety of socio-particular forms.

Initially, Hindus who migrated since the 1960's were middle class English educated professionals from a variety of socio-cultural backgrounds. However they would have shared similar urban life-styles and been raised in the postcolonial atmosphere of nationalism. Their worldview therefore would have been very different from those of previous groups who were rural, illiterate migrant workers.

Hindu immigrants under colonialism were of three classes. The predominant groups were migrant labourers from rural areas, predominantly from the lower classes. They were recruited in homogenous groups, consisting sometimes of whole villages,

drawn mainly from two linguistic areas, the Hindi speaking Bhojpuri area of Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Bengal, and from the Tamil and Telugu speaking areas of the Southern India. The second group consisted of the *bania*'s (moneylenders), and traders from Gujarat and Tamil Nadu, and a third group of urban civil servants from Punjab and other backgrounds. Temples built by them reflect their class, linguistic and ethnic particularities.

In South Africa, all four linguistic groups were apparent. Gujaratis and Punjabis settled mainly in the urban areas. The Gujaratis were middle class traders or professionals, while the Punjabis were traders, administrators, or migrant workers recruited to work on the railway lines. Tamil and Telugu labourers assimilated into a dominant Tamil culture and were recruited for the plantations and to build railroads. Based on this ethnic mix, according to Bhana (1999) and Kumar (2000), temples in South Africa reflect two distinct styles: South Indian and North Indian.

Temples began to emerge within a few years of the arrival of the migrants. Local plantation owners, wishing to stabilize a steady source of labour, encouraged their labourers to build temples. They even provided them with land and permitted religious processions against complaints from local white settlers. Kumar notes that the Ganesha Temple at Mt. Edgecombe was partially financed by the Campbell family (2000:16). The earliest temples built by South Indian labourers between 1864 and 1885 were on plantations in Natal. These were mainly to the goddess Mari Amman, a popular deity of the lower class Tamils who has now become incorporated into the classical South Indian Tamil religious form, or "universalized", as *Shakti*.

Later, between 1880 and 1885, temples sprang up in the midlands along the railway tracks. Here according to Kumar (1996), one finds temples to three deities: Shiva, Vishnu, and Amman, reflecting an ethnic mix of North Indian and South Indian labourers. Most often all three deities were enclosed in one complex. Primary deities were installed in a central sanctum while others were arranged in separate smaller shrines. In smaller temples, the *murthis* were merely placed around a central deity. According to Kumar's informant, this arrangement was designed to maintain unity and accommodate all the Hindu groups. From the account of the manner in which rituals are practised at these temples (which Kumar details at some length), one forms a picture of a blend between *Brahmanical* and non-*Brahmanical* traditions.

Vedic gods were given precedence, and non-Vedic gods were placed at the periphery of the compounds. Later, distinction between North Indian and South Indian styles seems to recede with the mixing of styles and requirements of local conditions (Bhana 1997:4). As so few *Brahmans* went to Africa, priests were drawn from non-*Brahmans*. Temple priests in South Africa are still mainly from non-*Brahman* castes and it is only in the last two decades that temple worship patterns are increasingly "*brahminized*" and priests are being brought over from Sri Lanka or India (Kumar 2000). Major festivals were postponed to weekends to accommodate the global week. Thus, the Mari Amman Temple at Isipingo holds its festival at Easter weekend for the convenience of its devotees. Hindus of all backgrounds still participate in the festivals at this temple and at other goddess temples. Rituals like the *kavati* and fire walking that are particular to South Indian are now popular with all Hindus here.

Bhana (1997:3) prefers to classify the temples of South Africa into traditional and modern. By traditional he refers to the older temples that were built “relatively free from structural modernism”, by which he means the incorporation of modern features like skylights, carpeting, that he observes in temples built more recently. It also refers to temples built by immigrants before the arrival of the Arya Samaj missionaries in the early 20th century. These temples therefore reflect regional diversities in the deities, *vahanas* (vehicles), altars, antechambers, domes, and the appellation attached to the deities. Gujarati and Punjabi groups in urban areas built modern temples. Reflecting the reform influences of the Arya Samaj Organization, these do not have the same profusion of idols and *vahanas*.

After 1905, the South African Diaspora seems to have been visited by several religious leaders from India who travelled around the country giving lectures on Hinduism. Some were sectarian *swamis* who preached the philosophies of their particular sect, but most were from the Arya Samaj. These visiting missionaries brought the Vedic traditions to Hindus in South Africa whose practices had until then been largely non-Vedic and non-*Brahmanical*. The Hindu Young Men’s Association was established in Pietermaritzburg to achieve the “unification of all different linguistic and denominational groups of Hindus” (Kumar 2000:22). In 1908, the Veda Dharma Sabha was established and later in 1912 the Hindu Maha Sabha, that began actively campaigning for institutionalized services and Hindu religious holidays. Currently the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, (ISKCON) and Sai Baba Fellowship (SBF) have gained popularity in South Africa and are involved in various charitable

projects. The SBF organizes weekly *satsangs* (gatherings) in different parts of Durban. They have also established schools at various locations.

The Gujarati community dominated in East Africa, and according to Younger, they modelled their temples after the Ismaili hospitality centres. Each caste would set up guesthouse accommodation for travelling members. Temples were attached to these centres so that these travelling businessmen could perform their *samaskars*. These eventually developed into major community centres for each caste. Younger notes that they are not built according to scriptural specifications and resemble “fortresses” with high walls all around. The flower and fruit offerings that are an integral part of temple worship in India are absent and instead, large *hundis* (cash boxes) are placed in front of the deity for cash offerings (1999). In some caste temples, the focus of worship is on saint deities like Jellaram and his wife Viraben. There are also temples of the Swaminarayan sect and orthodox *Sanatana* temples where traditional deities are established jointly with the Punjabi Hindus.

In Malaysia, the Tamil culture dominates. According to Ramanathan, two types of temples emerged here. Plantation and railway depot temples are non-agamic and dedicated to non-Vedic goddesses such as Mari Amman, Mundakani Amman, and the god Aiyanar. Agamic temples most commonly to Lord Murukan are built by Chettiar communities and can be found in the urban areas. Sri Lankan Tamils also migrated to the area in colonial service. They supported temples to Lord Murukan and were noted for providing religious and Tamil language instruction to children. Both Chettiar and Sri Lankan temples follow Shaiva Agamas and recruit *Brahman* priests from India or Sri Lanka. Apart from these structures, there are also numerous roadside shrines to spirits,

where séances are held (Ramanathan 1999). During the Islamic revival in the 1970s, several Hindu temples were attacked and Hindus were harassed. However, the positive outcome of this was seen in the revival of Hinduism. Muslim dedication to Islam inspired a similar ardour amongst Hindus towards their own religion and many rituals were revived. Temples were renovated and reconstructed in larger grander styles. Swamis were invited from India and Hinduism was put on a *Brahmanic* track.

Modifications in religious observances began for immigrants bound for the West Indies even before they left Indian shores. Migrants were housed together in holding depots at the ports, sometimes for weeks before their journey began. These accommodations did not consider caste or religion. The journey itself took 100 days and was treacherous and disease ridden. Under those circumstances, it was difficult to maintain purity standards and the immigrants learned to get on with each other. Deep friendships were forged, even between Hindus and Muslims. These relationships were maintained not only after the voyage ended, but known as *jahazi-bhai* (ship brothers), continued even into subsequent generations, and their progeny still treat each other as fictive kin (Deen 1994:167).

Klass (1991) and Vertovec (1989) both detail the religious life of Hindus in the Caribbean. Here, Indians built *kutis* or small temples and, following an important Bihari tradition, these functioned as shelters for wandering *sadhus* (ascetics). Migrant life centred on the celebration of calendrical rites. A *panchayat* system (village council) was established within their communities. In the West Indies, the Hindus were the targets of aggressive conversion tactics by Christian missionaries. Converts received additional educational and employment benefits and many Hindus converted nominally for benefit.

However, they clung privately to their Hinduism. In this atmosphere, *Brahmans* filled the religious void and were well respected. The bulk of religious activity probably revolved around individual *pundits*, who initially catered to people from their own region. Gradually, as homogeneity increased, these *pundits* “cast a wider net”, gaining clients from other parts and traditions of India. The *pundits* obviously propagated higher caste teachings to appreciative lower caste migrants. Vaishnava *bhakti* was prominent and this became the core of Trinidad Hinduism.

Hindu missionaries visited the islands periodically and inspired Hindus into organizing themselves into national religious bodies in the early 1930's (Klass: 1991:38). Two rival organisations were established, the Sanatana Dharma Association and the Sanatana Dharma Board of Control. Each claimed to represent orthodox Hinduism. Divided more by personalities than ideology, the two shared a common antagonist -the reformist Arya Samaj. In 1952, the two orthodox organisations united as the Sanatana Dharma Maha Sabha. Thirty-one Hindu schools were built and a single *pundits parisad* was created to co-ordinate and standardise practices. The effect was Christian like congregations of Hindus attending temples built like churches that held Sunday services and Sunday schools. The *pundits* functioned like parish priests. A single creed was promulgated and published in a *Mahasabha* prayer book, which contained Sanskrit *mantras*, transliterated, and translated into English.

In the 1970's, sugar prices soared and since Indians now owned many of the sugar estates, the Hindu community prospered. Since the days of post indentureship, *pujas* had been refined to the forty offerings directed to Hanuman on Fridays, Satyanarayan on Saturdays, and Suryanarayan on Sundays, and coloured flags representing the deity

would be erected outside the home of the sponsor. *Akhand Path* (reading of scriptures like Ramayana or *Bhagavat Purana*) with daily readings and interpretation by a *pundit* were arranged during festive seasons. Such functions became frequent and elaborate, with *prasada* and food served for up to 1000 people. Pujas to other deities like Lakshmi, Saraswati, and Ganesha became popular and *yagnas* (a ritual similar to the Vedic sacrifice), which were previously rare, became institutionalized and commonplace.

The religious identities of these immigrants of the colonial era endured. Naturally, modifications occurred, but the form that these changes took varied from location to location. The shortage of *Brahmans* in the Caribbean resulted in the homogenisation of Hindus under an orthodox leadership, while in South Africa two groups became formed. A South Indian group which was a coalition of Tamil and Telugu, and a North Indian one that consisted of immigrants from the Hindi speaking areas. However there were amicable interactions between the two groups. Through endogamy, group cohesiveness, and determination Hinduism was able to survive in all three Diaspora locations discussed here.

Post-Colonial Diaspora

There are several differences between the Hindus who migrated under colonialism and those who emigrated in postcolonial times. Apart from differences in social factors such as class status, group diversity, education, occupation, the fact of improved communication and transportation has to be considered. What took the colonial emigrants to the Caribbean hundred days, now takes a couple of days at most. The printing press that played such a crucial role in the 19th and early 20th centuries in the

spread of ideas was nothing compared to what was to come. First, the wireless, followed by television and now the explosion of cybernetics, completely revolutionized communication. Thus while communities in the previous Diaspora had some contact with the home culture, current Diasporas, especially since the 1980's, are in constant daily touch not only with the home culture but also with other Hindu communities around the world. No sooner is an innovation implemented in one location than it becomes passed on and imitated around the world. The "milk miracle" is a good example of this universalization of the particularism.

Hindus who migrated since the 1960's were mainly middle class professionals raised on secular idealism. Their initial impulse therefore was towards building secular community centres that included Indians of all religions and creeds. Early communities were constructed around what Mallory Nye terms quasi-nationalistic associations (1993:126). They celebrated national events like Independence Day, Republic Day, and Mahatma Gandhi's Birthday. The Hindu festival of Divali, was the only "religious" holiday that was celebrated, but as a social event devoid of religious overtones, similar to secular "Christmas" parties. In the 1970's, emotional attachments to India began to fade and new re-groupings occurred along linguistic lines.¹⁷ Associations dedicated to Hindustani and classical South Indian music and dance, and language classes emerged.

A public "Hindu" identity appeared only in the mid 1970's. It coincided with increases in the Hindu populations in Canada with the arrival of large homogenous

¹⁷ Hans Mol argues that this pattern of behaviour is typical of immigrant groups. When a group first arrives in a foreign land, they initially organize on the basis of national affiliation. As group size increases, a regrouping occurs along regional and ethnic lines, which in turn breaks down as assimilation with the host culture occurs. (Mol 1985) Mallory Nye found a similar situation in Edinburgh. First came the quasi-political parties and then the Hindu Temple. Although both exist side by side, the Temple group is the more active. (Nye 1993: 125-126).

groups of Gujarati and later Sri Lankan refugees. Families too had begun to mature and there was an increasing need for institutionalized services. Political developments in India had by then embittered relationships with Sikh and Muslim groups from India.

A survey of the literature (see Baumann 1999, Kurien 1998, Klass 1991, Dessai 1994, Williams 1988, Fenton 1988, Bowen 1987, Knott 1987) reveals a basic pattern in the emergence of religious institutions in Diaspora. Initially small groups of Hindu families get together on a regular basis in people's homes to celebrate *pujas* or *bhajans* (hymn singing), followed by a meal. They may share the same linguistic affiliation, *guru*, sect, or social interests. A member of the group, usually a *Brahman* who is familiar with the rites, performs rituals at these gatherings. Since very few Hindus actually know how to perform these rituals, instructional tapes that guided Hindus through the rites became available in the 1970s. If however the group share a common *guru*, or belong to a sect, then the *guru* or organization sets the ritual procedure. As group sizes increase, there is a move to formalise the gatherings by holding them in community halls. The next step is the registering of the organisation, followed by fund raising towards building a permanent site.

David Bowen (1987) and Kim Knott (1987) have both observed the stages of Hindu organisation towards institutionalization amongst Gujaratis and Punjabis in Britain. The first step taken by Gujaratis in Bradford was to establish a general unity amongst Gujaratis irrespective of caste. As numbers increased, re-organisation occurred along caste and sectarian lines. Finally, in the interest of pooling resources, attempts were made to re-establish unity based on an all-embracing structure (Bowen 1987:15-16). Knott observed a similar phenomenon in Leeds, where unlike Bradford, the population

size was too small to warrant or finance more than one major temple. Several Hindu groups therefore pooled their resources towards a single institution. Since the largest majority was Punjabi, the temple was originally dominated by a Punjabi influence. The influx of Gujarati Hindus from East Africa in the mid 1970's however countered the Punjabi influence, leading to power struggles. After several "political swings and roundabouts", Knott observes that peace has been established and the two groups now share use of temple facilities (1987:162).

This trend from unity to separation and then back to unity is common amongst newly immigrated ethnic groups, and has been described by Hans Mol (1985) with regard to the Italian community in Canada. Such "joint temples" are sometimes the first step towards religious institutionalization, especially where populations are small or do not have a clear majority group. They tend to be what Elizabeth Asa Hole (1999) calls "ecumenical", by which she means that they focus on a neo-Vedantic unity. Another type of "joint-temple" accommodates diversities by installing all gods and sharing ritual time. The former type focuses on *bhajans*, lectures or scripture readings, rather than ritual. If the group share a *guru* then the *guru's* image is placed on the altar along with those of deities, as in the case of Sai Baba group. In the absence of priests, religious practices tend to be informal and uncommitted to any particular tradition. Their presence however compels orthodoxy and it is generally at this stage Hindus divide along regional/linguistic lines.

Although Hindus in Diaspora insist that their religious practices are based on *Vedic* texts, temple rituals are based on *agamas* developed for each deity. Hindus are generally split along a North /South divide. The "North Indian" category arbitrarily

includes Punjabis, and all Hindi speaking people. In Diaspora, Gujaratis generally relate with “North Indians” when their numbers are small, but form their own distinct *mandirs* (temples) when resources permit. The term “South Indian” generally covers the four Dravidian language groups, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, and Malayalam. This classification is however very discretionary and depends entirely on who is doing the classifying. It also does not account for groups such as the Marathi, who may fit into either group, or the Bengalis who generally form their own groupings or gravitate towards the Ramakrishna Missions or ISKCON temples, which they find compatible with their own customs.

Immigration patterns in Great Britain differed somewhat from other areas. As mentioned earlier, the first wave of immigrants who arrived in the 1950s were mainly, unskilled workers recruited to work in the factories and service sectors. By the end of the 1950s, there were approximately 70,000 Indians in Britain, the majority of whom were Punjabi. In 1962, immigration from commonwealth became restricted to students, professionals, and paraprofessionals of diverse ethnic mix.

After 1975 however, Gujarati refugees from East Africa began arriving and now make up 70% of the Hindu population in Britain. They are sub-divided into several regional, caste and *sampradaya* (sectarian) affiliations. The most energetic of these is the Swaminarayan Mission, which has built a magnificent edifice in Neasden in 1995. Punjabis make up the second largest linguistic group (15%). There are also Hindu immigrants from the Caribbean and they established England’s first Hindu Temple in Coventry as early as 1967. By the early 1990’s an estimated 300 temples, have come up in Britain, but most have been established in private homes, community centres, or

converted churches, since land is scarce. They tend to be ecumenical or “joint temples”. More recently, old buildings have been demolished to give way to “purpose built” temples. Examples of this are the Sri Murukan Temple in East London and the Swaminarayan temple in Neasden. After 1984, Sri Lankan Tamils began arriving as refugees and now make up 6.3% (approximately 35,000) of the Hindu population in England. The majority are concentrated in the East London area where two traditional South Indian temples have emerged - the Sri Murukan (established in 1984) and the Sri Mahalakshmi Temple (established in 1990), within a few blocks of each other. A third Mari Amman temple has also been established in north London.

The Sri Murukan temple began as a joint project but its main support is now the large Tamil (75% of the support) population in East London. Previously established in an existing building, which has now been demolished, it is being rebuilt and expanded. The main deities here are Lord Murukan and Lord Siva and four full time priests from Tamil Nadu perform rituals in the South Indian style. The presence of an assortment of other deities, like the goddess Padmavathi, Lord Venketsevara, Sri Ayyappan, Sri Guruvayurappan, Sri Lakshmi –Narayana and Anjaneya (Hanuman), reflect the presence of devotees from other South Indian regions. The presence of saint/deities Baba Balaknath and Shirdi Sai Baba reflect the “North Indian” input at least in the initial stages of the temple, but the majority of devotees now are Tamils- the prominence of Tamil signs confirms this. The temple also organises Tamil literacy classes and arranges a *kavati* festival every summer.

Another South Indian institution, the Sri Mahalakshmi temple is a mere block away but the atmosphere here is very different. For one thing, it is a Sri Vaishnava

institution and is housed in an existing building on a narrow site. Because of the narrowness of the lot, the floor plan here is unique. The sanctums of the primary deities are arranged at one end of the hall so that they face west. Other *murthis* are lined along the southern wall. I was told that this plan was devised in order to comply with *agamic* specifications. The goddess Mahalakshmi and her consort Mahavishnu occupy the main sanctums and a *lingam* has been placed beside them. This last feature is very unusual in Sri Vaishnava temples. Other deities include Ganesha, Murukan, Anjaneya, Gayatri, Durga, and Sudarshan. Priests from both Sri Vaishnava and Smarta sects serve here and the temple receives funds from the Swaminarayan Trust. Signs therefore are in English and Hindi.

Hindu professionals had been migrating to Germany since the 1950s, but it was only in the 1980s, when a large influx of Sri Lankan Hindu refugees arrived, that temples started emerging here. There are now an estimated 70,000 Tamils organized into about 100 cultural societies. Previously, Tamils organized weekly *pujas* in various rented spaces, but there are now four-major Hindu temples in Germany that also serve Hindus from neighbouring countries. The two I visited, the Vinayaka Temple and Kamadchi Amman Temple, were in the industrial city of Hamm in northern Germany. Both are Sri Lankan temples, supported by the large Tamil population in the area.

The Vinayaka Temple is housed in what was previously a garage. The entrance to it is non descriptive, but once through the rather narrow door, one is transported into a different space. The walls are painted with colourful murals depicting various mythological themes. The main deity is Lord Ganesha who occupies the central sanctum. There is no image of Lord Vishnu in this temple, but a wall hanging at the entrance

displays a print of Lord Venketeshvara. The priest at this temple is a Sri Lankan *Brahman* who arrived in Germany as a refugee. Although not trained as a priest, he took up the occupation when he found it difficult to find suitable employment. His father, a trained priest from Jaffna, assists him. Lord Vinayaka (Ganesha) is the main deity here and is installed in a large central shrine. Around him are smaller shrines to the various *Shaiva* deities, Murukan, Durga, and Shiva.

A dynamic young priest, Paskar Kurukal, established the second temple in 1994. Formerly a priest at the Vinayaka temple, he left to form his own institutions after differences with the temple's committee. His ambition is to establish a centre of Hindu culture and learning modelled after the Kamakoti Matha in Kanchipuram (Tamil Nadu). Hence the temple's presiding deity is the goddess Kamadchi, who is also the presiding deity of the temple town of Kanchipuram. Paskar is also a disciple of the Shankaracharya and has therefore installed a small bronze image of the Adi Shankara in the main sanctum. Rituals here are carried out with meticulous *Brahman* orthodoxy. When I visited in 1998, the temple was housed in a building adjoining the main house where Paskar lives with his young family (wife and two daughters). Plans were underway to construct a large traditional temple on adjoining land. According to Paskar, the services that he provides for life cycle events generate sufficient revenue for the temple's maintenance and the building project. This may not however be true.

Hinduism in the United States is largely of the Vedic variety. Even the South Indian institutions emphasise Sanskrit rather than any particular regional language, and the Sri Murukan Temple in Washington may be the first temple in this country to focus specifically on Tamil culture. The Vallabha Ganapati Temple in Flushing, New York

was the first temple in North America to be established by Indian immigrants. Built in 1976, it accommodates several communities in the New York area, especially a large Gujarati community. However rituals are performed in the South Indian style by priests from Tamil Nadu, and all *murthis* are granite. The temple also has a vegetarian café attached to it.

The most affluent immigrant established temple outside of India, is the Sri Venketeshvara Temple in Penn Hills near Pittsburgh. This follows the Sri Vaishnava *sampradaya* (tradition) and has close links with the Tirupati institution in Andhra Pradesh (India), which has recently been entered in the Guinness Book of Records as having the most number of visitors per day- an average of 1 million per day during peak season. The American branch has become almost as popular and attracts devotees from India who find the crowds at the Indian institution too numerous. A *murthi* of Lord Ganesha has been installed near the entrance to the temple to accommodate the large number of non-Vaishnava devotees who also worship at this temple. Similarly, a ritual, like the *varalakshmi puja*, that is performed by non Vaishnava Tamils is also arranged.

Hindus in Canada are concentrated in Ontario, mainly in the Toronto area. Again, the Gujarati, North Indian (includes Punjabi and Hindi speaking groups), and Sri Lankan Tamils who dominate here and this is reflected in the temples built in the Toronto area. Toronto also has an energetic Caribbean Hindu community who have established their own Vishnu Mandir, frequented also by North Indians. A Vaishnavi Devi Temple in Oakville serves North Indians and is built in a style similar to the Vishnu Mandir. Both have marble images, arranged on a stage at one end of a carpeted hall. Another beautiful temple worth mentioning in the Toronto area is the Hare Krishna Temple, which is

housed in a converted church. The main deities here are Lord Krishna and his consort Radha and Gujaratis and Bengalis in the Toronto area frequent it. Gujaratis have also build a Sanatana Mandir that focuses on Gujarati customs. Apart from these, there are several South Indian temples too, but I will be describing these in Chapter 4.

There are two main temples in Montreal, the Thirumurukan (established in 1996), and a Hindu Mandir (established in 1999). Two other smaller institutions are the Devi temple and a Subramania/Ayyappa Temple (in Val Morin, on the grounds of the Shivananda Ashram). In other cities Hindu populations are still too small to support several temples, therefore the tendency is still to build “joint-temples”. Edmonton has both a North Indian temple and a newly consecrated South Indian temple.

Types of Hindu Institutions in Western Diaspora

As already mentioned the linguistic groups currently most prominent in the global Diaspora are Punjabi, Gujarati, and Tamil. Punjabi and Gujarati groups often share an immigration route through East Africa and therefore quite often unite their resources towards *sanatana* temples. Williams (1988: 56) arranges Hindu places of worship into, home shrines, organized religious groups, sectarian groups, yoga and ashram institutes, and ecumenical Hindu organisations. This model is, however, too broad and tells us nothing about the linguistic, sectarian, regional or philosophical characteristics of the institution. In addition, an institution may begin as one form yet change course as the ethnic mix and interests of the community it serves changes. I outline four general categories: Ecumenical, Sectarian, Traditional that may be South Indian or North Indian

and a Non *agamic* group. A fifth, which I call Hindu affiliated organisations, include *yoga ashrams* and meditation groups, catering mainly to westerners.

The form that a temple takes is influenced at any given location by population size and density, and ethnic mix. By density, I refer to the concentration of Hindus within an area, and the degree of group homogeneity. For example, according to Baumann (1997), of the 100,000 Hindus in Holland, 15,000 are from Sri Lanka, while the rest are from the former Dutch colony of Surinam. However, since the Dutch government follows a policy of de-concentration, that prevents immigrants of one ethnic group from settling together in one area, the Hindus are scattered and have thus been unable despite their numbers to create a cohesive community, or construct a temple. The small 5000 strong Hindu population of Sweden however is concentrated in the Stockholm area and therefore a cohesive religious community has emerged.

1. *Ecumenical Institutions*: Elizabeth Asa Hole (1999) aptly describes ecumenical Hinduism as a politically polite religion that does not require a specific place of worship. The emphasis at these institutions is a neo-Vedantic type of unity that embraces all, excludes none. If populations are small and diverse, institutions tend to be ecumenical. They are organized like congregations and members contribute a set amount towards the expenses of the meetings. Rituals tend to be like services and are scheduled at set times, usually Friday evenings or on Sundays, according to the convenience of the members rather than any religious significance. The architecture of the building if there is one is non-specific. Meetings are generally held in rented church basements or community centres.

Another type of institution that can emerge when populations are small but diverse is the traditional “joint-temple”. These institutions also attempt to accommodate several linguistic groups, but the focus is on ritual. In the absence of priests, certain *Brahman* males take turns to officiate. Similar to the early temples built by immigrants to South Africa, these temples seek to accommodate all regional groups and include several main deities. The architectural style of these establishments can be anything from modern to traditional or eclectic and they tend to be supported by a fixed membership. Priests here must be able to accommodate a variety of traditions although the customs of the dominant group always prevail. Festivals are celebrated according to the astrological almanac and, although main events are often postponed to weekends, priests perform the *pujas* on the specific day in a simplified manner and celebrate the elaborate version during the weekend.

The linguistic emphasis for ritual at both ecumenical and “joint-temple” institutions is Sanskrit while English is used in publications and communications. When the size of a single linguistic group increases then there is a tendency for that group to dominate. Minority groups either adjust or splinter once they too increase in size and can afford a traditional institution of their own.

The Hindu Mandir in Montreal illustrates the “joint-temple” concept. Its architecture can only be described as ultra modern and only a large “Om” emblazoned on the tower above the sanctum, indicates its religious identity on the outside. Inside, the entrance hall is spacious and airy, with rooms on either side for coats and shoes. The temple is on the first floor while a large commercial kitchen and dining hall are located in the basement. Life size *murthis* of the goddess Durga, Lord Rama, his family, and Lord

Ganesha are of marble. A priest from Varanasi was officiating at the temple on the day I visited, but I believe he has now returned to India.

2. *Sectarian institutions* or *sampradayas* focus on a sectarian deity or the teachings of a particular *guru*. They may be traditional like the Sri Vaishnava and Swaminarayan *sampradayas* or centred around modern gurus like Sai Baba or one of the numerous neo Vedantic swamis. Images are generally limited to the various forms of the primary deity and secondary deities of the sect. However, the Sri Vaishnava institution in Pittsburgh has incorporated other deities and rituals for the convenience of non-Vaishnava devotees who also visit the shrine. The emphasis at these institutions is on *bhakti* (devotion), either to god or to the *guru* as his/her messenger. The architecture at these temples is generally traditional if centred around a deity, and eclectic if it is a guru-oriented *sampradaya*.

Apart from the Sri Venketeshvara temple in Pittsburgh, other sectarian examples are the Hare Krishna temples, Swaminarayan institutions, and Sai Baba Fellowship Centres.

3. *Traditional institutions* reflect the classical *Brahmanical* model of Hinduism based on the Vedas and Agamas and are split along north/south lines. North Indian temples are not always constructed according to *agamic* injunctions, but incorporate the architectural style of north India. They include onion shaped *shikharas* (domes), marble *murthis* (images), marble floors, and plush carpeting. Deities are generally assembled on a platform at one end of a hall, with the main deity placed at the centre. Sometimes Jains and Hindus combine, as in Pittsburgh, to build a “joint-temple” that incorporates Hindu gods and the Jain preceptor Mahavir.

Two types of South Indian traditional temples are emerging in the Western Diaspora. Temples built by Indian immigrants and those built by Tamil immigrants from Sri Lanka. The former, which are more common in the United States, emphasise Sanskrit culture, while the latter use Sanskrit for priestly rites, but focus on Tamil culture rather than the Sanskrit. The focus at these Sri Lankan temples is Tamil Shaivism but they incorporate images of Lord Vishnu.

All South Indian temples, whether sectarian, South Indian, or Sri Lankan is built according to strict *agamic* injunctions. Deities are installed in elaborate *kumbhabisekam* ceremonies and grounded firmly to the earth. They display triangular *gopurams* (domes) that are elaborately decorated with mythological figures and consecrated deities are always black granite or bronze, each being enshrined in his/her own *sannidhi* (sanctum). Rituals here are orthodox.

4. *Non-Agamic* temples that do not follow *Brahmanical* injunctions. They are dedicated to non-Vedic deities like Mari Amman or Ayannar and their priests are *upasaks* (shamans), either male or female. Sometimes of course, these temples become so popular that the deity is *Brahmanized* and incorporated into the Vedic pantheon. Temple rituals then come under *Brahmanic* influence and *Brahman* priests take over. Few non-agamic temples, to my knowledge, exist in the western Diaspora. The Abhirami Amman Temple in Denmark is probably the single exception. In South Africa and Malaysia however, several continue even with the practice of animal sacrifice.

5. *Hindu affiliated groups* would include institutions that were founded outside India and cater mainly to Western congregations. Examples are the Hare Krishna, Sri Chinmoy, and Transcendental Meditation.

The most recent Diaspora is, not surprisingly, in cyberspace. Several Hindu groups and temples now have websites. Swami Sivaya Subramaniaswami of Hawaii, whose organisation publishes the popular magazine *Hinduism Today* has observed: "As the new millennium approaches the world's oldest religion is donning shining new clothes. The age-old Hindu philosophy passed from mouth to mouth in tiny villages across India is now going high-tech" (Hinduism Today 1999).

It must be stressed that the outline presented above is a very broad guide to identifying the various forms of religious institutions. Some institutions can be placed in more than one category. For example, the Sri Vaishnavas could come under either traditional South Indian or under sectarian. Some may regard Tamil temples as sectarian, while Hare Krishna temples may not be regarded as Hindu. A further illustration of the arbitrary nature of these classifications is the following list published by *Hinduism Online*. Warning Hindus that groups linked to Hindi institutions do not necessarily promote and protect the "renaissance of Hinduism", it arranges organizations under three headings: "Hindu", "Not exactly Hindu", and "Non-Hindu". Compiled by the staff of *Hinduism Online* it presumably reflects their bias.

Under "Hindu", it lists the Arya Samaj, Chinmaya Mission, Gitananda Ashram (Italy), Hindu Students Council, and Hindu Temple Society of North America, which include several traditional temples in the USA. International Swaminarayan Satsang (ISSO), Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, Nityananda Institute of the Kashmir Shaivism tradition, Ramakrishna Mission (New York), Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the Saiva Siddhanta Church of Satguru Subramuniaswami (the publisher of *Hinduism Today*) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP).

Under “Not exactly Hindu or Quasi-Hindu Organizations” are the Arsha Vidya Gurukulam, Divine Life Society, Ramanashrama (Ramana Maharshi), Siddha Yoga Dharma (Chidvalasananda), and the Sivananda Yoga Vedanta Centres. The Ananda Marga, Gayatri Pariwar, Mata Amritanandamayi (MA Ashram), Sadhu Vaswani Mission, Integral Yoga Institute, (Satchidananda) and Satya Sai Baba Centres are listed as social service organizations.

The “Non-Hindu” organizations are: the Brahma Kumaris, who designate their organization as a new religion at Global Forum meetings; ISKCON which insists that it is “neither Hindu religion nor any other religion”, Transcendental Meditation which the site regards as “purely a practical technique, a science that does not depend on any faith”. It concludes with the Veerashaivas.

This chapter surveyed the global Hindu Diaspora and suggested that the reconstruction of Hinduism happens differently at various locations. National and local environments, population size, density, and composition have significant influences on the type of institution that develops and since these factors are continuously changing, the forms of these institutions too are subject to change.

Chapter 3: The Road From Jaffna: The Emergence of Tamil Identity.

Elam uril Tamilan anal Tamilan ka uril illai. (There is a Tamil in every country but no country for the Tamils)

Few by now, are unaware of the ethnic war in Sri Lanka. More than 30,000 people, Tamil and Singhalese, have been killed since the outbreak of violence in 1974. The conflict has devastated the once idyllic Jaffna Peninsula, compelling half a million Tamils to flee their homes in search of asylum in Britain, Canada, Australia and several European countries.

In these new locations, the Tamils have reconstructed social and religious institutions with an amazing alacrity that is the envy of other Hindu groups. Along with several temples, Tamil literacy classes have also emerged with an enthusiasm that is seldom witnessed.

Several reasons are offered for this swift reconstruction of social institutions. As refugees, the Tamils feel that they have little hope of returning “home” in the near future and this makes the setting down of roots more urgent. Yet they have not abandoned these hopes altogether and are determined to preserve their culture and ensure its propagation amongst the younger generations. Homogeneity in terms of religion and language enables them to make institutional decisions unimpeded by the usual wrangling that beset diverse groups of Hindus. The majority of Tamils are Shaivas and their religious practices, rooted as they are in the Shaiva Agamas, are expressed through *bhakti*. Temples are important to the practice of these rituals, and temple building is proof of the

piety and vitality of the community. Popular Tamil dictum states, “Do not stay in a place that has no temple”, and the Sri Lankan Tamils, it seems, take this adage seriously.

The population of the island of Sri Lanka is divided into Tamils and Sinhalese who are separated by language, religion, culture, and race. The majority 74% is Sinhalese Buddhist, while Tamils form a minority 12%. However, the Tamil group is further divided into Muslim, Christian, and Hindu. Unity has been achieved between Christians and Hindus, but Muslims, who make up 7% of the Tamil population, operate as a separate group.

It is argued that the cultural differences between Tamils and Sinhalese have been greatly exaggerated. Pfaffenberger notes that S. Rasanayagan, a writer of the 19th century, had pointed out striking similarities between the two cultures that suggest that Sri Lankan Tamils have more in common with the Sinhalese than they do with the Tamils of South India (Pfaffenberger 1994:2). Moreover, the island’s 300 years of colonial history had until recently been free of the ethnic conflicts that plagued other native societies. Yet, Tamil separatists now argue that the island has always been two geographically separate nations in one, a Tamil kingdom that was in the Northern and Eastern Provinces and a Sinhalese Kingdom in the South. The British united the two regions under a single administration for reasons of expediency and thus, according to separatists, created an artificial nation. The statement of Sir Hugh Cleghorn in 1793 is recalled to validate their claims:

Two different nations, from the very ancient period, have divided between them the possessions of the island: First the Sinhalese, inhabiting the interior of the country in its southern end and western parts... and secondly the Malabars, who possess the northern and eastern districts. These two nations differ entirely in their religion, language and manners. (cited in Pfaffenberger 1994:2).

Nationalists however, discredit this two-nation theory and lay claim to the entire island. They point out that Cleghorn's contemporary Robert Percival makes no mention of separate Tamil homelands. Older Buddhist sources speak of King Vijaybahu's victories over invaders from south India in the 11th century and the restoration of a Buddhist kingdom in Anuradhapuram. This version creates minorities of the Tamils even in areas that they consider their bastions.

From one perspective, it would appear that the conflict stems from the British and their colonial policies, and the subsequent discriminatory policies introduced by a Singhalese dominated government. Seen from a globalization perspective, however, the problem has deeper roots and began in the 17th century with the arrival of the Portuguese in 1591. Since then, the island has been ruled by three consecutive colonial powers, the Portuguese, Dutch, and British until it gained independence in 1947 and emerged as a national democracy. Each regime introduced innovations intended to serve their own economic interests. Administration was centralized, Christian missionaries established schools and later an English education system, a judiciary system was developed, and when under the British the island was united under a single administration, roads and communication links were built that improved transportation from one part of the island to another. Along with the spread of these concrete innovations, came the inevitable spread of modern European ideas that transformed native thinking and the components upon which identity is based. Previously identity was rooted in vertically organized collective relationships, but the introduction of modern institutions transformed these relationships into horizontally dispersed functional ones (Pfaffenberger 1994: 19).

Until the 20th century the term, “Tamil” referred specifically to the dominant *Vellalar* castes. *Vellalars*, who had converted to Christianity, however retained their *Vellalar* identity and were included in the Tamil identity. Minority Tamils, referring to labourers who were brought from South India under the Dutch and British colonists, and Untouchables of the *Nalavar* and *Pallar* however, were a different matter. The *Vellalars* depended on their labour and therefore it was in their interest to keep them subjugated. They were not seen as Tamils and extra legal social controls were employed to distinguish them in public and to prevent them from “passing” as *Vellalars*. The law under the Dutch endorsed these controls, but after the British introduced the liberalisation policies, gangs of thugs enforced them. This discrimination went on until well into the 1960s (Pfaffenberger 1994:148). It was only under the aggressive tactics employed by the Tamil Tigers that these discriminatory practices were abandoned and Tamil identity emerged in its present inclusive category.

When religious freedom was restored under the British, it encouraged a revival of native languages and religion. European Orientalists had already reconstructed Ceylon’s past and with the subsequent introduction of English education, the theories of European nationalism took hold in Ceylon. As in India, Ceylonese nationalists drew on the research of European Oriental scholars in much the same way, using it to justify the right to nationhood. However, Orientalists had reconstructed the past based on Buddhist chronicles and therefore Ceylon’s past had emerged as a “Buddhist” past that translated into a “Singhalese” nationalism. The components of national identity became based on religion and language, and in the process, Tamils found themselves caste as “outsiders”. While language and religion justified them as a distinct community, it could not

legitimize their claims to territory (Rajanayakam 1994: 75). It was within the context of this complex atmosphere of religious and language revival, modern politics, and ideals of nationhood and democracy that Tamil identity and religion were constructed.

Pre-colonial period

Sri Lankan history is heavily oriented towards the Singhalese Buddhist culture; therefore, the early history of Tamil settlers on the island is somewhat sketchy. Historians suggest that migrants first started arriving on the island from South India around 3 BCE, but these early settlers scattered in various parts of the island and generally lost their identity amongst the people with whom they lived (Younger: 1995:131-133). A steady stream of settlers began arriving in the 5th and 6th centuries CE and a Hindu kingdom was established in Jaffna, with its capital in Nallur (Pfaffenberger 1982:2).

As the kingdom flourished, fresh waves of immigrants were attracted to the peninsula from south India. The majority were *Vellalars* who became the pivot of the social structure, around which a number of lesser castes stood in varying degrees of service relationships. Jaffna became the seat of Hindu culture and the Tamil language struck firm roots on the island. It was fostered by the kings of Jaffna and enriched by constant contact with south India. Nevertheless, it developed its own unique idiom and speech. The state religion was Shaivism. Temples were built, and *Brahmans* were brought over from South India to serve in them.

One cannot reconstruct the patterns of pre-colonial Jaffna society with any certainty. The *Vellalar* Tamils came from the “Coromandel Plains” in South India now

Tamil Nadu, and they were traditionally paddy cultivators¹⁸. Land holdings were allocated only to groups, therefore membership in the *Vellalar* group meant access to land and hereditary rights to the harvest. Temple ceremonies performed by *Brahmans*, in which *Vellalar* landowners received public recognition of their high status (*mariyatai*), served to legitimize their dominance in the area. In return for performing these rites, *Brahmans* received a portion of the harvest. Labouring castes were similarly compensated by ritual endowments for the labour that they provided.

In India, rice is grown in the irrigated lands of Tamil Nadu. Jaffna however is both arid and river-less and therefore *Vellalars* had to adapt to dry paddy farming.¹⁹ *Vellalars* lived like chieftains, surrounded by their *kutimai* (from *kuti*, which means family or tribe) who were closely connected to the *Vellalar* lord and *atimai* (serfs). *Kutimai* castes had their own traditional occupations, but were obligated to also provide services to the *Vellalars*. In return, they were entitled to a portion of the harvest, and

¹⁸ By the 8th century BCE, Madurai and Kanchipuram had emerged as great power centres under the Cholas, yet the agricultural hinterlands were highly de-centralized. Separate families developed separate parts of the valley, and these regions, called *natus*, operated as semiautonomous political units. Intermarriage and common interests bound the families of the *natus* together. The *vellalars* owned the land and therefore controlled the economies, and politics of the region. Legends suggest that they came to the south from northern and western India, perhaps even from the Indus Valley civilisation that had a similar agrarian economy based on river irrigation. Other castes of artisans settled around these families and although they maintained their own social and cultural identity, they pursued their trade under *vellalar* leadership (Younger 1995:132). The classical *catur-varna*, four-class system depicted in the *Dharmasastra* arranges Hindu society into four hierarchical classes: *Brahman*, *Ksatriya*, *Vaisya*, and *Sudra*. While the first three classes are allotted hereditary occupations and are considered "twice-born", the only function of the *Sudra* is to serve the other three castes. In South India, however, this classical structure runs into problems. Apart from the fact that *Ksatriya* and *Vaisya* classes were poorly represented in the Tamil *natus* (regions), three quarters of the population were *vellalars*, who technically speaking are *Sudras*. However, far from being servile, they have in fact always been a dominant caste that owned the lion's share of land. This social circumstance, peculiar to the Dravidian regions, resulted in the development of a unique social formation that was considerably different to the classical *jajmani* system found in northern India. *Brahmans* were still accorded respect and given high ritual status, but *vellalars* were also ranked high, "next only to the *Brahmans*" (Pfaffenberger 1982:22).

were treated as extended family members.²⁰ The *atimai* castes, on the other hand, lived apart from the *Vellalar* master, and foraged and cultivated for their subsistence. Although they were obliged to work in the fields or perform menial tasks for the *Vellalar*, they were not entitled to a portion of the harvest, but received meals and clothing instead.

In the 15th century, the economy of Jaffna, which had been exclusively based on subsistence agriculture, became incorporated into the expanding Indian Ocean economy. It therefore became diversified and commercialized, developing into a major trading kingdom. Coastal fishing and maritime populations became strong and other non-agricultural artisan castes settled in the royal capital, ports, and market areas. People from the influential commercial Chetty castes were also drawn to Jaffna. Thus, a pluralistic socio-economic tradition of agriculture, marine activities, and commerce and handicraft production was established. They were drawn together by the integrative presence of the Tamil State. Land-owning *Vellalars* performed revenue and customs functions down to the village level. In time, these positions became hereditary.

As the Jaffna peninsula became more heavily populated, Tamil settlements spread to the mainland areas of Ceylon, known as the *Vanni*, reaching into the southern Mannar and Trincomalee regions. These settlements remained connected to Jaffna by kinship and marriage, and followed similar social formations.

Batticaloa, in the Eastern district of Sri Lanka, however, developed autonomously from Jaffna. Settlers to this area came from different parts of Dravidian south India,

¹⁹ *Vellalars* were obliged to grow rice as tribute for the King in return for their land allotments. However, they also set up more productive *tottams* (garden farming), which were watered by an abundant supply of ground water and grew a variety of crops, like Palmyra, onions, gourds, chillies, turmeric, ginger, pumpkin, eggplant, melon, gram, millet and pulses. As long as labour was available, Jaffna farmers could reap astonishing profits from a mere acre of land (Arasaratnam 1994:43-44).

mainly from the Malabar Coast. The social structure of Batticaloa therefore was different and followed a matrilineal system similar to that found amongst the Nairs of Kerala. Tamils in Batticaloa were less insular than the Jaffna Tamils and therefore less rigid, even intermarrying with the Singhalese. Consequently, Jaffna Tamils frowned upon marriage links with Batticaloa, and kinship ties with the northern province did not develop.

*The Colonial period*²¹

The Portuguese were the first of the Europeans to arrive on the scene in 1505. They were granted trade concessions by the King of Kandy and soon became indispensable to him. By 1591, they had taken over the southern kingdom. Jaffna, however, held out longer until the Jaffna King began harassing the *paravar* fishermen who had converted to Christianity. The *paravar* appealed to the Portuguese for protection and they intervened and took control of Jaffna.

Aggressive Catholic evangelism was introduced under the Portuguese, and several thousand temples were destroyed as a result. Keen on maintaining the revenue returns of the province, the Portuguese however retained the traditional administrative structure and system of authority. These were now integrated into an organized civil administration system. The four territorial divisions - Valikamam, Vadamarachchi, Tenmarachchi, and Pachilappalai were maintained, but Portuguese governors were appointed over them. These governors had supervisory control over the native police, revenue functionaries,

²⁰ There were eight *kutimai* castes: five artisans (goldsmith, blacksmith, coppersmith, carpenters and temple carvers), and five working classes (potter, mason, washer man, barbers, and *pariahs*, untouchables who laboured in the fields and became ritually incorporated as funeral drummers).

and the judiciary. Native functionaries were mainly from *Vellalar* castes and they now received official letters of appointment bearing the colonial insignia (Arasaratnam 1994:35). Thus, what had been a loose system sanctioned by custom, became officially recognised.

In an attempt to reduce *Vellalar* control, the Portuguese also promoted other non-agricultural castes by giving them titles, tax collecting, judicial, and policing powers. This however only led to the fusion of these castes into a wider *Vellalar* caste. Land-owning *Vellalars* formed a wealthy core that they maintained through marriage ties and newcomers were incorporated around this core.

The Portuguese also initiated a land register system (*tombo*) to maintain precise records of land ownership, labour services, dues, and taxation. This too was an attempt at curbing *Vellalar* power and landholders and officials alike resisted it. Instead of dislodging *Vellalar* authority, it only created an elite of large landowners. Since *Vellalars* owned the land, they controlled the labour of the landless Untouchables and this situation did not change even though the Portuguese state also competed for their labour.

The Dutch, who were an even more aggressive mercantile power, replaced the Portuguese in 1650. They divided the island into three administrative divisions, Colombo, Galle, and Jaffna; but also saw the wisdom of retaining traditional land and service relationships. However, they used these connections more methodically to serve their own interests. A Dutch judiciary system was set up and customary law prevailed only as far as it did not clash with Dutch jurisprudence. Attempts to codify native

²¹ The data in this section are mainly derived from de Silva (1972), Arasaratnam (1994, and Ludowyk (1966 and 1962).

customs resulted in the formulation of the *Thesavalamai* of the Tamils by 1707. Islamic law was applied to Muslims, and because of the difficulties of codifying Singhalese law, Roman- Dutch law was increasingly applied to them.

The Dutch did away with the obligatory rice tributes to the king and instead introduced the concept of cash farming. They encouraged the cultivation of *tottams*, introduced tobacco as a cash crop, and imported thousands of *atimai* labourers from South India to ensure steady field labour. This shift to cash farming transformed Jaffna from rice exporting to rice importing area, and the Dutch grew rich in the export trade. *Vellalar* landowners also benefited and lucrative cash farming pushed land prices up. Land now became a commodity that could be bought and sold. Non-*Vellalar* castes could not afford to buy land and therefore *Vellalar* dominance remained unchallenged. In addition, the increase of cash crops decreased the growth of traditional crops and therefore the portion due to the *kutimai* was greatly reduced. Nonetheless, *Vellalars* continued to demand the same service from them. It was the *atimai* castes, however that suffered the most by these changes. Under Dutch law, they became equated with western slaves and as a result, lost their traditional prerogatives. They could no longer leave a cruel master, and the obligatory meals and clothing in exchange for manual labour was no longer due to them (Arasaratnam 1992:37).

Under the Dutch, commerce between Jaffna and other parts of the Indian Ocean flourished. Rice was imported from South India and Bengal. Weavers and dyers from India had been encouraged to settle in Jaffna, and cloth was exported to Java and Southeast Asia. Most of the sea borne commerce was in the hands of expatriate Indians, Malayalees and Muslims from Tamil Nadu. However, they worked closely with the

Vellalars, who provided the local infrastructure and brokered the lucrative tobacco and elephant trade.

Construction activity initiated by the state increased the demand for labour in excess of the requirements of agriculture. A wage economy was introduced to buy the extra labour. Skilled labour was in short supply and artisan castes that were independent of the *Vellalars* took advantage of this. Unskilled labourers however were constrained by social factors that were enforced by the state and as a result, although they received some wages, they were bound by traditional obligations to serve their *Vellalar* masters first.

The British conquest of Ceylon coincided with the French Revolution in Europe. The Netherlands came under France's control, and the British occupied Ceylon from their base in Madras. After a half-hearted attempt at resistance, the Dutch surrendered Ceylon to the British in 1796.

As a colonial power of the industrial age, the style of the British was very different from the previous two powers. Ceylon became a Crown colony in 1802, and in 1818, the British united the island under one central administration. One of the first sets of reforms that the British introduced was the abolition of slavery and relieving natives of judicial responsibilities. They also stopped the custom of payment in kind and dealt strictly in cash. However, they could not completely do away with the local power structure. Further reforms in 1833 systematized their administration and laid the foundation of a new political and economic system. Colombo was made the capital, and roads were built connecting north and south.

The reforms introduced by the British brought prosperity to the island. Coffee, tea, and rubber plantations were introduced in the interior wetlands, and more indentured

workers from Tamil Nadu were recruited to supply labour. Capital investments were, however, limited to urban areas and the plantations. As a result, the northern dry zones remained undeveloped. By the 19th century, overpopulation in the Jaffna peninsular began taking its toll. Paddy farming had declined and 75% of the rice for the area's consumption had to be imported. This resulted in the increase of market farming. The network of newly built roads boosted marketing and exposed Jaffna Tamils to other opportunities. British liberalisation policies allowed *kutimai* castes to pursue their occupations in the expanding urban areas, and many artisans moved away from the land. The secular atmosphere of the British work environment opened a variety of occupations for both *kutimai* and *Vellalar* castes, and many *Vellalars* set up businesses or went into banking.

When the British unified the island, they restructured the eastern province, joining the Singhalese districts with neighbouring Tamil areas. The newly formed Eastern Province now included Tamils, Muslims, and Singhalese. The Northern Province however remained a homogenous Tamil area. By the end of the 19th century, the Jaffna peninsula had become overpopulated and agricultural resources were becoming depleted. Since it was not in their interest, the British had not bothered to develop the Jaffna peninsula and economic opportunities there were limited. Consequently, Jaffna faced the threat of high unemployment. At this point, the British introduced English education in the peninsula.

Under the Portuguese, the efforts of Catholic missionaries were powerful and intrusive. They set up primary schools in every village, and Tamil catechists were employed to teach in these schools. When the Dutch took over, they attempted to reform

these schools. Their efforts to convert the population met with disastrous results and there was a mass scale abandonment of Christianity. The Dutch lacked the extensive infrastructure of the Catholic Church and therefore found it difficult to maintain these schools. Schoolmasters who were nominally converts were appointed and paid a government stipend. Soon these schools also began to teach Tamil literacy with the result that Hindu children enrolled in them as well.

After the fall of the Dutch, the schools were taken over by various missions. They organized a very efficient educational system, first of primary and then secondary education. All the primary and secondary education was in Tamil, but over time, there was a gradual shift to English. The system was therefore already in place when the British decided to introduce an English education system. Already used to high Tamil literacy, the Jaffna Tamils took to the system enthusiastically. Many went on to professional occupations in the sciences, engineering, medicine, and finance. They soon began to dominate the professional fields in the private and public sectors. By the early 20th century job availability slowed down as economic growth slowed. It was becoming increasingly difficult for college graduates to gain employment within the island. At this point, the Federated Malay States and Straits-Settlements, which were under British rule, began to expand its public service and this created employment opportunities for educated Tamils. Plantations in Malaysia also offered opportunities and it became common for educated Tamils to emigrate from the peninsula, first southward and then overseas (Arasaratnam 1994:49). The main beneficiaries of the educational system were of course the *Vellalar* but individuals from other castes also benefited and there was considerable social mobility.

With English education came exposure to modern ideas. The printing press already introduced by the Dutch and with the improved means of transportation facilitated the spread of ideas to the increasing English educated middle class elite. With it came the inevitable move towards Sri Lankan nationalism.

Sri Lankan Nationalism

Tamil and Singhalese identities began emerging in the 19th century with the rise of Sri Lankan nationalism. The first step towards this identity was religious revival in response to aggressive Christian evangelism. The Portuguese had not only destroyed temples but also suppressed the public practice of Hinduism and Buddhism. They also rewarded converts to Christianity with official appointments and, as a result, many *Vellalars* nominally converted for economic gain. The Dutch were less aggressive but continued the practice of rewards. It was only in the 19th century under the British that full religious freedom was restored under a secular government.

Once again, European Orientalists undertook the reconstruction of Ceylon's past and here too an "Aryan" heritage was discovered. However, here the legacy belonged to the Singhalese. According to Orientalists reconstruction, they were the earliest settlers on the island having come from Bengal to establish the legendary settlement of Anuradhapuram by 247 BCE.

The sources for these accounts are the Buddhist chronicles *Mahavamsa*²², and *Culavamsa*²³. The opening section of the *Mahavamsa* contains the story of the birth of

²² The *Mahavamsa* is the chronicle of the *Mahavihara* monastery and its authorship is attributed to a monk called *Mahanama* (Thapar 1978: 278).

Prince Vijaya and his arrival on the island (Thapar 1978, Kapferer 1988) on the same day as the death of the Buddha.²⁴ He then marries Kuveni, a local *yaksa* queen, presumably to assume territorial control, but casts her aside to marry a Pandyan princess from India. Buddhist apologists are quick to specify, that “Pandyan” refer to the Pandus of epic glory, and not to the south Indian Pandu dynasty, thus making clear the purity of the racial lineage. The tribal Veddas are the children of Prince Vijaya and Queen Kuveni.

A Tamil version of this legend appears in the *Yalappana Vaipava Malai*, a Tamil text compiled from oral tradition that had been commissioned by a Dutch governor in the 17th century. However, it differs in some crucial details. Here, Prince Vijaya is a Shaivite who builds four of Ceylon’s oldest temples. It is also made clear that the princess he marries belonged to the Pandyan dynasty of Tamil Nadu. Vijaya was a tolerant and compassionate man and therefore extended a welcome to Buddhist monks, fleeing persecution in India. They then settled on the island and were able to spread their teachings (Rajanayagam 1994:56). However, modern historians discredited these and other accounts based on Tamil legends for they did not measure up to the modern view of history. The *Culavamsa* on the other hand, which claims to record, the history of

²³ Although both the *Mahavamsa* and the *Culavamsa* were written in an area outside the geographical limits of India, they nevertheless followed the same historical tradition. The historical tradition had three major forms: genealogy, historical narrative, embedded in mythological and cosmological theories. Both began as oral tradition and were recorded at a latter period. The narrative presents the history of Ceylon and the history of Buddhism on the island with cross-references to events in India. Included are royal records, monastic records, and histories of relics, legends, folklore, and personal accounts. Given to literary embellishments and incorporation of myths, the purpose of the material was historical and partly didactic since it was intended for the edification of the Buddhist *Sangha*. The material in the *Culavamsa* is more narrow and limited to the history of the island (Thapar 1978:278).

²⁴ The story begins with a princess of *Vanga* (Bengal) being married to a lion. She gave birth to a son and daughter but remained unhappy and homesick. Therefore, when her son grew up she talked him into killing his father the lion and returned home with her children. However, the two children wandered away and got married to each other. They had sixteen pairs of twin sons the eldest of who was Vijaya. The King of Bengal exiled him because he was evil, but allowed him a retinue of 700 men. Vijaya travelled first to western India and then sailed to the island.

Buddhism in Ceylon, from the 2nd century to the arrival of the British in the 19th century, was acknowledged as history.

Rajanayagam (1994:56) argues that the concept of history is vital to the way that history is recorded. This varies from society to society and changes with time. Buddhist monks had enjoyed the patronage of Singhalese kings, and their writings were as much calculated to glorify their patrons as to edify Buddhist teachings. Their genealogies therefore were well recorded. Nevertheless, they too were greatly embellished and could only be verified against the South Indian inscriptions.²⁵ Yet the Orientalists deemed them “historical” while the Tamil accounts were denigrated as fiction. The Tamils had had no need to legitimize their existence on the island in the past and therefore did not have any records connecting them to island. They were therefore considered a people who did not think historically. The Buddhist texts were given pride of place, and Singhalese histories became the history of Ceylon (Rajanayagam (1994:59).

The critical period in the shaping of Tamil consciousness in Ceylon was 1880 to 1930. It was during this time that much of Tamil history was written. Tamils suddenly felt called upon to prove that they belonged to Ceylon and that Jaffna was not just an outpost of a greedy, power hungry South Indian dynasty. The writings therefore not only reflect the concerns of the times, but the issues of the period shaped what were written.

The Tamil Christians first realised the importance of a secular history and led the Tamil renaissance. Since they could not validate their presence in Ceylon through their own sacred scriptures, and could hardly resort to Hindu mythology, they began looking at

the secular works of Ceylonese Tamil literature. Although the kingdom of Jaffna had been a Hindu kingdom, it had fostered secular works that afforded them enough material to construct a credible history for themselves. Two brothers, John and Daniel Britto translated the *Yalppana Vaipava Malai* into English, and a series of articles were written for the Royal Asiatic Society. John Samuel wrote a history of the Jaffna Kingdom in 1879. The period can be seen as a Tamil renaissance. In 1884, a Hindu Tamil, Catacivapillai, wrote another history of Jaffna. According to Rajanayagam, several books began to emerge in this period, but all of them had one objective in mind. That was to validate the existence of the Jaffna Kingdom (Rajanayagam 1994:62). The printing press and the high literacy rate encouraged an explosion of newspapers and journals in Jaffna. As these, gradually spread to the Eastern Province, a new local awareness began to emerge that brought Tamils of the two provinces closer.

There was also a gradual revival of native languages accompanied by a revival of native religions. In the early 1900s, Buddhist monks began clamouring to restore Buddhism to its former status on the island. Constitutional reforms in 1910 enabled the nomination of native representatives to the legislative council, but natives did not hold executive power.

The Ceylon National Congress was formed in 1919 and consisted of both Tamil and Sinhalese members. In 1924, constitutional modifications were made to provide elected representation along communal lines. Sinhalese leaders, however, wished to do away with communalism and make territorial representation universal, but Tamils and

²⁵ For example, legends like that of King Dutugemunu that is highlighted as great Buddhist victories were greatly embellished. According to Buddhist accounts, Dutugemunu defeated the Chola King Elara and cut off his head. Although parts of the canon admit, that Elara was a benevolent king who protected the

other minorities wishing to ensure their share of power wished to retain communal representation. The controversy resulted in the minorities breaking away to form their own parties (Shastri 1994:211).

In 1947, the Ceylon Act conferred Dominion Status to Ceylon and the island held its first elections. It was a foregone conclusion that the Sinhalese, who formed 74% of the population, would dominate the legislature. In 1955, the Sinhalese National Party swept into power and made Sinhalese the only official language. Buddhism became the state religion and Tamils, who constituted only 12% of the population, became increasingly marginalized. Urban middle class Tamils from Jaffna, who had so far dominated the civil services, were doubly hit by these language policies. Sponsored agitation on the part of Tamil representatives to decentralise the power structure met with fierce opposition from Sinhalese- Buddhist clergy, pressure groups and opposition parties. In 1973, the Standardisation and District Quota System, an affirmative action type of legislation designed to encourage more Sinhalese representation in universities and government, was introduced. This was followed by colonisation schemes that encouraged Sinhalese to move into the Eastern Provinces. Tamils were now being threatened in their own territory (Shastri 1994: 212-224).

Although the Tamil-speaking people represented only 12% of the island's population, they were further divided into several conflicting interest groups. There were the Jaffna Tamils, the Batticaloa Tamils, and the Tamils who had settled in Colombo. Apart from these groups, there were also Minority Tamils and Untouchables. No efforts were made to change this situation until the passing of the Sinhala Only Act in 1956.

Buddhists and had had the support of Sinhalese generals, these details became glossed over, and Dutugemunu's conquest of Elara became celebrated as the restoration of Buddhist Rule.

Even then, the *Vellalars* were reluctant to include the Minority Tamils into their ranks. From their point of view the stigma of unsociability and their relatively recent history of immigration denied the minority Tamils, any real claim to membership in the Tamil community.

In India, exposure to western humanism through English education had resulted in the emergence of several reform movements that attempted to discourage caste discrimination. There was no such corresponding movement in Ceylon. On the contrary, there was a keen interest in maintaining the low status of the Minority Tamils even amongst the highly educated professionals in Colombo and Malaysia. Pfaffenberger attributes this to the dowry and inheritance customs of the island that combines *Vellalar* employment and agriculture (1994:151). Following Singhalese custom, dowry amongst the Tamils included land, and land inheritance was matrilineal. Grooms therefore married as much for the land as for the “girl” and a bride with considerable land holdings could expect an excellent groom- “excellent” implying English educated, professionally employed and from a good caste²⁶ (1994:151). It was therefore in the interest of the well-educated *Vellalar* males to maintain these traditional caste relationships thereby ensuring a steady supply of labour.

Restrictions to ensure that Minority Tamils and Untouchables did not assume *Vellalar* status had been endorsed by law under the Dutch and in the early part of British rule. These included restrictions that prevented them from wearing jewellery, riding in carriages or using “tom-toms” in their marriage processions. They were also denied entry

²⁶ *Vellalars* are divided into numerous sub-castes called *sondakara*. By “good caste” is meant that one’s *sondakara* is of high rank within the *Vellalar* caste and has no ties with the non-*Vellalar* that have crept into the ranks through upward mobility. Crucial to proving ones descent from *vellalar* headmen were the appointment letters and entitlements issued by the Dutch to community officials (Pfaffenberger 1994:151)

into temples, water from high caste wells, and entry into barbershops, cafes, or taxis. They were also not allowed to sit on buses, attend school, cover the upper part of their bodies, own a bicycle or car, cremate the dead, or convert to Christianity or Buddhism. Their women had to be kept in seclusion and ritual obligations required them to imbibe ritual offerings believed to have become tainted with the substance of bad spirits which could bring madness, disease or disorder to *Vellalar* households. In doing so, the spirits would become transferred to the Untouchable, who having had contact with them would become contaminated instead. The stigma of this pollution could not be removed and thus these castes were doomed to remain forever marginalized (Pfaffenberger 1994:148).

After the British removed the legal basis for discrimination, many Untouchables moved into other occupations and raised their status by adopting Sanskritized rituals. Some even "passed" themselves off as *Vellalars* and this caused considerable caste tension. Landowners sought to lower the compensation for Untouchable labour and, rather than support them, *Vellalar* landowners encouraged the *atimai* to settle in their own marginal settlements. Left on their own they were able to finally benefit from new opportunities. Many abandoned the agricultural sector and declined to follow the old customs that were designed to prevent them from assuming *Vellalar* identity.

In 1957, the *Vellalar* dominated the Federal Party, had entered into a coalition with the United National Party, but their success depended on presenting an image of Tamil unity. The year 1968 began with hopeful signs for redressing Tamil grievances. The ruling National Party had agreed to place before Parliament legislation that would devolve a modest amount of support to the District Development Councils. However, efforts were set back by the occurrence of the Maviddapuram Temple conflict later that

year. Several hundred Minority Tamils, led by the “Peking-wing” of the Ceylon Communist Party, sat in non-violent protest outside the orthodox Hindu temple of Lord Kanacami in a village called Maviddapuram. They were protesting the fact that only 17% of temples in Jaffna allowed entry to Minority Tamils. After a week of confrontation at the gates of the shrine, Hindus of high caste beat back the protesters with iron bars and sand filled bottles. The incidence almost led to a full-fledged caste war (Pfaffenberger 1994:143)

The opposition Sri Lankan Freedom Party, in an effort to undermine the ruling party, introduced a bill to inquire into caste discriminations. The All-Ceylon Minority Tamil Party who called for protection against violent *Vellalar* reprisals bolstered their demands. Adding to the situation were two new factors: missionary activities, this time from the Buddhists and the growing radicalism of Tamil youth.

The 1970's saw the rise of violent guerrilla youth groups. Unemployed and frustrated the younger generation of *Vellalars* was becoming impatient with traditional authority. Support for the radical groups therefore cut across caste lines, reflecting the Tamil unity that the moderate Tamils had feebly been attempting to generate. Dedicated to social reform and the abolition of caste, their aggressive influence finally cracked *Vellalar* domination. Thus, a new inclusive Tamil identity emerged.

Hinduism in Jaffna

Having outlined the political and social atmosphere of Ceylon in the 19th and 20th centuries, I now turn to the religion of Jaffna. Since Hinduism was repressed under the Portuguese and Dutch, the temple tradition was in decline in the 17th and 18th centuries.

However, it saw a revival in the 19th century when religious freedom was restored. Temples were restored, new ones built and the old practice of inviting Brahmans from south India to serve as priests was renewed. Orthodox Shaivism also saw a revival under the energetic efforts of Arumuka Navalar (1822-1879). A *Vellalar* educated in Christian schools, like Dayananda Saraswati the founder of the Arya Samaj in India; he became engaged in responding to the criticisms of Christian missionaries. He too conceded that Hindu practices had become corrupted and called for a return to a pristine past. However, this “past” was rooted in Shaiva Agamas and *Brahman* codes of purity and ritual. His reformed Shaivism repudiated everything that did not have its foundation in the *Shaiva Siddhanta* tradition. This included folk practices, sacrifices, ritual obligation of Untouchables, and the worship of the goddess *Kannaki*, a village goddess whose cult now fused with that of the Pattani cult had become prominent in Batticaloa (Arasaratnam 1994: 156).²⁷

The two striking features of the religion practiced by Jaffna Tamils are the temple tradition and fervent devotionism. Both characteristics are rooted in the Shaiva Agamas. The term *agama* literally means, “that which came from the past” (Iyengar 1995: 103) and the cosmological foundations upon which *Agamic* religions are based differ from that of the *Vedic* tradition.

The *Vedic* tradition is oriented towards the idea of the divine as a numinous transcendent realm, one that is “wholly other”. Rites focus on the fire, which becomes a communication channel between man and god (Pfaffenberger 1982:138). The fire is constructed on specially prepared ground, and this serves as the *axis mundi*.

²⁷ The Pattani cult has also merged with the Draupadi cult and Pattani Amman is now regarded as an aspect of Kali (Iyengar 1999: 601). For further information on the Draupadi cult see A. Hildebeitel (1988) and A.

Significantly, it is not the site that is the *axis mundi*, but the *axis mundi* is wherever the sacrifice is held.

The *Agamic* belief, on the other hand, is on an essential sanctity inherent in the universe. However, it is inconsistent, and displays itself in the increase of entropy, especially in disease and death. It can, however, be converted and put to good use. Sacred power thus has two states: a primordial state in which it is inconsistent and antithetical to social order, and an ordered state in which it is controlled and can be advantageous. The transformation is effected by ritual, especially through music- that is ordered sound (Pfaffenberger 1994:138). The locus of sacred power is believed to be especially in the wilderness, in remote caves, lakes, and mountaintops. Elaborate rituals in which sacred power was “bound” to the spot were performed at these sites, which were then considered the *axis mundi*, and maintained in perpetuity. While *Vedic* philosophy focuses on attaining immortality in some form or another, *agamic* scriptures on the other hand are believed to have emanated from the lips of Shiva or Vishnu, and the emphasis therefore is on *arca* (homage) and *bhakti* (devotion) to a deity.

In ancient times, only kings, aristocrats, and the wealthy performed Vedic rites, and when these began to decline after 600 BCE Brahman priests turned their attention to the household rituals of the common folk. Iyengar suggests that these domestic practices were fire-less *Agama* rituals that consisted of offering food to the deity to the accompaniment of ritual singing and dancing (1999:113). In the *Puranas*, *Vedic* and *Agamic* systems exist side by side, until they gradually gravitated towards each other and by the 5th and 6th centuries CE, coalesced.

Danielou (1965)

The *Vedic* and *Agamic* blend is best reflected in the ritual structure of the temple. It also represents the *Brahman- Sudra* alliance that is unique in South India. The *Vedic yajamana* concept ²⁸ was supported by the *caturvarna* (four class) system. Only those who had undergone the initiation process (*diksa*) were entitled to perform the sacrifice (*yagna*) and receive the benefits that ensued from this status (Pfaffenberger 1982:67). These rites involved the sacrifice of an animal that infused the *yajamana* with restorative powers. The rite was thus connected to land fertility, and since only the “twice born” could own land in the *jajmani* system of North India, only they were qualified to receive the “power” that was won out of the ritual (Gonda 1969: 6-8). The idea that the ritual’s patron wins vitality from the rite is also found in the consecration ceremonies, *abisekam*, which invested kings with a “power substance” that endowed him with vitality that produced progeny, prosperity, strength, and wisdom, and insulated him from impurity. In other words, he brought the possessions of the gods to earth (Pfaffenberger 1982:67).

Since the Vedic system excluded *Sudras* from receiving the *diksa*, the land owning *Sudras* of South India could not receive the power of the sacrifice directly. In South India, however the caste system differs and is based on a *Brahman-Sudra* relationship. The other two castes were non-existent and *Sudras* were the dominant landowners. The temple institution provided a way out of this dilemma. Agama states:

Let him who wishes to enter the worlds that are reached by sacrificial offerings and the performance of obligations (*istapurta*) build a temple to the gods, by doing which he attains both the results of the sacrifice and the performance of religious obligation. (Cited in Kramrisch 1976:139).

Sacred power in the fire rite is bound by drawing a *yantra*, a geometrical device on a spot. The spot then becomes the *axis mundi* and radiates power outwards in four

²⁸ Derived from the Sanskrit *yagna*, which is translated as “sacrifice”, it refers to the Vedic fire ritual. The

directions. In temples, the *murthi* (image) of the deity is grounded to the earth upon which the *yantra* has been placed, thus “binding” or “rooting” the divinity to that spot. A chamber called the *garbhagrha* (womb chamber) is erected over the *murthi* (ibid:11). This becomes the sanctum, the heart of the edifice. Temples therefore are literally places where sacred power is “held” or “bound” and temple buildings therefore not only reflect the builder’s piety but also is are also the source of his vitality. Temple Agama also specifies that the temple stand as the *Sudra*’s twice born body (ibid:139, Mitchell 1977:72). The communication between the sacred “vitality” bound in the *yantra* and the patron or *yajaman*, is established by the building itself. The *murthi*, which is regularly, consecrated through *abisekam* rites, stands as proxy for the patron. In this way, the builders and patrons of the temple receive the full entitlements and benefits of *yajaman* status. The temple thus provides a way for *Sudras* to enjoy the *yajaman* entitlements, without undergoing the *diksa* that is reserved exclusively for the three other castes.

Throughout the Tamil culture, temples reflect the prosperity of the patrons. Traditionally the *Vellalars* provided the lands and funds for the maintenance, supported the priests and their families, and paid for festivals and other routine operational expenses. In return, they received the *mariyatai* (honours) and the public recognition of their status, along with the *yajamana* benefits (see Appadurai 1981, Pfaffenberger 1982:62). Pfaffenberger observes that serving as *yajamana* (patron), is far more beneficial than merely visiting a temple to which one does not donate. This would be tantamount to going “free”, and does not entail any reciprocity between deity and devotee (Pfaffenberger 1982:64). Tamil Hindus therefore seek from their temples not only the

yajaman is therefore the “performer of the sacrifice”.

darsan (audience) of the deity, but also the *punniyam* (merit) and *palan* (rewards) amassed in their role as *yajamans*.

In modern times, especially in diaspora, communities usually build temples. The trustees and donors, along with the sponsor of the day's *pujas*, are joint *yajamans*, and therefore are mentioned in the *samkalpa* (statement of intent) of the first *prayer* and receive the merit accrued in the days *pujas*. This is perhaps a reason why Tamil temples in Diaspora have no shortage of support.

Temples in Jaffna follow the South Indian architectural traditions, the general features of which are as follows. Each temple replicates the body of the cosmic *purusa* (man), traced on the ground and the plan is designed according to cosmological rules encoded in the *Agama* texts. At the very heart of the structure is the *garbhagrha*, (womb), in which the sacred *yantra* and *murthi* are placed. Above the chamber that houses them is built a copper or gold *gopuram* (dome), which is the sacred Mt Meru. Only priests are permitted to enter the *garbhagraha*. Beyond this, are the *mantapams* (halls) that were ranked in order of purity. The first is restricted to the priest; the second to *Brahmans*, and the third is for Vellalar patrons and his kinfolk. The general public have access only to the fourth hall (Pfaffenberger 1982).

The temple's main deity is installed in the central *garbhagrha*, amidst elaborate ritual. Other deities of the same sect are housed in smaller shrines around the complex, their positions also fixed by the *agama* texts. Lord Ganesha, unless he is the main deity, is always placed at the entrance to the left of the main sanctum, so that devotees may worship him first, before proceeding to the other shrines in a clockwise direction, always

keeping the main deity to one's right. *Navagrahas*, (Seven Planets and Constellations) are another important feature of South Indian temples.²⁹

Religion in Jaffna is bound to have undergone considerable change in the last three decades. However, Pfaffenberger documented Jaffna society as it was before the 1984 crises and updating his research is impossible under present circumstances. According to him, the prominent gods in Jaffna were those of the Shaiva pantheon, Shiva, Ganesha, Murukan, and Devi. He observes that despite his standing at the apex of Shavism, as the patriarch of the Shaiva deities, temples to Lord Shiva are not as plentiful as one would imagine. He is most often represented as a *linkam*. Two prominent Shiva temples in Jaffna are the Koneswaram Temple in Trincomali, built, it is believed, 3000 years ago by Prince Vijaya, and the Munneswaram Temple. Both were destroyed by the Portuguese but rebuilt in the 1950s (Rao 1980: 157).

Murukan, also very popular, is known by numerous epithets. Skanda (Spurt of Semen), Saravana (Forest of Arrows), Kumara (Boy), Kartikeya (Son of the Pleiades), and Subrahmanya (dear to the *Brahmans*) (Danielou 1964:299). Armed with a *vel* (spear), he is depicted as a handsome young man, often with six faces (Aramukan- Six faced One), mounted on a peacock. The *kavati festival* that re-enacts the Idumbun myth³⁰ is the most important ritual. It is generally celebrated in *Thai* (January/February) and *Chitrai* (April/May) months, but in the western Diaspora is postponed to warmer summer

²⁹ The temple committee in Edmonton informed me however, that by tradition, in temples where Lord Ganesha is the main deity, *Navagrahas* are not placed within the building. They claim that except for their Edmonton temple, all other Ganesha temples in the Hindu Diaspora have included these inside the building.

³⁰ Idumban, a devotee of Lord Murukan, is asked to move two mountains, which he does by suspending them on two ends of a pole. However, when he sets them down to take a short rest, they became fixed to the ground and could not be lifted again. Murukan becomes angered by this and kills him, but later impressed by Idumban's devotion restores him.

months. It is believed that those who carry the *kavati* as penance gain Lord Murukan's favour.

Pfaffenberger observes that the most numerous temples in Jaffna are to Lord Ganesha who as the second son of Lord Shiva and the Goddess Parvati, is fully incorporated into the South Indian Shaiva and *Brahmanical* traditions. *Shakti* as the goddess Durga or Thevi is also a popular deity. The cult of the goddess Pattani is also popular in the eastern district, but was discouraged in Jaffna during the Shaiva revival. The big festival to these goddesses is in the month of July-August. After ceremonial worship and the offering of foods such as milk, pumpkin, and coconut - all believed to have a cooling effect on people inflicted with disease- there is a fire-walking ritual.

The second aspect of Tamil religion is its fervent devotionism. The *Bhakti marg*, the path of devotion, found dramatic expression in Tamil cultures especially through a succession of Shaiva poet-saints (called collectively the Nayanars, i.e. leaders) who emerged around the 6th century CE. Although their individual messages differ in emphasis, the common theme is an intense devotion to God. Moreover, their teachings are not in Sanskrit but in poetic Tamil, and can be learned, recited, and sung by everyone.

The poetry of the Nayanars was strongly influenced by the stories of the gods and heroes of the Puranas and Epics. These classic tales were transformed into ardently expressed devotions that are conveyed in human feelings of love, friendship, joy, and despair. While the sages of the Upanishads pursued fusion with an impersonal and remote *Brahman*, Shaiva saints sought a very personal salvation in an eternal relationship of blissful devotion, in which the distinction between god and devotee is preserved (Hopkins 1971:118). The twelve *Tirumurai* constitute the bulk of the teachings of the

Nayanars. They bring together in a devotional manner, epic and *Puranic* stories, the saint's own experiences, and the teachings of the Shaiva *Agamas* dedicated to Lord Shiva.

The most prevalent Tamil Shaiva sect, the Shaiva Siddhanta developed in the 13th century. The essence of its teachings is in the reality of the three categories, God (*Pati* or Lord), souls (*pasu*, literally animals), and matter (*pasa*, bond). The most important texts are the *Tirumandiram*, which consists of 3,000 stanzas written by the mystic Tirumular, the *Tevaram* which is a collection of songs composed by three poets, Appar, Sambbandar and Sundarar, and the third, *Tiruvassagam* composed by Manikkavasagar, who is hailed as the greatest poet of Tamil literature (Walker 1983:328).

Tamils in dispersion

Since the outbreak of violence in 1974, more than 30,000 people, both Tamils and Singhalese have been killed. Official records estimate 600,000 Sri Lankan Tamil refugees or asylum seekers now dispersed in various parts of the world. 320,000 of these are believed to be in India, and the rest have been given asylums in Europe, Canada,³¹ Australia, and New Zealand.

Although theoretically Tamils fit the international legal definition of refugee used by most countries, in practice the acceptance rate has varied from one state to the next.³²

³¹ There is some discrepancy between official figures and figures that Tamils themselves give out. According to unofficial Tamil sources, there are now 200,000 Tamils in Canada. Statistics Canada records are however much lower. When confronted by this difference in numbers, the Tamils merely smile mysteriously and without putting words into their mouths, conveyed that there are many more Tamils in Canada and elsewhere, who arrive illegally.

³² The United Nations Convention of 1952 defines a refugee: "any person who owing to well founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of the country, or who not having nationality and being outside the country of his

For example, under this convention, Canada accepted a sizeable number of asylum seekers, while the United States accepted hardly any. In Europe, Switzerland and Germany extended shelter only on a temporary humanitarian basis.

Christopher McDowell (1997) divides Tamil migration into three typical phases. An early phase (1983-1985), during which 90% of those that emigrated were single males from Jaffna. They were mainly *Vellalar* English speaking, professionals who moved to English speaking countries where they quickly gained employment in their fields. The second phase (1985-1990) brought the families and contacts of the first group, unattached males or females generally with a relative or parents already in the West. In the third phase (after 1990), only 20% were from Jaffna. This group consisted of non-*Vellalars* from the artisan castes.

Tamil informants with whom this scheme was discussed affirmed that this was a fair assessment. However, it was pointed out that the emigration of Tamils from Sri Lanka began as early as 1956, with the introduction of the Sinhala Only Act. Many Tamils recognised the warning sign then and left to pursue careers in Britain, United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

As noted earlier, Tamils have been recreating their social networks and communities in dispersion with amazing swiftness. Naturally, political mobilization is a major focus in most of these groups. Nevertheless, temples too play a significant role in creating these communities. Although some temples make a conscious effort to separate politics and religion, others combine the two and often raise money for political action at

former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it" (http://www.unhchr.ch/html/menu3/b/o_c_ref.htm).

religious functions. Thus, some temples are identified as “Tiger temples” dominated by the Liberation Tamil Tiger Elam (LTTE) group.

Of the estimated 65,000 Hindus in Germany, an estimated 40,000 are Sri Lankan Tamils. (Baumann 1999: 64). The Hindus from India who began arriving in Germany in the 1960’s are mainly professionals, academics, or prosperous businessmen. However, much to the chagrin of the early group, the arrival of the Tamils changed the image of middle class respectability that they had enjoyed. Tamil refugees in Germany are not fluent in German and therefore do not qualify for technical and white-collar jobs (Dessai 1994: 106, 118). They therefore take low paying service jobs and are seen as “low paid and uneducated immigrants”, a stereotype that is causing concern amongst the earlier group who feel that the reputation that they have worked hard to establish is being tarnished. Consequently, they have distanced themselves from the Tamils and the two groups remain separated by a class system based on economics. In the last few decades, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) has attempted to unite Hindus under a single temple institution. But as Dessai (1994:117) observes, what has taken the educated middle class Hindus three decades to achieve, has been accomplished by Tamils in the short time that they have been in Germany. Tamil immigrants have already built three major temples in the country.

Similarly, Tamil temples have emerged in Switzerland, France, and Britain. They are generally established in existing buildings that are renovated to suit their needs. Some, like the Kamadchi Amman temple in Hamm (Germany), are “purpose-built” while others are lodged in leased property or older buildings renovated for the purpose. Denmark has set a new trend by being the first temple in Europe and in the West, to have

a priestess. Founded in a basement in the early 1990s by Abhirami Upasaki, a shaman who becomes possessed by the goddess Abhirami Amman while in trance, this temple appeared on international television during the “milk miracle” episode in 1995 (*Hinduism Today* December 1988). The *Upasaki* also travels to other European countries to perform *puja*, counsel devotees and heal their sicknesses during trance

Canada accepted several thousand refugees, and several Tamil temples have emerged in Toronto and Montreal. They will be discussed in the next chapter. The United States did not accept Tamil refugees and therefore we do not see temples built specifically by Sri Lankan Tamils there. Nevertheless, there are several South-Indian temples, but these tend to emphasise *Brahmanic* ritual. The Sri Murukan Temple in Washington seems to be the only institution so far that has a Tamil focus.

Based on the 1986 Census, there were 21,500 Hindus in Australia. Of these, Bilimoria notes that 4250 were Tamils from Sri Lanka. By the 1996 Census, their numbers had increased to 7834 and they are mainly professionals and quasi - professionals (Bilimoria 1999: 15-16). There are no Tamil temples yet in Australia. This chapter focused on the historical processes that have led to the dispersal of the Tamils. It also outlined the changes in Jaffna society during the colonial period under globalization. The essence of the discussion has been that the spread of modern institutions led to corresponding shifts in the way identity became constructed. While there are parallels to the Indian experience, some interesting variations explain the uniqueness in the manner in which Tamils reconstruct their institutions in Diaspora.

The next chapter examines the specific socio-legal decisions and opportunities that have influenced the development of Tamil religious institutions in Canada. Each

case is unique to the circumstances of the locations in which the Tamils are situated. Substantial populations support temples in Toronto and Montreal. Therefore, these institutions have emerged as “regionally- specific temples” particular to the Tamil community. On the other hand, the Tamil population of Ottawa is too small to warrant a separate temple and therefore uses the “joint” facilities of the Hindu Temple of Ottawa-Carleton. While each group’s experience influences the reconstruction of Hinduism, their decisions regarding what is legitimate and appropriate in religious matters has much to do with practical factors such as population size and group homogeneity.

Chapter 4: “In the Land of Dreams”: Reconstructing Hindu Institutions in Canada

Chapter Two focused on an overview of the global Hindu Diaspora. Here I shall focus on the religious institutions of specific groups. Beyer and Appadurai propose that the dynamics that influence Diaspora experience lie in a combination of global historical processes and group experience along universal and particular lines. Using this as a model, and having already dealt with the global Diaspora, I shall begin with an overview of Hinduism in Canada before proceeding to discuss the institutionalized practice of three Tamil groups.

The Canadian Landscape

Hindu migration to Canada occurred in two phases. A brief period of “*Hindoo*” immigration from India took place from 1904 to 1909. Although called “*Hindoos*”, these immigrants were actually rural Sikh Jats who had been recruited as migrant workers. However, public pressure against them from a white majority public became so volatile, that their immigration was stopped altogether by 1909 (Johnston 1984:3-7). South Asian immigration to Canada began again only in the 1960s.

Canadian immigration policies have always been closely tied to economic development and nation building. Accordingly, immigrants had been selected on the bases of occupational requirements and cultural adaptability. Thus, until 1962, immigration regulations were constructed in such a way as to assure easier access to immigrants from Britain, North Europe, and the United States. Since the Second World War, however, Canadian regulations have moved through a series of changes reflecting

the evolving pattern of global political development and Canada's new position as a mediator in world affairs. It could hardly assume an arbitrator's role when its own immigration policies were under criticism from decolonising Third World countries. At the same time, manpower needs argued for a greater emphasis on economic rather than cultural factors (Indra 1981:164). Consequently, the Immigration Act of 1967 removed all criteria based on race, nationality, culture, or ethnicity for the selection of immigrants. Subsequent to its enactment, selection was based on a point system, whereby an applicant was assessed according to the requirements of the labour market. At the end of World War II, Canada became a core industrial nation and the growth in industry created large demands for industrial workers. At the same time American investment increased, increasing the connection between American and Canadian economies and thereby weakening Canada's ties with Europe and Great Britain. The development of the European Common Market had a further deleterious effect on Canadian-European trade and Canada's economic ventures moved away from the British Empire towards the American.

In the mid 1960s, 85% of immigrants to Canada came from Europe, Great Britain and the United States and only 7% from Asia (Indra 1981:165). Moreover, immigrants came from only 15 countries, primarily from rich developed countries of the world. Asian immigrants came from countries that were either "traditional source countries" or covered by specific immigration treaties. Therefore, the majority were from Hong Kong, Japan, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

After the 1967 Act, European and American immigration dropped to 47% as the number of source countries increased, reflecting a more equitable ratio of European and

non-European immigrants. The point system, however, was predisposed to select immigrants from countries with a high or increasing GNP. Thus immigrants came from rich countries or Asian countries where the GNP was rapidly increasing -Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and the Philippines. The two exceptions were Japan and India. Japan remained a low source of immigration since there were insufficient incentives for the Japanese to emigrate, and India became a high source because of the large number of skilled people who could not be absorbed into the Indian work force. Asian immigrants tended to be from urban industrialised contexts, shaped by Western ideas and practices. 1971 data shows that the majority of Asian immigrants to Canada were highly skilled and qualified. Moreover, they were from cultural backgrounds that reflect Western ideas and institutions, in particular from those countries that have been heavily influenced by Britain or United States. In a sense, colonial experience had pre-formed Indians for Canadian society (Indra 1981:168).

By 1975, Canada's labour requirements had changed once again and this fact was reflected in the new Immigration Act of 1976 that emphasized family reunion, trade, commerce and scientist categories. As a result, professional and technical categories declined in favour of business investors. This period also saw the increasing Africanization policies in East Africa that led to the expulsion of British passport holding South Asians from Uganda and Kenya. Many were absorbed by Britain as refugees, but a large number were taken by Canada on humanitarian grounds. In 1985, more South Asian asylum seekers arrived, this time from Sri Lanka. The Immigration Act was further amended in 1989 to improve the refugee determination process. The year 1992 saw further changes in the Canadian economy in the direction of the high tech industry.

Table C. South Asians Population by Home Language for Canada and Provinces. Single Responses. 1996

Language	Ontario	Quebec	B. Columbia	Alberta	Canada
Punjabi	58,570	5345	74,015	12,325	154,485
Tamil	47,320	7105	600	330	55,675
Gujarati	17,665	990	2940	2585	26,670
Hindi	9840	990	8995	2620	23,235

<http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/People/Population/demo29b.htm>

Table D. Population by Selected Religion for Canada and Provinces 1991. (Eastern Non-Christian).

Religion	Hindu	Islam	Sikh
Canada Total	157,010	253,300	147,000
Newfoundland	0.4 x (1000)	0.3 x (1000)	0.1 x(1000)
PEI	-	0.1	.01
Nova Scotia	1.0	1.4	0.3
New Brunswick	0.6	0.3	-
Quebec	14.0	145.6	4.5
Ontario	106.7	145.6	50.1
Manitoba	3.5	3.5	3.5
Saskatchewan	1.7	1.2	.6
Alberta	10.8	31.0	13.6
British Columbia	18.1	24.9	74.6
Yukon and NWT	0.1	0.1	0.1

<http://www.statcan.ca/english/Pgdb/People/Population/demo30c.htm>

Changes in immigration patterns had an effect on the composition of the Hindu population. In the 1960's, the South Asian population consisted mainly of middle class professionals with affluent life-styles. Although culturally diverse, they shared a common English education and middle class status. By the end of the 1970's new immigrants were no longer necessarily professional or even English educated. Based on language statistics, it became evident that in the 1996 census the prominent South Asian linguistic groups were Punjabi, Gujarati, Tamil and Hindi and that the majorities of these languages, except for Punjabi are concentrated in Ontario (see Table C). Table D indicates that in 1991 the majority of the Hindu population (157,010) was also concentrated in Ontario.

As noted earlier, the Hindus who arrived in Canada in the 1960's were primarily urban, English educated professional and quasi professionals who represented a full pan-Indian diversity. Moreover, they already had exposure to modern secular institutions and therefore were able to adapt to the Canadian work environment fairly easily. Socially, their first impulse was towards building a secular Indian community that included expatriate Indians of all creeds. Quasi-nationalistic institutions, generally registered as Indo Canada Associations, emerged that celebrated national holidays like Independence Day, Republic Day, and Gandhi Jayanti. Divali, which is a national holiday in India much like Christmas in the West, was also celebrated. But, in those days very few Hindus actually understood its religious significance, and it was just another day for Indians to gather and socialize.

Soon emotional attachments of this sort began to fade, and Indians began to re-group along linguistic, regional, and religious lines. Generous heritage grants allowed the setting up of language schools to propagate their languages to the Canadian born children

of new immigrants. Although Hindi is the official language of India, immigrants of Indian heritage preferred teaching their children their mother tongue. Thus, several language classes, representing the various regional languages of India were organized. Along with these language classes, classical dance and music were also taught, the latter remaining an important medium for the propagation of Indian culture to the young.

As far as religion was concerned, events were celebrated privately and all one's friends, including Sikhs, Christians and Muslims would be invited to participate in the festivities. *Satsangs* (religious meetings) would be organized on a weekly basis for *bhajans* or scripture readings. I personally remember three such groups emerging in the early 1970's in Ottawa: Sunday afternoon *bhajans* at the home of a South Indian family attended mainly by South Indians, Sai Baba *satsangs*, and a short lived Vedanta group of intellectually inclined people who would meet to discuss the scriptures.

Pujas would also be performed, either at people's homes or in rented halls. At these events, lay Hindus of the *Brahman* caste would officiate as priests. Although not trained in priestly craft, these men nevertheless were able to perform basic rituals based on what they had picked up in their formative years, embellished with subsequent research. In time, some of these men became quite proficient and even obtained licenses from the Registrar of Marriages that enabled them to solemnize marriages.

As the Hindu population grew, these *satsangs* were moved to rented space and discussion turned towards building temples. By then, Hindu families were maturing and the numbers of life cycle events was on the increase. The demand for full-time priests became urgent. In addition, political developments in India had created rifts in the Indian community as Sikhs and Hindus polarized towards their own religious affinities. The

Babri Masjid episode in 1995 further polarized Hindus and it was also around this time that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad opened a chapter in Toronto, coinciding with the visits of notable Indian politicians of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Both Sikh and Muslim communities had already begun constructing religious institutions by then, and Hindus began to feel that they were the only ones lacking concrete institutions.

Hindu temples in Diaspora follow typical stages in development. They start off as small *satsangs* in people's homes and move to rented spaces as the group expands. At this point, the group usually registers itself as a religious non-profit organization, in order to qualify for the reduced rates available for such organizations. Fund raising activities begin towards acquiring a permanent site. If the group can support a priest then one is recruited, usually from India, although lately, organizations like the Hindu Society of Saskatchewan and Hindu Prarthana Samaj in Toronto have also advertised in English weeklies like *India Abroad* for priests "well versed in all Hindu *samaskars* and *pujas* and able to explain these in English. Other Indian languages an asset." (March 8, 1999: 10).

Alleyn Deisel (2000) organized her data on Hindus in South Africa according to practice and discovered four major streams of practices; traditional ritualistic, Arya Samaj, neo-Vedanta, and Hare Krishna and more recently an increasing number of Sai Baba devotees (4-5). However although it is quite possible that the majority of Hindus that she came across were participants at all four major institutions. It is quite common for Hindus to profess belief in the abstract Neo-Vedantic philosophy and yet participate in orthodox ritualistic worship. Likewise, Hindus may attend Sai Baba *bhajans*, and worship regularly at Hare Krishna temples and also support the local Hindu temple. An understanding of the type of institution that emerge in various locations however can

reveal a lot about the size, ethnic composition and of Hindus living in the area, and a closer look at the dynamics within these institutions will shed light on the beliefs and interests of the people who establish these temples.

Where Hindu populations are small diverse, “joint-temples” emerge. However the décor and rituals will reflect the group that is most prominent. For example there are too few Hindus in Halifax to warrant separate temples, and therefore a “joint-temple” has been established that has a membership of 250 Hindu families. Before, a group had been meeting on a weekly basis in each other’s homes and a Kashmiri *Brahman* schoolmaster officiated as priest. In 1975, the group had raised money and bought an old church building. A nine-member committee was appointed to run the place. The building was renovated in 1984 and since Punjabis formed the majority, renovations reflected the north Indian traditions. When *murthis* of Lord Rama and his *Pariwar* (family), Hanuman, Shivji and Vaishno Devi were commissioned in marble, politics threatened to create a rift in the community along north/south lines. Conflicts however were amicably resolved by the inclusion of a granite *murthi* of Lord Ganesha. The Kashmiri *Brahman* has since retired and moved to Toronto, so other lay *Brahmins* now take turns to perform the regular “services” that are organized on Sundays. According to my source who has been involved with the temples since its conception, the Sunday services are performed in the “Hindu way”, while “other South Indian pujas” are conducted at different times.

The largest Hindu population is concentrated in Ontario, specifically the Toronto area. Here three linguistic groups are prominent: Tamil, Gujarati and Punjabi. The Tamils are predominantly Tamils from Sri Lanka and are concentrated in Markham. The largest South Indian temple is the Sri Ganesha Temple in Richmond Hill, (which I will be

discussing in more detail later in this chapter) but there are several smaller ones like the Thevi and Shiva Temples and one to Sri Ayyappan. The latest trend is the private temple, set up by freelance priests in their homes.

Gujaratis form the next largest group in Toronto and they represent several sects and castes. A large number arrived in the 1970s as refugees from East Africa. So far they have built two temples, the Sanatana temple established in Markham in 1996 and a Hindu Mandir in Mississauga that was opened in 1998. The deities at the Sanatana temple are: Ganesha, a Lingam, Mata Amba, Radha Krishna, Ram Pariwar, Gowri Mata, Hanuman, Swaminarayan, and Mahavir. *Murthis* are marble and the institution also functions as a community centre. Its large auditorium is rented out for weddings. A groundbreaking ceremony was performed in June of this year, for a new Swaminarayan Temple that is estimated to cost \$10 million and is to rival the magnificent edifice in London (UK).

The Vaishnavi Devi temple in Oakville serves the needs of Punjabis and Hindus from North India. The temple is built in the North Indian style, with an onion shaped *shikhara* (dome) and marble *murthis*. Although the goddess takes the centre position, *murthis* of Shiva, Hanuman, Ganesha, and Rama Pariwar are also present. Another North Indian style temple in Toronto, but built by Guyanese Hindus, is the Vishnu Mandir in Richmond Hill.

Until recently, the devotees of Sai Baba were content to use the facilities of existing temples for their *satsangs*. Since the 1990s however they have begun building their own centres and Sai Baba Fellowship Centres have emerged in Toronto and Ottawa. Vedanta Centres that propagate the teachings of the 19th century Bengali sage Sri Ramakrishna are also active in Winnipeg, Montreal and Halifax, but only Toronto has a

separate building and a resident *swami*. Other *gurus* like the Radha Swami, Swami Chinmayananda, Swami Dayananda, Sri Sri Ravi Shanker, to name only a few, also have followings.

A recent trend is for priests to freelance. Generally priests are recruited from India on 3-year contracts, and some opt to stay on and freelance. The increasing Hindu population in Toronto makes it a lucrative profession in that city, but Ottawa too has a freelance priest. There are several other temples in Toronto but, it is impossible to discuss them all. I therefore, limited my remarks to the institutions with which I have the most familiarity. I shall now turn to the three temples selected for this study.

*Sri Lankan Temples in Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa*³³

Tamil emigration from Sri Lanka began as early as 1958, when Singhalese was made the official language of Sri Lanka. Many professionals left for Great Britain and since then there has been a steady stream of Sri Lankan professionals and students to the United States, Australia and New Zealand. Very few came to Canada until the 1970's and Census records show that the total Sri Lankan population in 1979 was a mere 3,594 (Johnston 1984:15). (These figures include Singhalese and Tamils). In 1984, immigration criteria were waived in the case of Tamils and other refugees seeking entry into Canada, on humanitarian grounds. By 1986 the Immigration Department was inundated by a staggering backlog of refugee applicants from all over the world and a general amnesty was declared, awarding all refugee applicants landed immigrant status.

³³ By Sri Lankan Tamil temple I mean those temples built Sri Lankan Tamils or where financial support is predominantly from this group.

While official records indicate a total Canadian population of 55,000 Tamils (see Table 3) in 1996, Tamil informants estimate it at a much higher figure of 150,000. Both figures indicate a sizeable population, and in cities like Toronto and Montreal the Tamil presence is very evident in places of worship, Tamil owned grocery stores, shops, cafes, restaurants and other businesses listed in a Tamil/English guide called the *Tamil's Guide: Commercial & Information 1999*, which also has a website: www.tamilsguide.com.

The first few groups of Tamils arrived in Montreal, as Quebec was then the only province that extended welfare benefits to refugees. However, the province of Ontario began granting these benefits in 1985, and the preferred destination became Toronto. Many Tamils moved to Toronto where there are more job opportunities and their children could have an English education. More recently the trend is to move out of Toronto where the Tamil Tigers Organization (LTTE) has become increasingly aggressive in their fund raising campaigns, to Ottawa. Consequently the Tamil population of Ottawa is gradually increasing.

The Sri Ganesha Temple in Richmond Hill, Ontario

In Toronto, there already existed the beginnings of a South Indian Temple. The Sri Ganesha Temple was officially registered as the Hindu Society of Canada in 1973 and is the first "purpose built" temple in Canada built by immigrants. The idea was conceived by a small group of South Indians in Toronto whose intent was to form a "joint- temple" to serve the ritual needs of all Hindus in the Toronto area. There were plans to build a community centre adjoining the temple where weddings and other social activities could be held. They managed to interest about 50 families, from different backgrounds, and registered the institution as the Hindu Temple Of Canada with the ambitious idea that it

would the umbrella organization for temples all over Canada. An administrative committee of nine members was appointed and weekly *pujas* were held in various homes every week to raise money.

The next decade saw very little progress and the group had raised a mere \$13,000. Except for a core of enthusiasts, interest had begun to wane. In 1983, 3.8 acres of land became available in a new development in the Township of Richmond. It was zoned for religious purposes, but the city council members were reluctant to sell it to them, and it was only after the committee with the help of scholars at the University of Toronto, convinced them that they were indeed a *bona fide* religion and not a cult, that the Mayor hesitantly accepted their offer.

The down payment of \$50,000 was easily raised by a few large donations, but it was the financing of the remaining \$100,000 that presented problems. Banks would not loan them the money, until a few committee members put up their homes as collateral. On April 14th, 1984 the temple was formally inaugurated. A large granite *murthi* of Lord Ganesha had been ordered in India and it arrived via New York, in time for the ceremonies. A priest had also arrived by then, in time to perform the *Bhumi Puja* (ground breaking ceremony), attended by the Mayor and City officials. A granite *murthi* of Lord Ganesha was installed in a temporary trailer, and for the next year or so daily *pujas* were performed there.

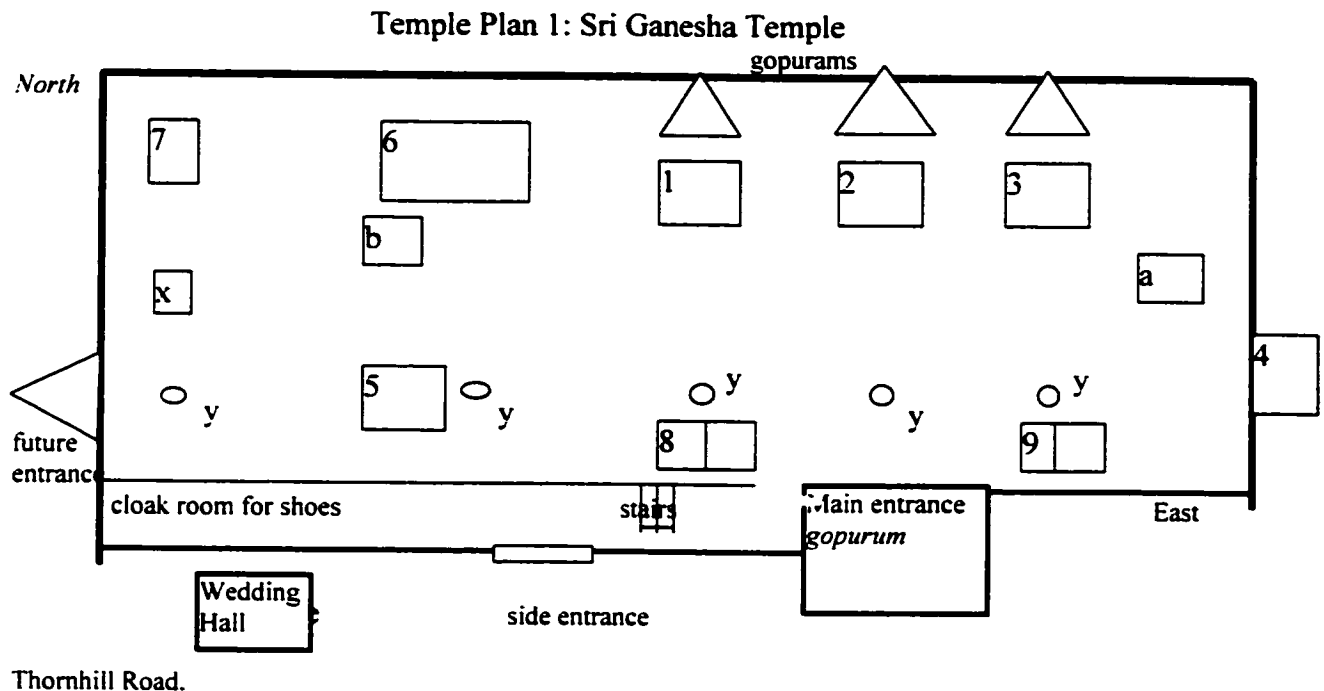
Temple committee members insist that the *murthi* brought them luck. Within a year enough money was raised to build a structure within which the *murthi* along with *murthis* of Sri Durga and Lord Murukan, was installed and consecrated. *Murthis* of Lord Shiva and Lord Perumal followed soon after. The edifice by then had three *gopurams*

(domes) and had generated enough income to support itself. As one gentleman gleefully declared: “We were struggling to raise money for 10 years but as soon as Ganesha arrived, money started pouring in”.

The influx of Sri Lankan Tamil refugees, who now flocked to the temple may also have had something to do with the sudden turn in fortunes. Apart from the Hare Krishna institution, the Sri Ganesha Temple as it was now known, was the only Hindu institution in Toronto. It must have been a comforting place for these new immigrants. Even today it is they who provide the bulk of the financial support. Although the membership still stands at 300 members, the number of visitors to the temple on special occasions, such as Tamil New Years Day, exceeds 10,000. The temple today serves an unofficially estimated Tamil population of 120,000.

A *stapathi* (architect), was commissioned in Chennai to design the floor plan, which was later modified by a local Toronto firm. *Shilpis* (stone masons), were recruited from India to work on the *gopurams*. Amongst the Sri Lankan population were several temple artisans and carpenters who were able to help in the construction. Temples in India and Sri Lanka, usually have one main deity in a central *garbhagrha* (sanctum), and smaller shrines are arranged in the courtyard around it. Here however, Sri Ganesha, Murukan and Lord Perumal occupy equal size shrines, situated parallel to each other, with Ganesha in the centre. The shrine of Goddess Durga is of equal size but is set apart, facing north as is customary. Lord Siva as Chandramouli and his *shakti* in the form of goddess Tripurasundari, occupy a separate suite, in the northeast. Facing west is a small shrine with Shiva in his fierce form of Bhairava. The presence of benign and malign forces is necessary to balance the powers of the deities, and these are carefully worked

out by the *stapathi*. An alter bearing the *navagrahas* is in the northeast, and a fire pit for *homas* that has an effective exhaust system. On the south side of the building is the Vishnu grouping. A small shrine holds Surya, and Narsimhan -the fierce *avatar* of Vishnu who balances Bhairava. A separate shrine houses marble *murthis* of Sri Rama Pariwar on a lower level. The spouses of the various gods have separate shrines facing the deities, along with the divine *vahanams* (vehicles), peacock, mouse and garuda.



1. Murukan 2. Ganesha, 3. Perumal (Vishnu), 4. Rama Parivar, 5. Durga, 6. Chandramouliswara (Shiva) and Consort Tripurasundari (Shakti) & Linkam, 7. *Navagrahas*, 8. Consorts of Murukan, 9. Consorts of Perumal. a) Surya, b) Bhairava. x, fire pit, and y, flag-posts.

Although built according to the *Agamas*, the plan has also been adapted to Canadian standards and weather conditions. The idea to build a single overarching structure like a stadium to enclose all shrines was clearly designed with winter in mind. Devotees leave their footwear at a specially allotted area at the entrance. Thus once inside

the temple area they are freely without being hampered by removing footwear and coats at each site. Evening processions and other nocturnal activities can be carried on irrespective of the weather conditions outside.

The complex also has separate family quarters for priests and a marriage hall. There are now six priests, two Vaishnava, three *Smarta* and a *Shaiva* priest from Sri Lanka. The daily administration of the temple is managed by a 9 member committee who are elected annually. A salaried manager, and a handyman/cook look after the daily running of the institution. An energetic core of volunteers assists them. A women volunteer who is also a paraprofessional employed in hospital administration, has been involved with the temple since its inception. Known for her piety, she spends all her spare time at the temple, cleaning the brass lamps, decorating the portable *murthis*, amongst other chores, in silence without getting involved in the social activity around her. It is rumoured that she has over the years acquired spiritual powers.

Since Tamil is the dominant language here, all signs are in Tamil and only a few in English. Revenue is largely through tariffs charged for the various services provided by priests. Charges for other services such as special *homams*, *abisekams*, and weddings vary. Priests also make house calls by special arrangement. In India and Sri Lanka, funerary rituals are not performed at temples, or by temple priests. But here for the sake of convenience, a special section is set aside for the performance of *devasams* (the annual remembrance rites). All the priests have become licensed, so that they may solemnize marriages.

All the customary rituals of an *Agamic* institution are observed; starting with the morning *suprabhatham* (wake up ritual) of each deity at sunrise. The priest who is on

duty opens the shrine door of each deity, chanting appropriate mantras, and waving a smoky *sambrani* (dioxin) flare that is meant to purify the temple air of any lingering spirits of the night that may be malignant. Each deity is then bathed and robed in fresh garments. *Naivedhyam* (food offerings), which at this time is not elaborate but may consist of mere dry fruits, is offered. The deity is thus made ready to give *darsan*, and the temple is open to public. Three *aratis* are conducted morning, noon and evening at each shrine. At night, the door of each shrine is closed after appropriate mantras are chanted and the environment is left in the safe keeping of Lord Bhairava. Apart from these daily routine rites centered around attending on the deities, priests also perform *arcanai*, (homage rituals) on behalf of devotees. *Arcanai* chits are available at the office, and devotees present these to the priests at the shrine, along with flowers, fruits and other offerings. The offerings are returned to the devotee as *prasadam* and priests receive a *daksina* (tip) for making the offerings. *Arcanais* are performed on both special occasions like birthdays and anniversaries, or just for the good of the family. *Utsava murthis* (portable festival images) of Lord Murukan and his consorts are taken in procession around the temple on Tuesdays and Fridays. The ritual called *oorvalum* involves placing the deities on biers that are borne on the shoulders of devotees. It is then taken around in procession to each shrine in the temple where a priest performs *arati*. The procession is led by temple musicians playing *nadhaswaram* (long clarinets) and *tavil* (percussion).

Another regular ritual at Shaiva temples and one that is performed here is the offering of sesame lamps to the god Shanniswara on Saturdays. Lord Shanniswara (Saturn) is one of the *navagraha* deities, and influences fortune. According to myth, Chaya (shadow), the consort of the Sun-god Surya, found the heat of her husbands body

too intense. Her son Shanni (Saturn) therefore offered to absorb the heat on her behalf. The belief is therefore that if paid proper homage, Lord Shanniswara will absorb one's karma, and neutralize any negative influences in one's horoscope.

Other celebrations are conducted according to the Tamil calendar that is based on a solar-lunar combination. The seasons are according to solar configurations while the *tithes* (days) follow the waxing and waning of the moon. A timetable publishes the important *vrathas* (avowal) days of the month. The regular *vrathas* in a month are: *ammavasai* (new moon), *poornima* (full moon), *chaturthi* (fourth day) of full moon), *shashti* (sixth day), *ekadasi* (first day of the dark moon) and *krithigai* (the star krittika is in ascendance). On these days, devotees generally fast and offer special *puja*. In summer, an annual *kavati* is arranged during which there is also a *rathotsavsa* (chariot festivals), during which deities are placed in tall wooden chariot (*rath*), and pulled by devotees through the streets of the town.

Vaishnava festivals are also celebrated, but these do not attract the same numbers. In fact, much to the consternation of the founding members, most of the activity in the temple takes place around the Shaiva shrines. Now that the new committee is dominated by Sri Lankan Tamils, there is even less interest in celebrating the major festivals of Lord Vishnu.

The Sri Ganesha temple not only supports itself but also has amassed a surplus fund of \$1 million³⁴. It is rumoured that Sri Lankan Tamils have prompted by the Tamil Tigers in Toronto, wish to donate money to charities in Sri Lanka. This is resisted by non Sri Lankan Tamils and the issue has split the temple committee along communal lines.

The Thirumurukan Temple in Pointe Claire

Compared to Toronto's 100,000, the Tamil population in Montreal is considerably smaller. An estimated 12,000 are concentrated in the Pointe Claire suburb of Montreal's West Island.

The Shaiva Mission of Quebec was founded in 1991 and although the name suggests a sectarian affiliation, the group insists that they are not sectarian. They registered themselves as such only because 98% of its members are Shaivas. The purpose of the organization was to construct a temple in the Jaffna style and to perpetuate Hinduism and Tamil culture.

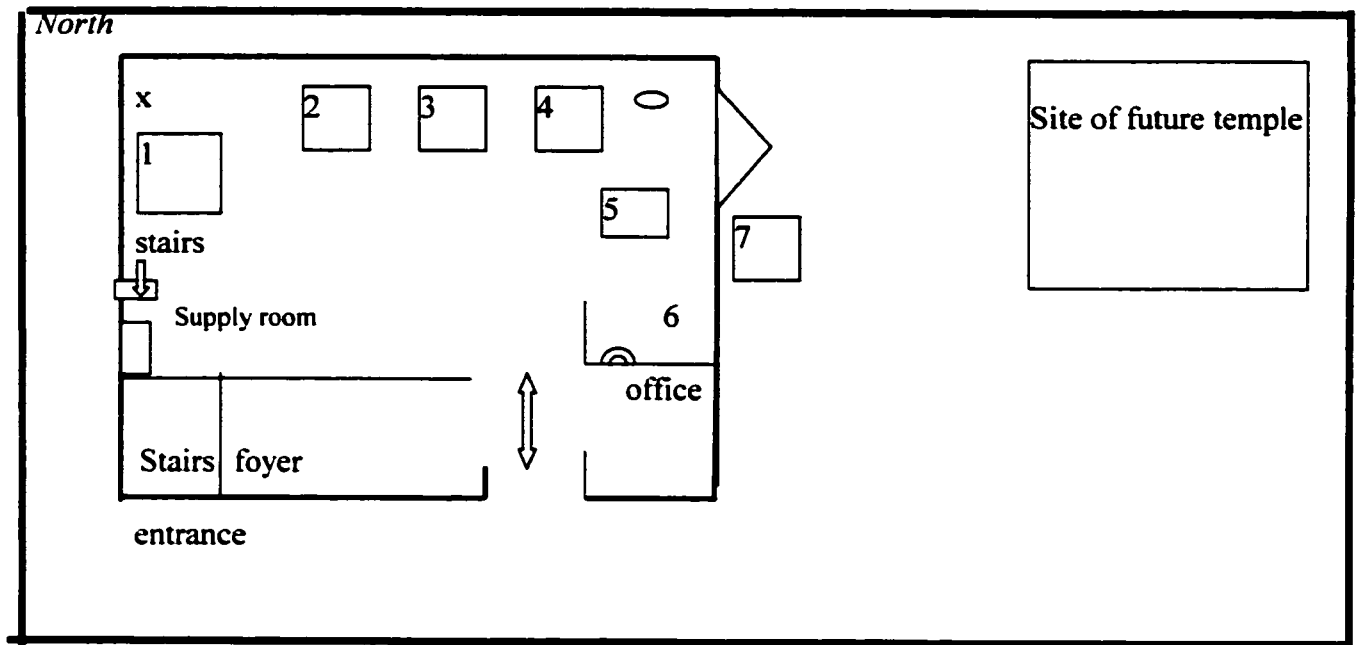
An 11 member Board, elected annually, oversees the organization's interests. Their mandate is to a) make available a place of worship in the Jaffna tradition, b) to promote the education of classical culture- music and dance- Tamil language and Hindu religion and c) to liaison between the Tamil community and local governments and boards for minority privileges. In this last matter, they have successfully approached the local school board to include Tamil as one of the minority language options available to high school children. The temple is modelled after the Malaysian model that focuses equally on religious ritual and Tamil culture.

The Board acquired land in a non-residential area, where bylaws are flexible. The temple now stands on 11/2 acres in an industrial park in Dollard Des Ormeaux in the West Island area of Montreal. The price of \$450,000 was quickly raised through generous donations and the re-mortgaging of homes and a *stapathi* in India was consulted for the initial blue print and *yantra* diagram. The plans were adapted by a local structural engineer and brought up to Canadian standards. In 1995 the *kumbabisekam* of goddess

³⁴ This amount varies between 1 million and 10 million, depending on who one speaks to.

Durga was performed and *murthis* of Murukan, Ganesha and Venketeshvara are installed temporarily within individual and will be shifted to new building at a later date.

Temple Plan 2: Thirumurukan Temple



.Durga, 2. Ganesha, 3.Murukan, 4.Venketeshvara, 5.Navagrahas, 6 Bhairava, 7. Chariot, X. flag post.

Further funds were raised through donations, pledges, and a system of monthly pre approved automatic payments by members of the Shaiva Mission and community. The final bill amounted to 1 million dollars, of which the Temple now owes less than 350,000.

Currently, the Thirumurukan Temple is a white brick building, with a small entrance *gopuram*. The interior plan is a smaller version of the Ganesha temple and consists of three domed *sannidhis* (sanctums), elaborately decorated with plaster figures. Lord Murukan occupies the centre shrine, Lord Ganesha and Lord Venketeshvara

(Vishnu) are on either side. These face west towards what is now the main entrance. A larger *sannidhi* houses Sri Durga, and faces a northern entrance. In the completed plan, the other *murthis* will be shifted to a new building on the north east. Along the northern wall is a small grotto that houses an icon of Siva, an altar bearing *navagrahas* and a platform on which are placed the *utsava murthis* (portable festival deities). A large wooden temple chariot is garaged in a wooden cabin outside. Lord Bhairava protects the north-east.

The basement consists of a large hall and several rooms where Tamil, music, and Hinduism classes are held on weekends. Priests quarters are also here, and currently there is one full time resident priest. His married brother is employed as a technician in a local firm, but assists him on weekends and at other busy times. A senior priest and Tamil scholar, Shri Tyagaraja Gurukkal, lives near by and is consulted on various temple matters. Other staff include an office manager, and an energetic group of volunteers. The monthly budget for maintenance is approximately \$3500.

Rituals at this temple follow the traditional Shaiva *Agamas* just as closely as the Sri Ganesha Temple in Toronto. When asked whether there was a difference between the two temples, a member of the Thirumurukan board replied: “that [the Ganesha temple] is a commercial temple, while ours is like the Malaysian model”. This was a criticism of the commercial manner in which the Sri Ganesha Temple is run, with no emphasis on education.

Sri Lankan temples have always stressed the preservation of Tamil culture and even temples set up in Malaysia in colonial times were famous for this (Ramanathan 1999). Publications and flyers are in Tamil and children are instructed to speak only in

Tamil on temple premises. Indeed, I was very impressed by the classes in Tamil, music and religion held on Sundays, which are attended regularly by some 75 students of ages ranging from 5 years to 16 years. Courses are taught by parent volunteers and parents are very committed to making sure that their children attend. From time to time, special pageants are put on so that the children can show off their skills. The Tamil dramas put on by the older children are particularly impressive. The children are also fluently bilingual in English and French.

Here too the weekly processions of the *utsava murthis* on Tuesday and Fridays take place with accompanying musicians. The annual *kavati* is held in August, and last year (August 2000) about 10,000 people attended from all over Ontario and Quebec. Cheek and tongue piercing take place. They had intended to incorporate fire-walking, but local fire regulations did not permit it.

Here too, in the early stages, Tamil Tigers threatened to take over the temple administration. But the committee tactfully evaded them and stayed focused on the educational aspect of their agenda.

The Hindu Temple of Ottawa Carleton

The Sri Lankan Tamil population in Ottawa is only 1500 strong. Of these only 200 participate regularly in religious activities and therefore it is not feasible for them to have a separate temple. They therefore use the facilities of the Hindu Temple of Ottawa Carleton, a “joint- temple” established by Hindu immigrants from India.

The decision to build the temple was taken in 1984 at a meeting held of the 200 Hindu families in the Ottawa region. Very little was achieved at the meeting beyond a general agreement that a temple was indeed vital to the Hindu community. The Hindu

Temple of Ottawa - Carleton Inc was formally registered as a non profit, religious charitable organization and one of its primary aims was to unite Hindus of all regional cultures into a single temple community.

Aghast by the general lack of “discipline” at temples, both in India and abroad, the founders of this temple were insistent that this temple should have a peaceful and aesthetic environment, showcasing “the best of Hinduism,” in the Nation’s capital. A board of directors was appointed whose mandate, according to the souvenir booklet published at the consecration ceremony in 1989, was “to construct and equip a religious centre with a temple as a place of worship, fellowship and meditation, to provide a place for “Retreat”; assembly halls and meeting rooms for theological, cultural and scholastic discussions; a library of religious books and a kitchen” (Hindu Temple of Ottawa 1989).

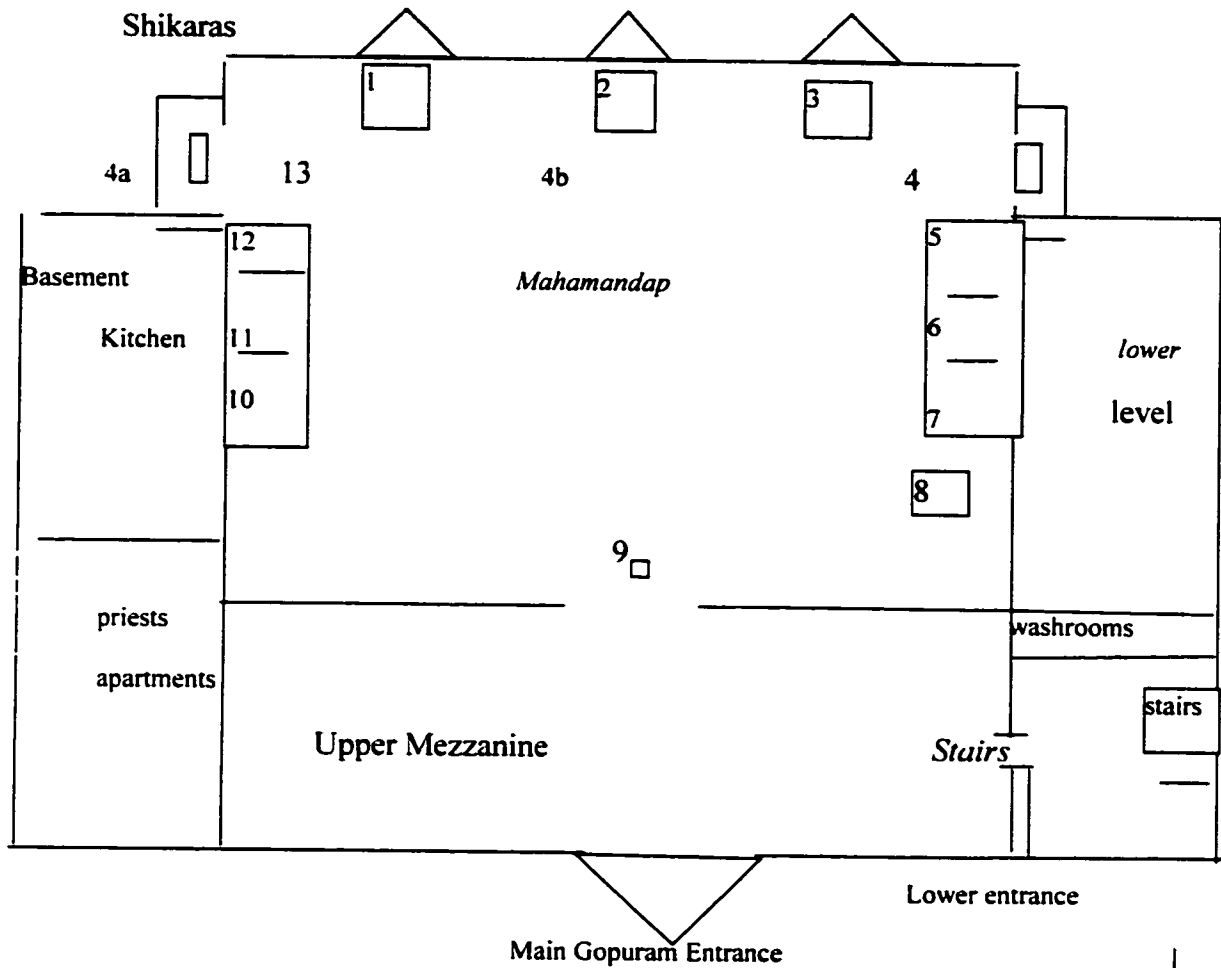
Initially the Board consisted of seven directors who were to serve three-year terms. But since the initial trio had invested considerable time, effort, and (most importantly) huge amounts of money towards the project, they remained on the Board as permanent members. In 1986 a further eight members were added to include wider representation. All decisions are made by the Board after considerable discussion, but obviously the founding trio wield the greatest clout.

The customary *Ganesha Puja* was performed in a school hall on September 2nd of the same year, invoking the blessings of that deity for success. Religious events from thereon were organized throughout the following years, and donations were solicited at these gatherings. *Brahman* males from the community shared the priestly duties on these occasions.

Ten acres of land was acquired in the township of Gloucester, south of Ottawa, and *Bhumi Puja* (ground breaking ceremonies) were held at the site in February 1984, followed at later date by *Shanti Havan* (exorcism) and a *Yagna* (fire ritual). The Mayor of Gloucester and the High Commissioner of India were invited to both events. \$115, 000 had already been raised, and construction began in stages. Phase one was the foundation and basement within which was planned an auditorium, kitchen, and library. The auditorium called the *Gita Bhavan*, served as a temporary shrine, until the *mahamandap* (central hall) was completed on the first floor. An efficient ventilation system was also installed for *homas* that are held here.

Since the Temple was to be a united project, elevation plans were designed to reflect both northern and southern traditions. Three onion shaped *shikaras* (domes) typical of north Indian tradition were raised and a south Indian style triangular *gopuram* (tower) is planned for the entrance. Three principal divinities, Shiva, Vishnu and Shakti occupy equal sized *mulasthanams* (i.e. *garbhagrahas*), in the *mahamandap*, which has marble floors and plush red carpeting. Sri Vishnu and his consort Lakshmi Devi occupy the centre shrine, and Lord Shiva (right) and Devi Durga (left) are on either side. Smaller shrines to Sri Ganesha, Sri Kartikeya or Murukan, Radha/Krishna, Rama Pariwar, Sri Hanuman and Lord Nataraja are arranged on other side. The scriptures- Veda and epics are displayed on separate pedestals, and in March 1998, bronze *navagrahas* were added in the north-western corner (see figure: Temple 3).

Temple 3: The Hindu Temple of Ottawa Carleton



1. Shiva, 2. Vishnu, 3. Durga Devi, 4. Mahabharatha, 5. Rama Pariwar, 6. Hanuman, 7. Nataraja, 8. Navagrahas, 9. Hundi, 10. Ganesha, 11. Murukan, 12. Radha Krishna, 13. Veda

The first trained priest was recruited on a two-year work permit from Pune in 1986. The temple can support three priests, but the living quarters are not adequate. Priests therefore cannot bring their families and therefore are reluctant to stay beyond their 2 year tenure. All the priests who have been recruited by the temple, have relocated themselves in Toronto or the USA or taken up freelancing. There are currently two young priests, one from Maharashtra and the other from North India, who although competent enough are unfamiliar with South Indian traditions.

Pranapratishta (life giving) and *kumbhabisekam* (consecration) ceremonies were celebrated in October of 1989 and *murthis* were formally consecrated in accordance with Vedic injunction. Since the temple had only two priests here at the time, five more were invited from various other temples in the United States to meet the ritual requirements. The institution was now established as a “living temple”, and daily rituals honouring the deities are performed in the North Indian style. The Temple booklet published at the time of *sthapana* (installation) defines the Neo-Vedantic ideals of the Temple Board. Deities are defined in terms of “manifestations of a single divinity”. Supreme power rests in three forms. Brahma, Vishnu, and Mahaish (Shiva). These derive their power through Shakti who is personified in the form of the goddesses Durga, Lakshmi, and Parvati. Finally, the sacred letter *om*, *shanti mantras* (peace invocations) and various other symbols are explicated.

Two *aratis* are conducted daily, at which the *shanti mantras* are chanted followed by the singing of the popular Hindi *arati* song, “*Om Jai Jagadisha Hare*”. The standardized weekly *puja* held on Sunday mornings, consists of *puja*, *Vishnusahasranama* (the chanting of the 1008 names of Vishnu), *bhajan*, scripture readings, and *arati*. Scripture readings are from the Upanishads or Bhagavad-Gita and a priest or a retired federal scientist proficient in Sanskrit share the discourse. Services are followed by a lunch, sponsored each time by different groups.

Different groups are allotted separate days on which they can hold their own customary *pujas*. A group of Punjabis gather at the temple on Tuesdays for *Ramayan Path* (reading of the Ramayana) and *Hanuman Chalisa* (40 verses in praise of Hanuman). *Havan* is held every second Sunday by an Arya Samaj group and on full moons,

Sathyanarayana Puja, and *Katha* (story) are sponsored by individual families. Kannada and Marathi Associations organize Ganesha Puja every year in September, and since this celebration is important to both groups, it is arranged twice on consecutive days to accommodate both languages. The Board organizes the major festivals common to all, like Divali and Navarathri. The temples anniversary is celebrated annually with special *pujas* and cultural programs.

Weddings, birth ceremonies, anniversaries, birthdays and other socio-religious events can be celebrated in the basement *Gita Bhavan* - that has a well-equipped kitchen. Classical dance performances, music concerts and *bhajans*, scripture readings, workshops and other courses are also arranged here from time to time. Long term plans for the temple include a larger auditorium on adjoining land, accommodations for the priests and a senior citizens home.

The temple enjoys a steady income through donations. For sometime the temple's board resisted the practice of charging set tariffs for the various services, considering these too commercial. They rather depended on voluntary donations, but have recently had to reconsider. Donors are classified under four categories according to amount of donation: Patron (\$25,000), Donor (\$5000) and two categories of Sponsors (\$2000 and \$1000). A fifth category lists people who have donated under \$999. Monthly expenses amount to \$6,000, and are covered by the revenues. However, extra funds are always required for the elaborate building projects and the temple committee is always soliciting for funds.

According to a temple committee member, there are now an estimated 1500 Hindu families from India who support the temple. North Indians form the largest group

(30%), followed by Gujaratis (18%) and then South Indians (15%). Other groups are too small to be viable. 115 Bengali families in Ottawa do not participate in temple activities as a group, preferring to celebrate their annual Durga Puja festival in a rented hall in their own manner. For other events they find the local Hare Krishna Temple more compatible with their customs.

According to official records the Tamil population in the Ottawa –Hull region in 1996 was 685. Sources in the Tamil community however estimate it higher at 1500, of which a sizeable number are students who do not participate at the temple. Tamils have been allotted Friday evenings for their *pujas*- listed in the temple timetable as *Shiv Puja*. Abisekams are performed for the *lingam* and the *utsava murthis* of Lord Murukan and his consorts. Tamil *bhajans* follow and the evening ends with dinner, sponsored each week by a different family.

The purpose of the Hindu Temple of Ottawa is to provide a religious centre embracing all Hindus. It therefore strives to maintain neutrality, without favouring any particular sect or cult. However, its definition of Hinduism is based on classical Neo-Vedantic model. Tamils, on the other hand follow the *Agamic* traditions that emphasize rituals and devotional practices. They believe that *murthis* are storehouses of divinity. The maintenance and strengthening of a *murthi*'s divine power is dependent on the regular and proper performance of ritual by devotees, and this strength then sustains devotees. As one informant explained: "Gods must be served and kept happy, if we are to have success in Canada". This thinking is in contrast to the Neo-Vedantic philosophy which sees *murthis* as mere symbolic representations of an abstract divinity, and leads clashes.

The first conflict came early in the development of the temple and related to the choice of deities. From the outset, it was ruled by the founding board that only deities would be installed in the *mahamandap* while saints, historical figures, and demi-gods, would be accommodated in a separate space, to be constructed at a future date. This disqualified historical figures like Mahavir, Buddha, Guru Nanak, and Sai Baba from a “seat” in the *mahamandap*, a ruling that alienated Jains, some Punjabis, and Sai Baba’s devotees. Many Punjabi Hindus attend the Sikh Gurudwara and the Sai devotees have built their own Sai Meditation and Fellowship Centre.

From the onset it was decided to include all three major Hindu deities, Shiva Vishnu and Shakti. Ganesha is mandatory as also *Hanuman* for Sri Vaishnavas, although in this case it seems that *Hanuman* was included at the request of a North Indian devotee who gave substantial donations to the temple. Tamils wished to include Murukan, but it was vetoed on account of Kartikeya’s (the god’s Sanskrit name) bachelor status in Vedic mythology that portrays Kartikeya, or Kumara, as a very beautiful god who seduces young maidens. Gujarati’s especially felt that the presence of this deity could adversely effect the unmarried girls in the community. In Tamil culture, however, Murukan is immensely popular and has two wives, Valli and Devayani. Tamils therefore were very upset by the ruling and threatened to boycott the temple. It was only after Swami Dayananda from the Arsha Vidyalaya interceded on their behalf that the Board relented and included Karitkeya.

A second conflict was related to the form of the deities. In north India, *murthis* are cast in marble, while in the south they tend to be granite or bronze. Undoubtedly beautiful, marble is however a soft stone and does not stand up to the rigors of ritual

abisekam (anointing) that is so important in Shaiva ritual. The North Indian members of the board were not keen on including such practices, and had envisioned a temple built along North Indian Vaishnava traditions, that do not require *abisekam*. Hindus split along north/south lines, with the less ritualistic North Indians reluctant to give up the aesthetic beauty of marble, and South Indians stubbornly clinging to ritual injunctions. After many long and heated committee meetings, a compromise was finally struck. It was decided that in addition to the three primary deities: Shiva, Vishnu and Durga, *murthis* of Radha/Krishna and Rama/Sita, were to be in marble while others, a *lingam*, Ganesha, Murukan, presumably “gods” who require frequent *abisekams*, and Hanuman, would be cast in granite and a Nataraja in bronze. Bronze *navagrahas* were to be added at a later date.

Another constant source of irritation for all worshippers, and not just Tamils, is the Board’s obsession with cleanliness and order. Temple going for Hindus is not a congregational activity where one attends weekly services at fixed times. Although *arati*’s are performed at regular times, Hindus usually go to a temple to make offerings, for individual prayer, or to attend festivals. There are no Church-like pews, and Hindus are not expected to be silent and attentive during *pujas*. There is constant milling around as people come and go, chatting and greeting friends while children play. Congregational type “order” occurs only in *ashrams*, or at discourses by *swamis*. This temple’s Board, however, expects order at all times. Notices are posted to remind people of the rules, and although some appreciate the discipline, others resent the zealous attempts to enforce it.

In keeping with the policy of cleanliness, “messy” practices like coconut breaking and *abisekams* are restricted. For South Indians, breaking coconuts with great gusto is an

important part of rituals. However, the marble floor and plush carpeting at the Ottawa Temple inhibits this practice. Alternatively, a basin is fitted to one side, where coconuts are to be cracked open discretely and carefully, so as not to spill the fluid onto the marble or carpet. Burning of camphor is also a “heated” issue. For Tamils, camphor *arati* is particularly auspicious, but it is forbidden here on grounds that it sullies the walls and is carcinogenic. However, the outcry was so vociferous, that concessions were made for the “discrete” use of camphor on special occasions.

Alankaram- the practice of adorning *murthis* in silks, precious ornaments and flowers has also become a contentious issue. Members of the Board, perhaps influenced by the iconoclastic views of the Arya Samaj, view this practice as a “Barbie Doll syndrome” that must be discouraged. Rational statements such as “*murthis* themselves are a work of art and need no additional embellishments”, rather than mollify, actually horrifies Hindus for whom the consecrated *murthis* are actual immanent presences. The dispute has not been fully resolved and the last I heard, an uneasy compromise had been struck between the two groups. *Murthis* are permitted to be “dressed” on special occasions, and at other times garments may be draped around the *murthi*’s shoulders and returned to the donor after *puja*.

The Tamils in Ottawa, because of their small numbers are in a position where they must adjust to the North-Indian dominated board. There are two of their members on the Board of Directors who try to strike compromises with the others. Some concessions have been the weekly *abisekams* for the small bronze *utsava murthis* (festival deities) of Murukan and his consorts along with that for the *lingam*, the consecration of a silver *vel* (spear), the trademark of Lord Murukan, and a silver crown

for the God. Apart from their regular Friday evenings, the group also celebrates other special events, but in a modified manner. There are no annual *kavati* festivals or weekly *ooravalums* (processions) and only priests are permitted to light the sesame lamp a single lamp to Lord Shanniswara on Saturdays on behalf of all devotees.

The temples discussed here each represent a specific type of institution, serving different purposes. The Ganesha Temple serves as a purely religious institution for the unofficially estimated 100,000 Tamils in Toronto. They do not offer any educational programs, classes for Tamil literacy or culture. These services are provided in community centres or privately organized classes. The Thirumurukan Temple in Montreal serves a dual function and provides both religious and educational needs. It has become for the unofficially estimated 8,000 Tamils in the area, a focus of religious and cultural activities, and as was the intent of the founders. The temple has therefore become a major source of reinforcement of religio-cultural activity. Sri Lankan Tamils in Ottawa on the other hand, form a very small, albeit energetic group, that cannot afford a temple of their own. They are therefore accommodated at the Hindu Temple of Ottawa, where they encounter the vast diversity of beliefs and practices among their own co-religionists who have emigrated from different regions of India. The Board of the Ottawa Temple profess Neo-Vedantic ideals that sometimes clash with the ardent ritualism of Tamil Shaivism. While they adjust as much as possible, sometimes they are stirred into fighting for their rights to worship according to their own beliefs. For cultural reinforcement, Tamil children in Ottawa attend the classes set up by the Tamil Sangam, a secular association that focuses on language.

Chapter 5: “Doing Hinduism”: Analysis of Field Data.

This chapter extends the arguments presented in the previous chapters but focuses on “particular” situations. The analytical focus is the relationship between religion, particular groups, the environments that contain them and the reproduction of institutions through the domestic and institutional practice of religion. The “particular” groups here are the Tamils participants at three locations, the Ganesha temple in Toronto, the Thirumurukan temple in Montreal and the Hindu Temple of Ottawa.

Ever since Swami Vivekananda presented Hinduism as a unified system at the World’s Parliament of Religions (Chicago) in 1893, its propagation in the West has, until recently, been through either modern Indian religious movements led by *sadhus* or by Western Orientalists such as the Theosophists. The aim of both these groups was to seek Western converts and so the tendency was to separate the spiritual teachings from their cultural contexts in order to make them universally applicable. The middle of the 20th century however brought Hindus in large numbers to western shores. These immigrants were mainly middle class and initially they too relied mainly on the roving *sadhus* for religious guidance. While some, no doubt, were genuinely interested in the message of these god-men, the majority like people everywhere were more concerned with the issues of daily life- the well being of families, personal achievements, health and prosperity. Such concerns necessitated rituals of appeasement rather than the performance of spiritual exercises designed for *moksa* (liberation). Only specialists trained in religious ritual could fulfill these requirements and accordingly priests were recruited from India to provide ritual services. What followed, as a natural consequence was the emergence of

temples erected to strange looking gods that demand veneration, that present a different version of Hinduism that has little to do with the intellectualized version propagated by *sadhus*.

Judith Brown has observed that, while the analysis of the intellectual aspects of a religious tradition are no doubt important to the understanding of a religious culture, they form but a small part of the reality and experience of the actual religious practices of middle class Hindus (Brown 1980:5-6). In her study of religious beliefs amongst middle class Hindus in a small south Indian town, she found that only three out of hundred and seventy-five educated middle-class Hindus, thought or spoke in terms of philosophical abstractions. For the majority, the religious emphasis was on a general feeling of dependence on a superhuman being, a god or gods (Brown 1980:35). A similar study conducted in Pune produced similar responses. 80% of the participants confessed that it was difficult to base ones personal religion on metaphysical theories and that their own conception of religion did not embody such ideas (Brown 1980:34). Burghart (1987) and fellow authors discovered the same situation amongst Hindus in Great Britain.

My empirical research centered on the question as to how Hindus reconstruct their religious practices under contemporary Diaspora conditions. Chapter 3 presented Hinduism in Jaffna as a social system where the temple institution played the pivotal role, reflecting, supporting, and perpetuating the hierarchical structures upon which Jaffna society was based. Those conditions no longer exist in the now devastated Province of Jaffna, and can hardly be duplicated in the urban environment of Toronto, Montreal, or Ottawa. Yet, Tamils continue to build temples, indicating therefore that temple institutions still hold some relevance in the practice of religion. I also wished to see

whether Hindus recognize a greater category of *Hinduism*, one that is distinct from their “socio-particular” cultural identity, and secondly to observe how they reconstitute the components of religion and culture while reconstructing their temples in Canada. In the changing environments of globalization, it is the middle classes who are most exposed to the strains of change. Consequently, their world changes the most. For this reason it was decided to examine the religious practices of middle class immigrant Hindus, engaged in modern occupations.

The Sample

The focus group of the study was Tamil Hindus in the Canadian Diaspora. Participants were selected from two temple sites, the Sri Ganesha temple (SGT) in Toronto and the Thirumurukan temple in Montreal, and a third group of Tamils at the Hindu Temple of Ottawa were included for comparison.

The urban location into which the Tamils are set is not a culturally barren environment but a “landscape” made up of traits that are of significance to the particular location. Chapter 3 already dealt with the historical processes that brought the Tamils to Canada. It was observed that they are a homogenous population in terms of regional culture, language, and religion. We could expect therefore that the religious practices that they bring with them will be of a socio-cultural variety and the institutions that they recreate will reflect this socio-particular form. Nonetheless, in the present research it was found that the structure of each of the institutions under study (and which were described in detail in the previous chapter) differed from the other and reflected the ideas and situational needs of Tamils at each location. A South Indian temple was already in existence in the Montreal area, yet Tamils there decided to build another institution for

themselves. Thus, the Thirumurukan temple was built under the auspices of the Shaiva Mission of Montreal, which committee members are quick to point out is not a sectarian institution. "We just all happen to be Shaivas", explained a committee member, who went on to describe it as pentadic institution (one that includes the five primary deities of Hinduism; Shiva, Vishnu, Shakti, Ganesha and Surya). The *murthi* of Lord Vishnu, installed in one of the principal shrines, is according to them in keeping with the traditions of temples in Jaffna where they insist that Lord Vishnu is also known and worshipped.

On the other hand, the Sri Ganesha temple, which is now seen strictly as a Tamil temple with strong Shaiva emphasis, began as a "joint-temple". The original intent of its founders was to build an institution that would serve all Hindus. With this in mind, they planned a pentadic institution, but the prominence of the Tamil population in Toronto has gradually transformed its focus. Although a magnificent *murthi* of Lord Vishnu has been enshrined in one of the primary shrines, and images of the Ram Pariwar (Rama's family) are included in the complex, there is relatively little activity at these shrines. Because of the fewer Vaishnava devotees here, Vaishnava festivals are scaled down and not celebrated as elaborately or given the same prominence.

In sharp contrast to these two sites, the Hindu Temple of Ottawa describes itself as "a common place of worship for all of us, Hindus" (Temple Souvenir 1989:4). In reality however the temple, is dominated by North Indians whose ideas on the way religion is to be practiced differs with those of the Tamils. However, Tamils are in a minority situation here and therefore obliged to compromise on many of their customs.

The main factors that influenced the selection of participants were their familiarity and experience of the religious and social customs practiced in Sri Lanka. New immigrants tend to be homesick and their comparisons between “new” and “old” environments are coloured by nostalgic memories that generally idealize the past. It was thought therefore that some Canadian experience, at least three years of residence Canada, would yield some objectivity. Similarly selecting only those participants, who had completed their secondary school in Sri Lanka, ensured that they were familiar with the “home” culture and able therefore to articulate differences between practises in Canada with those in Sri Lanka. The minimum age was fixed at 20 years, but there was no maximum age limit. Care was also taken to ensure that there were an equal number of men and women participants at each site. All participants were fluent and literate in Tamil.

Table 1. Education (30 male participants)

Site	Sri Ganesha	Thirumurukan	Ottawa Temple
Secondary school only	-	1	1
Technical	9	5	2
University/Professional	6	4	2
Total	15	10	5

Table 2. Education (30 female participants)

Site	Sri Ganesha	Thirumurukan	Ottawa Temple
Secondary school only	8	8	1
Technical school	3	-	-
University/professional	4	2	4

Total	15	10	5
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Of 30 participants selected in Toronto, 15 were women aged between 20 and 70 years. They had all completed secondary schooling in Sri Lanka before arrival in Canada. 3 had pursued technical courses at community colleges and are employed in quasi-professional fields like nursing aids. 4 had gone on to pursue professional careers after completing university and are employed in multinational high tech firms. The other 8, who had only high school diplomas, work in factories or in retail. All but one were married with children and women over 50 also had grandchildren. The single female is university educated and teaches classical Indian dance in her spare time. At the other end of the range was a widowed senior citizen who had been a schoolteacher in Jaffna. She now teaches Tamil at literacy classes held by the Tamil Sangam. Education levels were reflected in the incomes of the women: professional women drew higher incomes ranging from \$30,000 to \$ 40,000, while others averaged around \$25,000. Education was also reflected in their fluency in English- those with higher education were more fluent and articulate.

The fifteen male participants were selected in a similar fashion. Their ages ranged between 30 to 70 years. Nine had completed university and are now employed in high paying jobs between \$30,000 to above \$60,000 per annum, while others are employed as drivers, cooks or in factories. They earn from \$20,000 to \$30,000 per annum. All could speak English, but here too fluency depended on education level and the number of years spent in Canada.

20 participants were selected at the Thirumurukan temple in Montreal. 4 males had completed technical training in Sri Lanka prior to arrival in Canada, 5 were university-educated professionals, and only 1 had only secondary schooling. Of 10 female participants, 2 were University educated and employed professionally while others had had only high school education. Like the Toronto group, those with university education are now professionally employed while those with only high school or technical training are in blue-collar occupations. Only 1 participant was neither fluent in English or French despite being in Canada for 5 years. She had to be interviewed in Tamil. The average income was slightly lower than in Toronto, and education levels were not reflected in higher incomes. It was a businessman with only high school education made the most money.

Another group was approached at the Ottawa site to act as a comparison. The Tamil population in Ottawa is much smaller- estimated at around 1500. Among these is a sizable number of students who do not participate regularly in the temple activities. The ages of the 10 participants selected for interview here ranged between 30 and 75 years. Of these 2 males and 4 females were professionally employed either in the Federal government, high-tech industry or as private consultants in finance and engineering fields. 2 males were employed in blue-collar work and 1 male owned a grocery store. Here too as in Toronto, education was reflected in the higher income levels that ranged between \$30,000 to over \$60,000 per year.

Interviews were conducted individually, using a questionnaire with some 75 questions (see appendices). Questions were open-ended, compiled in order to encourage participants to speak freely and tangentially on various topics. The researcher took

copious notes, with a view to gathering qualitative data rather than fixed response data. Each interview took about an hour and a half. Responses at the three sites regarding beliefs were remarkably similar and are therefore tabulated together. Participant response at the Ottawa site differed in topics relating to practices and comparisons between practices at the Ottawa temple with those in Sri Lanka. There were no marked variations between the responses of male and female participants and where necessary I discuss them separately.

Apart from these participants, I also interviewed priests at all three sites and spoke with priests at temples in England, Germany, and South Africa. All the priests interviewed were of the *Brahman* caste trained either in Sri *Vaishnava* traditions or in the pentadic *Smarta* tradition. I included their comments because, although each institution has administrative committees to organize events and set policies, the actual worship of deities is the exclusive responsibility of priests. At Toronto and Montreal, priests are conceded this responsibility, but the Ottawa Temple is an exception. Here the temple committee supervises even the way *pujas* are to be done and this has led to some tensions. Since temple priests are in immediate contact with *murthis*, they are expected to maintain rigid standards of *mati* (purity). This includes following vegetarian diets, avoiding *rajasic* (passion inducing) foods like garlic, onions, and heavy spices. Traditionally orthodox *Brahmans* will not eat foods that are prepared by non- *Brahmans*. All priests do not follow this last convention in Canada, but some still follow it and will not accept even the *naivedhyam* (food offered to deities during *puja*), if cooked by non-*Brahmans*. Most however will accept any freshly cooked vegetarian food prepared according to the rules of *mati*, which involves bathing before cooking and that the women

who prepare the food are not in their period of menstruation. Social activities like visiting restaurants, attending movies, or partying are also disapproved. .

Another group of significance is the committee members that administer the various temples. They constitute an elected body of representatives and function within the temple's constitution and the guidelines provided by provincial governments. They organize the various functions, decide policies, hire the priests, make daily decisions, and take responsibility for the general maintenance and upkeep of the premises. In many ways, they represent the "authority" of the temple and therefore it was decided that they too should be interviewed. Where necessary their comments and observations are included as well.

The data presented here therefore is a combination of interviews with participants, priests, committee members, and other knowledgeable or prominent sources at each site and on my personal observations and experience.

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 3, Tamils have had a long history with Christianity. The Portuguese destroyed Hindu temples, forcibly converted natives to Catholicism and suppressed the public practice of Hinduism. The Dutch restored some freedom of religion but did not permit the rebuilding of temples except in exceptional cases. The Portuguese Catholic missionaries however also set up mission schools in almost every village in Jaffna that under Dutch Reform were extended to teach Tamil. Consequently, Hindus also sent their children to these schools. The Dutch continued the practice of promoting Christians over Hindus in public administration and therefore although there was a mass abandonment of Catholicism under Dutch rule, many Hindus converted nominally to Protestantism. Christianity became localized through the

introduction of Tamil liturgy and Christians therefore were able to retain their cultural connections with their mother tongue. The national government introduced reforms making it mandatory for children to receive their primary education in their own mother tongue. Christians and Hindus therefore attended the same Tamil schools. Although they receive separate religious instruction, the shared language heritage, and the fact that they are, all from similar *vellalar* backgrounds has helped maintain close bonds between the two groups. These bonds were further emphasised in the 19th century, when it became crucial to build Tamil solidarity. Tamils are therefore familiar with Christianity and with Christian institutions. A participant disclosed that before the appearance of Hindu temples in Canada, his wife and he would visit local Catholic churches on special days and pray before the statue of the Virgin Mary. He stated that “We would imagine the Virgin Mother as Amman. After all, they are both mothers and therefore the same”.

David Mearns also observed that Tamils in Malaysia, who have also had a long familiarity with Roman Catholicism and link the Virgin Mother to the goddess Mari Amman (1995:163). Some participants in Toronto said that they sometimes attended Christian services with Pentecostal friends.

Whereas in the past, under colonialism, Hindus had taken advantage of the education facilities offered by Christian mission schools, now Tamil Christians are sending their children to Tamil literacy classes organized at local Hindu temples. A Christian parent at the Montreal Temple explained that he saw this as the only way his children would learn Tamil. His daughter also takes the music and dance lessons offered by the school and participates in school pageants and music shows.

The same intimacy however does not exist between Tamil Hindus and Tamil Muslims. A participant informed that me “They have nothing in common with us. We have an inherent antipathy towards them that goes back even before the current problem”. Localization of Islam, similar to that of Christianity did not occur in Ceylon. I was told that they do not send their children to the Tamil classes, but send them instead to Arabic or Urdu classes organized by the local Muslim community.

By contrast, interactions between Tamils and Buddhists have been more constant. Several shrines are sacred to both groups. For example, according to the Tamils, the Kataragama deity is Murukan. Buddhists however believe that it is one of the three places on the island where the Lord Buddha rested. It is therefore also sacred to them. None of the participants admitted to having friends amongst the Sinhalese. As for other religions, participants had heard of Sikhism and Judaism but were not familiar with the beliefs or practices of these groups.

Tamils are also involved in various other activities unconnected to religion. Although the majority of their relationships are with other Tamils- and some of these connections go back several generations to Jaffna- they do socialize outside the ethnic group. Some participants came to Canada via Europe, mainly Germany and France. Others have relatives in England and Australia. They also are in touch with relatives and friends left behind in Jaffna. The most common method of communication is by telephone or e-mail. They all said that they phoned their immediate relatives every week and those with e-mail access communicated on a daily basis.

Other methods of keeping in touch with community news and the outside world are through the international Tamil radio network Ceylon Radio (rather than Sri Lankan

Radio), which has branches in several European countries. A TamilNation website which sizzles with political debates and opinions, features articles by scholars in both English and Tamil. Tamil newspapers printed both locally and in Tamil Nadu are freely available at the several Sri Lankan grocery stores. Some of these stores seem jointly owned and advertise “Sri Lankan and Guyanese groceries” or “Sri Lankan and Pakistani foods-*hallal* meat”. Stores that sell music, clothing, and jewellery are also numerous. People of all backgrounds, and not just Tamils patronize these.

Tamils also participate in the types of secular activities that one would expect of any average middle-class Canadian family. Men follow the NHL, tennis, and other sports, and retain their passion for cricket. Women complain about the lack of time and rush around between work, weekly shopping, and household chores. Their contact with “others” is largely at work or through their children, who have normal social relationships with other Tamil and non-Tamil children in their areas. I noticed a young blonde boy at the temple in Toronto and was told that “Jason” often accompanies his Tamil baby-sitter to the temple on Fridays, along with the other children. It was obvious that he was familiar with the procedures. I watched him milling around the priest for *prasadam* like the other children and later relishing the spicy *sadams* (rice) served at the temple on weekends.

Tamils also visit McDonald’s and Wendy’s with their children as well as various Sri Lankan restaurants. I overheard a couple of boys arguing over whose father made the best pizzas and learned that the fathers of both these boys work at a local Pizza Hut. Other activities include movies, both in English and Tamil, music, and dance performances organized by local South Asian cultural organizations. There are also the

quasi-nationalistic Tamil *Sangams* (clubs) in each city that celebrate popular Tamil events like Pongal and Tamil New Years Day

Participants would not discuss politics and only one participant was candid about his involvement with the Tamil separatist movement. The Tamil Tiger Organization is said to have a huge presence in Toronto and it is rumoured that its members intimidate local Tamils into donating money to support their cause. According to an ex- committee member at the Ganesha Temple, they even attempt to influence how the temples surplus revenue is to be spent.

Diaspora living is not a new experience for Tamils. At one time, it was said that every station agent in Malaya Railway was a Jaffna Tamil (Pfaffenberger 1982:150). They established enduring Diasporas in Malaysia where their temples are known as centres for the propagation of Tamil culture. Committee members at Montreal stated that they had modelled the Thirumurukan temple on the Malaysian model.

From the evidence thus presented, it is clear that Tamils are far from being an isolated or marginalized group. Too often, studies relating to ethnic minorities tend to portray them as lonely, depressed people, unaware or uneasy of their new surroundings. On the contrary, Tamils in Canada not only maintain networks within the Tamil community and with other ethnic communities through personal and public channels, but also are aware of local government policies. What is more, they have learnt to use these very effectively. 73% of participants had already obtained Canadian Citizenship and others are landed immigrants who have either applied for or are waiting to qualify for citizenship. In Toronto, provincial pamphlets explaining how Senior Citizens and the unemployed can claim pension and welfare benefits are now published in Tamil. Ceylon

TV keeps the community informed on all kinds of public information and Tamil is now an accredited language course in Ontario Schools.

As far as the communities themselves were concerned, Tamil populations at all three sites are remarkably homogenous. Not only are they predominantly *Shaiva*, but also the majority (80%) is from the dominant *vellalar* castes. According to a *Brahman* participant, there are very few *Brahmans* in Jaffna. They validated Pfaffenberger's (1994) observation that the *vellalars* have always been the dominant caste in Jaffna. He explained that

The Tamils accord *Brahmans* great respect, but when all is said and done, we remain mere employees of *vellalar* masters. There are few career opportunities for *Brahmans* in Jaffna and so *Brahman* children are sent to India to be educated. I myself grew up in Trichi [south India]. Was brought up by my Uncle and visited my father in Ceylon for the holidays.

Vellalars are divided into hundreds of sub-castes called *sondakara* (extended family). The highest of these, according to an informant are the Pillai castes. They are vegetarian and known to be very devout. Others stated that the vegetarian Mudalali caste is also considered very high. Although reforms had been introduced under the British and by the national government, the Untouchable castes continued to suffer from caste discrimination even until the 1960s. The majority of participants however insisted that they no longer observed the caste system. A participant explained that the presence of the Tamil Tigers who receive strong support from the minority Tamils and Untouchables is also a deterrent to those who would persist with caste divisions. Another participant

admonished me for probing into people's castes, which he felt was very rude. He explained,

Many have come up very well after the liberalization policies and will be hurt by your questions. Anyway, we have bigger problems to deal with now than caste. The policies of the Sinhalese government have put us all under the same roof.

I however continued asking the caste question. As expected an overwhelming 80% admitted to being *vellalar*. There were only two *Brahmans* and of the others, 4 identified their sub-castes and 6 refused to answer the question.

Table 3. Caste configuration of 60 participants

Vellalar	48	80%
Brahman	2	3.3%
Other	4	6.6%
Irrelevant	6	10%
Total	60	99.9%

Only four participants admitted that caste was important. One, a woman in her 60's argued that caste identity gave her respect in the community. She stated quite candidly. "If caste is discontinued, they [the lower castes] won't show us respect." Another participant a woman in her 30s, said that caste becomes important only when it comes to choosing a spouse. She explained that her own marriage a young man of her caste, had been arranged in Canada according to cultural traditions to. The other 2 participants who also felt that caste was important were both men in their 40s. They too felt that it became significant when it came to "arranging" marriages for their children.

They both stated that they would not like their children marrying into lower castes. The priest at the temple in Germany had some interesting comments. According to him:

They will all say that caste is not important. But when it comes to fixing marriages they are very particular and see into everything. I have seen them fight like street people.

When it came to the priesthood, however all participants felt that only *Brahmans* were fit to be priests. It was pointed out that non-*Brahman* priests are *pandarams* (shamans), who are either possessed by a deity or through austerities have developed mystical powers. But such individuals are attached only to non-Agamic institutions that do not follow *Brahman* tradition. The term used for priests by Tamils is *gurukal* (*guru* + the Tamil suffix *kal* that indicates respect). They are considered learned men who lead pure and ascetic lives. As one participant explained:

Non-*Brahmans* are used to a good life. It's our heritage. We are not capable of leading a strict life. *Brahmans*, however have lived a disciplined life for generations. Therefore it comes naturally to them.

By "good life" he was referring to meat eating and drinking alcohol and this sentiment was expressed several times. Vegetarianism is considered a sign of piety and several, especially the women, admitted that they observed at least one "meatless" day a week- usually Friday or Saturdays. The majority however agreed that if a non-*Brahman* wished to be a priest, and could live up to the ascetic standards, then he should be encouraged. An Agamic temple in Rochester apparently has a non-*Brahman* priest who is highly revered for his piety and learning. A participant who has visited this temple admired the way in which the gentleman explained the significance of the rituals to children and youth, which "none of these *Brahman* priests do."

As for women in priesthood, even the women participants found the idea amusing. It was pointed out that women would not be able to observe the strict laws of *mati* (purity) required of a priest until she had reached the age of 50 years. Surprisingly, a priest suggested that women should be encouraged to take up the priesthood. However, he was pretty certain, that it would not happen in his lifetime.

The Data

In what follows, I present the data under the following headings:

1. **Ideas of Religion.** under which I look at whether participants see themselves under the larger category of *Hinduism* or as a socio-particular group.
2. **Reconstruction of Ritual Practices.** Rituals are divided into two sets of practices: life-cycle rites that traditionally take place at home, and worship rites. Worship rituals may also be divided into two: home worship and temple worship. However, as life-cycle rites are now increasingly being performed at temples, so I discuss them separately.
3. **Propagation of Religion.** The reconstruction process is most evident in this category. Whether rituals or philosophy, conscious decisions are as what must be perpetuated, and how to present it. In the process, certain elements are re-defined, while others are discarded as irrelevant.

Ideas of Religion.

The first concern in the chapter is with determining whether “Hinduism” exists in the minds of Hindus as a coherent system, or whether it is, as suggested by Fitzgerald (1990) and Frykenberg (1989) largely an intellectual model invented by foreign scholars.

Other Hindu groups have often observed with envy that the Tamils have managed to settle very swiftly into their new environments. Reasons offered for this range from the refugee situation of the Tamils that increase their determination to preserve their culture, to the fact of their homogeneity. They share a common language, religious culture, and very often even immigration history. Since they arrived *en masse*, like the migrants of the previous era, their social connections were already formed. Very little time and effort therefore had to be extended towards “creating” a community. They arrived as a community, or group of people arranged under the single category of Tamil refugee, and settled all together in the Markham area of Toronto. Thus, they have the advantage of both size and density when it comes to establishing social institutions.

Table 4. Primary identity at 3 sites (60 participants)

Identity	Number
Sri Lankan	2
Tamil	48
Hindu	8
Canadian	1
All Four	1
Total	60

In order to determine the criteria upon which this “community” defined itself, linguistic, nationality, or religion, participants were asked to choose the most significant aspects of their identity, and in doing so to define the terms “culture”, “religion, and “Tamil”. The replies indicate that 80% identify themselves as Tamil and only 13.3% as Hindu. The majority are averse to calling themselves Sri Lankan. They said that they

prefer to call themselves Ceylonese but since that category no longer exists, they prefer to be identified as Tamils. A participant who is actively involved in the separatist politics of the situation said that it was “jarring” to hear the repeated use of the term Sri Lankan and “to please stop saying it in my presence”.

It became evident in the discussions that the three terms language, religion and culture become blurred. One participant described Tamil as culture and saw religion as a separate entity:

Our culture is Tamil. There are Tamil Christians and Tamil Muslims, but we are Tamil Hindus. We have the same culture but not the same religion.

Yet, 13.3% emphasized *Hindu* identity over a Tamil one and saw religion as culture:

- Religion and culture are like Siamese twins
- Religion moulds culture and without religion, culture has no value.
- If you practice culture in the right way then you are practicing your religion properly.

Table 5. Identification of Temple at 3 sites (60 participants)

Identity	Number	%
Hindu Temple	45	75%
Tamil Temple	-	-
South Indian Temple	3	5%
Sri Lankan Temple	2	3%
North Indian	10	16%

When it came to identifying the temples, 75% saw the temple at their site as a Hindu temple. 5% saw it as a South Indian Temple and 16% as North Indian. It is interesting that participants in Toronto and Montreal primarily identified the institutions

at these sites under the broader category of “Hindu” rather than by a socio-particular category such as “South Indian”, “Sri Lankan”, or “Tamil”- it was pointed out several times that there is no such thing as a *Tamil* temple. Participants in Ottawa however identified the institution in socio-particular terms as a “North Indian” temple. Thus, they see themselves as practising a religion that is “Hindu” and not Tamil, Sri Lankan, or even *Shaiva*. For them Tamil is a lingual-cultural category, Sri Lankan a national identity and although outsiders constantly project them as Shaiva, they themselves do not emphasize this term.

It was also quite clear that Tamils are aware of the differences within Hinduism. They have social links with Hindus from other regional areas and are aware of other Hindu temples around them. The Ottawa group in particular is made aware of these differences on an on-going basis. A participant from this site expressed the differences in the following manner:

We know that the religion is the same, but, they [the North Indians] do things differently. Their gods are different and they do the rituals differently. They are not as ritualistic or even concerned about *mati* (purity) as us [Tamils]. For them *satsang* is more important and for us its rituals like *abisekam*..

While Tamil scriptures like the *Periya Puranam*, *Kural* and *Tevaram* songs were well known to all Tamils, except for the *Brahmans* and university educated Tamils, few participants in Toronto or Montreal were familiar with Sanskrit texts like the Mahabharata and Bhagavad-Gita. All members of the group in Ottawa were familiar with these Sanskrit texts.

Participants were also asked whether they regarded “other” Hindu group like say the Hare Krishnas as Hindu. Most participants agreed that they are Hindu. Many admired

the way in which “these westerners show such devotion to our gods”. A few had been to the Hare Krishna temple in Toronto and stated that it was very beautiful. A participant in Ottawa explained:

The atmosphere in the Hare Krishna Temple in Toronto is so beautiful. I used to go for the *arati* quite often with my children. Kalayan [her husband] also liked to come there. He is not into rituals but liked the quiet atmosphere for meditation.

A priest at the Toronto site said that he has several friends amongst the members of the Hare Krishna congregation who visit him at this temple from time to time.

They come and we talk about philosophy and the Bhagavad-Gita. They have studied the text very thoroughly and can quote from it extensively, remembering each stanza and where it is written.

Another priest explained that anyone who has had *diksa* (initiation) from a Hindu *guru* could be considered a Hindu and becomes entitled to the Hindu *samskaras* (sacraments). He recalled the conversion programs of the Arya Samaj Organization of which he did not fully approve because it consists of investing “everyone and anyone with the sacred thread and teaching them the sacred *Gayatri mantra*”. He also pointed out that the Sai Baba who has an increasing number of “foreign” devotees. When asked how he would perform an *archanai* (homage *puja*) in their names, when they did not have the necessary *gotra*, he replied:

We have the same problem with the Guyanese. Even the Tamils do not have a *gotram* only a *nakshatram* (star). If they do not have either, then we just give them the *gotram* and *nakshatram* (star) of their *guru* or the god that they are praying to.

The priest in Germany however was not as approving. He felt that the Hari Krishnas and other westerners who put on the outward garb of Hinduism (*vesham*) were

merely playing at being Hindu. He was particular critical of the Brahmakumari sect that are popular in Germany, feeling that they projected the wrong image of Hinduism.

The average person does not generally think about the precise meaning of religion. They merely “do it”. However, when confronted by a researcher who asks them to explain what it “is” rather than “how is it done”, they naturally are nonplussed. The insouciance is threatened and practices become scrutinized and open to interpretation. This has consequences for religions future development and reconstruction. It became evident that very few participants had thought consciously about what Hinduism “is”. Consequently, when they were asked to explain it they usually described it as a form of activity. Answers reflected a preponderance of action words like “Fasting”, “Being good”, “Doing *puja*”, “Celebrating Pongal, Shivarathri, Kartikai” (festivals). Note also that the Ottawa participant quoted earlier also described religious differences in terms of “doing” things differently rather than in terms suggesting “beliefs”. Only one young man defined it as:

...A term wrongly imposed by foreigners. It is actually *sanatana dharma*- the eternal law and is based on the Vedas of which there are four.

It turned out that he had taken an introductory course in Hinduism at the University of Toronto.

Other responses were:

“Our god is Shiva. Parvati is his consort. Then we have Murukan, Ganesha, Venketeshvara, the Navagrahas- so many different kinds of god”.

“Ancient religion like Christianity- all religions are the same. God is same ways are different. Mecca resembles Shiva and Jerusalem”.

“Belief in god and the *Puranas*. It our *parampara* (tradition)”

“A religion allows everyone to attain spiritual maturity at his or her own pace. You may believe in one formless god, one personal god, or many gods- it doesn’t matter. Exemplary living is all that is important”.

“Ancient religion. There is nothing to say. We believe that’s all”.
“We go to temples”.
“It is a religion”.

Others admitted that they had not thought about it and just did whatever their “parents had taught them to *do*”. As to why they “do” religion, the following were some typical answers:

- The belief in rebirth and discovering what’s within
- To lead a good life so that one may be liberated
- To attain *moksam*
- Search for *moksam*
- Peace of mind
- Its tradition
- To please god
- For gods blessings
- Because our parents taught us to do it
- Just do that’s all
- Makes me feel good
- Because I am a Hindu
- To teach my children

Those who used the term *Moksam* defined it as:

- The final destination beyond rebirth, at the feet of Lord Siva
- Going to Mount Kailash
- When we die, through Lord Shiva’s grace we go to Kailash

A *Brahman* participant explained that Ceylonese Tamils (he was careful to point out the distinction between “them” and “us Indian Tamils”) are not familiar with the Upanishads. According to him, they are staunch *dwaitins*, (dualists) and believe in a separate entity that is Supreme, as opposed to the non-dualist vedantic view of unity or absorption with the Divine and, he gloated, that “they” were not familiar with Sankara’s teachings.

Priests on the other hand were able to articulate their beliefs in a more organized fashion. They all defined the purpose of religion as being the search for *moksam* and

explained that *moksam* can be pursued in various ways. The path of *bhakti* (devotion) is the most popular amongst householders because it is in many ways the easiest for them to practice. The senior priest at Toronto admitted that he knew he should be saying that all souls are one, and Brahman is the only reality. However, still thinks of God as a separate entity. Priests generally subscribe to the neo-vedantic version of Hinduism.

95% of participants referred to Lord Siva as the Supreme Deity. However, they were not necessarily referring to monotheism. By “supreme” some participants meant “ultimate” while others meant the “highest”. Yet, others meant both and it became evident that the issue of monotheism versus polytheism is not one that concerns them. One participant described Siva as the Supreme god, and Parvati, Ganesha and Murukan as members of his family, each with his/her own role in the universe. “They are all one family. Shiva is the Father, Parvati is the mother, and Ganesha and Murukan are the sons. They each have different jobs”.

Tamils place a great emphasis on family life and therefore it is not surprising that they draw cosmological parallels between divine and earthly families. When asked to explain further as to the need for so many gods, most often Shiva was presented as the Supreme god, while the others were manifestations of divinity. However, it was uncertain as to whether they meant manifestations of Shiva or of a power parallel to Shiva. When pressed into discussing the finer points of this monotheism issue, they merely shrugged and stated: “That is the way they have made it”. The “they” could refer to the elders, tradition, or sages. A participant in Toronto admitted that he had often wondered about this himself, but he did not believe in any of them. He just tagged along to the temple to keep his mother and wife happy.

Although Lord Siva is the most revered as the Supreme deity or patriarch of the divine family, only 6.6% chose him as their *istadevata* (personal god). The problem is that Shiva is considered too remote for most to comprehend and approach. He is an ascetic, removed from the direct concerns of the world. Although the ultimate power, according to Vedantic philosophy his power is latent and expressed through his *Sakti* (consort). The form of energy depends on the particular aspect of the *Sakti* that is dominating the site and this in turn depends on the relationship that the particular group or individual has achieved with the divine group. It is not through Shiva then that devotees approach the divine, but through one or more of his family or manifested forms:

Shiva is difficult to approach; he demands very strict *tapas* (penance). Amman, the mother can be approached by anyone, because mothers are more loving. She will do anything for her children. But when angry she can also punish. Ganesha and Murukan are like friends.

The priest at the Hamm temple had a different slant on the issue. He explained it thus:

Shiva is the Supreme deity. But he demands extreme *tapas*, which most people cannot accomplish. Therefore, they [the sages] decided to create levels so that people would not be discouraged. Thus, they created Amman for those who need a gentler approach, and Ganesha and Murukan to appeal to those who need friends or leaders.

The senior priest at the Ganesha temple however explained that the different gods represent different Agamid schools that existed in ancient times and which were, according to him, integrated into a single system by the 8th century philosopher Shankara. Instead of deleting the various forms, he retained them all but explained them as different expressions of the same Supreme. His explanation was along Vedantic lines: "Ultimately, there is nothing. Only the *nirguna Brahman*, but the ordinary person cannot relate to this and therefore we have the *saguna* forms." (He had admitted earlier that he himself could not think in terms of a formless Brahman).

Ganesha was the first choice for *istadevata* for the majority of participants and most often appeared as the family deity. Vinayaka and Pulleyar are other popular Tamil epithets for the deity who is seen as the remover of obstacles, and known to bring great success to those who worship him. His power lies primarily in the area of malevolent spirits, which he will control if correctly propitiated. He is thus worshipped at the commencement of all ceremonies and devotees pray to him seeking insurance against potential interference, rather than as a redresser of specific ills. Ganesha is also the god of wisdom, is compassionate, never forgets devotion, and is always ready to forgive. Myths generally emphasize his loyalty to his parents and he is seen as the elder son who exercises power on behalf of Shiva- sort of like a power of attorney. He is the object of several vows, which usually take the form of promises to break specified numbers of coconuts in his honour. He is especially popular with students before exams. The *caturtti* (fourth day of the month) is especially propitious for worshipping Ganesha with *abhisekam*. At the Toronto and Montreal temples, the monthly *caturtti* is observed, by performing *abhisekam* to the *murthi* of Lord Ganesha. His special day of appeasement is Monday.

The Ottawa temple celebrates only the annual *caturtti* that falls in the month of *avani* (August- September). Since Ganesha is a popular deity in both Maharashtra and Karnataka, both Marathi and Kannada communities celebrate it on different days. The Marathi community commences the celebration on the Saturday closest to the *caturtti* by installing a small clay effigy of Lord Ganesha in a temporary shrine in the basement hall. The Kannada group performs a *puja*, officiated by the temple priest, on the following

Saturday. On the tenth day, the closing ceremonies, attended by both groups, takes place during which the effigy is immersed in water.

Murukan is popular with males, who describe him as “playful”, “mischievous”, “friendly” but very “powerful”. The second son of Shiva, he is a great warrior in the cause of good overcoming evil and is always depicted carrying his *vel* (spear) that is symbolic of his power. One of the *Brahman* participants explained that the *vel* also symbolizes truth and wisdom that pierce through the darkness of ignorance or *maya* (illusion). When the *murthi* of Lord Subramaniam (the Sanskrit name for Murukan) was installed at the Ottawa temple, the temple committee, who are mainly north Indians unfamiliar with the traditions of Murukan worship, had forgotten to include the *vel*. Tamils had to convince the committee that the *vel* was a necessary part of Murukan’s accouterments, without which their *pujas* would be useless. A silver *vel* was then acquired and installed with the customary rituals.

Where Ganesha is easy going, contemplative and fat, Murukan is depicted as slim youthful and passionate. He is appeased each month on the day that the *kartigai* star, associated with him, is in ascendance. In Hindu, astronomy Mars is equated to *Kartigai* (*Karttika* in Sanskrit), the Pleiades asterism. Mars is considered malefic and causes anxiety and restlessness in those who are under its influence. Tuesdays is the special day set aside for appeasement of both Mars and Murukan. At Toronto and Montreal temples, devotees arrange for special *abisekam* for both the *murthi* of Lord Murukan and that of Mars arranged with the *navagrahas*.

On Tuesday evenings, *oorvalams* are held at the Toronto and Montreal sites. This ritual consists of taking portable images of the deities in processions around the temple.

Lord Murukan and his consorts are decorated and seated on a bier that is borne on the shoulders of devotees. The procession, accompanied by musicians winds its way through the temple, and stops at each shrine. A priest performs *arati* (waving a flame in front of the deity) and the procession proceeds to the next shrine. When the procession returns to the shrine of Lord Murukan, a more elaborate *arati* is performed, the deity is offered refreshment and invited to stay in the shrine. The bier bearers are generally the sponsors of the ritual and deem it a great honour to bear the deity on their shoulders.

According to myth, Karttika (Murukan) was created when Shiva spilled his sperm that was caught by *Agni* (fire), who finding it too hot to handle dropped it into the Ganges River. The Ganges washed it ashore, and it split into six beautiful boys who were suckled by the wives of the six celestial sages. Struck by their beauty, Parvati, the wife of Shiva, embraced them together and they coalesced into one child with six heads. Thus, he is also known as Skanda (pieces) and Kumara (youth who keeps his chastity). The month *Kartikai* (*Vricikam* in Sanskrit) corresponds to the zodiac Scorpio that symbolizes sexual potency. Murukan's *vahanam* (vehicle) is the peacock (*mayil*) that represents the notion of "beautiful illusion" (*maya*), which is overcome or controlled by the deity. The peacock however is also able to kill snakes- the symbol of sexuality. The Murukan motif is thus loaded with symbolism, although the average devotee is aware only that the god has the power to solve any of their problems if they are suitably devoted, and show penitence. His devotees therefore participate regularly in *kavati*, which consists of bearing the *kavati*, a decorated box like frame attached to a yoke, on their shoulders. To show their faith they also pierce needles through their cheeks and tongue, in fulfillment of a *vrata*, (vow). *Kavati* festivals are celebrated at both Montreal

and Toronto, but not at Ottawa. Many participants had participated in these and assured me that the piercing did not hurt. Murukan has two consorts Devayani and Valli, who are light and dark skinned, representing, it is believed, the marriage of the *Brahman* and non-*Brahman* traditions, or Dravidian and Aryan cultures. The Amman or Thevi is the Mother Goddess or *sakti* of Shiva. While Shiva is remote and inaccessible, Amman as the “mother” is readily available to her devotees. She can be both kind and stern, protect, or destroy. At all three temples, she is depicted in a relatively calm form as Durga, the warrior goddess, seated on her lion throne. At the Toronto temple, she is also shown along with Shiva (as Chandramoulisvara) as Tripurasundari- the goddess of the three worlds. The Mari Amman form began as a village goddess who was believed to protect people from smallpox and women in childbirth. However, this “particular” form has now become universalized and associated with the *Brahmanic* pantheon as Shiva’s wife. While some of the temples dedicated to this form of goddess are non-Agamic, like the ones I saw in Durban (South Africa) that still practice animal sacrifice, in Agamic temples her rituals have been *brahmanized*. To my knowledge, there are no temples to Mari Amman in Canada or the USA, but I have heard that Tamils have built an Agamic Mari Amman temple in England. Pregnant women and new brides propitiate the goddess to seek her protection for their children and young women pray to her for husbands. Fridays are sacred to the goddess, and at all three temples special pujas are performed in her honour. At Toronto and Montreal, weekly oorvalams after which a light meal is served as *prasadam* (food offered to deity and then distributed to devotees). The Ottawa temple does not have *oorvalams*, but the *Lalitasahasranama* (thousand names of the goddess) is chanted on Friday evenings during the time allotted to the Tamils. This is a

more *brahmanic* way of worshipping the goddess while the former style is more particularly Tamil.

Table 6. Popularity of deities at 3 sites (60 participants)

Deity	Family Deity	<i>Ishtadevata</i>	Most powerful deity
Shiva	9	4	24
Amman	8	12	7
Ganesha	24	26	13
Murukan	15	13	4
Vishnu	2	3	2
Other	2	2	2
All are same	-	-	8
Total	60	60	60

Table 6 reflects the sectarian bias of participants. Only three participants relate to Lord Vishnu as their *istadevata*. Of these, two were of the Vaishnava sect who explained that they belonged to a caste of weavers whose ancestors had immigrated to Jaffna from south India several generations earlier. The third participant, a young woman in her 30s had become familiar with the god Krishna through her contacts with Gujarati friends. She took to the deity and is now a frequent visitor to the Hare Krishna Temple in Toronto.

The lack of interest in Vishnu was a sore point at the Ganesha Temple and an Indian Tamil member of the committee complained about this bitterly. He argued that the temple had originally been envisioned as an all India institution; hence, the founders

had registered it as the Hindu Temple Society of Canada. Yet, since the bulk of the support came from the large Sri Lankan Tamil population, the Temple had gradually evolved into a Tamil institution and the religious emphasis was on Shaivism. He said:

These people don't know anything about Vishnu, and are not even interested. They hardly come this side [to the image of Lord Vishnu], and simply want to do *abisekam* to Shiva or Murukan. We have tried to educate them and things are a little better now.

Other non-Tamil visitors also complain that the Tamil emphasis is too great and feel out of place in the "Sri Lankan atmosphere". As one observer put it: "It is no longer our temple. They [the Tamils] have taken it over". It must be pointed out that Tamils are not anti-Vishnu, but merely unfamiliar with Vaishnava practices. They make their offerings at the shrine and participate in rituals that are being performed. The presence of a consecrated *murthi* makes regular *puja* mandatory and two specially recruited Vaishnava priests carry out all the general observances in the proper manner. However, the "particular" observances of the Vaishnava sect do not draw large crowds and these therefore are underplayed.

Although the Montreal temple has an image of Vishnu, here too there is little activity or focus on Vaishnava functions. However there are no conflicts since the overwhelming majority of the temples patrons are Shaivas. At Ottawa, however, the Tamils feel a definite Vaishnava bias. They point to the fact that Lord Vishnu has been installed in the centre shrine and cite the early problems that they had with incorporating their south Indian deities. While two of Lord Vishnu's *avatars*, Krishna and Rama, and in addition a *murthi* of Hanuman, the devotee of Lord Rama, were to be installed, the committee were reluctant to include a shrine for Lord Murukan. It was only after Swami

Dayananda of the Arsha Vidyalaya interceded on behalf of the Tamils that the temple agreed to include Murukan. The practice of *abisekam* (ritual anointing of *murthi*), which is the chief ritual of the Shaiva sect, is also limited here. The temple committee however arranges regular *Sathyanarayan Katha* in the *Mahamandap* on every full moon, and during the Sunday service, the *Vishnusaharanamam* is chanted. There is very little emphasis on Shaiva observances and *abisekam* to the *linkam*, is restricted to Friday evenings along with those of the other Shaiva deities.

Ritual practices

Thomas Hopkins observes that the *Brahmanical* synthesis, upon which he bases modern Hinduism, is “not so much an orthodoxy, “right teaching,” as orthopaxis, “right practice”, in accordance with priestly, social and ritual standards.” (Hopkins 1973:73). *Dharma*, “that which is established” or more specifically “that which men ought to do,” was ordained in the *karma-kanda* texts and distinguished from the *jnana-kanda* (having to do with knowledge) texts. The oldest of the *karma-kanda* are the *Brahmanas* but by the 7th century BCE, these were supplanted by the *Kalpa-sutras*, which contain concise rules dealing with Vedic rites and ceremonies (ibid). A second class of texts dealing with rituals based on *smriti* (popular customs) is comprised in writings called the *Smarta-sutras*, which are sub-divided into *Dharmashastras* and *Grhyasutras*. The *Dharmashastras* are concerned with the rules and conduct of men as members of the community and deal with the rules of *varna* (class), and *asrama* (stages). The description of domestic ritual is taken up in the *Grhyasutras* (Pandey 1982:7).

Somewhat in contrast, Srinivas Iyengar asserts that the religion practiced by Hindus today is almost entirely based on the *agamas* and has little to do with the Vedas

(1995:103). According to him, the Vedic and *agama* schools were rival cults that became amalgamated over the centuries but the distinction between them is not realized, “all the more so as the theory is now prevalent that the *agamas* are ultimately derived from the Vedas and contain amplifications of the Vedic teaching to suit the modern age”(Iyengar 1995: 104).

The concern here is not with validating Iyengar’s argument which are very feasible but with the distinctions that he points out between the Vedic and *agamic* traditions. His explanation clarifies the essential distinctions between *samskars*, (life cycle rituals) which are founded in the Vedic tradition and the devotional rituals used in personal and temple worship, which are rooted in the *agama* tradition.

Iyengar posits that Vedic rites require a fire into which oblations are poured. A series of gods are invoked, each having a separate function in the scheme of the universe, and every ritual action, big or small, is accompanied by the recitation of *mantras*. Since the essence of the rites is the pouring of libations into a fire, no physical representations of a deity or deities are necessary. Only the twice born castes, those that have received *diksa* (initiation), are qualified to perform Vedic rites, therefore in the case of the non-twice born, the officiating priest assumes the role of the *yajaman* (one who offers sacrifice) and offers the libations on behalf of the client (Iyengar 1995:104).

Agama rites on the other hand are fire-less and libations are merely shown to a physical representation of a deity. Only one deity, who at the time is held responsible for all cosmic events, is invoked. Vedic mantras have no legitimate place in the ritual; instead, the names of the deity are repeated numerous times with the phrase *namah* (I bow). The essence of *agamic* ritual is *upacara* (hospitality). Therefore washing,

bedecking, feeding, honouring, all attentions that are normally shown an honoured human guest, are performed to the image. This necessitates the use of a *murthi* or concrete forms of deities. *Agamic* rites can be performed by anyone and not only the twice born castes.

Hindu rituals are divided into two sets, *Samskaric* (life cycle) practices and Worship practices.

i) *Samskars* (life cycle rituals)

Traditionally a Hindu receives ten important *samskaras* in his or her lifetime. These begin with pre-natal *samskaras* and end with the *antyeshti* (funeral) rites. Rites differ according to *Varna* and *jati*. The majority of Tamils interviewed for this study were outside the “twice-born” category and therefore their life-cycle rites do not require the Vedic fire during their celebrations. *Pujas*, during which the priest functions as *yajaman* on their behalf, are conducted instead. The ritual emphasis for Tamils is *abisekam* (anointing). Traditionally it is considered auspicious to celebrate life cycle events at home. However, they are increasingly being moved to temples or community centres in Diaspora communities, including those of this study, for the sake of space and convenience.

The most sacred Hindu *samskara* is the rite of marriage, for it is the center of all the rituals performed by householders. According to the *Asvalayana-Grhya-Sutra* text which discusses the variations in wedding ceremonies amongst peoples of different villages and regions, rites commonly performed at the ceremonies of the “twice-born” Hindus are: *kanya-dan* (giving away the bride), *vivaha -homa*, (marriage fire ritual), the *pani-graham*, (the grasping of the brides hand), and the *sapta-padi* (seven steps) (Devadoss: 1979:99-103). Other rites considered important for the “twice-born” include

a *laja-homa*, where the bride pours offerings of grain given to her by her brother into the fire, the *asmarohana* (treading the stone) and *agni-parinayam* (circumambulation of the fire). Other customs are added to these essential rituals according to region and caste. For non “twice borns”, the *vivaha homa* is replaced by a *puja* and there is no *laja homa* or *agni-parinayam*. Instead the tying of the *tirumangalyam* (thali -a gold talisman displaying family emblems, strung on a cotton thread stained with turmeric) is important and has been adopted even by Tamil *Brahmans* and Christians.

Marriages are traditionally performed at the home of the bride, but are now celebrated at any convenient location. All three temples have facilities for the celebration of weddings. I witnessed weddings at all three sites, and at a temple in Hamm. Weddings at the Toronto, Montreal, and Hamm temples were very similar. One ceremony at the Toronto temple differed in that it was greatly simplified and shortened from the usual elaborate and lengthy procedure. Yet, all the main ingredients that make a ceremony “sacred” were included. It was conducted in front of the Sri Durga shrine rather than in the wedding hall. The couple was dressed according to custom: the groom in a *sherwani* (long coat) and trousers and had on a small brocade cap. The bride was dressed in a traditional red sari, her face covered by a laced veil. This last feature is apparently a custom that Sri Lankan Tamils have borrowed from Christians as also the presence of bridesmaids and best. The ritual consisted of the exchanging of garlands by the couple after which the groom tied the *thali* around the bride’s neck. After a brief incantation of *mantras* by the priest invoking the blessings of the goddess, the couple prostrated to the deity and then to both sets of parents and received their blessings. An *arati* (waving of flame in front of the deity) concluded the ceremony and the wedding party then withdrew

to the adjoining *kalyana mandapa* (marriage hall) to sign the register. "Cake cutting", another custom unique to Sri Lankan Tamil Hindus was next and a sumptuous feast (to which I was invited) followed this.

The last *samskara* in the life of a Hindu is the *antyeshti* (the funeral) and these must be performed with meticulous care. Corpses are cremated as soon as possible and the family and close relatives begin a period of mourning during which they are considered polluted. Various *santi-karma* or pacificatory rites are performed for the departed soul and offerings are made to ancestors on the 12th day, or in some cases the 35th day, when the soul is believed to reach its final destination. The family of the bereaved don fresh clothing after a ritual bath and come out of "pollution", and a feast is held to celebrate the safe crossing of the soul.

Participants explained that in Jaffna these funeral ceremonies are very elaborate and social protocols are carefully observed. Pallbearers are from certain castes and there are official mourners. The funeral procession follows an Untouchable who beats a drum. Temple priests will not perform funerary rites, as these are considered "inauspicious" and therefore a separate group of priests specialize in these rituals. In diaspora these rites have necessarily undergone considerable modifications. Firstly, the body of the departed is taken to the crematorium directly from the funeral parlour whereas traditionally it is brought home first. Since in Diaspora there is no separate caste of funeral priest, the temple priests are obliged to provide these services. Again, traditionally these rites are conducted at the home of the departed, but the lack of facilities has obliged temples to provide the space for these ceremonies and for the *tithi* rites (anniversary service) in honour of deceased parents. These are not public celebrations and include only the

immediate family members and close relatives of the deceased. Standard sets of ritual goods, clothes, fruits, and vegetables, are offered to the ancestors, which the priest, who chants the *mantras* for the *shanti* (peace) of the soul, accepts on their behalf. The family then withdraws to share a family meal. Outsiders are not invited to these meals and, indeed, even if they were the invitation would be declined as it is considered “inauspicious” to partake of such foods unless one belongs to the family or caste of the deceased. I witnessed several of these ceremonies at Toronto, Montreal, and in Germany.

The Ottawa Temple has also made provisions for these ceremonies. They have standardized the funeral rituals, which are performed at the funeral parlour rather than at the temple. The family of the deceased are invited to go down to the crematorium room, after a prayer and eulogy (which are not part of the Hindu tradition). Here the eldest son is asked to pull the switch- symbolically representing the lighting of the funeral pyre that starts the incinerator. Attending mourners meanwhile are directed to sing *bhajans* upstairs until the family returns. Ashes are collected, and since it is inauspicious to store these at home, are stored in the garage of a temple committee member, who has made his garage available for this purpose, until they can be taken back to India for immersion in a sacred river. Of late, Hindus are beginning to immerse the ashes in local rivers rather than taking them back to India. “After-all” explained a committee member of the Ottawa temple “all rivers flow into the Ganges”.

Although several people scoff at the “christianisation” of funeral rituals, the family members of deceased seldom complain. Rather they seem to derive comfort from the simplicity of the process and appreciate the fact that the temple takes care of all the details and the bereavement counselling that it provides if necessary. It is not

compulsory that all Hindu funerals be organized by the temple or even that they follow this format. Other freelance priests follow more traditional rituals.

Other *samskaras* are divided into prenatal, natal, childhood and puberty rituals for girls. These puberty rituals of course cannot be performed in a temple, since it concerns menstruation and women do not visit temples or participate in sacred rites during their menses. I therefore did not witness any of these rituals.

ii) Worship practices:

While life cycle rites invoke protection or blessings, *pujas* (worship rituals) display devotion. The most personal type of private religious activity includes fasting, reading scriptures, meditation, and prayer. Household shrines to family deities are maintained where the women of the household light a daily votary lamp. These rituals differ from household to household, and may be elaborate or simple. A *puja* in essence is a hospitality ritual, and consists of five *upacharas* (hospitalities): 1) *avahana* (inviting) 2) *sthapana* (seating) 3) *sannidhikarana*, (establishing communion) 4) *pujana* (offering water for cleansing, sandal paste, flowers, incense, lighting the lamp, offering food) and the 5) *visarjana* (send off) (Rao 1999:).

Generally, the head of the household or mother performs these daily *pujas* for the good of the whole family. The home *puja* is generally simplified and often involves merely the lighting of a lamp, singing a bhajans (hymn) or chanting simple *mantras*. Fruit and milk may also be offered and the rite ends with an *arati* (waving of the flame). Older participants said that they also read scriptures. Participants with young children

said that they usually did this in the evenings before supper, so that the whole family could participate while the older participants performed their *pujas* in the mornings.

All participants said that they had home shrines, which contained pictures of their family gods and a votary lamp. They all agreed that the lamp was very important and that since it signifies the presence of god in their homes must be lit daily. Men however generally left it to the women and admitted that they lit it only when the women were “out of doors,”- a euphemism that refers to the menses period. If an oil lamp was not convenient then they would light incense sticks instead. However, a candle was not acceptable as it is “too Christian-like”.

Interviews also revealed that greater emphasis is shown to devotional activities like observing fasts and *bhajan* singing rather than to the intellectual activities of attending lectures, scripture readings or meditation. Only one participant said that her husband was more inclined towards meditation. Fasting is especially popular amongst women and is done for a variety of reasons such as the success of children’s education, daughters marriages, safe deliveries, health problems, and for the general good of the family (also see Pearson 1996).

Table 7. Home worship patterns at 3 sites (60 participants)

Religious Practice	Lighting lamp a daily lamp	Fasting	Bhajans	Scripture Reading	Attending Lectures	Meditating
Number	60	37	11	17	15	3
Percentage	100%	61%	15%	28.3%	25%	5%

Some days are accorded special significance and these days are specified in a Tamil almanac, based on a Hindu calendar. The Tamil calendar, which the Sri Lankan Tamils use, is based on a combination of lunar/solar systems; it uses solar years and lunar months. The year is divided into 12 months and following the Greek system, names each month after a zodiac symbol. The months are based on the lunar movement and are divided into two *pakshas* (segments) the *Shukla Paksha* (bright segment), and *Krishna Paksha* (dark segment), which correspond to the waxing and waning of the moon. Each *paksha* (segment) therefore has 14 days, and are known by their numerical terms: *prathama* (one), *dwitiya*, (two) *trithiya*, (three) and so on. The full moon is called *purnima* and the new moon is *amavasya*. Each phase is divided into 7 days and these are named after *grahas*, (planets) which are believed to dominate on that day. Each *thithi* (day) is also influenced by a *naksatram* (star constellation) that is in ascendance, and is divided into three *kalams*, (times), *rahukalam*, *gulikakalam* and *yamagandakalam*, whose timings vary each day (Thomas 1971:123 Pfaffenberger 1982:219).

Celebrations are either of astronomical significance like the New Year, Full Moon, New Moon, equinox and solstice, or in honor of divinities such as Shivarathri, Navarathri, Ganesha Chaturthi, Skanda- shashti, Gokulashtami, Ramnavami etc. On these occasions, special offerings are made to the relevant deity both at home and in temples.

Three types of deities were placed in home shrines. *Grama-devatas* (village deities), *kula-devatas* (family deities) and *ista- devata* (personal deities). The first two are fixed by birth, but the third is a matter of personal choice. Significantly, very few participants and only those over 50 years, knew the names of their village deities. These

are connected to specific locations, and it is interesting to note their decreasing importance. Family deities, however, are still remembered and worshipped along with *istadevatas*. Some participants counted as many as 10 gods in their home shrines. They all have images of Lord Ganesha, Murugan, and Devi. Shiva is present only in picture form, as it is believed not advisable to keep a *linkam* in the house, unless one can live up to the uncompromising *mati* that the god's presence demands.

Hindus also generally place pictures of personal guru in their home shrines. I was surprised, however, to find that few participants understood the term *guru*. At the Toronto and Montreal sites, many participants thought that I was referring to the *gurukkal* - the term for temple priest. A Brahman participant informed me that although local *sadhus* are revered as holy men, the concept of "religious preceptor" is not commonly understood by Sri Lankan Tamils. When I explained the concept to some of them, they shook their heads and said that they did not have a teacher. A participant in Toronto, however, stated that he was a disciple of the 19th century saint Sri Ramakrishna. He had been initiated by a swami of that order and was a regular participant at the Vedanta Centre. However, in addition, he continued to practise the traditional rituals that he had grown up with and his daily prayer routine consists of: chanting the initiation *mantra*, followed by 20 minutes of meditation, after which he worshipped his family deities in the traditional manner- in his case, offering of flowers, lighting incense and chanting the *mantras*. He also read chapters from the *Gospel of Sri Ramakrishna* every night before retiring.

Apart from him, few participants in Toronto, Montreal, or Ottawa, were aware of Swami Vivekananda although the Swami had visited Ceylon and there is a Ramakrishna Centre in Colombo. Only older university educated participants were familiar with the

Mission and had some knowledge of the *Vedanta* philosophy propagated by Swami Vivekananda. In contrast, it was found that the popularity of the Sai Baba is increasing amongst Tamils. Several participants mentioned that they attend Sai Bhajans.

Temple Worship

Pfaffenberger (1982:64) observed that generally old women and children frequent temples in Jaffna. Younger male participants in Toronto and Montreal, admitted that they visit temples more often in Canada than they did in Jaffna. There they visited only on special occasions when their presence was necessary. In Canada however, they came at least once a week with their families. It was as much a social visit for them and after visiting the temple, they mentioned stopping at a fast food restaurant for a meal. Ottawa participants were all weekly visitors, and made special attempts to attend the regular Friday sessions. However other than these sessions, they all said that they rarely visited the temple unless there was a special program arranged. That is all but one participant, who was serving on the temple committee at the time of the interview. He was obliged to visit more frequently.

Table 8. Frequency of temple visits at 3 sites (60 participants)

Frequency of visits	Number	%
Daily	18	13.3%
Weekly	28	46.6%
Occasionally	21	35%

Special purposes only	3	5%
Total	60	100%

Table 9. Reasons for visiting the temple at 3 sites (60 participants)

Reason for Visit	Number	%
Religious	31	68.9%
Spiritual	2	3.3
Social	5	8.3%
All Four	3	5%
Total	60	100%

Religious indicated ritual practises such as performing *archanais*, *abisekams* or other practices that involve the priest. Spiritual was understood as personal prayer, to receive *darsan*, or as one participant said, “to simply enjoy the environment”. A participant in Ottawa was especially appreciative of the serene surroundings of the Ottawa temple. She had visited the other two sites and had found them too noisy, with too much going on. She complained that “There [Toronto], children run around and there are too many people. One cannot find a quiet corner to sit and do *parayanam* (scriptural chanting). Also, here [Ottawa] there is a plush carpet to sit on, in Toronto one has to sit on the cold cement floor.”

The temple plays an important social role in the lives of the elderly in Toronto and Montreal. Several elderly men and women in Toronto come to the temple almost daily by bus and their families pick them up in the evenings. It provides a social outing for them. They help out with small chores like cleaning the lamps, read scriptures

together, discuss philosophy or just visit. Some bring their lunch and even have afternoon naps in the dinning hall downstairs. A few said that they had tried local Senior citizens clubs but found that they shared few common interests with seniors from other cultures. As one participant explained:

In our Hindu culture, after a certain age, we focus on god. I went to a senior's centre but was not interested in those activities. They play cards or go on picnics or dancing. I come to the temple to help, pray, and meet other elderly people like me [Tamil]. I take the public bus in the morning and my son or daughter-in law comes in the evening to pick me up. This way I can get out of the house even in winter, which are terrible.

Many old contacts have been renewed at the temple, and new ones made. (Even I ran into an acquaintance at the Toronto temple, that I had not seen in many years). The weekends are especially affable. The Friday evening *puja* draws quite a crowd even during winter and in Toronto and Montreal, a *prasadam* consisting of two varieties of rice (lime rice and yoghurt rice) and *vadai* (savoury donut) are served. I noticed that many families make an evening of it, arriving around 7pm and staying for the *oorvalum* (procession of *murthis*) which takes place around 9 p.m.

Hindus who argue that praying can be done at home have often questioned the necessity for temples. Home worship is performed for the benefit of the immediate family and is guided by family traditions rather than a set of rules. The priest performs temple rituals for the benefit of the public. They are described in the Agamas and are both complex and precise. Characteristically elaborate, the ritual sequences are meant to attract and impress crowds of devotees.

Temple worship however is also an extension of the personal relationship between a devotee and a deity. Visiting a temple is like seeking the *darsan* (audience) of a monarch. The god or goddess "sits" in majestic glory within the sanctum. Generally,

they are beautifully robed and jewelled, with flower garlands around their necks. The jewellery, which is often genuine, glistens in the light of the oil lamp. Only priests have access to the sanctum and worshippers stand at the doorway while their offerings are made on their behalf by priests. The image of regal authority seems to have an important psychological benefit for worshippers. It symbolizes the presence of the "divine" in a foreign land (see Fenton, Narayana, Clothey).

All participants said that the atmosphere of temples is more sacred than that at home. The following is a sample of what some of them said in this respect.

- "The priest performs rituals more correctly."
- "The daily concentration of prayer and ritual creates good vibrations, which we can take home with us".
- "At home one is constantly distracted while doing *puja*".
- "We may not say the *mantrams* correctly. Here the priest says it accurately".
- "We cannot decorate the gods in the same elaborate style at home."
- "We cannot maintain the necessary purity at home".
- "It's very important to take children so that they can see and be familiar with our gods and customs".

Temple ritual is a complex of ceremonies that are either religious or social. Religious rituals pertain to the daily rites that are intended to preserve the spiritual power of the image in the sanctum and to promote the sanctity of the shrine. The priest carries them out at appointed hours in partial or complete seclusion (Rao 1999:276).

Temple worship is generally conducted at least three times in the course of 24 hours: morning, noon, and evening. Known as *trikala* (three times) *puja*, the ritual is formal and elaborate, but follows the same sequence as the home ritual. Extra elements of homage, like the holding of an umbrella and *abisekam*, are added on days of special significance and according to sectarian requirements. Towards the end comes the final *arati* (waving of lights), which is done very elaborately in temples, followed by *mantra-*

pushpam (hymnal offerings), recital of *stotras* (laudatory verses), circumambulation, and prostration (Rao 1999).

On special days, Hindus visit temples to witness these *pujas*, and receive the *prasadam* that is distributed by priests. On ordinary occasions the *prasadam* consists of a few dried nuts or fruit but on special occasions the priests generally cook the *prasadam*. In Montreal and Toronto, a temple employees or volunteers do the cooking. At Ottawa, the sponsor of the *puja* arranges the *prasadam*. Devotees may also sponsor special *arcanai* (homage) during which the priest announces the presence of the devotee to the deity and submits their offerings of flowers, fruits, and sometimes food. At other times, devotees may sponsor special *alankarams* (adornments). These consist of plastering the image with sandal paste. Later the substance, which is rendered sacred, is collected and returned to the sponsor who then uses it as sacred potions. Special *abisekams* to are generally sponsored over the weekends at Toronto and Montreal. Images are generally anointed with milk, but on special occasions *panchamartam* (a concoction of fruits, milk and butter-milk, sacred basil leaves and honey) may be used. These fluids are also collected and returned to the sponsor who distributes $\therefore$ among his/her friends as *prasadam*.

The sacred days of the deities are maintained at the Toronto and Montreal sites. *Abisekam* to Lord Shiva is performed on Mondays, Tuesdays for Lord Murukan, Fridays for Devi and Saturdays for Lord Vishnu. Since Ganesha is the main deity of the temple in Toronto, *abisekam* to Lord Ganesa is performed everyday. Similarly daily *abisekam* is performed to Lord Murukan at the Montreal site and *ooravalums* take place on Tuesdays and Fridays.

The routine at the Ottawa site is very different. Here *arati* is conducted only twice a day. The priests perform the veneration at each shrine and *arati* is then conducted at the centre shrine in front of the Vishnu *murthi*, during which the popular Hindi *arati* song, *Jai Jagadish Hare*, is sung. It is only on Friday evenings that *abisekam* is performed for the *linkam*, and to small bronze images of Lord Murukan and his consorts.

Apart from these routine activities, temples also organize annual festivals like *kavati*, which are meant to contribute to the prosperity of the people and the nation. Of course, they also contribute to the temple's revenue. These rites are conducted separately and independently of the daily rituals, which must carry on uninterrupted. Festivals are generally extended over several days and during the period, *katha-kalabsekams* (telling of *puranic* stories), *bhajans*, music and dance performances are arranged in the evenings. *Kavati* festivals are arranged at the Toronto and Montreal sites, but at different times so that there is no clash. Some devotees attend festivities at both centres. The festival in Montreal lasts two weeks the climax of, which is the *kavati* ritual on the morning of the last day which is followed by the *ratho-utsava* (car festival). The ritual begins with a special *abisekam* for Lord Murukan, as male devotees place the *kavati* on their shoulders. Those who wish it, have cheeks and tongues pierced by arrow like needles. Hooks pierced through the skin on the back and connected to threads, which are then held like a harness and yanked by a friend w. The person carrying the *kavati* then dances while those watching sing devotional songs. One *kavati* (as the person bearing the *kavati* is then called) trembled as he danced and fell to his knees. Those watching said that he had become possessed and several women performed *arati* to him. After the portable images

of Lord Murukan and his consorts are decorated and installed in the tall *rath* (carriage), the *kavatis* join the procession as devotees pull the *rath* around the perimeter of the temples premises.

A similar procession is held at Toronto, but here the procession is actually taken through the streets of Richmond Hill, led by a police escort. Ottawa naturally does not have a *kavati* festival, but Tamils from Ottawa attend the festivals in Montreal or Toronto.

By and large, participants at the Toronto and Montreal temples did not see much change in the way rituals are observed here from the way that they are performed in Jaffna. Differences related to the architecture and minor adjustments because of the different weather conditions. They pointed out that here all shrines are enclosed under a single roof and that there are several *mulasthanams* (primary sanctums) in one complex. At "home", however, temples are dedicated to a single deity and the smaller accompanying shrines are situated separately in the compound. In addition, temples there have several courtyards accessible only to priests and patrons. Therefore, it is more difficult to get a glimpse of the *murthi*. In general, they were pleased with the modifications that are made in Canada. The presence of several deities under one roof and the removal of the courtyards from around each sanctum allow devotees to have *darsana* of "all gods in one trip". The open architecture enables devotees to see the *murthis* up close.

All participants at the Toronto and Montreal sites noted the efficiency and dedication of the priests. According to the priests, the core rituals have been maintained with little or no change. It is their responsibility, they say, to make sure that the transition

happens smoothly, and they take pride in the fact that there have so far, been no compromises in the way the deities are attended on. All the paraphernalia required for *puja* are available in Toronto and Montreal and they are able to maintain all the rules of *mati* (purity). As noted earlier, a non-Tamil observer commented on the fact that the Tamils had brought everything required with them. This includes large items like the raths (wooden cars) and biers, royal umbrella's and *asanas* (seats). Only one participant in Toronto commented that the rituals at the Sri Ganesha temple were close but not "exactly" like those in Jaffna. He could not however point to anything specific.

Priests at the Ottawa temple however are not so pleased. There have been several different priests at the temple over 3 years that I conducted this research. One priest left abruptly, claiming that the temple committee imposed too many restrictions that applied even to his social life and how to conduct *pujas*. The temple committee apparently decided on the format of the *pujas* and would not let him perform them the way he has been trained to. Currently the two priests are from Benares, and Maharashtra, who to the disappointment of some Tamils are unfamiliar with south Indian rituals. Others, however, praise them for their willingness.

Since both Montreal and Toronto serve a Tamil clientele, rituals at these institutions are conducted according to the South Indian *agamas*. However, Hindus from other parts of India also visit occasionally and are accommodated as much as possible. Even Westerners are accommodated especially if they have had initiation from a Hindu guru and this is a departure from orthodox custom.

At Toronto and Montreal, a priest's day begins at sunrise with ritual bathing. According to *agama*, the bathing must take place in the open air with water from a well

or running stream. In Canada, of course, neither climate nor convention makes this possible. Therefore here they merely use the shower. *Mantras* are recited during the shower and until they are dressed in the traditional *vesti*. They then sip sanctified water and do *pranayama* (breathing exercises), intended to clear the mind before doing their *sandhya-vandana* ritual, which is mandatory for all twice-born Hindus and especially so for priests. They then complete their personal *puja*, for the well-being of their own families, and then proceed to the temple.

Throwing open the doors of the temple, the priest on duty, walks through it chanting appropriate *mantras* and waving a pot of *sambrani* (benzoin) set on hot coals. The smoke that this creates is believed to purify the air and ward off any lurking night spirits. The *dwarapalakas* (door guardians) receive the first homage as recognition of the performance of their duty and the *murthi* of Lord Ganesha is “awakened” first, followed by Sudarsan the Sun deity. The priests then proceed to clean out the shrines and get the other deities ready for the day’s worship. While the area outside the sanctums can be cleaned by anyone, the interiors are accessible only to the priests and therefore they must do this themselves. Faded flowers are removed, lamps are cleaned and fresh water, and flowers and other articles for the day’s rituals are collected. Deities are then formally “awakened” with appropriate *mantras*.

In Sri Vaishnava temples, the deity of Lord Vishnu is “awakened” at sunrise with a set of *mantras* called the *suprabhatham*. At the Toronto temple, however, these *mantras* are chanted only on Saturdays, and on special festival days. There I attended the *suprabhatham* on a Saturday that also happened to be the *Vaikunta Samaradhana* day - the winter solstice- when, according to Hindus, the doors of *Vaikunta* (Vishnu’s heaven)

are opened. Fortunately, for me, sunrise in Toronto on that day was as late as 6:50 am and I arrived in time for the special *suprabhatham*. It is considered a great honor to have this first *darsana* of the image (like having breakfast with the Queen). The two Vaishnava priests were in attendance and the half-lit atmosphere of the surroundings was charged with an air of mystery. The chanting took place at the shrine of Lord Perumal (Vishnu). The handful of devotees who had braved the weather to be there chanted along with the priest. While one priest did the chanting the other cleaned the shrine and prepared the *murthi*, bathing it with sanctified water prepared with herbs and spices and then draping it in fresh garments. All this was of course done behind a curtain in order to preserve the privacy of the deity. Once the *murthi* was robed, the curtain was thrown open for the first *darsana* and *arati*.

The sequence of worship that follows is similar to the home *puja* routine. The deity is invoked, offered clothes, flowers, incense, perfume, songs of praise, and refreshments, and finally an *arati* is performed. *Prasadam* may be elaborate on special days, but usually consists of milk and nuts like almonds and raisins. Later, around 10am an archway was erected that represented the gateway into *Vaikunta*. Devotees were invited to pass through it, to receive the blessings of Lord Vishnu, delivered by a priest waiting on the other side. The special *prasadam* that day was *rava soji* (sweet semolina), which I was told is a special favourite of Lord Vishnu. Around a hundred people attended this rite; several of them, like me, were not Vaishnavas, but merely visitors who had come on a regular visit to the temple. However, all stayed and participated in the ritual. A group of Sri Vaishnavas arrived in the evening to sponsor the evening *puja* during

which the priest chanted the *Vishnusahasranama* (Thousand Names of Vishnu). This was followed by *teyvaram* (Tamil *bhajans*) by a group of Tamil Indians.

Puja is repeated again at noon and then in the evening, the only difference being that the *suprabhatham* is not chanted again. *Abisekam* and *arcanai* (homage ritual) may be sponsored at any time during temple hours, which are from 10am to noon and 5pm until final closing at 9 p.m. After all devotees and visitors have left, priests perform the final closing rituals, and each deity is “tucked in for the night”. Lord Sanniswara is invoked and the temple is left in this deity’s capable hands for the night.

Fridays are sacred to the goddess and at both the Toronto and Montreal *ooravalum* rituals are carried out. After the evening *pujas* are completed, the portable *utsava murthis* (festival images) of Sri Durga is placed on a bier and taken around the temple. This ritual is conducted in a similar manner at the Montreal site but on a smaller scale since the area is smaller and there is only one full time priest. However, according to a committee member, the rituals at Montreal are more “authentic” than those performed at the Ganesha temple, which he said were “hybrid”. When asked to qualify he could not however pin point anything specific.

Rituals at the Ottawa temple differ from both of these other two temples. The aim of the founders of the temple was to unite Hindus of all regional cultures into one single temple community and showcase “the best of Hinduism” in the Nation’s capital. The institution was intended to be a place of retreat and fellowship where Hindus could meditate and hold theological, cultural, and scholastic discussions. As discussed in Chapter 4, the temple Board has stringent rules. It opens to the public only at 10 am on Saturdays and Sundays. Since the doors are alarmed for security, during the week it is

recommended that you make an appointment with the priests. Priests clean the shrines and since “dressing of *murthis*” and flower garlands are not permitted, this is a straightforward task. After a short *puja* performed by the priests at each shrine, a general *arati* is performed at the centre of the hall, intended for all deities. The *Shanti mantras* are chanted, followed by the popular North Indian *arati* song, *Om Jai Jagdish Hare*, which now seems standard in north Indian temples to during which those present take turns waving the *arati*. *Arcana*s are performed here too on request and closes at 1pm. To open again only at 5pm. The *arati* is repeated at 8 p.m. after which the temple is closed.

Tamils hold their *pujas* on Fridays. Much to their dismay, they are not permitted to perform *abisekam* to the *linkam* on Mondays. They must instead do it on Friday evenings along with their regular *pujas*, which the temple newsletter lists as *Shiva Pariwar Pooja* and *Bhajan*. For Tamils, the Monday *abisekam* is a matter of benefit for the temple and Ottawa’s Hindu community in general. However, the committee do not understand this sentiment.

Tamils in Ottawa face numerous problems apart from those discussed in Chapter 4. A limit of one litre has been set on the quantity of milk that can be used for *abisekams*. An enraged Tamil threatened to “bring a hundred litres of milk for my god, if I want to”. Fortunately, other Tamils did not want to provoke a confrontation and pacified him. Largely they are unhappy with the sterile atmosphere of the temple and it is only because they feel that they cannot afford a temple of their own that they compromise and stay on.

Some Tamils however, expressed their admiration for the temple. She pointed out that functions organized by the committee in the *Mahamandap* upstairs are always meticulously arranged and begin punctually. A female participant, who is well known

for her devotion, said that she liked the cleanliness and disciplined manner in which the *pujas* were conducted. What she did not favour was the serving of food at all functions. She felt it was “like bribing people to come”. She therefore stopped attending the Friday sessions and organizes special *pujas* on New Years Day. These have been very successful. Two years ago January 1st fell on a Friday so she organized a *Valakku puja* (Worship of Lights) that is performed for the goddess by women. Each devotee receives an oil lamp set in a tray and as the *Lalitasahasranam* (thousand names of the goddess Lalita who is a form of *Shakti*) is chanted, led by a priest, flower petals are offered to the lamp. By the time, all thousand names are chanted the trays become piled high with petals, which are then collected and showered on the *murthi*. This is not a standard *puja* for Sri Lankan Tamils, but the participant had attended one of these events during the *Navarathri* (festival of the goddesses) period was she was so moved that she decided to organize one of her own. The date and time of these events is emailed to her contacts and the only *prasadam* served are fruits. Yet, they are well attended.

3. Propagation of Culture

61% of parents with children under the age of 12 years were very optimistic that the future generation would maintain their traditions. 23% were undecided and only 16% doubted very much that traditions would be preserved. The last group were parents of teenagers and expressed disappointment over the fact that their children would no longer accompany them to the temple. A woman with teenage daughters was particularly cynical, complaining that despite her efforts her girls no longer showed an interest in

religious practices. Instead, they were “into pop music and western culture”. They also refuse to talk Tamil amongst themselves and speak to her in that tongue only if she nags them.

Those with children under 12 years felt that the home atmosphere was very important. “If parents maintain the culture at home, then children will automatically pick it up and retain it,” they argued. Many teach their children simple *slokas* (Sanskrit prayers) at home, but feel that they learn more in the organized setting of a classroom from their peers. All parents felt that Tamil was an important element in retaining and propagating their culture and the creation of a Tamil atmosphere seems to be the foremost strategy at the Montreal and Toronto temples for ensuring continuity. All notices and publications at these institutions are in Tamil, and only rudimentary directions for the benefit of non-Tamils are in English. Children are directed to speak only in Tamil on temple premises.

The main language used in the Ottawa temple is English and even priests are selected because of their fluency in English. The discussion that follows scripture readings is also in English as are all signs and publications. There are no religion or language classes here. A workshop for teenagers was held several years ago but since then only lectures by visiting Swamis aimed at older Hindus have been organized. Tamils at this site accept the indifference of the teens philosophically and rationalize it by saying that they are busy with their studies. They feel that interest will be renewed once they start families of their own.

Classes in Tamil literacy, religion and the performance arts, are held at the Thirumurukan temple every Sunday afternoon. Children also learn music and dance and

boys learn *nadhaswaram* and *tavil* (musical instruments). Teachers are volunteer parents and their dedication is obvious, as is that of the parents who make sure that these children attend these sessions.

A text used at the Montreal temple's school for religious instruction includes *Living with Siva* by Sivaya Subramaniaswami of the Himalayan Institute in Hawaii. A western disciple of the Ceylonese saint, Satguru Yogaswami, the book is based on *Shaiva* doctrines and is described as the "Catechism of Hinduism". It is divided into 10 sections, dealing with as Ethics, Belief, Practice, Personal Life, Livelihood, Men and Women, The Family, Protocol, Fellowship and finally Monastic life. It states that although based on *Shaiva -siddhanta* doctrine, it recognizes as its primary scriptural authority the *Shaiva Agamas*, four Vedas and Upanishads. The author explains that the institute is a Vedic-Agamic Tradition (Subramaniaswami 1991: 27). The emphasis however is soundly rooted in the notion that Lord Siva is the "Absolute Being" whose "immanent nature is the Primal Soul, Supreme Mahadeva, Siva-Sakti, the Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of all that exists"(1991: 29). Followers are also urged to believe in Lord Ganesha whose rule is compassion and in Lord Murukan "whose *Vel* of Grace dissolves the bondage's of ignorance"(1991: 31).

A chapter on raising Children contains 5 *sutras* that exhort parents to consider the raising of children as a sacred responsibility. They are advised to; "based on astrology, tradition and wise counsel formulate patterns that cultivate each child's inherent talents and higher nature". It advises that boys should be trained in technical skills and girls the art of home making. The basic sacraments such as: name-giving, first feeding, head shaving, ear piercing, first learning, puberty and marriage rites must be followed. Parents

are forbidden to spank their children or use harsh language and those parents who fail to correct their attitudes should be ostracized.

Considering the number of female Tamil students enrolled in professional programs I doubt that these injunctions are taken too literally. However, Tamils from India have often remarked that Tamils raise their children in a very loving manner and use the respectful suffix (generally used for elders) when they address them. Apart from this text, the Director of the school intimated that he wished to teach the children “a more general form of Hinduism.” While Tamil, scriptures like the *Periya Puranam*, *Kural*, and *Tevaram* songs were well known to participants in Toronto and Montreal few were familiar with Sanskrit texts like the Mahabharatha and Bhagavad-Gita. Here only *Brahmans* and university educated Tamils had heard or read these. The Director felt that these children should learn the philosophy of the Upanishads and become familiar with the Bhagavad-Gita. When he discovered that I had taught introductory courses on Hinduism to university students, he asked me to design a course for his classes. I declined arguing that my notes would be too academic and that what he needed to do was to teach the children the practical and devotional aspects of religion. He retorted: “They receive enough superstition from their parents” and sees it as his duty to “raise their intellectual appreciation of the scriptures”. I reluctantly gave him my course outline and class notes which focus on the Upanishads and the Bhagavad-Gita and reflects my distinctly Advaitic bias. However, he found the materials very useful and urges me to publish a book. It will be interesting to see how these children will interpret Hinduism in the future.

The Ganesha temple does not sponsor either language classes or religious instruction. However, language classes are organized at several venues and attended by

both Hindu and Christian children and they learn Jaffna history and Tamil literature. However there always seem to be several teenagers and young adults at this temple. Apparently, they came to volunteer, and help with the painting and landscaping chores.

Participants at the Ottawa institutions were however, familiar with the Sanskrit tradition, as it is the dominant culture at the institution. The Sunday scripture readings are based on the Upanishads or Bhagavad-Gita. A devotee recently donated \$25,000 to be spent to propagate Sanskrit learning. Tamils feel that the specific focus on Sanskrit is unfair and are trying to direct some of these funds towards supporting Tamil literature. There is no regular religious instruction at this institution. Tamil children attend literacy classes organized by the Tamil Sangam where they study Tamil secular literature. Younger children accompany their parents to the temple, but as already mentioned, older children stay away unless there it is a special event or festival.

To summarize the main points of the data, it was found that Tamils think of themselves as Hindus and as practicing "Hinduism". The Montreal and Toronto institutes follow south Indian ritual traditions, and the socio-particular customs of Shaiva Agama, while Tamils at the Ottawa temple have had to considerably modify both ritual and custom.

Chapter 6: The Glocalization of Religion: Synthesizing the Inquiry

The aim of this chapter is to encapsulate the data within the perspective of globalization theory. The statement of purpose in the Introduction stated that the intention of this dissertation was to demonstrate that the reconstruction of minority Hindu institutions is a current stage in the larger historical process of a worldwide construction of Hinduism. Tamils in Canada were chosen as the focus group to illustrate the theory and because they are part of a wider Hindu diaspora, the analysis of which was set within a global context. The discussion therefore began with the construction of Hinduism as a religious category in the 18th century by Orientalists scholars and British bureaucrats, and its subsequent emergence and development in the 19th century with the introduction of modern institutions. A survey of the global Diaspora was followed by a focused study of the Sri Lankan Tamils.

The theoretical perspective was based on the ideas of Roland Robertson (1992) and Peter Beyer (1994, 1998a, b, c). Robertson's theory of relativization proposes that globalization sets into motion simultaneous processes of *universalization and particularisation*, which together produce unpredictable results. Elements of the universal are internalized at "particular" levels and similarly elements of the particular are diffused "universally" (1992:100). The "milk miracle" is an example of this dual process, where an event at a particular location was spread worldwide through the media generating a global response, which in turn became localized at particular sites. In Denmark, for example, it caught the interest of Europeans who visited the local Hindu temple out of curiosity and subsequently became disciples of the *upasaki* who resides there. In Ottawa money offered by devotees was donated to a half way house for battered

women. The link between the global and local is best expressed by the term “glocalize”, (derived from the Japanese *dochakuka*, which roughly means “global localization”, which was developed as a marketing strategy to address this very issue (Robertson 1992:173). Glocalization can explain the enormous diversities found amongst groups of Hindus, who yet claim to belong to a single religious tradition.

Two of Beyer’s ideas relating to the re-organization of “religion” under modern and global conditions offer a new approach to the study of “religion”. Under modern conditions, “religion” which in traditional societies functioned as the pivot of social systems, becomes differentiated with other systems along functional lines. In this form, it spreads globally as an institutional system like any other modern functional system, such as education, politics, economics, and yet at particular locations is able to retain its connections with local socio-cultural identity. Thus, Beyer proposes that the study of religion be undertaken along a dual track, one following the global form and the other observing its local manifestations.

Beyer’s second idea addresses the issue of whether we can call Hinduism a “religion” in the modern sense of the term. He argues that the modern concepts of “religion” and “religions” are both products of the social and historical contexts of 16th and 17th century Europe and therefore Western Christianity provided the model of what a “religion” should look like. The concept was diffused worldwide under colonial expansion, where it was appropriated by native cultures, resulting in the emergence of several Eastern religions. However, although natives appropriated the concept, they did not meekly imitate the Abrahamic model upon which Western Christianity, namely one that entails fixed dogma, rigid monotheism, and a rejection of idolatry. Instead, they

constructed a “religion” according to their own needs and attitudes. In India, this took the shape of an integrated system that incorporates numerous beliefs and practises and supports idolatry and numerous manifestations of deities. However, these elements were reinterpreted in light of the new understanding that they had appropriated from modern western ideas. Beyer approaches the development of Eastern religions as “old wine in new caskets” rather than the Biblical “new wine in old caskets”. To understand why Hinduism developed in the form that it has, we must understand the socio-historic context of 19th century India.

Diaspora communities are generally viewed as minority adaptation to new environments. Although a valid approach, the dynamism of the contemporary global situation makes the issue more complicated than that of mere assimilation that is based on assumptions that “home” and “transplanted” environments are stable. On the contrary, both these environments are constantly changing and affected by the global economy, migration of populations, technological innovations, media images, and public policy, which Appadurai refers to as “scapes”. This naturally has consequences for the way people reconstruct their identities. This study is not concerned with the formation of ethnic identities but with how religion reconstructs itself at particular locations often in close relationship with ethnicity. Although religion also functions to preserve language and customs, it is the reconstruction of religion in particular as exemplified in Hindu temples that is of concern here.

The discussion therefore begins with the emergence of Hinduism, its spread into a global Diaspora, and the historical context of the Canadian diaspora. It then proceeds to

look at the specific situation of the Tamils in Canada, as an instance of the global Hindu diaspora.

Construction and Emergence of Hinduism and Its Development in India

When the British “discovered” India in the 18th century, Indian society was still traditional. Although Mughal rule had extended over most of the sub-continent, 800 years of exposure to Islam had not brought radical changes to Hindu society. Even contact with the Portuguese had not transformed the basic structures upon which Indian society was organized. The reason for this is that the Portuguese were themselves from a traditional Iberian-Catholic culture, whose institutions bore similarities to those of the Islamic- Hindu culture they encountered. They therefore merged with the existing society, forming yet another group or “caste” in the multi-cultural jumble of the Indian sub-continent.

With the British, however, the situation was different. Unlike previous invaders, they carefully avoided interfering with the religious institutions of the conquered. Instead they improved communications, introduced a judiciary, English education and a secular administration under which minorities were treated equally. Ironically, the introduction of these modern institutions proved more invasive than the unsympathetic policies of previous rulers, and brought radical changes to Indian society. The reason was that modern institutions differ not in their size or bureaucratic nature, but in their ability to gradually undermine traditional institutions.

Under Mughal Rule, Hindus had been used to second-class status. Therefore, the introduction of a secular administration under which all subjects were treated equally

gave them equal status with the Muslims. The introduction of a judiciary entailed the development of separate legal systems for Hindus and Muslims and the Hindu penal code, along with the introduction of other functional systems, such as English education and secular administration, gradually corroded the traditional authority of the caste system. The British took over many of the social functions hitherto organized by religion, such as economic distribution, education, and justice, thus freeing it from its pivotal role. Subsequently, religion too became reorganized along modern functional lines, becoming increasingly reified and re-interpreted within the standards of the emerging social contexts. The standards of the new contexts were derived from the modern ideas that were spread by the newly introduced secular English education system. Several native leaders emerged to redefine the ancient Indian heritage in a manner that was acceptable to the rising class of English educated Indian. Instead of merely replicating the western notions of religion, they constructed their own version of "religion" through a selective process in which they appropriated western ideas but reassembled them according to their needs.

Before British arrival, Indians had had no notion of "nationality" or visions of an "Indian nation". Society had been divided by religious, regional and caste differences and these did not facilitate the development of a broader identity, according to Spear (1981), it was this lack of national consciousness rather than superior administration that enabled the British to conquer India so easily.

Orientalists had already constructed a scholarly category of Hinduism by the 18th century and British administrators in their census records turned it into a religious category. Initially, the contact with the British brought about a period of introspection.

An educated Indian elite began to examine their culture from the viewpoint of the foreigners and found it wanting. Practices like *sati*, child marriage, that had until then seemed perfectly natural, now came to be seen as oppressive. Rather than a full-scale abandonment of Hindu values however, Indians initiated social reforms and responded to the vitriolic criticism of Christian missionaries against such ideas as idolatry and polytheism by reinterpreting these beliefs in a way that could be accepted by modern educated Indians. Thus, idolatry was explained first as an excrescence and later idols became emblematic representations for those who required concrete symbols.

The early part of the 19th century was a period of lively encounters with between Indians and colonialist and Christian missionaries. The language of the Indians became increasingly couched in the idiom of the westerner, reflecting that they were gaining increasing familiarity with the devices of the Europeans. Ideas of self rule, nationhood, and the concept of unity in numbers rather than caste began to germinate, and these were facilitated by such colonial policies as granting privileges to minorities based on numerical criteria.

While men like Ram Mohan Roy and Swami Dayananda were responsible for the direction of the new trends, their ideas would have remained within the narrow circle of the educated elite if it had not been for the timely introduction of a universal English education system and the invention of the printing press. Both these innovations ensured the spread of these ideas to the middle classes where they took root. The neutrality and universality of Vedantic philosophy fit in with the theme of unity, as did Max Muller's discovery of a common heritage for all Hindus. By the end of the 19th century the idea of an Indian nation had taken root and is reflected in Swami Vivekananda's writings:

Can you adduce any reason why India should lie in the ebb tide of the Aryan nations? Is she inferior in intellect? Is she inferior in dexterity? Can you look at her art, at her mathematics, at her philosophy, and answer “yes”? All that is needed is that she should de-hypnotize herself and wake up from her age long sleep to take her true rank in the hierarchy of nations (1990:79).

Seen against this backdrop of debate with outsiders, appropriation of modern ideas, internal reforms, spirit of nationalism and introduction of modern institutions, it is little wonder that “Hinduism” developed in the form it did. Unity was the burning issue of the times and to generate this, Indians used every means available to them. Oriental scholarship, especially Max Mullers thesis of Aryan heritage, the *Brahmanical* framework set in place by the judiciary, and ideas appropriated from Vedic philosophy were selectively and successfully employed in the incorporation of the enormous diversities existent in the sub-continent. As Mahatma Gandhi explained, Hinduism sees contradictions as the same truth, adapting itself to the varying circumstances (Gandhi 1994:192). “Unity in variety is the plan of nature” (1994:191)

The result is a system that reconciles everything, from neo-Vedantic neutralism to radical forms of iconoclastic monotheism, traditional polytheism, idolatry, *bhakti*, *jnana*, Vedism, Agama, caste rituals, and popular beliefs. In 1995, the Supreme Court of India reiterated the inherent ambiguities in a ruling.³⁵ In its summation, the bench recognised as coming within Hinduism’s “broad sweep”

(i) Acceptance of the Vedas with reverence as the highest authority in religious and philosophic matters and acceptance with reverence of Vedas by Hindu thinkers and philosophers as the sole foundation of Hindu philosophy.

³⁵ Full story featured in *Hinduism Today* (1995). The gist of the matter was that the Mission submitted a petition declaring itself a minority religion so as to avail itself of the various extra benefits extended to minority religions in India. The main argument was that, since the movement followed the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna, it could be regarded as a separate religion: Ramakrishnaism rather than a denomination of Hinduism. Swami Ramananda in his affidavit in opposition used Sri Ramakrishna’s great *chela* (disciple) Swami Vivekananda’s own statements claiming his pride in his Hindu heritage, to refute the argument. The Supreme Court ruled against the petition.

(ii) Spirit of tolerance and willingness to understand and appreciate the opponent's point of view based on the realization that truth was many-sided.

(iii) Acceptance of great world rhythm, vast period of creation, maintenance, and dissolution follow each other in endless succession, by all six systems of Hindu philosophy.

(iv) Acceptance by all systems of Hindu philosophy of the belief in rebirth and pre-existence

(v) Recognition of the fact that the means or ways to salvation are many.

(vi) Realization of the truth that the number of Gods to be worshipped may be large, yet there being Hindus who do not believe in the worshipping of idols

(vii) Unlike other religions or religious creeds Hindu religion not being tied-down to any, definite set of philosophic concepts as such (*Hinduism Today* 1995).

Hindus from Swami Vivekananda to Mohandas Gandhi learnt and viewed Hinduism in this form. Moreover, this is the form that middle class Hindus around the world view their religion. Any attempts to deny its existence would be futile. It should be further pointed out that inter community unity was not an issue with most Muslims. Only Hindus were split along religious, caste, and linguistic lines and in the modern arena, where numbers dictate policy, Hindu leaders were faced with the task of constructing a Hindu unity along with a national identity. Thus, the emergence of Hinduism as a unitary system went hand in hand with the rise of Indian nationalism and it could be argued that Indian nationalism rested on Hindu unity. Therefore, the current rise of Hindu radicalism may be seen as a natural sequel to the nationalist movement.

Reconstruction of Hinduism in Diaspora

Although "Hinduism" has gained standing as a global religion, as noted earlier, the term "Hindu" was originally a national category. It therefore implies an extraordinary pan Indian diversity that now extends beyond national boundaries into an ever-increasing Diaspora. In its global form, it takes on an identifiable systemic structure, similar to

other world religions, yet at local levels it displays the full range of regional, linguistic, and cultural diversities.

The spread of Hinduism has largely been through migration, which as earlier discussed (in Chapter 2) occurred in two stages: migration under colonialism, and more recently the post-colonial migration. The circumstances of the émigrés in both stages are vastly different. The earlier group were primarily indentured migrant workers who met with hostility in their new homes. They were uneducated, rural folk, from lower castes, although a few *Brahmans* seem to have immigrated to Africa and the Caribbean. The majorities were Tamils, Telugus, and an assorted group from the Bhojpur area of North India. Other immigrants were either petty civil administrators, amongst whom were Punjabis, Sikhs, Goans and Malayalees, or traders mainly Gujarati or South Indian. The pattern of settlement amongst this early group displays some similarities. The immigrants worked hard and after the terms of their indenture-ship, either went into farming or business. Groups in Africa and the Caribbean faced hostility either from Christian missionaries or colonial settlers. Migrants to Malaysia faced opposition only later in the 1970s from an Islamic revival. However, similarities end there and the reconstruction of Hinduism at these various settlements took place under very different local circumstances. These differences are reflected in the variety of institutions that developed which vary from country to country and location to location.

In the Caribbean, Hinduism developed under the leadership of the few *Brahmans* who managed to “sneak through” the immigration channels. Although the population was split into eight different dialects, the migrants were all from the same area in India and therefore they quickly homogenized under the *Brahmans* and formed a single group.

The *Brahman* leaders were able to successfully confront the zeal of both Christian and Arya Samaj missionaries. As a result, Hinduism in the Caribbean assumed an orthodox form.

In South Africa the population was more diverse. Apart from the Hindi-speaking group, there were also Tamils and Telugus, and Gujarati businessmen. Later the ethnic mix was further transformed with the arrival of administrators from Punjabi, Goa, and Kerala. Although the migrants had been promised full religious freedom, in reality there were no facilities made for them. The presence of numerous temples to the Tamil village goddesses Mari Amman tells us that the Tamil population were mainly low caste Tamils. However, the different groups seem to have integrated amicably with each other and many temple sites have shrines to both North Indian and South Indian gods. South African Hinduism reflects a blend of both *Brahmanic* and non-*Brahmanic* traditions and is united under a quasi-political organization called the Hindu Maha Sabha that lobbies for their privileges. Currently, the Sai Baba Organization seems to be making great inroads in the country.

The situation in Malaysia was again vastly different. The majorities here were lower caste Tamils and, according to Ramanathan (1999), they were not met with any hostility in the early stages of their migration. Early temples reflect the non-Brahman traditions of south India and the prominent deity was Mari Amman. In urban areas where the trader Chetty castes settled, *agamic* temples to Lord Murukan emerged. Ramanathan conveys the impression that religious practices were lax until the 1970s Islamic resurgence in Malaysia. During this period, temples were attacked and Hindus were harassed. Hindus responded by showing a renewed interest in their religious culture.

Temples were restored and enlarged. Auditoriums were attached for marriages, religious instruction, and dance and music classes. Muslim devotion to Islam and adherence to its tenets had impressed Hindus and there was an interest in scriptural texts and commitment to Hindu beliefs.

While the Hinduism spread under colonialism was essentially of the socio-particular variety, the reified form first made its appearance in postcolonial immigrant communities. The direction of immigration this time was towards the West and except for those who went to Great Britain and Holland, initially this group were urban English educated, middle class, professionals, and quasi-professionals, who were highly secularized. Therefore, religion was not at the forefront of their social activities. Their first impulse was often towards constructing secular community centres that incorporated “Indians” rather than just Hindus. Hinduism was at this stage largely represented by neo-Vedantic missions, represented by a few roving *swamis*.

Hindu refugees from East Africa began arriving on Western shores in the 1970s. Mainly Gujarati and Punjabi, their arrival changed the ethnic, socio-economic, and educational characteristic of an otherwise affluent middle class, professional community of Indians abroad. Moreover these “twice migrants” were used to diaspora living and had prior experience with setting up Hindu organizations in alien cultures. While the Indians had initially set up quasi-nationalistic organizations, these immigrants were not tied to ideas of Indian nationalism and set about building temples and the first temples began emerging in England in the late 1970s. Prior to this Hindus from the Caribbean had established a Hindu temple in a town house in Coventry.

It was only in the 1980s that a “Hindu” identity began to emerge amongst Hindus from India. By then Muslim and Sikh communities had also begun to polarize, and Hindus began to feel the need for institutionalized services, brought home to them when confronted by sudden deaths in the community. Being educated in secular schools that were oriented towards modern professions, these Hindus, even the Brahmans amongst them, knew very little about their religion. Hinduism in India is not organized and therefore Hindus are not taught the beliefs or practices in any conscious manner. Emphasis is on family and caste ritual, which children either pick up through observation or perform under the guidance of a Brahman priest- a ritual specialist. The necessity for institutionalized services therefore sparked a sudden interest in the Hindus living abroad about their religion and the process of reconstruction began as Hindus began selecting and re-interpreting their religious heritage.

A number of temples began to emerge in the western Diaspora in the 1980s and the initial tendency was to build what western scholars have termed “ecumenical” institutions that were politically polite and all inclusive. The arrival of priests made it necessary, however, to commit to certain traditions and it soon became evident that even the orthodox *Brahmannic* form of Hinduism varied according to region. Hindus began splintering according to northern and southern traditions. However, the forms that Hindu institutions take are influenced by the size of Hindu populations, its density, and ethnic mix. Where populations are small, Hindus still build “joint temples” that accommodate several regional groups. Large homogenous populations build socio-particular temples.

Great Britain and Holland are the only exceptions to this pattern. Faced with labour shortages in the aftermath of World War II (1935-1945), both these countries

threw their doors open to their previous colonies. Hindus from both India and the Caribbean arrived in England and were absorbed in the public service industries and it was only later in the 1960s that professionals began to arrive. The first temple was established in Coventry (London) as early as 1952 (by Caribbean Hindus) but it was only with the arrival of families in the late 1960s and the refugees from East Africa in the 1970s that the practice of Hinduism became evident. The prominent linguistic groups in the country are Punjabi, Gujarati, and Tamil. Gujarati and Punjabi groups often co-operate and form "joint temples" while Tamils build their own South Indian style institutions where language classes are held on weekends.

The majority of Hindus to Holland were from the former Dutch colony of Surinam and are mainly descended from North Indian migrants. Their practices therefore are based on the form that developed in the Caribbean. However, although there are 100,000 of them in Holland, they have not been able to develop much of a community or even build a temple because of the Dutch policy that prevents immigrants from settling in the same areas.

Hindu immigration to other countries in Europe is still very recent. Indian professionals, who went to Germany in the 1960s, did not build temples or develop a religious profile. It is only in the 1980s with the arrival of Tamil refugees from Sri Lanka that temples began emerging here. Hindus in Australia and Canada share some similarities because of the colonial experience. The United States has chartered its own course, dictated by the immigration policies of that country. South Asian immigration to the USA was restricted until the 1960s when only special groups (professionals) were allowed entry. Since the 1980s, the technological boom has created a high demand for

high tech professionals, a field in which Indians excel. Like elsewhere in the west, temples in the USA reflect North Indian, South Indian, eclectic, and sectarian traditions.

The Emergence of a Tamil Identity

If India is considered the *punya bhumi*, then the Hindu settlement in Sri Lanka can be considered a diaspora. Indeed, until the recent past Jaffna Tamils looked upon themselves as an annex of South India. The Hinduism here however was based on a “particular” variety of *Shaivism*, which continued without being affected by the nationalistic *Vedantic* ideology. Yet, identified as “Hindu” by Europeans, they were included in the larger category.

Here too, Orientalists scholars uncovered an ancient and glorious Aryan past. But this time the beneficiaries of the “Aryan” heritage” were the Sinhalese who were deemed the original discoverers of the island. In relation to them, the Tamils who started arriving on the island only after the 6th century CE were newcomers.

The island was unified under the British, and the usual modern institutions were introduced such as a secular administration, judiciary, improved communications, and an English education system. As elsewhere, these innovations paved the way for the introduction of modern ideas such as self-rule and democracy. Here however it was the Sinhalese who formed the overwhelming majority (78%). In addition, they were predominantly Buddhists. Tamils on the other hand, were divided into three religious groups; Christian, Muslim and Minority Tamils.

While in India, Hindu nationalists successfully attempted to maintain the delicate unity between the Hindu majorities and Muslim minorities. In Ceylon, Sri Lankan

Nationalism became overtly Sinhalese. The Sinhalese intelligentsia like their counterparts in India maximized the history constructed by the Orientalists to prove their prior claim to the island. These claims were based on the Buddhist chronicles, which the Europeans deemed history. Tamils on the other hand had nothing but their religious scriptures and oral traditions, which were judged mythology. They had had no reason to justify their claims on the island prior to the 19th century and therefore had no records of events that connected them to the island. They were thus rendered minorities in their own lands.

In India, the Vedanta philosophy and Aryan heritage had offered maximum opportunity to the nationalists to develop homogeneity amongst a diverse Hindu population. In Ceylon, however, Hindus were already a homogenous group. The majority were *Shaivas*, from the dominant *vellalar* caste. Others were the Untouchables and the Minority Tamils who were brought over from South India to provide indentured labour by the Dutch and British. *Vellalars* also relied on the labour of these castes and were therefore reluctant to concede equality to them. Instead, they focused on language as a basis of unity and the Christian population who had retained their links with the Tamil language through the localization of Christianity, were included under the term Tamil. It was only with the rise of the Tamil Tiger organization in the 1960s, and their aggressive tactics that the caste system was smashed and a single Hindu identity emerged.

Hinduism in Canada

Like Australia, Canada too saw a brief period of “Hindoo” immigration in the early part of the 20th century. However, these immigrants were migrant Sikh Jats from Punjab and were subject to enormous hostility; restrictions were imposed that soon put and end to Oriental and South Asian immigration. Although Canada did not introduce an overtly racist policy like Australia, its immigration strategy nevertheless was biased towards European immigrants. However, in the 1960s the high demand for professionals and quasi-professionals and in the interest of forging good relationships with newly independent countries of the Commonwealth, the system opened a crack to allow entry to South Asians in these categories. It was only in 1969 under a liberal government leadership that a point system was introduced that put all immigrants on equal footing. By then the demand for professionals had diminished. Africanization policies in Kenya and Uganda, however, brought large numbers of South Asian refugees from these countries to Canada’s shores. Predominantly Gujarati and Punjabi, their arrival changed the ethnic mix of the Hindu population that had so far been diverse and largely urban middle class English educated professionals. The arrival of further immigrants from Sri Lanka increased the ethnic and social diversity.

There are now three prominent linguistic groups amongst Canada’s Hindu population; Gujarati, Punjabi/Hindi, and Tamil. The majorities of all these groups are concentrated in Toronto, and it is here therefore that we find the greatest number of socio-particular temples. Hindu populations in other parts of Canada are still relatively small and therefore the tendency is to build “joint-temples”. Edmonton has two types of “joint-temple”. One built by a group of North Indian ethnic groups and the other by

South Indians³⁶. In Toronto, however the Gujarati, Punjabi/Hindi, and Tamil groups have built several socio-particular temples and Hindu affiliated organizations.

Tamil Hindus in Canada

The majority of Tamils arrived in Canada as refugees in the 1980s and most of them are settled in the Toronto area. Montreal too has a substantial number, but in other areas of Canada they are relatively few. Toronto and Montreal therefore have the largest Tamil temples. The three temples surveyed in this study were the Sri Ganesha in Toronto, Thirumurukan in Montreal, and Tamils at the Ottawa Hindu Temple in Ottawa. Participants came from similar cultural backgrounds and the majority had entered Canada as refugees since 1984. However, those that had come earlier have also been affected by the situation in Sri Lanka and too consider themselves refugees.

To the envy of other Hindu groups, the Sri Lankan Tamils have very quickly set up their religious institutions. Dessai (1994) observes that while the affluent middle class professional Hindus in Germany debated the feasibility of building temple for decades, the Tamil refugees began building them almost immediately upon arrival. An Indian Tamil observer expressed amazement at the array of religious paraphernalia at Sri Lankan temples and commented that “they seem to have brought the entire Jaffna with them”. In this, she is not far from the truth. Part of the determination that drives the Tamils is the fact that “home” no longer exists for them. Jaffna has been so transformed by the devastations of the current situation- temples have been razed to the ground or occupied

³⁶ Since the completion of this thesis, Sri Lankan Tamils had already taken over the newly constructed Ganesha Temple in Edmonton by gaining access to the temples committee. Other South Indian groups continue however to use the temple.

by the Sri Lankan army (*Hinduism Today* 2000:6). The urgency to build therefore is a desperate effort to recreate not a “home away from home” but “home” itself.

The temples surveyed were all *agamic* temples where deities are served according to *Brahmannic* rites and attended upon by *Brahman* priests. The focus at two of these institutions is regionally rooted in South Indian tradition. They emphasize more particularly the Shaiva customs. The third site in Ottawa attempts to provide a broader focus. Tamils built the Thirumurukan Temple for the specific purpose of propagating Tamil culture; the Sri Ganesha temple began initially as a south Indian temple, but gradually developed a Tamil focus. All three temples however claim to authentically replicate the ancient “Hindu” tradition.

Participants selected were middle class “lay” Hindus who lead active modern lives. While for the majority, religion is very important; it is not their only activity. Toronto has a large population that can support several separate social institutions and Tamils have created a “little Jaffna” in the Markham area. There are numerous Tamil businesses, ranging from grocery stores, florists, and jewellers to professional firms offering accounting and legal services. Tamil literacy classes and classical music and arts are taught at community organizations and the quasi-political Tamil Sangam organizes cultural programmes and raises money for charitable causes in Sri Lanka. The Sri Ganesha Temple therefore does not perform a cultural or educational role but restricts itself to providing the religious needs of the South Indian community. Montreal too has a large population. However, Tamils here have chosen to make their temple the focus of cultural, social, and educational activity, in addition to its religious role. Tamils in

Ottawa form a minority group in a larger Hindu community and therefore use the temple only for religious purposes.

It was also found that participants are not alienated or isolated from the larger host culture. They have friends and contacts amongst non-Tamils, are aware of other religions, Hindu groups, and Hindu temples at other sites. They also participate in the everyday activities of average Canadian citizens such as going to the movies, playing sports and visiting fast food restaurants. Through the media, they are exposed to other cultures and ideas, which they are bound to internalize. Many are better travelled than the average Canadian and have relatives and friends in various parts of the world.

While all participants were committed to preserving their religio-cultural traditions, their exposure and interaction with the environment and global community is bound to have an impact on the manner in which they do this. Two issues arise in relation to the reconstruction: questions of authenticity and authority. All participants and temple committees insisted that their practises were “authentic”. Yet, at all three sites Hinduism was being practiced differently. Thus, authenticity evidently is not a mere duplication of past practices, which would be impossible, given the different social environment that exists in Canada and Sri Lanka.

The inquiry examined continuity and change in two areas of ritual practice: home worship and temple worship. Participants observed that home worship had been considerably modified since their arrival, although all maintain *puja* areas at home where votary lamps are lit to family gods. The deities most often mentioned were Ganesha, Murukan, Durga, and pictures of Shiva. Other deities included those that were specific to particular temples, for example Parani Appan, a name of Murukan is associated with the

Parani temple and Skanda kumara with the Kataragama temple. The votary lamp and *puja* ritual was generally left to the women and only older males admitted to spending considerable time in prayer. Women complained that life was so busy that they had little time during the week to do more than light the lamp, and even this was generally delegated to the evening when children were around to participate. Other special *pujas*, fasting, attending bhajans, and temple going, were also postponed to weekends. Thus, the global workweek has already had considerable impact on the way they practice religion.

Contact with other Hindu groups has generated an interest in the Sai Baba. Many participants stated that they attended Sai *bhajans*, but the majority still associate the term *guru* with temple priest, and did not understand the concept of *guru* as preceptor. At the Toronto and Ottawa temples, Tamils were more exposed to the Sanskrit traditions and have taken up the chanting of *Lalitasaharsnamam* (1000 names of the goddess).

The reallocation of life-cycle rites represents a departure from the norm. Such rites as naming ceremonies and first feeding are generally celebrated at home, but the lack of facilities and convenience has made it necessary to shift these two events to temples or community centres. Even funerary rites, which are considered inauspicious and therefore not permissible on hallowed ground, are now accommodated in temples and performed by temple priests. Thus the temple becomes even more the centre of religious practise than it was in the already temple oriented Shaivism of the homeland.

As mentioned earlier all three institutions insist that they are “authentic” and designed according to the *Agamas*. Yet they vary considerably in architecture and ritual. The Toronto and Montreal temples have similar floor plans although the structure in

Montreal is only temporary. They are authentic in the sense that they were both designed by a traditional *sthapathi* (architect) who planned the location of the shrines according to cosmological codes prescribed in the *Agamas*. Thus, the shrine of Durga is located in the south and faces northwards, while those of the other deities are in the east and face west, so that devotees may face east while worshipping. As is customary, the *Navagrahas* are in the northwestern corner. Each deity is enclosed in a shrine that is roofed by an elaborately carved monolithic capstone. However, the resemblance ends here. The rest of the architecture is accommodated to the inclement Canadian winters. The shrines are set closely together in an overarching structure and the temple is dedicated to a variety of primary gods rather than to a single main deity. While most participants appreciated the convenience of having “all the gods under one roof”, the committee of the newly constructed Ganesha Temple in Edmonton have deliberately avoided this departure from the tradition claim that their “single deity” temple is the only authentic temple in North America.

The temple in Ottawa, of course, is more eclectic and follows cosmological codes only loosely. While in the other temples the goddesses’ shrines are set apart from the male deities, here it has been placed alongside the primary male deities, reflecting true equality. Another departure from *Agamic* tradition at the Ottawa temple is that deities are not grounded in the earth a custom not necessary in the *Vedic* tradition.

Ritually too, each one varies. The Thirumurukan Temple follows more closely the rites performed in Jaffna. Regular and daily *abisekams* to the primary gods, Tuesday and Friday special *pujas* to Murukan and Devi, evening *oorvalum* (processions) of portable deities and *prasadam* of specially cooked food. In Jaffna, at the conclusion of

each special feast or festival, it was customary for the temple to recognize the status of temple patrons and local dignitaries with some sort of *mariyathai* (honour). This could involve being presented with the deities garland or *angavastram* (shoulder cloth) or sari or being invited to be a bier bearer at the *oorvalum*, or performing a special *arati*. However, the Thirumurukan Temple has done away with this *mariyathai* system while at the Ganesha Temple it is practiced to some extent.

Rituals at the Ganesha Temple have also gradually increased the Tamil focus of its temple. However, since it also serves non-Tamils, it continues its Sanskrit traditions. Rituals at Ottawa are greatly modified and *pujas* are standardized to include elements from both North Indian and South Indian traditions.

Caste considerations are also dispensed with at all three institutions. While the sanctum is restricted to all but the priest, the shrines are not enclosed in *mandirams* (halls), intended to segregate patrons and ordinary devotees, but allow a full access to the deity by all. The majority of participants insisted that caste is no longer relevant. It is not a consideration in the policies and practices of the temple except in the appointment of priests. They are still expected to be *Brahman*. So far, they are the only *Varna* that is trained in the rituals, but participants and priests were open to the idea of non- *Brahmans* being trained as priests. The idea of female priests conducting *pujas* at orthodox temples however was met with amusement. Committees are elected democratically and at the Ottawa Temple, the allotments of committee members are based on language rather than caste. Divisions that have emerged at Ottawa and Toronto are along regional and linguistic lines rather than caste based.

It is often naively assumed that in religious matters, authority is derived from a divine source and interpreted by *Brahman* priests. In all three temples, however authority was seen to be firmly in the hands of temple committees. The committee ultimately decides what constitutes “religion” and members of the committees derive their power either through the size of their donation- as in Ottawa- or through majority support as in Toronto. Annual general meetings are held at which new members are elected to office, and although membership on the committee is open to all irrespective of caste or gender, very few women seek office. Grievances and suggestions are also entertained at these meetings but the committee takes ultimate decisions. The Ottawa Temple has two female committee members, but the Toronto and Montreal committees had none. Thus, all three temples have adapted “congregational” style of organization that differs greatly from the organization of temples in their country of origin.

In Toronto, the gradual replacement of Tamils on the committee has resulted in the transformation of this temple, which was intended to represent South Indian culture, to one that is decidedly Tamil in focus. Festivals like *kavati*, which are particular to the Tamil culture, were introduced and festivals popular in India, such as *Navarathri* and *Deepavali* have been scaled down. More recently, internal conflicts regarding the allocation of temple surplus funds resulted in the ousting of the few remaining Indians on the committee.

At Montreal, there has been no conflict yet. The committee has successfully restrained the infiltration of politics on temple property. The power in Ottawa is concentrated in the hands of members who have donated large sums of money to the institution. Although here too the committee is democratically elected, these members

have been appointed to the committee as life members. Thus, they continue to “guide” the development of the temple.

Committees also decide on the way religion is to be practiced, a tendency that sometimes results in conflicts between priests and committee members. Here too the committee has the upper hand for they decide whether or not to renew the work permits and contracts of priests. The services of several priests at both Ottawa and Toronto have been terminated in this manner. Conflicts between committee members and patrons of the temple are a different matter. In Ottawa, these conflicts have been very bitter at times, and settled through compromise. Occasionally, the South Indians have appealed to Swami Dayananda to intervene on their behalf.

Reflected in the type of temple that has emerged at each site are the differences in the aims and purpose of each institution. The Toronto temple was conceived as a “joint-temple” for all Hindus. It then became a South Indian temple. Priests were recruited from Tamil Nadu to perform rituals that are popular amongst South Indians. Now however, the emphasis has narrowed to Tamil customs. In Montreal the focus from the start was on Tamil culture, and therefore Tamil is the culture that has been emphasised. The Ottawa Hindu Temple however is a “joint-temple” and was built to “showcase the best of Hinduism in the nations capital”. The neo-Vedantic philosophy prevails and cleanliness overrides ritual fervour.

All participants stated that they are regular temple visitors and males admitted that they visit here more often than they did in Jaffna. Several men said that they came because they felt they had to chauffeur their families. Weekends are the busiest times at both temples. Participants at the Toronto and Montreal sites do not notice any vast

differences in the way rituals are performed here compared to how they were done at “home”, and this is to the credit of the priests. However, there have already been considerable changes in the way rituals are performed here. Several rituals that would normally have been held at home are now conducted at temples, the most obvious example being the funerary rites. Festivals are accommodated to suit the workweek. If, for example, a particular festival falls on a weekday, then the priest will perform a small version of the *puja* on that day and the big celebration will be held at the weekend and special festivals like the *kavati* are arranged during the summer holidays.

While the Ottawa temple is discernibly different from the other two institutions, differences between the Toronto and Montreal temples are not so obvious to outsiders. Yet the committee at the Montreal temple insist that they follow the traditions of Jaffna whereas according to them the Toronto temple does not. The main point of difference that they pointed out was that the Toronto institution is a commercial temple, whereas their temple’s community emphasis is more in keeping with the ancient intent of temples, as the pivot of social activity.

The final area of inquiry related to perpetuation of religion by participants to their children. It is here that the reconstructive process is most evident. The national government of Sri Lanka made it mandatory for children to receive religious instruction and primary education in their mother tongue. Tamil Hindus therefore display high levels of mother tongue literacy, more so than other Hindu groups, and instruction in their religious texts. However, practises were acquired through observation and practice, and participants admitted that they performed particular rituals because they had been instructed to do so by parents. They were merely following the norm. In Canada, of

course, education is secular and in English or French. Therefore, Tamils have to make a special effort to teach their children both the language and religion. However, their familiarity with Tamil literature makes the task a little easier.

Female participants with young children admitted to postponing the lamp lighting ritual to evenings, so that children could be included and teaching easy *slokkas* (verses) for them to recite. *Puranic* stories and the Indrajai comic books are also useful tools, but they all admitted that the most effective way to impart Tamil Hindu culture was through literacy classes and classical arts. All participants stated that they sent their children to Tamil classes and that their child was learning at least one of the cultural arts. Girls generally learn vocal music and dance, while the boys learn instruments.

The Thirumurukan Temple conducts “Sunday school” on Saturdays and has included religious instructions in the curriculum. As mentioned earlier in Chapter 5, the director of the school who teaches the subject requested my input in setting the course outline and now bases his classes on my lecture notes. It is likely therefore that the Hinduism that these children will learn will include a more general form of Hinduism based not only on a neo-Vedantic point of view, but also on one that is decidedly from an Indian perspective. Other texts used by the school include the four books written by the Hawaii based Swami Shivayasubramaniaswami. Thus, the Hinduism that these children are learning is already considerably modified.

Tamil children in Ottawa and Toronto do not have any formal instruction in religion like those in Montreal. The Tamil classes that they attend are secular and do not cover the religious texts. However, parents are confident that the language will inculcate the cultural attitudes and religion can be absorbed from the home environment. Ann

Pearson (1999) is involved in a study of the younger generation and has found that there is interest amongst them in continuing some of their traditions. However, they too are in a process of selection and re-interpretation and the Hinduism that they reconstruct will reflect the ongoing processes of globalization.

Globalization theory has been the underlying thesis throughout this dissertation and the findings in this thesis highlight the relationship between the local and global aspects of religious reconstruction. The emergence of Hindu diasporas is the product of global migration and diasporas are characterized by both global and local change. Moreover, field data also reveals that thanks to technological advances in telecommunications and transportation, immigrant Tamils are able to maintain transnational links with other diasporas and the “home” country in spite of the difficult situation in Jaffna. There is therefore no sense of isolation or of being “cut off” from their roots as implied in “adaptive” models. This ease of communication facilitates religious activity and allows it continue uninterrupted in diaspora. Everything required for orthodox ritual is readily available in Canada and other countries. *Murthis* of all sizes are easily commissioned from traditional *shilpis* (carvers) and shipped out to temples around the world. *Stapathis* (architects) and *shilpis* (carvers) in Tamil Nadu compete with each other to win “foreign” temple contracts and renowned *sthapathis* like Muthiah Sthapathi and Ganapathi Sthapathi shuttle between various cities in America, Europe and their base in Chennai quite regularly. Similarly, other religious paraphernalia like wooden chariots, royal umbrellas, and adornments for deities are equally easy to come by. Competent priests are at hand to provide required services, and temples provide the necessary space if home environments are not adequate. Participants therefore do not see

themselves as “adapting” to local conditions. Except for inclement weather conditions, there is very little need to compromise and participants saw themselves as carrying out their religious rituals in an authentic manner.

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Appendix A

Consent form

Project: "Global Reconstruction of Hinduism; the Case of Sri Lankan Tamils in Canada"

Researcher: Radhika Sekar
11 Southern Hills Court
Nepean, ON K2R 1C5

Supervisor: Dr. Peter Beyer
Department of Classic and Religious Studies
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Ottawa, ON

This research project is being conducted as part of the requirements for the PhD in Religious Studies at the University of Ottawa. The result of this research will be used in a thesis to be submitted by Radhika Sekar. Publication in the form of articles and/or monograph may also ensue.

The purpose of this research is to examine the religious practices of Sri Lankan Tamil immigrants in Canada in order to determine how Hinduism is reconstructed as a minority religion in a global diaspora.

The project involves no physical risk and anonymity of participants will be maintained.

Participants will be interviewed using a questionnaire, each interview taking approximately one hour. The researcher will take notes during the interviews which may also be recorded.

Participants will be asked to discuss topics relating to their religious beliefs and practices both at home and temple. They will also be asked to compare current practices with past practices in their home country.

The researcher may quote from interview or use the interview in other accepted research forms but the anonymity of participants will be maintained at all times. If so desired, participants will be identified only by a pseudonym and all personal data that could identify the participants will be omitted from transcriptions and quotations. The questionnaires and tapes, if any, will be kept in safe guard for five years and only the researcher and the research supervisor will have access to them. No compensation will be given for this project.

Questions concerning the ethical performance of the research may be addressed to the
Secretary,

University of Human Research Ethics Committee,
c/o School of Graduate Studies and Research
University of Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5

I have received a copy of this form and I agree to the conditions stated above.

Participants Signature:

Date:

Appendix B

Questionnaire

Global Reconstruction of Hinduism, The Case of Sri Lankan Tamils in Canada

The following contains statements and questions relating to the way Tamil Hindus are reconstructing their religious practices in Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa. They represent statements for which there are no right or wrong answers. The questionnaire is confidential and you do not have to sign your name on it. However, you will be asked to sign a waiver statement that will allow the researcher to use the data in future projects.

Section I: Country of Origin

1. When did you arrive in Canada?
2. Did you arrive directly? [If not, please specify route]
3. Have you been back to Sri Lanka since your arrival?
a) Once b) Twice c) Many Times
4. What is your status in Canada?
a) Citizen b) Landed immigrant c) Other

Section II: Age, Education, and Economic Status

5. Which age bracket do you fall under:
20 – 30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 71-
6. Have you completed:
Secondary School University Community College
Professional Quasi Professional
7. Which income bracket do you fall under:
Total family income between:
\$20, 000 – 30, 000 \$30, 000 – 40, 000 \$ 40, 000 – 50, 000
\$ 50. 000 – 60, 000 \$ 60, 000 and above

Section III: Language Use

8. Do you speak Tamil?
9. What is your fluency level?
Speak only Speak, read and write Speak and read
Working knowledge only
10. Do your children speak Tamil?
11. What steps are you taking to see that they retain Tamil literacy?
12. What is more important: Tamil or Sanskrit?
13. How important is Tamil in maintaining your culture?
14. How important is Tamil to the practice of your religion?
15. How would you explain the terms “Religion”, “Language”, and “Culture”?

Section IV: Identity

16. Do you consider yourself primarily

- a) a Tamil b) a Sri Lankan c) a Hindu d) a Canadian
e) Other
Discuss

Section V: Community Involvement

17. Do you socialise with people outside the temple community?
18. Do you have friends amongst non-Hindus?
19. Do you have Hindu friends from other regional and linguistic groups?
20. Are there any differences in their religious practices? Discuss
21. Do you consider them Hindu?
22. Do you see differences between Sri Lankan Hindus and Tamils from India?
Discuss
23. Do you consider Hindus from other regions “real” Hindus?
24. Do you accept converts, for example the Hare Krishnas as “real” Hindus?

Section IV: Involvement with the Temple

25. How often do you visit the temple?
Daily Weekly On special occasions only
26. How important is the Temple in your life?
Very important Somewhat important Not very important
27. Would you call this temple
a) a Hindu temple b) Sri Lankan temple c) South Indian Temple
d) other
28. Do you support the temple financially? Explain
29. Do you support any other temple?
30. Which other temple of temples do you visit?
31. Do you think that it is necessary to have more than one temple in a city?
32. How often do you visit temples in the home country?

Section VII: Religion

33. Would you call Hinduism a religion?
34. How many religions can you name?
35. How much do you know about these other religions? Discuss
36. How would explain Hinduism to an outsider?
37. What are the main beliefs of Hindus?
38. What is the purpose of Hinduism?
39. Why are there so many gods in Hinduism?
40. Which is your favourite God? (Ishtadevata)
41. Is this also you family deity?

Section VIII: Home Worship

42. Do you have puja area at home? If so please describe it
43. Do you light a lamp
Everyday Weekly Occasionally
44. How often do you spend in prayer each day? Could you explain the ritual
45. Why do you do these rituals?
46. How did you learn to do them?
47. Have they changed since you came to Canada?
48. Do you get all the things you need for puja here?
49. Do you observe fasts and if so why?
50. Attend bhajans?
51. Meditate?
52. Attend lectures

Do you have a personal guru?

Section IX: Temple Worship

53. Since you do puja at home, why is it important to have a temple?
54. Have you observed any differences between this temple and those in the "home country"? Explain
55. Do you think the rituals here are done authentically?
56. Are you satisfied with the priests?

Section X: Family Involvement

57. Does your spouse also participate in the puja rituals?
58. Does he/she accompany you to the temple?
59. Are your children involved in your religious life?
60. Do they accompany you to the temple?
61. Do you think your children will maintain your religious traditions?

Section XI: Caste

62. Do you think caste (varna) differences are important?
63. Is it important for the priest to be a Brahman? Discuss
64. Would you support a non-Brahman priest?
65. Would you support women priests?
66. What caste do you belong to?

Section XII: General Comments

67. Is there anything that you would like to add?

Thank-you for your time.

Illustration 1: Gengaiamman Temple, Cato Manor Durban (South Africa). This temple was built by Tamil plantation workers. Made of wood and corrugated iron sheets it is built over a large ant-hill.



Illustratio 2. Interior of temple. Anthill is draped in a red sari and decorated with garlands of gold chains and marigold flowers. In the foreground are *puja* articles and pictures of Shiva, Murukan, Ganesha and different forms of *shakti*.

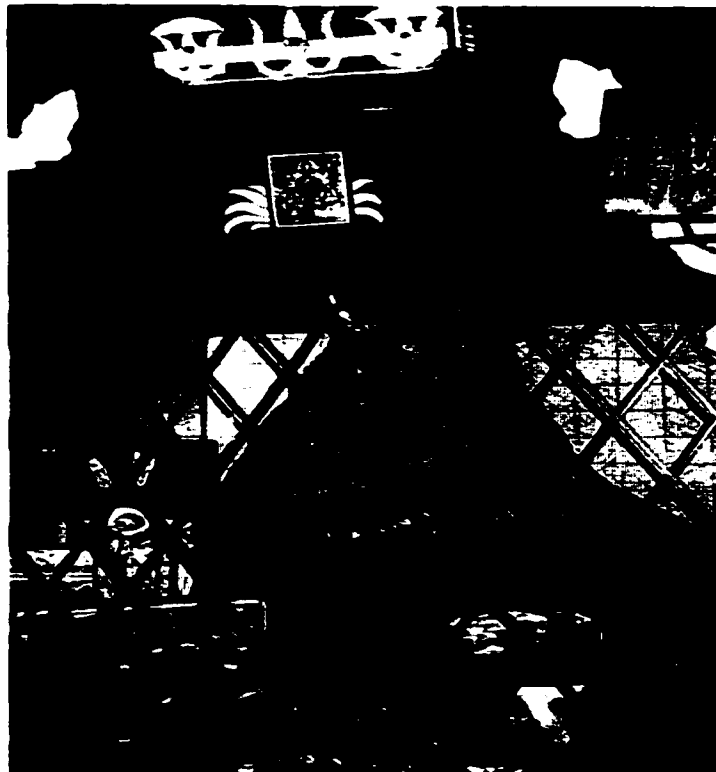


Illustration 3: Hindu Mandir at Isipingo Durban. Joint temple established by immigrants from North and South India.



Illustration 4: Interior of Temple. An assorted group of deities are placed on a marble alter. Among them are: Hanuman. Krishna. Vishnu. Ganesha. Lakshmi and Shiva.



Illustration 5: Mariyammen Temple. Isipingo Durban built by Tamil migrants. Animal sacrifices are still held here and an annual festival in August



Illustration 6: Goddess Muthumariyammen- the small- pox goddess. Draped in red sari and crowned by a many headed cobra she holds a poker and trident.



Illustration 7: The Umbilo Draupadiamman Temple, Durban. Established by Tamil migrants. An annual fire walking ceremony is held here.



Illustration 8: Interior of Temple. Goddess Draupadi occupies the central shrine and other forms of *shakti* are arranged along the sides. Saris hang from the ceiling.



Illustration 9. Swaminarayan Temple, London (U.K). Built by Pramukh Swami Maharaj of the Swaminarayan sampradaya and supported by Gujarati immigrants in the U.K. the temple was constructed according to the *vastu shastra* (science of architecture) in Gujarat (India), and shipped to the site and reassembled there stone by stone.



Illustration 10: Old Murukan temple in East London. It has been demolished and rebuilt in traditional South Indian style.

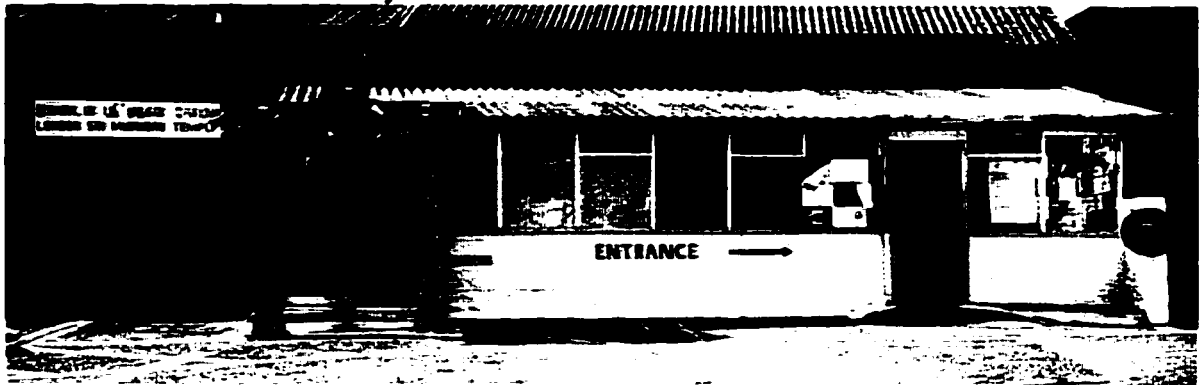


Illustration 11: Sri Mahalakshmi Temple in East London.



Illustration 14: Kamadchi Amman Temple in Hamm (Germany).



Illustration 15: Site of future Shankracharya Center and Kamadchi Amman temple



Illustration 16: Bronze *murthi* of Goddess Kamadchi within the main shrine (Kamadchi Amman Temple Hamm). The goddess is seated on a silver *asana* (seat) and draped in a red and white sari. On her head is a silver crown. In the foreground, directly in front of her is a bronze Sri Cakra in the form of Mt.Meru.

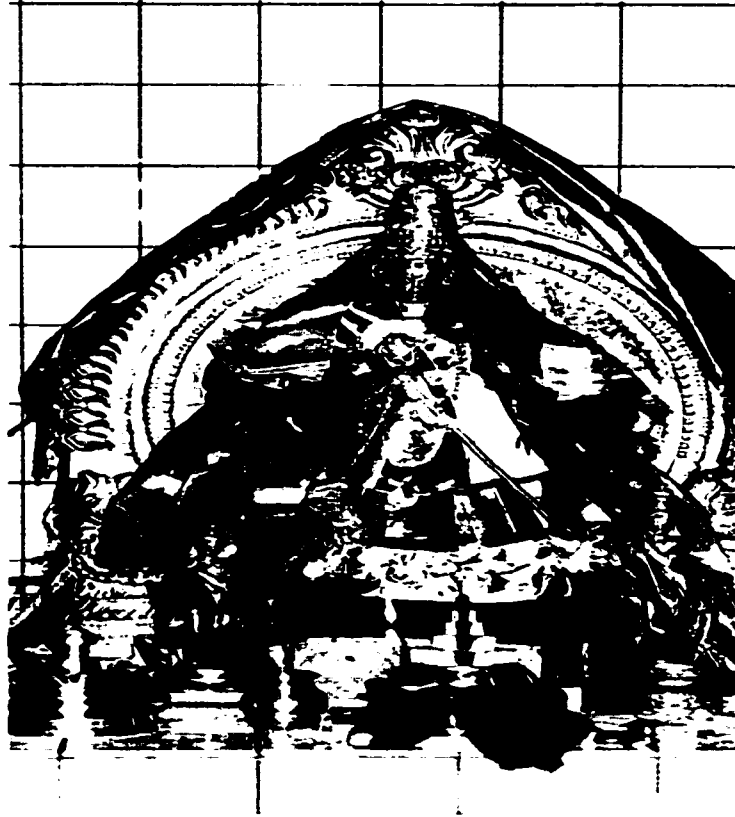


Illustration 17: Bronze *utsava murthis* of the goddess, Ganesha, Murukan and his consorts.

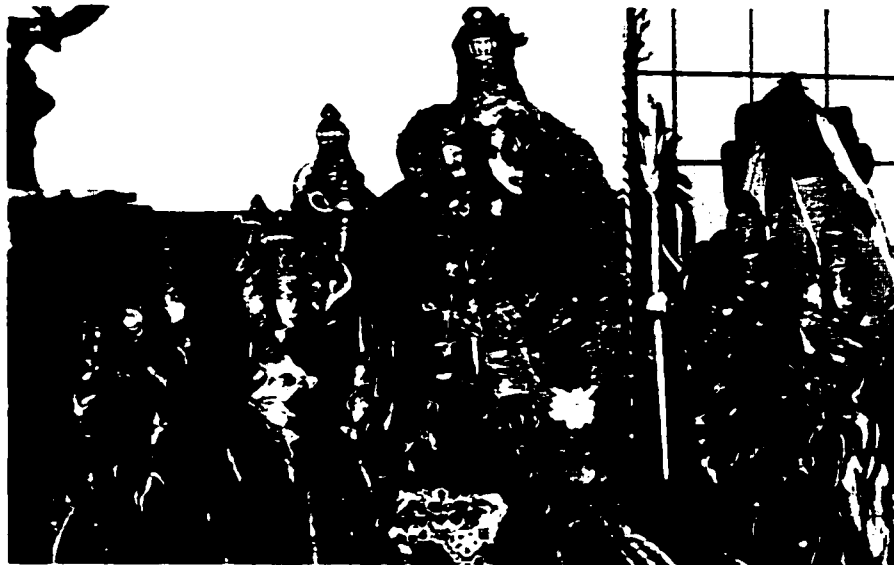


Illustration 18: *Kavati* festival. Thirmurukan Temple Montreal



Illustration 10: *Ooravalum* procession of deities. Ganesha Temple Toronto. Seen here are decorated *utsava murthis* of Lord Murukan and his consorts and the goddess Durga arranged on a bier borne by devotees.



Illustration 20: Sri Lankan Tamil wedding ceremony. The bride is dressed traditionally in a red sari, but her face is covered by a veil and she presents her bouquet to the groom.

