Sagar

A South Asia Research Journal

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Editors' Note

Area studies is in a state of crisis. As a model to frame research investigations, the area studies approach no longer suffices to understand how geographic regions are constructed and how different cultural zones interact with one another. This special issue of SAGAR investigates how the role of area studies, in particular South Asia, is constructed and expanded through the terms diaspora, transnationalism and globalization.

The approach of diaspora studies incorporates new ways of understanding the processes of culture, politics, history, economics, and society as they change over time and space. The move away from static and fixed conceptions allows the possibility of a dynamic conception of migration and movement. This change in theoretical approach also pushes us to think of the complicated ways in which culture is made through the influences of different sites be it Bombay, Boston, New York, Karachi, London or Dhaka.

Furthermore, as we further interrogate how questions of diaspora and transnationalism alter the area studies approach, we can begin thinking of different terms and categories. For example how do religious, secular, gendered, and class diasporas relate to the area studies model.

We hope that this double issue of SAGAR raises pertinent questions about the varying understandings of South Asian peoples offered by the diaspora studies approach.

Romi Mahajan, Junaid Rana, Linta Varghese, *Editorial Collective*

"What Can Be in a Museum Catalog?" Family, Politics and the Indian Diaspora

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In my teaching and scholarship, I advocate that anthropological research be done in a relationship of accountability to the community of study. I have recently had occasion to ponder this assertion in more detail. What happens, for example, when the "community" decides it only wants one side of a story told? Who speaks for "community" and what happens when it decides certain forms of critical scholarship are not fit for a wider public?

In June of 1998, I was approached by Leela Prasad, curator of Balch Institute exhibit "Live Like a Banyan Tree" to write an essay on the "Indian Family" for the museum catalog. I was hesitant, but interested in what an installation exploring the relationship between first and second generation Indian Americans would highlight. The project was a worthwhile one, and it would be a challenge to write for a larger public audience.

When I turned in the first draft of the essay to Dr. Prasad in mid August of 1998, she expressed concern that the tone of the essay was too negative and asked for revisions. Over the next few months, Dr. Prasad continued to express this concern, and made several suggestions which I then incorporated into the text. Three or four rounds of revision were undertaken at Dr. Prasad's behest, and the final version of the essay was submitted for publication in December 1998. In late January of 1999, I was suddenly informed that members of the Indian community on the Balch Institute board felt that the essay could not be published in the catalog. I received a letter from the Director of the Balch Institute of Ethnic Studies, informing me that "the essay in its final form still veered too much toward the 'negatives' of Indian American families and didn't adequately consider other aspects to contextualize these downsides." These "negatives" were apparently issues like domestic violence and the existence of lesbian, gay and bisexuals in the community. According to the director, "the essay focused almost entirely on these issues and did not serve as an introduction to the Indian American family for those who know little about Indian American families." Unfortunately I was never given any indication that the

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"community" had final say about whether the essay was to be published. Nor was I given any opportunity to speak with these anonymous community members to defend my decision to use the space available to me to educate the community about issues that it has difficulty addressing.

The Balch letter indicates that the question of audience, and what can be made publicly known about our communities is a site of contestation. The Balch's Institute's refusal to reprint this essay must be located in a larger context where the "community" systematically refuses domestic violence organizations and gay rights organizations the right to participate in community events like India Day parades. The fact that these exclusions are also mentioned in the essay might be significant. How is it that the politics of the community prevents discussion of that very theme?

Dr. Prasad's own introductory essay for the catalog, ironically proclaims, "Of course there will be some stories that the exhibition will not--indeed cannot--tell." What is offered below is thus a counter history to the Balch Institute exhibit.

Families of the U.S. Indian Diaspora

There is a joke that circulates among consular and international aid officials in India. I first heard it from a retired consular officer in Madras, who with certain presumptions about my identification with mainstream American attitudes asked me, "Do you know the name of India's national tree?" Like a good desi-minded person, I replied instantly, "the Banyan tree." No he laughed, "It's the outstretched palm."

It took perhaps a minute for the insult to sink in, perhaps because the first thing I associate with the image of an outstretched arm is the community's willingness to lend a helping hand to those in need. When Indian families, by force of historical or political circumstance, were not strong enough to care for their own, the community's social and political organizations; its temples, mosques, churches and gurudwaras were often there to provide sustenance and advice. Today such organizations continue to provide informal services such as family old-age care, child care and immigration advice.

It is perhaps true that Indian families spread like the Banyan tree-- itself a diasporic image or "map of home."[2] One of the pieces of folklore that affectionately circulates in the imaginary of the New York city community is that entire villages from Punjab have re-established themselves in Queens, N.Y. In part, this is because Indian immigrant families are not exclusively nuclear in form. It is not uncommon for parents or parents-in-law to arrive for lengthy stays, or for nieces, nephews, or the children of cousins to be informally adopted into U.S. households for the duration of their college-going years, as they are in India. The open

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[2] S. Maira and R. Srikanth, eds., *Contours of the Heart: South Asians Map North America* (New York: Asian American Writer's Workshop, 1996), p. xvii.

expansiveness of the Indian family may not be its most unique feature, but it is one of its most enduring and admirable features. The children of the Indian diaspora can expect their parents to be involved in their lives, to contribute to college tuition and living expenses, to help them find marriage partners, with setting up new homes, and to assist with new babies.

The belief that close contact with relatives should be cultivated is shared by most Indian families, where the definition of a "relative" is broad, and includes not only immediate and distant blood relatives, but friends from the same town/village/city, and so on. Toward this end, family reunions are organized to commemorate rites of passage or simply even being together. When contact with immediate relatives is not possible to maintain, surrogate familial relations are assiduously developed. New arrivals to the circles are often offered material and emotional support; at celebratory or other events like deaths. It is this circle that serves as the immediate family. That this circle can sometimes feel like a noose, is evident from the experiences of second generation children who feel that "aunties" and "uncles" while intending to be supportive, sometimes generate standards that become bases of competition among families. It is in this sense that my students refer affectionately or disparagingly to "Big Aunty" or the "mami-archy."

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the bulk of Indian immigration to the U.S. is under the family preference category. According the INS Statistical reports, the number of Indians who immigrated to the U.S. in 1994 under the family preference category was roughly 26,000 (26,045 in 1994, and 26,864 in 1995), while those immigrating under the Employment preference category in 1994 numbered only 281, (a number that jumped to 7,164 in 1995 once restrictions imposed on the labor certification process eased). In 1996, the number of Indians immigrating under the family preference category rose to 34, 291, and those admitted under "Employment Preference" rose to 9,910.[3] The 1990 census reported 815,562 people of Asian Indian origin in the U.S. – more than double the number of 387,223 reported for the 1980 census.

Studies on the Indian diaspora have commonly used the image of the Banyan tree to describe the facility with which families pack up roots and traditions to be transplanted in a new environment. Yet, as Aparna Rayaprol points out, there is also the trauma and tension that accompanies life in a new country.[4] A looming aspect of the long process of establishing this "new life" centers around issues of the family, issues that become particularly acute with the coming of age of a second generation in U.S. society. Raised, for the most part, in India where "home" and "family" figure significantly in the general social consciousness, it is important for

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[3] Vijay Prashad, "The Karma of Brown Folks," m.s.

[4] Aparna Rayaprol, *Negotiating Identities: Women in the Indian Diaspora* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).

the first generation of Indian immigrants that their children grow up with an awareness of "Indian values" and "Indian culture." Often, there is great variation, debate, and conflict regarding what might constitute these values, and how they can be transmitted or emulated. Traditional music and dance, religious and ceremonial practice, regional foodways, ethnic clothing or ornamentation, and popular culture (through the media of modern film) are often chosen as avenues for cultivating "Indian culture." "Indianess" is a highly diverse, malleable construct, expressed, for example, in preimmigration narratives of the first and 1.5 generation of immigrants, in cultural and political choices, or in later generations of imaginings about "India." Thus, while on the one hand, the Indian family can be considered a structure of support and nurturance, on the other, it is also a site for debate and contestation about marriage, sexuality, childrearing, and attitudes toward aging.

Family as Community, Community as Family

Despite the strengths of the Indian extended family, in the U.S. it has tended to become more nucleated in form. While the Indian community has unique ideas about family and matrimony, it is also under pressure to assimilate to dominant norms like the nuclear family or, in the case of South Indian immigrants, the use of surnames. Given the erosion of an extended family that, many times, implicitly "shares" the emotional and/or material responsibilities of creating a sense of community, Indian American families find themselves turning to other resources to foster a sense of belonging. It is thus difficult to speak of the Indian family, without also speaking of what the notion of family evokes in its other metaphors: community and nation. As Annanya Bhattacharjee notes, "South Asian immigrants see their community as an 'extended family,' separate and distinct from other ethnic communities. The immigrant community sees itself, in all its specific ethnicity, as a private space, within which it must guard its own national heritage against intervention from mainstream U.S. cultural practices."[5]. This desire to preserve a cultural heritage however, often results in a form of Hindu nationalism that prevents true community building among a diverse group of Indian immigrants that also include Muslims, Christians, Sikhs, Jains and other religious communities.

The pressure on the family to conform to dominant roles results in, as several writers have noted, the tendency of the Indian diaspora to enact a partitioning between work life and home life. That is, they accept the values of the larger host society in the workplace, but maintain "Indian" values at home. As Madhulika Khandelwal says, "The public and private

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[5]Annanya Bhattacharjee, "The Public/Private Mirage: Mapping Homes and Undomesticating Violence Work in the South Asian Immigrant Community," in Jacquie Alexander and Chandra Mohanty, eds., *Feminist Geneologies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

lives of Asian Indians are very separate."[6]   Such a partitioning may however, cause high levels of stress, especially for women, upon whom the burden of maintaining family and religious tradition often falls.[7] Women in the Indian diaspora play a central role in constructing and maintaining extended family structures, and in the socialization of their U.S. born offspring.

The split between work life and home life also affects the community's attitude toward retirement and the aging process. While elderly parents commonly reside with the oldest son or another child in India, few parents, though they may (with adequate funds) visit the U.S. for long stretches of time, are willing to spend their last years here. They experience a sense of isolation, being cut off from friends, family, leisure activities, and often language. This is often true of their first generation immigrant children as well, who not infrequently see the U.S. as a place to make enough money so they can retire "back home."

If the notion of family as sanctity or refuge from a hostile host society results from a separation of work life from home life, what do we make of how the family's or community's own dissidents are treated: those women who are battered and abused; those divorced or widowed; lesbian, gay and bisexual men and women; all of whom are stigmatized? These members of our communities are harshly judged for their departures from a national heterosexual family norm. Once innocuous India Day Parades have now become major sites of contestation where women's and gay rights organizations have been banned from participating in the event.[8] In protest last summer, progressive South Asian groups which included the South Asian lesbian and Gay Association (SALGA), the South Asian Women's Creative Alliance, the Forum of Indian Leftists, Worker's Awaaz, the Taxi Worker's Alliance and others created a "Desi Dhamaka" at the foot of the India Day Parade to reclaim community space as their own.

Some of the difficulties Indian women in diaspora face are linked to immigration. In the Indian immigrant community it is not uncommon for single men to come to the U.S. on employment-based visas, to later marry in India, and then send for their wives to join them.[9] Women thus

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[6]in Alexia Lewnes, "The Two Worlders," *Brandweek*, June 21, 1993, p. 19.

[7]Snehendu B. Kar, Kevin Campbell, Armando Jimenez and Sangeeta, "Invisible Americans: An Exploration of Indo-American Quality of Life," *Amerasia* 21(3); Alan Roland, *Cultural Pluralism and Psychoanalysis: The Asian and North American Experience* (New York: Routledge, 1996); Rayaprol, *Negotiating Identities*.

[8]Gayatri Gopinath, "Nostalgia, Desire, Diaspora: South Asian Sexualities in Motion" *Positions* 5(2): 467-91; Purvi Shah, "Redefining the Home: How Community Elites Silence Feminist Activism," in Shah, Sonia, ed., *Dragon Ladies: Asian American Feminists Breathe Fire* (Boston: South End Press, 1996).

[9]This is not always an easy process. The Association of Americans for Spouse Reunification was started by a Bengali whose wife was denied entry to the U.S. for

comprise the majority of applicants for spouse-based visas, although either spouse can petition to have husband or wife join.[10] Since marriage to citizens or green-card holders is increasingly seen as a means to emigrate, women are often caught in abusive "marriage for a green-card" scenarios, although cases have also been reported to battered women's organizations of Indian men marrying second generation women for purposes of emigration.

The marriage process is only one way in which the problems of Indian families are often transplanted in North America. In India, a woman's legal status is dependent upon her membership in family and community--this has posed difficulties from everything from dowry harassment to bigamy, to custody, divorce, and property settlements. Resolutions to these questions have increasingly called for feminist legal interventions that are transnational, and can address the differences in laws between, say, the United States and India, Canada, Australia and Britain.[11] For example, there is some indication that the Indian government may consider legislation prohibiting the dissolution of marriages to NRIs conducted on Indian soil. Such a "law to protect the rights and interests of women married to NRIs on decree of annulment obtained from foreign courts, properly falls under the domain of private international law, but advocates have urged the Indian government to enact domestic legislation prohibiting annulment of Indian marriages on foreign soil."[12]

Physical and emotional abuse, marital rape,[13] and incest are also growing issues in the Indian immigrant community, challenging the stereotype of the Indian family as the ideal, model family. The first group addressing domestic violence in the South Asian community was Manavi, founded in 1985. Apna Ghar of Chicago and Sakhi in New York city were founded in the late 1980s, and Saheli of Austin, TX in 1992. Other organizations include Narika and Maitreyi in the San Francisco Bay Area, SEWA in Philadelphia, SNEHA in Connecticut, DAYA in Houston, and ASHA in Washington D.C.[14] There are now approximately 18-20 South Asia women's groups in the U.S. According to one estimate, the incidence

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several years on the basis of his status as a permanent resident. The URL for this group is www.apsr.org.

[10]Bhattacharjee, "The Public/Private Mirage."

[11]Kamala Visweswaran, "Gender Asylum in U.S. South Asian Communities," *Manavi* 8(3):2-6.

[12]Smt. Neeraja Saraph v. Shri Jayant v. Saraph & Anr. [R.M. Sahai, J.], *Judgements Today* (6), pps. 489-491.

[13]Rinita Mazumdar, "Marital Rape: Some Considerations," in S. Das Dasgupta, *A Patchwork Shawl: Chronicles of Soputh Asian Women in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

[14]Margaret Abraham, "Ethnicity, Gender and Marital Violence: South Asian Women's Organization in the United States," *Gender and Society* 9(4): 450-69.

of domestic violence in the South Asian community is about 20-25%, although some analysts feel this percentage is low given the rate of unreported incidents.[15] In the last few years however, several South Asian domestic violence organizations have reported an increase in the number of calls fielded. ASHA, for example saw the number of calls it handled double between 1995-6, from 75 to 150.[16]

Feminist organizations use a variety of strategies to address domestic violence in the community. SNEHA says its activism "draws on the model of the extended family... comprised of relatives, close friends, and neighbors. Some non-kin are accorded a status equivalent to family members because of daily interaction. An 'aunt' could be a blood relative or the mother of a very close friend. These types of relationships have deep roots in the South Asian ethos. In times of family crises, it is often a relative or friend who serves as an empathetic listener." Other groups such as Sakhi, have been split over the degree to which direct public action such as picketing in front of an abuser or employer's place of work is a viable solution.[17] Some Sakhi activists point to the need to transform understandings of "home" so that domestic violence is understood as not only something that takes place within the family, but also intrinsic to the immigrant labor process.[18]

Rethinking Home: Sexuality and Gender Roles

The public/private split in Indian diasporic communities has resulted in a version of Indian (often Hindu) culture being maintained that is static and rigid. As Shamita Das Dasgupta has argued, the attitudes of Indians long settled in the U.S. have frozen in time, even as India has changed. They tend to stick to the older picture of India. They are developing 'Hindi cinema Hinduism,' portraying 'pativrata' women who may not be reality-based at all. This dual expectation of extreme modesty on the one hand, and hyper-sexuality on the other can be found in the stylization and enactment of Hindi film song and dance sequences by young girls at India Day Parades and other public community performances. Analyzing the performance of the popular Hindi film song, "Choli ke peeche kya hai?" (What is underneath my blouse?) at one such

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[15]Satya Krishnan, et al., "Lifting the Veil of Secrecy: Domestic Violence Among South Asian Women in the U.S." in S. Das Dasgupta, *A Patchwork Shawl: Chronicles of Soputh Asian Women in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

[16] Amita Bhandari Preisser, "Notes From the Field: Domestic Violence in South Asian Communities: Advocacy and Intervention," *Violence Against Women* (Forthcoming).

[17]Bhattacharjee, "The Public/Private Mirage."

[18] ibid.

event, Sunita Mukhi asks, "What happens to the dance when a young girl of seven, whose sexuality is still ambiguous, or at least unrealized, performs it for Indian Independence Day?" She concludes that while the dance is made more modest because a girl rather than a woman performs it, the young girl is herself endowed with adult sexuality.[19]

The re-enactment of particular sex roles in the public domain, however, does not necessarily mean that girls or women have more control over their sexuality. As Ginu Kamani observes, "In American culture, individual sexuality has now evolved to a place where, more often than not, the desirable ideal of sexuality is opposed to pleasure-less repression. But in other cultures, including South Asian (ones), individual sexuality is still rigorously opposed to family control, and pleasure/repression are tertiary topics at best."[20] The (overt or covert) group ownership of any given woman's sexuality is still the most pressing subject for a large number of Indian women, including in the diaspora. In this context, one young woman recently remarked:

> The hardest struggle for me has been, in general, to be a sexual being as a woman, and particularly so growing up in India, where women (at least those from the middle class) were not supposed to be sexual at all. In India, homosexuality is closeted for sure, but hell, even heterosexual sex before marriage is a big deal.[21]

This concern over women's sexuality also extends to men who depart from the heterosexual norm. Gay and bisexual Indian men who have remained unmarried over a period of time, often face concerted pressure from their families to agree to an arranged marriage. Some go through with the marriage, but then wind up leading double-lives because they know their families will never accept their sexual orientation. Others recount a gradual process of acceptance by their parents. Trikone-Texas co-founder L. Ramakrishnan, who is bisexual, first resisted the idea of arranged marriage by dating women who were not Hindu or even Indian. As he put it, "By the time I had worked my way through caste, region, religion, and

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[19] Sunita Sunder Mukhi, "Underneath My Blouse Beats My Indian Heart: Sexuality, Nationalism and Indian Womenhood in the United States," in S. Das Gupta, ed., *A Patchwork Shawl: Chronicles of Soputh Asian Women in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), p.191.

[20] Ginu Kamani, "Just After 'Just Between Indians,' " in S. Maira and R. Srikanth, eds., *Contours of the Heart: South Asians Map North America* (New York: Asian American Writer's Workshop, 1996).

[21] Naheed Islam, "Naming Desire, Shaping Identity: Tracing the Experiences of Indian and Bangladeshi Lesbians in the U.S.," in S. Das Dasgupta, *A Patchwork Shawl: Chronicles of Soputh Asian Women in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998), p.10.

national origin, my parents had accepted the fact that I would not consent to an arranged marriage, and did not care for these--or any other--socially imposed boundaries. This understanding perhaps made it easier for them to accept my relationship with a man when one developed." Such a broad range of experiences, from how young girls are socialized to the expectations of respectability for those who differ in their sexual orientation suggest the need to rethink how we build families, and therefore how to constitute "home" and community.

Marriage and Partnership

Like other Asian groups who arrived in the U.S. at the end of the 19th century, the first Indians in the country lived primarily in bachelor communities. For the Punjabi Sikhs in California however, miscegenation laws of the time prevented them from intermarrying with whites, resulting in a number of mixed marriages between Punjabis and Mexicans.[22] Yet South Asians, like other Asian groups have the highest rates of "outmarriage," in particular intermarriage with whites,[23] while intermarriage between Indian immigrant communities is surprisingly rare. Though in large urban areas, Hindus, Muslims, Parsis, Sikhs, Jains, and Christians may have their own associations and still socialize with each other, intermarriage between communities is still comparatively uncommon.

What Sayantani and Shamita Dasgupta term "female exogamy" in the Indian community refers to the fact that "more and more young women complain that they are unable to find a partner within the community who is supportive and encouraging of their independence, assertiveness, activism, and ambition".[24] In this context, activist Purvi Shah has declared: "marriage is a political and not just a social act".[25] At the same time, the Dasguptas note that "many more of their male counterparts are voluntarily returning to their parents natal land to find brides," producing what they call a "no confidence vote being cast between the genders in the second

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[22]Karen Leonard, *Making Ethnic Choices: California's Punjabi Mexican Americans* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992).

[23]Sharon M. Lee and Marilyn Fernandez, "Trends in Asian American Racial/Ethnic Intermarriage: A Comparison of 1980 and 1990 Census Data," *Sociological Perspectives* 41(2): 323-342.

[24]Shamita Das Dasgupta and Sayantani Dasgupta, "Women in Exile: Gender Relations in the Asian Indian Community in the U.S.," in S. Maira and R. Srikanth, eds., *Contours of the Heart: South Asians Map North America* (New York: Asian American Writer's Workshop, 1996): 381-400.

[25]Shah, "Redefining the Home."

generation".[26] The Dasguptas also see a certain tendency for young men in the community to hold women in the community to tighter standards regarding dress and behavior than they hold their (white) American girlfriends, who may be outspoken and independent. This puts a cultural twist on the rather generalized double-standard placed on the expression of men's as opposed to women's sexuality; accounting both for second generation women marrying outside the community, and young men travelling to India to marry women who are expected to conform to more traditional roles.

At a panel on "Gender, Sexuality and Equality" at a recent meeting of the Youth Conference of the Telugu Association of North America held in Austin, Texas, participants who ranged in age from 18-30 agreed that the double standard in the community was making it difficult for young women to date (several said they were not allowed to date, even in college, and had to keep their relationships secret from their parents), while their male peers faced no such restrictions. Saheli, a community support group for Asian and Asian American women, has addressed young women's frustration with this double-standard by making a video called, "Daughters and Dates."

Despite differences in expectations, and the difficulties members of the second and third generations report in relating to each other, there does seem to be increasing desire for arranged marriages, or at least a willingness to explore initial stages of the process among second generation Indian Americans. The newspapers of the diasporic community such as India Abroad and News-India Times are filled with matrimonial advertisements. Parents who have themselves had love-marriages in India have been surprised at their U.S. born children asking for help in arranging marriages.[27] One reason given by younger members of the community, is their fear of losing their heritage if they marry outside of the community, and a difficulty in raising children in bi-racial or cross-cultural relationships. Another young woman at the same youth conference expressed a different fear: "if everyone marries out of the community, pretty soon there will be no more Indians in the U.S."

Along with such contradictory assertions about national identity and inter-racial relationships, attitudes about sexual identities and orientations are increasingly in flux. While most attending the Austin youth conference thought gay and lesbian relationships were fine, and wondered how

[26]Shamita Das Dasgupta and Sayantani Dasgupta, "Women in Exile: Gender Relations in the Asian Indian Community in the U.S.," in S. Maira and R. Srikanth, eds., Contours of the Heart: South Asians Map North America (New York: Asian American Writer's Workshop, 1996), p.382; see also Celia W. Dugger, "In India an Arranged Marriage of Two Worlds," New York Times July 20, 1998, pp. A1, 10-1.

[27]Dugger, "In India an Arranged Marriage;" Johanna Lessinger, From the Ganges to the Hudson: Indian Immigrants in New York City (Boston: Allen and Bacon, 1995).

common they were in South Asian communities ("very common" was the response), few were comfortable with the notion of gay marriage or felt they would choose an alternative sexual orientation. At the same time, several students present felt that bisexuality was increasingly common – most had friends who identified as bisexual, and as some felt it was a "fad" to identify this way, had also considered identifying as bisexual.

Identities in Question

Teachers of second generation children of Indian heritage often report a range of identifications for this group. Many identify simply as "American," and may see themselves as nominally white, editing out their Indian culture or heritage. Another group consists of youth who were raised by parents with a strong sense of ethnic identity and who identify as "Indian," "Indian-American" or as Punjabi, Gujarati, Bengali, etc. A smaller number identify as Asian American, or South Asian American. For this last group of college-age students, the experience of racism in the U.S. society has sensitized them to the experiences of other communities of color.[28] Some of these students report identifying with rap, hip-hop, jazz and other forms of African-American expressive culture.

It has been suggested that intergenerational conflict is the result of different cultural orientations: children raised in India are said to gain their identities from family and community, while those in the West draw their sources of identity from their peers, especially during adolescence.[29] What may be more accurate however, is that the privatizing of Indian cultures results in severe pressure to assimilate, since youth are constantly confronted with a radical difference between what is valued at home, and the values of dominant Anglo-American culture. Even though almost half of the Indian immigrant community had professional/managerial jobs in 1980 (as opposed to 24% of white Americans),[30] class does not protect the children of immigrants from internalizing racial stereotypes. As one young woman recounted,

> I used to have secret fantasies of having long blond hair tied
> with those rubber bands with two large colorful balls at the
> end. I was embarrassed of the difference between my

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[28]Sucheta Doshim, "Divided Consciousness Amidst a New Orientalism: South Asian American Identity Formation on Campus," in S. Maira and R. Srikanth, eds., *Contours of the Heart: South Asians Map North America* (New York: Asian American Writer's Workshop, 1996); Anuradha Advani, "The Development of a South Asian Labor Organization: An Examination of Identity-Based Organizing," *Positions* 5(2): 589-604.

[29]Manisha Roy, "Mothers and Daughters in Indian-American Families: A Failed Communication?" in S. Das Gupta, ed., *A Patchwork Shawl: Chronicles of Soputh Asian Women in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998)

[30]Lessinger, *From the Ganges to the Hudson.*

parents and others. I prayed and hoped that my mother would change and look like Mrs. Hopkins next door with short hair and fashionable business suits.[31]

According to a recent survey conducted by Brown university students, 92% of the Indian parents they interviewed wanted their children brought up in the "traditional" way.[32] Second generation Indian Americans are also eager to discover aspects of their heritage they previously downplayed in order to assimilate into mainstream white society. Parents' concern with the assimilation of their children into mainstream American culture has meant that they have started to send their children to summer camps where they are taught about Hindu, Sikh or Islamic traditions from which they hail.[33] Unfortunately some of these summer camps have also been the ground for teaching and mobilizing about Hindutva – a seemingly innocuous celebration of Hinduism in the U.S., but having devastating consequences on Indian domestic politics.[34] For this reason, the "Youth Solidarity Summer" sponsored by a volunteer collective of progressive activists[35] in the northeast is a good alternative for both students and parents seeking to reaffirm South Asian cultural heritage(s) without recourse to ethnic or religious chauvinism. Last year 24 participants came from Vancouver, Houston, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Providence, Washington D.C and New York City.

In conclusion, the families of the Indian diaspora face the dual challenge of dealing with the changing cultures of the Indian subcontinent and United States. To meet this challenge, Indian American families must continue to adapt in ways that affirm all its members, thereby making possible the continued growth and positive expansion of the community.

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[31]Roy, "Mothers and Daughters", p. 99

[32]See Amber Oliver and Apurva Dave, 1996, "Hinduism in America" http://www.brown.edu/Departments/AmCiv/Studentprojects/apurva/index/html.

[33]Laurie Goodstein, "At Camps, Young U.S. Sikhs Cling to Heritage," *New York Times* July 18, 1998, pp. A1, A7.

[34]Prashad, "The Karma of Brown Folks."

[35]see http://www.foil.org

Illuminating India: How a South Asian Diaspora Helps Build a Hindu Nation

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Diwali celebrates Ram's return to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile in the forest. The festival occurs in late fall on a night with no moon. As the story goes, the sky was so dark that the people of Ayodhya feared Ram would not be able to find his way out of the jungle in order to come home to be crowned king of their community. So they lit their homes with candles and small oil lamps, known as *diyas*, which flickered in the night and provided a pathway for their king. Ram, hero of the well-known *Ramayana* epic, returned safely to Ayodhya, where he ruled for many years in an era marked by peace, happiness and prosperity. An incarnate of the Hindu god Vishnu, he ascended to heaven upon his death, accompanied by a retinue of followers.

Every year, hundreds of millions in India remember the exiled Ram on the night of Diwali. For centuries, it has been India's most widely celebrated festival, observed by Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists, and countless other groups. Among the estimated 15 million Indians who comprise a far-flung South Asian diaspora, Diwali carries a special significance in that it allows them to remember not just Ram but also their own ties to India. Though accounts about Ram's life and the meanings of Diwali vary, it is a common practice to leave a lamp burning in one's home on that night. The glowing beam beckons Ram home and subtly illuminates a trail that allows these "exiles" to return, spiritually, to an imagined homeland, to the soil of their roots.

Over the past two decades, in an era of multicultural identities and transnational communities, Ram has returned in reconstructed form as an angry, militant defender of a nation, with some of his staunchest support coming from his middle-class compatriots in exile. Hindu nationalists in India contend that Ram's "home" in the north-central Indian community of Ayodhya has been desecrated by Muslim "invaders" whose insistence on such things as "minority" privileges saps the strength that the modern nation-state of India could command. Under the umbrella of a Sangh

Parivar "family," pro-Hindu groups have mounted an aggressive, often violent, campaign for political leadership that puts restoration of Ram's birthplace at its center. After a decade of building up a crescendo of anti-Muslim rhetoric, these nationalists unleashed their wrath December 6, 1992, on a 16th century Muslim mosque in Ayodhya that they contend was sitting on Ramjanmabhoomi, the place of Ram's birth.

More than 300,000 people gathered outside the Babri Masjid for a day that was advertised as a convergence for prayer and fasts. Most wore the saffron color of Hindu nationalism and many carried chisels, pick axes, iron rods and shovels. Above the crowd loomed the three red domes of the mosque, built in 1528 by the Mughal emperor Babur. For many Indians, the mosque's very existence in a modern-day Ayodhya suggested a spirit of religious tolerance, much in keeping with the secularism embodied in India's national constitution, adopted in 1950. Others – aligned with the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) or at least receptive to the pro-Hindu cultural ideology espoused by the political party's primary bastions of support, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Rasthriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) – viewed the 464-year-old mosque as a relic of a centuries-old narrative of corruption and disease that foreign "invaders," namely Muslims, had inflicted on a "mother land" of purity.

On this particular morning, walls of security guards, police, wooden barricades, barbed wire and iron gates surrounded the mosque. As the crowd approached, holy men declared the day auspicious. The numbers swelled; shouts of "Jai Sri Ram" and "If a Hindu's blood does not boil, then it's water" began to break out. Some, repeating a popular BJP slogan, declared that they would "build a temple on this very site."

The first attack came at 10:30 a.m. As shouts of "Jai Sri Ram" erupted, stones began to fly and part of the crowd surged forward. People clawed past police, breaking through the barbed wire and barricades, scrambling to reach the domes. A teenage boy scaled one dome and plunged a grappling hook into it. He sent down a rope, which allowed others to climb up. Clouds of dust arose as rods and chisels speared the brick. The first dome fell at 2 p.m.; the second went down 90 minutes later. By 4 p.m., the final dome caved in as the crowd, feverish with ecstasy, formed a human chain around the rubble. Smoke rose from nearby homes of Muslim families, which some in the crowd of Hindu militants had set on fire. Construction of a Ram temple was begun that night while bricks that had been collected from Hindu nationalist supporters over the past few years were exhibited in a pit outside the former mosque. Among them were bricks contributed from South Africa, the Caribbean, Canada and the United States.[1]

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[1] See David Ludden, "Ayodhya: A Window on the World," *Contesting the Nation: Religion, Community and the Politics of Democracy in India,* David Ludden, ed., (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 1-2; Stanley Tambiah, *Leveling Crowds: Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia,*

An Imagined India

Boiled down to its simplest interpretation, the destruction of the Babri Masjid could be seen as a heinous act of violence. A place of worship dating to medieval times was torn down ruthlessly while a state government sympathetic to Hindu nationalist beliefs did little to prevent the violence from occurring.[2] The massive riots that followed over the next four months throughout India and Bangladesh, resulting in 1,700 deaths and 5,500 injuries among both Hindus and Muslims, have been described as India's greatest political crisis since its independence in 1947. (Then, a partition hastily-conceived by British colonialists who were eager to quit India split the subcontinent into two highly hostile nation-states – India and Pakistan – forcing a mass migration of 15 million people across these artificially constructed borders and causing at least 500,000 deaths.) Secularists have decried the mosque destruction as "violence against Muslims" and a threat to India's national unity, while Hindu nationalists have justified it as "liberation of a Hindu sacred space." Meanwhile, six years later, the situation in Ayodhya remains at a tense standoff with Ram's alleged birthplace consisting of a pile of rubble guarded by a police force of more than 200. Hindu nationalists have drawn up blueprints for an elaborate temple that would syncretize a multiplicity of Hindu beliefs, while Muslim groups in India frequently declare December 6 a day of mourning and mount demands that their mosque be restored. Scholars, politicians and others wring their hands, wondering why this crisis hasn't been brought to a resolution.

This "crisis" – often cast short-sightedly as the latest battle in an "ancient" war between Hindus and Muslims and more thoughtfully as a threat to India's ability to hold itself together as a "modern" state devoted to an agenda of secularism and a celebration of a multiplicity of peoples and beliefs – may be unresolvable. For the leveling of the Babri Masjid and the ongoing effort to build a birthplace to Ram in its place was not solely a religious battle nor a political fight but more of a fusion of the two. It represents an attempt to craft a nation through a strategy that puts less emphasis on conventional geo-political boundaries of a state as defining characteristics and relies more on a globalization of media and the

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(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Peter van der Veer, *Religious Nationalism: Hindus and Muslims in India*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 4; and Dilip Awasti, "A Nation's Shame," *India Today*, Dec. 31, 1992, for details about the Babri Masjid's destruction and its aftermath.

[2] A BJP-dominant government had been elected in the state of Uttar Pradesh, where Ayodhya is located, in 1991. Media reports often describe this state in India's heartland as encompassing the "saffron belt" or "Hindi belt," labels that subtly tie one of the predominant colors in India's flag and one of the most widely-spoken languages in the country to the pro-Hindu movement.

establishment of a relatively small but affluent diasporic community to define "nation" in a broader cultural and spiritual sense. The Hindu militants who gathered in Ayodhya in the name of Ram could be seen as building support for what might be called a "state-nation," a political entity with designated geographic boundaries that would draw much of its cultural and financial sustenance through a nurturing of a community of "alienated" Indians. Just as leaving a light burning through the night for Ram helps South Asians living overseas connect spiritually with a "native" soil and just as donating bricks to a campaign for a temple in his name lets them cement that identity in a politicized, territorial sense, Hindu nationalists, like many organizations within India, rely on the financial success and an accompanying sense of cultural alienation of a diasporic community for much of their identifying and affiliative strength.

While the depth of Hindu nationalism's strength among Indians who reside outside India has yet to be measured comprehensively, many media reports indicate that Indians in the United States -- 75 percent of whom are immigrants -- have contributed substantially to the movement, not only to the Ram campaign in Ayodhya but also to ongoing projects run by groups sympathetic to Hindu nationalist beliefs.[3] Other anecdotal evidence offers a sense of the movement's growing potency among followers overseas: Shortly after the Babri Masjid was destroyed, an organization known as "Concerned NRIs of Southern California" ran an ad in *Indian Express* supporting the construction of a temple, saying, in part, that "Hindus have only one place (other than Nepal) to call home. Their roots are in Bharat."[4] Affluent Hindu businessmen in Los Angeles organized the Federation of Hindu Associations after being "energized" by the mosque demolition.[5] Overseas Friends of the BJP, founded in New York in the early 1990s, now includes 14 chapters in the United States with about 350 active members. An organization known as the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh replicates the self-disciplinary training that is a hallmark of the RSS. With 40 branches and more than 800 members in the United States, Sangh members in New York routinely invite young Hindu children to spend a weekend morning exercising, playing traditional Indian games and discussing Hindu culture.[6] With reported contacts with more

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[3] See, for instance, Benedict Anderson, "Long-Distance Nationalism," *The Spectre of Comparisons* (London: Verso, 1998), 73; Praful Bidwai, "Bring Down the Temple: Democracy at Risk in India," *The Nation* Jan. 23, 1993; and Sadanand Dhume, "No Place Like Home: Hindu Nationalism Draws Strength from U.S. Supporters," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Feb. 25, 1999.

[4] Lise McKean, *Divine Enterprise: Gurus and the Hindu Nationalist Movement* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 319.

[5] Prema Kurien, "Constructing 'Indianness' in the United States and India: The Role of Hindu and Muslim Indian Immigrants," unpublished paper, (1997).

[6] Dhume, 1999.

than 10,000 families in the United States, the VHP of America says it has raised more than $2 million among overseas Hindus since 1980 for charities, and other projects such as campaigns to prevent tribal groups in India from converting to Islam or Christianity. Shortly after masterminding the campaign that led to the Babri Masjid demolition in India, the VHP organized a global conference in Washington D.C. that drew more than 5,000 Indian immigrants. As BJP leader Murli Manohar Joshi called December 6, 1992, "the most memorable day" of his life, many cheered vociferously.[7] For scholars who are attempting to quantify the breadth of Hindu nationalism's popularity in the United States, such anecdotes provide vague data, at best, and suggest a need for additional research. Yet, they do back up an increasingly persuasive argument that movements to establish nations in an era of globalization rely at least in part on a diasporic community for support. As David Ludden puts it:

> The men who destroyed the Babri mosque marched to a cultural movement whose ideas, images, media, organizations, and resources are transnational in form, scope, and influence. Ayodhya is a refraction of 'ethnic cleansing' in Serbia, the 'moral majority' in the United States, and other movements that define nations by ethnicity and religion.[8]

Ludden describes Ayodhya as a window on a world in which a political and cultural battle is being staged in a global theater. This window reveals both connections and fractures that get produced among those of South Asian ancestry who may have had little or no physical contact with the geographic unit that is India yet still are drawn into what Arjun Appadurai calls an "imagined world" of Indians bound together through an interplay of mass media and migration.[9] As a member of that "imagined world," I cannot help but relate to this issue personally. I grew up as an Indian, born in the United States, interacting with an "imagined India" shaped almost completely by my parents' memories and images. Part of that imagined community included Ayodhya and Ram. My parents would tell my sisters and me stories from *The Ramayana*, creating an image of Ram as a heroic warrior and an honest, trustworthy person, and conveying a sense of morality and good behavior. In *The Ramayana* of my imagined community, Ayodhya was depicted as a peaceful, sort of romantic place. Although it was not a "real" place, it did become real for me as I learned to

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[7] Arvind Rajagopal, "Transnational Networks and Hindu Nationalism," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 29:3 (1997), 45, 48-49.

[8] Ludden, 1996, 2.

[9] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 33.

read maps and pinpointed its locale in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, not far from Varanasi. Through a process that can hardly be described as "rational," I mentally conjoined the two Ayodhyas, and fantasized about someday visiting this mythic/real place.

I got my wish in August 1996 and, with a police "intelligence agent" as my escort, strolled into the rubble where the Babri Masjid once stood. I walked through four security gates, showed my U.S. passport to six officers, emptied my bag of all cameras, film, notebooks and writing devices, and was frisked twice. Finally, my escort pointed out a small statue strategically placed in the compound on a particular piece of rubble and said, "Madam, this is Ramjanmabhoomi." Worshippers willing to undergo the security measures I went through, may view this Ramjanmabhoomi daily from 3 to 5 p.m.

The destruction of the Babri Masjid generated worldwide shock effects: Indian consulate offices were attacked in Pakistan and Bangladesh; Middle Eastern and Persian Gulf states issued official condemnations; Hindu temples and cultural centers were fire-bombed in Great Britain; and members of the Nation of Islam launched a protest outside the United Nations' headquarters in New York.[10] Though efforts to establish a Hindu nation have long prevailed in India, the movement's political power and credibility never have been stronger. As anthropologist Lise McKean observes, the movement's success can be related to "complex dynamics associated with the domestic and transnational political economy and with the religio-cultural politics of nationalism."[11] With that in mind, I tell the story of my relationship to Ayodhya and Ram for two reasons: It illustrates how powerfully such images can resonate as cultural symbols in a globalized community and it reveals how the linkage between a community that is "imagined" and one that is "real" often is not as smooth as we are led to believe.

Benedict Anderson usefully defines a "nation" as an "imagined community" in the sense that hundreds of thousands of people who are unlikely to ever meet face-to-face accept an idea that they are bound together as a community under a unifying set of beliefs and values.[12] By building on that metaphor, Appadurai offers a way to see how, in an era of globalization, communities transcend geographic boundaries. And in these "imagined worlds" culture travels. As people migrate across continents and oceans, they transport stories, religious beliefs and daily practices – retelling and reworking these cultural artifacts over time. The story of Ram and Ayodhya illustrates this cultural journeying particularly well as it is a story that gets "told" by Indians everywhere in oral tales, comic book

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[10] McKean, 1996, 318-319.

[11] ibid.

[12] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983, repr 1991).

renditions, puppet shows, bharatnatyam dance performances and television serials.

With such a high level of worldwide cultural familiarity, Ram and Ayodhya give Hindu nationalists a potent tool with which to cultivate transnational support. Although "we" hear the story differently, depending on who and where "we" are, some themes remain the same, giving it a veneer of veracity.[13] Touching a common, emotional chord gives members of the various groups within the Sangh Parivar a means of convincing Hindus that their "homeland" is being overrun by a foreign pestilence and that support for a Hindu rashtra (nation) is the "answer." Globalized media provide a channel through which Ram and Ayodhya, as cultural symbols, can travel and, in the process, become linked to contemporary politics. Along these lines, the VHP – which describes itself as a "worldwide family of Hindu organizations" whose goals are to "foster Hindu unity, consolidate Hindu society and work for Hindu interests" – dedicates its home page on the World Wide Web to the "Martyrs of Ayodhya." Clicking on an indicated spot pulls up a photograph of two young men, standing side by side against a dusty rose backdrop on which a portrait of the Hindu goddess, Durga, is placed. Both were "felled by the bullets of Mullah Mulayam Singh Yadav's goonda raj."[14] As a cultural organization, the VHP spent much of the 1970s and early 1980s cultivating a diasporic Hindu community, and remains the most prevalent purveyor of a worldwide Hindu cultural identity today. Its high-tech consecration of Ayodhya becomes a telling means through which Hindu nationalists are able to cultivate a perception of a seamless tie from the present to a mythic past. This then suggests that an affiliation with their movement may help Hindus who might feel alienated or disenfranchised by the geographical and social dislocations that result from globalization regain an intimate, day-to-day connection to a cultural heritage and, correspondingly, a sense of self.

In an era in which culture travels across vast spaces at unprecedented speeds, an unwillingness to affiliate with a particular point of view can be cast as a repudiation of one's culture or identity. Feminist scholar Chandra Talpade Mohanty recalls visiting her family in Bombay in December 1992, "post-Ayodhya." Her status as a U.S. green card holder previously had made her an object of envy among members of her extended family. On this particular visit, when anti-Muslim emotions were running high among middle- and upper-class Hindus who provide the

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[13] Neeladri Bhattacharya, "Myth, History and the Politics of Ramjanmabhumi," *Anatomy of a Confrontation: Ayodhya and the Rise of Communal Politics in India*, Sarvepalli Gopal, ed., (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1990, repr. 1993) 122-140.

[14] From www.vhp.org/vhp 1997. Mulayam Singh was chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, the state in which Ayodhya is located, in 1990 when the incident to which this Web page alludes occurred.

backbone of the BJP's political strength, the green card designated her as an "outsider" incapable of understanding the "Muslim problem." In describing two shouting matches with her uncles, Mohanty writes, "Arguing that India was created as a secular state and that democracy had everything to do with equality for all groups (majority and minority) got me nowhere. The very fundamentals of democratic citizenship in India were/are being undermined and redefined as 'Hindu.'"[15]

Like Mohanty, I had viewed the rise of a "Hindu right" in the late 1980s as a threat to secularism, democracy and the moralistic creeds of honesty, compassion, fairness, justice and tolerance that the Ram of my imagined India seemed to personify. During a trip to India in February 1992, "pre-Ayodhya," I was surprised to hear so many pro-Hindu and correspondingly anti-Muslim views expressed among my own middle-class, well-educated relatives. When I tried to investigate a reason for this antagonism, I was shushed as one who, by virtue of being born an American, could not understand "this Muslim issue." In hindsight, it appears that it wasn't that I couldn't understand but that I was refusing to participate. As Anthony Giddens shows, globalization offers consumers – particularly middle-class consumers – more choices, de-linking culture from a people and subjecting it to global market forces. But, in doing so, it forces you to confront the anxiety of facing practices that differ radically from your own.[16] This tends to cause people to retreat to what is known and familiar, and to regard those of your ilk who fail to do as you do with heightened suspicion. Because of the worldwide attention that the mosque destruction received, I was hardly surprised at what I found in Ayodhya in 1996. I was, however, saddened. When the Babri Masjid was destroyed, a piece of my imagined India was destroyed as well.

Hindu diaspora

In an era in which nation-states are splintering into a plethora of new states and in which ethnonationalist pursuits for self-determination are stronger than ever, many scholars argue that the relationship that exists in the hyphenated space connecting the words "nation" and "state" has become, at best, tense. As Appadurai explains, "states" traditionally have defined themselves as territorial entities containing boundaries that might not necessarily be static but are nevertheless recognized concretely as the spatial embodiment of a given place. By evoking more abstract, personal

[15] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Defining Genealogies: Feminist Reflections on Being South Asian in North America," *Our Feet Walk the Sky: Women of the South Asian Diaspora*, South Asia Collective, (San Francisco: aunt lute books, 1993), 355.

[16] See Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1991).

characteristics, such as language, blood, soil and race, the idea of a "nation," has become associated with the "culture" of a given group of people.[17] Linking these two concepts has allowed culture to be defined in terms of the identity of a given state. The positioning of "nation" before "state" suggests an adjectival relationship; the territorially defined noun "state" is described by the qualities of its nation. At the same time, the use of a hyphen suggests the pair can be seen as equal attributes of each other.[18] The tension arises from a realization that in an era of globalization this pairing is illogical. A state, an entity that is inherently territorial, no longer can confine its "nation" to a given space. The Hindu nationalists' move away from territoriality gives rise to a "nation" that can be conceptualized as being "diasporic." While a diasporic nation still relies on an idea of a territorialized space, that space increasingly is an imagined one. Appadurai explains:

> Where soil and place were once the key to the linkage of territorial affiliation with state monopoly . . .,key identities and identifications now only partially revolve around the realities and images of place. Images of a homeland are only part of the rhetoric of popular sovereignty and do not necessarily reflect a territorial bottom line.[19]

Inverting the nation-state juxtaposition calls attention to the fact that even in an era in which globalized communications, transnational capital and mass migration are causing the idea of a nation-state defined by geographic space to splinter, those very forces are simultaneously causing the nation-state to be strengthened. As a result, the political quest for such entities remains alive and well. As noted, the personal anxiety induced by globalization often causes individuals to retreat to the familiar. A similar dynamic leads to an idea of community formation that might emphasize a sense of territorial boundedness but does not rely entirely on geographic boundaries for its existence. While the idea of diaspora indeed does present a threat to a universe defined and ordered by the nation-state, I would argue that the political forces that seek to control that state understand that diaspora potentially can undermine their goals and have learned to manipulate it to support their own ends. This can be seen in how several ethnonationalist movements operate such as quests by Sikhs and Tamils to

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[17] See Appadurai, "Patriotism and its Futures," *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, and "Sovereignty Without Territoriality: Notes for a Postnational Geography," *The Geography of Identity*, Patricia Yaeger, ed., (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1995).

[18] See R. Radhakrishnan, *Diasporic Mediations*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), for an analysis of the grammatical tensions that arise in the use of hyphens to articulate identity.

[19] Appadurai, 1996, 160-161.

establish independent states in South Asia, in the form of Khalistan in northern India and Eelam in Sri Lanka, respectively. At the same time, those individuals who might classify themselves as diasporic see the political control of a state that differs from their place of residence as a way of responding to their own sense of cultural alienation. Hence, the decision in early 1998 by New York doctor Mukund Mody to close his practice temporarily and travel to India to campaign in national elections on behalf of the BJP.[20]

In India and overseas, Hindu nationalists typically define the groups that support their cause as members of a society (sangh) or family (parivar). Though many groups fall under the Sangh Parivar umbrella, it generally is regarded as consisting of three major organizations: a political party (the BJP), a cultural group (the VHP) and a community service organization that often has been regarded as a paramilitary arm (the RSS).[21] Though the actual relationships between these groups often are difficult to sort out, their activities, membership rosters and overall missions complement each other. The oldest of these organizations, the RSS, provided much of the paramilitary training for the kar sevaks (temple builders) who destroyed the Ayodhya mosque. However, the eight-year international campaign that led to its demolition was masterminded by the VHP, founded in 1964. The BJP technically is the newest of these organizations, but its newness is in name only. It is an outgrowth of the pro-Hindu Jana Sangh political party that was organized in 1948 by sympathizers of the RSS, which had been banned following the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi. The Jana Sangh, unable to significantly challenge the ruling Congress Party and perpetually at odds with the leadership of the RSS, became defunct in the 1970s until some of its key members reorganized in 1981 as the BJP.[22] While these three groups operate autonomously from each other, their activities often overlap. This allows for an expression of Hindu nationalism that can be tailored to reach a broad array of constituents.

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[20] Dhume, 1999.

[21] Though often viewed as a paramilitary group, the RSS was founded in 1925 as a community service organization that promotes Hindu values through such activities as physical exercise and camaraderie. Many of the BJP's top leaders gained their political training in RSS shakhas – training camps which stress the importance of strengthening Hindu virility through exercise, nationalistic messages and camaraderie. The party also draws many campaign volunteers and grassroots organizers from the RSS. See Christophe Jaffrelot, *The Hindu Nationalist Movement in India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), for a discussion of the RSS' often tenuous relationship with the BJP and its precursor, the Jana Sangh Party.

[22] See Ashis Nandy, Shikha Trivedy, Shail Mayaram, Achyut Yagnik, *Creating a Nationality: The Ramjanmabhumi Movement and Fear of the Self*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), 69-73, for a concise description of the post-1947 BJP's genealogy.

Like most political parties, the BJP realizes that winning elections requires reaching out to a broad constituency. It tends, therefore, to shy away from associating too closely with groups that seem non-mainstream. Yet, many of its activists gained their training in RSS shakhas (training camps) and most of its top leaders were in Ayodhya when the demolition occurred. Current BJP rhetoric describes the event as the "greatest mass movement in post-Independence history" and refers to Ram as a cultural symbol that "lies at the core of Indian consciousness."[23]

The state that the BJP seeks to control is, of course, the modern nation-state of India, territorially defined as a geographic space most more or less would recognize. Its nation, however, is much broader. It is defined culturally in the context of a global order that evokes the words of Veer Savarkar, the early 20th century Hindu nationalist and author of the 1922 "Essentials of Hindutva."[24] Savarkar described the "geographic limits of Hindutva" as being the "limits of our earth," and saw Hindus as members of a nation, a rashtra and a race with a common origin and blood. Writing during India's campaign against British colonialism, he saw cultivation of a cultural tie to a "mother land" as a key strategy in mobilizing hatred against the British. He opened a 1937 speech, for instance, by greeting all Hindus in "greater Hindustan" – Africa, America, Mauritius and Bali, subtly linking Indians worldwide who were being oppressed through British colonialism into a unified community that could effectively mobilize against the British.[25] A half-century after the decline of British imperialism and the establishment of the "new" state of India, the BJP defines its nationalist vision as being "not merely bound by the geographical or political identity of Bharat" but by "our timeless cultural heritage . . .. This we believe is the identity of our ancient nation 'Bharatvarsha.' "[26]

The BJP's use of "Bharat" and "Bharatvarsha" in a manifesto, prepared for the 1998 elections in India, illustrates "state-nation" well. While Bharat is a name that many Indians use to refer to India in an emotive, spiritual sense, Bharatvarsha refers roughly to the land of India, the geographical entity. By positioning "state" before "nation," Bharat is

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[23] http://www.bjp.org, March 1998

[24] Hindutva means roughly a sense of being Hindu, a Hindu community.

[25] See McKean, 1996, 80-91, for Savarkar's quotes. Indians migrated to the areas recognized in Savarkar's speech largely as indentured labor. In the United States, most South Asian immigrants of this period were primarily Sikh plantation laborers who suffered a great deal of discrimination. Many nationalists in India turned the harsh treatment that these Sikh and other overseas Indian communities suffered into a further mobilization against the British Empire. See van der Veer, 1994, 111-114, and Verne Dusenberry, "A Sikh Diaspora? Contested Identities and Constructed Realities," *Nation and Migration: the Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora*, Peter van der Veer, ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 31-34.

[26] www.bjp.org, March 1998.

seen as incorporating Bharatvarsha. In this sense, it is not the Indian state that manifests the values of the nation but the Indian nation that embodies the qualities of the state.

"Citizens" of this "nation" thus could include members of a Hindu "diaspora," a term derived from Greek words that suggest a scattering of seeds, as well as a sowing or a sprouting.[27] I want to draw attention to these definitions of "diaspora" for they convey a sense that even as one becomes distanced from a "native" land, a relational tie is maintained despite the putting down of new roots, lives, and communities. Until recently the term was applied primarily to the study of communities of exiled Jews and conveyed a sense of homelessness, captivity, exile, alienation, or isolation. If the state and sense of community it produced were the norm, peoples who wandered from or did not root their identity in the land of their birth or that of their ancestors were regarded as deviating from that norm. Robin Cohen writes: "Collectively, Jews were seen as helpless chaff in the wind. At an individual level, diasporic Jews were depicted as pathological half-persons – destined never to realize themselves or to attain completeness, tranquility or happiness so long as they were in exile."[28] In this context, the promise of a homeland beckons exiles – voluntary or otherwise – as a means of achieving that completeness through uniting with the land, manifested in the familiar entity of state.

Like most political parties, the BJP wears many faces. Much of its recent success in Indian national elections comes from its ability to know which persona to present before which crowd, how to style itself as a "mainstream" party able to represent all of India and how to cast themselves as a viable alternative to the Congress Party (whose members have dominated Indian politics for most of the nation's five decades of independence) that would encourage other "minority" parties to join them in forming a ruling coalition. To a large extent, the party accomplishes this goal by downplaying its anti-Muslim stridency and appealing for a unity among a commonly linked people. Rather than describe Dec. 6, 1992, as a day on which a mosque was destroyed, BJP rhetoric casts it as the day on which India was "reborn." The event, proclaims the BJP, "reoriented the disoriented polity in India and strengthened the foundation of cultural nationalism."[29] While this manifesto, like the rhetoric historically associated with the rise of nation-state, quietly erases the realities of anti-

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[27] In the modern nation-state system, a citizen claims an allegiance to a particular government, is therefore entitled to be protected by that government, and generally codifies the relationship with documents such as a passport. I argue that a citizen also can be viewed loosely as a person who holds an emotional allegiance to a particular community, and that it is this idea of belonging that is emphasized in the formation of diasporic communities.

[28] Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction*, (Seattle: University of Washington, 1997), 4.

[29] www.bjp.org, March 1998.

Muslim violence and bloodshed that the 1992 mosque destruction produced, this proclamation of a Hindu unity resonates particularly strongly among affluent Hindus living in the United States who, on one hand, resemble the BJP's upper-caste, middle-class, urban bastion of support and, on the other hand, are placed in the uncomfortable position of being an "other" by being residents of the United States.

Ideas of an ethnically based nationalism often originate as a concern to protect a cultural identity and are not necessarily tied just to territory. In this sense, establishing a connection to a homeland – while perhaps a time-honored, even natural characteristic among those residing in diasporic communities – can be seen as a form of resisting an oppressive pressure to "assimilate" into a nation-state that defines itself in terms of racial, religious and linguistic practices that appear to differ so radically from one's own. Even – and perhaps especially – for affluent immigrants to the United States, the racialized, subtly Christian values that constitute an "American" can have an alienating effect. With economic resources on hand and communications networks easily accessible, it becomes easy to lead a split life. Outwardly you live and work in U.S. society; inwardly, you become able to disassociate yourself from an alienating community in which you live and to connect at least emotionally to an imagined homeland. Identifying one's self as Hindu, argues Arvind Rajagopal, makes it easier for some to be American.[30]

In August 1993, the VHP of America held its Global Vision 2000 convention in Washington, D.C. It attracted predominantly upper-middle class Americans of South Asian ancestry and featured a variety of speakers, many of whom were BJP activists who declared that December 6, 1992, would someday be inscribed in Indian history in "letters of gold." As BJP demagogue Uma Bharati exhorted the crowd to chant "Kaho garv se: Hum Hindu hain!" (Speak with pride: We are Hindus!), more than 3,000 attendees joined her chorus.[31] Among those at the gathering was Kumar Barve, a state legislator from Maryland. As one of the first Americans of South Asian ancestry to hold a political office in the United States, his presence could be seen as suggestive of a model of what a successful Indian guided by the VHP's vision of Hindutva might achieve.[32]

Non-resident Indians

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[30] Arvind Rajagopal, "An Unholy Nexus: Expatriate Anxiety and Hindu Extremism," *Frontline*, Sept. 10, 1993.

[31] Arvind Rajagopal, "Transnational Networks and Hindu Nationalism," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol. 29: No. 3 (1997), p. 45. Also see Rajagopal, 1993.

[32] See Krishna Kumar, "Behind the VHP of America: Responding to the Challenge," *Frontline*, Sept. 10, 1993.

A 1988 report in *The Hindustan Times*, one of India's largest English-language newspapers, quotes the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi as saying that overseas Indians "should not be considered as a brain drain but as a bank on which the country could draw from time to time."[33] This idea fits well with an argument that developing nations, such as India, often encourage citizens to migrate – to become diasporic, so to speak – in order to seek better economic opportunities and to fill their home country's coffers with foreign cash. Gandhi's remark also illustrates how the territorialized "nation-state" of India ultimately may have helped facilitate the process by which a global Hindu nation was developed through the government's subtle staking of a claim on Indians abroad.

As globalization produces a transnational work force, overseas remittances increasingly provide significant revenue for developing nations. Myron Weiner, for instance, notes that such remittances totaled $65.5 billion worldwide in 1989, compared with $40 billion five years earlier. This money even exceeds the $51 billion in development aid such nations received in 1988.[34] The Indian government, as Rajiv Gandhi's comment indicates, has been well aware of this cash potential, and, beginning in the early 1970s, consciously attempted to increase such remittances, particularly from Indians who had emigrated to the West. In doing so, the government manipulated concepts of identity-formation and community building linked to the emotional tie of individual to "nation" to essentially create a community of South Asians in this group's diaspora. I would suggest that this helped facilitate the Sangh Parivar's efforts to cultivate this group a decade later. In an interesting analysis of this development, Rajagopal notes that the Indian government staked a claim on Indians abroad through use of the term "NRI" – non-resident Indian.[35] This was done, he argues, not only to tap their checking accounts but also to create a model for those who didn't leave India of what a successful "Indian" might achieve. As he explains, "the education and affluence of the NRIs, coupled with their (alleged) sense of identity as Indians, makes them the apotheosis of the Indian middle class. They exemplify what 'Indians' *could* achieve if they were not hobbled by an underdeveloped society and an inefficient government."[36]

Identities – individual or otherwise – typically are established by defining yourself in relation to an "other." This ability to establish an "us" in relation to a "them" constitutes an act of power in that you generally cast yourself as superior to that "other." As a construct, NRI conveys a variety

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[33] Myron Weiner, *The Global Migration Crisis: Challenge to States and Human Rights*, (New York: HarperCollins College Publishers, 1995), 110.

[34] ibid, 38

[35] Rajagopal, 1997, 49.

[36] ibid.

of meanings: It negatively designates an Indian who leaves India as a "non-resident," similar to the half-being ascribed to diasporic Jews, while simultaneously crafting an identity for that Indian as "ideal," "successful," a model for the "others" in India to follow. The Indian government's use of "non-resident Indian" carries a significant association with economic affluence. While "non-resident Indian" technically can mean anyone with a genealogical link to India, the term NRI, in reality, has come to apply primarily to South Asians living in the West, particularly the United States – a group that earns an annual per capita income that not only far outstrips the earnings of its counterpart in India but also exceeds the average of other Americans in general. Members of this group, as noted, tend to come from an upper-caste, Hindu background and, again like their counterparts in India, typically define themselves as "not Muslim." Rajagopal, citing economist Ashok Mitra, notes that remittances from overseas Indians in the Persian Gulf states might increase substantially if the Indian government offered these non-resident Indians, who typically are Muslim and temporary migrant workers intending to return to India, the same investment incentives aimed at their American counterparts. Class and race biases, Rajagopal argues, have stopped the government from taking such a position.[37]

While creating an NRI community establishes a disjunctive yet idealized Hindu "other" for India, the construct also conveys a distinctive meaning for Indians in the United States. It lets them establish a positive identity for themselves as "not white," "not entirely American" while continuing a practice of distancing themselves from Muslims, a group that many have argued is vilified by the U.S. governmental and media elite to further the nation's globalized military and economic interests. In order to understand the potency of these identifying traits among the affluent diasporic Indians who affiliate themselves with Hindu nationalism, it helps to look briefly at the "types" of South Asians who emigrated to the United States after immigration restrictions against Asians were eased in 1965.

This group of Indians generally was a privileged lot. The U.S. economy at the time was undergoing a transformation from hard manufacturing to more high-tech and service sectors, and in the post World War II weapons' race against the former Soviet Union, was developing its military industry. A demand for doctors, engineers and scientists, as a result, was high. Much of the labor need for this new kind of work force came from recently-decolonized countries such as India, where caste and class hierarchies had ensured that a pool of young, well-educated professionals could be cultivated despite the fact that more than two centuries of British rule had weakened these new nation-states too greatly to create the jobs these professionals needed. So, a labor hungry United States beckoned. As Surinder M. Bhardwaj and N. Madhusudana Rao write:

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[37] ibid, 50.

The broad spectrum transformation of the American economy generated a powerful pull on the technological cultures of the developing world, India included. It helped skim, some allege drain, some of the most resourceful young professionals from India.[38]

Bhardwaj and Rao go on to note that these immigrants generally settled into the United States quite easily in an economic sense, earning advanced technical degrees from elite universities and landing jobs either at those universities or with major engineering, defense and high-tech corporations. Like many of their white American middle-class counterparts, they took advantage of cheap land in burgeoning suburban neighborhoods and the availability of low-interest mortgage loans to buy their own homes, something that generally wouldn't have been possible in India. Though most retained some tie with families and friends in India, few saw a pressing need to establish a sense of community with other South Asians in the United States. They had come to the United States speaking English fluently, and because they had come from a multiplicity of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, they often saw themselves not as "Indian" but more as Punjabi, Gujarati, Bengali, Tamil, etc. Unlike other Asian groups, Bhardwaj and Rao argue, South Asians tended not to settle into distinct ethnic neighborhoods but went instead to where jobs and economic opportunities took them. When an "Asian Indian" census category was proposed in the 1970s and early 1980s, many of these immigrants initially resisted that designation. Racially, they saw themselves as "Caucasian."[39]

Though sensitive, the connection of Caucasian to American is significant. As many scholars have shown, U.S. national identity has been crafted through historical texts, literature and other sources as being essentially white and genealogically tied to Europe. Caste-conscious Hindus from north India often describe themselves as being of an Aryan race. Their affiliation with that designation allowed this group to construct a place for themselves in the United States' post-World War II racial hierarchy, aligning themselves not with "blacks" whom they considered subordinate, but more closely with "whites" whose racial identity fit into their own consciousness of genealogy. U.S. immigration policies reinforced this consciousness. Because the United States' interest in loosening its immigration laws lay primarily in a desire to attract a highly

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[38] Surinder M. Bhardwaj and N. Madhusudana Rao, "Asian Indians in the United States: A Geographic Appraisal," *South Asians Overseas*, Colin Clarke, Ceri Peach, Steven Vertovec, eds., (Cambridge, Great Britain: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 199-200.

[39] See Ron Takaki, *Indians in the West: South Asians in America*, (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1995) and Maxine Fisher, *The Indians of New York City: A Study of Immigrants from India* (New Delhi: Heritage Publishers, 1980), 117-118.

trained, well educated labor pool, the policies contained built-in restrictions that made it possible for only the most talented professionals to enter the United States. As Rajagopal notes, "Indian immigrants in the United States today possess the archetypal immigrant virtues of hard work, thrift and material success."[40]

Yet, as most "melting pot" myths associated with non-white immigration show, Indians could not become "American" as long as "American" was perceived as being white. Even if Indians saw themselves as "Aryan" or "Caucasian," they were cast in the United States as "Indian," brown-skinned Indian. In a spirit of celebrating diversity and praising multiculturalism, they are allowed to affiliate economically. Socially, they remain outsiders. The memory of Falguni Trivedi, a college student in Houston, illustrates the isolation that results from this experience: "When I was 12 years old, American kids would gang up at the bus stop, yelling 'Gandhi dot! Gandhi dot!' to make fun of my bindi and ask 'Why do people in India worship cows and drink cow urine?' until I cried."[41] Such recollections are common, as anyone who is an Indian, born in the United States to parents who were among those economically comfortable, purportedly easily assimilating immigrants would attest. "We" heard it too when "we" were young, and remembering it today, it can't help but hit a raw emotional nerve. Such experiences, coupled with a slowdown in the demand for technical and service workers, led more Indians to embrace the idea of being classified Asian Indian, or as Indian-American, by the early 1980s.[42] The willingness to be regarded as an ethnic minority in the United States significantly coincides with the formation of the BJP in India in 1981, and as will be discussed later, the VHP's move from a primarily cultural organization dedicated to fostering a worldwide community of Hindus toward a more militantly politicized stance.

Given their blend of economic comfort with social isolation, Indians in the United States present an intriguing dichotomy that the Indian government has exploited. Through the process of developing an economic relationship between "home land" and "diaspora," the Indian government offers overseas South Asians a remedy for their cultural loneliness. Its many NRI programs let these Indians deposit money in special accounts in banks in India that are exempt from wealth and income taxes. NRIs also are encouraged to invest in business partnerships in India, and are offered certain breaks on buying property. Much of the promotional literature circulated to NRIs encourages this investment as a sort of down payment on the revitalization of a glorious civilization dating back thousands of years. One NRI guide, for instance, urges Indians who have "made good fortunes" overseas to share their wealth by contributing to that resurgence:

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[40] Rajagopal, 1997, 48

[41] "Searching for Our Roots," *Hinduism Today* (October 1997), 28.

[42] Fisher, 1980, 117-133.

"Even as (NRIs) are eager to contribute to the development of the mother country, the country also wants to and can utilise their vast resources, finance and technology . . . .We are proud of them and they should be proud of us as well."[43] India, notes Rajagopal, offers an opportunity to "belong" in exchange for much-needed money from abroad.

Non-resident Hindus

Just as the Indian government is sensitive to the benefits of establishing a strong overseas community of supporters, Hindu nationalists long have seen such a network as a primary wellspring for support. Unlike the economic schemes that the government supports, however, this movement's tactics are, in some ways, more subtly aimed at establishment of a personal, emotional tie between diaspora and homeland that ultimately serves a political end. While the BJP cultivates support through such organizations as the Overseas Friends of BJP and the Hindu Student Council (a youth group that operates on more than fifty campuses in the United States), it has been the VHP – the "cultural" arm of Hindutva – that has most effectively tapped Hindus within the NRI community.

Before discussing groups such as the VHP in America, I want to review the various ideas of community discussed so far. As Benedict Anderson shows through his concept of "imagined community," people identify themselves as belonging to a particular community through a shared experience of reading books, newspapers and other mass media. With a globalization of media, this shared experience can form a community that transcends geographic boundaries. In a multicultural society such as the United States, "ethnic" newspapers such as *India Abroad* and *India West* allow South Asians to establish a sense of belonging to a worldwide community even as they live in a predominantly-white society that racially – but not always economically – excludes them. The Indian government's encouragement of NRI investment establishes another view of a globalized community based on an economic relationship between "homeland" and "diaspora." A third manner in which a global community forms is through a cultural relationship, which is where the VHP comes into play. It would be inaccurate to assert that the Indian government's pursuit of NRIs is the same as the VHP's cultivation of Hindus. However, I would suggest as a further area of study that the establishment of a community of non-resident Indians has helped facilitate the formation of a non-resident Hindu community within a broader, ethnically and religiously diverse Indian group.

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[43] Rajagopal, 1997, 49.

As Manini Chatterjee notes, the VHP devoted much of its first decade of existence to opening branches outside India.[44] It opened its first U.S. branch in 1969 and a convention took place the following year in Canton, Ohio. The organization – known in the United States as VHP of America – currently has branches in 13 states. While its official membership in the United States is about 2,000, the organization claims to have contacts with about 10,000 families.[45] The VHP's initial outreach to overseas Indians can be placed in the context of politics in a newly independent India. Although the Hindu nationalist movement's origins are rooted in the anti-British independence movement of that late 19th and early 20th centuries, the idea of a Hindu state received little public support in the early years of independent India largely because of first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's secularist ideals and the 1948 assassination of Mahatma Gandhi by Nathuram Godse, a former member of the RSS. Lacking respectability at home, groups such as the VHP turned to a growing diasporic community, advertising themselves as organizations that could help alienated Indians maintain a tie to a "lost" community.

This message resonates particularly strongly among diasporic Hindus who resemble the BJP's primary supporters in India in terms of economic class and social caste. For many of those Indians, particularly those in the United States, participation in religious activities offers a means to express a sense of distinctiveness without being forced to confront the racial or ethnic marginalization that life in U.S. society – historically constructed as being white – forces on any group that cannot adhere to this norm. It suggests, as Julia Kristeva has argued, that a sense of being a stranger or a foreigner only disappears when one is united spiritually and bodily in citizenship with a cultural homeland that reflects one's heritage and roots.[46]

Like other cultural groups, the VHP fills this cultural need in the United States by hosting youth camps and children's educational programs and by sponsoring community celebrations of Hindu festivals. It gives lectures, sponsors workshops and encourages its NRI community to support a range of social service projects in India. It also provides family counseling that offers what Rajagopal describes as a "Hindu outlook on life" and generally styles itself as a means by which disenfranchised, alienated Hindus can reconnect with their mother country and their culture. A fear that children might forget their heritage through successive generations drives much of the interest in such groups, as does a concern that India is becoming too capitalistic, too much like the rest of the world

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[44] Manini Chatterjee, "Saffron Scourge: The VHP's Communal Fascism," *Frontline* (Sept. 10, 1993).

[45] Rajagopal, 1997, 48.

[46] See Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

and increasingly does not resemble the "India" of immigrants' imagined pasts. One VHP center in Atlanta encourages parents to involve their children in the organization by noting that "Indian youngsters in America not only do not have the opportunity to 'breathe in the values of Hindu life' from a dominant Hindu culture, but also are exposed to cultural value systems 'not congenial to the Hindu way of life.' " This center runs a Bal Vihar, or children's Sunday program, that teaches yoga exercises, scripture, Indian history and such stories as *The Ramayana*.[47]   Similar organizations in other cities set up sessions for reading the Gita or discussing Hindu culture.[48]

The VHP promotes an idea of India as a holy land, and encourages Jains, Buddhists, Sikhs and other "spin-offs" from Hinduism to join their world community, a "parishad" that unites all those who identify themselves as "Hindu," regardless of the multiplicity of definitions encompassed under the umbrella of Hinduism.   It does occasionally contend that Muslims, 132 million of who live in India, do not belong in this Hindu community. VHP, USA president Yash Pal Lakra, for instance, claimed in a recent *Hinduism Today* column titled "Let Us Call Ourselves 'Hindu Americans' " that while all people of Indian origin can stake a claim to Hinduness, Muslims cannot because "their Muslim identity to them is more important than their Indian identity."[49]   Aside from such occasional slams, however, the VHP seems to rarely issue any official statement that would indicate it is interested in channeling its mission of "cultural" unity into a fight for political Hindu nationalistic unity that would encourage violence against Muslims. Even though it dedicates its web page to the "Martyrs of Ayodhya," the rest of the page and its corresponding links focus primarily on providing information about temples it supports in the United States, welfare projects it backs in slums and villages in India and its "Speak Sanskrit camps" in which young Hindus are encouraged to discover the "key to a priceless heritage" through an "easy" and "enjoyable" 10-day program.[50]

While such activities might seem harmlessly cultural and of social benefit, it is almost impossible not to see that they can have political

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[47] John Fenton, *Transplanting Religious Traditions: Asian Indians in America*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1988), 127.

[48] See Prema Kurien, "Becoming American by Becoming Hindu: Indian Americans Take Their Place at the Multicultural Table," *Gatherings in Diaspora: Religious Communities and the New Immigration*. R. Stephen Warner and Judith G. Wittner, eds. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 37-70. Kurien particularly argues that such culturally oriented organizations help build a community that potentially would be receptive to a call for a "Hindu India."

[49] Yash Pal Lakra, "Let Us Call Ourselves 'Hindu Americans,' " *Hinduism Today* (October 1997), 9.

[50] From www.vhp.org/vhp 1997.

overtones. Savarkar's writings, for instance, promoted Sanskrit as the "true" language of Hindus, so when VHP literature suggests that "India once led the world to glory through Sanskrit," and that "It is time to create history again,"[51] the very act of sponsoring a Sanskrit camp can be seen as a nationalistic move. Indeed, it is through such programs that a version of Hinduism as the "proper" religion for those who consider themselves "Indian" subtly is purveyed. In Atlanta, for instance, one supporter described the VHP's work as one of emphasizing unity: in his words, a Hindu community cannot survive unless it is strong.[52]

By the early 1980s, the establishment of such an international base began to be seen as having potential to support a Hindu nationalist resurgence in Indian politics. About this time, the VHP shifted its focus from promoting cultural unity among Indians overseas to magnifying the Ayodhya issue in India. While some scholars argue that this change represents a significant shift in direction for the VHP, the transition is quite logical when the cultural overtones of the political stance it took are examined and when it is remembered that one's cultural identity typically involves a relationship with a territorialized space that is culturally identified as being inextricable from one's community and one's sense of self. At the same time, the VHP, as noted, describes itself as a "cultural" organization dedicated to promoting unity among Hindus worldwide. The success of such a mission relies heavily on the ability to find a common symbol or thread that can bring a diasporic community together. The VHP chose Ayodhya, a place that has the mythological connotation of being the birthplace of Ram.

A rumor that Mughal emperor Babur tore down a temple dedicated to the hero-god Ram to build a Muslim mosque dates to the mid-19th century and received a momentary flare-up of attention in 1949 when an idol representing Ram surreptitiously was placed in the complex, resulting in a governmental decision to lock the mosque's gates to prevent an outbreak of Hindu-Muslim violence. Despite this, the issue was a relatively minor, localized skirmish until the early 1980s. By 1989, it had become an emotionally charged symbol worldwide of a supposedly hostile and irrevocably divided relationship between Hindus and Muslims. Much of this transformation can be attributed to the VHP.

The organization launched a Sacrifice for Unity in 1983 in which pilgrimages across India were organized. This was followed by a 1984 procession to Ayodhya in which the VHP demanded that the gates surrounding the mosque be unlocked so Hindus could worship "their" god, Ram. Pressure to open the gates intensified and in 1986, a court ruling responded in the VHP's favor. Former prime minister Rajiv Gandhi, in an effort to cultivate Hindu votes, later hailed the court's

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[51] ibid.

[52] Fenton, 1988, 124

decision, and even kicked off his 1989 election campaign with a rally in Ayodhya. Beginning in 1987, the VHP issued a worldwide plea for Hindus to donate bricks for a new temple to be built in Ayodhya, dedicated to Ram, and pledged alliance with the BJP – whose political clout had grown in tandem with the swelling outpouring of support for the VHP's Ayodhya campaign. BJP president L.K. Advani launched a famous Ram yatra nationalistic trek to Ayodhya in 1990. When police arrested him and fired on the procession for entering the mosque compound illegally, the VHP circulated video tapes and audio cassettes glorifying the same "martyrs of Ayodhya" to whom they dedicate their web page.[53] After the Babri Masjid was destroyed, VHP secretary-general Ashok Singhal was among the key Hindu leaders arrested for inciting the crowd to violence.

In her study of the religious links to Hindu nationalist politics, Lise McKean describes meeting Singhal at his office in New Delhi in 1987 and hearing him talk about building a temple to Ram. She recalls: "While meeting Singhal and his associates alerted me to the formidable determination of the VHP's leadership, later events disclosed the ruthlessness of its political will."[54] Five years later, the mosque was destroyed, and once again, key leaders of the pro-Hindu movement were arrested. But the process, once begun, could not easily be turned back.

Just as this process builds in India, it grows overseas with a Hindu diaspora well established through two decades of effort. Although estimates of the movement's size remain rough and its efforts continue to be scattered, awareness of its influence grows. In 1995, the Federation of Hindu Associations was established in Southern California to pursue "Hindu political interests," as sociologist Prema Kurien notes. Describing the events of December 6, 1992, as "energizing," this group of upper-caste businessmen in Artesia, California, has come to be a visible presence at virtually every Hindu function in Southern California. The group promotes Hindu nationalism by sponsoring visits of BJP leaders to Southern California and frequently pushes a Hindutva agenda in speeches delivered at cultural functions. In a community where an unofficial "Little Bombay" has taken root, leaders of this group use weekly newspapers that cater to area South Asians to circulate their views.[55]

Communities of Believers

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[53] McKean, 1996, 318.

[54] ibid, 316.

[55] Kurien, 1998, 64-65 and Kurien, 1997, 7. Evidence of the Federation of Hindu Association's influential presence in Southern California also can be seen routinely in advertisements, articles and other notices that run in such community newspapers as *India West*.

While Hindu nationalists undoubtedly are pushing a political agenda that threatens the religious rights of countless minorities, particularly India's 132 million Muslims, it is important not to overlook the role that religion plays in attracting support for this nation, particularly among diasporic Indians. Overseas South Asians who support the Hindu nationalist movement often do so not because they wish to repudiate the ideal of a secular state but more because they see the Sangh Parivar as a means of helping them protect a deeply-ingrained sense of spiritual identity that the fast-paced, consumerist-oriented mindset of a global world threatens to assimilate out of existence. Building on Eric Hobsbawm's idea of "protonational feelings of collective belonging," Peter van der Veer decenters much of the political rhetoric that has defined the BJP's rising popularity by suggesting that religious nationalism grows at least partly from a previous idea of religious community. Writing off religion as a "smokescreen" or "political trick," he suggests, overlooks the importance it plays in constructing identity:

> If we want to penetrate the very real passions and violence evoked by the temple-mosque controversy, we must understand how this controversy is related to fundamental orienting conceptions of the world and personhood. This implies that we have to analyze not only the ideologies that produce these conceptions but also the historical context in which they are produced.[56]

Van der Veer limits the scope of his study to the rise of religious nationalism within India, but his argument can be extended to the Hindu diaspora, where fostering a sense of identity and communal belonging is particularly critical for many individuals, particularly those who, like upper- and middle-class Hindus living in the United States, are economically secure but, often, socially alienated. With few cultural reminders of a homeland in an overseas community, ritual becomes a form of communication through which a person defines a self and an other. The urgency of that communication often grows as immigrants abandon a dream of returning to India and turn to passing on cultural values to their children, as religious studies scholar Martin Baumann has shown.[57] When individuals engage in a form of religious ritual, they are, quietly, affiliating themselves with a like-minded community of "believers" that, in the process of defining themselves, subjugates the "other" through a form of symbolic violence, as van der Veer describes it. One's religion tends to be private and highly personal, which may make the beliefs that religious practice instills a particularly powerful reason why individuals can be

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[56] van der Veer, 1994, 8.

[57] Martin Baumann, "Conceptualizing Diaspora: the Preservation of Religious Identity in Foreign Parts, Exemplified by Hindu Communities Outside India," *Tenemos* 31 (1995): 19-35.

convinced by a Hindu nationalist message that the sacrality of their homeland is under threat.

When overseas South Asians leave a lamp burning in their homes all night on Diwali as a means of symbolically guiding Ram "home," this act also illuminates a linkage between their individual identity to the idyllic kingdom of *The Ramayana*. By performing this ritual, diasporic Indians not only are connecting with other Indians but also are overtly defining themselves as a distinct community autonomous from the dominant society in which they live. It is not unusual, for instance, for Indians in the United States to decorate their homes on Diwali with Christmas lights and to line their driveways and walkways with candle-lit bags of sand, and it is not uncommon for a house belonging to an Indian family to be the only one in the neighborhood to be decorated in this way.[58] Celebrating the festival in such a way allows you to put up a "fight" against the forces threatening a cosmic harmony. This then gives rise to an idea that your identity with a community of true believers only can be established when those forces are overcome. As a result, van der Veer explains:

> What seems to happen in religious nationalism is that ideological movements give a new interpretation to the cosmological understandings communicated in religious ritual. The nation is presented as an extension of the self and nationalism as part of religion, dealing with the shame and honor, the illness and death, of the person.[59]

The process of establishing a nation-state involves subsuming a wide array of personalized qualities, such as race, religion and ethnicity, into the defining characteristics of a territorial entity, homogenizing these qualities in the process. As Benedict Anderson shows in *Imagined Communities*, the nation-state took root through the development of print media – and in this sense is a product of modernity. Van der Veer, among others, complicates this argument by suggesting that shared experiences in particular religious, spiritual and cultural practices forged creations of similar "imagined" communities prior to the advent of modernity. In this sense, the unifying force was not necessarily the printed word as much as a sense of familiarity that would result from repeated performances of a deeply personal cultural practice.[60] Van der Veer scrupulously avoids

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[58] While Diwali is celebrated predominantly by Hindus, it is not celebrated solely by Hindus. Sikhs, Jains, Christians and Muslims actively partake in Diwali celebrations that occur throughout South Asia and in diasporic South Asian communities, much as non-Christians throughout the world observe Christmas.

[59] Van der Veer, 1994, 83.

[60] See also Sandria Freitag, *Collective Action and Community: Public Arenas and the Emergence of Communalism in North India* (Berkeley: University of California

using the word "traditional." He argues that linking nationalism solely to modernity would imply that religious violence will disappear once India becomes truly "modern." Incorrectly seeing such outbreaks of violence as the Babri Masjid's destruction as "ancient" or "primordial" refutes the possibility that they might be as products of modernity in and of themselves and eliminates the ability to interconnect these events to what Appadurai has described as a deterritorialization of the idea of state.

While van der Veer's argument is persuasive, the importance that a globalization of media has played in establishing a "world" community of Hindus cannot be overlooked. As religion and ritual communication forged a sense of community in pre-modern societies through a shared experience, certain practices came to be defined as a standard way of doing this. Walter J. Ong has shown how this standardization took place in societies defined by orality as does van der Veer's own analysis of pre-colonial religious communities in India.[61] With globalization, the standardization takes place at a much more rapid pace. Ideas such as "Hindu" and "Hinduism," which typically have been seen as umbrellas under which hundreds of varying definitions interact, become more standardized and homogenous in the process. In his eyes, a key difference between the pre-colonial era and contemporary times is the pace at which this standardization has taken place.

The transformation that the image of Ram has undergone illustrates this homogenizing process particularly well. It can be argued that *The Ramayana* has evolved into a central religious text for overseas Hindus, partly because the story line is relatively simple and that, as Bhikhu Parekh suggests, the tale of exile embodied in the epic resonates with the experiences of Hindu migrants. Among indentured laborers brought by British colonialists to such communities as Fiji, Trinidad, South Africa, Surinam and Guyana, the practice of telling stories from *The Ramayana* was immensely popular – a tradition that I would argue continues even more intensely among more recent and more affluent immigrants, such as those living in the United States.[62] Like any traditional tale, of course, *The Ramayana* has been told and re-told differently depending on locale and the context in which the story is being conveyed. As Romila Thapar has pointed out, there are Buddhist, Jain and Muslim versions, not to mention hundreds of variants on a so-called Hindu version.[63] With a rise of

Press, 1989), and Gyanendra Pandey, *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[61] Walter J. Ong, *Orality & Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, (London: Routledge, 1988).

[62] Bhikhu Parekh, "Some Reflections on the Hindu Diaspora," *new community*, 20:4 (July 1994), 603-620.

[63] Romila Thapar, "A Historical Perspective on the Story of Rama," *Anatomy of a Confrontation: Ayodhya and the Rise of Communal Politics in India*, Sarvepalli Gopal, ed., (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1990, repr. 1993), 141-163.

globalized mass media, the story has taken on an increasingly standardized form. In 1987, India's national television station, Doordarshan, launched a teleserial of *The Ramayana* that attempted to cast this epic as a singular representation of India's great stories. As Uma Charkravarti and many other scholars have shown, telecasting the show to hundreds of millions of viewers on a publicly-owned television station "privileged a single strand of India's vast and varied cultural traditions and thereby contributed to the belief that it was this strand that was the authentic culture of the past."[64] With such a level of credibility established by the Indian government – purportedly a protector of all of the nation's interests – it was not difficult for the BJP to use the epic's popularity among a diverse array of Indians as a means of channeling an anti-Muslim stance into a political position. As much of their printed political media repeatedly states, a rebirth of Ram represents a rebirth of India – a Hindu India.

Just as ritual establishes a link to a religious community, so does an act of pilgrimage. In the 1980s, growing numbers of middle-class Hindus began to make pilgrimages to special temples. Both state and national governments encouraged this development by promoting pilgrimage as a tourism-oriented, vacation experience. Both national and state governments embarked on an effort to upgrade generally poor lodging and meal facilities so that they would be more amenable to middle-class Indians. Ayodhya was one of the cities targeted for such improvements. These tourism campaigns have been extremely successful both at promoting tourism among Indians and at strengthening a sense of Hinduness. As van der Veer observes, sacred centers provide a focus for religious identity. When you make a journey to one of these centers, you make a discovery about yourself about your relation to a "community" of believers.

What makes this campaign particularly interesting is the emphasis placed on Ayodhya. On Dec. 31, 1992, two weeks after the Babri Masjid was destroyed, *India Today*, a news magazine that circulates widely among middle-class, upper-caste Indians throughout the world, ran an extensive package of story's about the tragedy. The package took up nearly 50 pages of the magazine, and included a half dozen stories as well as numerous photographs and on-the-scene accounts. Buried in the middle of this package was an advertisement placed by a tourism authority of the government of Uttar Pradesh, the state in which Ayodhya is located. The ad made use of a variety of Hindu emblems to promote pilgrimage as a relaxing, emotionally recharging holiday experience. It focused primarily on Ayodhya, described as "all-resplendent," "powerful" and glorious. Its opening words evoked a well-known symbol: Ram. In the ad, as Ram neared the boundaries of Ayodhya with his brother Laxman he said, " 'Let us rest awhile.' "

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[64] Uma Chakravarti, "Saffroning the Past: Of Myths, Histories and Right-Wing Agenda," *Economic & Political Weekly*, (Jan. 31, 1998), 225.

By turning Ayodhya into a tourist destination, Hindus are encouraged to visit the city and relax. Letting these visitors know that this is a place where Ram rested gives them a connection to an India of their imaginations. Indians worldwide who have spent years, if not generations, leaving their lights on in their homes on Diwali, illuminating a pathway for Ram, now connect with him more concretely through devotional trips to the land of his birth. In a way, as the ad suggests, the journey is complete: Hindus, alienated from their homeland through the forces of migration, can now find their way home.

Remaking Relations: Placemaking Among Sinhalese Buddhists in North America

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In February 1998, Sri Lanka celebrated its 50th anniversary of independence from Britain. Just days before official celebrations, a bomb attack damaged the country's most sacred Buddhist temple, the *Dalada Maligawa,* or Temple of the Tooth, in Kandy. Since 1983, Sri Lankans have endured a violent civil war between separatist groups representing a Tamil-speaking minority, most of whom are Hindu, and the Sinhalese majority, who are mostly Buddhists. Although the conflict is rooted in economic, political, and social inequalities stemming from colonialism, it has been fueled by religious and ethnic intolerance. For many Sinhalese Buddhists, the separatists' demand for an independent state of Tamil Eelam represents an interrelated threat to their national identity, the territorial integrity of their island, and their sense of religious duty.[1]

For Sinhalese Buddhists living abroad, the bombing of the *Dalada Maligawa* was a bitter reminder of their country's failure to establish a unified nation fifty years after Independence. It also highlighted the difficult task of harmonizing their own conflicting values. One Sinhalese woman, an active expatriate and practicing Buddhist, explained the situation in Sri Lanka like this: "It's a small country," she said, sighing. "It can't be divided. It's just too small, you know?" Shifting her feet and looking back into the room where we had been meditating together, she then said "I'm not attached to any country. Wherever I am living, that is my country." She reminded me of the Buddha's teaching that we should avoid becoming attached to things, and that words like 'my' lead to problems. Her comments suggest that being a Sinhalese Buddhist in North America is an experience in contradictions, conflicts, and alternative values.

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[1] According to the *Mahavamsa* or Great Chronicle, an ancient Pali text composed by Buddhist monks in the 6th century AD, the Sinhalese people were chosen by the Buddha to protect his *Dhamma* (teachings) and Sri Lanka was declared the *Dhammadvipa,* or land of the doctrine. As a result of the popularization of this chronicle in the modern era, there has been within Sinhalese Buddhism a "fusing of national identity, territorial integrity, and religious duty." Liyanage, Priyath, "Popular Buddhism, Politics and the Ethnic Problem," in "Demanding Sacrifice: War and Negotiation in Sri Lanka," *Accord* (London: Conciliation Resources Lancaster House, 1998): 1.

In my research among Sinhalese Buddhists in Washington, D.C., I am finding that a *vihara*, a Sinhalese Buddhist temple, offers opportunities to express alternative values and negotiate social relationships. Through their participation at the Washington Buddhist Vihara and related sites, Sinhalese Buddhists are negotiating relations between monks and laypeople, between Sinhalese and American Buddhists, and between Sinhalese and other Buddhist immigrants. In this paper, I demonstrate how Sinhalese Buddhists have used the Vihara to negotiate each of these relationships. For each relationship, I describe the historical and social context in which negotiations are taking place, examine the alternative values underlying various groups' placemaking activities, and discuss factors influencing the effectiveness of certain placemaking strategies. My research suggests that it is the ambiguity of a place like the Vihara, with its diverse congregation, and its complex histories and geographies that makes these negotiations possible. The outcome of such negotiations is dependent on many factors though, including the degree to which underlying values resonate among participants, the opportunities for change within existing power structures, and the persistence of ideological constraints.

'Place' and 'Placemaking'

I approach this project from the theoretical perspective that a 'place' is a cultural construction, that people endow places with meanings in ways that are multiple, shifting, and highly contextual. According to Gupta and Ferguson, our common sense notion of a 'place,' as inherently and unproblematically linked to a group of people, naturalizes social relations which are in fact the result of complex cultural processes.[2] Studies in the field of cultural geography demonstrate that people define and use places in socially purposeful, though not necessarily intentional, ways.[3] I refer to this process as 'placemaking.'

Scholars concerned with such diverse topics as diaspora, postcoloniality, and nationalism have likewise challenged the notion that social relations are the product of an underlying spatial order, suggesting instead that relationships are, in part, the product of placemaking activities. Clifford characterizes 'diaspora' as a strategic claim to a history and homeland for the purpose of identifying with other members of a displaced group. Members of a diasporic community, he contends, are linked not by

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[2]Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson, "Beyond 'Culture:' Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference," *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (1992): 6–23.

[3]Jackson, Peter, *Maps of Meaning: An Introduction to Cultural Geography* (New York: Routledge, 1989); Pred, Allan, *Making Histories and Constructing Human Geographies: The Local Transformation of Practice, Power Relations, and Consciousness* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990); Cosgrove, Denis and Stephen Daniels, *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic Representation, Design, and Use of Past Environments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

cultural and historical ties to a distant place, but by their use of these ties to differentiate themselves from members of the host country.[4] Similarly, Frankenberg and Mani argue that the term 'postcolonial' represents a claim to a particular historically and geographically constituted social relationship. For both colonizers and colonized, the link to a postcolonial place is not predictable or transparent, because it intersects a constantly shifting matrix of race, gender, and class relations.[5] Studies in nationalism suggest that placemaking is an effective tool for contesting, as well as making, claims to a place. Spencer describes how Sinhalese nationalists restored ancient features of the Sri Lankan landscape to counter Tamil claims that they historically occupied parts of the island.[6] These scholars suggest that a sense of 'community' lies not in the fact that members are inherently linked to a common place, but by the fact that they share at least one interpretation, or reading, of place that makes symbolic and rhetorical sense to them.[7] Typically, members of a community share a range of possible interpretations reflecting their range of alternative values.

As people endow places with new meanings, places themselves become the content and context for new narratives that express diverse, and sometimes contradictory, values. In this way, people and places mutually influence one another. In the context of diasporic communities, placemaking may play an especially critical role in negotiating changing values and relationships. Narayan has shown how Hindus from southern India transformed, and were simultaneously influenced by, their location in western Pennsylvania. To accommodate the demands of living in the United States, they scheduled religious events on Sundays and added ecumenical outreach programs to their services. However, by building their American temple in the likeness of its parent temple in southern India, and then declaring this property "land where karma is in effect," these Hindus created a place, geographically distant from their homeland, which nevertheless reflects shared values. Their placemaking activities provide an ideological framework for interpreting and negotiating relations with Hindus remaining in India.[8]

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[4]Clifford, James, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9 no. 3 (1994): 302–338.

[5]Frankenberg, Ruth and Lata Mani, "Crosscurrents, Crosstalk: Race, 'Postcoloniality' and the Politics of Location," *Cultural Studies* (1993): 292–310.

[6]Spencer, Jonathan, "Writing Within: Anthropology, Nationalism, and Culture in Sri Lanka," *Current Anthropology* 31 no. 3 (1990): 286–287.

[7]James Duncan also makes this argument in *The City as Text: The Politics of Landscape Interpretation in the Kandyan Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[8]Narayan, Vasudha, "Creating South Indian "Hindu" Experience in the United States," *A Sacred Thread: Modern Transmission of Hindu Traditions in India an Abroad* ed. Raymond Brady Williams (Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books, 1992): 147–

Given the interlinked nature of the modern transnational world, even the most localized placemaking activities necessarily articulate with global events and ideologies. Appadurai argues that under current conditions, cultural forms are not only interrelated, but "fractal" and "overlapping."[9] In order to grasp the complex and reciprocal relationships between people and places, he proposes we consider local activities within a context of fluid 'scapes'—political, social, and economic contexts. Disjunctures between these contexts provide opportunities for people to negotiate social relations on both local and global scales.[10] Several factors suggest that for Sinhalese Buddhists living in North America, a *vihara* may be a particularly productive place for remaking relations.

Methodological Approach

As an anthropologist, I approached this project with a holistic perspective and concern for grounding theoretical ideas in social context. Ethnography, the central tool of my research, combines long-term participation with interviews and observation in order to grasp the values that inform people's lives, including their placemaking decisions. In preparation for this project, I conducted two years of exploratory research at the Washington Buddhist Vihara to establish a rapport among participants. In 1997, I began working with a language tutor to develop conversational competence in Sinhala, the language spoken in informal conversation among some Sinhalese Buddhists at the Vihara. The bulk of my research data was collected between May 1997 and December 1998.

During the course of this study, I participated in the Vihara's weekly meditation sessions and bi-weekly Buddhist studies classes; attended weekly devotional services; observed Sunday School classes; and took part in ceremonies, including the annual Vesak and Kathina ceremonies, various blessing and memorial services, and special offerings called *dana* (meals served to the monks as a merit-making activity). Besides these activities, I visited the Vihara for language classes, to volunteer my services in the upkeep of their library, and to take part in cultural activities such as the Annual Food Bazaar. For each of these activities, I used fieldnotes, photography, and sketches to document my observations, note participants' explanations and interpretations of events, record changes in the Vihara's appearance and use, and map groupings and movements of people.

Participation at the Vihara is not limited to members, and official membership listings are currently out-of-date; however a board member who recently headed a fundraising campaign estimates that the Vihara

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[9]Appadurai, Arjun, "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy," *Public Culture* 2 no. 2 (1990), p. 20.

[10]Appadurai, 1990: 1–23.

serves approximately 300-400 families in the Washington area, with 200 of these considered to be active members and reliable donors. Important annual events can attract as many as 300 people to the Vihara during the course of a single day, though most activities are rather intimate, with groups ranging from as few as two participants to twenty-five. My own observations suggest that approximately 75% of participants are Sinhalese American immigrants; approximately 20% are native-born European Americans; and the rest are African Americans and other Asian immigrants.

The participants I observed during this study are necessarily a very fluid group. While there are many 'regulars' (participants from all ethnic groups who have visited the Vihara off and on for many years), there are also a large number of mostly non-Sinhalese participants who visit only once or for only a few months. Through the course of this study, I conducted conversational interviews with a core group of 76 regular and occasional visitors representing various ethnic, age, and gender categories (see Table 1 below). These conversational interviews addressed three central topics: participants' perceptions of the Vihara and its place in their lives; its relation to other sites and resources; and reactions to my interpretation of activities and my understanding of the values informing participants' placemaking choices. In addition, I conducted formal, taped interviews with two monks and six laypeople dealing with each of these topics in greater detail.

Table 1. Core Participants Grouped According to Ethnicity and Gender

	Monks (all male)	Male Laity	Female Laity	Total
Immigrant Buddhists				
Sinhalese Americans (teens to mid-70s)	10	16	19	**45**
Other Asian Americans (mid-20s to mid-40s)	1 (Korean)	2	2	**5**
Buddhist Converts				
European Americans (mid-20s to mid-60s)	2 (one novice)	12	8	**22**
African Americans (mid-20s to mid-50s)	–	1	3	**4**
Total	**13**	**31**	**32**	**76**

This project centers on participants' activities at the Vihara, but these activities necessarily complement, compete, and overlap with activities at other institutions. To determine how the Vihara functions as a part of participants' diverse networks of activity, I conducted several site visits. In the Washington area, I visited a newly established Sinhalese-Buddhist temple; the site of the Vihara's planned retreat center; and neighboring Vietnamese, Korean, and Tibetan temples. I also visited the West End Buddhist Center in Ontario, Canada, and the Bhavana Retreat Center in West Virginia, both run by Sinhalese monks affiliated with the Vihara. I attended neighborhood association meetings; lectures and classes related to the practice of insight meditation; and activities sponsored by the Sri Lankan embassy and expatriate organizations. Through participant observation and interviews conducted at the Vihara and these related sites, I have identified groupings of participants involved in defining the Vihara, the strategies they use to influence its meaning and function, their alliances with and oppositions to other groups, and the ways they use alternative values to interpret their activities.

My preliminary findings have revealed certain themes related to the meaning and use of the Vihara. These include the changing role of monks in modern societies, the issue of Theravada's perceived 'purity,' and the need for ecumenical outreach among diasporic communities. By linking participants through their shared activities and views regarding these issues, I have found that observable categories such as 'monks,' 'laity,' 'Sinhalese,' and 'non-Sinhalese Buddhists' often break down into multiple, temporary groupings of participants who collectively define and use the Vihara in specific ways and for specific purposes.

Harvey suggests that to understand the placemaking process, participants' definitions and uses of a place must be linked to the social situations in which they occur.[11] At the Vihara, for instance, factors such as the proportion of 'white' Buddhists in attendance can radically influence certain placemaking activities, determining for instance, whether participants use Sinhalese or English. The presence of even a few 'conservative' lay Buddhists can constrain the activities of resident monks, while the presence of 'American' Buddhists is often used by the monks to justify a more relaxed code of behavior. Strategies such as formalizing seating arrangements, requesting donations, or initiating conversation over tea, can alter power relations between various groups, lead to conflict, or help to establish a greater sense of intimacy across participant groupings. My research shows that temporarily aligned collectives, or groupings of participants, draw upon alternative values (e.g., democracy, traditionalism, fundamentalism, nationalism) to explain or inform their placemaking activities. In doing so, religious and ethnic differences are either blurred or reified. According to Duncan, places provide a medium for expressing

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[11]Harvey, David, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989), p. 220.

competing values, as well as an observable record of past negotiations.[12] By documenting multiple and contradictory definitions and uses for the Vihara, this paper shows how participants draw from alternative sets of values in order to cope with tensions, to exert control over a particular space, to make sense of their own and other participants' activities, and to reorganize relations among themselves and others.

The Washington Buddhist Vihara

The Washington Buddhist Vihara occupies a two-story house in an urban residential neighborhood in northwest Washington, D.C. This ordinary-looking building is identified only by a Buddhist flag and a sign in the front yard. Inside, the main living areas have been cleared for use as a joint meeting hall and shrine room. Visitors are initially drawn to an altar at the far end of this room, where a six-foot tall statue of the Buddha sits surrounded by candles, small statuary, and vases of flowers. A small bookstore occupies an enclosed front porch, and a library featuring Buddhist texts is located upstairs. Three to five monks reside here for months or years at a time, supported by donations from the lay community. A male lay helper also lives at the Vihara.

The Vihara was established in 1966, making it the oldest Theravada[13] Buddhist center in the United States. Historically, Theravada Buddhism was practiced in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Burma, and parts of southeast Asia. In 1965, only a handful of Sinhalese Buddhists were living in Washington, D.C., and most of them worked for the Sri Lankan embassy. With support from the Government of Ceylon[14] and an organization of lay Buddhists there, they established the Buddhist Vihara Society. In 1966, the society purchased the current building and set up its first resident monk.[15] The Vihara is now locally funded and administered by a board of directors made up of twelve lay people and two monks. The temple maintains ties to its parent affiliate in Sri Lanka, the *Siri Vajirañana Dhammayatana* (a training center for monks), and major policy decisions must be approved by its patron, the Ven. Madihe Pannasiha Mahanayaka Thera.

From its beginnings, the Vihara was conceived as both a Sinhalese cultural center and an international, ecumenical Buddhist center. In its mission statement, the Vihara is described as "a religious and educational

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[12]Duncan, 1990.

[13]Theravada, one of two main schools of Buddhism, is typically distinguished by its conservative monastic lineage, its reliance on the Pali Canon, and its belief in gradual, individual progress toward enlightenment.

[14]Ceylon was renamed Sri Lanka in 1972.

[15]Roehm, Michael, "A Few Fragments from the Vihara's Twenty-five-year Chronology," *Silver Jubilee Commemoration* (Washington, D.C.: Washington Buddhist Vihara, 1991), p. 9.

center dedicated to presenting Buddhist thought, practice and culture. . . Visitors, regardless of religious affiliation, are invited to participate in Vihara activities."[16] Most activities are conducted in English, though Sinhala is used in some informal conversation. Visitors are mostly Sinhalese immigrants and native-born Americans of mixed backgrounds, but also include immigrants from Korea, Laos, Vietnam, Burma, and Bangladesh. Most report that they come to the Vihara to meditate, discuss Buddhist teachings, or perform meritorious deeds. However, participants define and use the Vihara in ways that reflect their multiple experiences, interests, and goals, so they make sense of these activities in different ways. The Sinhalese participants I observed, for example, typically visited during holy day ceremonies which allowed them to socialize in a familiar context and enjoy food and conversation from home. Most of them also visited regularly to make offerings and receive blessings from the monks, but only two participated in Buddhist studies classes, and only four regularly attended meditation sessions. Over half of the European-Americans, on the other hand, had participated in meditation sessions and attended Buddhist studies classes. They associated the Vihara with interests in alternative medicine or Eastern philosophy, and reported participating for reasons related to personal health, self-awareness, and spiritual curiosity.[17]

Participants at the Vihara regularly visit related sites as well. Over half the laypeople I interviewed, and virtually all the monks, had visited other Buddhist temples in the area, and some had even traveled to pilgrimage sites in South Asia. Eight laypeople had attended a meditation retreat at the nearby Bhavana Retreat Center, established and run by a monk from the Vihara, and twenty others had visited the center. Many of the resident monks were assigned to the Vihara through the monks' training center in Sri Lanka, but invitations are also extended through personal networks of teachers, relatives, friends and former hosts. The Vihara itself has hosted monks from all over Asia, Europe, and Australia, and regularly welcomes visitors from *viharas* in New York, California, Michigan and Toronto, Canada. The Vihara also hosts government officials and business leaders visiting from Sri Lanka, and provides monks to officiate at embassy-sponsored events.

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[16]"Vihara Mission Statement," (Washington, D.C.: Washington Buddhist Vihara, 1965).

[17]Numrich describes this phenomenon as "parallel congregations." In his study of two Theravada temples in the U.S., he found that in these temples, "under one roof and through the guidance of a shared clergy, two ethnic groups pursue largely separate and substantively distinct expressions of a common religious tradition." At the Vihara, I find that there is relatively more interaction between Sinhalese and Americans, so I prefer to think of these as "overlapping" congregations. Numrich, Paul David, *Old Wisdom in the New World: Americanization in Two Immigrant Theravada Buddhist Temples* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1996), p. 144.

Such wide-ranging networks suggest that both monks and laypeople make sense of their activities at the Vihara within a transnational and multicultural context. In this way, global phenomena, including the civil war in Sri Lanka, a history of western scholarship on Buddhism, and the development of lay meditation societies, influence participants' placemaking activities.

Negotiating Relationships At The Vihara

Monks and Laypeople

When I first began visiting the Vihara, I noticed that in the kitchen some of the cupboards were labeled with red plastic strips punched with white letters. On one cupboard, just above the sink, the label read "*bhikkhus* dishes" (*bhikkhus* referring to the monks). Across the room, two more cupboards were labeled "dishes for laypeople." Except for the labels, there was little to distinguish the dishes in one cupboard from those in another. On Sundays and holy days, I noticed that tea is served to everyone in the appropriate cups, *bhikkhus'* cups for the monks, laypeople's cups for the rest of us. When I began meeting with one of the monks to exchange lessons in English for lessons in Sinhala, I noticed that he invariably served me tea in a cup from the *bhikkhus'* cupboard. When I asked about this, he jokingly replied that, in this case I was his teacher, so I was the one who was "honorable." Since then, I have found that other forms of respect, designed to distinguish monks and laypeople, are context-dependent as well. For example, just as there are separate dishes for monks and laypeople, in Sinhala there are different forms of address. After studying Sinhala for a few months, I mistakenly referred to a monk using the informal pronoun "*oya.*" My teacher corrected me in front of two other monks, then the three of them laughed, and he said reassuringly, "It's okay if it's just us!" When we were with certain laypeople, he suggested, I should remember to use the formal address. These laypeople, he explained, were more "conservative" in their relations with the monks. They would find my lack of respect offensive, but more importantly, they might begin to question the appropriateness of our relationship. On another occasion, I referred to him in conversation as "a friend." Overhearing this, he quickly interjected "I'm a teacher, not a friend!"

Historical and social context

These interactions become especially meaningful when viewed in light of the history of relations between monks and laypeople in Sri Lanka and America. According to Theravada tradition, monks follow a set of 227 rules[18] designed to promote morality, protect the discipline, and distinguish Buddhist monks from laypeople and other religious specialists.

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[18]The monastic code of discipline is contained in the *Vinaya-pitika,* one of three parts of the Pali Canon.

The rules require, for example, that monks shave their heads and wear robes, abstain from eating solid foods after noon, and remain celibate. As traditional Buddhism developed in Sri Lanka, monks became both the model and mediators of the Buddha's teaching for laypeople. During the late 1800s though, as part of a 'modern' Buddhist revival, lay Buddhists began to take a more active part in religious affairs, and monks began to explore new roles.

Monastic reforms had already begun in Sri Lanka by the mid-eighteenth century, but the transformation to 'modern' Buddhism is typically linked to a series of debates beginning in 1865 in which Buddhist monks skillfully defended their religion against Christian missionaries. The debates inspired Colonel Henry Olcott, an American theosophist, to travel to Sri Lanka in 1875. Olcott introduced reforms aimed at modernizing and universalizing Buddhism: he established an active lay organization within the Buddhist Theosophical Society, introduced a Buddhist catechism, and instituted Buddhist-run schools.[19] Anagarika Dharmapala, an influential Sinhalese Buddhist, furthered Olcott's reforms, promoting meditation among laypeople as an indigenous method for dealing with problems of modern life rationally. He urged laypeople to study the Buddhist texts for themselves, suggesting that all human beings were capable of attaining *nibbana* in this lifetime, an idea which stood in stark contrast to traditional Theravada beliefs. He was a critical opponent of the *bhikkhus,* who he depicted as largely ritualistic and lazy.[20] Even the name Dharmapala took reflects his reformist vision of Buddhist religious life: an *anagarika* is neither a monk nor a layperson, but something in-between, a lay renunciate.[21] The ideas of these reformers paved the way for the establishment in the 1950s of lay meditation societies in Sri Lanka, as well as the Sarvodaya Shramadana movement in which monks and laity work side by side for economic development based on Buddhist principles.

As laypeople became increasingly active and self-sufficient in religious affairs, the role of the monk was shifting as well. Almost since the Buddha's time, two kinds of monks have been recognized: *vanavasi,* or forest monks, who renounce the world to practice meditation in solitude, and *gamavasi,* or village monks, who preserve the Buddha's teachings and minister to the laypeople.[22] In Sri Lanka, devout kings made land grants to the *Sangha* (order of monks) and built temples which were passed down from teacher to student. As competition for temples increased, monks

[19]Bond, George D., *The Buddhist Revival in Sri Lanka: Religious Tradition, Reinterpretation, and Response* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1988): 46–52.

[20]Bond, 1988: 53–57.

[21]Roberts, Michael, "For Humanity. For the Sinhalese. Dharmapala as Crusading Bosat," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 56 no. 4 (1997): 1016–1020.

[22]Carrithers, Michael, *The Forest Monks of Sri Lanka: An Anthropological and Historical Study* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983),. p. 141.

began working as teachers and social workers; some have established meditation centers and overseas missions, others write books and do lecture tours. In Sri Lanka, monks have historically faced criticism for their involvement in worldly affairs. In 1946, a group of so-called "political bhikkhus" issued a statement calling for a revised set of guidelines for monks which recognized changing social conditions. In particular, they argued that monks should be allowed to advocate politically for the protection of Buddhism, which had suffered under centuries of colonialism.[23]

The specific reforms advocated by bhikkhus of that generation have largely failed in retrospect or been ignored, in part because of the powerful rhetoric and political popularity of more moderate, neotraditionalists from among the Sinhalese urban elite. Bond describes this group as reformers who sought to rejuvenate Buddhism and Buddhist values in order to address modern problems. Unlike truly innovative reformers though, neotraditionalists retained traditional goals, were hesitant to institute change, and tended to maintain the status quo whenever possible.[24] For decades after independence, this neotraditional outlook dominated Sri Lankan politics. The Sangha as a whole, and particularly the traditional ecclesiastical leadership, has remained influential. Despite occasional outbreaks of militancy, the latest generation of monks has proven to be less concerned with nationalist interests, and more involved in socio-economic matters. Young, reform-minded monks now criticize older, establishment monks for their hypocrisy in claiming to uphold out-dated rules of conduct, and for allowing worldly interests to overshadow their religious responsibilities. They have renewed the call for a revised set of monastic rules consistent with the contemporary needs of Buddhist society.[25]

In some countries, monks have successfully created new public roles for themselves through "socially-engaged" Buddhist movements which aim to balance material and spiritual interests.[26] The Dalai Lama, for example, has raised the consciousness of many westerners through his pleas for non-violent protest against the Chinese occupation of Tibet. Thich Nhat Hahn, a Vietnamese Zen monk, has similarly developed an international following (the Mindfulness Community) by promoting mindfulness in everyday life as a way to achieve personal and global peace. In America,

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[23]Bechert, Heinz, "S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike and the Legitimation of Power through Buddhist Ideals," *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka.* ed. Smith, Bardwell L. (Chambersburg, PA: Anima Books, 1972), p. 205.

[24] Bond, 1988, p. 34.

[25]Seneviratne, H. L., "The New Buddhist Monks and the Decline of Linguistic Nationalism in Sri Lanka," Institute for Global Studies in Culture, Power and History, General Seminar, Fall 1993, Johns Hopkins University: Baltimore.

[26]Queen, Christopher S. and Sallie B. King, ed., *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist liberation movements in Asia.* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

Buddhist organizations are generally less-hierarchical than in Asia, and many of them have sought to integrate laity into religious activities while integrating Buddhist practice into lay life.[27] One result of this effort within the Theravada tradition has been the development of the *bodhicari*, or 'ordained' lay minister, who vows to uphold many of the same rules as monks with the exception of celibacy. Numrich notes that the *bodhicari* ordination, which is similar to "the Bodhisatva Vow of selfless service to others," reflects the pervasive influence of Mahayana traditions in this country.[28] In addition to creating these new intermediary roles, Buddhist organizations run entirely by laypeople have been established in the United States, eliminating the role of monastics altogether. As a result of these developments, the distinction between monks and laypeople has become increasingly blurred.

Placemaking strategies and the values underlying them
At the Vihara, the vast majority of laypeople have little involvement in administrative affairs; the board of directors is selected by the chief resident monk, who is himself appointed by the patron founder. Membership on the board is rather exclusive: only three new members were elected in 1998 and one of them had previously served in the 1980s. Two laypeople have served on the board for 20 years; together with the chief resident monk, they were referred to by one layperson as "the power of three." According to other board members with whom I spoke, the decisions made by this group are rarely challenged.

On one occasion though, during an annual general meeting, a small group of Sinhalese laypeople who had lived in America for many years, together with a few Americans, confronted the leadership and pressed for a greater role for laypeople in the Vihara's financial dealings. The group suspected corruption within the board, and demanded a fuller account of the Vihara's finances. Their demand was squelched by a Sinhalese layperson who was offended by their request. The Vihara was not a business, he argued, and donations, unlike investments, were not subject to laypeople's scrutiny. For him, questioning the board's handling of finances was tantamount to questioning the morality of the monks themselves (who served on the board), and that was beyond the bounds of appropriate lay behavior. His comparison of the Vihara to an American-run business is particularly significant. As he explained, this was simply "not the way things are done" at temples in Sri Lanka, to which another layperson responded, under his breath, "This is not Sri Lanka."

New expectations of the monks, lay leaders, and the Vihara itself, reflect conflicting values among lay participants. The undisputed authority

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[27]Morreale, Don, ed., *Buddhist America: Centers, Retreats, Practices* (Santa Fe: John Muir Publishers, 1988).

[28]Numrich, 1996, p. 130.

of a chief monk and his close advisors has a historical basis in Sri Lanka, but in America, members of non-Buddhist congregations often enjoy a great deal of influence in local 'church' affairs. This was the expectation shared by the long-term expatriates and the Americans who initiated this confrontation, and who subsequently withdrew their participation and support from the Vihara. Similar confrontations have been skillfully avoided at events following that meeting. In two instances, the chief monk preceded the announcement of important policy decisions with a reminder to the laity that both tradition and practicality demand that such decisions are made by the monks alone, because it is the monks who "know what's best for the Vihara."

More often, it is the monks who are effectively challenging traditional boundaries and relationships. One monk, for example, has taken driving lessons and requested the donation of a car for the monks' use. Driving has traditionally been prohibited for monks in Sri Lanka, but laypeople at the Vihara are divided about the issue. Some have taken a very practical stance, as this monk did, arguing that the monks need to drive to get to lectures and appointments because laypeople in Washington are too busy to take them. Others suspect that driving will lead to the monks' moral corruption as they begin to act increasingly like laypeople. In this case, the underlying values overlap rather than conflict directly. On the one hand, the monk and his lay supporters recognize the different conditions posed by their new American context, and are advocating a practical response to a modern problem; on the other, tradition suggests that for Theravada Buddhism to survive in tact, monks must remain visibly distinct from laypeople. At other Sinhalese temples in America, monks have been allowed to drive, but at the Vihara, this remains an unresolved issue.

Factors influencing the outcome of negotiations

Despite the efforts of a few laypeople to expand their influence, or the challenges put forth by progressive monks, relations between monks and laypeople at the Vihara remain fairly traditional. This is in part due to Theravada's strict rules for monks' behavior, and to the laity's generally high level of respect for the monks' authority. It may also reflect the interests of a dominant group of participants in maintaining the status quo. The placemaking activities of these participants are consistent with the neotraditionalist values of Sri Lanka's post-independence ruling urban elite. It is significant that many of the earliest Sinhalese immigrants to Washington, D.C. were members of this elite group, and English-speaking professionals and their children continue to form a large percentage of the Vihara's Sinhalese lay supporters. Neotraditionalist values clearly resonate among many in this group.

Nevertheless, recent changes in the pattern of Sinhalese immigration are introducing new values into the placemaking process at Sinhalese Buddhist temples elsewhere in America. At a temple in Canada, for instance, a monk who extended a loan to a refugee family fleeing the war

during the late 1980s was rebuked by other monks in his temple for overstepping the boundaries of the monk-laity relationship. He subsequently established another temple in the area which functions as a center for informal social services networking to assist newly arriving immigrants. The unique nature of this *vihara*, and the new relationships it makes possible, was enthusiastically expressed by one of its members: "In Sri Lanka," she explained, "the people have temples. Here, the temple has people." While there are certain lines that may never be crossed in relations between Theravada monks and laypeople, placemaking activities in American *viharas* are in fact giving rise to new roles and relationships. By choosing whether or not to observe simple practices such as eating from separate dishes or using different forms of address, monks and laypeople are communicating their expectations of one another and continually renegotiating the terms of their relationship.

Sinhalese and American Buddhists

One of the most popular activities among Americans at the Vihara is the meditation class held twice weekly. During these classes, up to fifteen participants practice sitting and walking meditation, and chant or listen to a short sermon.One summer day, the monk leading the class asked me to help him set out cushions. Attendance had been fluctuating so it was difficult to know how many to set out. Suddenly he tossed down a cushion and with an air of frustration said, "If you offer something for free, people don't think it's worth it!" I asked what he meant and he shared an experience he had had in Berlin. Before he arrived there, he explained, an older monk had been teaching a free meditation class which was attended only by two elderly German women. When he was put in charge though, he determined a reasonable price for the class and put an ad in a newspaper. He received so many calls, he had to limit the class size because there was not enough space to accommodate everyone! In Sri Lanka though, he complained, "If you charge money, no one comes. They ask, 'Did the Buddha charge money?' But in the West, it's different, no?" In fact, several American converts indicated to me that they are uncomfortable with the idea of monks taking money for teaching. One convert, who had just returned from a Buddhist conference, complained that the monks there had been paid to lecture. He acknowledged that they may have accepted the money on their temple's behalf, but even so, he felt the *Dhamma* (the Buddha's teaching) should be shared freely.

The monks at the Vihara seem particularly sensitive to, if not always completely aware of, the fact that American converts have different expectations than Sinhalese participants. Once, while having tea, a Sinhalese woman suggested that there needed to be a low bench installed in the kitchen so laypeople could sit and talk with the monks without having to break the rule prohibiting them from sitting at the monks' level. Aside from there being no room for such a bench, one of the monks informed her

that Americans might find this practice offensive. Given Americans' concern for equality, he said, some may ask "Why should I sit below the monks?" Accommodations must be made for the Americans, he insisted, and for the very different conditions in this country.

Historical and social context

Again, it is useful to consider these interactions in light of larger processes, particularly ways in which participants at the Vihara are working out various post-colonial relationships. Literally translated, Theravada means "way of the elders," and it is often Theravada's conservatism that attracts Americans to the Vihara. As one long-time participant put it: "this is real Buddhism." But this notion that Theravada is a particularly 'pure' form of Buddhism is in large part a product of western Buddhist studies. During the colonial period, Theosophists and other scholars, eager to find alternatives to a religion-based morality, discovered in Theravada Buddhism 'a way of life' rather than a religion. But cast as an agnostic, rational, ritual-free philosophy, 'pure' Buddhism was a thing of the past. Scholars returned to the Pali Canon, preserved by Sinhalese monks over the centuries, in search of the essence of the Buddha's teaching which they believed had been corrupted as Buddhism moved away from its roots in northern India.[29]

One reason Buddhism spread so successfully throughout Asia was its ability to absorb elements of local belief systems. In Sri Lanka, for example, Buddhists incorporated into their practice devotional elements of Hinduism as well as rituals associated with local spirit cults. According to Gombrich, Sinhalese Buddhists typically distinguish between practices with worldly efficacy, such as astrology, and those aimed at attaining enlightenment, but they do not consider such practices incompatible.[30] Buddhists agree that the ultimate goal of Buddhism is enlightenment, but orthodox Theravadans (citing the Pali commentaries as their source) have traditionally held that such a goal is unattainable in this lifetime, even for one who has renounced the world and committed to meditation. Instead, they advocated a life of morality and meritorious deeds to prepare oneself for a future rebirth in which the goal may draw nearer.[31] Besides following basic moral precepts, rituals such as making offerings *(puja)*, listening to sermons *(bana)*, and receiving blessings *(pirit)* from the monks constitute essential practices for Sinhalese lay Buddhists.

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[29]Southwold, Martin, *Buddhism in Life: The Anthropological Study of Religion and the Sinhalese Practice of Buddhism* (Dover: Manchester University Press, 1983).

[30]Gombrich, Richard, F. *Buddhist Practice and Precept: Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon* 2nd edition (New York: Kegan Paul International): 23.

[31]Bond, 1988: 136–143.

Recognizing the growing prestige associated with Buddhism at the turn of the century, Sinhalese nationalists incorporated elements of Theravada Buddhism into their own idealized concept of Sinhalese cultural heritage. Along with the rice paddy and water tank, the *vihara* was cast as a symbol of a glorious, but nonetheless imagined, Sinhalese-Buddhist past.[32] Like the early Buddhist scholars, nationalists returned to the ancient Pali texts where they found and revived claims that the Sinhalese were Buddhism's chosen protectors. Even today, Sinhalese Buddhists take their responsibility as protectors of the *Dhamma* quite seriously. The constitution adopted by Sri Lanka in 1972 states that "The Republic of Sri Lanka shall give Buddhism the foremost place and accordingly it shall be the duty of the state to protect and foster Buddhism while assuring to all religions the rights guaranteed by [this constitution]."[33]

On the one hand then, Theravada Buddhism has historically been linked to Sinhalese culture and the prosperity of the Sinhalese people as a whole. On the other hand, English-language literature has often characterized Theravada as 'pure' and rational, emphasizing the psychological aspects of meditation in particular. As early as the 1950s, Sinhalese laypeople, inspired by reforms in Burma and encouraged by interest among westerners, began establishing centers in Sri Lanka for the practice of *vipassana bhavana*, a uniquely Theravada method of insight meditation. Unlike traditional *viharas* which mainly served laypeople's ritual needs, these centers focused on meditation, with the expectation that enlightenment was a viable goal even for the layperson.[34] Since Theravada Buddhism began to receive sustained attention in the West in the 1970s, popular interest has focused on this form of meditation.[35]

Vipassana bhavana involves 'watching' one's breath with detached awareness, and gradually becoming mindful of the impermanence of one's thoughts, feelings, and ultimately one's entire existence. While the purpose of *vipassana* is to develop insight into the true nature of our existence, there are other well-known benefits to 'breath meditation.' Tamney reports that Americans meditate for a variety of reasons: to get in touch with one's inner self, relieve physical pain, achieve peace of mind, or experience oneness with a higher power.[36] However, he speculates that initial

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[32]Spencer, 1990, p. 287.

[33]Dharmadasa, K. N. O., *Language, Religion, and Ethnic Assertiveness: The Growth of Sinhalese Nationalism in Sri Lanka.* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1992), p. 315.

[34]Bond, 1988: 149–162.

[35]Van Esterik notes that this trend is apparent in Canada, England, and Australia, as well as the United States Van Esterik, Penny *Taking Refuge: Lao Buddhists in North America* Center for Refugee Studies, York University (Toronto: York Lanes Press, 1992), p. 105.

[36]Tamney, Joseph B. *American Society in the Buddhist Mirror* (New York:

curiosity in Buddhist meditation as a tool for self-exploration may lead some Americans to appreciate the philosophical aspects of Buddhism. Buddhism teaches that all things are impermanent, and nothing that is impermanent can bring true happiness. As one comes to appreciate the psychological and emotional effects of detachment through meditation, there may be an increased interest in discovering Buddhism's "essential truths."[37] Given the orthodoxy of the Theravada tradition, and the reformers' emphasis on the ancient Pali scriptures as the source of the Buddha's truths, it is not surprising that both Americans and Sinhalese value Theravada for its 'purity.' However this 'purity' is defined in different ways, and therefore what constitutes acceptable change in Buddhist practice is a subject of considerable debate at the Vihara.

Placemaking strategies and the values underlying them

Participants at the Vihara frequently state that, for them, Buddhism is not a religion, but a philosophy or 'way of life.' Most of the American converts I interviewed distinguished between 'religious' practices such as chanting, making offerings, and receiving blessings (which they associated with Sinhalese practitioners), and non-religious or 'pure' practices such as meditation. Resident monks typically referred American newcomers to the meditation sessions and Buddhist studies classes, rather than the devotional services. In the Buddhist studies class, American participants expressed a critical view toward "watered-down" versions of Theravada that attempt to make *vipassana* more accessible to Americans; one convert has dubbed this trend *"Dhamma*-light." There is, then, a sense among these converts that 'pure' Buddhism implies a philosophical and psychological approach to living, characterized primarily by the practice of meditation, unencumbered by ritual, and necessarily involving the study of authoritative texts. This distinction was not held by all Americans though. One European American reported that during a chanting ceremony in which she participated, she felt a sense of community that made her "more spiritually aware." An African American layperson reported that she purposely avoided reading about Buddhism because she felt that it interfered with the immediate experience of her meditation practice. Both these participants had also studied within the Tibetan tradition, which tends to place more emphasis on devotional and experiential practices.

Many of the Sinhalese participants with whom I spoke, on the other hand, associated a Buddhist 'way of life' with a romantic version of Sinhalese village life that emphasized principles of simplicity and self-reliance. One young man described himself as a 'typical Sri Lankan': he grew up in a village with family, friends, and relatives living nearby, and he went to Buddhist schools where his mother was a teacher. Many participants reported going to the temple with their parents when they were

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Garland Publishing, 1992), p. 81.

[37] *Ibid*, 82.

young, and listening to the monks chant in Pali. Two siblings fondly recalled a treasured Buddhist text written on palm leaves that their father kept when they were children. These Sinhalese Buddhists take pride in their culture's long established ties to Buddhism. I was frequently reminded, for instance, that it was Sinhalese monks who preserved the Pali Canon over the centuries.

In conversation with Americans though, these same Sinhalese Buddhists were also quick to point out the relevance of Buddhism in the modern world. One monk explained to me that long before quantum physicists conceived their theory of reality, the Buddha saw that our bodies are made up of small particles, which come into and out of existence so rapidly, we are not in fact solid at all. The suggestion here is that what the Buddha revealed centuries ago, and what the Sinhalese have preserved and practiced for generations, is a truth about the nature of reality which westerners are just now (re)discovering through modern science. In speaking to a group of American college students at the Vihara, a European American convert shared this same illustration; in this case suggesting that despite any exotic associations it might have for them, Buddhism is in fact quite compatible with western values. These characterizations of Theravada Buddhism, on the one hand historically linked to Sinhalese culture, and on the other transhistorical, rational, and pure, suggest a range of values through which Sinhalese and Americans at the Vihara interpret and explain their placemaking activities.

Factors influencing the outcome of negotiations

As an underlying value which explains placemaking activities at the Vihara, the notion of Theravada's 'purity' resonates widely among both American and Sinhalese participants. It is a highly ambiguous value though, and the way it is interpreted often depends on the nature of the participants involved and the relative social power they are able to access and exert. During large annual ceremonies, Sinhalese participants visibly dominate the Vihara: they congregate in nearly every room and spread outside onto the sidewalk and lawn. Sinhala is spoken in informal conversations, and occasionally used in making announcements. Women wear colorful *saris* and Ceylonese tea is served in the afternoon. Group activities include chanting, making offerings, and listening to sermons. Laypeople prepare a mid-day *dana* (meal) for the monks, and everyone is invited to enjoy the vast array of Sri Lankan foods. At the end of the day, the merit earned through participating in these activities is symbolically transferred to deceased relatives and friends to aid them in their next rebirth. In this context, Theravada Buddhism is intimately intertwined with aspects of Sinhalese culture (e.g., food, language, clothing), and 'pure' Buddhist practice implies traditional merit-making activities. While not all Sinhalese Buddhists choose to participate in all these activities, the majority share a common interpretation of the values underlying them.

Non-Sinhalese Buddhists are a minority at the Vihara but, because the Vihara is located within the context of a largely non-Sinhalese society, their influence on placemaking can still be quite effective. At the conclusion of a recent ceremony, a monk announced to the crowd of mostly Sinhalese Buddhists that the ceremony would be ending early because of a wedding. Weddings are typically not celebrated as religious occasions in Theravada Buddhism, so the Vihara rarely hosts such events. The bride and groom were American Buddhists though, the monk explained apologetically, "They wanted to have it here, and we can't say no, because this is America and it's their country, no?" When viewed in this larger context, the Vihara provides opportunities for Sinhalese and American Buddhists to negotiate relations on multiple levels, and to use placemaking activities to reevaluate their expectations of one another, even beyond the Vihara itself.

Sinhalese and Other Buddhist Immigrants

Clues throughout the Vihara reveal that this is a Sinhalese temple. The aroma of Sinhalese curries hangs in the air, images of Sri Lankan pilgrimage sites hang on the walls, and Sinhala language newspapers are stacked near the door. But there is also evidence that this is an international Buddhist center. In the foyer, a lotus-shaped lantern hangs from a chandelier. Similar lanterns, made from hundreds of hand-folded pieces of brightly colored paper, are strung around the shrine room as well. These Korean-style lanterns were made by an energetic young Korean monk who stayed at the Vihara a few years ago. In addition to these lanterns, there are other signs of multiculturalism at the Vihara: Burmese texts line the shelves of the library, Vietnamese statues decorate the shrine, Chinese joss sticks are burned at the altar, and participants themselves speak a variety of languages.

During recent ceremonies at the Vihara, events have included sermons by a Vietnamese monk and a Tibetan lama, chanting by a Burmese layperson, performances by Bangladeshi musicians, and a Buddhist "naming ceremony" for non-Sinhalese devotees including one man from Malaysia. In response to the Bangladeshi performance in particular, several Sinhalese laypeople pointed out that this performance was not representative of Sinhalese cultural practices. One Sinhalese man who knew of my research explained that in Sri Lanka, instead of singing devotional songs, they sometimes performed dramas based on stories about the Buddha. Another Sinhalese layperson remarked: "It's not Sri Lankan, but I think it's good. It's good to have some entertainment."

Historical and social context

These comments reflect the ambiguous function of this place, as both a Sinhalese cultural center and an international Buddhist center. Most non-Theravada Buddhist temples in America today serve mono-ethnic congregations, either Asian immigrants or American converts. Theravada

centers, on the other hand, frequently serve multi-cultural congregations.[38] As a result, these temples face an inherent tension between interpreting religious beliefs and practices for an American audience and supporting the cultural needs of complex diasporic communities. Van Esterik suggests several reasons for this trend. In many Theravada countries, including Sri Lanka, Buddhism enjoys state support and benefits from the existence of built temples, ordained monks, a populous and devout laity, and a wealth of symbolic imagery. In America, on the other hand, Theravada communities face a lack of resources associated with becoming an ethnic as well as a religious minority.[39] Refugees from countries like Cambodia and Laos have been particularly disadvantaged in this regard, but cooperation has been critical even among wealthier populations of Theravada immigrants. The Sinhalese immigrants who established the Vihara in Washington, D.C. in 1966 had financial and political support from Buddhists in Sri Lanka, but they also relied on the Thai Buddhist community already living in the United States.[40]

Studies of Buddhism in America have typically focused on the efforts of American-born converts, while the impact of Buddhist immigrants, particularly those from Theravada countries, has received less attention. Prior to the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, few immigrants from Theravada countries were living in the United States, but by 1990 they numbered close to 700,000.[41] As the first Theravada temple in the United States, the Washington Buddhist Vihara played a key role in the establishment of Theravada temples throughout North America. During its thirty-three year history, the Vihara has supported Buddhists from Burma, Cambodia, Nepal, Thailand, Korea, Vietnam, Laos, and Bangladesh.[42] In many cases, these immigrant communities later established temples of their own in the area.

The Vihara also provided a model for at least a dozen other Sinhalese Buddhist temples in North America. During the 1980s, unprecedented rates of immigration from Sri Lanka correlated with a surge in the construction of Theravada temples here.[43] Unlike earlier Sinhalese immigrants who were largely English-educated and brought with them valued skills or resources, these later arrivals were often "voluntary exiles" from the civil war.[44] As such, their diasporic experiences have been very different. Social services, job networking, immigration assistance, and other

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[38]Numrich, 1996, p. 144.
[39]Van Esterik, 1992, p. 109.
[40]Roehm, 1991, p. 11–12.
[41]Numrich, 1996: xix.
[42]Roehm, 1991: 9–22.
[43]Numrich, 1996: xvii–xxi.
[44]Ibid, xix.

newer immigrants. In 1998, a second Sinhalese Buddhist temple was established in a nearby suburb of Washington D.C. Despite claims that this is simply a result of the increased population of Sinhalese Buddhists living in the area, it seems likely that the new temple is also a reflection of the very different needs and expectations of these new arrivals. In a conversation at this temple, for example, a newly arrived immigrant asked a layperson from the Vihara whether she knew of an immigration lawyer, or someone who might help him find a job. She advised him to contact a certain agency and offered to get a phone number from another Sinhalese layperson she knew.

Meanwhile, at the Vihara, the children of earlier Sinhalese immigrants are reaching adulthood, and these second-generation Buddhists are posing new problems for the community. Lack of interest in religious issues among youth, the desire among some young people to establish an identity separate from their parents, and the conflict of values posed by American society's attachment to materialism, are just some of the problems faced by Buddhist immigrant groups. In late 1998, the Vihara acknowledged the special needs of this group by sponsoring a day-long Youth Seminar attended by 25 youth, aged approximately 12 to 16. The seminar included traditional activities such as *puja* (making an offering), as well as "religious talks" by contemporary Buddhist scholars aimed at a younger audience. Such specialized programs require considerable planning and support though.

Limited resources and a recognition of common needs and problems outside of one's own ethnic group have prompted some Sinhalese temples in America to embrace Buddhist ecumenism. Numrich cites "the sheer isolation felt by immigrant Buddhist temples and monks" as another factor in the development of organizations such as the American Buddhist Congress.[45] Some Buddhists, he argues, have recognized that "Buddhist unity is prerequisite to the successful spread of Buddhism in the United States" where "historical divisions and antipathies among the various Buddhist schools, ethnic traditions, and monastic groups...carry less force."[46] There are obvious problems associated with multicultural ecumenism. Van Esterik notes that language, race, class, and cultural barriers have prevented many immigrant communities from working together.[47] Nevertheless, the need to interpret Buddhism for westerners, as well as for second-generation immigrants, often necessitates the creation of trans-cultural forms of Buddhist practice and teaching. The fact that Sinhalese monks and laypeople are typically English speakers may make

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[45]Ibid, 55.

[46]Ibid, 55–56.

[47]Van Esterik, 1992: 91–101.

For many of the Sinhalese people I interviewed, the Vihara c primarily as a cultural refuge. One young man who went to temples when he was a boy in Sri Lanka, now says he comes to the Vihara because, "It's familiar. The rituals and everything make me feel grounded." A woman brings her three-year-old daughter to Sunday school classes, even though she is too young to participate, because she says, "I want her to get used to the culture." Among non-Sinhalese participants though, the Vihara is often viewed quite differently. Two African American women, for instance, came to the Vihara one day after visiting a Korean temple. When asked if they were Buddhists, one replied: "No, just international citizens of the world." This comment suggests that for some participants, the Vihara functions not as a religious or cultural center, but as one of many institutions whose activities cut across cultural and religious traditions, and which are therefore categorized broadly as "international places."

The fact that the Vihara serves a multicultural congregation poses challenges to those who view the Vihara as primarily a Sinhalese cultural center, but it also provides opportunities for change. While sharing a snack with a monk one day, an older Sinhalese woman explained that, growing up in Sri Lanka, laypeople never ate the monks' food. But Buddhists in Thailand and Burma developed other traditions, she said. "This is a international place, all kinds of people come here. We can't discrimina against their traditions. Everyone must be welcome!" The monk agree with her, adding that "even in Sri Lanka nowadays, things like this a changing."

Not all the participants with whom I spoke embraced such diversi though, either for its own sake or for the opportunities it presents. A fe were rather critical of one monk's efforts to include non-Sinhalese activit in an annual program at the Vihara. Two Sinhalese laypeople w observed the Bangladeshi's musical performance were upset that the mc had allowed music to be played in the temple, even if it was conside devotional. Although they welcomed the presence of the Banglade laypeople (who had no temple of their own), one suggested that Vihara's participants would have been better served if the monks had gi a "religious talk" as is often done in Sri Lanka. Cooperative efforts non-Sinhalese Buddhists help to expand the Vihara's base of sup though, a fact that was acknowledged by other participants. The monk accepted the Bangladeshi's request to play music has a reputation enthusiastically pursuing this kind of cross-cultural networking, and has made him particularly effective in attracting non-Sinhalese partici and donors to the Vihara. Some laypeople are suspicious of his mc though: he was described facetiously by two Americans as a "reli entrepreneur."

Lankan" food. Placemaking activities such as this do not directly challenge ideological assumptions which have tended to lump all Asian Buddhists together, but by working within the constraints posed by these assumptions, Sinhalese Buddhists are attempting to negotiate new social relations.

Conclusion

As these examples suggest, relations between Sinhalese and other immigrant Buddhists, between Sinhalese and American converts, and between monks and laypeople, influence one another in complex ways. While 'Sinhalese Buddhists' constitute an identifiable group at the Vihara, their multiple and sometimes contradictory definitions and uses of the Vihara demonstrate that they are neither homogenous nor consistent in expressing values related to Buddhism. Through their placemaking practices, these Buddhists draw upon alternative values to negotiate their social relationships. Localized negotiations articulate with events and social relations on a global scale. While some aspects of these relations seem particularly persistent, others, involving the role of Theravada monks for instance, may be shifting dramatically. The efficacy of certain placemaking strategies is dependent upon several factors. I have discussed three: 1) the degree to which the values underlying participants' placemaking activities resonate with those of other participants; 2) the relative power participants are able to access in terms of political authority, economic influence, or sheer demographic dominance; and 3) the relative persistence and force of ideological constraints such as racism. The level of analysis at which one views the Vihara, as a site for contesting local relations or the site of global negotiations, is also significant. Because of its culturally diverse congregation, Theravada's history within colonialism, and the overlapping geographies of Buddhists in the world today, the Washington Buddhist Vihara appears to be a productive place for remaking relations, both locally and globally.

One further question prompted by this research concerns relations between Sinhalese and other Sri Lankans, particularly Tamils. In the introduction to this paper, I described the ambiguity one Sinhalese woman expressed regarding the conflict in Sri Lanka. On the one hand, she felt that the island could not be divided; after all, it is the unity of her land, culture, and religion which is at risk. On the other hand, as a serious meditator and scholar of Buddhism, she recognized that it was precisely such attachments to places, people, and ideas that give rise to suffering in the form of violence and division. Liyanage has observed and noted that, unlike events in the past, the bombing of the *Dalada Maligawa* sparked almost no retaliatory communal violence by Sinhalese in Sri Lanka. It did however reinforce efforts within the Sinhalese diaspora to ban the LTTE, the

primary organization of militant Tamil separatists[53]. In July 1998, monks and laypeople from the Vihara joined other Sinhalese living abroad to rally in front of the British embassy in Washington, D.C., urging the British government to close down LTTE offices in London. As Sri Lankan national politics are played out among exiles in distant international contexts, it is worth considering how the placemaking activities of Sinhalese Buddhists at places like the Vihara reveal changing values and concerns that may ultimately influence Sinhalese-Tamil relations half a world away.

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[53]Liyanage, 1998, p. 6.

The Sacred Landscape of Hindu Temples: A 'Marker' of Indian Diasporic Identity in the US

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In contemporary times, there has been extensive discussion on the "deconstruction" and redefining of the term "diaspora," that has acquired several new dimensions, and which subsequently no longer operates within the paradigm in which it was originally generated[1]. Expounding Walker Connor's general definition of "diaspora" as "that segment of a people living outside the homeland,"[2] this paper in its exploration of the Indian diasporic community in the Chicago area, attempts to understand the process of 'cultural hybridization' as one such new diasporic dimension. The meaning of 'cultural hybridization' as the 'coming-together' of two or more diverse cultures (with their values, beliefs, and practices), in a way that is new and different from any of the original, yet which incorporates and assimilates the elements from its 'components'[3], will be examined in the context of its expression in shaping the built environment of Chicago's Asian-Indian community, with specific attention to the nature and design of sacred spaces of the Hindu temple in this area.

In the light of Gabriel Sheffer's definition of "diaspora," as an "ethnic minority group of migrant origins residing and acting in host countries but maintaining strong sentimental and material links with their countries of origin..."[4], this paper raises pertinent issues about the nature and design of sacred spaces of the Hindu temple in the Chicago area, and the influence of its 'hybridized' architecture and landscape in constructing and expressing the Indian diasporic identity in the US. It explores the

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[1] Stuart Hall, "Fantasy, identity, politics," in Erica Carter, James Donald, Judith Squites, eds., *Cultural Remix: Theories of Politics and the Popular* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1995).

[2] W. Connor, "The Impact of Homelands Upon Diasporas," *Deutschland-Nachrichten* 27(Jan. 1988): 1-8.

[3] Interpreted from David B. Guralnik, *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, Second College Edition* (Cleveland: William Collins + World Publishing Co., Inc., 1976).

[4] Gabriel Sheffer, *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, in Gabriel Sheffer, ed., (London: Croom Helm, 1986), p. 4.

intimate interface between the sacred landscape and architecture as a spatial setting, within which the Indian diasporic identity gets created, evolves and acquires a 'new form'. This 'new form' of the Indian diasporic identity in the US, "its re-construction or translation of the "grammar" of culture in a new context"[5] incorporates features, at a conceptual (and symbolic) level as well as at a functional and physical level, from both the home country of India and the host country of the United States.

The expression of hybridization is also seen in the shaping of the architecture and sacred landscape of the Hindu temple in the US. As a spatial entity whose essential task is to function as a 'container' for the expression of diasporic cultural dispositions and practices of the Indian community[6], this role gets 'realized' through the 'form' of the architectural expression as a 'hybridized' manifestation. The Hindu temple, becomes the 'container' for the 'hybridized' diasporic culture in the sense that it is seen by the Indian community in the United States as a symbolic and physical entity for the expression of its own unique culture, that is able to establish 'real' and/or symbolic connections with both the home country and the host country. The architecture and sacred landscape of the Hindu temple in the US is 'hybridized' in the sense that its functional and philosophical roles are different than those in India owing to the change in the sociocultural and spatial context in the United States, yet similar in their 'essence' as a place of worship for housing the *murti* or 'image of the divine'. Additionally, it is also 'hybridized' in its use of architectural strategies, such as the assimilation of cultural symbolism, the design and layout of its architectural spaces, the influence of architectural styles, the use of materials and details of construction, etc., that are specific to both the home and host country.

Diaspora and Hybridization

Before one looks at the nature of the Indian diaspora in the United States, with particular reference to the Asian-Indians in the Chicago area, it would be beneficial to understand diaspora as 'dispersed immigrant communities', in terms of the "historical specificity" and the uniqueness of "the moment"[7], with particular emphasis upon its hybridized character. This "transnational moment"[8] of the complex, changing, so-called 'post-colonial' world of the present is also seen as a juxtaposition of mass

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[5] As suggested by Rajeshwari Pandharipande, in "Religious Ritual in the Indian Diaspora," a lecture from the Ford Foundation Seminar *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities* at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (April 15, 1998).

[6] Raymond Williams, *Religions of Immigrants from India and Pakistan: New Threads in the American Tapestry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

[7] S. Hall, "What is this Black in Black Popular Culture," *Black Popular Culture* (1992): 21-33.

[8] K. Tololyan, "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Movement," *Diaspora* 5(1): 3-36.

migrations, with "the rapid flow of mass-mediated images, scripts, and sensations"[9], within a world of multiculturalism, with its "reconstructed and redefined" pluralistic identities[10]. In conjunction with the spread of "transnational" corporations and the tremendous surge of information-technology and global networking systems, it has over-ridden the semblance of neatly-packaged, cohesive and integral, well-defined units with distinct 'centers' and 'peripheral boundaries'.

'Embedded' within this larger, post-modern cultural scenario, scholars such as James Clifford, William Safran, Khachig Tololyan, Stuart Hall and others, in their discussions on "diaspora" and their attempts at its "reconceptualization – thinking it in new, displaced or decentered position within the paradigm"[11], have realized the close translatability of the term with the concept of 'cultural hybridization'. The term 'cultural hybridization' involves the possible coding or mixing of two or more diverse cultures or traditions in a way that is new and different from the original home and host countries that 'conceived' it. As Khachig Tololyan aptly says of the "overlapping but also sometimes boundary-blurring concepts" of diaspora, hybridity and others, "These concepts add to the complexity and reach of the discussion; they are mobile and protean terms that slip and slide against each other."[12]

Such an understanding of the 'diasporic world' and the postcolonial vision of hybridity brings to mind T.S Eliot's words in *Notes towards the Definition of Culture*, where he wrote, "The culture which develops on the new soil must therefore be bafflingly alike and different from the parent culture: it will be complicated sometimes by whatever relations are established with some native race and further by immigration from other than the original source."[13] This 'alike-nature' helps "constructing homes away from home"[14], while the differences are created owing to an assimilation of elements from the host country where the diaspora evolves. It "proposes a social subject constituted through cultural hybridization, the overdetermination of communal or group differences, the articulation of baffling alikeness and banal divergence"[15].

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[9] Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 4.

[10] Zygmunt Bauman, "From Pilgrim to Tourist—or a Short History of Identity," in Stuart Hall, P. Gay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), p. 18.

[11] Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs "Identity"?," in Stuart Hall, Paul duGay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), p. 2.

[12] K. Tololyan, "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Movement," *Diaspora* 5(1): 3-36.

[13] T.S. Eliot, *Notes towards the Definition of Culture* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1949), p. 62.

[14] J. Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9(3): 302-338.

[15] Homi Bhabha, "Culture's In-between," in Stuart Hall, Paul duGay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* London: Sage Publications, 1996), p. 54.

The potential of such diasporic hybridity, as seen in the context of the Indian diasporic community in the Chicago area and in their sacred architecture, is enormous. For not only does the hybrid strategy or discourse open up "a space of negotiation where power is unequal but its articulation may be equivocal"[16]; however also because of "the collision between differing points of view on the world that are embedded in these forms... such unconscious hybrids have been at the same time profoundly productive historically: they are pregnant with potential for new world views, with new 'internal forms' for perceiving the world in words."[17]

Nature of the Indian Diaspora in the US

Now that one has established the relevance of the close relationship between diaspora and hybridity, let us proceed to examine the nature of the Indian diaspora in the US, with particular reference to the Asian-Indians in the Chicago area.

Firstly, the approximately 80,000 Asian Indians from the Chicago area, represent a rich mosaic of people from various Indian communities and regions, religions and faiths, speaking a diverse myriad of different languages and belonging to diverse ethnic and social classes.

Secondly, for this varied diverse group, Raymond Williams in his book entitled *Religions of Immigrants from India and Pakistan: New Threads in the American Tapestry,* recognizes the role of religion in the formation and preservation of Indian personal and group identity, particularly in the United States where it becomes "an accepted mode both of establishing distinct identity and of intercommunal negotiation"[18] It is interesting to note that it is undeniably accepted, by both Hindus and non-Hindus alike, and by all Indians whatever religion and region they belong to, that the Hindu temple *does* play an important role as one of the major symbols associated with India in the United States.

And thirdly, there is a basic class unity underlying the diversity of the Asian Indians in the Chicago area, since permission to emigrate following the Immigration Law of 1965 when Chicago's majority of Asian Indians entered the US, was granted essentially to individuals from a fairly narrow range of professional and educational scales[19].

The nature of the Asian-Indian diasporic community in the Chicago area can be well understood in terms of William Safran's six-point paradigmatic framework for the conceptualization of "diaspora" enumerated

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[16] Ibid., p. 58.

[17] Mikhail Ivanovich Bakhtin, "Discourse in the novel," in M. Holquist, ed., *The Dialogic Imagination: four essays* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 360.

[18] Raymond Williams, *Religions of Immigrants from India and Pakistan: New Threads in the American Tapestry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 3.

[19] Raymond Williams, *Religions of Immigrants from India and Pakistan: New Threads in the American Tapestry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

in his article "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return" published in 1991[20]. In terms of William Safran's first characteristic of diaspora that is associated with a common history of dispersal from an original homeland, for a large majority of Asian-Indians in the Chicago area, the 'drive' to come to the United States, was not as violent as the history of exile and coercive migrations of the Jewish diaspora, nor was it the forced expulsions and the persecutions associated with the case of the Armenian diaspora; rather, the essential motivation for the Indian diasporic community in the Chicago area was economic, and the need to find better educational and professional opportunities[21]. The educational, professional, and economic success of the Asian-Indians in the Chicago area, is an important factor associated with the concept of 'hybridization' of this diasporic community. For with their high educational and economic status, the ability to make negotiations with the host country and assimilate with the mainstream culture in the host country, yet having the choice to retain, "reject, replace, or marginalize"[22] whatever aspects they so desire from their home country, is much more a preferential issue than a question of 'forced decisions'.

The Asian-Indian community in the Chicago area retains a strong "collective memory" and "myth about their original homeland," while at the same time they also maintain a positive sense of identification with India, establishing links and cultural organizations for its "safety and prosperity," thus fulfilling William Safran's second, sixth and fifth qualifications respectively[23].

The Asian-Indian diasporic community in the Chicago area strongly expresses William Safran's third point of qualification for a diasporic community, namely its perception of itself as not being fully accepted by the host country[24]. This is seen in their sense of alienation and marginalization by mainstream society, a feeling common amongst a large number of informants interviewed for this study. Their participation in social and communal gatherings with other Asian-Indians, specially at the location of the Hindu temples, is felt to give a psychological comfort about their 'identity of difference'. The functional and organizational dimension of activities associated with the Hindu temple and with other cultural organizations of the Asian-Indians established in the area, along the lines of

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[20] W. Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1(2): 83-99. Others elaborating upon Safran's six-point paradigmatic framework include J. Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9(3): 302-338; K. Tololyan, "Rethinking Diaspora(s): Stateless Power in the Transnational Movement," *Diaspora* 5(1): 3-36; etc.

[21] Parmatma Saran, *The Asian Indian Experience in the United States* (Cambridge: Schenkman, 1985).

[22] J. Clifford, "Diasporas," *Cultural Anthropology* 9(3): 302-338.

[23] W. Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1(2): 83-99.

[24] Ibid.

'Western models' such as those seen at churches, clubs etc. helps assimilate within the mainstream culture, yet maintaining their different 'hyphenated' cultural identity in the diaspora. For example, at the three temples undertaken for this study, a major activity was the conduction of special Sunday services, lectures on spiritual topics of practical importance, as well as Sunday classes on Indian culture (specially for the second generation Asian-Indians born in the US). One would not usually find a similar 'Sunday service tradition' in the Hindu temples in India, and such a tradition seems to have been borrowed from the United States.

In the context of the Asian-Indian diaspora from the Chicago area, William Safran's fourth characteristic of diaspora, namely a desire for eventual return to the "original homeland"[25], can be interpreted in terms of what Amitav Ghosh argues as "not so much oriented to roots in a specific place and a desire for return as around an ability to recreate a culture in diverse locations"[26]. This re-creation of the idealized homeland takes place successfully only within the process of 'cultural hybridization', where elements form both the home and host country are assimilated to create a 'hybridized home'. This 'new form' of the home in the host country, can associate with the home country, yet also maintain a 'positive contact of interaction' with the host country. Additionally, as seen in the study of the Asian-Indians in the Chicago area, the return (or the desire to return) to India may not necessarily be an actual return; it could very well be a 'conceptual return'[27] in terms of maintaining spiritual links with India and becoming a part of sociocultural organizations with other Asian-Indians, that 'replaces' the need to actually return back to the Indian homeland.

Research Sites

In order to understand the role of the Hindu temple in the United States, this paper examined the sacred landscape of Hindu temples located in the Chicago area and explored these as 'symbols of religion' chosen as 'markers' of the Indian diasporic group
and individual identity. The Hindu religious centers chosen for this study were:

A) The Vivekananda Vedanta Center at Hyde Park, Chicago
Established in 1930, this center was chosen in this study as a modern representation in the regional context of the US, of a Hindu monastic and

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[25] W. Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1(2): 83-99.

[26] A. Ghosh, "The Diaspora in Indian Culture," *Public Culture* 2(1): 73-78.

[27] As suggested by Rajeshwari Pandharipande, in "Religious Ritual in the Indian Diaspora," a lecture from the Ford Foundation Seminar *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities* at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (April 15, 1998).

scholastic establishment that caters to the spiritual needs of a select group, focussing on the method of *jnana yoga* or 'inward exploration via philosophical enquiry' (See figure 1). Chicago's Vivekananda Vedanta Center demarcates spaces for meditation and other spiritual practices, as well as philosophical and intellectual explorations on traditional Indian culture and its potential integration in the modern contemporary lifestyles in the US. The Society maintains a temple and monastery in Chicago, as well as accommodates a bookshop and library for books on Eastern and Western religion and Culture, within its premises.

B) The Sri Venkateswara Swami Temple of Greater Chicago at Aurora
Popularly referred to as the Balaji Temple, this temple was consecrated in 1995, and it was initially established in order that devotees from the Midwestern states could have *darsana* or 'sacred vision' of *Sri Venkateshwara Swami*, whose nearest shrine was located only at Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (See Figure 2).

C) The Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago at Lemont:
The Hindu temple of Greater Chicago at Lemont was established in 1984 in order that it would function as a religious shrine, based on a macro-vision to integrate all Hindus from various parts of India. It seeks to integrate different cultural traditions, including those devoted to architectural expression, from various parts of the country, by providing a panoramic vision for a place of worship, a place of sociocultural and spiritual advancement as well as a focal point for cultural and educational activities (See Figure 3).

Both the temples at Aurora and Lemont represent symbols of 'popular religion'. They provide for the growth of traditional religious and cultural values amongst the larger Indian community in the Chicago area, by focussing on *bhakti yoga* or the 'path of devotion'. This is expressed in the worship of images which establish a concrete symbolic personal relationship with the divine.

In order to understand the sacred landscape and architecture of the Hindu temple in the US, the three sacred sites in the Chicago area were closely studied and physical surveys of these religious centers were made. Additionally, qualitative interviews with the priests, officials and administrative authorities at these religious centers were also undertaken. Informal interviews with several Asian-Indians in the United States, both of the first generation who were born in India and immigrated to the United States, as well as second generation US citizens, who are of Asian-Indian descent and were born in the United States, also provided significant information.

Role of the Hindu Temple in the United States

In order to fully understand the complex 'diasporic-cultural process' by which the Hindu temple, as a 'sacred marker' in architecture, helps in constructing and expressing the Indian diasporic identity in the US, it is necessary to examine some of the important psychological, sociocultural, religious and philosophical roles performed by the Hindu temple in the Chicago area.

With reference to the three case studies examined in the area, one of the major roles of the Hindu temple and its sacred landscape and architecture, was to become a visible, physical and psychological symbol that attempted to 'mark' out and help in the recognition of the Indian group identity in space. This was achieved by relating to a symbolic architecture that recognized and proclaimed itself as belonging to the Indian cultural milieu. Just like the Indian *saree*, that is seen as a strong physical symbolic 'marker' of India, an architectural element like the *vimana* or 'tower' atop the main shrine at the Sri Venkateswara Swami Temple at Aurora (See figure 4), also becomes 'symbolically' representative of India. This was achieved, owing to its 'association by re-creation', with the traditional architectural element of the *vimana* from the South Indian *Dravida School* of temple building.

As a psychological symbol, the Hindu temple is thus the most 'concrete representation' of the meaning of diaspora, that according to Walker Connor in *The Impact of Homelands Upon Diaspora,* is "a dwelling in displacement"[28]. With reference to a "dwelling" in India or a memory of India as a symbolic "dwelling," in conjunction with the 'physical and conceptual realities' associated with the state of being displaced in the United States, the architectural setting of the Hindu temple becomes a common symbolic physical manifestation for these varied perceptions by the Indian diasporic community. Asian-Indians in the US, irrespective of their regional, linguistic, social and ethnic affiliations, express of a shared common history (however varied it may be!) of the Indian subcontinent. The Hindu temple then provides a spatial setting for a 'conceptual concretization' of this symbolic or 'real' history of the Indian diaspora, memories and myths of the homeland, insulation in the host country and a desire for eventual return, ongoing support for the homeland etc.

Another important role of the Hindu temple in the Chicago area, was to establish a 're-constructed spatial vision' of the Indian diasporic identity in the US. This re-construction of the Indian diasporic identity takes place in the new cultural and spatial context in the US, as a means of 'cultural adaptation' between the two pulls of globalization and localization. It is achieved through an integration of various thematic representations, as well as architectural symbols, methods and materials of building construction, and design strategies etc. that are native respectively to both

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[28] W. Connor, "The Impact of Homelands Upon Diasporas," *Deutschland-Nachrichten* 27(Jan. 1988): 1-8.

the host and home country settings; yet that are cohesively unified to create a new architectural idiom, appropriate and unique to the new cultural and spatial context. It gets expressed in the Hindu temple's 'hybridized' spatial environment that simultaneously helps associate with India, yet at the same time reminds the perceiver of its location and context in the United States.

An excellent expression of this 'new architectural idiom' is seen at the meditation hall interior at the Vivekananda Vedanta Center, that utilizes the architectural element of the rose-window, a common sight in most Christian churches in the US, to depict themes from Hindu mythology. This kind of intermixing of architectural elements or styles, building materials and themes from different cultural traditions serves to create a new 'hybridized' vocabulary in architecture, that incorporates from both the home and the host country; yet in its representation, this 'new architectural idiom' is different from both the 'home and host traditions'. Another example is seen at the Vivekananda Vedanta Center's meditation hall that accommodates a source of light from the ceiling, very similar to those seen above altars in American and European churches. This feature in the design of the Hindu religious center, expresses the use of an architectural element from the host country, however in its use in the Hindu temple, it creates a 'new architectural vocabulary' appropriate to the context (See Figure 5). Moreover, in response to the 'locational contextualization' of the Hindu temples in the United States, some sections of certain rituals and ceremonies performed at the temple, are provided with English translations by the priests, an activity that one does not see much too often in ritualistic performances at majority of Hindu temples in India[29].

The Hindu Temple also provides an integration of sacred and social space for establishing cultural identity by becoming a venue for socialization and community participation. This merger of the social realm and sacred space in the Hindu temple in the United States reveals a form of "representational space" that becomes dominated, manipulated, and homogenized by the "powers of production"[30] (Lefebvre, 1991). It is seen in the "abstraction of space" and the process of a specific cultural identification and socialization that encompasses the sacred activities and the performance of rituals in the Hindu temple in the United States. In India, the Hindu temple represents an epitome of "Absolute Space," the *ksetra* or 'bounded space of intense spiritual energies', that is highly charged owing to its unique experiences in time and space, and the nature of its activities in the realm of the sacred as distinct from the social.

In the case studies of Hindu temples in the Chicago area, the fusion of sacred and social space helps meet the psychological needs within the

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[29] As suggested by Rajeshwari Pandharipande, in "Religious Ritual in the Indian Diaspora," a lecture from the Ford Foundation Seminar *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities* at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (April 15, 1998).

[30] Henri Lefebvre, The Production of Space," (London, 1991), p. 74.

physical setting. By hosting sociocultural and religious functions, celebrations and festivals, the Hindu temple not only provides a venue for socialization, but it also serves to provide continuing emotional, mental, physical and conceptual connections with India. Hosting get-togethers for Indian meals, picnics, social and cultural shows as well as inviting artists from India to perform within the temple premises, are examples of activities that are usually not seen taking place at Hindu temples in India. However such activities are not uncommon at Hindu temples in the US, for it is essential that the Hindu temple become a venue for the enactment of such functions, owing to the needs of the Indian diasporic community for some sort of conceptual or 'real' ties with India. Thus, functions like the cultural festival organized by the Hindu Temple at Greater Chicago at Lemont, where Anuradha Paudwal, the famous singer from the Bombay film industry, was invited to perform at a concert of Hindi-film music conducted in the temple auditorium, are common activities sponsored by Hindu temples and sociocultural organizations in order to express on-going ties with the Indian homeland.

From the studies of the three sacred sites in the Chicago area, it was seem that one of the major tasks of the Hindu temple in the US, which makes it different from most of the modern Hindu temples in India, is its role as an educational institution that imparts knowledge about various dimensions of the cultural traditions of India to the second-generation Indians in the US. Though traditionally in India, such education was imparted through the *gurukul* system where students used to live with their *gurus* or 'teachers' for a certain period of their lives in *asaramas* or 'hermitages' that were located around or within temple complexes; today modern temples in India, particularly from the north, function essentially as religious centers, with little or no importance given to the issue of education about Indian culture, since it is assumed that that aspect is to be provided by the family or the school.

In the context of the Hindu temple's role in the US as an institution for imparting education about India, at all the three temples studied for this paper, the main concern underlying their activities was related to the transfer of the cultural and social values to the second generation US citizens of Asian-Indian descent born in the US. It was perceived by the priests and the temple authorities that in general, the second generation US citizens of Asian-Indian descent needed a stronger framework of Indian culture in order to help them cope with the aggressive lifestyles in the US. It was thought that such cultural and religious education would not only help the second generation Asian-Indians in the US maintain roots with their heritage and give them an understanding of Indian culture, but additionally it would also help them avoid major social and cultural problems such as drugs, lack of family ties, excessive materialism etc.[31]

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[31] As suggested by Rajeshwari Pandharipande, in "Religious Ritual in the Indian Diaspora," a lecture from the Ford Foundation Seminar *Identity and the Arts in*

Thus, it was seen that one of the main agendas at the Hindu temples in the US was of providing a framework for educating the younger generation of Asian-Indians born in the US, about various cultural, artistic, religious and philosophical traditions of India. For example, at the Vivekananda Vedanta Center, a bookshop and library for books on Eastern and Western religion and culture were as important components of the center as the meditation hall. All three temples and religious centers were involved in conducting summer camps for children and other educational methods for creating an awakening and awareness about Indian culture amongst the youth in the US. Special spaces were provided within the temple layouts for conducting classes on various classical music and dance forms, *yoga*, and other cultural traditions of India, with the aim of addressing these specific sociocultural needs of the Indian community in the US. Thus, for example, at the Sri Venkateswara Swami Temple of Greater Chicago at Aurora, classes on *yoga* were used to reduce the stress-level in today's work environments, or education on Indian culture was being imparted via modern methods such as computer-networking systems, the Internet etc.

Additionally, according to Rajeshwari Pandharipande, by becoming a spatial setting for the performance of rituals, the Hindu temple provides an "experiential dimension" in the education of the second generation Asian-Indian US citizens about Indian cultural and social values, thereby ensuring its perpetuation and transfer amongst the younger generation[32]. For the first generation Indians, the Hindu temple symbolizes in the image of 'a replica of home' that forms an important element in their psychological make-up. On the other hand, for second generation Asian-Indians, whose identity is primarily American, by integrating the social and cultural dimension with the sacred, the Hindu temple in the US, provides them a space for socialization and a coming together with other second generation Asian-Indians. It also gives expression to the uniqueness within them that helps to integrate their psyche as a 'harmonized whole'. This plays an important role in the 'mediation process' of their diasporic-identity formation, where the 'outsider' in their hybridized existences is allowed to bond with others 'of the same kind'.

Unlike their parents, several of the second generation Asian-Indians in the US, were not satisfied with following the rituals, in what a majority of them regard as "blind faith." Many of them expressed a need to have a deeper understanding of Indian philosophy and religion in its manifold dimensions, and this function is, to a large extent, provided to them within the sacred environment of the Hindu temple.

Diaspora Communities at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (April 15, 1998).

[32] As suggested by Rajeshwari Pandharipande, in "Religious Ritual in the Indian Diaspora," a lecture from the Ford Foundation Seminar *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities* at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (April 15, 1998).

The Hindu temple thus fulfils several functions for the diasporic community in the United States. In addition to its role as an educational institution for the second-generation Asian Indians in the US, the Hindu temple as the 'spatial container' for the performance and expressive practices of rituals, successfully becomes the 'experiential reality' that triggers 'memories' of the Indian homeland. The Hindu temple achieves this function, by becoming a venue for ritualistic activities and sociocultural performances associated with India. Additionally, the physical form and appearance of the Hindu temple expresses a connection with India in terms of sharing common features with Indian temples. This can be interpreted in terms of Thomas Turino's analysis of Peircian semiotics in his unpublished paper "Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: Towards a Peircian Theory of Music," as a sign of "something that stands for something else to someone in some way"[33], where the object or "that something else" is the vision of India as a whole, or more specifically, the Hindu temples in India. The architecture of the Hindu temple as a spatial experience of expressive cultural practices and rituals of India, thus, functions very much in terms of the Thomas Turino's understanding of Peircian index or "a sign that is related to its object through co-occurrence in actual experience."[34] When the Hindu temple in the US is interpreted in its resemblance to Hindu temples in India, it becomes an expression of the Peircian icon where signs of identity are established between the two since they rely on a "resemblance" to each other.

It is interesting to note that architecture, often poetically expressed in terms of 'frozen music', shares more with music than just a vague, romantic or metaphorical use in language. The somatic experience of music, like that of architecture, is much more of the kind of "direct, less-mediated" in its experiential effects in generating emotional responses. The emotional, perceptive and mental processes involved in the working of the nervous system in both instances requires going beyond the "mind-body dichotomy"[35]. The experience of musical signs through the auditory sensory perception, can to some extent, get encompassed within the overall experience of architecture, where the sense of hearing (of the chanting of rituals within the temple complex, for example) becomes a part of the total 'phenomenological experience' of architecture that can utilize all the senses of vision, hearing, touch, smell and taste in its experience.

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[33] T. Turino, "Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: Towards a Peircian Theory of Music," Unpublished Paper for *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities*, a Ford Foundation Seminar, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (February 1998).

[34] Ibid.

[35] T. Turino, "Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: Towards a Peircian Theory of Music," Unpublished Paper for *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities*, a Ford Foundation Seminar, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (February 1998).

In this paper, the Hindu temple as a symbolic architectural representation that functions as a 'marker' of Indian diasporic identity in space, is expressed in terms of Carl Jung's use of the "symbol" as a visible reality[36], behind which lies a deeper, hidden meaning which represents its roots in the archetype—"deposits of the constantly repeated experiences of humanity"[37]. These archetypes are buried deeply within the collective unconscious, the container of all the ideas, instincts, dreams, myths, symbols, and archetypes that shape human behavior. The archetype manifests itself in the here and now of space and time perceptible to the conscious mind, only in the form of archetypal images or symbols[38]. This use of "symbol" is markedly different than the Peircian symbol, that according to Thomas Turino, gets defined as a sign "that is "arbitrarily" related to its object through the use of language rather than being fully dependent on iconicity or indexicality"[39].

Sacred Landscape and Architecture of the Hindu Temple in the US

It has long been recognized by Amos Rapoport, Norberg-Schulz, Irwin Altman, Martin Chemers, and others, that the physical environment, including architecture, can be a powerful tool for the expression, representation and manifestation of a culture[40]. In the context of diasporic cultures, as seen in the case of the Indian diaspora in the Chicago area, the sacred landscape and architecture of the Hindu temple in this area, reveals the "triangular relationship" between the diaspora, the homeland, and the host society, alluded to by Gabriel Sheffer[41] and expounded upon by William Safran[42], that gets expressed in the 'concretization of form' of the Hindu temple's 'hybridized' environment. The Hindu temple successfully creates a spatial environment very reminiscent of Indian Hindu temples; however this re-creation of the new 'home' is very unique to the US in the

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[36] Carl Jung, "Man and his Symbols," in Carl Jung, ed., *Garden City* (New York: Doubleday, 1964).

[37] Carl Jung, "The personal and the collective (or transpersonal) unconscious," *Collected Works 7* (London: 1953).

[38] C. Cooper, "The House as Symbol of the Self," *Fundamental Processes of Environmental Behavior* (1974): 130-146.

[39] T. Turino, "Signs of Imagination, Identity, and Experience: Towards a Peircian Theory of Music," Unpublished Paper for *Identity and the Arts in Diaspora Communities*, a Ford Foundation Seminar, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign (February 1998).

[40] I. Altman and M. Chemers, *Culture and Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[41] Gabriel Sheffer, *Modern Diasporas in International Politics*, in Gabriel Sheffer, ed., (London: Croom Helm, 1986).

[42] W. Safran, "Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return," *Diaspora* 1(2): 83-99.

sense that it gets created only by the assimilation and absorption of symbolic and 'real' elements from both the home and the host country.

The study of Hindu temples in the Chicago area reveals that the nature of the sacred landscape and architecture of the Indian diaspora in the US is greatly varied in its architectural form and expression. The nature of these specific temples and religious organizations, and the particular needs of the diasporic Indian community that shaped their emergence in the US within the larger historical context, had a major impact upon their architecture and the character of the sacred spaces represented within their consecrated environment. For example, though both the Hindu Temple at Lemont and the Sri Venkateswara Temple at Aurora both draw a large number of devotees from various Indian ethnic, regional and linguistic backgrounds, yet the nature of their varied origins has shaped the emergence of their distinct forms. The Hindu Temple at Lemont originated to meet the needs of a more diverse group of Indians, in terms of their regional, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, while the Sri Venkateswara Temple at Aurora, was initially established to meet a very specific need of providing a sacred shrine for housing of a very particular deity, that is *of Sri Venkateswara (or Balaji)*, who is more commonly worshipped in this 'form' in South India. This point is important when we examine its influence on the sacred landscape and architecture of both the temples, where the Hindu Temple at Lemont derives its *authority*, as a conceptual entity as well as in its architectural form, owing to the eclectic character of its devotees, while the Sri Venkateswara Temple at Aurora, derives its *authenticity* as a religious center, in its physical expression as well as in the symbolic meanings associated with it, due to this specific need relating to housing of a particular deity, that ultimately shaped its architecture as less eclectic, in conceptual form and stylistic representation.

In contrast to the two temples at Lemont and Aurora, which incorporate symbolic architectural features that remind the perceiver of the spiritual connections with India in order to attract a larger number of members from the lay community, the Vivekananda Vedanta Center, is more of a monastic and scholastic establishment, and thus does not incorporate the use of typical architectural features and symbolic 'temple-facades' to make itself a popular 'symbol of religion'.

The variation in the architecture and sacred landscape of the three Hindu religious centers from the Chicago area, expresses differences amongst these multiple sites, though all of them get represented as an outcome of the process of 'hybridization' within the Indian diasporic context in the United States. This reveals the subjective consciousness of the diaspora and its varied expressions, depending upon the specific conditions in the different diaspora and its sociocultural locales.

Having examined the background of the three temples studied in the Chicago area, now let us explore the physical features, functional attributes and symbolic characteristics of the three Hindu temples in the Chicago

area, and note deviation from traditional and modern Hindu norms of temple building in India, in terms of:

A) Conceptual framework for laying out of the Hindu temple.

The framework for laying out of the Hindu temple in India is based on the concept of the *Vastu-purusa Mandala*, that is mentioned in the authoritative *Vedic* architectural treatise of the *Vastu Sastrras* or the traditional 'science of architecture'. As a sacred ritualistic diagram, the *Vastu-purusa Mandala* creates a microcosmic representation of the macrocosmic universe, that becomes the basis for the layout of the Hindu temple[43] (See figure 6).

The layouts for both the temple complexes at Lemont and Aurora derived their *authority* as authentic architectural representations of Hindu temples, owing to their creators, the *sthapatis* or *vastushilpis*, the priest-architects, who are the instructors in the traditional science of architecture, and who were called in specially from India for the entire duration of construction of the temples. For the Vivekananda Vedanta Center, that was housed in an already existing structure, rituals for sanctifying the meditation hall within its interior were performed by a priest from India.

This behavioral/cultural pattern of having priests from India sanctify the laying out of the Hindu temple in the United States, suggests the need of the diasporic Indian community to establish ties with the 'idealized homeland' of India during the process of establishing the sacred precincts of the Hindu temple. It also shows the reliance upon 'associations with India' in order to provide *authenticity* and *authority* to the process of temple-building in the United States.

B) Location and selection of temple site.

The essential motivating factor for the selection of site for the location of all three temples in the Chicago area was economic, depending upon the donation of the devotees, and the availability of land considered appropriate for the specific temple or religious center. In contrast, the sites of Hindu temples in India are established and designated by virtue of their mythical history, where such sites are especially chosen for their religious sanctity, based upon their mythical association with the pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses, or as a result of their connections with the lives of holy saints and seers.

The natural geography and landscape plays an extremely important role in establishing spiritual meanings and the sacredness of the site[44]. It is believed that the entire geography of India is potent with a latent spiritual energy because of its symbolic connection with *madhyadesh* 'the land at the center', that is symbolic of the homeland of the Aryans. The *ksetra* or

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[43] Stella Kramrisch, *The Hindu Temple*, Vol. I & II (Calcutta: University of Calcutta Press, 1946).

[44] Rana P.B. Singh, *Banaras (Varanasi): Cosmic Order, Sacred City, Hindu Traditions* (Varanasi: Tara Book Agency, 1993).

'sacred region' of India is believed to be symbolically drained by the sacred waters of the River Ganges that descends from Mt. Kailasa, symbolic of Mt Meru, the sacred mountain located at the center of the universe. The location of temples in India, then symbolically taps this sacredness in the landscape in a manner that successfully mirrors the sacred geography associated with the conceptual center of the universe or *madhyadesh*[45].

It is extremely interesting to observe the mechanism of bestowing such spiritual energies or sacredness to the land for the construction of temples in a country such as the United States, that is not perceived to have any symbolic or real connection with the sacred geography of India. For all the three temples studied in the Chicago area, the first step in the process of constructing the temples in the US involved the performance of religious rituals for purposes of purification and sanctification of the selected site. These rituals symbolically established spiritual connections with India on the selected site in the US by means such as: the use of special *mantras* or sacred verses that involved repetition of names of sacred spaces in India; the use of sacred elements in the rituals such as fire that represented the agent of purification, or water that was believed to symbolically represent the sacred waters of the Ganges; and the performance of special rituals that established the *purana* or 'mythical association' for the presiding deity, where symbolic connections with major Hindu gods at their traditional sacred homes at the important *tirthas* or pilgrimage centers in India were established.

According to the priests at the Hindu temples in the Chicago area, the *authenticity* of performing most rituals in the United States was established due to the performance of those same rituals in India. There were however some rituals, which are not practiced in India, yet which are being specially created for practice in the United States. This shows the influence of 'hybridity' on the traditional performance of rituals, where owing to the location in the host country, there is seen to be a change/modification in the process and performance of the particular ritual from the way that it is practiced in India.

C) The sacred environment of the Hindu temple.

Landscape features play an important role in establishing the sanctity of a Hindu sacred center in the minds of the people. At both the temple complexes at Lemont and Aurora, elements of nature and the presence of beautiful wooded natural settings and natural surroundings, were important features. Their role was to essentially establish a contrast of the peaceful natural landscape of the Hindu temple, to the typical urbanscape of the American city, with its sprawling megapolis of skyscrapers and complex transportation networks. This suggests an important need expected of the Hindu temple in the US, namely that of establishing a 'psychological

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[45] Surinder Bhardwaj, *Hindu Places of Pilgrimage in India: A Study in Cultural Geography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

distance' between the sacred and the secular environment, in order for it to attract devotees and make itself popular amongst a larger lay community.

In contrast to this, in modern India, whether the Hindu temple is located in the natural landscape or within the heart of the urban core of the city, a sacred activity such as a visit to the temple, is essentially as secular in its implication as going to work, in the sense of being an integral part and parcel of the believer's daily activities. In the context of the activity of visiting the temple in India, it becomes a daily ritual that is perpetuated by considerations that do not perceive any distinction between the sacred and secular in its spatial and temporal dimensions[46]. With reference to space, by recognizing sacred markers such as tree shrines etc., mythical and spiritual associations are established at even the most mundane of sites such as street crossings, neighborhood alleys etc. while in the context of time, each day of the week is considered appropriate to one or the other of the Hindu gods and goddesses, and this makes any moment of a visit to the Hindu temple sacred and special.

In Hinduism, owing to special spiritual connotations associated with water such as its role as a purifying agent whose essential function is germinative, most temples in India incorporate the element of water in their sacred and ritualistic landscapes[47]. Hindu temples in the US, such as those at Lemont and Aurora, also incorporate the element of water in their designs, but more for its symbolic value as a pleasing aesthetic element, rather than for its mythical and ritualistic significance.

Hinduism denotes symbolic connotations to the natural vegetation, and the sacred environment of temples in India incorporates these as important landscape elements within its setting. Additionally, special trees, shrubs and grasses are associated with certain deities, for example *Kadamba* tree is associated with *Lord Krishna*, the 'Blue-god of the cowherds'; the *Asoka* tree with *Kama,* the 'God of love'; etc.

In the United States, owing to the climatic and geographical conditions in the country, the nature of vegetation is markedly different in this temperate region as compared to the tropical nature of the Indian subcontinent, and subsequently, the natural vegetation on the US does not have any specific spiritual meanings associated with it. Thus there was a tendency to ignore the natural vegetation in contrast to the treatment of the sacred architecture in the Hindu temple in the US.

D) Temple layout, the configuration of its various parts, and the influence of architectural styles.

Tracing the origin of the Sri Venkateswara Swami Temple at Aurora to the particular needs of the Indian diasporic community for providing a sacred

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[46] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy: Centenary Edition, Volume One* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[47] Diana Eck, *Banaras: City of Light,* First Edition (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1982).

shrine for housing the particular image of the popular South Indian deity of Sri Venkateswara Swami, the temple at Aurora derives its architectural authority as a religious center, owing to its authentic translation and interpretation, in conceptual form and stylistic representation, of the *Vastu-purusa Mandala* from the textual descriptions suggested in the ritualistic South Indian *Agama* texts.

The *Agama* texts specify the layout plan of the temple at Aurora to be based on the shrine of its presiding deity, *Sri Venkateswara Swami,* who is also mentioned in the southern texts of the *Bhanvisyottara Purana* and the *Varaha Purana* as an incarnation of *Lord Visnu,* and whose shrine is located directly as a culmination of the east-west cardinal axis (See Figure 7).

On either side of the main shrine are indicated shrines for *Sri Devi* and *Bhudevi,* both incarnations of *Lakshmi,* who is the consort of *Lord Visnu,* the Hindu god of sustenance. Since the main entrance is prescribed to be from the east, devotees upon entering the temple first pay homage to shrines of guardian deities such *as Ganapati, Subrahmanyam, Siva* and *Parvati* that are closer to the entrance.

The exterior architectural representation of the Sri Venkateswara Swami Temple, with its creative use of exposed brick, in combination with the judicious use of minimal concrete and plaster as a means of ornamentation; the lines and rhythm generated within the harmony of the entire architectural composition; the use of traditional architectural elements like the *chaitya* or horse-shoe arch in a new representative style, and the colorful balance and play of red and cream achieved in the entire architectural composition; completely rejuvenates the traditional South Indian *Dravidian* architecture to suit its context and location in the United States, yet retaining its Indian spirit and character (See figure 8).

In contrast, owing to the history of the origin of the Hindu Temple at Lemont as a sacred entity catering to the spiritual needs of a more diverse group, in terms of their regional, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, the Hindu Temple at Lemont is extremely eclectic in its architectural representation. It derives its authority by assimilating common features of the *Vastu-purusa Mandala* derived from different textual sources, without being concerned with authenticity in following the particularities of one specific textual source.

Thus at a general level, the temple layout at the Lemont complex follows characteristics for temple building common to most sacred texts, such as their orientation towards the cardinal directions, and the marking of the temple entrance towards the east, etc.; however in its representation, layout and use of architectural styles it amalgamates from different architectural and textual sources (See Figure 9).

The temple complex at Lemont consists of two main separate temples. The Rama Temple, which with its plastered, curvilinear towers or *gopuras,* one atop the sanctuary of the main deity, and the second piercing the center of the eastern face and forming the entrance gateway; along with

its *prastara* or the blank outer wall that encloses the temple; is essentially conceptualized along the South Indian *Dravida* style in spirit and character (See Figure 10). The second temple, the Ganesa-Shiva-Durga Temple (popularly called the GSD Temple), is conceptualized in the spirit of the North Indian *Nagara* style of temple building with its typical Nagara elements, such as *sikharas* or the pyramidal towers atop the different shrines, the emphasis of the plastered or stone-tiled *sikharas* upon vertical lines, their abstract symbolic sculptural representations, etc. (See Figure 11).

Like most modern temples and unlike the traditional temples in India, at both the temples at Lemont, one sees under one roof, a wide range of incidentally selected deities from different parts of India, and from different time periods in Indian history, such as *Sri Rama, Lord Ganesha, Sri Krishna* etc. who are more popular in North India, as well as *Lord Venkateswara* and *Mahalaxmi*, who are commonly worshipped in South India.

In traditional Indian temples, the typical layout of the South Indian *Dravida* temple such as at the Minaksi-Sundareswara Temple in the southern city of Madurai from the sixteenth century CE, was based on a series of concentric spaces around the main deity's shrine. This shrine was usually located at the center ('real' or conceptual) of the temple complex, and shaped the radial growth of the temple about itself (See Figure 12). On the other hand, the Linghraj Temple at Bhuvaneshwara from the eleventh century CE represents the layout of the typical North Indian *Nagara* temple, where the evolution of the temple plan was more linear. In such *Nagara* temples, the tendency was to accentuate the east-west cardinal directions by the addition of pavilions and shrines along the major axis[48] (See Figure 13).

At the Rama Temple at Lemont, one sees an integration of both *Dravida* (South Indian) and *Nagara* (North Indian) elements in the temple's layout, where the position in the middle is taken over by a huge *mandapam* or community hall, and subsidiary shrines are located randomly and laid out in a radial concentrated growth around the central *mandapam* hall, an element borrowed from traditional *Dravida* temples (See Figure 14). At both the temple shrines at Lemont, such typical *Dravidian* temple features are incorporated with other features that draw inspiration from traditional *Nagara* temples. One such example in the temples' layout is seen in its accentuation of the east-west cardinal axis, where the main deity's shrine gets pulled along the west direction, a feature very similar to that seen in traditional *Nagara* temples in India.

In contrast to the temple complexes at Lemont and Aurora, the Vivekananda Vedanta Center that functions more as a philosophical center than a symbol of 'popular religion', is housed in a quiet residential setting

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[48] George Michell, *The Hindu Temple: an introduction to its meaning and forms* (London: Elek, 1977).

in an ordinary house-like building, and the role of the landscape, architecture, and its authenticity in terms of prescribing to any particular textual source of origin, plays a very small role in establishing the sacredness of the center. Even at its entrance, except for the sign with the name and activities of the spiritual center, there is no other landscape feature that sets it apart and indicates the presence of the center within. Typical features with attractive 'temple like' architectural elements in its exterior façade is minimal, since its main function is more as a monastic and scholastic establishment that addresses the spiritual needs of a select group, rather than making itself acceptable amongst a larger Indian community. This is seen as a complete contrast to the complex of the Lemont Temple, where even an architectural element like the entrance gateway, becomes a visible, physical and psychological symbol that 'marks' out and helps in the recognition of the Indian group identity in space (See Figure 15).

Unlike in India where a majority of devotees to temples do not own their own vehicles, here in the US accessibility to these suburban religious centers is only via private vehicular transportation, and allocation for parking space within the layouts at the temple complexes at Lemont and Aurora were major concerns. Thus, at the Lemont Temple, sensitive design strategies like the incorporation of landscape elements, terrain, and rolling greens are used to create a distance, both physically and psychologically, between the sacred precincts of the Rama temple and the space allocated for parking.

Future plans for the development of the temple complex at Lemont envision the construction of a large multi-purpose community hall for social and recreational activities right in-between the sacred spaces of the Rama temple and the GSD Temple, a decision that suggests site planning and management based upon a need to blur the distinctions between sacred and social spaces in the site layout.

E) Temple Interior

In both the temple complexes at Lemont and Aurora, the traditional location of the *Ardha Mandapam* or the porch leading unto the main hall is enlarged and extended to house auxiliary spaces such as racks for shoes, information desk etc. One also sees most of the lower level accommodating spaces for hosting socio-cultural functions, such as get-together for Indian meals, picnics, social and cultural shows as well as inviting performing artists from India to perform within the temple premises. This accommodation of spaces for social and cultural activities can be seen as a strong 'visible' difference in the temple design from traditional temples in India, owing to the influence of the 'hybridized' cultural environment and the emergence of the Hindu temple as a sociocultural center in the United States.

Narrow circumambulatory paths around each shine within the interior layout generates images of traditional *pradakasina* paths and helps

establish authenticity for the Sri Venkateswara Swami Temple at Aurora, where each shrine in the temple layout incorporates this element in the form of a closed corridor for circumambulation about itself; at the Hindu temple at Lemont the element of the *pradakasina* path is conspicuous by its absence in the temple's layout.

In the interior of both the temple complexes at Aurora and Lemont, there is a conscious effort to imitate stone and timber building techniques that were used in traditional Hindu temples. Even structural elements like the finely carved columns in unfinished concrete at the two temples, are created as replicas of a stone columns from a traditional Hindu temple in India in order to establish authentic memories of the 'idealized homeland' (See Figure 16).

Abundant use of new materials like steel and glass, as well as modern furnishings, like ceiling and floor tiles, sophisticated lighting fixtures, fine carpeting etc. as well as artificial air-conditioning and other service systems remind us of the location of the Hindu temple here in the United States. Delicate use of artificial lighting at the Sri Venkateswara Swami Temple at Aurora and at the Lemont complex, directs the gaze towards the interior shrines with their images of the deities, which is starkly in contrast to the *garbhagriha* or the small dark chamber housing the main deity's idol in the traditional Hindu temple in India.

At the Vivekananda Vedanta Center, the meditation hall forms the main focus of the religious institution, and it is housed in a modestly sized, simple room, one end of which is taken over by the *pujagriha* or 'worship house' where a host of symbols and images of gods, goddesses and saints from various religions across the world are placed. This area is separated from the public seating area by a wooden partition, created in the image of a traditional stone arch, that evokes the memory of Rajput and Islamic architecture in India. Additionally, public functions like a book store, library for books on Eastern religion and culture and reading rooms were an important component at this center. Moreover, at all the three temples studied, special spaces were provided within their layouts for conducting classes on various classical music and dance forms, *yoga*, and other cultural traditions of India, with the aim of providing education about India to the second generation Asian Indians born in the US.

Conclusion

According to Per Raberg, the role of architecture in providing a spatial form and organization for human activities, draws heavily from the various social functions and cultural formations within which it is created[49]. The experience of architecture "in its whole context of place, history and social assumptions" is essential, for the built environment is

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[49] Per Raberg, *The Space of Man* (Stockholm: University of Umea, 1987).

brought into being by "the needs and aspirations of human beings in that place at that time"[50].

In the context of the 'architecture of the diaspora' and the expression of its hybridization in the study of the three Hindu temples located in the Chicago area, the sacred landscape and architecture of the Hindu temple becomes an important 'tool' for the diasporic community to express its ties with the homeland. Yet as an architectural entity, within the physical and cultural environment of the host country, and its social, economic, political and architectural processes, it also gets shaped consciously or unconsciously by its location and context in the host country. This is highly evident in the case-studies of the Hindu temples, where the sacred landscape and architecture acquires a 'new form' in its truest sense, since it incorporates not only symbolism, design strategies, details and materials of construction from India, but borrows richly owing to its emergence as an 'architecture of the Indian diaspora' in the United States. An important point to note is that even though the Hindu temples play similar psychological, philosophical, and sociocultural roles, their means of expression and the design of their sacred landscapes are markedly different. These differences are greatly dependent upon the nature of the specific Hindu temple and the particular needs of the diasporic community. This reveals the 'subjective multiplicity' of diaspora consciousness in its expression in the built environment. Such variation in the 'hybridized' environments depends upon the nature of the specific 'diasporic consciousness' of the community to which the particular sacred center 'caters' to. It is specifically tied to the needs and expectations of the particular community within the diaspora, and its specific historical, sociocultural and economic 'locales'.

The 'hybridized' environment expresses itself depending upon the perceptions of the community about the psychological, philosophical, sociocultural and religious roles of the Hindu temple. It also depends upon the specific community's perception of the Hindu temple's function as an authoritative and authentic 'marker' of their diasporic identity. The variation in the degree and extent of hybridization in the built environment expresses in the particular architectural form of the Hindu temple. It is also seen in the process of establishing the conceptual framework of the Hindu temple, and in the location and selection of the temple site. In the three sacred sites studied in the Chicago area, the variation in the 'hybridized' environment and sacred landscape of the Hindu temple, manifests in the design and layout of the temple, the configuration of its various parts and the influence of architectural styles, the use of symbols and iconographic representations in the temple interior and exterior, the choice of building materials and details of construction etc. Such a discourse on the subjectivity of the 'hybridized experience' in the built environment realizes the richness, multiplicity, and complex nature of diasporic cultural

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[50] Sinclair Gauldie, *Architecture* (London: Oxford Publishing Co., 1969).

formation, and its expression in shaping architecture and sacred space. On this note, it is worthwhile to end by remembering Stuart Hall's thoughts on identity. He states, "...the discursive approach sees identification as a construction, a process never completed – always 'in process'. It is not determined in the sense that it can always be 'won' or 'lost', sustained or abandoned. Though not without its determinate conditions of existence, including the material and symbolic resources required to sustain it, identification is in the end conditional, lodged in contingency."[51]

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[51] Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs "Identity"?," in Stuart Hall, Paul duGay, eds., *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage Publications, 1996), p. 2.

FIGURES

Figure 1: The Vivekananda Vedanta Center at Hyde Park, Chicago.
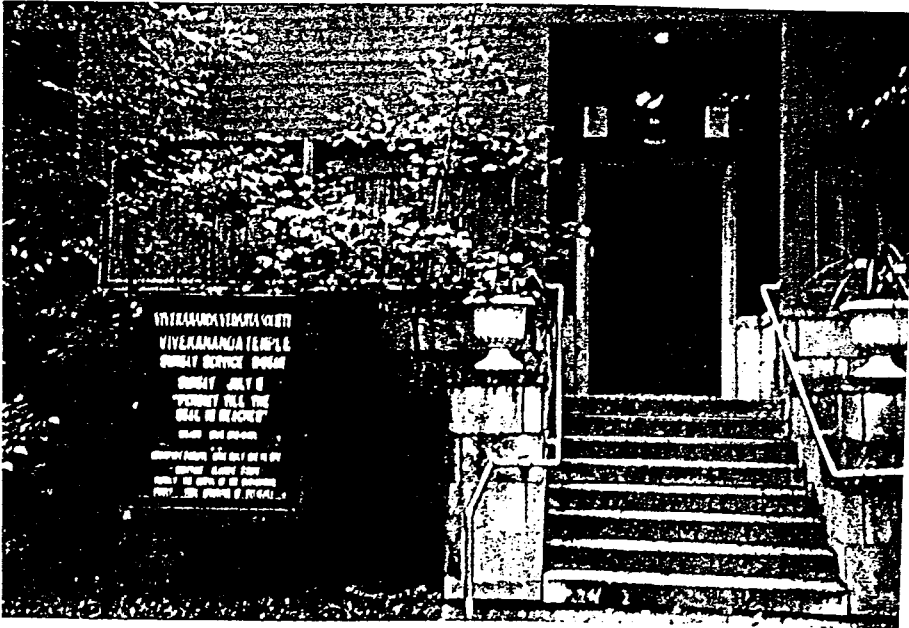
Figure 2: The Sri Venkateswara Swami Temple of Greater Chicago at Aurora.
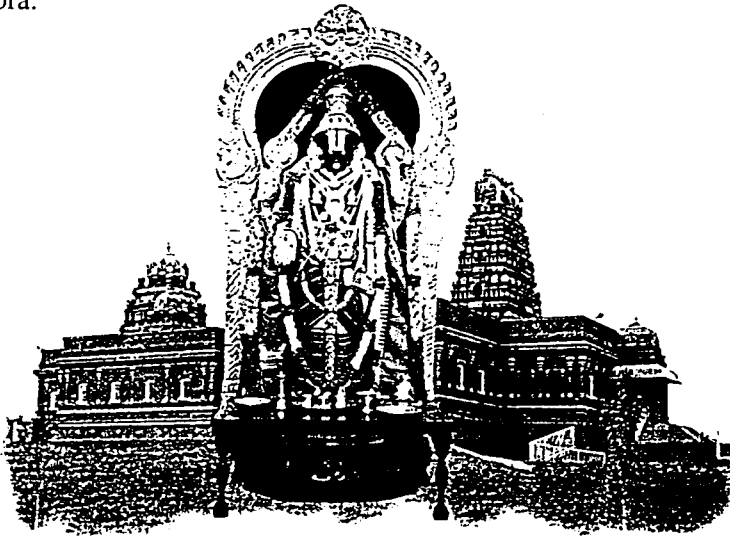
SRI VENKATESWARA SWAMI (BALAJI) TEMPLE OF GREATER ....

Figure 3: The Hindu Temple of
Greater Chicago at Lemont.
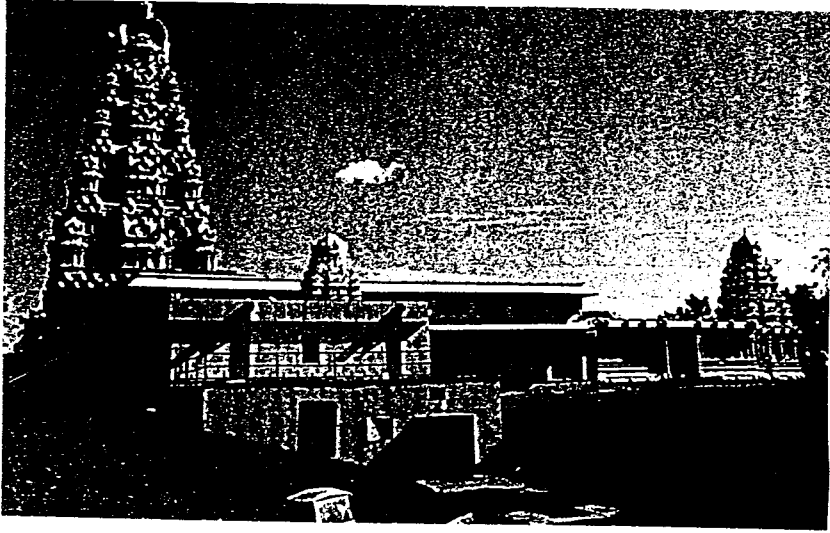
Figure 4: The vimana or the 'tower'
atop the main shrine at the Sri
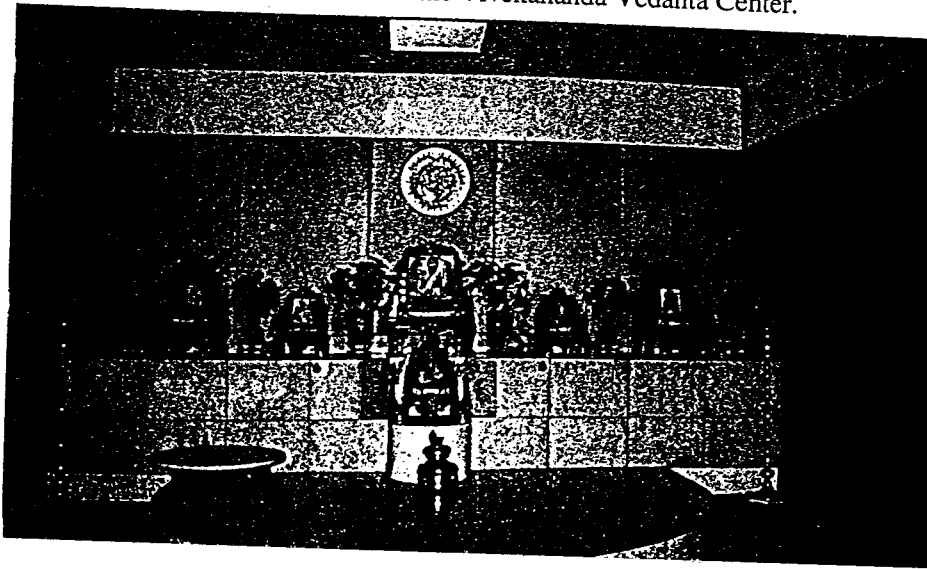Venkateswara Swami Temple
of Greater Chicago at Aurora.
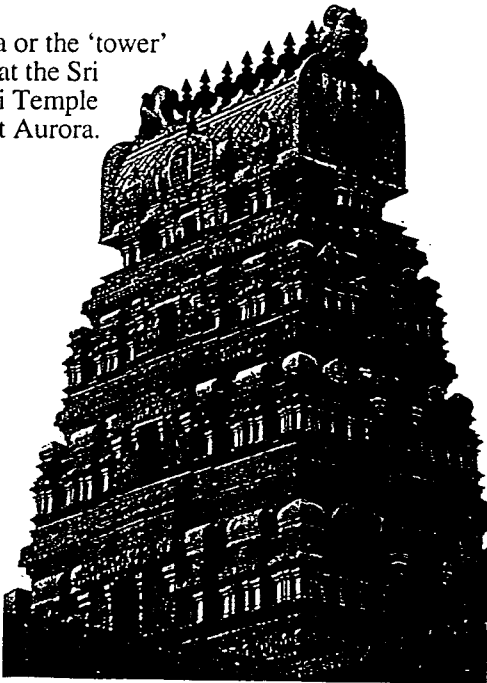
Figure 5: The meditation hall at the Vivekananda Vedanta Center.
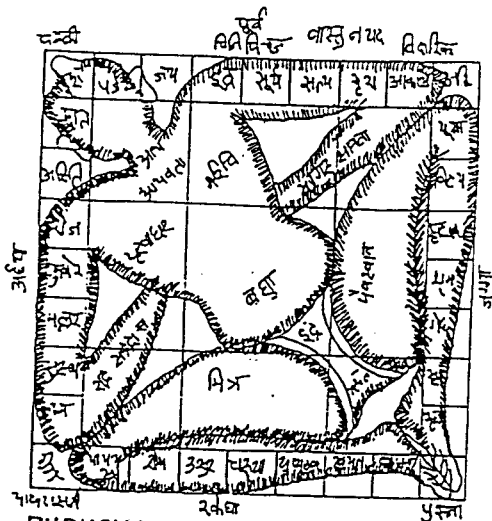
PURUSHA IN VASTU MANDALA
Original Drawing From Grover (1980). The Architecture of India.

Figure 6: Vastu-purusa Mandala.

Figure 7:
Layout plan of the Sri
Venkateswara
Swami Temple of
Greater Chicago
at Aurora.
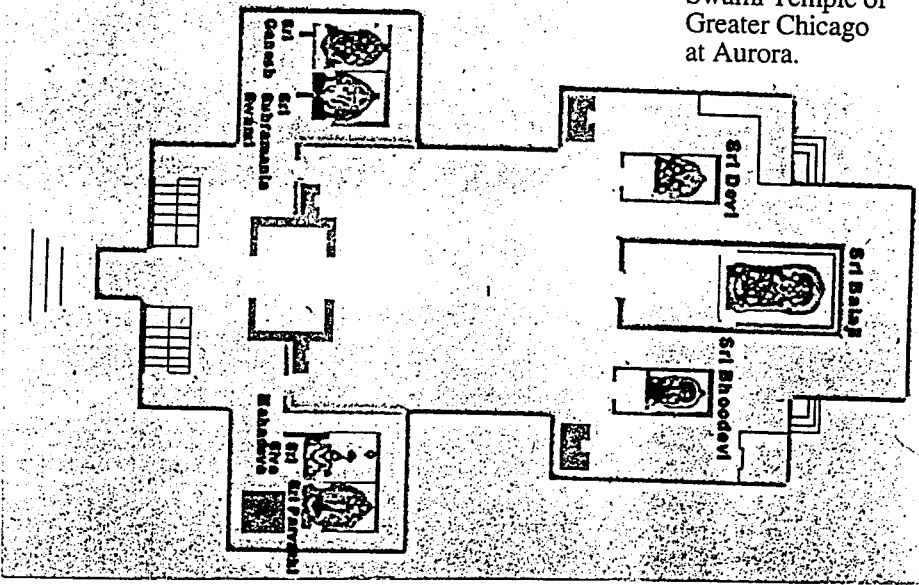
Figure 8: Exterior
façade of the Sri
Venkateswara Swami
Temple of Greater
Chicago at Aurora.
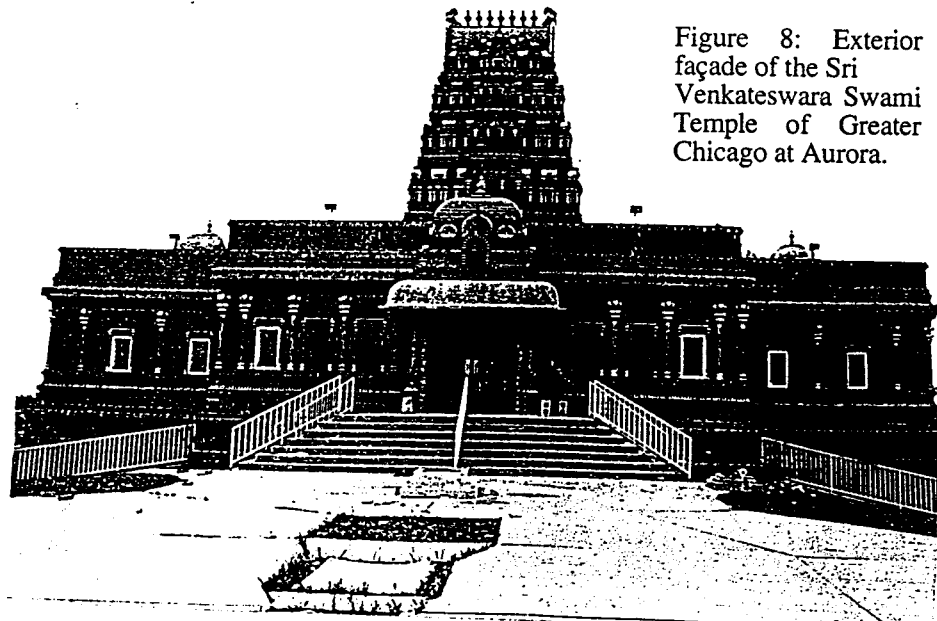
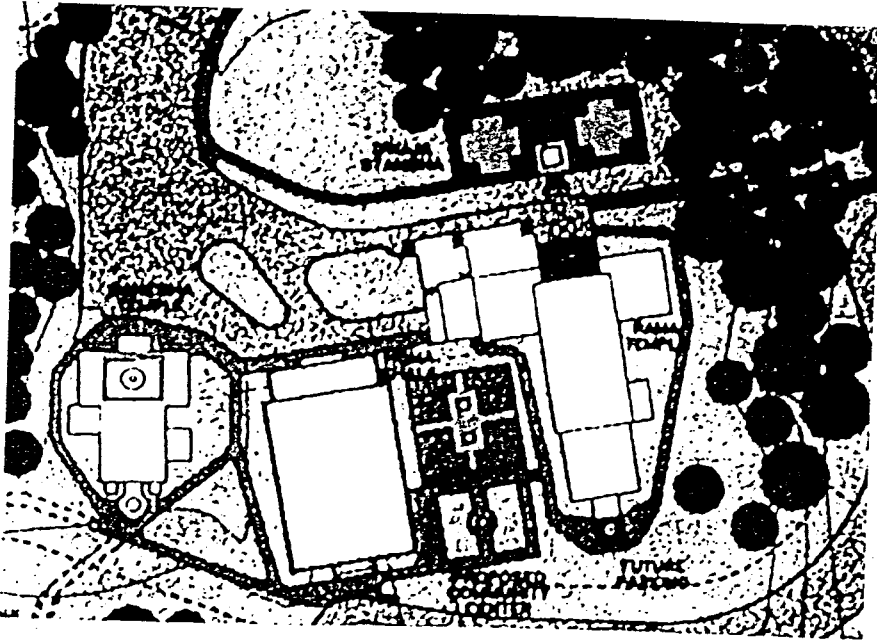Figure 9: Layout plan of the Hindu Temple of
Greater Chicago at Lemont.
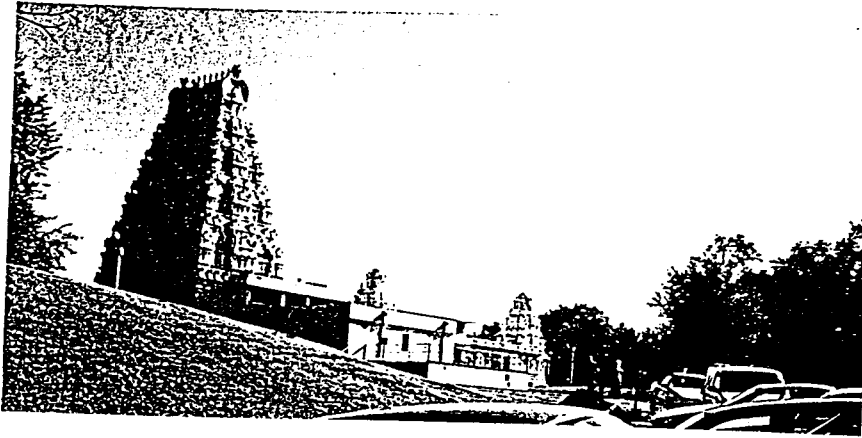
Figure 10: Rama Temple at Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago at Lemont.

Figure 11: Ganesa-Shiva-Durga Temple at the Hindu Temple of
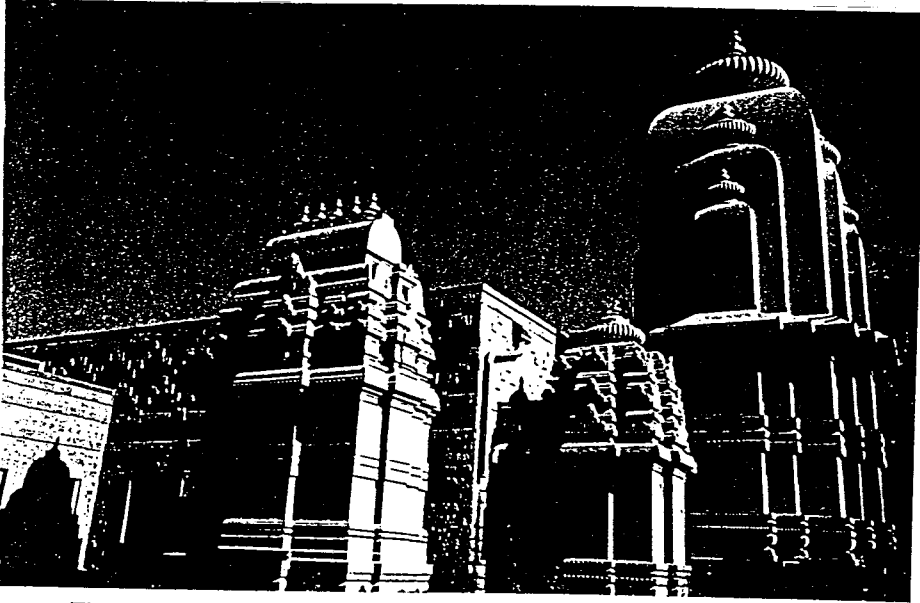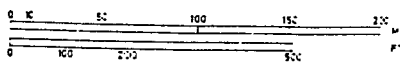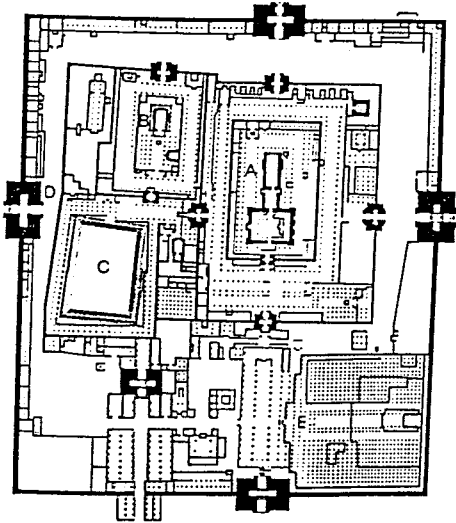Greater Chicago at Lemont.

Figure 12: Layout plan of the Minaksi-Sundareswara Temple, Madurai.

A Shrine of Sundareshvara
B Shrine of Meenakshi
C Temple pond
D South Gopura
E Hall of One Thousand Pillars

Figure 13: Layout plan of the Linghraj Temple in Bhuvaneshwara, Orissa.
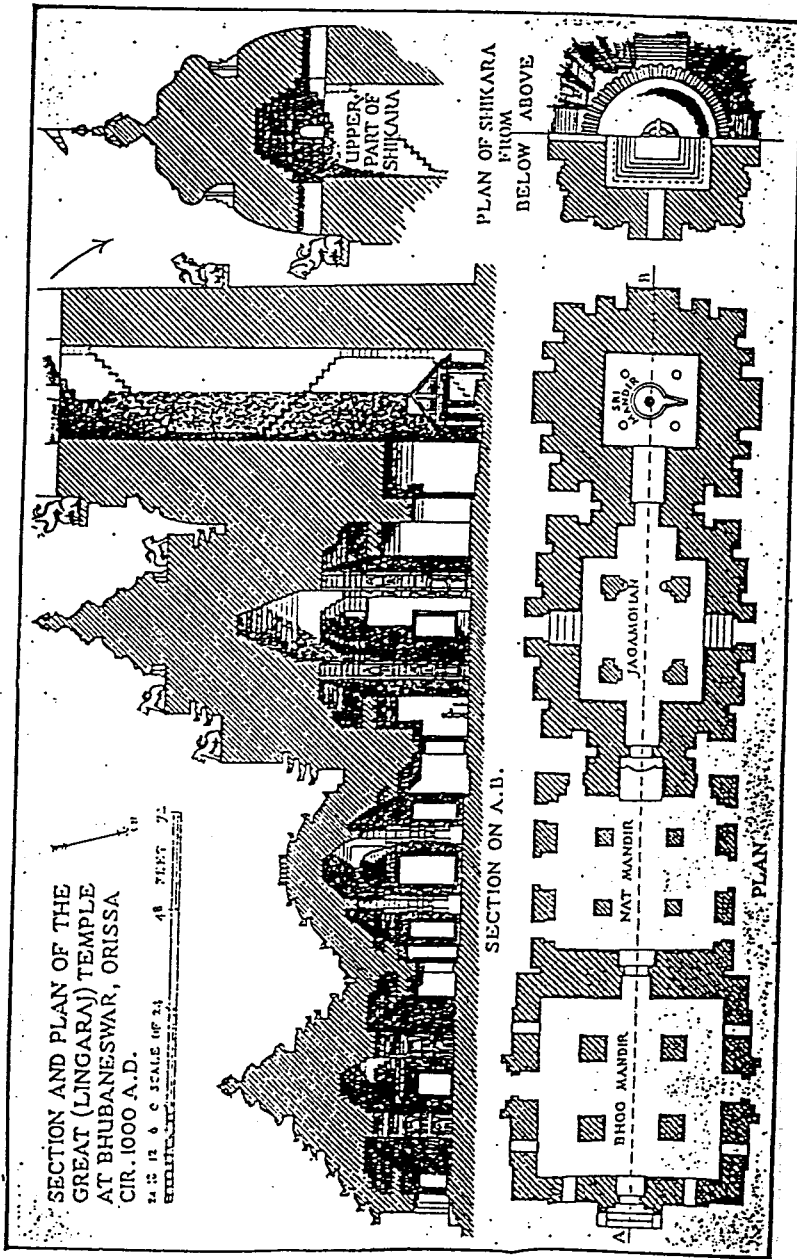
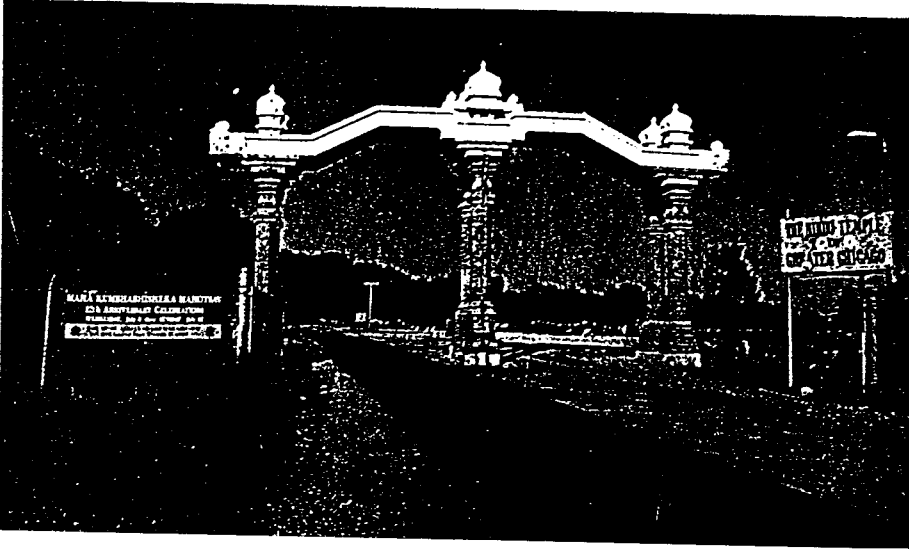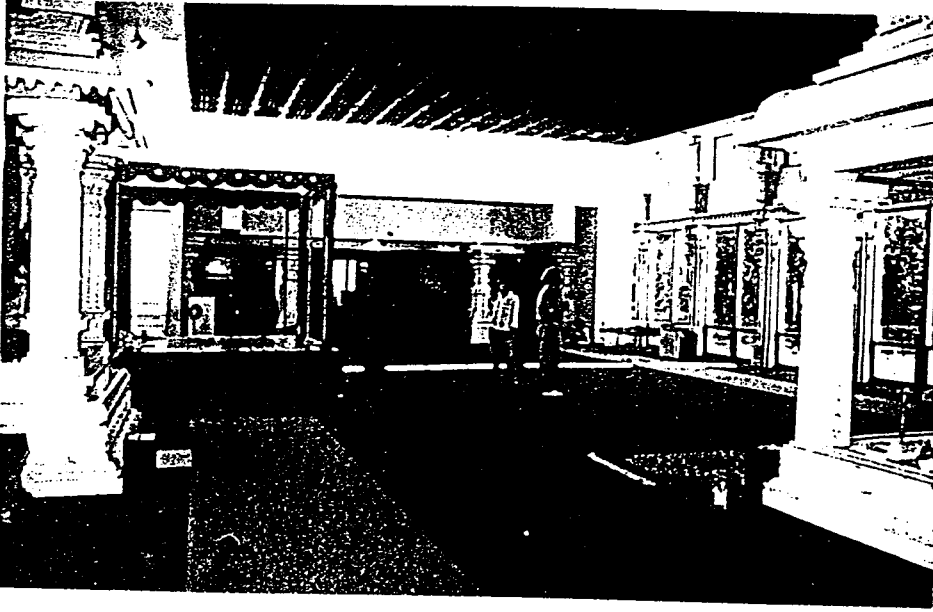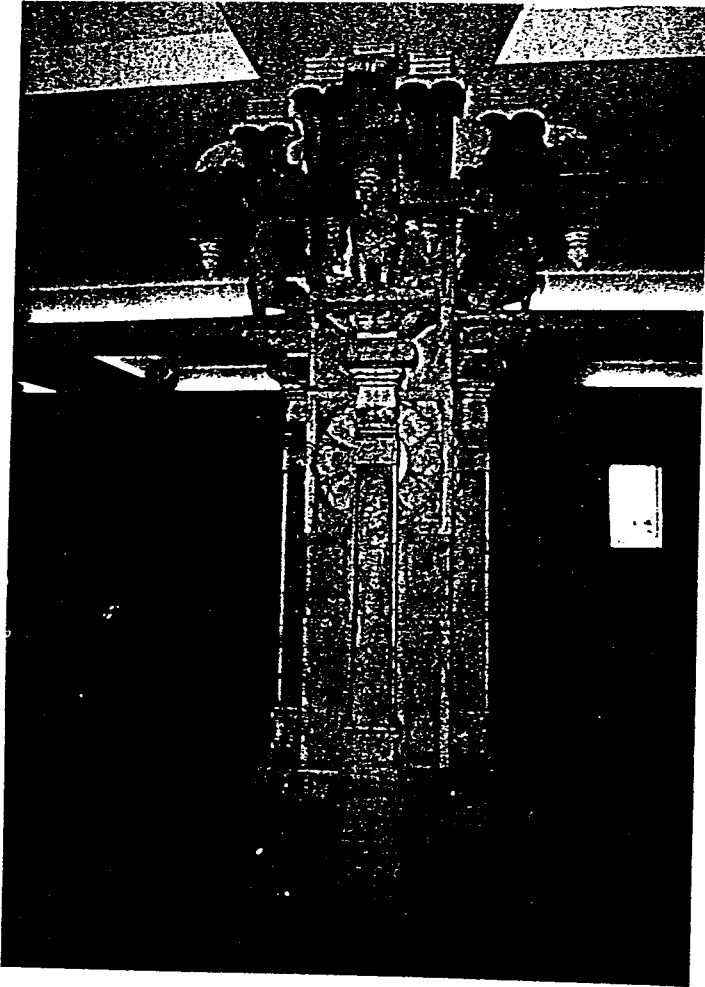Figure 14: *Mandapa* hall at the Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago at Lemont.

Figure 15: Entrance gateway to the Hindu Temple of Greater Chicago at Lemont.

Figure 16: Structural column at the Sri Venkateswara Swami Temple of Creater Chicago at Aurora, created as a replica of a stone column from a traditional Hindu temple in India.

Asian Underground Music and the Public Sphere in London: Exploring the Politics of Production[1]

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It's November, 1996 in London, England, and Talvin Singh, a classically-trained tabla player, born and bred in London, has started a club night at the famed music venue, the Blue Note, situated in the east end of London. The club night is called "*Anokha*" meaning "unique" in Hindi, and is on every Monday night for an affordable three pounds entry fee. The night features current trends in dance music, but with what the promoters call an "Asian aesthetic," which amounts to a fusion of dance music with tablas, sitars, and South Asian vocals. This Asian aesthetic includes a *chaat* bar where one can consume masala tea, *papad, bhajia* and other South Asian food snacks that have become popular in England. The aesthetic is also promoted through a series of visuals, including paintings and (mostly Hindu) religious signifiers from South Asia that adorn the walls of the Blue Note. The main visual is a video screen hung above the middle of the dance floor that loops segments from various Hindi films from the 1970s and 1980s.

While others have run similar kinds of clubs, by 1997, *Anokha*, perhaps through a combination of Singh's own strength at public relations, the fame of the venue, and its location in the newly gentrifying and trendy East End, started receiving *particular* attention from clubbers and from the media. By mid-1997, almost every Asian and mainstream press, from tabloid dailies to the more "respectable" papers, had featured a story on Talvin Singh and his club night, all of which further heightened its popularity.

By the end of 1997, *Anokha's* Monday night slot was accompanied by similar events almost every other night of the week run by Asian sound

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systems[2] like Earthtribe, Joi, State of Bengal, and record labels such as Outcaste, that promote British-Asian artists. While these groups had been producing Asian "fusion" music (as it is often termed) since well before 1996, they, too, became prominent in the media as part of the new wave of interest in Asian dance music. Now, nearing the end of 1999, there are more second and third-generation British Asian artists, sound systems, DJ's and singers signed to recording deals than ever before.

Media coverage of *Anokha* had consequences beyond what anyone expected and beyond any individual's control. One outcome was the introduction and increasingly popular usage of the term "Asian Underground" to characterize all new, South Asian-influenced dance music. As part of the promotion for *Anokha*, Singh released a compact disk compilation called, "*Anokha*: Soundz of the Asian Underground." To the disdain of many artists and as a consequence of what many feel is the racism of the music industry and press, media attention to *Anokha* and the compilation meant that the term "Asian Underground" took on a life of its own. It came to function as a label and shorthand for the mainstream press for *any* music being created by musicians of South Asian descent, regardless of the differences in musical content. On the other hand, this media attention also created spaces for these musicians to tell stories about their music and its relationship to their identities as British Asians, a group who comprise the largest minority population coming of age in Britain.[3]

The other major consequence of media coverage of the newly termed "Asian Underground" scene was that it introduced a new set of images of Asians into the popular press, imagination, and public spheres in the UK. Previous images consisted of stereotypes of Asians as either shopkeepers or professionals (depending on which socio-economic class one wanted to emphasize); in terms of youth culture, young Asians were seen as bound by family and backward traditions and basically "unhip." These new images are best summed up by the phrase, bandied about in 1997 and 1998, that "brown is the new black" -- with "black" functioning as a signifier of all that is "cool" in youth subcultures in the urban West (which itself says much about the intersections of cultural cool and racial politics). Also, through coverage of Asians making music, as actual

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[2] A sound system is usually a team or collective of DJ's who have their own equipment, generally "perform" as a group, and have a name or title. There are "sound system clashes" where different systems set up and compete against each other. In these competitions, the "sound" refers to the music, originality, etc., and the "system" refers to the bass speakers, equipment, and effects. Sound systems have a more extensive history in the UK than in the US and have been most popularly used for reggae DJ's.

[3] According to the 1991 census, Indian (840,255), Pakistani (476,555), and Bangladeshi (162,835) groups total to nearly 1.5 million or 2.6% of Britain's total population. Black populations (Black Caribbean, Black African, and "Black Other") number around 900,000 and Chinese, "Other-Asian," and "Other-Other" groups at about 650,000. In London itself, 20% of the population classify themselves as non-white.

producers in London's famed club life, the media helped usher in a wide-ranging interest in things "Asian." As one example, the fact that young white and black women began donning bindis and mehndi (or henna designs) was brought to bear as evidence that being Asian was "in" and "hip." While this raises a host of questions about cultural appropriation, commodity capitalism, and race, and while none of this has led to a real decrease in racism or racist violence[4], the introduction of these new ways of reading the other were significant to many young British Asians. As Imran Khan, the editor of a new and successful magazine called "Second Generation" states, "I'm sick of Asians being seen as victims."

Now, nearing the end of 1999, there is a lot of uncertainty about the future of Asians in music production and of the impact of "Asian Kool." Over the course of these past few years, while many opportunities have opened up for British Asians to produce music, the scramble for the market has pitted some promoters and record labels against each other. The weekly club nights have ended as competition has led them to effectively kill each other's crowds. Meanwhile, the appropriation of what people have come to term "Asian aesthetics" continues as high fashion adopts fabrics from the Indian sub-continent, mehndi designs become institutionalized and sold as body art in London's department stores, and internationally famous artists like Madonna and Mary J. Blige take up mehndi and bindis. The label "Asian Underground" has moved from a hated necessity to just plain hated by many British Asian artists, and panic has set in about their success being a trend or fad. While these artists continue to produce music for Londoners, they are also searching for new markets abroad; but many are questioning, where are we going to be in five years time?

During these past two years, as the mass media have been involved in marketing British Asian musicians and "Asian Kool," I have been interested in understanding the impact of these developments on young British Asians themselves. How, as the publicity went national, did this media dissemination of "Asian Kool" have an impact on local groups of Asian youth and on their struggles vis á vis the British state and society that continue, in many ways, to construct them as cultural outsiders? Discussions with British Asian artists and various sets of consumers of the "Asian Underground" scene reveal that these developments in music and the media have initiated a new set of debates about identity and the politics of being a second-generation British Asian. I will briefly discuss one issue about the category of "the political" raised by certain audiences. I will then use this to launch a discussion about the politics of production. Here, I

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[4] "In 1997/8, the police recorded 13,878 racial incidents in England and Wales, an increase of 6% over the previous year," CRE Fact Sheet, Racial Attacks and Harassment, CRE, Revised 1999. See this fact sheet and the web site: http://www.homebeats.co.uk/resources/violence.htm for more thorough information on racial violence, racially-motivated murders, and issues of reportage.

will examine the narrative of one DJ as an example of how artists situate themselves, their work, and their politics as they negotiate these newly formed yet mass-mediated spaces. This ethnographic analysis of musical production will reveal the ways in which artists have continued to wage a political struggle despite criticism by British Asian audiences that they have "sold out."

The Audience[5]

Anokha and similar clubs have attracted among its clientele, a particular section of British Asian artists (actors, visual artists, etc.) and political activists who have been committed to bettering the lives of Asians in Britain in different ways. Discussions with many of these people about Anokha, the "Asian Underground," and up-and-coming artists revealed a particular understanding about the relationship of British Asian identity to political life in Britain. Their general argument is that these newly famous British Asian musicians have in one way or another failed them. As Nadia, a race relations worker states, "I don't even pretend to think they are political. Most of them are interested in being 'cultural' Asians-- they'll talk about identity to the mass media, but that they are not 'political' Asians -- Asians who are committed to the project of eradicating racial discrimination." For her, only the indie group, Asian Dub Foundation (ADF), whose lyrics explicitly comment on politics and who have joined in political campaigns, are truly political. In Nadia's words, "they DO something."[6]

Sangeeta, an actor and photographer who works with a variety of British Asian youth organizations, agrees with Sangeeta that only ADF are truly political, not necessarily because they have explicitly political lyrics, but because they have the ability to situate themselves and their work historically and in a political context. She states, "If these groups are going to use the fact that they are British Asians to sell their music, if, in fact, they are 'fusing' western and eastern sounds, then they have a responsibility to articulate the political and historical contexts of Asians in this country." And in her opinion, most fail miserably.

Finally, one playwright, Parv Bancil, who has been interested in the Asian Underground scene since its onset, echoes the sentiments of Sangeeta and Nadia in a recent play about the British Asian musicians who have newly found fame within the media. In it, he challenges these artists to have artistic and political integrity. One of the many ideas communicated

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[5] I have used pseudonyms to protect certain audience members' confidentiality.

[6] As Jatinder Barn states, "This is a part of a wider, late 1990's debate about the state of the category "political" and the way we do politics. 'Doing something' forms the basis of a claim, if not the only claim, to a higher, purer form of politics. Real activists credentials are only for those who devote their entire lives to the cause, never deviating from such paths of righteousness," (in conversation, 1999).

through his play is that one should not "sell-out" to the mainstream media by, for example, learning to play a sitar simply because it sells at the moment. Through his play, he encourages his audiences to be more critical of the exploitative nature of the recent capitalist-driven interest in British Asians.

Whether it amounts, in Sangeeta's words, to actually doing something, in Nadia's words, to being able to articulate politics and history, or in Parv's words, to not "selling-out" to the media, these voices index a wider dismay at the way in which these British Asian artists have negotiated the mass media. All three signal that these musicians have compromised any substantive political project. The fact that all three consider themselves members of an older generation also raises questions about shifting generational understandings among British Asians of what it means to wage political struggle.

DJ Ali[7]

In many ways Sangeeta's, Nadia's and Parv's statements are confirmed by the musicians and DJ's themselves. Among many artists I spoke with, there was a definite disdain for the "political" -- repeatedly, musicians and DJ's would state that they had no interest in it whatsoever. They did not consider their music political and they had no interest in making political statements. As one former member of the music industry indicated, unlike in the early 1990's when there were groups like Fundamental, Kaliphz, and Hustlers HC who sang about racism and related issues that Asian youth growing up in England have to deal with, with the "Asian Underground" scene, politics had become a dirty word.

However, what I want to argue is that, as an interview with DJ Ali reveals, the "political" is a far more complex *negotiation* of competing and conflicting forces including: (1) the everyday functioning of the mainstream media and music industries (that many perceive as racist); (2) the internal politics of the much smaller Asian music industry; (3) one's commitments to one's own "artistic" self and sets of experiences that inform that; and (4) the demands of one's parents and ethnic/ religious communities. Through a reading of Ali's work, as he narrates it, I hope to explore a politics and a subjectivity that gets produced through his negotiation of these various institutions.

DJ Ali produces dance music. He identifies as Indian and was born and raised in the East End of London in a working-class area well-known for National Front racist activity. His parents' own struggle paralleled those of other migrants whose foremost concern was survival. Ali states, "My dad always said, you will be staying in this country, so the best thing is to contribute something to this society... We understood what he

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7 I have used a pseudonym here to protect his confidentiality.

meant." As he matriculated through the schooling system with the hopes of working with computers, a disability barred that as an option. At the end of his coursework, with no other career options lined up, he found himself turning to music -- as the only other thing he had a passion for. Listening to records and going clubbing had already become a resource in his life; he narrates it as part of a seamless existence -- as part of an escape from the "noise" of the demands of his parents and as part of the natural course of growing up in a predominantly black and white area.

His first experience of DJ-ing solidified his decision to take it up as a career. The fact that he was making people dance, making them "do" something, gave him the adrenaline to continue. Here, the importance of dance to his relationship to music -- that it is not about just *listening* to it, but *feeling* it -- is part of a politics of pleasure that Paul Gilroy has discussed and that I will pick up later.

As he became a more experienced DJ, he began mixing eastern sounds with western sounds (as this "fusion" is commonly described). However, Ali did not get signed as a recording artist until several years later, after the creation of a few Asian-owned record companies and after "fusion" music became more widely marketable.

Ali's initial interests in mixing eastern sounds with western beats developed out of an experience of lack -- while he enjoyed DJ-ing, he felt something "missing." Attuning his ears to the Hindi film his mother was watching one particular day, he decided to experiment. This experience of lack also became a kind of nostalgia for India -- a place he's never been to but connects with through sound. All of this soon developed into a mission of "bringing the Asian culture forward." He states, "I think Asian culture in a way is like listening to the Asian sounds. Like if I was in India, but I'm not there, I'm here. Keeping that alive. Cause a lot of British-Asians out here are either into rap or bhangra... I wanted to bring something else into it... natural, classical Asian sounds."

When asked what his music is about for him now, after he has established himself as a recording artist, he states, "all the music that you hear is about my sounds, my moods, my surroundings...my struggles coming to this country...it's about me just growing up in England, basically." In this context, Asian sounds for him, "add all the ingredients: emotional struggle, support, growing up...living in London, the racist society we live in." So, while what he produces is distinctly dance music, a genre that is non-lyrical and associated with the escape that drugs and clubs offer, it operates for him as a form of nostalgia, a discourse of belonging, and an expression of struggles.

Interestingly enough, when it comes to the question of communicating with specific audiences or of stating whether there is anything political about his music, his answers seem to contradict these earlier statements. He is not particularly interested in whether or not any actual Asian people listen to his music. He states, "I never said, 'Oh I want Asians to come forward'... it's just about enjoyment; it's not about

pleasing a specific person, region, race; you're not going to please everyone.... " When asked if there is anything political about his music, he states: "No, I want music to be the way I started. As enjoyment, as a passion." While he will express anger through sound, he states passionately,

> I would never put a political statement, or anything from religion to say, 'Oh, this is what I feel'... I don't need statements to portray my music, my music will speak for itself... After listening, interview me and ask me about it; rather than listening to the music, then listening to the politics and stuff and saying, 'Oh you're about this kind of person, you don't like this color, you don't like that color, you're about this race, you hate this person.' I'm not about that. I'm not about hating people. I'm not about putting people down. It's about me, enjoying music, playing music. But if you want to know what I'm about, interview me, and I'll tell you what I'm about.

On the one hand, this move could be read as overtly capitalist-- the overarching concern for the "bottom line" means that many British-Asian artists have no particular concerns towards any audiences or communities. Their music loses that mooring in identity and becomes something for "everyone." On the other hand, this needs to also be read through an understanding of how race structures these artists' relationship to the music industry. The concern for the bottom line becomes particularly acute for British-Asian artists as many are wary that attention to their music is part of a media fad. While opportunities to work for the mainstream industry have opened up, most opt to work for an Asian-owned recording company because they have faith that these companies will continue to promote their music well after the fad ends.

Artists like DJ Ali are, in fact, incredibly frustrated and angry about what they consider the internal politics of the Asian music industry. Many have found themselves reluctantly pulled into political battles. As artists, they are struggling to retain a form of solidarity with each other as British-Asian musicians, even as the competition between the different Asian companies they are signed to constantly threatens this. Despite the internal conflicts, Ali, like many others, refuses to work for a non black-owned record company because of a greater distrust of the wider industry ("black" functioning here as a signifier of both Afro-Caribbean and South Asian communities in Britain).

While "Asian Kool" has given these artists a space in the media, it is one that is tenuous. As the phrase, "brown is the new black" communicates, British Asians have historically rarely been given the space, the acclaim, to be considered a *producer* of "hip" popular culture. Thus, in

the course of evaluating the politics of a particular kind of production, we need to examine how discourses of race structure an artist's relationship to the means of artistic production. This is something that Gilroy, for example, does not consider in his analysis of the anti-capitalist politics of black expressive cultures.[8]

In addition to reflecting a negotiation of current economic and media structures, Ali's discourse about politics, about how his music is about enjoyment and passion, not statements and hate, also reflects a simultaneous engagement with black expressive cultures and with being Asian in Britain. In his own history of growing up in the East End of London, he narrates that clubbing was about dancing in a dark space, where you listened to "hard grooves," and it was just about you and your relationship to sound. In comparing this history to current trends in the Asian underground scene, he states,

> With me, when you're in a club, it's got to be a club environment. With the Asian underground, they have a lot of lights, paintings, so it's not a club anymore. It's like going to a gallery, checking out visuals... for me it's not about that, for me, it's about dark, loud sounds, and just enjoying yourself. That's what a club's about. It's not about burning incense and having saris there... it's about pure groove, pure dance.

Here, Ali's music clearly links up with a politics of pleasure that has a history in black expressive cultures. While much of dance culture is often represented as hopelessly commercial and complicit with a capitalist politics, Gilroy has theorized how the body, through dance, can also becomes the locus of resistance and desire. The aesthetics and pleasures of dance have the ability to participate in an anti-capitalist politics. As Gilroy states, "The body is... reclaimed from its subordination to the labor process, recognized as part of the natural world and enjoyed on that basis."[9] Ali's refusal to talk about hate, the unspoken being that his music is about love, also situates his music as part of an attempt at redemption, which itself has been central to a number of black political projects.

However, in these comments, Ali evidences yet another set of negotiations with the media and with himself as an Asian. The resistance to place signifiers of Asian-ness visually in clubs or literally through statements in his music indicates a resistance to being "read" easily. This itself constitutes a form of resistance to the history of the relationship of Asians to wider public spheres in Britain -- a history in which Asians were

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[8] See Paul Gilroy's There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack': The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987) and Small Acts: Thoughts on the Politics of Black Culture. (London: Serpent's Tail, 1993).

[9] Gilroy, Small Acts, pg. 43.

too easily perceived in stereotyped ways. This desire to have more control over the hermeneutics of his identity is reflected in his earlier statement, "if you want to know what I'm about, interview me."

Finally, in his re-telling of how he came to be a recording artist, it becomes clear that Ali has had to also negotiate relationships with his parents and with Islam-- relationships that are shaped in their own ways by politics and struggle. For example, Ali draws a particular line in terms of what is to remain private and what can go public in relationship to Islam and the music he creates. His music,

> ...has no religion in it, no statements; people like it for what it is... I don't need to portray it by putting a god in there, incense, a sari there, just to justify that I'm Asian. You don't have to portray Islam into music...leave that at home, you have that inside you, you don't have to bring that out in music.

This line he draws is one created out of struggles with his parents over conflicting notions of Islam. Although his parents' own understanding of Islam dictates against being involved with music, Ali has settled this score with them through his own belief that he is creating his music out of his heart and out of "good-ness" as opposed to evil. The fact that he will not use sonic or visual signifiers of Islam or certain sounds that his mother states is forbidden by Islam suggests that his voice continues to be mediated by the desires of his parents. Through these struggles, he has had to re-interpret what it means for him to be a Muslim in Britain.

Conclusion

Through this analysis, I hope that I have complicated Sangeeta's idea of "doing" something political, Nadia's notion that there can be a transparent form of political speech vis á vis the media, and Parv's suggestions that one is simply either resistant to capitalism or selling out. All three participate in what Homi Bhabha calls a politics of *negation* which is predicated on the notion of a coherent consciousness and on the idea that a subject acts in and for herself.[10] Here, I have tried to put forth an alternative notion of a politics of *negotiation*. This is predicated instead on the idea that the subject has multiple points of reference and affinities for any given action and does not, in fact, operate with coherent consciousness. A subject of negotiation must deal in relations: including relations of power, relations of communities, and relations of strategies. Through my reading of DJ Ali's narrative, I have suggested how this politics of negotiation has evidenced itself through his attempts at retaining his own sense of artistic integrity while struggling with the media, the

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[10] Homi Bhabha, "The Commitment to Theory," in The Location of Culture (Routledge, London: 1994), pg. 19-39.

mainstream music industry, the Asian music industry, his parents, and his received ideas about Islam.

In the case of the Asian underground and ensuing debates about being a second-generation British-Asian, it has become cliché among some audiences to state that none of this phenomena is political. However, while I have been interested in re-reading the "political," it would be problematic, and a misreading of my position, to state that the Asian underground is actually all about political resistance. The idea that there is a politically conservative state-produced media that is received and appropriated in transgressive ways by consumers has itself become a form of academic received wisdom that needs to be questioned. But this construction becomes even further complicated when we consider how minorities engage with mass-mediated spaces when they have opportunities to enter. In any case, my hope is that this discussion has complicated our understandings of terms like politics and resistance, and more importantly, opened up spaces of discussion and critique regarding new forms of public and popular cultures.

Book Reviews

Language and Politics in Pakistan, Tariq Rahman. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1996. 320 Pp.

Tariq Rahman has written a judicious and informative book about a topic that has, all too often, been the subject of polemics. His work covers, in fact, a multitude of topics: the Anglicist-Orientalist controversy in early colonial education policy, the Urdu-Hindi controversy during the nationalist movement in the subcontinent, and various language movements since the independence of Pakistan: Bengali, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, Siraiki, Punjabi, Kohistani, and so on, not to mention the debate between advocates of Urdu vs. English as the medium of higher education in contemporary Pakistan. It is safe to say that Rahman's book is the definitive study on the thorny subject of language movements and their relation to political power in Pakistan.

To write this book, Rahman had to digest a tremendous amount of information, travel to regional capitals and libraries, and interview linguists and political activists in all the provinces of Pakistan, as well as Bangladesh and Britain. The work displays the enormous effort that went into it: it is a goldmine of information and an essential work of reference, with an exhaustive bibliography. It also repays to do a close reading. While other works have dealt in greater detail with the Orientalist-Anglicist debate and the Hindi-Urdu controversy, Rahman situates these and other language movements in contemporary theories of identity and nationality formation, whether instrumentalist or primordialist, invented or imagined. He further reflects on how language relates to religious orientation and class power in the jab and parry of Pakistani politics, military of civilian.

All of the foregoing makes it sound as if Rahman's book is either dryly theoretical or so crammed with details as to be heavy going. On the contrary, this reviewer found the book to be highly readable, often compelling. The author explains his theoretical concepts and defines his terms at the outset, and the tells the story of the close relationship of language, ethnicity, and politics in the several regions of Pakistan. His coverage of the Bengali language movement, that provided the impetus for the autonomy campaign in East Pakistan and the ultimate emergence of Bangladesh, is particularly empathetic. So is his discussion of the continued ascendancy of English as the link language which assures the continuation in power of a small, highly privileged elite. Rahman's work is consequently that seeming contradiction in terms: an objective work that nevertheless carries conviction as its subtext.

If I have any criticisms of the work, they are minor. Rahman does not ignore, but nevertheless gives inadequate coverage to the interests and patronage of neighboring countries, India, Afghanistan, Iran, and Saudi

Arabia in these linguistic and ethnic movements. Nor does he fully discuss the international economic pressures (as opposed to the internal ones, which he does take into account): globalization, remissions from the migrant economy, that influence both central language planning and regional jockeying for position. On balance, this is a complex and valuable work that should find an audience beyond the discipline of linguistics, among social scientists, historians, political and social activists.

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Everybody Loves A Good Drought Stories from India's Poorest Districts,
Palagummi Sainath. New Delhi: Penguin Books, 1996. 470 Pp.

Palagummi Sainath's provocative book consists of expanded versions of a series of stories filed for the Times of India by the author as he traveled to India's poorest districts to see how large sections of India live. What has emerged is in this reviewer's opinion perhaps the most important book on India published in the recent past. Written very much in the clipped style of a journalist, this book will not be popular with those who favor solely "academic" treatments of subjects like structural poverty, rural healthcare, and development in general. Still, breaking with the ignoble tradition of superficiality that characterizes most journalistic reporting, *Everybody Loves A Good Drought* offers penetrating insight into the processes that maintain and reproduce hierarchies of power in India; further, it offers up the most rare of commodities -- description and incisive analysis of the struggle to survive that is the dominant characteristic of hundreds of millions of Indians -- an enormous group of people who do not figure into the invocations of "India" that emanate from the sleek, liberalized, and unequivocally business-oriented global mass media. Sainath's book is a salutary antidote to the hyperbolic business press that seems to have miraculously discovered that India is really a rich country and that the number of people in the middle class is equal to the number who are poor. It reminds us of *real* the answer to Nehru's famous question *"Kaun Hai Bharat Mata?"*

Much of the focus of the book is summed up in its ironic title. Sainath describes grand development projects whose putative goal was/is the alleviation of poverty in what are termed "backward" regions of India. Yet typical of centrist polities, decisions made in Delhi by politicians and bureaucrats who know nothing of the conditions in the districts about which they wax lyrical come election time, these projects not only are unsuccessful, but often make living conditions for those they aim to help far worse. But, since development and poverty alleviation projects are funded by large bodies provided by the government, venal contractors and corrupt officials grow fat on the monies provided -- monies never seen by the poorest Indians. In the chapter that the book is named after, Sainath

discusses the drought relief "industry." He neatly encapsulates the irony as follows:

> Drought is, beyond question, among the more serious problems this country faces. Drought relief, almost equally beyond question, is rural India's biggest growth industry. Often, there is little relation between the two. Relief can go to regions that get lots of rainfall. Even where it goes to scarcity areas, those most in need seldom benefit from it. The poor in such regions understand this. That's why some of them call drought relief teesra fasl (the third crop.) Only, they are not the ones who harvest it.

Other chapters include analyses of issues like gender inequality, health in rural India, rural education, forced displacement of the poor for large development projects, survival strategies of the poor, usury, debt and credit, and rural crime -- as seen from the vantage point of the life stories of real people whose life trajectories are determined by forces far beyond their control. Happily, the last chapter is entitled "With Their Own Weapons: When the Poor Fight Back," stories that reaffirm our faith in the fact that despite being beaten down, the poor understand the dignity of being human. It also suggests that the material conditions of life have created consciousness in the poor, who are organizing social movements for equity.

This book should engender three different types of reactions in the reader. First, Sainath's thoughtful descriptions of the material difficulties of life for the hundreds of millions of people whose lives are almost totally controlled by the elite ten percent shock the senses and reduce the soul to beggary. Second, that most of us, even scholars of India, have so little idea about the character of life of the struggling poor, should provoke a great deal of shame in us all. Finally, that in the face of such adversity, against such a deadly ensemble of forces arrayed against them, in an environment that militates against even the most elemental of progressive forces, the poorest of the poor in India never cease to struggle for a more dignified existence, should both shock and shame us all into affirming a commitment to support in any way possible the struggles of the tread-upon and into realizing that the production of scholarly work is not a legitimate excuse for moral lassitude.

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A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America. Lavina Shankar and Rajini Srikanth, (eds). Temple University Press, 1998. Pp. 270.

Addressing the central question of "what constitutes the gaps between South Asian Americans and the rest of Asian America" (1) the eleven essays of *A Part, Yet Apart: South Asians in Asian America* are grouped into four sections: Limiting Names and Labels, The Disconnections of Race, Topologies of Activism, and Literary Texts and Diasporics. Dealing with the inclusion of one group into another, the workings of labels and names are examined through numerous dividing venues including 'semantic' splits such as postcolonial, diaspora and Asian American (Shankar, Dayal), racial meanings (Kibria, Song) and national origins (Srikanth, Roy, Dayal). Using literature (Hsiao) and college and community activism (Sinha, Roy), other articles seek to broaden the scope of the Asian American community through alliances forged from common interests.

The first essay of the collection, "With Kaleidoscope Eyes: The Potential (Dangers) of Identitarian Coalitions" by Deepika Bahri, is a fitting opening piece. Questioning the foundations of the identity Asian American, Bahri reaches back into an often forgotten trajectory and examines the creation of the regional identity and space referred to as Asia. According to Bahri, the terms " 'Asia' and 'Asiatic' (later 'Asian') " was not so much based on the similarities the peoples in this region had, rather the conceptualization of "Asia" was "to consolidate the notion of 'Europe' on the basis of the latter's cultural homogeneity and difference from 'non-European'" (27). Thus Bahri warns that a concept of Asian American based on identity politics, what she refers to as a "foisted choice" (41), rather than political coalitions, runs the risk of widening the gaps between disparate Asian groups in the attempt to close them through homogenizing identity.

Examining an instance of political and social coalition between Punjabi farmers in California in the beginning of the century and their Japanese counterparts, Min Song successfully "redresses" what he sees as methodological practices which leave South Asians out of the history of Asian America (79). Song recounts the case of Pahkar Singh, who in 1925 killed the two white American paper owners of his sizable farm. Focusing on the class, color, race and legal laws of the land allows Song to trace the shifting and historically specific characteristics of the category Asian American. Through a discussion of the Alien Land Laws enacted during the first quarter of this century, Song shifts the framework of "race" from phenotypical distinctions to "historical and structural" moments (87). In doing so, he offers a productive methodological starting point with which to examine the changing complexities of all racial categories.

Following Song's approach, but challenging the basis of categorization even further, "Crafting Solidarities" by Vijay Prashad urges us to think beyond the categories Asian American and South Asian

American. Prashad points out the pitfall, and similarity, that the use of race as a socially constructed concept shares with the older understandings of race as a biological concept. Like the latter, the former still "forms the bedrock upon which our categories of cultural groups rest" (107). This article is one of the few in the collection that seriously interrogates how "Asian" has been and continues to be defined against other racialized groups in the United States, particularly through the concept of the model minority. With this in mind, Prashad advocates moving beyond identity politics and working under the "category people of color." This will allow groups to craft solidarity, "to negotiate across historically produced divides" (121-2) while still attending to the differences in each community.

Sandip Roy's "The Call of Rice" discusses the gap between Asian American and South Asian American in the queer community. Through personal narrative and an examination of queer Asian anthologies and films, Roy address not only regional divisions, but also those which exist between gay men and lesbians in both the entire and fragmented Asian American queer community. Involved in Roy's article is a discussion of the ways in which "mainstream" gay culture, through the fetishization of Asian queers, also contributes to the conceptions of who is and is not Asian. Most importantly, Roy's article is one of the few which overtly probes the distinctions within the South Asian American community.

Pieces by Bahri, Song, Prashad, and Roy stand out as welcome contributions not only questioning the position of South Asians within Asian America, but examining the relationship to broader racial, class, heteronormative and imperial structures as well. Unfortunately, not every one of the essays in *A Part, Yet Apart* offer insightful, critically engaged exploration of the place of South Asians in Asian America..

Although two of the essays in the collection detail Asian American activism on college and university campuses (Gupta, Sinha), neither delve into the ways that "identity knowledge" produced through ethnic studies courses, shapes how groups on college and university campuses organize themselves. Or further, how those institutions often offer a space to solidify Asian American identity given the nature of organizing on campuses. In addition, while race was pivotal in many articles, not all explored the meaning and creation of racial meanings in the contexts discussed. For instance some authors, while acknowledging that race is a social construction, appeared to rely on phenotype to mark the distinction between South Asian Americans and other Asian American groups (Kibria). Other articles raise important questions such as the role of heritage and parentage in broader community identification (Srikanth), the use of writing style and topics addressed to examine the belonging of South Asians in the canon of Asian American literature (Hsiao), but fail to question the concepts with which they start; such as literary canons, nations and cultural heritage. Further, few of the articles pick up the question and workings of identity politics and the ways in which South Asian American and Asian American identities are deployed socially and

politically. Finally, as with many anthologies on South Asians in the United States, the majority of essays focus on Indian communities, and thus risk the danger of collapsing South Asian and Indian in spite of awareness of this very problem.

Despite its shortcomings, *A Part, Yet Apart* makes welcome and needed contributions to numerous growing and established fields including diaspora studies, racial theory, ethnic studies and Asian American Studies. Further, questioning the category and identity Asian American, one which is steadily gaining notoriety both on college campuses and in communities, is a much needed venture. This, perhaps, is the book's greatest contribution.

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Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture and the Making of Modern India.
Akhil Gupta. Durham: Duke University Press, 1998. Pp 409.

In this ambitious and thorough ethnographic exploration of the 'postcolonial condition,' Akhil Gupta has set a new standard for writers of anthropology and development studies. After Arturo Escobar's monumental critique *Encountering Development* left development studies at a veritable dead-end, Gupta offers us new light on what some consider a dead issue. Development is indeed a thorny issue for those trying to understand the current conditions under which we live. For many, development has come to represent a vestige of colonial history, of a time long ago that must be forgotten. Akhil Gupta's *Postcolonial Developments:* challenges us to think of development in a much more complex way. For example, why is it that development often does not work and why is it that programs designed to eradicate poverty are inevitably doomed to fail? Such a question is a difficult and complex one. And this is exactly what Gupta has set for himself to answer. By tackling diverse yet highly interrelated subjects such as populism, agrarian revolts, colonialism and postcolonialism, the modernity-tradition debate, indigenous knowledges, environmentalism and governmentality, this book runs the risk of covering too much ground. And in little under then 400 pages of text the reader is forced to wonder why so much is crammed into one book. Nonetheless, the value of this book far exceeds this minor criticism.

The book follows a fairly straightforward presentation. It opens by asking how one is to understand the postcolonial condition through its theories. This remains the central premise throughout the book. Postcoloniality however is a means of ethnographic entrance to discuss the local and the global. Gupta's ethnography is quite succinct in discussing this relationship. In addition, he quite usefully contributes to the current thinking about the role of nations and states in the local-global dichotomy. This is precisely where the teleologies of progress and development

appear. Briefly, the argument runs that nation states attempt at modernity is inscribed in a development discourse with both local and global effects. Hence, it is from multiple subject positions that development discourse and its effects must be understood. This simple formulation frames the rest of Gupta's complex exploration.

Gupta's project began as an investigation of the green revolution in the agricultural development of India. For this his particular research sites are in and around the area of Alipur in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Gupta's analysis involves all sorts of data including quantitative information and ethnographic data obtained from newpapers, interviews and secondary literature. Gupta should be commended on the clarity of his methodological positions and ethnographic description. One of the strengths of this book is the comfort with which the author discusses different types of source material.

The chapters on what he cautiously calls 'indigenous' knowledges will be of useful to those interested in the relationship between local agrarian practices, national programs of development and what he loosely terms alternative modernities. This last concept is not clearly pushed far enough in his analysis. For Gupta's argument, it is a device used to navigate the tricky terrain of the modernity-tradition debate. The power of the concept of alternative modernities is that it allows us to understand how modernity is experienced at the local level: through the negotiation of the market, the innovative hybridity of local and global practices of production, and finally the construction of modernity that is particular to India.

Gupta also quite convincingly makes a critique of how the development paradigm has been used to interpellate the postcolonial nation state. While drawing global maps of regimes of governance (i.e. the role of the IMF, World Bank, structural adjustment, GATT, etc.), Gupta's macrological arguments are consistently connected to the condition of the subaltern in rural India. In his analysis he ties the technologies of food production, the politics of nation states, global regimes of development, and the organization of capital to understand a particular conjuncture of modernity in India. Development in this web of interconnections is a form of govenment rationality, Foucault's governmentality, that seeks to control through the regulation of bodies, populations and things. Gupta argues that the failure of development discourse is tied to the ways in which populism has been used as a political device. The result is that development is then a rhetorical symbol of legitimation for ruling parties. Hence, development becomes the language in which politics is understood and struggled over. This is a key lesson of the many social movements in India that have mobilized through this language. Here, Gupta's analysis provides us with interesting examples of the successes and failure of this approach. What is left undone is a deeper analysis of global politics and the uneven power of decision making of polices constructed by regimes of governance to fully understand the impact on the local.

If there is a fatal theoretical/ethnographic turn in this book, it comes

at the end. After several wonderful chapters on the local knowledges of Gupta's research, he ends by broadening his conclusions and analysis to what he refers to as environmental globalization and govenmentality. Following the flow and the aim of the book, Gupta might have fared better had he tried to take his conclusions of the global back to the local sites where he conducted his extensive fieldwork. This would offer a sense of how such global movements are lived and felt in the everyday and quotidian. This final section of the book, however, should not be mistaken as without its uses. In fact it is one of the most sophisticated parts of the book. Gupta here offers a highly substantive theoretical framing for the study of development and the workings of nations and states. In Gupta's defense, one might argue that he is leaving his conclusions open to further research for a new generation of scholars interested in the workings of development in the local and global sense.

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