

**'A Place For Our Gods':  
the construction of a Hindu temple  
community in Edinburgh**

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## ABSTRACT

This is an examination of the various ways in which Hindu religious traditions are being adapted and reinterpreted by people of Indian descent, now living in Edinburgh. It looks in particular at the development of worship in the context of an Edinburgh Hindu temple (Mandir), and how those involved in the temple project are constructing the notions of 'community' and 'Hinduism' around themselves. The Hindu population of approximately one thousand are divided into various groups and factions - particularly in terms of regional identity (mainly Panjabi and Gujarati) and migration history (approximately half were once resident in East Africa). Two communal institutions attempt to work across these lines of division - the temple, and a cultural organisation called the Edinburgh Indian Association.

As they are an 'ethnic' minority group, it is important to consider the means by which religious and cultural ideas are being produced through interaction between Hindus and white Scots. Although principles of boundary maintenance and reactive ethnicity are useful for understanding these processes, it is also important to consider that notions of ethnic identity are often an area of intense creativity, and such creativity is as much the result of relationships *within* an 'ethnic' group as those *between* such groups. Edinburgh Hindus are reacting as much against each other as against white Scottish society.

The presence of the Mandir is helping to produce several important changes within this population. Firstly, it is one of the main areas where this sense of ethnic identity is being developed. Secondly, it is a major social arena, in which the different groups and factions choose to gather together, and by doing so it encourages (and helps to construct) a sense of community. Thirdly, the notion of what it means to be a Hindu - and also of what 'Hinduism' actually is - is having to undergo rather considerable modification to accommodate the coming together of these different regional traditions. In fact, the notion that there is such a thing as 'Hinduism' is not without problems, since there are strong arguments to make that in India itself the various 'Hindu' religious traditions are not variations on a common religion, but actually distinct religions. At the same time, however, the notion that Hinduism is a unification of these diverse systems has a strong appeal to many Hindus, and has been used as the basis for several important reformist movements - such as Arya Samaj and Swaminarayan, as well as the 'counter-reformist' version of Hinduism called Sanatan Dharm. These three traditions have been very important within the various Hindu diasporas, particularly in East Africa, and indirectly have had a strong influence in Edinburgh.

However, to understand the role of Hinduism within the Edinburgh Mandir, it is also necessary to understand both the history of the temple project and of the community that is based around it. This is discussed with reference to the present day structures and organisation of the temple, the plans for the future, and the political relations between the temple leaders. This also provides the background for understanding the forms of worship that are being developed at the temple meetings. The main religious gathering - called a *satsang* - is first described, and then discussed with reference to how it is used as a forum in which the different regional Hindu traditions can come together without being too radically compromised. This is particularly because of the symbolic nature of these types of worship, which allow for multiple meanings and understandings within a common ritual form.

This use of temple worship as an arena for divergent religious traditions is part of a process in which the temple congregation is becoming identified as a community, and at the same time this community is becoming identified with the wider concept of the 'Hindu community'. This construction is 'imagined' to a large degree by external agencies, it is also becoming an important symbolic idea (again with multiple meanings) for most Hindus living in Edinburgh. These processes of ideological construction are occurring at the same time as the physical construction of the temple building. That is, as the shape of the building is designed and constructed, the community itself - along with the notion of Hinduism - are also being created out of divergent elements. Although the temple building will one day be complete and concrete, the construction of the notions of Hinduism and community can never be complete, they are always fluid and indefinite.

## **Declaration**

This thesis is an original piece of research, composed solely by myself, and the work is my own.

Malory Nye

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# CHAPTER ONE. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THESIS

The study that I am presenting here is concerned with a Hindu temple community that has formed in Edinburgh. It is not altogether surprising to find such a community in the capital of Scotland - there are now many Hindu communities and Hindu temples<sup>1</sup> in Britain. However, in order to understand what is happening among British South Asians - and among Hindus in particular - it is vital to question the expectation that a group of Hindus living together should form a community.

### 1.1.1 The bases of community

Those people who are considered 'Hindu', 'Asian', or even 'immigrants', are also (in most cases) British citizens - they have multiple social roles and attachments in the various segments of white British life. For example, most Hindus in Edinburgh are employed in positions where their 'Hindu-ness' is far less important than most other aspects of their social identities, they often mix in predominantly non-Hindu social networks, and so on.

Of course, Hindus are usually quite noticeable when they do participate in such networks - there is a widespread British cultural assumption that skin pigment is a significant marker of social identity - therefore 'Asians' are often perceived as being different from 'whites'. But other elements may mark out a Hindu as distinct - s/he may choose to wear clothing influenced by sub-continental Indian styles (e.g. a *sari* or a *salwar kamiz*), rather than British styles, or s/he may wear a mark on his/her forehead (a *tilak*, *tikka*, or *bindi*). Skin colour cannot be easily changed, but these other marks of distinction are more optional. Likewise, to form a community based around the

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<sup>1</sup> Some unofficial estimates put the number of Hindu temples in the UK at about two hundred and fifty.

notion of being Hindu is equally optional - and so when people choose to do so, there must be some important reasons motivating them.

If these communities were based purely on family groups - close kin, cousins, maybe even extended a little further - then perhaps it would be easy to understand the bases of such social organisation. Indeed a number of 'Hindu' groups in Britain are based on kinship networks - there are many different Lohana and Patidar communities, which organise around common membership of the same caste-jati<sup>2</sup> group, and hence around a cluster of related families. In the Lohana and Patidar cases, however, the small groups have built up into large national organisations, with memberships of around 40-50,000 each (Michaelson 1983: 34, Kalka 1987: 75). Other groups are organised around people who share close ties, which may well extend back before migration to Britain. People who migrated from nearby villages or towns are well disposed to forming social networks once settled in this country. Their shared past helps them to share a present, and to form a communal group.

The Edinburgh community is made up of strangers, however - out of people who know nothing of each other, but who choose to create social networks across this ignorance, based on the assumption that they have something in common. The formation of such a 'community' requires some explanation. Even people who share a common language, a common religion, and common traditions, may not have enough to motivate them to mix with each other. This is especially the case if they are living in an urban environment in which there are many other claims on their time, and some effort is required to participate in Hindu social networks.

But despite these inhibiting factors, there is a Hindu community in Edinburgh.

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<sup>2</sup> Throughout this thesis I shall use the term caste-jati to describe the social groups that are in English called 'castes', but which are called '*jatis*' in Hindi. I shall be using this term because the word *jati* is not always used by British Hindus - many of them prefer to use the English word *caste* instead. This is perhaps derived from the fact that in East Africa most younger Hindus made a switch from the term *jati* (or *gnati* in Gujarati) to *caste*, even when speaking in Hindi, or Gujarati (Bharati 1967: 288). Precisely how to define either *caste* or *jati* is beyond the scope of this thesis, and I refer the reader to works such as Schwartz (1967), Michaelson (1979, 1983), and Barot (1974) for discussions of this difficult topic within the context of overseas Hindus.

Many people choose to overcome the boundaries of strangeness, and to use the basis of a shared religion and shared non-British traditions to form friendships. Not all Hindus in Edinburgh do choose to do this - some refuse to have anything to do with the 'community', others are simply indifferent to it - but a sizeable proportion talk as if this is what is happening, they talk about a Hindu community.

### **1.1.2 Hindus and Hinduism**

This tells us perhaps why there is a community, but it does not tell us why the basis of this community is a perception of a common cultural identity - as Hindu Indians - or why it is primarily centred around a notion of a common religion, i.e. Hinduism. The answer to this may well lie in the relationship between religious institutions and communality - or to put it in more Durkheimian terms, the relationship between religion and society. Religious institutions can (and often do) serve as important centres for social networks, they can help to bring disparate groups of people together and lay the bases of a community.

The Edinburgh Hindu temple can play this role. Although worshippers may attend the temple for their own personal reasons - to do *puja* to Hindu gods, and to bring auspiciousness on themselves and their families - by doing so they meet other Hindus living in Edinburgh. The physical congregation of a number of Hindus can lay the basis for social networks to develop between them. However, this is not an inevitable process - the mere fact that people are together in the same room does not mean that they would wish to form a community, no matter what they are doing. A group of students sitting in a lecture may or may not form social ties amongst themselves outside the lecture room - similarly people gathering together to worship and pray do not have any mystical bond that will inevitably encourage them to form a community.

So the temple can provide a forum in which a community can be created - but only if the worshippers wish it to happen. When dealing with a Hindu group, it is



important to be aware that Hindu temple traditions are very different from Christian church models - many Hindu temples are not 'community centres' like the stereotypical English parish church - they are places where individuals and small groups of people can go to worship on their own. Furthermore, there is an assumption among many people - both within and outside the Hindu community - that Hinduism is a religion that is shared by all those who call themselves Hindu. But it is necessary to question whether this assumption is correct. Can we say that Hindus share a religion, in the same way that Christians do? India is a large country in which there is great diversity - many different forms of religious belief and practice come within the rubric of 'Hinduism', and it is extremely difficult to find a common element amongst these varieties. Some writers even argue that the notion of Hinduism is a western construction, and that instead the many forms of religious practice in India do not constitute a single world religion (like Islam and Christianity), but different religions, which are each distinct, although similar in some respects.

In this thesis I shall be examining this problem from the perspective of western anthropological approaches to Indian/Hindu diversity - to see how we can account for diversity, and to also ensure that we are clear with our own (and others') uses of the terms 'Hindu' and 'Hinduism'. This is essential in understanding the ways in which the terms are being used and understood by those who label themselves as such in Edinburgh. The process of participating in a 'Hindu' community requires a construction of particular connotations and significances around these notions, which perhaps they did not have before.

### **1.1.3 Diversity**

The problem of cultural diversity within the umbrella of Indian-Hinduism is very real among the groups being described here. I shall show that the Hindu population originates from a number of different areas in India, and thus from a number of different traditions. In each of these traditions there is a distinctive understanding of

what it means to be religious, and so what it means to be a 'Hindu'. Some of these traditions are not easily accommodated within a single institutional framework.

It is important to realise, therefore, that the co-operation that is occurring between these groups within the Hindu community should not be taken for granted. There is no obvious reason why a number of different factions originating from different cultural and religious traditions should try to work together as 'Hindus', rather than work separately. It would be equally possible for groups to organise in terms of their differences, rather than unite under the common identity of being 'Hindus'. Why should these people wish to overcome the centrifugal forces of regional and sectarian difference with the more vague and ill-defined centripetal forces of common Hindu/Indian identity?

A simple answer to this is that if they did organise according to their differences, then they would not be able to construct a temple building. The Hindu population is quite small - less than one thousand - and so if each factional element worked separately, then no one group would be able to raise sufficient funds to make a temple project successful. By pooling their resources, and also their differences, they can establish a Hindu temple in Edinburgh.

#### **1.1.4 The temple**

But this begs the question of why they should want a temple. Why should they make so much of an effort (since a temple building is expensive to construct, and time-consuming to run)? There are many different reasons for this, none of which are exhaustive. There is a general feeling that there should be a temple: so that the gods can be worshipped effectively; so that traditions can be maintained; so that Edinburgh Hindus can be comparable with other Hindus in Britain, who already have temples; so that children can be taught Hindu traditions and religious values, and so on. A temple is also a useful project for self-designated community leaders - it is an arena in which they can hope to acquire prestige, and maybe some power.

There is also a feeling that the temple should be a 'community centre', it should be the place where the Hindu community can meet together and develop. The temple organisation is called the 'Edinburgh Hindu Mandir and Sanskritic Kendra', which members usually translate as the 'Edinburgh Hindu temple and community centre'. The project envisages the temple building as having catering facilities for social (as well as religious functions), and also a hall 'for the community' (as well as for the non-Hindu 'local community').

### **1.1.5 The construction of concepts**

But this brings us back to where we started - if the temple is to serve the community, and the community is being formed around the temple, how on earth did all this start? I do not claim to be able to answer this question, if indeed there is an answer. What I will be attempting to discuss in this thesis are the relationships that exist between the three ideas - the temple, the community, and the religion. The ways in which these constructions are occurring - as well as the forms that they are taking - give us an idea of why there is such an ongoing process - even if they do not fully explain the process itself. When I talk of construction, I use the word both metaphorically and literally - the idea of the temple is being constructed alongside the building in which it is housed. And within this building site I - as an anthropologist - am treading carefully in an attempt to find some order, to understand the blueprints and the foundations, and maybe even have a view of what the future result will be.

## **1.2 METHODOLOGY**

In this section my intention is to demonstrate the ways in which the data for this thesis was researched, and to provide some context for the information which I provide.

## 1.2.1 Fieldwork history

### 1.2.1.1 Preliminary research

When I began research for a PhD in 1988, I knew very little about Indians in Edinburgh, nor even if there were a substantial enough number for me to be able to study effectively. I had recently moved to Edinburgh from London, and it was soon obvious that the South Asian population was a great deal smaller than in the areas where I had previously been living. When I talked to people about the subject of my proposed research I would commonly be told 'I didn't know that there were any Indians in Edinburgh'.

A small amount of investigation in Edinburgh found that there was a Hindu temple group (although at that time it was not based in any building), and a cultural organisation called the 'Edinburgh Indian Association'. From the small amount of publicity that these two groups put out it was clear that they both claimed to represent an 'Indian/Hindu community' in some way or other. I also found the results of a recent survey (by SEMRU<sup>3</sup> 1987) which suggested that there were somewhere between eight hundred and one thousand people living in Edinburgh who considered themselves Hindus. This was alongside a slightly larger population of Sikhs. At this stage I was still not sure if this Hindu population would be a suitable subject for research - since it could easily have been too diverse or factionalised for effective fieldwork to be conducted. With this potential obstacle in mind I also did some preliminary research into the Edinburgh Sikh population, which I found was centred around a fairly homogeneous caste-jati group called Bhatras<sup>4</sup>. Until I began doing participant observation I had no way of knowing if it would be possible to study either population - although the Sikh population looked a more obvious anthropological subject, since they were a well bounded group very much rooted in their local *gurdwara* (temple).

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<sup>3</sup> SEMRU is the Scottish Ethnic Minorities Research Unit, a body set up to monitor the needs of ethnic minorities in Scotland.

<sup>4</sup> The information which I found concerning these Bhatras is presented in §2.3.1.

I began fieldwork in the early summer of 1989 - a few months after the eruption over the publication of Rushdie's *Satanic Verses*. The furore over this book had already left deep impressions within the South Asian Muslim communities in Edinburgh, but its wider impact on other South Asians in the city had not really begun to be felt. The main theme that came across among Hindus who talked about this book was their stress on the lack of 'intolerance' in Hinduism - in contrast to the ways in which they perceived that many Muslims were behaving.

#### 1.2.1.2 *Making contact*

I began my fieldwork by contacting the offices of the Edinburgh Community Relations Council<sup>5</sup>. This body is also one of the main starting points for those university researchers who wish to conduct research about Edinburgh's 'ethnic minority' populations. The community relations officer also happened to be one of the main leaders of the Hindu temple, and so she was able to give me a great deal of help in the early stages of my fieldwork - particularly in providing me with introductions, and helping me to know my way around the Indian population. She also referred me to members of the gurdwara, since I was still unclear whether I would be studying Sikhs or Hindus.

My first impression among Hindus was that the temple was a fairly well supported institution with a reasonably sized membership. I found that another organisation - the Edinburgh Indian Association - was attracting a similar fellowship, so that these two institutions catered for a significant proportion of the total Indian/Hindu population. It was clear that research could be possible among this group, and that there would be no real problems of access.

In contrast to this, I began to feel that it would be much more difficult to study the Sikh community. The common Bhatra identity made them a very closed group who

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<sup>5</sup> This has subsequently been reformed as the Racial Equality Council. See §2.3.3.1.

were not so keen on outsiders looking around. They also relied very exclusively on Panjabi, which was a language that I did not know (having trained initially in Hindi). I realised that gaining access to this group would obviously take a long time - both in terms of being allowed to research freely, and also in having the language skills to be able to do so effectively. It was also clear from my first visit to the temple that these Sikhs maintained strict segregation between men and women. Once when I was standing around in the gurdwara after a prayer service had finished, I received a message from someone that his wife was waiting to see me in a side room. I had no idea why she would want to see me, but I went to find out. To our mutual embarrassment I found that the woman had mistaken me for her son's school teacher, whom she had arranged to meet. But what most surprised me was the fact that on first meeting me she commented that she had to be careful to make sure that 'people don't see me here with a strange man'.

My intention was to study a whole group - whether it was Hindu or Sikh - and I did not wish to be limited to conducting research among men only. This woman's reaction, along with the separation that I observed during my stay at the gurdwara, made me decide that participant observation among these Sikhs would not provide me with a situation that I would feel comfortable with<sup>6</sup>. My initial inclination to study Hindus was thus the one that I eventually followed.

I began my research by visiting public occasions - such as the monthly temple meeting, Indian association social gatherings and other gatherings, wherever they may occur. I also tried to interview or speak to as many people as I possibly could. This involved either arranging formal interviews conducted in homes, or otherwise informal interviews that could happen quite spontaneously. For example, I interviewed several people during car journeys between Edinburgh and Glasgow; another very useful

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<sup>6</sup> A week after my first visit to the Sikh gurdwara the building was set alight by local non-Sikh children and most of the prayer hall was gutted. This was obviously a rather difficult time for Sikhs and a highly inappropriate time for me to attempt to conduct research. This was another factor that led to me concentrating exclusively on Hindus.

interview was conducted whilst doing some painting in the temple. I found that such occasions provided the opportunity for people to discuss matters in a relaxed manner in which there was no pressure to be 'interviewed', or to tell me what they thought a researcher would want to know.

In the summer of 1989 I also began to attend Hindi classes at a local school, which were organised for the benefit of young Indian children to learn their 'mother tongue'. These classes were taught by the wife of a post-doctoral research fellow at Edinburgh University, and through her I came to meet a number of other Indian students and researchers, nearly all of whom had recently come to live in the city, direct from India. This group were very different from the more settled groups who organised the temple and Indian association.

During the autumn I tried to spread my contacts out as much as possible, by talking to people at functions or visiting their homes whenever I was invited. Much of this time was spent trying to establish my credentials as someone genuinely interested in Edinburgh Hindus, and also to discover the pertinent issues affecting the population.

### *1.2.1.3 Background research in India*

In December 1989 I visited India for two months, with the aid of research funds from my postgraduate studentship. This trip was organised for various reasons, all of which were successful. It was my first visit to the country, and so gave me an excellent opportunity to gain an understanding of the people and cultures that Edinburgh Hindus were constantly referring to. I decided that it would be better for me to travel to several different parts of India, particularly as Edinburgh Hindus originated from diverse regions. Thus I visited Delhi, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Gujarat. For most of my visit I stayed in the homes of friends, relatives, and contacts.

The trip also helped me to establish my credibility among Hindus in Edinburgh. I acted as a courier of gifts and photographs for several people, and I also met up with a friend from Edinburgh who was staying with his relatives in Gujarat. These things

helped me a great deal on my return home to Scotland in February 1990 - I found that I was taken much more seriously by members of both the temple and the Indian association. My use of Hindi had also improved and I was now regarded as someone who 'knew' about India and Hinduism<sup>7</sup>.

#### *1.2.1.4 Later stages*

In the spring of 1991 I became involved with a Gujarati network which extended beyond Edinburgh to Glasgow and parts of southern Strathclyde, and which met in people's homes every month. This was partly an alternative to the various temples in Scotland, but it was also a group for like-minded Gujaratis who otherwise would not be involved too strongly in communal worship. It was also very much a Gujarati group - most of the discourse was in Gujarati, and much of this talk was dominated by matters from a Gujarati perspective. It was perhaps the emphasis on Gujarati-ness which made it distinct from other activities that I came across in Edinburgh - where the emphasis was put far more usually on either more local kinship ties, or on wider Indian-ness.

I finished conducting full-time fieldwork at the end of September 1990, soon after the autumn festivals of Nawratri and Diwali. By this time I was a well known figure in the temple and the Indian association, and I was regarded as one of the handful of members who were ready to help with projects such as painting or cleaning the temple. I knew by acquaintance about two hundred Indian/Hindus, and I had been able to talk to over sixty of these for more than half an hour. Like most anthropologists, though, much of my research had only been made possible with the help of a small handful of people, who had quickly moved from the status of 'informants' to friends.

Once I had begun to write up this thesis - which I combined with some part-time teaching in the department of Social Anthropology, University of Edinburgh - I found it

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<sup>7</sup> Many Hindus in Edinburgh had never actually been to India.



very difficult to find the time to maintain contact with many of the people whom I had seen frequently during my fieldwork. I made sure that I still went to the temple when I could - although more irregularly than I had before, and less so than I wished. This regrettably made people at the temple feel that I was no longer so interested in them. My intention was to maintain some level of contact with the temple and Indian association (as well as particular individuals) for as long as I was living in Edinburgh. However, I was appointed to a teaching post in London in the summer of 1991, and so contact with the temple was drastically curtailed after this point. My intention is, however, to keep informed about future developments within the temple sphere through occasional visits.

## **1.2.2 Reflections on the fieldwork experience**

### *1.2.2.1 The position of the anthropologist*

Throughout my time of fieldwork I was an outsider in the group that I was studying. In fact, there is no way that I could have not been an outsider - my skin and hair colour were different from most Hindus I had contact with, my use of Hindi was always less than perfect, and my grasp of other languages (such as Panjabi and Gujarati) was almost non-existent (see §1.2.2.2 below). At no time did I make any claim to being Hindu, or of wishing to become Hindu. I made it plain right from the beginning of my research that I genuinely wished to learn about the complexities of Hinduism, but only as an interested outsider. Of course, I was aware of one or two individuals who thought that I should become a 'Hindu', and several others frequently joked about this idea. But in general, Hindus do not tend to evangelise, and very few actively attempt to convert. Thus I was allowed to participate and to observe as much or as little as I wished, with the full blessing of most of the community.

Despite my obvious status as an outsider, I felt that I had another ambiguous role which contradicted this. I was often assumed to be knowledgeable about Hindu religious traditions - for example, on meeting new people and explaining my research

interests I would commonly be told 'you must know far more about my religion than I do'. This was obviously not true, but yet there was a certain deference to me as a western scholar, who must know what Hinduism is 'really' about. I could not even claim the knowledge of a sanskritic scholar - I had read a number of Indian religious classics, but in translation in English. I did not even know any Sanskrit. Perhaps I may have considered some of the fundamental or abstract notions that underlie Hindu tradition to a more rigorous degree than many of the temple worshippers. But I still felt that I knew so little about the multitude of ways in which Hindu traditions could be expressed. In fact, as my fieldwork progressed, I felt that I was always discovering yet more of my ignorance about such matters - a feeling which has not diminished.

As an outsider, I also felt acutely that there were many things occurring within the Hindu population to which I could have no access. Limitations on my time obviously prevented me from spreading my contacts as widely as I wished. Likewise, limitations on my ability in India<sup>^</sup> languages prevented me from understanding everything that I wanted to. A great deal of data - from subtle nuances to the timings of social events - could be lost because I did not properly understand what was being said. Also, I am sure that there were certain things that were hidden from me as an outsider, the nature of which I cannot even guess.

Of course, the passage of time eased many of these frustrations. As fieldwork progressed, I came into contact with more and more people, and my proficiency in Hindi improved. My presence in the temple community, as well as my obvious interest and commitment, also helped to establish a measure of trust with many of the members. (I hope that this trust - which I have valued greatly - will not be broken by anything that is written in this thesis, or elsewhere.) Thus, after a while I began to hear (that is, people began to *tell* me) various pieces of gossip and conjecture that are so common to institutions and communal groups. Needless to say, *none* of that gossip (which was imparted in good faith) has been repeated anywhere.

### *1.2.2.2 Language skills*

The use of language was an obvious problem for me from the beginning of my research. Hindus in Edinburgh come from diverse regions of India and this meant the choice of which language I should learn for conducting fieldwork was not straightforward. There were two distinct language groups, Panjabis and Gujaratis, who would use their regional tongue to communicate between themselves. Most of these people could also speak Hindi and English (and in many cases they knew Swahili as well). There were other people in the community who did not speak any of these north Indian languages, since they came from areas of south India.

It was impossible to learn all the different languages spoken by Indians in Edinburgh, and so I mainly concentrated on Hindi. I attended two different Hindi classes during my time of fieldwork, one was a course of evening classes offered by the University of Edinburgh department of extra mural studies, while the other was the Saturday morning 'mother tongue' class. Through these two classes, and after a lot of perseverance, I became able to understand a lot of spoken Hindi - although I never became conversationally proficient in it.

In fact, English is spoken by about ninety-nine percent of the local Indian population, and so it was much more convenient to hold conversations and interviews in this medium, and to reserve my knowledge of Hindi for listening to other conversations and for clarifying concepts translated into English. I also found that the mere attempt to learn this language helped to improve my credibility among Hindus - I was seen as seriously wanting to learn about them on their own terms.

Apart from Hindi, though, there were other languages which were also important - in particular Panjabi and Gujarati. These are both related to Hindi, and a knowledge of Hindi can sometimes help in understanding conversations in Panjabi and Gujarati. But I did not have time to learn either of these two other languages, and so I was unable to understand very much of what was said when they were used. At the time of fieldwork I felt that this did hamper some elements of my research, although not too

seriously.

### 1.2.2.3 General points

The problems and advantages of doing fieldwork in a familiar 'home' environment have been much discussed (Jackson 1987; Ellen 1984: 110-132). I found that during the course of my fieldwork there were two particular problems associated with 'being at home' which made researching painful and difficult. On the one hand, the lack of distance from the subject of my study meant that it could be hard to detach myself from my research. My home was in the centre of my research - I would find it extremely difficult if I wanted to get away from the research - and so at times there was no real escape.

At the same time, however, I found that conducting fieldwork from my home - based as it was in the heart of an urban environment - I could very easily become cut off from the research that I wished to do. The archetypal fieldworker can sit in the porch of his/her hut, watching village life unfold before his/her eyes. In such a situation, the problem is an overdose of data, there is so much that it can be hard to find the time even to digest it - let alone record it<sup>8</sup>. For me, however, the problem was the lack of obvious data - fieldwork would only usually 'happen' if I made it happen. I could not simply sit around, I felt a constant pressure to phone up people, arrange interviews, and to discover new aspects of the subject I was researching. To make matters worse, I did not like to conduct too many formal interviews (especially those arranged over an unsolicited phone call), since most of my best understandings and insights came from spontaneous conversations (given direction by me, if necessary) without the pressure for questions and answers. As time went on, my contacts became wider and spontaneous involvement in community networks became easier - but I was never satisfied that the fieldwork I was conducting was the type of fieldwork I *should*

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed, I found this problem whilst doing fieldwork during my trip to India.

be doing.

Doing fieldwork at home did prove helpful in many respects, though. Although I was definitely an outsider, I was still not so much an outsider as the white British anthropologist among the 'natives' abroad. I shared a common citizenship, and many common values, with the subjects of my research. Furthermore, a lack of socio-economic differences helped me to establish my position. I was very much associated with the middle class white British establishment - perhaps especially so because I was English and not Scottish. I was from the university, I spoke with a standard southern English accent. These were all advantageous when working with people who themselves were highly integrated into that middle-class niche - even though they also chose to retain a distinction in terms of religious and 'ethnic' behaviour.

#### *1.2.2.4 Final discussion*

Whilst conducting this research, and especially now while discussing and describing my observations, I am conscious of the recent critiques made of 'traditional' anthropological paradigms (c.f. Clifford & Marcus 1986, Fabian 1983, Spencer 1989). Regardless of our good intentions as 'social scientists', the practice of anthropology - especially the process of writing anthropology - requires a degree of construction on the part of the anthropologist. It is, of course, possible and necessary to avoid participating in this. As anthropologists our aim is to describe, translate, and to make sense of what we observe - not to deconstruct our observations merely to construct them again in our own images. But it is inevitable that no ethnography can be free of this - the text will always be a dialogue between the author, the reader, and the ideas and data under discussion.

The end product may not be how it should be - in particular, I am aware of how I am participating in the very processes of construction that I am attempting to discuss. But any attempt to discuss this subject *requires* some degree of construction. If I simply choose to write ethnography, then I am giving a particular construction of how I

perceived events, people, and concepts at a certain time. If I wish to write a thesis and discuss this ethnography, then I must construct the thesis itself - I must impose my own blueprint of interpretation over the data.

Therefore I am left with various uneasy feelings about this work, which are an inevitable part of conducting social scientific research. I am aware that what I describe - like all ethnography - only represents part of the picture. Furthermore, I fear that my representation of this fragment is in some ways a misrepresentation. My knowledge of Edinburgh Hindus could never be complete, and I was constantly aware that there were many things that I did not really know. I was also aware of the fact that there were many people who were far better informed than me - and yet who were as articulate. And if this is the case, then why was there any need for me to write this thesis?

But the thesis is being presented as an attempt to understand a complex situation, whilst at the same time trying to place Edinburgh in a broader comparative perspective - which stretches through the Indian diasporas, as well as across the subcontinent. Thus I do not intend to take upon myself the role of spokesperson - for any group or 'community' - but rather that of an interested outsider, looking at the situation from a rather different perspective to any of those already being offered.

### **1.2.3 The choice of the subject**

I decided to study Edinburgh Hindus for a number of reasons. The population is small compared with other British Indian communities and it seemed that this may increase the chances of being able to understand its workings. At the same time it is large enough to have organised itself into various social organisations.

On learning more about the population of the community it soon became clear that it has a number of factors which make it different from other British Hindu communities which have been studied by anthropologists, sociologists, etc. (see for example, Tambs-Lyche 1980a; Michaelson 1979, 1983, 1987; Barot 1972, 1980). For one thing there is an almost equal balance of numbers of Panjabi and Gujarati Indians,

which in other parts of Britain could have resulted in two different communities emerging. But the relatively small total numbers that have settled in Edinburgh has encouraged a degree of cooperation to create multi-cultural (in the Indian sense) institutions. Knott (1986a, 1987) has observed a similar situation in the Hindu temple in Leeds, where a different balance between Panjabis and Gujaratis has created a somewhat different institution.

Two other aspects of the Edinburgh Indian Community are that it is not in any way ghettoised, the Indian population is spread out through the city and there is nowhere that could be described as a residential ethnic niche. This may be related to the fact that the population is also very much a professional and business orientated one - most of the people with whom I have talked have well paid jobs (there are of course exceptions) and live comfortable middle class lives.

Concerning my choice of the temple as the focus of my research, I have to stress that the Edinburgh temple is by no means the only place in which Hindus maintain and express their distinctive cultures<sup>9</sup>. Neither does it have any privileged position as the main ethnic/cultural arena. It is worth bearing in mind Michaelson's point<sup>10</sup> that Hindu temples are very different from Christian churches, and that it can be a matter of western bias to look at temples as the centres of religious communities (1987: 33, 48).

I have used the temple as the centre of my study of Edinburgh Hindus mainly because of its accessibility - it is an obvious place to make contact with the type of people I wished to study, and its roles and procedures are obviously part of an ongoing process which could be easily observed. But it is also an arena in which several potentially conflicting strands of Hindus are coming together to create a pan-Hindu institution. Why and how this should be so are questions that are well worth investigating.

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<sup>9</sup> The Edinburgh Indian Association mentioned earlier is a rival 'cultural' organisation, while many other cultural activities occur within the homes of community members.

<sup>10</sup> I will be discussing this in more detail in a later chapter, see §4.2.2.4.

### 1.3 THESIS OUTLINE

In the next chapter (Chapter two) I will give an introduction to the South Asian populations of Edinburgh, with particular reference to Hindus. The two main Hindu institutions in Edinburgh - the Edinburgh Indian Association and the Edinburgh Hindu Mandir (temple) - are briefly described, along with a profile of the main features of Hindus in Edinburgh. The second part of this chapter discusses other South Asian groups in Edinburgh (Sikhs, and Muslims), and the ways in which they relate to Hindus and to the majority Scottish population. I then introduce the concept of community as a principle of attachment, and the various approaches to understanding 'ethnic' identity.

Chapter three covers theoretical approaches to the understanding of 'Hinduism'. The first part of this chapter reviews the problem of variation and diversity among Hindu traditions, criticising in particular the Great/Little tradition dichotomy. Three 'new' Hindu traditions - Arya Samaj, Swaminarayan, and Sanatan Dharm - are examined to highlight the complexities of understanding the diversity of forms of Hinduism. This is followed by a discussion of Hindu traditions within the various Hindu diasporas, outlining particular developments which are relevant to understanding the British (and hence Scottish) situation. In particular, the various Hindu traditions found within East Africa and North America are discussed.

Chapter four introduces the Hindu Mandir. It gives the history of the temple project and of the community that is based around it. It also describes the present structures and organisation of the temple, their plans for the future, and political relations between the temple leaders. In this chapter I also discuss the roles that Hindu temples may have - both in India, and in Britain - with particular reference to the notion of mandirs as community centres, and the distinction between home-temples and 'public' temples. The notion of temple tradition is discussed, with reference to Hobsbawm's work on the reinvention of tradition.



Chapter five gives a detailed discussion of worship at the Mandir. I describe a 'typical' meeting (*satsang*) at the temple, covering its various aspects such as *darsan*, the singing of *bhajans*, *arti*, *puja*, and *prasad*. This is followed by an analytical discussion of these forms of temple worship. The *satsang* as a forum for different traditions is stressed, as well as the ritual and symbolic nature of *bhajans*. I then describe other forms of temple worship, such as the various festivals which Edinburgh Hindus consider to be important, and demonstrate how they are used by the various groups and individuals within the temple community.

Chapter six is an attempt to draw this material together. The concept of community as a real and imagined entity is discussed, as well as the relationship between the community and the temple congregation. The relationship between religious and social groups - and the ways in which the former is imputed to create the latter - is examined through a discussion of anthropological literature on pilgrimage. The symbolic construction of meanings is used as a framework for understanding the Edinburgh temple community - that whilst being a coherent entity, we must understand that it is also a construction in which there are multiple interpretations.

Appendix One is intended to give background information on the Edinburgh Indian Association (EIA), which is another important part of the Indian/Hindu community. In this chapter I provide a description of the history and structure of the EIA, as well as some of the roles that the Association performs in the 'community'. The overlap between the temple and the EIA is also discussed. A glossary of Indian and ambiguous terms is provided after the appendix.

## CHAPTER TWO. HINDUS IN EDINBURGH

### 2.1 INTRODUCING EDINBURGH HINDUS

#### 2.1.1 Statistical background

The Edinburgh Hindu population is quite small when compared with such populations in other parts of Britain - there are approximately 800-1,000 people who fall within this category. This is extremely different from areas such as London and Leicester, which each have Hindu populations of over 100,000.

The presence of people of South Asian origin in Britain is well known and well documented. It is notoriously hard to give any exact figures about how many are now living here, but estimates range from approximately one to two million (Clarke, Peach, & Vertovec 1990: 2; Knott 1982; King 1984). South Asians<sup>1</sup> are by no means a homogeneous population - in Britain they are divided by a great many factors, most importantly by country and region of origin, and by religion.

The three major *religions* of British South Asians are Hinduism, Sikhism, and Islam and the three main *countries* of origin are India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. This present study will be concentrating on a group of Indian Hindus who are now settled in Scotland. Of these, the two main *regions* of emigration were Panjab (in the north west

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<sup>1</sup> The terminology used to describe the different cultural groups from South Asia will be kept as simple as possible in this thesis, whilst still attempting to maintain accuracy and continuity with terms used by these people about themselves. 'South Asians' refers to people of any nationality or religion who have originated (either in person, or through their forebears) from the South Asian sub-continent (i.e. from present day India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, or Bhutan). The term 'Indian' will be used to refer to any South Asian who identifies culturally with the present day Indian state (rather than Pakistan, Bangladesh, or Sri Lanka). 'Hindu' will refer to any people who consider themselves as followers of Hindu religious or cultural traditions. The term 'Indian/Hindu' will be used to specify those who are *both* Indian *and* Hindu.

These definitions are not unproblematic. The use of a foreign national label 'Indian' to describe a group who are predominantly 'British' suggests a degree of alienation from citizenship that is not present. I can see no alternative to this, however, especially as it is a term used self-descriptively (for example, in the 'Edinburgh Indian Association'). The category Indian does also contain a large number of people who identify with what is now India, but who themselves do not wish to be 'Indian' - that is pro-Khalistani (a separate Panjabi state) Sikhs. These will be discussed later in this chapter (see §2.3.1). The term 'Hindu' is extremely problematic, and an examination of the ways in which it is employed and constructed forms the basis of much of this thesis.

of the country) and Gujarat (on the west coast north of Bombay).

Many of these came to Britain directly, emigrating during the post-war years in the 1950s and 60s. However, in the 60s and 70s there was another wave of migration of South Asians (including Indians) who had previously settled in the British colonies of East Africa but who left (either voluntarily or were expelled) following the independence of these countries. In many respects these East Africans are culturally the same as the direct migrants; but their histories are significantly different and this is still important, even after twenty-plus years of residence in Britain<sup>2</sup>.

The South Asian population of Britain is not distributed evenly throughout the country; there are significant clusters of settlement, particularly in the south and midlands of England. Places such as Southall in west London and Leicester in the Midlands are well known for their large Asian communities, as are other areas of London, along with Birmingham, Coventry, Bradford, etc. Other places in England have much smaller Asian communities (for a breakdown of statistics, see Robinson 1990).

Scotland is not well known for having an 'ethnic minority' population - it is generally believed that there are few living in the country. The meaning of the term 'ethnic minority' usually refers only to non-white New Commonwealth (NCW) people who migrated to Britain during the post war years<sup>3</sup>. It is rarely used to include other communities that have migrated into (lowland) Scotland, such as the Italians, the East Europeans (both Jews and Christians), the Irish, the English, or even the highlanders and islanders. These other migrants make up a substantial part of the community in

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<sup>2</sup> This will be discussed later, in §3.5.1.

<sup>3</sup> A Scottish Office report on the 1981 census figures states that 'for the purpose of this report the term ethnic minority is used to refer to immigrants from the New Commonwealth and Pakistan and their descendants. The main groups are Indians, Pakistanis, and Bangladeshis (whether from the Indian sub-continent or from Africa); Chinese, principally from Hong Kong; black Africans and West Indians. Not included in this definition of the ethnic minority population are Jews, various groups of European origin such as Poles, Italians, and persons from the Irish Republic, or residents in Scotland originating from the "Old Commonwealth" countries such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand' (Scottish Office 1983: 1). The report makes no attempt to justify this use of the term 'ethnic minority' and leaves the impression that it is merely a euphemism for 'dark-skinned people'.

Scotland and are generally considered to be unproblematic since they are on the whole well integrated<sup>4</sup>.

In fact, Scotland is generally perceived as a country of emigration rather than immigration, although this is a myth that Dunlop (1988, and Dunlop & Miles 1990) has examined and proven to be only partially true. It is believed that the New Commonwealth migrants arrived a little later than the other migrant groups, and (perhaps more to the point) they have a different skin colour which can mark them out as very different. It is perhaps because they have not settled in Scotland in quite the same numbers as they have in parts of England that it is believed that the NCW population of Scotland is insignificant.

There are no reliable figures for the South Asian populations of Scotland, but the 1981 census (Scottish Office 1983) estimated that there was a total of approximately 40,000 in Scotland as a whole. However, this is probably quite an underestimate. Glasgow is both the largest city in Scotland and also the home of the largest NCW population, and more recent studies have estimated that there are approximately 40,000 living in that city alone (Dunlop 1988). Edinburgh has the second largest non-white population (about 10,000) while Dundee has about 5,000.

The Edinburgh South Asian population is predominantly Muslim (see table 2.1 below) and these Muslims mainly originate from Pakistan - although some originate from Bangladesh, and a very small number from India. Sikhs and Hindus are present in equal numbers, and although both groups originate from India they remain quite separate and distant from one another. In fact, there is no such thing as a South Asian community in Edinburgh, it is a collection of several different populations, mainly divided by the principles of religion and former national identity.

A survey conducted in 1986-7 (by SEMRU<sup>5</sup> 1987: vol III) estimated that the South

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<sup>4</sup> It could be argued that the Catholic/Protestant and Scottish/English antagonisms are now so much part of Scottish life and culture that even these major sources of ethnic discord are integrated into the national culture.

<sup>5</sup> The Scottish Ethnic Minorities Research Unit, see footnote 3 in chapter one.

Asian population of Edinburgh and its surrounds (that is Lothian Regional District) was approximately 7,000 (out of a total population of approximately 700,000). There were 3,000 Pakistani Muslims, 400 Bangladeshis (mainly Muslims) and about 1,650 Indians [there were also approximately 3,000 Chinese, Vietnamese, and Afro-Caribbeans].

The Indian population was split into two different groups, over half of them being Sikhs and the remainder Hindus. Taking into account a natural increase in the population in the four years since these figures were compiled, there are probably about 900 Hindus now living in and around Edinburgh.

**Table 2.1 Estimate of Lothian Region NCW Populations**

(source SEMRU 1987, vol III)

<u>Country of origin</u>	<u>Official figure<sup>a</sup></u>	<u>Estimate for 1987<sup>b</sup></u>
Pakistanis	3,000	4,000
Indian (Sikh)	850	1,100
Indian (Hindu)	800	900
Chinese	2,700	3,000
African/Caribbean	300	500
<u>Bangladeshis</u>	<u>400</u>	<u>500</u>
Total	8,050	10,000

a. This figure is based primarily on 1981 census records.

b. The figure of 10,000 for the total population was given by SEMRU as an estimate based on natural increase. The breakdown into different ethnic groups is my own, based on the estimated rate of increase given in the SEMRU report. If this rate of increase was sustained for the period of 1986-1991, then the *present* total population may be over 12,000.

Local Hindu community leaders have quoted a figure of about 100 Hindu families in the area, which gives an approximate total slightly lower than the SEMRU figure, but using the names supplied by the membership lists of various institutions (such as the Hindu temple, and the Edinburgh Indian Association) and also by consulting public

lists (such as the telephone book and electoral register<sup>6</sup>) I would say that there are a *minimum* of 150 Hindu families, and that there may well be a lot more - so the figure of 800-900 seems to be approximately right.

Taking this into account, I concentrated my research upon the Indian/Hindu population of Edinburgh - a group who see themselves as being distinct from other South Asians living in the city. This group itself is internally divided along several axes, particularly by the state of origin in India (mainly Gujarat and Panjab) and by occupation. But in many other ways they share a similar outlook, and many consider themselves to constitute a distinct 'Hindu' or 'Indian' community.

### 2.1.2 Early historical background

There have been Indians living in Edinburgh for at least 120 years, although it is only in the past 20 to 30 years that they have settled in significant numbers. The first recorded settlement of people from the Indian sub-continent in Scotland appears to have been in the nineteenth century; although the involvement of Scots in the conquest and exploitation of India goes back a century or two before then (see for example Dunlop 1988, Dunlop & Miles 1990, Cage 1985), and one would guess that handfuls of Indians may have been brought back home to Scotland unrecorded during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for curiosity and/or enslavement.

In 1867 Joseph Salter<sup>7</sup> visited a number of towns throughout the British Isles, including Edinburgh, and met Asians in all of them (Visram 1986: 55). Two years later in 1869 'he travelled to Glasgow, Stirling, *Leith*, *Edinburgh*, Sunderland, Durham... and Brighton. He met 81 Asians including four at Edinburgh...' (ibid.: 55,

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<sup>6</sup> Names known to be of Indian/Hindu origin were checked against these lists to see if there were any other residents of the area who were not to be found among the official records. Thus the check could not be said to be definitive or accurate in any way, since there may well be other Indian names not checked in this manner and some of the names discovered in this way may not necessarily be Hindu since there was no attempt to follow up on the names so elicited. Thus the figure of 150 families can be at best an extremely rough estimate, and is most probably an underestimate.

<sup>7</sup> Salter was a missionary who ministered to Indian Lascar seamen (from India) who had 'jumped ship' and settled mainly in England.

emphasis added). Visram also mentions a group of 'oculist' (eye specialists), who settled in Edinburgh briefly in the 1890s, and who subsequently returned to India (ibid.: 62). Dunlop and Miles (1990) describe a group of 'professional beggars' who lived in West Port, Edinburgh in 1850. These people were given the generic title of 'Malays', but they may well have been from India, since one observer comments that they had 'Indian names'. It is not clear how these beggars arrived in Edinburgh, nor what happened to them.

In the early twentieth century, especially following the first world war, there was a small flow of Indians coming to Edinburgh - usually to trade in some way, as they did in other parts of Britain. This type of people are described as the 'pioneers' of emigration by Ballard and Ballard (1977), whilst Aurora calls them 'frontiersmen' (1967). These emigrants, who were nearly always men, left their homes in India and travelled to Britain to earn their livings through trade, often setting themselves up as tinkers or peddlars, travelling around remote areas of the country to sell their wares. Lal Khatri, one such early settler, who came to Edinburgh in 1929 speaks of his experiences during this early period as follows:

At that time [1929] there was no community of Indians other than university Indians... Working Indians would have been about ten at the most in Edinburgh and Leith... Anyhow, looking for a job was hopeless...and the only thing a friend could advise me was, 'If you get a peddler's licence from the police and you buy some stuff and sell it, then that will give you some income to live on if you are lucky'... We sold all sorts -- shirts, dresses and blouses... Some people banged the door in front of you, didn't even give you a chance to say what it was, and others would open it and suddenly realise that they could do with an overall or a girl's dress. (from Edensor and Kelly 1989: 46).

This man is still living in Edinburgh, having married two British women (he was widowed twice). He only spent the first five years of his time actually working as a salesman, and by 1935 he had become an engineer in a local factory. Having retired a number of years ago, he is now a well respected member of the community.

Helweg, in his study of Sikhs in Gravesend, describes the history of a similar man who found himself in Edinburgh after having made the arduous journey from India:

Ganda Singh, who had been a sweeper on the Indian Railways, became involved with the Ghadr Party [who] sponsored his emigration to train him as a local insurgent. He was to help promote an uprising in the Panjab, but he ended in Edinburgh, where he had a small business in cloth. When World War Two broke out, Ganda Singh feared being drafted into the British Armed Forces so he returned to [India]. (Helweg 1986 [1979]: 25).

Edinburgh was also a popular place for Indians to come because of its medical school, and during the second half of the nineteenth century there was a steady stream of students being sent to the city from British India to train to become doctors. These students created their own institution to meet their social and cultural needs in Edinburgh, founding an Edinburgh Indian Students' Association (this organisation is still in existence, although it has been transformed to serve the Indian community now settled in the city - see Appendix One). These students continued to come to Edinburgh to study throughout the first half of the twentieth century, but then their numbers drastically declined following Indian Independence and the development of medical schools in India itself.

The purpose of this brief historical sketch is to demonstrate that the presence of Indians in the city of Edinburgh is not a new phenomenon. Even though there has never before been quite so many living in the area, there have been pockets of Indians living in Edinburgh continuously for over a hundred years. During this time they have had to come to terms with the obvious differences between the cultures they left behind and what they found in Scotland. Until the 1970s, the Edinburgh Indian Students' Association was the only institution formed to help in this process. Even with this, however, there are signs that this was not only for the Indian students, but was also a vehicle for the education of British potential colonial administrators (see Appendix One).

So the adaptation of the cultural traditions of the Indians who came here in the first years of migration was made on an ad hoc basis with no real forms of institutional support, and there are few records to show how this happened. In contrast to this the present day Indian population has a number of institutions available to facilitate the



maintenance and transferral of their cultural traditions - and these institutions will be discussed below (see §2.2).

### 2.1.3 General profile of Edinburgh Hindus

Indian settlement in Edinburgh did not really begin until the 1960s and 70s. One couple told me that when they arrived in Edinburgh in 1967 there were very few Indians living in the city or the surrounds.<sup>8</sup> A rough estimate given to me by another informant was that when he arrived in 1974 there were about thirty to forty Hindu/Indian families, and this rapidly increased to about one hundred by 1980. Other people have confirmed this impression, and - although I could find no statistical data about the Indian population before 1980 - I think that it is correct to assume that the main period of migration into the area happened during the 1970s. Thus the population is a recently established one, and this is reflected in the fact that its main institutions are still in the process of becoming established.

There are a number of internal divisions within the 'Hindu community'. Of course these Hindus have to be distinguished from other South Asians living in Edinburgh - most importantly they are distinct from Sikhs, who have completely different organisational structures to the Indian/Hindus<sup>9</sup>. There are other Indians living in Edinburgh who are neither Hindu nor Sikh - I have come across a few Christian Indians (who are mainly from Kerala and Goa in the south west of India), and also a very small number of Buddhists and Jains (who in some respects are loosely attached to the Hindu community)<sup>10</sup>.

There are three main principles which divide the Indian/Hindu population in

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<sup>8</sup> Indeed this couple claim to be the first Indian (and Asian) inhabitants of Livingston, the new town built several miles to the south west of Edinburgh.

<sup>9</sup> Hindus and Sikhs remain quite separate in Edinburgh, despite their common 'Indian-ness'. I will be discussing Edinburgh Sikhs in §2.3.1.

<sup>10</sup> Most Jains in Scotland are Gujaratis, and so have a number of contacts with Gujarati Hindus. Thus those Jains that I have come across in Edinburgh tend to participate in Gujarati networks, either in the Edinburgh Indian Association, or in the Hindu temple. Buddhists from India also tend to participate in the Indian Association, although Sri Lankan Buddhists keep themselves distant from this group - and from most other Indian/Hindu networks.

Edinburgh. These are the regions of origin within India; whether migration was direct from India or via some other country (i.e. East Africa); and the occupations and status of Indians.

### *2.1.3.1 Place of origin*

The majority of South Asians in Britain are originally from either Panjab or Gujarat<sup>11</sup> - Hindus in Edinburgh are also predominantly from these two regions. Although it has been suggested to me (mainly by Panjabis) that there are more Panjabis in Edinburgh than Gujaratis, my observations gave the impression that these two groups are present in almost equal numbers. It is clear, though, that the two groups together outnumber all other Hindus living in Edinburgh. In fact, I would estimate that about forty percent of the total Hindu population are Panjabi (that is, approximately 400), and another forty percent are Gujarati. The remaining twenty percent are from many other parts of India - such as Bengal, Bihar, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Tamil-Nad, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala, Karnataka, and so on. A number are from eastern India - particularly Bihar and Bengal - and these constitute a third (far smaller) regional group who are generally distinct from the dominant Panjabi and Gujarati factions.

The various regions of origin are a very important source of factionalism within the Hindu population - and so these differing regional identities help to determine a great deal of behaviour and social organisation. There are great cultural and linguistic differences between Panjabis and Gujaratis, and these are both very different themselves from Biharis, Bengalis, and Southern Indians. All these groups find a common cohesive identity in their shared Hindu religion. But (as will be discussed in chapter 3), Hinduism is rarely 'common' or 'cohesive', and there is no apparent reason why any adherence to Hinduism should unite these diverse groups within Edinburgh.

Panjabis and Gujaratis have distinct cultural traditions - their languages, food,

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<sup>11</sup> According to Clarke, Peach, and Vertovec there are approximately 250,000 Gujaratis and 125,000 Panjabi Hindus living in Britain (1990: 19).

styles of dress, and religious outlooks are all different - and so there is little to encourage them to mix together. The linguistic differences between Panjabis and Gujaratis can make communication between the two groups difficult, and although this is often overcome through the use of a common language (either Hindi or English) such a compromise does not always happen. What creates even greater boundaries between the two groups, however, is the fact that there are different sets of cultural expectations which become particularly manifest within the religious sphere - since this is the area where they may come together the most. Biharis and Bengalis have different religious needs and so have to go to elsewhere (often to Glasgow) to have them fulfilled at the times of major religious festivals. South Indians have to make their own arrangements again, usually in their own homes, or by going down to one of the South Indian temples in England.

#### *2.1.3.2 Migration history*

Along with the region from which Indians originally came, there is also the question of whether they had settled previously in East Africa before arriving in Britain. This is something that has been discussed by other writers on South Asians in this country, particularly Bhachu (1985) - who labelled East African Asians 'twice migrants'. The authors of the survey by SEMRU (1987: vol.II: 24) believed that only about 10% of the Edinburgh Hindu population come under this category, so there should only be about 60-80 East African Indian/Hindus. However, this seems to be a gross underestimate, since many of the Gujaratis to whom I talked came from either Kenya or Uganda. The sharp increase in the Edinburgh Hindu population during the 1970s (the time when the main exodus from the East African countries occurred) also points to a larger East African Hindu population than this. In fact, I would guess that the majority of Gujaratis in Edinburgh are 'East Africans'.

These Hindus have brought a very different form of religion to Britain than the direct migrants, mainly because of developments that occurred within Hinduism in East

Africa. I shall be examining this in more detail in chapter three (§3.5.1). It is clear, though, that the two main strains of Hindu tradition within Edinburgh are East African Gujarati and direct migrant Panjabi.

### *2.1.3.3 Occupation and residence*

On the whole, the Hindu population are professional and middle-class. Many of them are doctors, teachers, accountants, architects, etc., whilst there is also a reasonably sized proportion of the community engaged in profitable businesses. There are in fact very few Hindus who do not fall into the 'middle class' category, and this is reflected in their choice of housing, which I will comment on later. Their socio-economic position thus makes them rather different from many other South Asian groups in Britain. But it is worth noting that recent research into population statistics has shown that most British Indians do in fact belong to this middle-class/professional economic niche (Robinson 1990).

It appears that only a small number of Indians came directly to Edinburgh after emigrating from India - most of them settled in the industrial towns in the south and only moved to the city for specific employment-related reasons; for example, to take up a job with a firm in the city, or to move their business to a place where property was cheap. (I was told that it was once possible to sell a house in London and with the money buy both a larger house and a shop in Edinburgh.) Thus Edinburgh has only tended to attract Indians who have 'made it' in other parts of Britain first. Although a small number of East Africans were encouraged to go to Edinburgh through the Ugandan Resettlement Board<sup>12</sup>, the majority appear to have moved to the city through

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<sup>12</sup> This was a government encouraged initiative in 1972 to house refugees from Amin's Uganda whilst ensuring that they did not concentrate in certain popular 'red' areas, and rather were distributed throughout Britain (Kuepper et al 1975: 60-84; Cunningham 1971; Humphrey & Ward 1974). Certain references in the literature on this programme suggest that Scotland was a very unpopular place for these refugees to go (despite some considerable encouragement), mainly because of its cold climate (Kuepper et al 1975: 80-81; Humphrey & Ward 1974: 66-7). Although the programme was not a complete success - insofar as most East Africans went indirectly to the 'red' areas, since this was where people that they knew were already living - the allegedly cold weather in Scotland does not appear to have prevented many East Africans from travelling north.

their own initiative. Most of these seem to have had a degree of capital (or the skills to acquire it) before arriving.

The Indian student population in Edinburgh is rather different from these other groups. Most of these students have come from India to study for postgraduate degrees at the universities - although there are some children of settlers here (and from other parts of Britain) who are doing undergraduate degree courses. But for most purposes the term 'student' is usually employed to describe someone who has recently arrived in the city from India to do some course of study at one of the universities (or in several cases to take up post-doctoral fellowships).

When I began my fieldwork I was told by an official at the temple that the student population is separate from the rest of the community since it is so temporary. There are definite differences between the two groups. Many of the students are still very 'Indian' - that is they are much less adjusted to life in Britain, with its different customs, routines, and weather - and many settled Indian/Hindus comment on this (usually admiringly). They are also usually younger, they have only recently come from India, and they are probably unlikely to stay in Edinburgh for more than five years. Most of them either go back to India when they have concluded their study, or otherwise move on to America.

The settlers are much more rooted in the city, they have (or once had) children growing up in the schools, they know the British way of doing things now, and many have no open intention of leaving Britain (or even Edinburgh). One man who has been living in Edinburgh for a number of years said that he thought the homes of these students were the only places in the city where you could find 'proper India culture' now.

But the perceived distance between students and more long term settlers is not absolute, and there are a number of close relationships between the two groups on many different levels. A common background helps to create ties, especially when the students are from areas that the settlers migrated from originally. Language and dialect

strengthen these ties even more. Then there is the sharing of professions - something that is particularly obvious between the students and the settled Indians who are academics. These acquaintanceships may easily develop between students and settlers, even in the short time that the students are in Edinburgh. An illustration of this is a woman who was brought to Britain when she was a baby, educated in Edinburgh and did her degree in Scotland. She has married a student who came from India to do a PhD at the university, and now they are both living and working in Edinburgh. They rarely go to EIA functions, and almost never to the temple, but they are good friends to a number of other 'students'. There are a number of other cases of students who have been befriended by more settled families, and so the boundaries between students and settlers are quite fluid.

The residential distribution of Indian/Hindus in Edinburgh is fairly indicative of their general socio-economic position. There is a spread of Indians across the city and its outlying areas in a fairly haphazard form with no obvious patterns of clustering (or 'ghettoisation'). In fact the only observable residence pattern seems to follow the white Scottish pattern - that is, the 'nice' middle-class areas are as popular with Indian/Hindus as they are with the indigenous populations. This contrasts with the Sikh population, who are mainly clustered in the more working-class area of Leith (see §2.3.1).

Nowikowski & Ward (1979) make a distinction between the more affluent and better educated Indian groups, who tend to live in dispersed suburban areas, and poorer groups, who live in larger concentrations. The more affluent groups are themselves divided into professionals and bourgeois. The latter are often from families that came to Britain to do manual work and lived in the areas of high concentration of other Indians, but who subsequently accumulated capital through trade and moved out to the suburbs, away from the 'ghettoes'<sup>13</sup>. Links with family are still maintained,

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<sup>13</sup> This is also described by Werbner amongst Pakistani Muslims in Manchester (1979).

however, and so the 'cultural' or 'ethnic' structures of their communities are also maintained - even if these become dispersed. In contrast to this, professional Indians had no such close contacts on arrival in Britain and so did not have the apparatus to form such strong communal networks. Thus they have tried harder to emulate the white British middle-classes and even in some respects try to be assimilated.

Although there are differences between professional and bourgeois Indians in Edinburgh, this is not as clear as Nowikowski & Ward suggest. In Edinburgh, both groups attempt to negotiate *both* limited 'assimilation' into white British middle class life *and* maintenance of 'ethnic' and 'cultural' structures. For example, both professionals and bourgeois serve on the temple and the Indian Association committees. Furthermore, the boundaries between bourgeois and professionals is becoming more and more vague as the younger generations grow up. The children of bourgeois families are frequently trained for some profession (medicine, pharmacy, dentistry, etc.). If they remain in the business sphere, then they almost always move away from small-scale retailing and into large-scale wholesale trade, or into accountancy.

Where the differences between bourgeois and professionals are most distinct in Edinburgh are, however, where there are also regional divisions. Most of the distinctly bourgeois Hindus are Panjabis, whilst most of those who are distinctly professional are from regions other than Panjab and Gujarat. To such people, the cultural differences are more important than their socio-economic differences - although both factors do help to reinforce each other.

## **2.2 HINDU COMMUNAL INSTITUTIONS**

It is apparent that in many ways, Hindus living in Edinburgh form a 'community' and are an 'ethnic group' different from other such groups in the city (such as Pakistani Muslims). In this sense, however, the notion of 'community' is extremely abstract and vague - and a number of writers have rightly criticised its over-use. But with regard to

the subject of this thesis, it must be remembered that the notion of 'community' is something that comes from within the Edinburgh Hindu population - that is, it is a very important term of self-description.

This community is an entity that has only recently been formed. In fact, it is so new that during the time of my fieldwork it was still in the process of being constructed, and the outcome of this process is still hard to predict. It is erroneous to think of the community as having any deep roots in the fabric of Edinburgh society. Hindus living in the city have contributed greatly to the local economy and many other aspects of the area - but the group do not have very much of a history of acting as a community vis-a-vis the rest of the population of Edinburgh.

The community - as it is at present - is also very immature in its internal workings. Its structures are still being created, which means that there is a great deal left to negotiate. There has also been a gradual development of what the Edinburgh community means to its members, and how it should operate to sustain and reproduce itself. When the community began to form in the 1970s, its members were from many different parts of India - they all had different ideas about what their tradition meant to them. There were vague areas of agreement among certain sections of this community - for example those people who had come directly from Panjab to Britain shared a common outlook, as did those Gujaratis who had recently left East Africa. But at that time there were no structures or mechanisms for channelling these traditions into a communal<sup>14</sup> group which encompassed all Hindus in Edinburgh. This may have been because there was little incentive or perceived need to form an association which used religion (i.e. Hinduism) or Indian-ness as a basis for social organisation.

Werbner notes that there are several important elements in the construction (or

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<sup>14</sup> I am using the terms communal and communality to refer to the creation of a sense of common identity. The related (but distinct) term communalism is avoided because in India it is often used to mean something different - that is, factional differences between social groups, and it is often a euphemism for Hindu-Muslim tensions and violence. For a discussion of contemporary communalism in India, see Das (1990).



imagination) of 'ethnic minority' communities. These communities may be the constructions of outside agencies - such as local councils and other bodies who look for leaders who can represent such communities on an official level (Werbner 1991: 21). The presence of such external agencies shall be discussed later in this chapter (see §2.3.3.1). Another source of the notion of community may be from self-appointed community leaders, who rely on 'ethnic' or cultural organisations - which they either create themselves, or take over. The communities which they claim to represent may be exaggerated entities (see for example, Eade 1989) - but this is not necessarily always the case. Hindu community leaders in Edinburgh may use the notion of community as a power base, but the notion itself is real enough to most Hindus in the city.

There are two such 'ethnic' organisations in Edinburgh - both of which claim to serve the Hindu/Indian community in various ways, and which both also help to construct and reinforce the notion that there is such a community. These are the 'Hindu Mandir and Sanskritic Kendra' (the Hindu temple), and the 'Edinburgh Indian Association'. Both of these organisations are the products of the specific historical circumstances of Indians in Edinburgh.

### **2.2.1 Edinburgh Indian Association**

Communal structures based on 'Indian-ness' have gradually developed over the past two decades - mainly prompted by individuals who saw some benefit from encouraging cooperation between the disparate Indian groups living in the city. The Edinburgh Indian Association (EIA) was formed first, and this served as a forum in which pan-Indian communality could be explored and exploited.

The EIA is a 'cultural' group - it puts on musical and dance performances and acts as a social centre for Indians of all backgrounds, regardless of region of origin or religion. The association is supposed to be secular, and it is not only for Hindus -

although it is mainly dominated by Hindus<sup>15</sup>. The association was founded in 1974 out of a defunct Edinburgh Indian Students' Association. Most of the individuals who were involved with this re-formation of the association were newly arrived East Africans. One of the main aims of the association is to actively promote cooperation between Indians in Edinburgh - people who have little in common, apart from their connection with India. The stress is put very much upon notions of common national identity and common culture - in contrast to what are perceived as the narrower notions of regional or religious divisions. The EIA, therefore, does not cater sufficiently for the religious needs of Hindus in Edinburgh - its philosophy is to transcend such divisions.

### **2.2.2 Edinburgh Hindu Mandir and Sanskritic Kendra**

The need for a specifically 'religious' organisation was one of the main reasons for the founding of the Edinburgh Hindu temple. But the creation of such a temple should not be taken for granted - many religious needs could be adequately fulfilled in people's homes - and they continue to be, even after the temple has been opened. Also there is no apparent reason why there should be a temple for *all* Hindus, from *all* parts of India - there are as many differences between the various groups of Hindus in Edinburgh as there are similarities. The creation of this temple inevitably meant that there would have to be compromises made between the main regional traditions represented in Edinburgh - particularly between Panjabis and Gujaratis. The fact that individuals were prepared to work for such compromises was probably because they believed that the dedication of a building in the city would be mainly beneficial.

The great cultural differences between Panjabis and Gujaratis have been a source of division and factionalism among Indian communities in Britain as well as in other parts of the world<sup>16</sup>. In those areas in England with large Hindu populations, Panjabis and

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<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed examination of the EIA, see Appendix One.

<sup>16</sup> For example, in East Africa - see §3.5.1 below.

Gujaratis have usually formed separate temples and associations. For example, there are two Hindu temples in Coventry, a Gujarati one and a Panjabi one (see Jackson 1981); whilst in London and Leicester there are a plethora of different temples, each serving different regional, sectarian, or caste-jati based groups. In Edinburgh neither group has enough members to set itself up on its own - the Hindu community is large enough to function if it works together, but there are not enough of them for the various groups to go it alone in any practical sense. There are definitely Panjabi, Gujarati, Bihari, Bengali, and South Indian networks, but these try to co-operate to ensure that the Edinburgh temple is an effective pan-Indian Hindu place of worship.

The Edinburgh Hindu Mandir and Sanskritic Kendra was formed in 1981 by a small group of Indians - mainly through the efforts of a Kenyan Gujarati woman (see §4.1). At first it was a very small group which organised religious meetings (*satsangs*) in people's homes; but after a couple of years they decided that it should become more permanent, and the meetings were held regularly every month in a community centre. In 1986 they were offered a derelict church by the Edinburgh district council for use as a dedicated temple, and since then the organisation has been working hard to turn this into a proper Hindu mandir. They found various ways of raising grants from outside bodies and donations from the community itself in order to convert the building.

In the meantime the regular monthly *satsangs* have continued, and important Hindu festivals were celebrated. The temple has an official membership of about one hundred and ten families (although I would not be surprised if there are more people than this who will make use of it once the project is completed). The new building opened its doors in October 1989, and is now regularly used as the place for meeting and worship. The project is by no means finished - completion and dedication will only happen when enough money has been raised.

If either the Panjabis or the Gujaratis had made separate decisions to have no involvement with the temple - or even to start separate projects for themselves - then the whole thing would probably have got no further than an idea. The two groups would

have had to meet in community centres without ever being able to raise the money for building temples of their own. I think there are some who would not mind too much if this happened, and who actually prefer to go to small gatherings of fellow Gujaratis or Panjabis in people's homes rather than to the larger mixed gatherings in the temple. But there were enough people who thought the creation of a temple would be more important than any factional or regional differences to make the project work.

The temple is the result of an emerging concept of what it means to be a Hindu in Britain. This concept is still very new and is developing all the time, as the community develops, matures, and changes. At present there is only a small handful of people who are involved in the practical running of the temple. A temple committee has been appointed from the individuals who took the lead in creating the project, and it is mainly these people, along with their families and friends, who go to the temple when it meets every month.

During the time of my fieldwork the average attendance at these monthly meetings was about thirty to forty adults, although at the times of important festivals there were as many as two hundred and fifty. There is as yet no temple priest or *pandit* running the building or the worship. There are plans to bring one over from India and no one knows whether this will be sooner or later, but when he comes people are expecting the attendance of services to increase dramatically. I noticed that there was a slight increase in people attending the meetings once they moved into the temple building from a room in a community centre - and the numbers attending the festivals are increasing dramatically. So it appears that the importing of a religious specialist may well provide a further incentive for people to go to the temple.

The installation of statues of the gods into the building is also seen as being an important way of making more people come. The statues will then be seen as permanent representations of the gods, and so the temple building will become the gods' permanent home (and thus a proper temple) rather than simply a religious meeting hall. In the future there are hopes of holding religious services in the temple

every day, rather than having them once a month, and there will be a major service every Sunday<sup>17</sup>. There is obviously a definite plan for what role the temple will play in the life of the community in the years ahead, and a general acceptance and hope that things will not be the same as they are at present.

The decision to create a temple was not a particularly popular one. It has taken ten years for the original idea to be realised, and many members of the community are only now beginning to take a real interest in the project. Now that the Mandir is functioning it is beginning to be used by more people. At first, people visited the building out of curiosity, then later they used it as a place to fulfil their religious needs. As time passes worshippers should come to rely on the temple as the main focus for the fulfilment of religious needs - it will be the permanent home of the Hindu deities, it will have a large hall where marriages can be held, and it will organise programmes for the important festivals.

The history of the Mandir shows that the temple is already fulfilling roles that it was not initially created to fulfil. About ten to fifteen years ago there was a generally agreed idea that a Mandir in Edinburgh would be a good thing - it would be a place where the gods could be worshipped and other religious needs could be fulfilled. But the temple is rapidly becoming a social and cultural centre for the Hindu community. It is a place where Indian-ness can be shared and upheld. It is also becoming a focus for the community's sense that they have a distinct culture, tradition and religion. It is one of the main arenas in which the notion of community itself is constructed and developed.

Because the members of the community come from quite diverse traditions within Hinduism, the temple is also playing a major role in redefining what those traditions mean. The temple project is one which *appears* to be leading to an homogenisation of Hinduism within Edinburgh. Such a process is unlikely to happen, however, for a

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<sup>17</sup> This is the usual day for Hindu services in Britain, and is the day on which the present monthly meetings are held.

number of reasons which shall be examined in this thesis. The temple project will produce reconstructed forms of Hinduism which will look backwards to India and the *sanatan dharm* (the 'eternal religion'), whilst also being rooted very much in the experiences and needs of Hindu Scots.

### **2.2.3 The Hindu community and the Indian community**

The situation in which Edinburgh Hindus live is very complex. Their lives have many facets, with multiplex relations with various sections of the Edinburgh population. Their socio-economic positions and their ethnic identities provide two differing bases for their lifestyles and outlooks. Relations are determined by historical developments in Britain and in India, as well as by cultural and religious similarities and differences.

The Indian/Hindu community is not a bounded, homogeneous whole, however - notions of difference and distinction also operate on a number of different levels. What is interesting is that there is a Indian/Hindu community at all. Why should the groups of individuals in Edinburgh have decided to gather together and form communal institutions at this level? Why is there no South Asian community, or a Panjabi community? Why should the principles of religion (i.e. the common Hindu religious tradition) and nationality (Indian) be the main elements for defining social organisation?

Leonardo has pointed out that this notion of 'community' is often used in a metaphorical sense by such groups, drawing on 'folksy' images of 'village women meeting at the village well' (Leonardo 1984: 134, quoted in Williams 1988: 10). Such communities are less likely to exist in urban contexts, and the Edinburgh Hindu community is a typical example of a voluntary urban social group, which is nested in other groups and networks, and which only takes on significance through the efforts of its members (see Bell & Newby 1971, 1978; Wellman & Leighton 1979; Suttles 1972). At other times the members of the community take on different roles and participate in different communities, most of which are white Scottish in outlook and organisation.

Williams points out that the phrase 'community' is often used to label

thousands of individuals, unknown to one another, living often hundreds of miles apart, with different ideologies... [Leonardo] points out that labelling a collection of humans as a community or a social category confers upon it a hoped for alliance of interest, solidarity and tradition (Williams *ibid.*).

This is an interesting observation, although it must be noted that the designation of a group as a 'community' may be made either externally or internally. In the Edinburgh Hindu context, the designation is made by the members themselves. Thus the 'hoped for alliance' is the intention of community members.

It must also be noted that there are, in effect, two Indian/Hindu communities in Edinburgh, which together form a single community. There is the Hindu community, which is mainly focused on the Mandir, and which is defined in terms of religious behaviour and adherence. This tends (in practice) to exclude Indians who are not Hindu, but it has an inclusive philosophy (non-Hindus are welcome to attend temple meetings if they wish). There is also an Indian community, which is centred around the EIA, and which is inclusive of all Indians, regardless of religious affiliation. But because this attempts to be secular and pan-Indian, in effect it excludes people such as Edinburgh Sikhs, who dislike these principles (see below). The EIA is determined to be non-religious, almost in opposition to the Mandir. Its claims to be 'secular' and 'cultural' are values which define<sup>it</sup> as being different from those of the Mandir<sup>18</sup>.

Thus the Hindu community is based upon the notion of a shared religious tradition, while the Indian community is based on the notion of shared ethnic/cultural/national identity. But in many ways there is a great deal of overlap between the two. In particular, there is a great deal of overlap of membership - most members of the Mandir also participate in EIA events - and there are one or two people who are on the committees of both organisations. There is also some overlap in function, since both are 'ethnic' organisations (even though one is concerned with religious ethnicity, and

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<sup>18</sup> I will examine this notion of 'secularism' in Appendix One.

the other with national ethnicity). But they are also distinct, since they serve different functions in different ways. Both of these ideas of community are self-defined (by both members and leaders) and are constructions.

It is therefore difficult to talk about 'the Hindu community' and 'the Indian community' as synonyms, there is a degree of difference between the two. At the same time these two communities also operate as a single community in some ways, particularly because of the many areas of overlap. This Indian/Hindu community is very vague and hard to define. However, the term 'Indian/Hindu community' does define a definite group of people, since there are many people who are both Hindu and Indian. Thus there are some contexts in which it is apt to use this rather awkward term. But it is impossible to be consistent in distinguishing between Indian/Hindu and Indian *or* Hindu communities on all occasions.

### **2.3 HINDUS AMONG OTHER EDINBURGH COMMUNITIES**

The Edinburgh Indian/Hindu population does not live in isolation from other groups in the city. Most Hindus have frequent contact with non-Hindus, especially with white Scottish people, whom they meet as neighbours, friends, and work-mates. They are also aware of their prescribed<sup>19</sup> status as an 'ethnic minority' among other ethnic minority groups in Edinburgh. They have a certain degree in common with some of these groups (such as other South Asians), whilst the only factor that they have in common with other groups is the designation of being an ethnic minority. In this section I will examine some of the relationships that exist between Hindus and other populations in Edinburgh.

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<sup>19</sup> That is, prescribed by external groups, such as the local authorities, the media, and the general conceptions of British society.



### 2.3.1 Other Indians

Hindus are not the only 'Indians' living in Edinburgh<sup>20</sup> - there are approximately 1,000 Sikhs, who originate from Panjab (SEMUR 1987: vol III; see §2.1.1 above). These tend to keep themselves distinct from Edinburgh Hindus - few of them have dealings with the Edinburgh Indian Association, the Mandir, or with Edinburgh Hindus on a personal level. Instead they tend to use the Sikh temple (*gurdwara*), which is the main centre of the Sikh community. This separation occurs despite the fact that Sikhs are Panjabi, like many Edinburgh Hindus. Relations between Hindus and Sikhs in Edinburgh are not very good, for a number of reasons - most of which derive from problems in the sub-continent. To understand this it is first necessary to know something of the history of the Edinburgh Sikh population.

#### 2.3.1.1 The history of Edinburgh Sikhs

The present Sikh population pride themselves on their long history of settlement in the city, even though most records show that they only arrived here in large numbers in the 1950s. The Sikh community is fairly homogeneous (which is very different from the Hindu community) being predominantly Bhatras, who are traditionally a 'trading' caste (*jati/biradari*<sup>21</sup>) in Panjab (Wishart & St Clair 1984). Individuals from such a group would have been well disposed to emigration to Britain as 'frontiersmen' (c.f. Aurora 1967) in the early days of migration to Britain, travelling the country as peddlars. According to Helweg:

During the early twentieth century, Bhatras, a *biradari* in the Jullundur Doab, were brought from their villages to Bombay, taught a smattering of English, and shipped to London to sell trinkets.

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<sup>20</sup> There are also a small number of other non-Hindu Indians in Edinburgh, such as Christians, Muslims, Jains, Buddhists etc (see §2.1.3). On the whole these tend to be subsumed within the 'Indian' community (particularly in the Edinburgh Indian Association), although they do not have very much contact with the temple.

<sup>21</sup> Most references to Bhatras describe them as a 'caste', which is usually the English translation of the word *jati* (see footnote 2 in Chapter One). From the very limited contact I have had with Edinburgh Bhatras, I have usually found that they describe themselves as a *biradari*, which refers to a smaller social unit. See Helweg (1986 [1979]: 12-14); Pettigrew (1975: 48-60); Jeffery (1976: 31-35); Anwar (1985: 62-95); Werbner (1990a: 93-99) for discussions of the notion of *biradari*.

(Helweg 1986 [1979]: 23).

Desai (1963: 17) claimed that members of the Sikh community in Glasgow have been peddling since before the second world war, and have even travelled far up into the Highlands. He does not mention Bhatras by name, but it seems clear that these are who he means (since most other Sikh caste-jatis are far less disposed to engage in trade). His claim that the Sikhs of Glasgow are mainly peddlars is contradicted by Srivastava, who describes the two main caste-jati groupings there as 'carpenters' and 'blacksmiths' - that is, not traders (1976: 40). Desai may well have confused Glasgow with Edinburgh, or otherwise the Sikhs initially went to Glasgow and then later moved onto Edinburgh. Ballard also associates Bhatras with Glasgow (1989: 211), arguing that this port - along with a number of others in England - was the place where Bhatras originally settled in the early years of migration. Thus Bhatra communities can be found in Bristol, Cardiff, Southampton, and Newcastle. This is a strong explanation for the existence of an Edinburgh Bhatra settlement, since the area where they live is around the once busy seaport of Leith<sup>22</sup>.

It is obvious that a small number of Bhatra Sikhs established themselves as peddlars/traders in Edinburgh during the 1920s or 30s. This handful of Bhatras encouraged the migration of large numbers of their kin from Panjab a few years later. A local study for the Multicultural Education Centre has observed that most Edinburgh Sikhs:

have come mainly from just two villages which are now part of Pakistan. Those are the villages of Galote'an Kalan and Bhadewala which lie near the town of Daska, about 20 miles from the border with India. One or two of them arrived first and more joined later. Some lived in English cities before eventually living here. (Wishart and St Clair 1984: 10).

Thus the familiar process of 'chain migration'<sup>23</sup> - by which one or two individuals encourage and sponsor their kin to join them - rapidly led to the growth of a Bhatra

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<sup>22</sup> Nesbitt (1980) also records Bhatras as having settled in both Glasgow and Edinburgh, as well as many other British seaports.

<sup>23</sup> As described by many writers, such as Anwar (1985: 19-21); Helweg (1986: 22-36); Jeffery (1976: 48-49); Ballard & Ballard (1977).

Sikh community in Leith during the 1950s.

In 1958 they set up their first Gurdwara (temple) in a converted house in Hopefield Terrace (in Leith), but by 1971 this had become too small so they moved to another house in Academy Street<sup>24</sup> nearby. Their numbers continued to grow, and so in 1976 the Gurdwara moved to an old church in Mill Lane (opposite the Leith Hospital) where it has subsequently remained (MEC n.d.).

Bhatra Sikhs have mainly settled in Leith too - nearly all of the community live within a radius of two miles from the Gurdwara. They have shown a disposition for trading - through peddling, market trading, or setting up their businesses (e.g. shops). Their common origins probably account for why the Leith Sikh community has remained 'remarkably homogeneous both socially and economically when contrasted with the heterogeneity of other Sikh communities [in Britain]' (SEMRU op cit.; vol.2: 19). An equally important element in this homogeneity is the common outlook that Bhatras share. Although no studies have been made of them in Edinburgh, Ghuman (1980; Ghuman & Thomas 1978) has studied Bhatras in Cardiff and many of the observations that he makes about them fit in with what is known about the Sikh community here<sup>25</sup>.

Bhatras are a low status caste-jati of Sikhs from Panjab who claim to be descended originally from a Brahman who 'once loved and wedded' a dancing girl<sup>26</sup> (Ghuman op cit.: 309). In line with this claim to a higher than ascribed status, Bhatras usually try to be very orthodox in their religious practices - they pride themselves on being *pakka* (pure) Sikhs. Their leaders argue that they were a community nominated by the Gurus (the founders<sup>of</sup> Sikhism) to look after the Gurdwaras, and so they maintain

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<sup>24</sup> This is very close to the site of the new Hindu Mandir building.

<sup>25</sup> Two other studies of British Bhatras also confirm this situation among the caste-jati that Ghuman describes. These are by Nesbitt (1980) for Nottingham Bhatras, and by Hindbalraj Singh (1977) for Bristol Bhatras.

<sup>26</sup> This seems to be a classic claim for mythical original status, the aim of which is to compensate for present low status. Bhatras are traders and as such they are supposedly inferior to Jats who are the 'dominant' farming caste of Panjab.

what they perceive to be very orthodox religious beliefs and behaviour.

This behaviour follows the classic model outlined by Srinivas (1952), whereby a low status caste-jati seeks to improve its position by out-orthodoxing the powerful. It is ironic that the caste-jati involved here is Sikh - where the division of society into caste-jatis is theoretically outlawed by their religion. However, Sikh society (in India and in Britain) is still strongly caste-based in many respects. As an illustration of this, Bhachu (1985) has observed a similar phenomenon amongst another low status Sikh caste-jati (Ramgharias, or 'artisans'). This caste-jati has, in the British context at least, tried to be more conservative in their religion than the more numerous Jats. Bhachu also notes that this process has led to Ramgharias 'Hinduising' some elements of their rituals (particularly marriages), by adding embellishments to what should be 'simple' ceremonies (ibid.: 165-66).

There is an important difference between Ramgharias and Bhatras, however. In Britain, Ramgharias are 'twice migrants' because they lived in East Africa before coming here (ibid.: 1-13). This experience of urban life in Africa, Bhachu claims, has given Ramgharias the necessary social skills to adapt easily to the situation in Britain. Thus their attitudes and behaviour are more oriented towards mainstream British values than most of the direct migrants who came straight from Panjab.<sup>27</sup>

Ghuman's portrait of Bhatras in Cardiff makes it clear that there is no such movement among them towards adaptation to western urban attitudes. In fact, he noted (in 1980) that many of them had been in the UK for over fifteen years but still spoke English poorly<sup>28</sup> (op cit.: 313). They had a strong dislike for British schools, withdrawing their daughters when they were fifteen and their sons at sixteen (p.314), and they were strict in ensuring that the women wore the traditional Panjabi dress (i.e.

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<sup>27</sup> In many cases the migration was not as 'direct' as this implies. Most Edinburgh Hindus have lived in other parts of Britain before coming to Edinburgh. The term 'direct' is meant to imply a contrast with the secondary migration that East Africans have gone through.

<sup>28</sup> Although there has been no study made of Bhatras since 1980, this may not be all that different in 1992. As I mentioned in chapter one (§1.2.1), I found that Edinburgh Bhatras used Panjabi for most social discourse, and a number were still very hesitant in English.

the *salwar kamiz* ) and some women 'even' showed 'signs of purdah' (p.315). In these ways, Bhatras consider themselves to be better or more pure (i.e. *pakka*) Sikhs than Ramgharias - although the latter may be strict in some respects, they are also 'degenerate' in comparison with Bhatras.

Some of these elements of strictness in religious and social matters have been found amongst Edinburgh Sikhs. In a dissertation on ethnic minorities in Edinburgh, Cooke says that Bhatras are 'strictly religious' (1986: 29). The boys seldom cut their hair and they wear the *kanga* (the wristband), both of these being symbols of orthodox Sikhism. Also the

girls accept that they will marry as soon as they leave school. One Sikh girl said that she would like to be a nurse but that her job would be to look after her husband (ibid.).

An undergraduate dissertation by Kermack has reported similar findings (1986). The pattern of behaviour observed by Ghuman in Cardiff is probably quite similar to that in Edinburgh.

Cardiff Bhatras have strict control over the local Gurdwara (possibly because of their claims to be custodians of the religion) - but it is also used by Sikhs of other caste-jatis who live in the region. The siting of the Gurdwara in Leith near the main Edinburgh Bhatra community does suggest that it is also dominated by this caste-jati<sup>29</sup>. Ghuman also notes that the relationship between Bhatras and Hindus in Cardiff is better than their relationships with other Sikhs in the area (Ghuman and Thomas op cit.: 57). These Bhatras are prepared to let their sons marry women from Panjabi Hindu families, whilst they would not think of allowing them to marry Sikhs of other caste-jatis (such as Jats or Ramgharias). Edinburgh Bhatras similarly tend to avoid contact with other Sikhs in the city, but they also tend to avoid Hindus (see below).

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<sup>29</sup> Ghuman states, however, that the only two Gurdwaras in Britain that are listed as being owned by Bhatras are the one in Cardiff and one in Preston. He says that there are other Gurdwaras with strong Bhatra composition (or were founded by Bhatras) 'covering parts of *Scotland*, the Midlands and the West of England. It is claimed that many of these Gurdwaras were originally exclusively Bhatra but as later immigrants moved in control was shared, sometimes lost completely, and unspecified bad effects followed...' (Ghuman & Thomas op cit.: 3, emphasis added). Maybe Edinburgh is one of the places in which complete control was lost and unspecified 'bad things' happened.

There is a minority of Sikhs of other caste-jatis living in Edinburgh. Kermack has noted that there are a number of Sikhs who have professional occupations (as opposed to the Bhatras' trading) and who do not live in Leith (op cit.). These Sikhs have different lifestyles and aspirations for their children than Leith Bhatras and even distance themselves from the community in Leith. They are mainly from Jat backgrounds, and a few of them lived in East Africa before coming to Britain. They tend to keep themselves separate from the Edinburgh Bhatra community, and they usually visit the Glasgow Gurdwara<sup>30</sup>, if they wish to attend some public worship.

### *2.3.1.2 Edinburgh Sikhs and Edinburgh Hindus*

There are many similarities between Edinburgh Sikhs and certain sections of the Hindu population. Panjabi Hindus originate from the same region of India, they share a common language and many similar traditions. Several people have pointed out to me that the connections between Hindus and Sikhs in Panjab are often very intimate, and that it is common practice for the first son of a Hindu family to be 'dedicated to the Gurdwara'. That is, many Panjabi Hindu families raise their first male child as a Sikh.

Intermarriage between Hindus and Sikhs is not uncommon - I have come across several examples of this in Edinburgh. I know of cases of Sikh husbands marrying Hindu wives, and also the other way around, with Sikh wives marrying Hindu husbands. I attended the wedding of a Hindu woman from Edinburgh who married a Sikh, whose brother was himself married to the bride's sister. What I did not come across, however, was a marriage between an Edinburgh Hindu and a Bhatra Sikh<sup>31</sup>.

These comments refer specifically to relations between Panjabi Hindus and Sikhs. Gujarati Hindus do not generally intermarry with Sikhs, neither do they attempt to

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<sup>30</sup> For a description of this see Srivastava (1976: 86).

<sup>31</sup> This may be because of the usual practice of local exogamy among both Hindus and Sikhs in Edinburgh. It is very rare to come across marriages between people who are both from Edinburgh. All the marriages that I have knowledge of involved individuals who were brought up in separate localities, and so entailed one or both of the spouses moving after the marriage.

cultivate any social ties with them.

A small number of Sikhs attend the Hindu Mandir in Edinburgh - usually at festival times, such as Janamasthami in August, and Diwali in October<sup>32</sup>. I have come across more Sikhs attending functions organised by the Edinburgh Indian Association, although they are still greatly outnumbered by non-Sikhs. It is rare to find Bhatras at these Indian and Hindu events - those Sikhs who visit the Mandir and the EIA are of other caste-jatis, such as Jats. Sikh religious practice is similar in many respects to Hindu practice. Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was born a Hindu, and the religion of 'Sikhism' slowly developed over a few centuries before it became distinct from Hinduism (see Khuswant Singh 1963; Macleod 1976)<sup>33</sup>.

As already noted above, many Sikhs come from Hindu families, or have one parent who is Hindu. There are several festivals which Hindus and Sikhs share, of which the most important is probably Diwali. In Edinburgh, the Mandir and the Gurdwara organise separate gatherings for this festival, and sometimes these are held at exactly the same time. Some Hindus have complained about the futility of having two celebrations of the same festival on the same night, and one or two Hindus make a point of attending both if it is possible<sup>34</sup>. These same individuals also try to occasionally attend the Sikhs' weekly Gurdwara meetings (which are held every Wednesday afternoon).

The image that many Hindus (especially those from outside Panjab) have of Sikhs is often quite negative. Many Hindus laugh about the average Sikh as being a '*sardar-ji*', who is rough, ignorant, drinks too much, and is quarrelsome<sup>35</sup>. The term *sardar-ji* literally means a 'respected sir', but when it is applied by Hindus to Sikhs it often used

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<sup>32</sup> For a description of these festivals see §5.3.2.

<sup>33</sup> In fact, a clear separation between Sikhism and Hinduism has only really occurred in the past century - following British rule in Panjab, and the rise of reformist Hindu traditions such as Arya Samaj (see Fox 1985, Kapur 1986, Ballard n.d.; see also §3.3.1).

<sup>34</sup> If this is not possible, then these Hindus attend the Mandir rather than the Gurdwara.

<sup>35</sup> Macleod (1976: 103-4) has rightly pointed out that this stereotype is based particularly on Sikh Jats, since Sikhs belonging to other caste-jatis are usually very different. But the equation of 'typical' Jat characteristics with Sikhs in general is common in much of India outside of Panjab.

in an ironic sense to mean the opposite. Hindus from north India usually talk of the average sardar-ji as a drunken truck-driver, who charges along narrow roads without care for his safety, or for the safety of the people around him.

The strength and forcefulness of Sikhs is also often mentioned by non-Panjabis. I was told several times that there are no beggars in Panjab because sardar-jis tell beggars 'if I see you begging then I will kill you'. The Panjabi folk dance *bhangra*<sup>36</sup> is seen as being representative of the typical Sikh personality - it is loud and forceful, and involves jumping around in circles. It is very common for Hindus to sit telling 'sardar-ji jokes' when they are gathered together. These jokes are modelled on the concept of an ignorant Sikh who somehow finds himself in trouble because of his stupidity. In many respects the 'sardar-ji joke' is similar to the 'Irish joke' in Britain, and several British Hindus have remarked on the similarity. I have heard these sardar-ji joke sessions being indulged in by Biharis, Bengalis, Gujaratis, and Tamils - in Edinburgh and in India. I have not heard Panjabi Hindus telling sardar-ji jokes.

In general, therefore, relations between Hindus and Sikhs are fairly ambivalent. There are many common ties between Panjabi Hindus and Sikhs, but on the whole the latter are looked down on by Hindus from other parts of India. But recent events in India have added an important element into Hindu-Sikh relations, and it is this that most influences the relations between the Edinburgh communities.

The present problems are centred around the fact that sections of the Indian Sikh population are demanding an independent, separate state, to be called Khalistan. This state would comprise the present Indian union state of Panjab, and might possibly include parts of other states - such as Haryana and Himachal Pradesh (as well as parts of Pakistan). It is proposed as a 'homeland' for the Sikhs, a place where they could live in freedom away from the rule of the Indian government (which is dominated by Hindus). In many ways the notion is modelled on the idea of partition along religious

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<sup>36</sup> I am referring to the original folk dance, although this comment is also applicable to the westernised disco bhangra, which has become popular in Britain.





affiliation, which was the principle behind the creation of Muslim Pakistan as a separate state alongside (mainly Hindu) India in 1947.

Sikh nationalism was a dormant force for many years, which smouldered away uneasily until the late 1970s and early 1980s. It came to a head in 1984, when the Golden Temple in the holy city of Amritsar in Panjab became the focus for a battle between Sikh separatists and the Indian army. The Indian army stormed the temple and a number of people (including the prominent Sikh Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale) were killed. A few months after this the Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi, was assassinated by one of her Sikh bodyguards. The assassination was a deliberate revenge attack for the storming of the Amritsar temple. Indira Gandhi's assassination was followed by fierce and bloody pogroms by Hindus against Sikhs in Delhi and Panjab. Since 1984, Panjab has been the scene of a series of terrorist activities, which have made the state almost ungovernable.

It is against the background of this Hindu-Sikh tension that relations between the two communities in Edinburgh can be understood. Hindu-Sikh relations have remained friendly in other parts of Britain, despite the situation in India - although there has been a marked growth in Sikh nationalism (D. S. Tatla n.d.). But in Edinburgh most Sikhs keep themselves distinct and separate from the Hindu community. I was told that in the past a number of Sikhs were involved in the Edinburgh Indian Association, but following the storming of the Golden Temple in 1984 they ceased their activities. These Sikhs argued that they did not want anything to do with the Indian Association because they did not want anything to do with India. They wished for a separate non-Indian Khalistan to be set up, and so they did not want to be involved with institutions that promoted the ideal of all-Indian unity<sup>37</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> It is interesting to compare the situation in Edinburgh with that in Bristol, where there is a similar Indian Association, and there is also a Bhatra Sikh population. Barot (n.d.2) has described how the 1984 tensions led to Bristol Sikhs taking over the leadership of the Bristol Indian Association, almost in revenge for what the Indian government had done to their people. Bristol Hindus were excluded from much of the management of the Bristol Indian Association, and so eventually they formed their own separate institution.

The reason for this support for the idea of Khalistan appears to be linked to the fact that the Edinburgh Sikh community is dominated by Bhatras. The fierce orthodoxy of the Bhatra outlook may be an explanation for their loyalty to Sikh nationalism. Bhatras' wish to be the most *pakka* of all Sikhs, may encourage them to be at the forefront of fighting for a Sikh homeland. But the main beneficiaries of this Khalistan, if or when it is created, will be the dominant Jats - who look down on Bhatras. Some Hindus have said that they believe Edinburgh Bhatras contribute money to Sikh fighting forces, and that they wish to take on roles of leadership when the new state is established. I do not know if this is correct, but there certainly seems to be a strong identification between Edinburgh Bhatras and Khalistan<sup>38</sup>.

Under these circumstances it is inevitable that at the community level there is tension between Hindus and Sikhs in Edinburgh. Sikhs generally tend not to identify with Indian-ness, whilst for Hindus this concept of Indian-ness is crucial. The 'ethnic identity' of Hindus and Sikhs in Edinburgh is constructed on different and conflicting assumptions - thus the ethnic communities which these groups have formed are separate and distinct. This is despite the fact that Panjabi Hindus probably have as much (if not more) in common with Panjabi Sikhs as they do with Gujarati Hindus.

This does not mean that there are no contacts between the two communities - I am aware that certain individuals work hard at maintaining links despite these difficulties. The role of the Community Relations Council (see below) has been very important in this respect. But from my experience of Hindu perceptions of Sikhs in Edinburgh I have found that the problem of Sikh nationalism in India has greatly reinforced the separation between the two communities.

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<sup>38</sup> At one of the Edinburgh sardar-ji joke telling sessions described above, I heard the following joke: 'What is the national bird of Khalistan? The tandoori chicken.' The implication is that most Khalistanis do not even live in Khalistan/India, they live in Britain, the home of the tandoori chicken (see below, §2.3.3.2).

### 2.3.1.3 Socio-economic divisions

Separation between Hindus and Sikhs in Edinburgh is not only along these political/ideological/ethnic lines, however. There are also spatial and economic/class differences between the two populations, which help to reinforce (and possibly motivate) the other differences. As already noted, Edinburgh Sikhs tend to live in one particular area of Edinburgh. The majority of the population (and nearly all Bhatras) live within about two miles of the Gurdwara in Leith. Thus Leith is distinctly associated with the Sikh community - I was told that the Hindu temple was first situated in Leith because most Hindus knew the area through the 'Indian' (i.e. Sikh) presence there already<sup>39</sup>.

This 'ghettoisation' of Edinburgh Sikhs is in contrast to the diversity of the Hindu population described above (see §2.3.2). A few Hindus do live in or near Leith, but the majority are spread out into other areas, and there is no real pattern of clustering in any particular district. Thus there is no residential basis for contact between Hindus and Sikhs: Edinburgh Hindus are far more likely to have white Scottish neighbours than to have Sikhs. Even when Hindus visit Leith - to go to the Mandir, or to buy from Sikh shops - their contact with the district is peremptory, they travel into it and then leave, without participating in any of the activities of the Sikh community.

This residential distinction between Hindus and Sikhs is related to socio-economic differences. Sikhs tend to identify to a greater extent with the Scottish working classes. They have developed a distinct identity as 'Leithers' - Leith is a traditional working class area of Edinburgh, with a large dock and a number of peripheral council estates.<sup>40</sup> Edinburgh Sikh children mainly attend Leith schools, where they obtain strong Leith accents. An Indian friend of mine told me that Sikh

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<sup>39</sup> At one time the Sikh shops in Leith were the only places where basic South Asian foods - such as *dal*, *ghee*, *masala*, etc. - could be bought.

<sup>40</sup> In recent years the image of Leith has been altered to a small degree by a programme of improvement, attempting to create a dockside middle class community modelled on other dockland schemes in Britain, such as the London Docklands.

children often have two names - one of them is a Sikh name, such as Amar or Gopal, which they use with their family; whilst the other is a 'Scottish' name, such as Jimmy, or Mick, which they use among their school friends. These names tend to be distinct and unrelated to each other, possibly symbolising different identities<sup>41</sup>.

If Edinburgh Sikhs tend to identify with the working classes, Edinburgh Hindus tend to be middle class and/or professional (c.f. §2.1.3.3). They choose to live in middle class areas, and send their children to middle class schools - either state schools in these areas, or to independent fee-paying schools. Their lifestyles are distinctly middle class, and their aspirations for their children are similar to the aspirations of their white middle class neighbours.

Thus most Hindus in Edinburgh have placed themselves in a distinct socio-economic part of British society which is different from the Sikh population. These socio-economic differences emphasise the political differences between the two communities. Contact tends to occur between Hindus and Sikhs who have taken on a more middle class identity - and these are mainly non-Bhatra Sikhs, who keep themselves distinct from the main Edinburgh Sikh community. In this way, when contact occurs it is along lines of class and political/ethnic identity - middle class Sikhs in Edinburgh tend to be less interested in Sikh nationalism and more interested in being Indian.

### **2.3.2 Other South Asians**

Edinburgh Hindus also have a great deal in common with the various Muslim groups in the city. There are approximately four thousand Muslims in Edinburgh (see §2.1.1 above), and they have at least four mosques, and several other social organisations. They greatly outnumber the Hindu population, and this inevitably

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<sup>41</sup> This seems to be quite different from a habit among Hindus, who are happy to Anglicise their names for the sake of non-Indian friends - so that Mukand becomes Mike, or Balwant becomes Billy.

means that their presence is much more visible. Most of the 'Indian' shops in Edinburgh (both retail and wholesale) are run by Muslims, as are most of the 'Indian' restaurants.

### *2.3.2.1 Bangladeshis*

Most Muslims in Edinburgh are from South Asia, particularly from Pakistan and Bangladesh<sup>42</sup>. Although Pakistan and Bangladesh were formerly one country, the two groups of people keep themselves distinct in Edinburgh - as they do on the Indian sub-continent. The Edinburgh Bangladeshi community is far smaller than the Pakistani community, and it has its own ethnic association (the Bangladeshi Samity) and mosque, along with a highly developed series of networks.

A large proportion of the population come from one area of Bangladesh - Sylhet, in the north of the country, which is the usual district of emigration for British Bangladeshis (see Eade 1989: 27). Edinburgh Bangladeshis tend to be very much immersed in business activities, particularly in restaurants, and a small handful of this community have become very wealthy through this activity. Few Hindus in Edinburgh have much contact with Bangladeshis, since most Hindus are from the west of India, which is over a thousand miles from Bangladesh. The small number of Edinburgh Bengali Hindus have more in common with Bangladeshis, but I did not find very many communal ties between these groups either.

The tendency for Bangladeshis to open restaurants is found throughout much of Britain. These restaurants usually go under the name of 'Indian', since this is the name that the white British population are most used to. But these Indian restaurants are usually run by non-Indians, usually Bangladeshis. One person went as far as saying 'all Indian restaurants in Britain are Bangladeshi, even those that aren't Bangladeshi'.

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<sup>42</sup> There is a small community of Arab Muslims, along with Muslims from other parts of the world, e.g. Africa, the Far East, and British converts etc., but these are outnumbered by Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslims.

The influence that this small group of South Asians are having on this area of activity will be discussed later in the chapter (see §2.3.3.2).

### *2.3.2.2 Pakistanis*

There are several Pakistani communities in Edinburgh - the population is large enough to have split into various factions along a number of issues. The two main mosques in Edinburgh are in the central area. One is called the Central Mosque and is in the process of being built on a site next to the University. It is being paid for mainly with Saudi Arabian money, which inevitably means that it is involved in the politics of Islam between the various sponsoring states. This mosque is often referred to as the 'Saudi Mosque', and I have been told that it promotes the conservative version of Islam that is associated with the kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

The other main mosque is about a mile to the north of the city, and is quite close to Leith. This mosque - the 'Pilrig Mosque' - is dominated by Pakistanis, and the type of Islam that it promotes is closer to the form of Pakistani Islam that is practised in Panjab (for a study of this mosque see Serisht n.d.). This mosque is also associated with the Pakistani Association of Edinburgh and the East of Scotland, an organisation which broke away from the Edinburgh Indian Association at the time of the Partition of the sub-continent in 1947.

Most Pakistanis in Edinburgh are from Panjab - from the part of the region which became Pakistan. Thus they share a language and some cultural characteristics with a portion of the Edinburgh Hindu community. These ties are not as close as the ties between Sikhs and Panjabi Hindus, but they are still potentially important. Before Partition many Panjabi Hindus lived in what is now Pakistan - it was only when 'communal' tensions between Hindus and Muslims broke into a pattern of explosive violence that the two communities became geographically segregated. Panjabi Hindus moved south and east into India, while Panjabi Muslims moved north and west into Pakistan. This tide of refugees, flowing in two directions, was an important factor

behind the emigration of South Asians to Britain during the post-War, post-Independence era (see Helweg 1986: 22-36; Jeffery 1976: 59). It is not surprising, therefore, that divisions and hostilities between these two groups have been maintained in the new context of Edinburgh.

Hindu-Muslim tensions have remained a strong force in both Pakistani and Indian politics. There have been several wars between the two countries over Kashmir (a predominantly Muslim area, much of which is in India). The recent clashes between Hindus and Muslims over the site of a mosque/mandir in Ayodhya led to the downfall of the Janata Dal Indian government in 1990, while in other areas of India there have been a spate of Hindu-Muslim massacres (the most notorious of which was in Bhagalpur in northern Bihar in November 1989). These tensions between the nations of India and Pakistan are mixed with the religious tensions between Hindus and Muslims, and thus the perceptions of each group towards each other are mutually hostile.

This occurs as much in Britain as it does on the sub-continent. Many Muslims in Edinburgh denounce Hindus for what the Indian government does in Kashmir and blame Indians for the situation. They see Hindus as idol worshippers, as superstitious and weak, and laugh at the gods who Hindus worship. An Indian told me that some of his Muslim friends in Edinburgh watch the television adaptation of the Hindu religious epic the 'Mahabharat' so that they can laugh at it. Their perception of Hinduism is the antithesis of what Islam should be - idol worshipping and polytheism are denounced vigorously as against the basic tenets of Islam. I have heard that some Edinburgh Muslims profess they prefer the 'secular and degenerate' white Scottish Christian population to the 'idolatrous' Hindus.

On the other hand, Hindus tend to have a similarly negative image of Muslims. When situations such as Kashmir and the Ayodhya mosque are discussed, Edinburgh Indians usually blame the problems on Pakistani agitation, rather than the Indian government or Hindu extremism. When Islam is mentioned by Edinburgh Hindus it is

usually discussed in contrast to Hinduism. Mention is usually made of the case of the author Salman Rushdie, whose 'blasphemous' book caused a great deal of upset among British Muslims. Many Hindus have remarked to me how such a situation could not occur in their religion - they have no concept of blasphemy, since Hinduism is such a tolerant religion. They are obviously contrasting this with Islam, which they consider to be intolerant and the antithesis of their own religion.

Hinduism is a notoriously 'tolerant' religion. It is different from Semitic religions such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, since its practitioners rarely claim to follow an exclusive path. Most Hindus follow the Vedic principle that 'there is one truth, and wise people call it by different names'. A British visitor to an Indian temple will often be told 'all gods are the same, your god and my god, there is no difference', and I have heard this phrase be used by Hindus in various temples in Britain. On this level, Hinduism promotes a very tolerant and inclusive religious attitude.

Balanced against this, however, must be considered the intolerance of many Hindu worshippers. The statement that all gods are the same is also based on the assumption that the speaker's knowledge is correct, whilst the Christian visitor's own religious viewpoint (that there is one exclusive god) is wrong. This statement is putting forward the view that Hindus have greater knowledge of the world, and that the 'real' religious order is basically a Hindu order. That is, the tolerant statement is making a very ethnocentric assumption.

The Muslim-Hindu tensions in India are another example of a tolerant religion being manifestly intolerant. The claims by certain elements of the Hindu population for the reconstruction of the Ram Janmbhumi Mandir in Ayodhya seem fair enough when argued by many Hindus - they say they only want to rebuild a temple for their god Sri Ram on the site of his birth. The fact that this site is presently occupied by a four hundred year old mosque makes it obvious that the claim is not as innocent as it appears. The way in which the issue has provoked a great deal of agitation and unrest



in India demonstrates that it is a fierce political issue<sup>43</sup>.

The issue is part of a development among various Hindu elements in India for a more assertive expression of their religious-cultural identity. This assertion is usually made at the expense of the secular ideals of the Indian state (that is, these Hindu activists work for the redefinition of India as a Hindu state), and particularly at the expense of non-Hindu minorities in India. The largest such minority are Muslim, and so the reaffirmation of Hindu communal identity in India is often directed against Muslim sections of the population. The conflict and massacres that ensue, cannot be described as 'tolerant'<sup>44</sup>.

The notion of tolerance is still important to most Edinburgh Hindus, and in many respects those Hindus with whom I had contact showed a great deal of tolerance and open-mindedness towards members of other faiths (including myself). The point is, however, that they often remark at the difference between their own tolerance and the intolerance of Muslims in Edinburgh. Muslims are seen as the epitome of intolerance - whereas Hindus claim that they would be more tolerant in the face of abuse, and they would certainly not resort to extreme actions such as issuing death threats against writers. Hindus claim that they allow their members to mix freely with the white British population, whilst Muslims keep their women locked up and separated. They attempt to make a comfortable life for themselves in this non-Hindu country, whilst Muslims make trouble for everyone by stirring up agitation, and thus create a racist backlash against the whole South Asian population.

In this way, many British Hindus create a clear distinction between themselves and Muslim South Asians in Britain - especially those Muslims originating from Pakistan. Although there are many cultural similarities between Panjabi Hindus and Panjabi Pakistanis, the crucial difference of religion is what matters most. Again, much

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<sup>43</sup> For a detailed description of the history of the conflict over the Babri Mosque-Ram Janmbhumi see van der Veer (1987, 1988: 38-41).

<sup>44</sup> For a discussion of the emergence of this fairly radical and intolerant form of Hinduism, or 'Hindianism', see Fox (1990).

of the reason for this separation can be linked to the historical situation in India - but the differences have been encouraged by developments that have occurred in a primarily British context, such as the publication of the *Satanic Verses* .

### 2.3.2.3 *Socio-economic similarities*

Apart from these religious and perceptual differences between Edinburgh Hindus and Muslims, the socio-economic differences between the two communities are not as great as between Edinburgh Hindus and Sikhs. A large proportion of Edinburgh Muslims are engaged in business - shop-keeping, wholesale and retail trade etc. - but their lifestyles are far more modelled on an affluent middle-class way of living than Edinburgh Bhatra Sikhs. Serisht (n.d.) argues that the reason for this high tendency towards business is the result of exclusion from other professions by the white British population, rather than it being a matter of choice. They are also much more residentially diverse. There are Muslims living in most areas of Edinburgh, and they can be found particularly in the popular middle-class areas. This again is in contrast to Edinburgh Bhatra Sikhs, but quite similar to the Hindu population.

These socio-economic similarities between Hindus and Muslims do not, however, mean that the two communities overlap. Muslim social networks tend to be based on closely linked *biradari* kinship ties<sup>45</sup>, and also around the various mosques in the city. These all exclude Hindus, since they are based on religious communality and exclusive kinship contact. Similarly, Hindu networks tend to be based on Hindu religious communality or on closer kinship ties. Thus the two communities are practically exclusive of each other.

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<sup>45</sup> See footnote 20 above regarding the term *biradari*..

### **2.3.3 The non-Asian British population**

#### *2.3.3.1 Official organisations*

There is an anti-racist, multicultural establishment in Edinburgh, as there is in most British cities. This is made up of a number of agencies and bodies that try to serve the needs of the various ethnic minorities in Edinburgh, or to promote racial/inter-ethnic harmony. Edinburgh District Council has a race relations committee, and a race relations department, which funds and organises other bodies, and monitors the state of ethnic communal relations in the city.

An example of the type of groups that the council funds is Shakti - which is an Asian Women's refuge for abused women who have nowhere else to go. The race relations department also provides funds for the Multicultural Education Centre, which encourages schools to promote the principles of multiculturalism in Edinburgh, as well as maintaining a library for and about ethnic minorities.

The Council for Racial Equality (a national body) runs the Edinburgh Racial Equality Council (REC, formerly the Community Relations Council). This is a monitoring body, which has the remit to ensure that there is equality of opportunity for members of ethnic groups at work. Until recently it also monitored cases of racial abuse and attack, but this function now appears to have been transferred to the District Council race relations office. The REC tends to be staffed and managed by South Asians, who obviously try to ensure that the organisation is relevant to the needs of the various communities that they each represent. Thus the REC is important to the Hindu community because a leading member of the temple is the Community Relations Officer in the REC. She has used these links for the benefit of Hindus when it has been possible for her to do so.

There is also the Roundabout International Centre (RIC), which is funded by the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association). This provides facilities for the learning of English by non-native speakers, and it runs various social groups for the ethnic communities. These groups tend to be used by sections of the Pakistani

community, and I came across no Hindus who used the RIC on a regular basis.<sup>46</sup> As nearly all Hindus in Edinburgh are able to speak English, there are not many who make use of the RIC language teaching facilities<sup>47</sup>.

Other links between Hindus and official bodies usually develop either out of necessity or through personal contacts. For example, certain departments of the District and Regional councils have been used for obtaining finance for community projects, along with other vital necessities, such as planning permission etc. The provision of a (derelict) building for the community's use as a Mandir came about because of links already developed with officials in the District council. Other official agencies - such as the Historic Buildings Trust - have been used for finance in a similar way.

In situations where a member of the community is working in a useful position, then this link is developed where possible. For example, a prominent Edinburgh Hindu used to work in the architects' office of the Regional Council, and so it was through his advice and effort that the plans for the Mandir building were drawn up and presented. The case of the REC Community Relations Officer mentioned above provides another good example of the way that many individuals try to do their jobs for the benefit of the Hindu community.

The Edinburgh Indian Association also makes good use of official bodies for financing community activities. Cultural performances are usually underwritten by the Scottish Arts Council, whilst other activities (such as music and dance lessons) are sometimes funded by grants from the District Council (see Appendix One).

The District Council also funds 'mother tongue' classes for the local South Asian ethnic communities. Thus there are lessons in Bengali, Urdu, Panjabi, and Hindi, which are all provided for children who may otherwise not learn these languages. These classes are popular for the first three languages, but the teaching of Hindi

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<sup>46</sup> The EIA did use a room in the RIC's building to hold Indian dancing lessons recently, but this was only because the room was offered free of charge.

<sup>47</sup> This may have been different a few years ago, when there was probably a higher number of Hindus who did not know English.

appears to have only marginal interest for the Indian/Hindu community. I regularly attended the Hindi classes (which were held every Saturday morning in a school in the centre of Edinburgh), and the average attendance was about three (including myself).

The reason for this lack of popularity is probably because Hindi is not the 'mother tongue' of most Hindus in Edinburgh. Panjabi and Gujarati are the two languages which most Hindus speak in Edinburgh - Hindi is more often a second language, which is only used as a common language between regional groups. Thus many parents would prefer to teach their children their proper 'mother tongue', rather than send them to classes to learn Hindi.<sup>48</sup> The Mandir is planning to start Hindi lessons when the temple building is opened - I am not sure if this will involve a transferral of the council funded classes down to the temple. It is also not clear how they will bridge the gap between Hindi and the community members' mother tongues.

These agencies and bodies that I have described above appear, however, to be marginal to the Indian/Hindu community in general. They are used as resources, but they rarely have much relevance for individuals or the community as a whole. They are vital sources for finance for both the Mandir and the EIA, and the work of bodies such as the REC is an important asset for ensuring equal opportunities for members of these ethnic groups. But the value of these organisations is seen as being peripheral to the concerns of Hindus in Edinburgh.

### *2.3.3.2 Informal relations*

All members of the Indian/Hindu community have contact with other populations of Edinburgh. This contact occurs in many different ways and on many levels. Hindus have friends, neighbours, and work-mates who are non-Indian, and they also relate to other non-Indians in official, business, social, educational, and many other contexts. The majority of these non-Indians are, of course, white Scottish. The

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<sup>48</sup> This is illustrated by the fact that the only children who attended the Hindi classes were from Bihari families - Biharis speak a dialect version of Hindi.

Indian/Hindu community is only one community that these people belong to, and their membership of it may not be as significant to them as their membership of other communities or groups. Many of them may feel more Scottish than Indian, and may not care to mix with other Hindus on a regular basis. Others may prefer the regional identity of being Panjabi, or Gujarati, or some more local association, and believe that this defines them far better than the inclusive description 'Indian'.

There are also a number of Hindus living in Edinburgh who are following a trend common to many South Asians in Britain. This is the conscious marketing of selected aspects of their distinctiveness as 'Indians' or 'Asians'. In a sense it is a renegotiation of their ethnic identity and image for the sake of the dominant white population.

This can be seen from the number of 'Indian' restaurants in Edinburgh (and in Britain). I mentioned above (see §2.3.2) that most of these restaurants are run by non-Indians - mainly Bangladeshis, along with some Pakistanis. The development of Indian restaurants in Britain began in the early years of migration from South Asia (around 1960) - the impetus for it coming mainly from recently arrived Pakistani migrants. Only a small handful of Edinburgh's Indian restaurants are actually run by Indians, and few of these owners have lived in India for very long, if at all. The 'Tandoori houses' that proliferate are quite a cynical manipulation of westerners' ideas of 'Indian' food. It is quite rare to find any Indians who will go to these places, and the food served in them has little to do with the food that the cooks in the restaurants will eat when they go home. But the images of the Taj Mahal, Moghul miniatures, elephants, etc., in the interiors, and exotic sounding names for the dishes, are all deliberate attempts to seduce the ignorant white British into believing that what they are getting is somehow a 'taste of India'.

There has been a more recent trend to market a different sort of 'Indian'-ness, which concentrates upon more particular regional or specialist forms of ethnicity within the sub-continent. Thus there are now restaurants where the food is promoted as being more than the run-of-the-mill *tandoori* or *biryani* - it is more special, more authentic,

it is 'proper' Bengali, Mughal, or Gujarati cuisine. This is probably a reaction to the marketing of the crass image of India, but is also a realisation that there are some in the majority population who are looking for a more 'authentic' experience when they dine out<sup>49</sup>. A few Edinburgh Indians have been involved in restaurant projects of this type, although the trend has again been dominated by Bangladeshis.

The Edinburgh Indian Association has also made an effort to play upon this factor (see also Appendix One). There is an awareness among some of its leaders that there are a lot of white middle class individuals who have developed an interest in classical Indian art forms. These whites can then be persuaded to regularly attend 'cultural' programmes that fall into this category when they are put on by the EIA. At nearly every EIA concert there is some comment of welcome to non-Indians attending. There are deliberate efforts to make sure that concerts appeal to this non-Indian population - for example, by advertising the concert in the Scotsman, and by putting posters up around the town etc.<sup>50</sup>

I have been told that the choice of big names in the Indian music world to come to play for the EIA are mainly for the benefit of non-Indians, although many Indians take an interest if someone like Ravi Shankar or Alla Rakha comes to the city. The conventional reason for wanting the white population to come to Indian Association events is to encourage greater understanding and appreciation between the two cultures<sup>51</sup>. But I think there is a further factor involved in this, which is the conscious marketing by at least some Indians of their ethnic identity, or at least selected parts of it. The EIA leaders know there is the gung-ho attitude to India, as a place of eastern charm, of fakirs on beds of nails, snake charmers, and the Taj Mahal. But they are also

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<sup>49</sup> This authenticity has its price - this type of Indian food is usually about twice as expensive as the 'traditional' tandoori.

<sup>50</sup> These efforts are not the usual way of informing Indians of functions and events, since members of the Indian community tend to rely on a different network of notification - usually by telephone or by post.

<sup>51</sup> This is obviously something that the Indian community would wish to promote from their position as a small minority in a rather hostile population.

aware that they can encourage a more sophisticated image of India as a place of deep wisdom, ancient knowledge and wonderful music and art. So they are selecting images connected with these facets of their culture and they are marketing them to a certain section of the white middle class - and they are doing it rather successfully as well.

There is an element of this among the people at the temple also, although it is not so strong in this context. Most Hindus are rather pleased that they have an anthropologist as part of their community, somebody from the white population who is taking an interest in their religion. It is frequently expected that I will take an interest in the more esoteric facets of Hinduism - such as the complex philosophy and methods of meditation - rather than the religion that they actually practise. Indians know that conceptions of their *cultures* are well respected by certain elements of the white population, but they are not so sure that their *religion* is so well noticed or understood. They are having more of a struggle to establish it as something that will be taken seriously in this country. Thus the founding of the temple demonstrates to the majority population that Hindus have a religion which is as important and as well established as Christianity or Islam. There is also a tendency to use neo-Vedantin forms of Hinduism (e.g. deriving from the works of Radhakrishnan, Krishnamurti, and Vivekanand) for this purpose. Many Hindus are aware of the interest that some educated British have in these intellectual forms of Hindu philosophy, and so they are quite keen to encourage this. For example, as an interested outsider, I was often expected to be interested in such works, rather than in the forms of Hinduism which were found at the temple.

This marketing of one's identity often happens among groups in a multi-cultural situation. There is no problem with this, so long as there is no risk that they will give themselves too high a profile and thus suffer a backlash of stigmatisation and scapegoating (as a minority community). But the image that is being presented to the wider society also becomes mirrored back onto Hindus themselves, and they begin to believe in their own stereotypes. An example of this is in the teaching of the religion and culture to the younger generation, particularly those who have been born in Britain,



and who have little or no first hand experience of India. Some people have told me that when they were children themselves, their parents were not able to answer their questions about why they do or believe certain things - they were simply told that it was their tradition. But these people are now grown up and they have become used to explaining their traditions to other people (since they often have to present an explanation to curious friends, work-mates, or neighbours). These explanations can then be used to satisfy the questions of their curious children as well.

Thus explanations, which are formulated to present an image to non-Indians, are becoming the paradigm for the transmission of the culture to the next generation of Hindus. Of course, there are more ways than this for children to learn about their culture, mostly through what is done and not what is said. But these verbal explanations are not forgotten and may well be recycled by the children at a later date, either to their own younger relatives, or to their friends in the non-Indian population.

One consequence of this is that the teaching of Hinduism has changed. It is traditionally a religion that is accepted as the way of life - there is no need to question why things are done or believed, they are just so because they are. Rituals are normally done in Sanskrit by a learned *pandit* (priest), who will do what is necessary while the worshippers look on understanding little or nothing of what he is doing or saying<sup>52</sup>. For many in Edinburgh this would pose a problem - they would ask what is the point of him doing the rituals if you cannot understand them - there must be some meaning to them. At the Glasgow Hindu temple there is a complicated ritual called *Hawan* , performed by the *pandit* in Sanskrit. But the words he speaks are written out on sheets so that the attenders at the sacrifice can follow what he is saying. I have even heard of cases where children have learnt Sanskrit specifically so that they can understand the wisdom of the rituals of their religion. These people are then very assertive about the benefits that this knowledge has given them.

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<sup>52</sup> There are many forms of Hindu worship, not all of which have this ritual component. I will be discussing the variety of Hindu forms in more detail in later chapters.

## 2.4 ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

### 2.4.1 Ethnic identity and relations

The Edinburgh Hindu community is partly the product of relations with outside agencies and peoples. Hindus in Edinburgh are often classified as an 'ethnic minority community', but it is hard to know what this means precisely.

#### 2.4.1.1 *Barth and boundaries*

Recent work about ethnic communities has usually focused on the external boundaries of these groups. This derives from the influence of Barth (1969), whose introduction to a collection of essays on ethnicity has set the terms of much of the subsequent debate on the subject. Barth used the example of Pathans (Pakhtuns) of north west Pakistan and Afghanistan to illustrate his thesis. He said that a Pathan is a Pathan because s/he identifies him/herself as one, rather than because s/he subscribes to a particular style of life or a set of beliefs that can be definitely labelled as 'Pathan'. This identity as a Pathan is mainly created by their sense of being different from their neighbours - such as Baluchis - and it is by looking at how a Pathan can change to become a Baluchi that the observer can understand what these different categories consist of<sup>53</sup>.

Barth therefore implies that ethnic groups are defined by the concept of identity, and this identity is the result of opposition and reaction to perceptions of other ethnic groups. People thus emphasise particular customs and/or ideas because these give them a self definition in reaction to their neighbours - they *are* what their neighbours or enemies *are not*. A person's ethnic identity is a matter of choice, with individuals making rational decisions to ensure the best results for them, and when it is no longer

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<sup>53</sup> A Pakhtun friend of mine was horrified to hear that Barth talked of this change of identity so easily. He could not believe that any Pakhtun would want to become a Baluchi. Perhaps this indicates how superficial it is to talk about ethnic identity as though it was dispensable.

practical for them to belong to one ethnic group then they will change to another. When this is applied to the British South Asian context it is possible to see that many choose to portray themselves as an ethnic group in reaction to the ethnicity of other groups around them (particularly the politically dominant white British). Indian-ness or Hindu-ness may be a matter of choice for them, there are various aspects of it which can be chosen or discarded, and there is the final option of rejecting this identity and becoming ethnically white British.<sup>54</sup>

But this does not explain ethnicity - it only says what people do with an aspect of it. Abner Cohen's criticisms of Barth, in his own edited collection of papers on ethnicity (1974a), point to the underlying political and economic bases of inter-ethnic relations. This is an important point which tends to be glossed over too much by Barth's earlier writing<sup>55</sup>. Cohen argues that Barth cannot explain the potency of the normative symbols which are manipulated within an ethnic group. Cultural symbols are not simply playing cards which can be shuffled and discarded at will merely for the advantage of the actors involved, although this seems to be what Barth implies<sup>56</sup>.

#### *2.4.1.2 Power and ethnicity*

To Abner Cohen ethnicity is important because of the common political and economic interests of a group. He uses the illustration of a group of stockbrokers in the City of London, which he says is as much an ethnic group as Pathans, or Jews in Golders Green<sup>57</sup>. The only reason that the stockbrokers are not described as an ethnic

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<sup>54</sup> The use of skin colour to define ethnicity in Britain may prevent this option. However, many Indians are 'fair' enough to be indistinguishable from well tanned white British, and so this is a potential option.

<sup>55</sup> His work on Swat Pathans is a particular example of this - see Barth (1959 & 1981); Asad (1972); Ahmed (1976).

<sup>56</sup> This talk of fluid ethnicity brings to mind the story of two white Scottish protestants told by the comedian Robbie Coltrane. The first mentions that if they had been living in the Middle Ages then there was no choice about which church one would belong to - they would all have been Catholics. The second replies 'I would never hae been a Pape [Catholic], no way! I'd hae been a Buddhist!'. This is an extreme and rather unrealistic picture of reactive ethnicity which illustrates the problem with Barth's view that almost reduces the matter of ethnic identity to something that can be done as easily as choosing a jumper at Marks and Spencers.

<sup>57</sup> Whether or not such stockbrokers are an 'ethnic group' is beyond the scope of this discussion.

group - while the others are - is because the term 'ethnic' has pejorative connotations, it is a device for labelling others. This, of course, is part of the political relationship within inter-ethnic dynamics - the anthropologist helps to create the 'ethnicity' of the other as much as the group itself does. Cohen's own monograph (1974b) takes his argument a stage further. He points out that the relationship between power and symbolism is a very under researched and yet most important part of anthropology, and the subject of ethnicity lies at the core of this relationship. In more recent years writers such as Bloch (1978, 1986), Asad (1983), van der Veer (1988), and many others have attempted to demonstrate the importance of political structures within the use of symbols - but Cohen's stress on power relations within the field of ethnic identity construction are still relevant.

Power relations are addressed by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS 1982), who are fiercely critical of the 'ethnicity school' of writers (mainly anthropologists) who have dealt with ethnic minority groups in Britain. The CCCS point out the underlying relations of power between the dominant white society and these various minority groups, and they argue that such relations are of much more importance than descriptions and analyses of the groups themselves.

One writer in this collection (Lawrence 1982) argues that the ethnicity school has in fact been part of the white establishment's misunderstanding of the minority groups, and they have provided (unwittingly) academic justification for extreme racist views. This criticism seems rather unfair when made of Saifullah Khan - who is one of the writers that Lawrence particularly takes to task. In a collection of papers published in the same year as the CCCS book, Saifullah Khan (1982) made a similar point about the importance of power relations in the structuring of inter-ethnic relations. In this article she says:

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What is clear, is that these people do not consider themselves to be an ethnic group, whilst Jews in Golders Green do.

The study of ethnic relations in England is the study of a continuing interaction between the dominant ethnic majority [that is the white British] and the subordinate ethnic minorities... The culture and structures of the majority as well of the minority are part of the analysis... [And] this relationship between dominant and subordinate ethnic groups is a relationship of power which is manifest in and maintained by the economic and social order (ibid. 197).

It is very true that power relations are a crucial part of the way in which ethnic minority groups are organised, and these relations have an effect on much of a group's behaviour. The relations of power influence individual and collective experiences of all members of a society, and they determine *and* derive from the socio-economic positions of the various segments of a society. But power structures are one of several factors involved in the equation of inter-ethnic relations. The relations between minority groups and the dominant society depend a great deal upon the balance of power, but minority communities (and members of those communities) will react in different ways to similar situations. There is no immediate determinism between political/economic marginality and ethnic identity.

The CCCS do not really address the different reactions of minority groups to similar situations. Instead they fall into the trap of pushing together too many different traditions and situations under the heading of 'ethnic minority groups'. Then they attempt to deal with these various categories as though they are an homogeneous mass (ironically this is something they accuse the ethnicity school of doing).

The Afro-Caribbean populations of Britain have a radically different history from South Asians, and the various populations within these groups are all very different from each other. But this is often forgotten, because both Afro-Caribbeans and South Asians share a similar problem of economic, political, and structural disadvantage in present-day Britain (because of individual, collective, and institutional racism). The way this racism affects various ethnic communities will vary in each case; it will depend a great deal on individual reactions, collective reactions, and also on the particular social, historical, and cultural apparatus that the communities have brought with them when they (or their antecedents) migrated.

I can illustrate this by my experience of the problem of racism in Edinburgh. It is well documented (e.g. Miles & Dunlop 1987) that racism is as much a problem for non-white minority communities in Edinburgh as it is in other parts of Britain. Although in general, relations between Hindus and white Scots in Edinburgh tend to be fairly good, I was aware that the problem of racist attack is quite real for most members of the Hindu population. A number of Hindus with whom I talked had also found problems due to exclusion from employment work because of their status as 'black/Asian'. However, I did not find that this problem of racism dominated the concerns of most Hindus in Edinburgh. There was little sense among Hindus of belonging to the category 'black', in which they shared a structural disadvantage with other 'blacks', such as non-Hindu Asians, Afro-Caribbeans etc. Nor does the notion of being Indian/Hindu have a strong connotation of being opposed to non-Scottish/non-white society.

There are probably several reasons why this is so, but it is particularly because racism has not been politicised among the people I talked to. A study of young Muslims in the city (Serisht n.d.) has found racism to be a very important issue for them, and there are communities in other parts of Britain where it certainly is<sup>58</sup>. There are not many Indians in Edinburgh between eighteen and twenty five - most second-generation children in the population are younger than this. On maturing in a few years they may well provide more impetus for radical bodies to be formed. But it must be remembered that the present lack of talk of racism among Hindu/Indians in Edinburgh does not imply that it does not exist, it merely shows that it has not been politicised to any considerable degree.

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<sup>58</sup> For example, in Southall in London there are vigilante groups of Sikhs, Hindus, and Muslims who have been formed to 'protect' their communities from white racist attacks. It is worth noting also that in the past two years a group called the Lothian Black Forum has been formed to counter what some perceive as the growing problem of racism in Edinburgh. Although I have been aware for some time of this body's existence, I did not come across any talk of it by informants.

### 2.4.1.3 *Stereotypes of ethnicity*

The CCCS rightly criticise the usual stereotypical contrast between Afro-Caribbeans being badly adapted to British life and South Asians being well adapted<sup>59</sup>. It is (or was) a common belief among white intellectuals that Afro-Caribbeans did not have so good a family structure as South Asians, and so were more exposed to the hardships of life as a marginal group. Thus South Asians could prosper in Britain because of this support - they had an advantage when creating businesses, and they had less propensity to become delinquent than Afro-Caribbeans. This is an extremely crude generalisation, partly because there are many South Asians who do not have this supposedly beneficial extended-family, while many Afro-Caribbean social networks can be as equally supportive as South Asian ones.

The generalisation is also crude, though, because the differences between South Asian groups are as great as those between South Asians and Afro-Caribbeans<sup>60</sup>. There are the many differences outlined in this chapter, as well as those between communities living in different parts of Britain. Each group has its own history and outlook, and the diversity within the 'South Asian' population of Britain is as great as the number of individuals who belong to the category. There are similarities of experience and cultural tradition, but there are also great differences too.

## 2.4.2 **Levels of identity**

### 2.4.2.1 *Hierarchical dimensions of ethnic identity*

'Ethnic groups' are not entities that can be easily observed. As Arutinov and Bronley (1978) point out, ethnic identity is hierarchical, working on principles of inclusion and exclusion. In England a person may see herself as being a north Londoner when talking to a south Londoner, a Londoner with someone from Norfolk, a Southerner with someone from Yorkshire, English with a Scot or a Welshman,

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<sup>59</sup> Although in the post-Rushdie era such contrasts are not made so frequently.

<sup>60</sup> And there is, of course, similar diversity among the many different Afro-Caribbean populations.

British with an Irishman, Great British with a Frenchman or German, European with an American, and White with an African or Asian. Similarly British Asians have many levels of 'ethnic' identity - a person will identify with a particular town and/or caste-jati group on one level, or a region, or a nation or religion, up to the level of being 'Asian' or even 'black' in dealings with the indigenous population.

Such a hierarchy of social organisation is well known to anthropologists. Evans-Pritchard (1940) provided the classic example of the Nuer to demonstrate how segmentation can both unite and divide political groups in different circumstances. He intended to show the political organisation of a 'leaderless' society, but this principle can be found in most societies, even when power is highly centralised. But political organisation and ethnic allegiance are not completely interchangeable, and even if a group of Gujaratis or Hindus or Indians may be able to organise themselves politically, I do not think that they could unite at a level any higher than this. A Hindu may identify him/herself as a 'South Asian' or 'black' occasionally, but this term does not have much political meaning - at least not in the context of the Edinburgh Hindu community.

However, this representation of hierarchy is too simple, since a British Asian will also identify with the place where s/he lives in Britain, and perhaps also with the place where s/he lived in East Africa (if this is applicable). Thus a person may identify with a *kul* (lineage) of the Patidar caste-jati, and look back to a village in Gujarat where his/her ancestors lived, but s/he may also think of him/herself as Nairobi/Kenyan, or Ugandan or Tanzanian, whilst still identifying him/herself as a south Londoner from Streatham. These are all markers of ethnic identity, and each is hierarchically inclusive, but each marker is not exclusive of the other. Thus one often hears of 'East African Gujaratis' (both in academic literature and among the people themselves), or British Panjabis, and it is equally possible to get north London Lohanas, or even Scottish East African Gujarati Hindu Brahmans.

To this extent Barth is correct: it is possible to manipulate these various markers



of ethnic identity according to the situation and context; but there are limits to how much manipulation can be done. A Panjabi cannot become a Lohana, and a Jullunduri Panjabi cannot be an 'East African' unless s/he actually lived there. These ethnic markers are descriptive of certain categories, and the content of these categories cannot be easily manipulated, even if the descriptions themselves can.

These various levels and dimensions of ethnic identity are not unique to the British Asian situation. All communities exist in multi-ethnic environments, and there are many ways in which cultural diversity can be perceived by different groups, and different factions within groups. Ideas of *internal* social differentiation are always more complex than the stereotypes perceived from an *external* perspective. Thus the dominant white population have the concept of a 'South Asian' community. However, on the other side there are many South Asians who lump together the 'white British' as an undifferentiated whole - whereas they are as multi-dimensional and complicated as any other society.

#### *2.4.2.2 Ethnic identity of Asian Scots*

The situation in Scotland reflects this problem. Scottish society is extremely complex, there are many axes of internal differentiation, ranging from national (English, Scottish, Irish, etc.), to religious (Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, etc.), class, region of origin, skin colour, and so on. There is no such thing as 'white Scottish society' - this is an ideological construction used to describe a general cluster of groups and individuals who share a common outlook, interest, and identity. The Catholic/Protestant and Scottish/English divisions within white Scottish society are a crucial part of the society's outlook and conception of itself (or its selves).

The idea of 'Scottish culture' is greatly politicised, largely because of a common perception that the culture is under threat from English dominance. The old antagonism between Catholics and Protestants is so deeply established that some writers (for example, Hanley 1969) have put forward the idea that the supposed lack of racism in

Scotland (that is, racism against South Asians and Afro-Caribbeans) is because Scots are too busy hating each other. Such an argument is fallacious<sup>61</sup>, but the fact that this argument can be regarded as plausible says something interesting about how the 'Scottish outlook' is perceived. It is also worth noting that in Scotland there is a common notion that racism is the 'English disease'.

South Asians are now as much a part of this Scottish society as any other group of people - even though most political and academic rhetoric implies that they are still outside the mainstream of Scottish life. It is inevitable to contrast the outlook of Hindus with those of the 'white Scottish' or the 'white British' (although those Hindus described in this thesis are as British as any other group of people in the country). The distinction is not only academic, however - there is a self-perception by many Hindus (and Muslims as well) that they are somehow distinct and different from the indigenous population. Religion, skin colour, use of language, styles of dress and eating, and personal history may mark out this distinction to the individuals concerned, and so reinforce a sense of difference.

But there are many occasions when this distinction becomes blurred. A large proportion of the Hindus that I talked to have been living in Britain for at least fifteen to twenty years, many of them were born and educated in this country. They have become integrated into this society - in the sense that they have found a socio-economic niche for themselves, they understand the language, and the way of life. They are not *only* South Asians, or Panjabi Hindus, or East African Gujarati Hindus. They are also Scottish - they are from Edinburgh (rather than Glasgow or Dundee), and they have a particular status depending on their occupation, their wealth, and the area where they live. These things have different meanings to different individuals of course, but these factors are now as important a part of the dynamics of their ethnic identity as the area from which they originated in India or where they lived in East Africa. Status, wealth,

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<sup>61</sup> Scots can be as violently inhospitable towards South Asians as any others.

and position are also important in determining relations with the non-Asian populations.

What seems to be evident in Edinburgh is that a sizeable number of Hindus came to the city only after they had lived elsewhere in Britain. This has been briefly mentioned earlier (see §2.1.3.3), and it seems to be significant to many Hindus themselves. The Hindu population is a Scottish Hindu community, but in many respects they appear to identify very much with England and English Hindu communities. Many of them have lived in England for some time, and many frequently visit families living there. Since marriage partners usually come from outside the city, when a wife comes to live with her new husband in Edinburgh she will probably be English. Hindu children born and brought up in Edinburgh tend to identify themselves as Scottish more than their parents, and there are a few adults who identify with Scots because of a sense of shared anti-English perceptions (anti-English being equated with being anti-colonial).

From the other perspective I have found that many Scots themselves see 'the Hindus' as outside of Scottish life. This is illustrated by the fact that many (white) people comment that they do not think there are many Asians in the city - although South Asians are quite noticeable in most districts. The concept that racism is not prevalent in Scotland - and that it is an English disease - also equates these ethnic minority groups with England. Although most of the younger generation of Hindus speak English (and often Gujarati or Panjabi) with a distinct Scottish accent, most of the adults learnt English prior to coming to Scotland and speak it without the Scottish resonances. This again marks them out as different from the native Scots, not only because they are 'Indian' or 'Asian', but also because they are not Scottish, they are more English. To many white Scots the 'Asians' live down in England, so those that live here cannot be 'properly' Scottish.

It is thus very hard to define whether the Edinburgh Hindu population is Scottish or British; and if it is the former, then what is it that makes it Scottish? These definitions mean different things to different people - and to find a common meaning in

terms of ethnicity or power relations appears to be impossible. The many traditions and notions of 'ethnicity' that are coming together in the Edinburgh temple all claim to share a common thread - that is, they are all 'Hindu' traditions. In the next chapter I shall be examining whether such appeals to a common religious tradition have any basis in Indian sub-continental religion, and how anthropologists should deal with this attempted unification of diversity.

## CHAPTER THREE. HINDU TRADITIONS

### 3.1 HINDUISM - TRADITION OR RELIGION?

#### 3.1.1 Defining Hinduism

There is a general feeling among anthropologists and indologists that the concept of 'Hinduism' cannot be easily defined. It is the diversity of Hindu traditions which provides the greatest challenge for the observer - how can such a variety of beliefs and practices, distributed throughout such a large population of people, be treated as a single coherent religion? What basis does the analyst have to describe Hinduism as a 'religion'? If it is a religion, then what defines a person as Hindu? And what defines Hinduism? W.C. Smith aptly points out

It is remarkable how many treatises on 'Hinduism' have as their opening sentence some such reflection as 'Hinduism is very difficult to define', and then proceed to define it' (1978: 66).

Indeed Hinduism is not something that can be easily defined - if at all. Within what is called Hinduism, there are sectarian, regional, caste, devotional, theological, and other differences, and these differences are considerable throughout many parts of India. It is questionable whether a definition is possible or desirable for something so vast - although of course a definition would be useful for telling us not only what Hinduism is, 'but also to indicate what it is *not*' (B.K. Smith 1989: 9, emphasis in original).

However, if a definition is not possible, then how is the observer to know what s/he is observing? What sort of criteria can be used to understand behaviour by individuals who describe themselves as Hindus? Can we simply assume that a Hindu is someone who thinks s/he is a Hindu? This definition may exclude many people who would not use the word about themselves.

#### 3.1.2 Orientalist constructions of Hinduism

The word 'Hindu' itself has a complex etymology. Many writers have taken up

W.C. Smith's observation that the word was first used by outsiders in India - the Muslims and then the British (1978: 63-64). The implication is that the notion of 'Hinduism' is also an external construction, which was not present until the Indian sub-continent was subjected to foreign rule.

### *3.1.2.1 Inden and India*

Inden has argued an extreme form of this view, that the idea of 'Hinduism' is an orientalist construction, it has been made up by western academics and colonials to displace explanations of human action away from the (Indian) individual and onto a refined and idealistic concept of 'Hindu' thought (1986: 402-3, see also 1990). This suggests that the use of the notion of Hinduism is not an analytical tool, but is instead a piece of political rhetoric which (although unwittingly) reinforces western stereotypes about easterners.

But the approach that Inden takes only outlines how not to treat Indian religions, he does not really say very much more than this. To dismiss the mountain of western Indological scholarship as 'Orientalism' (in its pejorative post-Said [1978] sense) may be appealing, but it does not really provide any constructive basis for understanding the complex religious systems of India.

The notion of Hinduism can be divided up in many ways. For example Hardy argues against the monolithic notion of Hinduism as a religion, and instead says that it is made up of several related religions - such as Vedic religion, the renouncer traditions, the Epic and Puranic religions, Saivite and Tantric religions, and 'Modern' (i.e. reformist) Hinduism (1990: 37-8). Of course these are all related, but they are distinct, and he suggests

That the global title of 'Hinduism' has been given to [this synthesis of religions]... must be regarded as an act of pure despair (ibid.: 72).

Von Stietencron (1989) argues a similar position, saying that it is a western indological construction to describe Hinduism as a single 'religion' composed of

multiple 'sects'. Instead, the different forms of Hinduism are in fact different (although related) *religions*, held together by a high degree of liberality and tolerance. Thus, what we call 'Hinduism' is made up of Vedantic religion, Avaita Vedantic religion, Vaisnavism, Saivism, and tribal religions (as well as other religions).

But even these typologies of Hinduisms are problematic. Once the notion is broken down into various forms it is very difficult to know where to stop. If Saivism (i.e. worship of Siva) is a distinct religion from Vaisnavism (worship of Vishnu), then what about the many cases of joint worship of both gods? Are the various sectarian groups, such as Swaminarayan and Arya Samaj, different religions or new interpretations of Puranic and Vedic Hinduism respectively? And if Hinduism is differentiated, then is Gujarati Hinduism a different religion from Panjabi Hinduism? Or is the religion of Brahmans different from that of other caste-groups?

The problem here is not so much with the definition of Hinduism, but with the definition of religion. A multiplicity of beliefs, and even practices, does not necessarily entail a multiplicity of religions. In fact, as most definitions of religion are so vaguely defined, it does not really matter whether we call Gujarati religious traditions a 'religion' or a 'sect' - what matters is that we can understand the great diversity within these traditions, as well as their points of similarity. It must also be remembered that the notion of 'Hinduism' is very real in India. Although it may have many forms, participants often work with their own self-definition that they share a common religious tradition. Without this there would be no 'Hindu' revival in India at present - it is precisely this notion that groups like the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the BJP are playing upon for political support.

To return to the argument about the etymology of the word 'Hinduism', some recent writers have pointed out that although it was Muslims and British invaders who coined the word, it was the participants themselves who developed and refined its use. Laine argues that the formation of 'Hinduism' as 'a "religion" was the *creation* of nineteenth century Indians' (1983: 165-79, quoted in B.K. Smith 1989: 6, emphasis in

original) and not the colonial British. Although the word itself is of foreign origin, like many other loan words in Hindi<sup>1</sup>, the concepts that it is used to describe are native to India. The word 'Hinduism' has thus only replaced other words, or concepts which were not previously so well defined. The fact that a new word is being used to describe an old concept may well indicate that the concept has been altered and redefined. But it is clear that some form of this concept existed before the word was coined to describe it.

### 3.1.2.2 *Burghart and Indias*

Whatever the case may be, there are now (and probably always have been) many forms of Hinduism. It is sometimes regarded by its practitioners as a unified tradition, as a single religion, but for others such a concept is not important or useful. It is worthwhile to apply Burghart's understanding of Hinduism to this difficult problem. His principal consideration has been the various models that are used by Indians to define the social world in which they live. He has particularly criticised Dumont's (1980 [1966]) notion of a single principle of differentiation (in terms of purity and pollution), which he says simplifies and distorts the alternative models which different social groups use in conflicting and complementary ways (Burghart 1978; 1983a). Thus an Indian king has a different perception of the social world from a Brahman priest, who in turn sees things differently from the ascetic renouncer.

Burghart limits himself by focusing on three main arenas of Hindu society - that is, priests, kings, and ascetics - and so it is not clear if his approach is meant to be extended to the many different world views found within India. Although these three arenas are extremely important within many Hindu traditions, they do not encompass all aspects of these traditions. What his approach does suggest, however, is that we

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<sup>1</sup> The word 'Hinduism' is only rarely used in Hindi. But 'Hindu' is quite commonly used, for example: '*main Hindu huun*' (I am a Hindu); '*Hindu dharm*' (Hinduism, Hindu religion); '*Hindu log*' (Hindu people).



should take into account a multiplicity of perspectives within Hinduism, instead of assuming a single underlying principle.

He also limits himself by focusing primarily upon an understanding of Indian religions as part of the process of understanding the social relations between different power groups (c.f. 1985: 9). This is, of course, a very important aspect of all religions - but there is also a sense in which religions are not simply ideologies for justifying social and political relations. They are *also* many other things: such as cognitive systems, and expressions of identity. Thus South Asian religions should be studied in their own right, as well as to shed light on models of social organisation.

In this respect it would be fruitful to use Burghart's analysis of Hindu social models on the notion of Hinduism itself. If we are to look for a 'sociology of Indias' (Burghart 1983a) then maybe there should be an 'anthropology of Hinduisms'. I do not mean that one should create a typology of distinct religions - such as Puranic and Saivite Hinduism - but instead look at the different models of Hinduism which are used by the different social, cultural, and political groups who define themselves as 'Hindu'.

Such an approach to understanding Hinduism means that there is no need to define the religion in any specific way. There are many Hinduisms, which are each diverse in practice and conception, but which are also linked by internal similarities. For example, they often share a common concern with purity (Dumont 1980 [1966]), with auspiciousness (Madan 1987a: 48-71; Raheja 1988: 37-67), or a common philosophy, a common set of gods and beliefs, and a common acknowledgement of the Vedas as sacred books (B.K. Smith 1989). None of these alone define Hinduism, since each element is open to interpretation by conflicting perspectives. This leaves a rather uneasy understanding of Hinduism. The concept is so fluid that it is still very hard to use it in anything other than the most general sense. And yet among Hindus in Edinburgh, the word is being used very liberally, and it is being used in a specific way.

### 3.1.2.3 *Edinburgh Hinduism*

It is not only the anthropologist who talks about 'Hinduism' in Edinburgh, and of the Edinburgh Hindu community. The members of the community use the term about themselves also. Many Indians in Edinburgh describe themselves as 'Hindus', and make the assumption that they share the 'same' religion. Thus they have a single religious institution, the Edinburgh Hindu Mandir. This is despite the fact that they have great diversity amongst themselves - these Hindus are divided up into several distinct regional, sectarian, and caste-based groups.

There is no straightforward reason why they should consider themselves to be co-religionists. The use of the label 'Hindu' as a form of self-definition relies on an assumption that there is such a thing as a pan-Indian, pan-Hindu religion. As I have already outlined - such an assumption is very hard to make, there are various forms of this one religion, which compete with each other. In this sense Edinburgh Hindus *themselves* are *constructing* the notion of a shared religion.

If Inden's arguments were taken to their logical extreme, then the Edinburgh situation could itself be described as a case of twisted Orientalism - in which, paradoxically, Occidental Orientals are constructing a notion of Oriental Hinduism. So it is worthwhile to consider why and how this concept of Hinduism is developing. And it is in the forms of expression (e.g. rituals and shared beliefs) of this pan-Indian Hinduism that such developments can best be observed.

## 3.2 **MODELS OF HINDUISM - GREAT AND LITTLE TRADITIONS**

A great deal of writing about Hinduism and Indian culture has dealt with the dichotomy between Great and Little traditions. This relies on an assumption that there is a Hindu great tradition which has spread throughout the sub-continent. This great tradition reacts and relates to numerous little traditions, all of which are different. Although this notion is quite common, it is still hard to know what the great tradition

consists of. Different writers have made different assumptions about it. It is generally agreed that the great tradition is supposed to be based on textual sources, is pan-Indian, and is spread by privileged members of Indian society (such as Brahmans).

### **3.2.1 Great Traditions**

#### *3.2.1.1 The great tradition*

Singer is perhaps one of the most influential proponents of the Great Tradition theory. He proposed the following list of arenas in which one could find India's great tradition:

1. A body of sacred scriptures and texts...
2. A class of literati who have the authority to read and interpret the sacred scriptures
3. Leading personalities, such as Nehru and Gandhi, who convey their vision of the great tradition to the masses of the people
4. A 'sacred geography' of holy places... defining a set of 'sacred centres' that provide the forum, media, and vehicle for expressing the great tradition
5. A 'sacred calendar' of rites and ceremonies marking the important occasions of the individual life cycle and of the seasons (1972: 56).

Of course, this does not tell us what the great tradition is, it simply tells us where it can be observed. This is one of the main problems with the theory: there is an assumption made that a great tradition exists, and that it can be found in sacred texts, literati, etc. But once the observer starts to look in these areas, then the great tradition itself becomes more and more elusive.

The theory of great tradition was initially proposed by Redfield (1955, 1956), who formulated it to explain cultural diversity in Mexico. Singer provides an interesting description of how this central-American based model was transferred to explain Indian sub-continental society (1972: 3-10). This transformation - primarily affected by Chicago anthropologists - became possible through a development of the work of Srinivas (1952), whose notion of Sanskritisation lies uneasily at the heart of the Indian great tradition.

### 3.2.1.2 *The Sanskritic tradition*

Srinivas put forward a model of Hinduism which operated on various levels (ibid.: 213-218), each of which was related to geographical spread. At the base of this model is 'local Hinduism'<sup>2</sup>, which is confined to small-scale local areas, and thus shows a great deal of variety throughout India. Above this, there is 'regional' Hinduism, which has a wider spread over a particular region. Thus within each region there is a measure of cultural/religious similarity, but there are variations between differing regions. Above this, there is 'peninsular' Hinduism - there is a degree of cultural homogeneity within peninsular India which sets it aside from the people of the plains and mountains of the north. At the top of the model is 'All-India' Hinduism, which is defined as the religious/cultural core of Indian society, the principle which creates unity out of the diversity of the sub-continent.

All-India Hinduism can be equated with the Indian great tradition - Srinivas explicitly equates it with Sanskritic texts and with learned members of society who read, interpret, and practise ritual from these texts (op cit.: 214, 225). He also describes a mechanism by which all-India Hinduism can spread throughout different areas and different groups. This process, called Sanskritisation, is based on the assumption that Sanskritic/all-India Hinduism is usually perceived as being socially superior to regional or local Hinduism. Thus (limited) social mobility for a group (not an individual) can be achieved by conforming to the Sanskritic model of behaviour. There are many examples of social groups who have attempted this mobility - by modifying their behaviour<sup>3</sup> and/or by claiming higher ritual status<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> In this section, the term 'Hinduism' is being used to refer to a body of cultural and religious phenomena found among Hindu Indians, rather than in its more specific religious sense, as used in the above section.

<sup>3</sup> For example, by practising vegetarianism, rejecting widow re-marriage, or using 'all-Indian' (i.e. Sanskritic text based) rituals instead of 'local' forms and variations of rituals.

<sup>4</sup> Usually by claiming descent from a higher varna. For example, a group that is usually associated with a Vaishya caste-jati group, may claim they are descendants of a Brahman or Kshatriya. A good example of this is the case of Bhatra Sikhs, who were described above in the previous chapter (see §2.3.1). This group, which is assumed to be a low status trading caste-jati by Sikhs and Hindus in Panjab, claim themselves that they are descendants of a wayward Brahman (Ghuman 1980:309).

Sanskritic Hinduism is a uniting principle of Hinduism in nearly all areas of India. The fact that Sanskritic rites and beliefs are found throughout the sub-continent is obviously integrative in itself. But the process of Sanskritisation is even more important, since it provides the framework for yet further integration. But it is not clear why most Indian communities are not more highly Sanskritised, since these forces have been operating for thousands of years.

Although Singer assumes that there is a link between all-India Hinduism and Sanskritic Hinduism, he questions whether the two are synonymous. He cites examples where Sanskritisation is accompanied by Westernisation; and also where groups de-Sanskritise - such as a group in Gujarat, who claim to be 'lower' ranked Baniyas, rather than 'higher' ranked Rajputs, because the former rank now has greater prestige (1972: 45). He argues

These differences tend to drive a wedge between Srinivas's conception of 'All-India Hinduism' and his conception of 'Sanskritic Hinduism'. They suggest instead a plurality of standards for an all-India Hinduism, a plurality that includes Sanskritic Hinduism as one set (ibid.).

### *3.2.1.3 Framing the dichotomy*

Thus Sanskritisation is an important element of all-India Hinduism for Singer, but it is not the only element. He argues that there are also widespread beliefs and practices, such as 'the worship of numerous godlings, animal sacrifice, witchcraft and magic, and widow remarriage' (ibid.). Such practice he defines as 'lower-level' Hinduism, and as 'popular Hinduism' (ibid.). Why he should define Sanskritic Hinduism as 'higher' and popular Hinduism as 'lower' is not clear. Elsewhere he says that

The 'higher' aspects are usually more reflective and more systematically presented and embody the greatest intellectual and aesthetic achievements of the culture (ibid.: 4).

He also describes the differences in terms of 'cultivation':

It is possible to place each structure along a continuum between two poles - an uncultivated little tradition of folk culture at one end and a cultivated and learned great tradition at the other end (ibid.: 192).

But these definitions merely beg the question. He is assuming superior status for a body of beliefs and practices simply on the basis of his own cultural preferences. There are many Indians who would themselves wholeheartedly agree with this distinction, but it is ethnocentric of him to make it nonetheless.

Singer believes that there are (at least) two forms of all-India Hinduism. There is the 'high-level' Sanskritic Hinduism, which is based on the Sanskritic textual core and the privileged custodians of that knowledge. There is also 'an alternative "lower-level" popular Hinduism of the uncultivated masses' (ibid.: 47). Through what seems like a subtle sleight of hand, Singer equates the notion of great tradition with Sanskritic Hinduism, and little tradition with popular Hinduism. It is not completely clear if he intends this simple categorisation of the two concepts, but that is where he inevitably leads himself.

#### *3.2.1.4 Diverse little traditions*

By making this straightforward assumption, however, a host of problems remain unresolved: in particular, the problem of diversity. Singer claims at one point that there is an all-India popular Hinduism, but then immediately after this he talks of little *traditions* (ibid.: 46). Either he is describing a singular entity, or diverse entities. His theory cannot cope with ambiguity in this respect.

If we return to Srinivas' hierarchical model, we see that diversity is found on various levels of Indian society. There are regional and local forms of Hinduism - Cohn and Marriott point out that diversity occurs within regions, sub-regions, localities, and even between different caste groups within the same village (1958: 2). It is not clear from Singer if he is equating 'popular' little tradition Hinduism with these various levels of diversity, or if he is talking about all-Indian cultural elements.

If Singer is referring to regional and local diversity, then there are many little traditions in India, which vary so much from each other that they can only be defined negatively. That is, these little traditions are simply versions of Indian culture which

are *not* Sanskritic. In this case, Singer is simply reformulating Srinivas' theory with a Chicago oriented gloss. Describing diversity in India as numerous 'little traditions' is mere typology, which says very little at all.

### 3.2.2 Dynamic traditions

#### 3.2.2.1 *Universalisation and parochialisation*

By collapsing the vast diversity within India into a simple great/little tradition dichotomy, Singer, and others, are encouraging a simplistic view which fails to take account of the multiple levels of that diversity. Another example of this approach is Marriott's (1955) consideration of Kishan Garhi (a village in Uttar Pradesh), and other 'little communities' in India. In this article Marriott tries to construct a complex and sophisticated model to understand the dynamics of belief and ritual in a local context.

His formulation of the processes of parochialisation and universalisation is well thought out. But he limits himself by using these concepts to explain how the simple dichotomy of little and great traditions interact within the village sphere. Universalisation is the process whereby local traditions are given recognised acceptance as forms of the Sanskritic tradition, whilst parochialisation is a more creative process through which Sanskrit traditions are transformed into new and distinct little traditions (ibid.: 197-201).

He argues that both processes are continually occurring, so

if we choose between universalisation and parochialisation as *the* explanation for similarities and differences between great and little traditions, then we are stopping arbitrary<sup>it</sup> in mid-cycle what must in fact be a circular flow (ibid.: 202).

In fact, the interaction between great and little traditions may well 'remain in equilibrium' (ibid.: 218), although such equilibrium would be a highly dynamic one<sup>5</sup>.

But Marriott's condensation of the diversity into a dichotomy between great and

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<sup>5</sup> The notion that there is equilibrium in Indian villages is itself a questionable one, which has recently been refuted. For a discussion of the notion of the timeless traditions of Indian villages, see Fuller 1977.

little traditions tends to undermine the rest of his argument. It is never clear precisely how he is defining either of the two categories of tradition. His discussion of the festival of Karwa Chauth ('Pitcher Fourth') illustrates this clearly. This festival, which occurs in autumn shortly before Diwali, is a time when wives fast for the well-being of their husbands. Marriott states that

Almost all the contents of the festival of Pitcher Fourth appear to belong to the ritual category of the little tradition (ibid.: 203).

He explains this statement by saying

neither the story nor the ritual of Pitcher Fourth has resulted from the devolution of any Sanskritic myth (ibid.: 206).

Thus he defines great tradition practice and belief as Sanskritic. His sole criterion is that if there is a Sanskritic source then a ritual/festival is great tradition, if there is no such source then it is little tradition. By doing this, he condenses all other behaviour into the vast category of 'little tradition', which is far too unwieldy to be of any use.

He notes that Karwa Chauth

seems to be distributed at least as far as Hardoi.. and Mainpuri districts in the southeast and Muzaffarnagar District in the north... [and is an example] ...of the regional little tradition in its creative aspect (206).

I know from informants in Edinburgh that this same festival is of importance in some parts of Rajasthan (particularly around Jaipur), and it is known in Gujarat. The reasons given for celebrating the festival are the same as those described by Marriott - it is a time when women are expected to fast and perform worship for the well being of their husbands. A Rajasthani woman living in Edinburgh attempted to organise a celebration of Karwa Chauth at the Mandir in 1990, and this idea was supported by several Panjabi and Gujarati women.

### *3.2.2.2 Multiple levels of tradition*

So what Marriott refers to as 'little tradition' Hinduism is obviously not simply a local or village based manifestation. If the festival of Karwa Chauth is little tradition, it also belongs to a regional tradition which covers a very wide area. Why does Marriott



spend such effort making and examining distinctions between Sanskritic and little traditions, if he then fails to take account of other important areas of distinction? If the processes of universalisation and parochialisation determine the interaction between great and little traditions, do they not also influence the interaction between regional, sub-regional, local, and caste traditions? To be more specific, the version of Karwa Chauth that Marriott observed is a parochialised and universalised version of a regional tradition, not a local-village tradition.

Marriott is prepared to assume a seemingly clear-cut definition of the great tradition as the Sanskritic core of Indian society (which is thus almost the same as Singer's definition). By doing this, he leaves the definition of the little tradition wide open, so that it includes multiple levels of diversity, which all interact with each other in vague and unspecified ways. Thus Marriott's analysis of interaction within the simplified dichotomy becomes unsustainable. His ideas of parochialisation and universalisation are still useful tools, however, since it is the processes that are more important than the entities themselves. If his dichotomy is ignored and we accept that there are multiple levels of diversity - from Sanskritic through to village and caste traditions - we are still left with a system in which there is no pure form of any tradition. Each of the traditions interacts with all the others, each 'universalises' and 'parochialises' other traditions in their own ways. The result of this complexity may be the dynamic equilibrium which Marriott suggests for Indian villages, but it may also lead to disequilibrium and rapid social change. The result may well be a re-invention of tradition (c.f. Hobsbawm 1983, & §4.5.2).

Once one moves away from a simplistic Great/Little tradition dichotomy, the term 'tradition' itself becomes more difficult to use. It is useful to describe these various collections of beliefs and practices as 'traditions'. But the term does imply a rather fixed and static content which belies the fluidity of the situation. These 'traditions' could also be labelled as 'models' or 'frameworks' - which convey much better the malleability of their content, and indeed the fact that we are dealing with abstract

notions that are difficult to observe. For consistency, however, the term 'tradition' shall be retained in this discussion.

### 3.2.3 Multiple great traditions

The idea of a unified Sanskritic great tradition is also hard to sustain. This assumption has formed the basis of all the cited attempts to understand 'Hindu culture'. But in the case of the village of Kishan Garhi, Marriott did not find an isolated and easily identifiable set of phenomena which could be labelled 'great tradition'. Wherever he found Sanskritic rites and beliefs they occurred in some universalised or parochialised form. What he takes to be 'great tradition' are rites and beliefs that have some source in classical Sanskrit texts. If a ritual has no known connection with such a text (for example, Karwa Chauth), then he says that it does not belong to the great tradition.

The great tradition, therefore, cannot be observed in its pure form in a social context - and so to find it Marriott has to look at the textual basis of Hinduism. But is it useful or meaningful to rely on such a catch-all definition? Is Sanskritic Hinduism merely whatever can be found in the Vedas, Upanishads, Puranas, and other sacred books? What about Singer's other arenas of great tradition, such as literati, important leaders, sacred centres<sup>6</sup>, and sacred calendars<sup>7</sup>? And if the definition is to be solely textual, then why do the texts have to be Sanskritic - why not in a derivative language, such as Bengali, Hindi, or even in a separate language such as Tamil? Vast works of pan-Indian literature have been produced in each of these languages, and some have status which is recognised throughout most of India, well beyond the boundaries of the areas where these languages are spoken (c.f. Staal 1963: 264-65).

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<sup>6</sup> In a later paper, which he co-authored, Marriott did discuss the importance of sacred centres in the formation and maintenance of the Indian great tradition, see Cohn & Marriott (1958).

<sup>7</sup> Marriott's discussion of the Kishan Garhi sacred calendar assumes that the calendar itself is based on the simple textual criterion. If he can find evidence of a festival (such as Diwali) in sacred texts, then he defines it as great tradition, if he cannot (such as Karwa Chauth) then it is not.

Fuller has also demonstrated the complicated relations that exist between rituals and their supposed textual basis, in his work on temple priests at the Minaksi temple in Madurai (1984: 135-161). He shows that although the priests claim the rituals they perform to be reproductions of prescribed rites in the Sanskrit Agamic text, the rituals are often very simplified and diffuse forms of the written procedures. In many respects, it is the particular temple tradition which prescribes the proper conduct of the rituals. At the same time, however, the priests themselves emphasise that the rituals are Agamic - that is, that they are textually based. In such a situation it is very difficult to say if these rituals are 'Sanskritic' according to Marriott's criteria. The rituals in the Minaksi temple are obviously connected with sacred texts, but at the same time, they are highly influenced by non-textual traditions. The gods who are worshipped in these rites are nearly all forms of deities described in Sanskritic texts. In a sense, therefore, the gods in the Minaksi temple are straightforwardly Sanskritic (or so Fuller himself claims in a later article [1988a: 29-30]), whilst the rites in which they are worshipped are not.

Parry (1985) has used his material from learned Brahmans in Benares to highlight similar problems in equating pan-Indian forms of Hinduism with specific Sanskrit texts. He has shown that in certain contexts these texts are extremely malleable, and are in fact like empty boxes into which different interpreters can place different meanings.

In essence, the notion of a single great tradition is no more coherent than the notion of a single little tradition. There is not one 'Sanskritic' tradition, there are a great many interacting traditions (c.f. van der Veer 1988: 61), none of which are definitive. Thus various ascetic renouncer sects each have their own understanding of the 'great tradition', and each claims that it is definitive (van der Veer *ibid.*). Burghart (1978) has shown how Brahmans, Kings, and Renouncers all propose that theirs is *the* great tradition and *the* model of social order - although each group has a different model.

In fact, different Brahman groups have different models also (see Fuller 1984: 39), and of course, groups in different areas of India will also have differing models.

To follow Marriott's definition of Sanskritic tradition, each of these groups is following the great tradition, since each has a Sanskritic textual basis. But the body of Sanskrit texts is incredibly diverse, since they were written by many diverse groups over long periods of time, and for many different reasons (Staal 1963). Singer accepts this problem with the great tradition. He remarks that

By comparing the social organisation, personnel, and institutions... of the major sects... it is possible to arrive at a general picture of the over-all structure of Hinduism within the region where the sects' constituencies are to be found. This procedure will not... yield a single authoritative version of the Hindu great tradition, but rather a structure of related and overlapping versions. An outside observer cannot say which version is most authoritative without assuming the vantage point of a particular sect or group (1972: 193).

Despite this well-thought out statement, Singer is guilty of indulging in the notion of a single great tradition throughout much of his work. Singer's main preoccupation is with examining the way in which one particular great tradition has adapted to urbanisation and modernisation. But, even so, he frequently has recourse to the notion that he is observing the interaction between *the* Hindu great tradition and the forces of modernisation. His theoretical position moves too quickly from the particular (Brahmans in Madras) to the general (the changes in Hinduism in a modern context).

It is far too simplistic, therefore, to describe diversity within Indian society in terms of a dichotomy between great and little traditions. There are many degrees and levels of difference, and these cannot be reduced to a simple dualistic framework<sup>8</sup>. Thus, if there is a distinction between Indian traditions, then it is a polychotomy, not a dichotomy. It is especially unhelpful to describe these distinctions in evaluative terms - such as 'Great' and 'Little'.

### 3.2.4 Constructions of traditions

Some recent writers have observed that the use of such evaluative notions are the

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<sup>8</sup> It is worth bearing in mind Marriott's assertion that 'Hindu thought' relies on ternary oppositions, not binary ones (1990:8). That is, we should not be looking for two concepts to oppose - within Hinduism there is always a minimum of three principles.

product of orientalist constructions of Indian society and culture. For example, van der Veer (1988: 54) claims that the assumption at the base of this approach is that

village culture was backward and limited in comparison with the high and ancient Hindu civilisation, as studied by the indologists. In this way there were two worlds in India: the textual civilisation, and a meagre derivation of it as found by the anthropologists in their village studies (ibid.).

The use of great and little tradition may well have this element of Orientalism, especially when it is used to justify the notion that Indian villages are backward, and that most Indians are very different from the pinnacles of great tradition Indian civilisation. Similarly Singer's use of the oppositions 'higher/lower' and 'cultivated/uncultivated' (1972: 45, 192) does tend to evoke derogatory images. But the theory cannot be dismissed merely because it has elements of Orientalism<sup>9</sup>. The distinction between different traditions does not have to be described in evaluative terms - the traditions may be distinct, even if none is 'greater' or 'higher' than any other. These differences should not be reified into two all-encompassing traditions (to do so is to indulge in Orientalism) - if there are different traditions, then they are multiple.

In his criticism of the Sanskritisation dichotomy, Babb argues that to emphasise distinctions

seems to carry with it the implication that in any ethnographic setting there will be... distinct 'systems of belief' (1975: 26).

In its local context - for example, in a village in Chhattisgarh - the various traditions are fused together into what appears to be a single system - they are not distinct. Thus it is creating a false impression to describe the religion of that place in terms of multiple traditions. But this combination of multiplicity and singularity may be understood by using Marriott's (1955) model used above. He argued that the distinct traditions interact with each other, rather than existing in separate forms. Thus a single

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<sup>9</sup> As Gold remarks in her review of van der Veer: 'we all stand on the backs of our ancestors, and ... if van der Veer would only apply the historicist imperative to his own discipline he might judge less harshly those who wrote in the pre-Said world of the fifties and sixties' (1990:179).

village form of Hinduism may be a blend of several<sup>10</sup> different traditions.

Despite Babb's claim to a unified local system, there is nearly always some diversity within Indian communities - even within small villages, where there are caste and family differences and traditions. In fact, the notion of system itself appears to be unhelpful - for this again assumes an essential quality, which is probably a reification of what is actually present. In fact, it is more important to consider that there are also differences in religious and social context - which Babb himself points out. In some contexts and situations a particular tradition is stressed more prominently than others.

For example

sacred texts, Sanskrit or not, play a more important role in some areas of religious life than in others (ibid.).

Babb goes on to argue that such contextual distinctions are not based on different levels of Sanskritisation, but on relations of power, and of purity and pollution. These relations are what he believes underlie all of Hindu religious thought and practice. But the purity/pollution opposition is simply one element of Hinduism, it is a tradition which has varying importance for different Hindu groups. For example, purity is of less importance to Indian kings than it is to Brahmins (see Dirks 1990; Burghart 1978, 1983a).

Fuller (1988a) has developed a more sophisticated form of this argument. He has examined the distinction between worship of 'Sanskritic' and 'village' deities in south India<sup>11</sup>. His argument is that Sanskritic gods are substantial, they exist in themselves, rather than in relation to other deities. In contrast, village deities are relational - their properties and status are determined by relations of purity and pollution, and in particular by whether they are worshipped through *puja* (a high status offering) or *bali* (a lower status sacrifice).

Fuller transforms this distinction between categories of gods into the principle of

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<sup>10</sup> Or two, in Marriott's (1955) view.

<sup>11</sup> While accepting that definitions for these terms are problematic, he believes that they are still useful categories to work with.

distinction between categories of people. Thus the Sanskritic gods are associated with Brahmans, who he argues also have substantial, no-relational status. That is, the Brahman ideal is 'a world where highness ceases to depend on the existence of lowness' (1988a: 35). Meanwhile, the village deities - being relational - are symbols for

the mutual though asymmetrical dependence of the high on the low, and vice versa, and the indispensability to society of the low castes (ibid.).

But Fuller slips too easily from his discussion of deities to his discussion of social relations. It is too simplistic - and idealistic - to equate one with the other. His premise that there is a dichotomy is also dubious. He works on distinctions between Brahmans and non-Brahmans, and between Sanskritic and village deities. This premise is straightforward, but it reduces the complexity of the situation absurdly. There are not two models, or traditions, of social reality - there are many. Fuller gives the (false) impression that he wishes to condense all other Hindu models of social and religious order into a simple dichotomy.

Thus his conclusion appears to imply that there is a single Brahmanic tradition in south India, and that this is opposed to many non-Brahmanic traditions. This bears many similarities to Marriott and Singer's conceptions of a high level great tradition, and multiple village-based little traditions. It contrasts strongly with his earlier work, where he showed powerfully the way in which different Brahmanic traditions exist within a single temple (1984: 39, 49-54).

### **3.2.5 Traditions in Edinburgh**

The idea of a distinction between various traditions is also more important to some groups than to others. Many Brahmans (particularly in urban areas of India) like to associate themselves with the idea of a Hindu great tradition, of which they can claim to be custodians. Singer's Brahman friend and informant in Madras Dr V. Raghavan (1972: 81-84) falls into this category. He is a good example of the many urban middle

class Indians who have taken up the idea.

In such cases, the idea of distinctiveness is used to create and/or maintain social distinctiveness. Different social groups manipulate different models for their own purposes. The terms great and little tradition<sup>12</sup> are often used by Indians themselves to describe this distinctiveness - in which case, the external 'Orientalist' perspective has been taken up with relish. Both the external and the internal models are constructions of reality, they are attempts to describe and create a particular social order.

The notion that there are levels of distinctiveness - and in particular that there is a dichotomy - also forms an implicit model for Edinburgh Hindus (although the term 'great tradition' itself is rarely used). Many of them make the assumption that there is a common Hindu religion/tradition that they share, and that this is rooted in some form of great tradition. This great tradition religion is often contrasted with more local forms which are also present in Edinburgh. The type of worship that is practised at the temple is often especially contrasted with the supposed beliefs and practices of other Hindus in Edinburgh. In particular, Gujaratis (who were mainly raised in cities in East Africa and Britain) sometimes describe Panjabis (who are mainly from rural Indian backgrounds) as unsophisticated followers of strange and backward traditions. The implication is that these Panjabis are followers of a backward little tradition, which is inferior to their own great tradition.

Worship at the temple is meant to belong to the great tradition. The temple is an all-Indian temple (in theory), and the gods selected for worship are Sanskritic gods - that is, they are nearly all gods who are referred to in Sanskritic texts (see §4.2.1.2). This is a commonly observed practice in British temples (see Jackson 1981: 68; Bowen 1981: 43-4), and contrasts strongly with many temples in India, which are dedicated to gods who are not necessarily associated with the great tradition (see, for example, Gold

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<sup>12</sup> And often evaluative distinctions such as 'higher' and 'lower', or 'cultivated' and 'uncultivated'. In many cases these are notions that come from within sections of classical Hindu belief, rather than being external loans.



1988: 38; Good 1985; Fuller 1987).

If 'little tradition' Hinduism is at all acceptable among Edinburgh Hindus, then it is contained within the domestic sphere. That is, the more local level gods may be worshipped at home, and regional and local rituals may be practised within a family group. In the arena of temple and other communal worship, the emphasis is always on gods and worship which could be classified as belonging to the great tradition. Thus Edinburgh Hinduism is attempting to define itself in an idiom which is akin to the Hindu great tradition described by Singer and Marriott. There are numerous 'little traditions' existing alongside this, however, because each regional, caste, and sectarian group in Edinburgh has its own distinct set of traditions.

It has already been commented upon that there is not one single Hindu great tradition. There are multiple traditions, each of which claims to be definitive. Thus when Edinburgh Hindus define themselves as all-Indian Hindus, they are attempting to construct or reconstruct a version of one of these great traditions. This version of Hinduism is meant to be inclusive - regional trends and practices are underplayed in favour of supposed all-Indian or 'Sanskritic' elements. But at the same time each group is trying to assert their own regional or local form of Hinduism, and to have that recognised and assimilated into the all-India tradition. In this respect, there is a high degree of Marriott's 'universalisation' occurring.

This thesis will be examining some of the many 'great' traditions of Hinduism that are being developed in the arena of the Edinburgh temple. The synthesis of these traditions (along with the many other regional etc. traditions that have been brought to Edinburgh) is leading to the development of new traditions of Hinduism, which are being constructed and invented for the new environment. To return to Marriott's village model (1955: 218), the flux that is occurring between the multiple traditions is not (at present) settling into any form of equilibrium. The temple is still in the process of being constructed (see §2.2.1, §4.1, & §4.2), and the structure and organisation of the temple has the potential for a great deal of development.

It is unhelpful to view the dynamics of the temple in terms of a relationship between great and little traditions, and such a dichotomy will be eschewed in this thesis. But there are many different varieties of Hinduism, and these can usefully be approached as different traditions, which operate on many different levels (region, caste, locality, relationship to religious texts, other sources of authority etc.). These traditions are never static, they are being developed in India at present, as they have been for decades in East Africa. So it is nothing new to find new developments of Hindu traditions occurring among Edinburgh Hindus.

### 3.2.6 The problem of unity

Much of these past two sections have been working around a central problem about understanding 'Hinduism'<sup>13</sup> - that is, how to understand the seeming contradictions of unity and diversity. In conclusion I feel that the problem should be approached head-on, by asking why it is that the supposed unity of Hindu-Indian culture is so important. If there is such diversity among Hindus, why is it so necessary to think in terms of unity? Indeed, the assumption that there is any level of unity may well be simply a construction on the part of the observer (whoever s/he may be).

There are certainly many groups of people for whom the notion of Hindu unity is useful. As outlined already, many western (and Indian) academics and politicians find the concept of Hindu unity a convenient pigeon-hole in which to categorise and try to understand the bewildering vastness of South Asia. This 'orientalist' perspective is not only intellectually convenient - it is also a useful basis for international relations.

There are also many Indians themselves who rely on the notion of unity. Many groups of people - such as politicians, administrators, and priests, along with many

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<sup>13</sup> It should be stressed, though, that this thesis is not about Hinduism, it is about Hindus. The multiplicity of traditions within Edinburgh, along with the complex interaction that occurs between these traditions dictates that the focus of study be more on individuals and their behaviour rather than general abstractions. With this in mind, the aim in writing this thesis is not to discover how Hinduism has changed in a new environment, but to look at the processes by which practitioners of the religion are adapting.

others - have political or ideological incentives to stress unity rather than diversity. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to discuss this in further depth, but such claims for pan-Hinduism cannot be dissociated from political relations. Indeed, this notion is very important within the arena of the Edinburgh temple, and will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.

If unity is assumed, then diversity is a real problem, and vice versa - whether we are looking at religion, language, culture, or whatever. It must be remembered that all attempts to understand this diversity cannot be anything more than models, and these models do not exist in a vacuum but serve certain purposes (intellectual, political, or social). And all such models should be treated as symbolic - whoever they are constructed by.

In the next section I shall be demonstrating how such claims to pan-Hindu unity and traditions have been used in the development of two (fairly) recent religious groups in India - that is Arya Samaj and Swaminarayan.

### 3.3 NEW HINDU TRADITIONS

Claims that there is a single Hindu great tradition have to make allowance for recent developments among Hindus. There have been numerous reformist movements in India (and abroad), many of which claim to be the definitive version of 'Hinduism'. Such movements are nothing new - the development of *bhakti* cults in southern India during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and their subsequent spread through the north, was an attempted reform of medieval 'Brahmanic' Hindu traditions. Bhakti Hinduism has spread unevenly through India, there are various forms or traditions of it - for example, Bengali bhakti cults are very different from Ravidasis, and these traditions are themselves distinct from the traditions of bhakti followed in south Indian temples.

Two more recent reformist versions of 'Hinduism' are Arya Samaj and Swaminarayan. Both of these are associated with the Hindu 'Renaissance' - the period

during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when contact between Hindus and British colonialists and intellectuals encouraged a number of important religious leaders to emerge<sup>14</sup>. In both cases the leaders of these new traditions/sects have made claims to be truly representative of Hinduism in its great traditional aspect - but they offered very different versions of the religion. They have also become associated with different Indian regional traditions - Arya Samaj with Panjab, and Swaminarayan with Gujarat. Thus two traditions, which both approximate to the putative Hindu great tradition, are distinct from each other, and are also fused with regional traditions (which are themselves usually defined as 'little tradition').

As already discussed, this association with a great tradition is fairly ambiguous - since there are so many great traditions to choose from. The selectivity in defining what is essentially 'Hindu' has meant that these two groups offer quite conflicting forms of reformist Hinduism.

### **3.3.1 Arya Samaj and Panjab**

#### *3.3.1.1 Swami Dayanand*

Although Swami Dayanand - the founder of Arya Samaj - came from Gujarat, the movement that he created has its strongest roots in Panjab. It was particularly among western educated Panjabis that this nineteenth century reform movement flourished and became a force in the reinterpretation of Hindu traditions (Jones 1976: 50-66). The aim of the movement was to re-mould Hindu practices so that they were more in line with the 'original' Vedic religion, which (they claimed) had been corrupted and polluted over centuries of misrule by Brahmans. Arya Samajis targeted two aspects of Hinduism in particular - the worship of 'idols' and the observance of rigid caste distinctions.

In Panjab, an area which has seen a great deal of religious foment and conflict

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<sup>14</sup> As well as Swami Dayanand and Sahjanand, there were also Ram Mohan Roy, Ramakrishna, Vivekanand, Radhakrishnan, M.K. Gandhi, as well as many others within the brief period 1800-1950.

over the centuries, the tenets of Arya Samaj took a strong hold, and have had a profound influence on other forms of Panjabi Hinduism (c.f. Bharati 1972: 299, and §3.3.3 below). Arya Samaj missions have been operating for over a century in many other areas of India, but their influence is strongest in Panjab. Arya Samajis have also played a crucial role in the development of Hindu communities in other areas of the world - this will be discussed later (see §3.5.1).

Swami Dayanand and his followers promoted a form of Hinduism which they believed to be true to its Vedic roots. They argued that 'modern' practices were mainly corruptions, the result of a stranglehold that Brahmans had had for centuries. Dayanand looked to the Vedas as the source of his reformed religious traditions, and claimed to be restructuring Hinduism in that model. In fact, as Bharati has argued (1976: 329), Arya Samajis make use of certain parts of the Vedas to support their doctrine, whilst disregarding more unpalatable elements<sup>15</sup>. Later Sanskritic texts are also ignored, or denounced - so the Puranas, the Upanishads, and the Epics are all dismissed as misleading or corruptions.

Arya Samaj theology is meant to be monotheistic<sup>16</sup>. When gods are mentioned in worship and ritual, then they are always Sanskritic (i.e. they derive from Sanskritic texts). However, not all 'Sanskritic' gods are considered to be acceptable - rejection of the Puranas and Epics means a rejection of the incarnations of Vishnu (particularly Krishna and Ram). The criterion of selection is, therefore, not in terms of language (i.e. Sanskrit), it is in terms of particular texts. The Vedas are the only acceptable sacred books - Arya Samajis claim that all other books (in Sanskrit or not) are not properly Hindu.

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<sup>15</sup> Bharati uses the example of passages of the Vedas with 'erotic content', which are against the spirit of Arya Samaj and are dismissed as 'dirty things'. He says 'any passages of erotic content in the Veda segments accepted as canonical by the Arya Samaj are either not known or else interpreted as metaphorical [by Arya Samaj pandits]' (1976: 329).

<sup>16</sup> The ten principles (*Niyam*) of Arya Samaj stress 'the ultimate authority of one formless, omniscient God, the source of all knowledge, and the authority of the Vedas' (Jones 1976: 37, also 321).

When gods are worshipped, the emphasis is upon 'non-idolatrous' practice - that is, without any physical representation of a deity. This is crucial to the Arya Samaj tradition - the movement developed out of a rejection of the use of divine images (*murtis*) by other Hindus. Arya Samaj ritual is modelled around this, as well as maintaining the 'pure-Vedic' basis.

Swami Dayanand brought together a number of *mantras* (Sanskrit verses) from the Vedas, to form the basis of a ritual of fire sacrifice, which has become known as *Hawan*, or *Hom*<sup>17</sup>. This is the main act of worship of Arya Samajis - it can be performed in the house as a domestic ritual, or in the temple by a *pandit*<sup>18</sup>. The ritual makes references to a number of Vedic gods, but it is not directed to any physical images of deities. Instead it takes the form of offerings (ghee, wood, spices, and grain) into the sacrificial grate (called a *kund*). The intention of the ritual is to replace other Hindu forms of worship - particularly *puja* and *arti*, which are both oriented towards 'idols'.

### 3.3.1.2 Arya Samaj as 'great tradition'

But Arya Samaj cannot be described as pure 'great tradition' or even pure 'Hinduism' - no matter how much its followers claim this for themselves. There are other traditions which have been incorporated into the movement. In particular, there are strong influences from British, and especially Christian, religious and intellectual models. According to Jones

Aryans based their rejection of unwanted [Hindu] customs on an appeal to ancient authority, the modern truth of science [sic.], and contemporary life in the more advanced countries if such seemed valid (1976: 96).

Indeed, the importance of *Hawan* is usually stressed in 'scientific' terms. The

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<sup>17</sup> Fire sacrifices are an important element of many non-Samaji Hindu traditions, especially those associated with Brahmins and temple worship. What is particular about the Samaji *Hawan* is that it takes a certain form which was composed by Dayanand himself to be instituted as the basis of Samaji ritual (see Knott 1986a: 128).

<sup>18</sup> For a full account of the *Hawan* ritual, see Knott (1986a: 128-140).

fire sacrifice is purported to be an important method of cleansing pollutants from the atmosphere. Thus I was told by a pandit in Glasgow, that although one performance of *Hawan* in the temple would not have much effect (except on those conducting it), if enough of these sacrifices were performed all over the city then it would be possible to eradicate all of Glasgow's air pollution.

Even polemics by Arya Samajis against Christianity were phrased in Christian terms:

Dayanand's logic was not dissimilar from arguments utilised by Christian missionaries in attacking Hinduism and the Arya Samaj. Both sides tended to be literalistic and dogmatic, appealing sometimes to reason, sometimes to traditional values and, on occasion, to modern science (ibid.: 141).

Thus Arya Samaj ideology and rhetoric has strong Christian influences<sup>19</sup>, as well as being based on a certain interpretation of classical Vedic Hinduism. Jones even argues that the form of worship developed by Arya Samajis was itself modelled on Protestant church traditions. The worship consists of

a *Hom* [*Hawan* ], hymns, a lecture or sermon, and again hymns which closed the meeting (ibid.: 44).

Although these 'hymns' were originally performed by hired outcaste Muslims

congregational singing soon replaced these professionals, leaving an Arya service which closely paralleled that of the Protestant churches (ibid.).

To argue that 'congregational singing' among Hindus is somehow a derivative of Christian influences is perhaps an overstatement. Such singing - called *bhajans* or *kirtans* - is common among many *bhakti* Hindu traditions, most of which pre-date British influence in India (see chapter five). This notwithstanding, it is possible that Christian devotional styles helped to encourage the development of pre-existing Hindu traditions of devotional worship, particularly within the development of Arya Samaj.

An important factor behind this British influence on Arya Samaj was that it developed among a certain class of Panjabis - the newly created middle class literati,

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<sup>19</sup> Jones also cites examples of Arya Samajis denouncing brahmins as 'popes', a term which is obviously taken from Protestant Christian missionaries (1976: 110).

who emerged during the mid-nineteenth century. These people, who had been introduced to British styles of education and thinking, took to Arya Samaj because of its claims to be 'progressive' and forward thinking.

Arya ideology filled the psychological vacuum felt by marginal and alienated Hindus striving to relate both to their parental world and the newly anglicised reality of British India... Arya [Samaj provided]... a chance to acquire English education without fear of conversion... to Christianity or godless materialism... (Jones *ibid.*: 66).

However, this portrayal by Jones of Arya Samaj as a compromise form of Hinduism, which provides an acceptable set of beliefs for upwardly mobile Panjabis is a little too simplistic. He does not take into account the many 'marginal and alienated' Panjabi Hindus who did not become Aryas, but who instead maintained the religious beliefs and practices in which they had been brought up.

But the British/Christian influence on Arya Samaj is important - it was mainly within the British educated groups that the movement flourished. Much of what came to be accepted as Arya Samaj was the creation of such marginal individuals. This appears to be in contradiction to the claims that Arya Samaj is 'pure' Hinduism, free from the taint of degeneration and external influences. How can the movement be *both* pure Vedism *and* also a western empiricist-rational religion?

Fox (1985: 122-130) has put forward the compelling argument that the growth of Arya Samaj was a reaction to British/Christian education. For this arising middle-class, the newly formed education system provided excellent opportunities for social mobility. But Christian missionary influences within this system were extremely strong, and thus conversion was a real fear amongst the well educated middle-classes. Ballard (n.d.) develops this further, by arguing that mid-nineteenth century Panjabis found a mature and self-confident British empire which knew what it was doing (as opposed to other parts of India, which were conquered earlier). It was in Panjab that the British made their most coherent attempt to colonise and convert the existing traditions. The reaction against such sustained attacks was the development of new religious traditions, particularly the growth of Arya Samaj.



There are other religious influences in Panjab alongside those of Hinduism and British colonial Christianity. Islam has been an important force in the area for centuries, and a significant proportion of the population of the region are Muslims<sup>20</sup>. Contact and conflict between Hindu and Muslim traditions in Panjab had already helped to create a new religious tradition - Sikhism - which although originally revived from Hindu traditions, has subsequently developed a separate identity and status.

Both Arya Samaj and Sikhism have emerged from Panjabi Hinduism, and both traditions have developed largely in response to foreign domination (Christian in the former case, Muslim in the latter). Members of these faiths initially recognised their similarities. They both found a common ground in their renunciation of 'idolatry' and the need to reform Hinduism. They also both saw themselves as defending the true faith of Panjab (i.e., the native religious traditions) against the threat of domination by foreigners (c.f. Fox 1985: 123-25).

Jones describes how co-operation between Samajis and some middle class Sikhs was enthusiastic in the early stages of the Arya movement (op cit.: 136). But Aryans soon came to define Sikhs in terms of their degeneration from classical Hinduism - they particularly criticised the elevation to sacredness of the *Granth Sahib* (the Sikh holy book) and of Guru Nanak (the founder of Sikhism). Relations between the two groups degenerated further when Arya Samajis began to 'convert' Sikhs through performing *shuddhi* (purification) ceremonies (pp.207-212). Jones argues that this developing hostility between Sikhs and Arya Samajis helped to encourage the emergence of a separate Sikh identity (p.210). The process also had a similar effect on the development of the newer Arya Samaj movement. This is also emphasised by Fox, but is most strongly argued by Ballard (n.d.), who says that Sikhism did not really crystallise as a distinct religion until the late nineteenth/early twentieth century, in the

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<sup>20</sup> The region of Panjab was partitioned in 1947 into Pakistani Panjab (Muslim dominated) and Indian Panjab (Hindu and Sikh dominated). The Indian state of Panjab was divided again (in 1965) into the states of Panjab and Haryana. However, 'Panjab' and 'Panjabi' are still important self-defining notions in all of these areas.

conflicts between Arya Samajis and Sikhs.

Although Arya Samajis claim to be pure and reformed Hindus, it is clear that there are a variety of influences which have shaped the tradition which they follow. It is unhelpful, therefore, to regard Arya Samaj as an homogeneous tradition, or as a purified version of the Hindu 'great' tradition. It is, rather, a blend of traditions which react (sometimes uneasily) with each other. Arya Samaj is the product of an historical process, which has helped to develop and shape the traditions which its founders brought together<sup>21</sup>. Arya Samaj has also had an important role among Hindu communities outside of India. Many Panjabis have settled abroad, and some of these have founded Samaji 'missions' to spread their reformed tradition (see in particular Jayawardena 1966, 1980; Bharati 1972, 1976; Vertovec 1989, n.d.1). The ways in which the movement has helped to develop other Hindu traditions, particularly those outside India, will be discussed later in this chapter (see §3.5.1).

### **3.3.2 Swaminarayanism and Gujarat**

#### *3.3.2.1 Sahjanand Swami*

The Swaminarayan movement was founded by Sahjanand Swami, who came from near Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, the centre of northern, Hindi speaking India. It began around 1804, and has developed into an orthodox but reformist form of Hinduism. Although the movement has subsequently divided into a number of different sects (see Barot 1987), the various branches have all maintained a distinctive form which is Swaminarayan.

The main element of Swaminarayanism is that it is Gujarati, most of its members and leaders are from Gujarat, most of its sacred texts are in Gujarati, and most of its ritual is conducted in that language. The movement is a truly regional religion, with

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<sup>21</sup> Of course, Arya Samaj is internally divided, there are several Arya Samaj traditions, which all claim to be the true successor of Dayanand. For a description of the early conflicts within Arya Samaj, see Jones (1976: 168-74).

most of its influence beyond Gujarat being the result of the activities of expatriate Gujaratis. The growth of the movement coincided with the spread of British influence in Gujarat. This brought new forms of technology - particularly printing presses and railways - which encouraged the development of communication over a wide area, thus facilitating the spread of the Swaminarayan message. The movement is also the result of British ideological influences - Sahjanand was 'the first of the neo-Hindu reformers' (Williams 1984: 24). He can be identified with other religious leaders of the nineteenth century - such as Ram Mohan Roy (of the Bengali based Brahmo Samaj), and Swami Dayanand - who developed the ancient traditions of Hinduism in the context of British rule.

[Sahjanand] developed a new religious organisation based on voluntary membership with a clearly defined hierarchy of laymen, ascetics, and acharyas and a definite world view of sacred people, places and times which met the needs of the Gujaratis during the period of modernisation and independence (ibid.).

Like Dayanand with his Arya Samaj, Swaminarayan presented a new form of Hinduism which was a mixture of old traditions, and re-interpretations and innovations to suit the new circumstances. Some of these innovations came from within Gujarati religious traditions, while others were obviously influenced by other sources<sup>22</sup>. Like Arya Samaj, the Swaminarayan movement attempted to break down some of the barriers of caste-jati in Gujarat - for example, membership is open to members of all caste-jatis, not only those claiming high-born status. But these reforms did not go as far as those by Arya Samajis, for whom Brahmanism was a state achieved and not inherited. In fact, Sahjanand stipulated that his followers should strictly follow the principles of commensality, avoiding impure contact with people of lower status groups.

Concerning the improvement of women's status, Sahjanand introduced even more ambiguous guidelines. In the movement, relations between men and women have

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<sup>22</sup> Two such examples are the reforms of infanticide and *sati* (widow immolation), which were both obsessions of the British Christian colonials.

to be strictly controlled - Swaminarayani male ascetics are not even allowed to look at women, whilst lay males may not talk to women other than their wives and relatives. Because of this segregation of women, separate temples and groups have to be organised to keep females away from male ascetics - whilst the worship and administration of these temples is the responsibility of women too. Thus, the avoidance by men of women in some respects has helped to give Swaminarayani women more power and influence than is usual in Indian societies. But, as Williams points out (op cit.: 145), even such important female figures are still subordinate in status to men. Most Swaminarayani women are expected to have their lives controlled by men, as fathers or husbands (ibid.)<sup>23</sup>.

It has frequently been noted that the growth of Swaminarayanism signalled a rejection by Gujaratis of more indulgent religious traditions, particularly the Vallabhacarya traditions such as Pushtimarg<sup>24</sup>. Both Weber and Monier-Williams commented on this rejection by Swaminarayanis of the 'epicureanism' of the Vallabhacaryas (see Williams 1984: 20). There are clearly differences between the Vallabhacarya traditions of Gujarat and the reformist Swaminarayanism, and Barot is certainly correct when he argues that the former 'provides the ideological baseline against which the evolution of the Swaminarayan sect in Gujarat is to be interpreted' (1980: 168).

But Williams has highlighted how Swaminarayanism is also *similar* to Vallabhacarya traditions, and in fact Sahjanand did not criticise followers of these traditions (op cit.: 21). The excesses and epicureanism of Vallabhacaryas were probably very much overstated by the British, as was their contrast with the 'puritanical' reformist Swaminarayanism. Barot also makes clear that Vallabhacarya

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<sup>23</sup> Williams notes that Sahjanand 'is an early representative of the practice of advocacy of women's rights without personal involvement with women' (1984: 146). In this respect, he was a typical reformer of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, taking the same ambiguous approach that Dayanand, Ramakrishna, and Ram Mohan Roy were to follow (ibid.).

<sup>24</sup> For a discussion of the Vallabhacarya traditions, see Barz (1976).

was associated mainly with the mercantile classes and caste-jatis in Gujarat, whilst Swaminarayanis were initially recruited from lower status caste-jatis (op cit.: 169-70). This may indicate that the growth of Swaminarayanism was not so much a rejection of Vallabhacarya traditions, but was instead the growth of new religious traditions among a distinctly different social group.

### 3.3.2.2 *Swaminarayanism as 'great tradition'*

Sahjanand aimed primarily to reform the religious beliefs of his followers, by attempting to introduce them to a more correct form of Hinduism. To him, however, this reform did not mean the drastic abandonment of post-Vedic traditions that Arya Samajis preached. Instead Sahjanand located his new movement firmly within Puranic Hindu traditions, by promoting the claim that he himself was an incarnation of the god Vishnu. Williams has demonstrated how this claim has variable meanings to different devotees of the movement<sup>25</sup>. Despite these differences of interpretation, there is a general consensus amongst those in the movement that the person of Sahjanand is in fact an incarnation of the supreme being (Purusottam), and that he is himself Swaminarayan<sup>26</sup>.

In line with this development, beliefs of Swaminarayanis have been modified and streamlined. Sahjanand discouraged belief in 'false' or 'inferior' deities (ibid.: 18), since their 'primary adherence [should be] to Narayan or Krishna' (p.19). These lesser deities were associated with the various local religious traditions of Gujarat, which were meant to be discarded (sometimes literally) on joining the movement. However, Sahjanand did allow worship of gods other than Vishnu (p.19) - and representations of

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<sup>25</sup> Thus some believe that Sahjanand is a lesser incarnation than Krishna (Williams 1984: 63), others that there is no difference between Sahjanand and Krishna (ibid.: 65), whilst the majority of Swaminarayanis probably believe that Sahjanand 'is the single, complete manifestation of Narayan [Vishnu]..., and, as such, is superior in power and efficacy to all other manifestations of god, including Rama and Krishna' (ibid.: 67).

<sup>26</sup> Thus the name Swaminarayan refers to the founder, the focus of worship, and to the worshippers themselves. Of course this is not very different from most religions (particularly Christianity), but to avoid confusion the founder will be referred to as Sahjanand in this thesis, whilst the devotees will be referred to as Swaminarayanis.

Hanuman and Ganesh can even be found at the entrances of many Swaminarayan temples (p.107). The principal figure for worship by Swaminarayanis is, however, Sahjanand himself (as Swaminarayan).

He also encouraged the recognition of Puranic texts by his followers, as well as the Vedas. In fact, Swaminarayanis now have a canon of eight Hindu sacred books<sup>27</sup> (p. 159). Sahjanand added to this canon four books of his own, which covered various topics - from devotion, through philosophy, to administration of the movement - whilst the works of some of his followers and contemporaries are also considered to be important. Thus Swaminarayanism is different from Arya Samaj, it is not an attempt to reject post-Vedic developments in Hinduism, rather it is a selected redefinition and reinterpretation of what Sahjanand considered to be the most important of these developments.

The choice of gods and sacred texts is very close to what could be described as 'Great Tradition' or 'Sanskritic'. Indeed Williams follows Srinivas' view that Swaminarayanism was an important element in the Sanskritisation of various elements of Gujarati society (ibid.: 19). Williams rightly points out, however, that such Sanskritisation was mainly achieved through the medium of the regional language - i.e. Gujarati - and so was an atypical form of the process. Also, the appeal was to a particular Sanskritic tradition - that of Gujarati Vaisnavism - and Sahjanand was obviously providing a new interpretation of this Sanskritic tradition, by promoting the belief that he was the most important manifestation of Swaminarayan. Also, if the Swaminarayan movement did facilitate the spread of a particular Sanskritic tradition across many levels of Gujarati society, it was combined by the addition and development of other traditions as well.

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<sup>27</sup> These are: Vedas, Vedanta Sutras of Vyasa, Yajnavalkya Smriti, Bhagavata Purana, Bhagawad Gita, portions of Skanda Purana, Vidurniti, and the thousand names of Vishnu listed in the Mahabharat (Williams 1984: 159-60).

### 3.3.2.3 Swaminarayanism as a Gujarati tradition

One such influence was Jainism, a religion which has strong links with Gujarat. The notion of *ahimsa* (non-violence) - which is crucial to most Jains - has had important influences on the development of religious traditions throughout the region. Sahjanand made the notion of non-violence an important part of the moral order (*dharm*) of Swaminarayanis - thus devotees are expected to show respect to all forms of life, and to be dedicated vegetarians. Following this principle, Sahjanand also tried to reform those Brahmanical traditions which encouraged the practice of Vedic sacrifices involving the sacrifice of animals (p.18). He attempted to encourage the performance of 'bloodless sacrifices' which he believed were 'the correct form, of the ancient Vedic sacrifice' (p.137). The spread of the notion of *ahimsa*, facilitated by the spread of Swaminarayanism, was the spread of a tradition which is particularly Jainist in origin.

A tradition among many Hindu religious groups is that of transmission of the status of *acarya* (religious leader or teacher) through a chain of succession. Thus many important religious figures can claim a spiritual connection with saints of the medieval era. Sahjanand followed this tradition, and was consecrated as an *acarya* of a sacred line of tradition which extended back to Ramanuja, the twelfth century South Indian philosopher (pp.12, 26-27). This line was also extended: Sahjanand nominated two of his nephews to succeed him as *acaryas* of the newly formed religious movement. These two heirs have subsequently passed on their status to relatives (their first sons in most cases), so that the present day *acaryas* of Swaminarayanism claim spiritual descent from Ramanuja, and spiritual *and* biological descent from Sahjanand. Dissent and factionalism within Swaminarayanism has often involved argument about this principle of succession from Sahjanand to the present - with new sects forming on the principle that leadership should be determined by other means.

However, Sahjanand also introduced a new tradition into this idea of the succession of *acaryas*. Instead of choosing one successor, he chose two, so that they could each administer different areas (*gadis*). He drew a line between Calcutta in the

east, and Dwarka in the west, and said that all Swaminarayani communities north of this line should be looked after by the acarya based in Ahmedabad (which is now the capital of Gujarat), whilst those living south of the line were the responsibility of the other acarya, who was based in Vadtal (p.28). This separation into two areas appears to be along lines similar to those in the Church of England (i.e. the archdioceses of York and Canterbury), and this has led some writers to suppose that Sahjanand took the idea from Christianity. Williams argues, however, that 'no proof of direct influence exists' (ibid.) - and so it is merely speculation to wonder if this was an incorporation of a Christian tradition into this reformed Hindu movement, or simply an elaboration of Sahjanand himself. What is important about this development, though, is that it altered the usual position of the acaryas, giving each of them a specific geographical power base.

The influence of Gujarati traditions on Swaminarayanism is probably the most obvious and noticeable element of the movement. The inclusion of vegetarianism is one such example, but the stress on success in business is also a strong element of Swaminarayanis' attitudes towards the movement. Not only do Swaminarayanis have a good reputation as honest businessmen (which itself attracts new business), it is also the case that

Becoming a member of the sect also establishes valuable associations because there is a tendency to patronise the business of fellow members (ibid. 141).

Indeed, the stipulations for being a Swaminarayani 'allow for, and even encourage, the acquisition and sober use of worldly possessions' (p.140). Such an attitude to trade and commerce is very Gujarati - there are several communities in Gujarat who are particularly associated with such activity (e.g. Patidars and Lohanas), and some writers have suggested that most Gujaratis have a very business oriented ethos (Tamb-Lyche 1980a, 1980b). Williams even argues that the lifestyles of Swaminarayani ascetics are also a mirror image of Gujarati society. Thus:

Couples yearn for children, and family ties in Gujarat are strong and deep. Yet young men renounce family responsibilities to parents and to future generations. Gujarati cuisine is a point



of pride... Yet ascetics destroy the taste before they eat. Likewise, industry and success in business and financial affairs are praised, but the ascetics renounce all possessions (ibid. 136).

The connection between Swaminarayanism and Gujarat is a two way process, however. Not only did Gujarati traditions play an important part in the formation of the movement, but also the movement itself was an important influence in the emergence of the region as a distinct entity. As noted above, the introduction (by the British) of innovations - such as printing presses and fast transport - obviously helped to spread Sahjanand's new religious ideals throughout the area. But in doing so Swaminarayanis also produced literature which encouraged the standardisation of the Gujarati language from its many dialects (p.24).

What is now the state of Gujarat is composed of several distinct areas, which themselves have divergent traditions and identities, and which are only vaguely united by the development of this common tongue. In the west is Katch, an area of mostly desert which is separated from its eastern neighbours by the sea for some of the year. The peninsular area of Gujarat - Kathiawar or Saurashtra - which is to the east of Katch, is more fertile, and its inhabitants consider themselves distinct from those living in the flat dry lands to the east - around the industrial towns of Ahmedabad and Baroda. These are different again from those to the south on the coastal strip which extends down to Surat, and eventually to Bombay. The unification of these diverse peoples into a distinct region of Gujarat appears to have been the result of the standardisation of the Gujarati language, and the unifying effect of the Swaminarayan movement.

The associations which [Sahjanand's] followers formed across territorial boundaries unified the state... The establishment of holy places and temples as pilgrimage sites started a movement of people and forms of association that have provided a significant element in Gujarati cultural identity (ibid.: 23).

This perhaps devalues the influences of other forms of Hinduism found among Gujaratis, as well as other factors - such as the effect of Mahatma Gandhi's Gujarati-ness on the region. But the connection between Swaminarayanism and Gujarat should be recognised as dialectic<sup>l</sup>/<sub>l</sub> - each has helped in the construction of the other.

Swaminarayanism has not remained static in the years since it was established. A new form of this reformed movement has developed in the twentieth century, which is beginning to outnumber the form established by Sahjanand himself. This is Aksar Purusottam Sanstha, a Swaminarayani sect with a different leadership from the 'old school' (which is still led by the two acaryas in Ahmedabad and Vadtal)<sup>28</sup>. This new movement began to develop in 1906, and over this century has been built up into a highly efficient religious group - it is in fact one of the fastest growing religious movements in Gujarat, and possibly in India (p.44).

The present leader of Aksar Purusottam Sanstha is Swami Narayanswarupdas, although this man is commonly known as Pramukh Swami (President Swami). He is responsible for building up the movement into its present form, which he has done by creating a highly organised system of devolution of power into many different regions and sub-regions. What he has created is 'an effective modern administrative organisation' which is run by a highly centralised leadership, 'with the almost absolute authority in the hands of one man', Pramukh Swami (p.53). Such an organisation is quite unusual for a Hindu group - which generally tend to be loosely organised, with no central authority. This organisation is very flexible to the needs of present day Gujarat, and is able to respond to important developments.

One such development is the growth of wealthy and well educated Gujarati communities in East Africa, and then in Britain and the US. Many of the members of these communities who have become Swaminarayanis have in fact joined Aksar Purusottam Sanstha, rather than the 'old school'. This has made Pramukh Swami and the organisation that he runs an important element among most overseas Gujarati communities.

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<sup>28</sup> The difference between Aksar Purusottam Sanstha and the old school focuses on a theological interpretation of the nature of Sahjanand as Swaminarayan, as well as on the role of the movement's leader. Aksar Purusottam Sanstha is led by a spiritual descendant of one of Sahjanand's chief followers, who is himself regarded as having close to divine status (for an explanation of this rather complicated distinction, see Williams *ibid.*: 71-78).

### 3.3.3 Sanatan Hinduism

#### 3.3.3.1 *Sanatanism and Hinduism*

*Sanatan* Hinduism is a term coined to describe the orthodox religious traditions which have developed in reaction to reformist movements, such as Arya Samaj and Swaminarayanism. The term itself is rather meaningless, or rather it has so many divergent meanings that use of it is rather uncertain. It is sometimes used to define a particular sect or group based around a temple, thus some Sanatanis are members of temples or religious groups called 'Sanatan Mandir', 'Sanatan Dharm Mandir', or 'Sanatan Dharm Sangh'<sup>29</sup>. More often, however, the term Sanatani is used to define orthodox, traditional, or unreformed Hinduism - particularly with reference to Arya Samajis or Swaminarayanis. Thus Sanatanis can be anything from extremely strict counter-reformist groups, to the more numerous eclectic Hindus who have no definite sectarian affiliations.

The notion of Sanatanism is used in Panjabi contexts to refer to strict Brahmanical Hindus, especially those Hindus who did not become Arya Samajis. It is a term greatly used by Jones in his discussion of Arya Samaj in the nineteenth century (1976), and it is often unclear whether he is talking about a single organised sect who were self-conscious of their status as Sanatanis, or if he is using it as an umbrella term to include the multitude of different groups who did not accept Dayanand's reforms.

However, in other contexts - particularly among South Asians overseas - the term is used very much as an inclusive category: to label ordinary mainstream Hindus. In this context, especially in East Africa and Britain, social scientists have begun to use the phrase to refer to the new styles of Hinduism which are developing. That is, there is a growing feeling that British Hindus belong to three main groups - Arya Samaj, Swaminarayanism, and Sanatan Hinduism; with the latter being the majority form, and

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Jones (1976: 111); Bharati (1972: 300); Morris (1967: 55-59); and §3.5.1.

the closest to mainstream 'Hinduism'. This implies that Sanatan Hinduism is somehow distinct from sub-continent based Hinduism, and that perhaps it is a new form of the religion. Such a view contradicts the views of British Hindus - even though they may worship at Sanatani style temples, and have beliefs and practices which fall into the descriptive category of 'Sanatani', these people maintain that they are Hindus of a similar type to their relatives in India.

The term '*Sanatan dharm*' itself refers to the eternal religion/order/way of life - it is meant to be a definition of Hindu religion, a Hindi alternative to the phrase 'Hinduism'. That is, to understand the complexity of Hindu religious traditions we have to understand the complexities of Sanatan dharm. But this is complicated by the fact that most forms of Sanatanism tend to be heavily Sanskritic based. They are made up of worship of Puranic gods, recognition of Vedic rituals, and other styles of belief and worship which belong to what other writers would describe as the 'Great Tradition'. But again there is the problem that Sanatanism refers to various different great or Sanskritic traditions, as well as including other regional and local traditions. It is very hard to say whether Sanatanism is itself a tradition, or whether it is a collection of different traditions which are labelled together for the sake of convenience.

### 3.3.3.2 *Sanatanism, Arya Samaj, and Swaminarayanism*

The consideration of Arya Samaj and Swaminarayanism within this section has been for two purposes. Firstly, both reformist traditions illustrate the ambiguity of the various forms of Hinduism - since both make claims to be 'properly' Hindu, whilst both are appealing to only certain elements within the diversity of Hinduism. Secondly, both reformist traditions have had important effects on 'mainstream' Hinduism in the regions from which they originated - i.e. in Panjab and Gujarat.

Moreover, both of these traditions have also played important roles in the development of diaspora Hinduism within various parts of the world, particularly among East Africans. These developments have themselves been important in the re-

creation of Hindu traditions in Edinburgh. As I will show in the next sections, the dialogue between Sanatanism and these reformist traditions in East Africa helped to create the traditions which were brought from there to Britain in later years. In other words, it is not possible to understand developments within the Edinburgh Hindu temple without understanding the various traditions which are helping to shape it.

### **3.4 THE HINDU DIASPORAS**

Hinduism - and Hindus - are not confined to the Indian sub-continent. Hindu religious traditions have spread to many parts of the world. Much of South East Asia has been influenced by the spread of Hindus in the past two millennia (see Michell 1977: 159-184; Burghart 1987: 3), from which have emerged forms of Hinduism which are quite distinct from sub-continental Hinduism. Contact between India and the eastern coast of Africa has been occurring for almost as long (see Ghai & Ghai 1970: 2; Hollingsworth 1960: 9-17).

Migrations that occurred during the colonial and post-colonial periods - over the past 150 years - are of most concern to this discussion. British control of India and other territories encouraged large movements of Indians (mainly Hindus) to many different parts of the world. These migrations have been in various stages, and the conditions of each are distinct from each other. Thus it must be borne in mind that there are multiple forms of 'diaspora' Hinduism, which vary according to a number of different factors. These differences are over and above those aspects of diversity which have already been discussed in this chapter.

These migrations have been motivated by different circumstances and went to very different cultural and geographical areas. It is not surprising, therefore, that settlers in each of these regions have developed distinct outlooks and traditions. But it is important to remember that the participants in each of these migrations also came from different regional traditions, and so the cultural baggage that they took with them was different in most instances.

### 3.4.1 Colonial migrations

#### 3.4.1.1 *Indenture*

British influence in India encouraged Indians (and other South Asians) to migrate to other areas of the (then existing) Empire<sup>30</sup>. Some of these migrations were more voluntary than others. The most notorious and widespread of these was under the indenture system, which operated between 1834 and 1917 (Clarke et al 1990: 8; Tinker 1974). Under this system approximately one and a half million Indians were taken to work on sugar and cocoa plantations in the Pacific, the Indian Ocean, and the Caribbean. These workers, who were regarded as a cheap source of labour to replace the recently abolished slaves, often had to live and work in extremely harsh conditions (see Mayer 1963, 1973 [1961]; Benedict 1961; Tinker 1974).

Despite the harshness of life in these colonies, many of the indentured labourers chose to remain after their contracts had expired - some continuing to work on the plantations, whilst others settled as small-holding farmers. As a result, large communities of Indians developed in a number of British (and French<sup>31</sup>) former colonies. These included Mauritius (Benedict 1961; Carter 1987), South Africa (Kuper 1960; Beall 1990; Lemon 1990), Surinam (Speckman 1965; Burg & van der Veer 1986), Guadeloupe, Martinique and Reunion (Singaravelou 1990), Guyana (Jayawardena 1966, 1973), Trinidad and Tobago (Vertovec 1987, 1989, 1990, n.d.1), and Fiji (Mayer 1963, 1973).

In some of these places, the Indian population has grown to outnumber the

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<sup>30</sup> In this section I shall be giving a simplified description of migration patterns from South Asia during the colonial and post-colonial periods. My aim is to give a general picture of the main migrations, rather than to be definitive. For more detailed accounts, the reader should look at Clarke et al (1990), Tinker (1974, 1977), Vertovec (n.d.2), and Visram (1986). There have been many other smaller migrations of South Asians during this period which I shall not be detailing in this discussion, for example the migration of Sikhs to California in the early twentieth century (see LaBrack 1988), traders to Fiji, and early Indian settlers in Britain (see Visram 1986).

<sup>31</sup> Clarke et al point out that '... following the abolition of slavery in their own colonies... French and Dutch planters reached agreements with British authorities in India to obtain labourers under the [indentured labour] system' (1990: 8).

already existing population - particularly in Fiji, Mauritius, and Trinidad. In other countries Indians have remained small minority communities. In nearly all of these instances the settlers were predominantly Hindus (making up 85% according to Clarke et al 1990: 11). It has been well documented that most of the indentured labour migrants were recruited in Calcutta (Clarke et al *ibid.*: 8; Mayer 1973: 3), and the scheme drew workers from a fairly small area (mainly from parts of Bihar and what is now Uttar Pradesh). Thus settlers in Fiji, Mauritius, South Africa, and Trinidad and Tobago tended to belong to traditions which originated in these regions<sup>32</sup>.

#### 3.4.1.2 *Contract labour schemes*

Between 1852 and 1937 there was another British organised migration of Indians, this time to the nearby countries of Burma, Malaysia, and Ceylon<sup>33</sup> (Sri Lanka). In this case, however, the migration was under contract labour schemes (*maistry* and *kangani* systems, see Clarke et al 1990: 8-10), which were less harsh than indentured labour. Most of these migrants returned to India after their contracts expired, but they have left Indian communities in all of these countries - for Burma see Chakravarti (1971), for Malaysia see Arasaratnam (1970), Jain (1970), Mearns (1983, 1986, 1987). These contract labourers were mainly recruited in Madras, and the majority of them were Tamils and Telugu-speakers.

Thus - in contrast to the indentured labourers - Hindus in Burma, Malaysia, and Sri Lanka were dominated by south Indian traditions and cultural forms. Another important difference was that the indentured labour migrants were shipped to areas far from India, and if they chose to stay in these places they were usually too poor to return

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<sup>32</sup> Other indentured labourers were recruited in Madras, and came from Tamil and Telugu areas. But these make up a smaller proportion of the communities in which they settled - for example, in Fiji approximately 46,000 migrants came from north India, while only 15,000 came from Madras (Mayer 1973: 3). A smaller number of mainly Gujaratis and Panjabis also settled in these areas in later years. In these cases, they migrated for the purpose of establishing trading businesses, rather than going as indentured labourers (Clarke et al 1990: 13).

<sup>33</sup> In the case of Sri Lanka, there was already a long established Tamil Indian population living in the country before the advent of the contract labour schemes. Those Indians who migrated to Sri Lanka through the *kangani* scheme kept themselves distinct, however.

to India to visit<sup>34</sup>. This meant that contacts with relatives and the sending-society were very weak, and in fact grew weaker over time. On the other hand, the contract labourers remained fairly close to home, and so the communities that grew up out of this latter category were able to keep strong ties with their original cultural base. Thus the two types of migration led to quite different types of community.

### 3.4.2 Trading migrations - East Africa

The British colonial government also encouraged another flow of migrants out of India. This was to the British colonies of East Africa, but the conditions of this migration were very different from those under contract or indentured labour schemes. Indians moved to East Africa to establish businesses and to work in the middle ranks of the colonial administration. It is clear that some Indians went to East Africa as indentured labour - most notably to construct the Kenya-Uganda Railway - but most scholars emphasise that such migrants only account for a small portion of the communities that settled in these countries (Ghai and Ghai 1970: 3; Hollingsworth 1960: 51; Gregory 1971: 52-3; Mangat 1969: 39; Morris 1968: 8-9). The majority of East African Asians migrated to take up trading opportunities - to become '*dukanwalas*' (shopkeepers) - in a newly expanding area of the British Empire.

East African Hindus were predominantly Panjabis and Gujaratis. Gujarat has had trading links with the East African coastal area for many centuries, because of the favourable winds that blow across the Arabian sea. These links developed into a flood of migrants making the most of the opportunities that became available with the spread of colonial rule in the higher inland areas of Kenya and Uganda in the late nineteenth century. Panjabis - many of whom made the most of British colonial rule to become soldiers and traders within India - also realised the possibilities that East Africa offered.

From 1890 to the 1950s there was a steady stream of Indians settling in East

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<sup>34</sup> Most indenture schemes offered workers a return ticket to India if they did not wish to remain in the colony when their contract of indenture was over (usually after ten years).



Africa. The flow ceased at the time of de-colonialisation and nationalisation - when these countries became the independent African countries of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. Like the South East Asian contract labourers, the East Africans remained in contact with the communities in India from which they had come.

### **3.4.3 Post-colonial migrations**

#### *3.4.3.1 Migrations to Europe*

The traumatic events of Partition between Indian and Pakistan led to massive population upheavals in Panjab. This probably encouraged many displaced Panjabis to move for a second time - to the United Kingdom - when it became clear that there were excellent employment prospects there (since at the time there was a shortage of labour in key sections of British industry<sup>35</sup>). Gujaratis, who had benefited greatly from British encouragement in East Africa, were also inclined to migrate to the United Kingdom in the post-war era. This led to the settlement of over a million South Asians in Western countries, predominantly in the United Kingdom. A sizeable number of migrants also came to take up professional positions (e.g., as doctors), or to set up businesses. Many South Asians who originally migrated to work in industry soon moved into retail businesses, and other areas of the economy (see Nowikowski & Ward 1979; Werbner 1979, 1980, 1987c).

The expulsion of Asians from East Africa in the 1960s and 70s resulted in a further influx of Panjabis and Gujaratis to Britain. This exodus was a result of de-colonialisation and 'Africanisation' in the newly formed countries of Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. The Asian populations of these countries were put under intense pressure during this period. Administrative jobs in the civil service which had traditionally been held by Asians were given to Africans, and incentives were given to non-Asians to take more control of the retail economy. This squeeze on East African

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<sup>35</sup> See Desai (1963: 1-2); Anwar (1985: 25-26).

Asians reached its most dramatic and brutal form in Uganda, when in 1972 President Idi Amin ordered the expulsion of the entire Asian population (see Twaddle 1975, Marrett 1989).

Refugees from Uganda, along with Asians under threat in other East African countries, were thus forced to migrate for a second time. Some of these returned to India, but the Indian government refused to accept more than a handful of the migrants (Twaddle 1975; Melady & Melady 1976). Many of these refugees had colonial British passports, but only a small proportion were given permission to settle in Britain - due to fears of 'swamping' and 'invasion' (Kuepper et al : 43-44; Plender 1972; Humphrey & Ward 1974)<sup>36</sup>. Other East African Asians had to migrate to other parts of the world - some to the United States and Canada<sup>37</sup>, some to European countries such as Norway, Denmark and Sweden, and others to Australia. In this way, the South Asian diaspora became even more diverse.

#### *3.4.3.2 Migrations to America and the Middle-East*

Another significant migration of South Asians to north America has also developed during the post-colonial period. Most of these migrants were well-educated professionals, who qualified under the strict conditions for entry into the United States and Canada. This migration has only recently been noticed by scholars (Williams 1988; Fenton 1988; Buchignani 1983; Buchignani and Indra 1985; Saran 1985; Saran & Eames 1980). The reason for the lack of attention was probably because migrants did not arrive in sizeable numbers until after 1965<sup>38</sup>. South Asians in the US are extremely heterogeneous in respect of region of origin - there is no particular group which dominates. This has led to some interesting developments among Hindus in the US, which I shall discuss below (see §3.5.2).

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<sup>36</sup> According to official estimates a total of about 28,000 Ugandan Asians went to Britain following the expulsion (Kuepper et al 1975: 111; Humphrey & Ward 1974: 151).

<sup>37</sup> It was often the best qualified who were given visas to these countries.

<sup>38</sup> This was the year in which US immigration laws were changed, see Williams (1988: 1-3).

The oil-rich Arab Gulf states have also been a popular area for South Asian migration in recent decades (see Gunatilleke 1986; Ballard 1987; Knerr 1990)<sup>39</sup>. The flow of remittances from workers in these countries has had significant effects on parts of the Indian economy. The Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and the second Gulf War that followed, have had devastating implications for these migrants - although at present it is hard to judge what will happen to South Asian migrations to this region.

There has also been a fair degree of contact between members of different diasporas. This has been primarily because of secondary migrations. For example, Vertovec (1992: 260-62, n.d.3) has described a group of Indo-Caribbeans who are now living in London, whilst there are also a number of Mauritians (Mannick 1987, Lingayah 1987). Similarly, Tambs-Lyche (1980a: 4) mentions a Fijian Indian that he knew living in London. There are in Edinburgh not only East Africans and direct migrants, but also Mauritian, South African, and Malaysian Indians - all of whom have brought the varied traditions of these different diasporas. There has also been a great deal of migration between East Africa, Britain, and the US and Canada - and the rate of this migration appears to be accelerating. This network of migrations also involves India itself - members of the various diasporas do also migrate to the country, as well as migrating from it.

### **3.5 HINDUISM IN THE DIASPORAS**

#### **3.5.1 Hindus in East Africa**

The development of Hinduism in East Africa is an extremely good example of the ways in which religious traditions can adapt and alter in a new environment. However, it must be remembered that East African Hindu life was severely disrupted by the traumatic (and often violent) events following Independence in the 1960s and 1970s. The most extreme case was the expulsion of the whole Asian population from

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<sup>39</sup> The best ethnographic description of South Asians in the Gulf is in a novel by Ghosh (1986).

Uganda by Idi Amin in 1972. Although there are still Hindu (and other Asian) populations in most of the East African countries now, the ethnographic data that is available about East African Asians stops around 1972 - after which it was assumed no further research was possible or necessary. Thus, in this section, East African Hindus are discussed in the past tense - the situation described has probably ceased to exist.

What is of great importance regarding these communities is that the expulsion and migration of South Asians from East Africa led to many of them arriving and settling in Britain. A number of these have subsequently migrated again (to the United States, Canada, Australia, or India), but a significant number of formerly East African Asians are now resident in Britain. It is clear, therefore, that the groups and communities described by Morris (1968) and Bharati (1967, 1972, 1976) are very closely related to groups and communities that now exist in Britain. The younger generations of Asians who were emerging in the 1960s in East Africa are now leaders and sponsors of community projects, temples, groups, etc. in the United Kingdom. Thus an examination of the development of religious traditions in East Africa provides crucial background to understanding subsequent developments among these communities following their re-transplanting to Britain.

East African Hindus organised primarily around their differences, maintaining communities based on regional, caste-jati, and sectarian identities. These three main factors overlapped with each other to produce many small communities, each of which attempted to keep themselves separate and distinct from other East African Hindu groups. All these groups kept themselves *en masse* separate and distinct from the other social groups in East Africa - there was little contact between South Asians and Africans in the years prior to and soon after Independence.

### 3.5.1.1 *An urban population*

One of the most important aspects of East African Hindu (and Asian) life was that it was predominantly urban - it was based in the large cities such as Nairobi, Kampala,

and Zanzibar. According to Bharati

[Nearly] all Asians in East Africa are urban people, with urban tastes, and with urban aspirations (1967: 291).

Bhachu makes a similar point, saying that most East African Asians 'developed a taste for urban status symbols' (1985: 25).

These urban centres were British built and British inspired (indeed much more so than in India), and so many of the 'urban aspirations' Bharati refers to were influenced strongly by British colonial rule. It is possibly for this reason that voluntary associations sprung up to serve the needs of the various Asian and Hindu communities. Such associations were particularly urban creations, and those found in East Africa were influenced to a high degree by British models. Thus schools, cultural centres, and temples emerged, each of which was run by a committee and/or a board of trustees.

The influence from Britain was perhaps indirect - Morris points out that most Hindu (and Muslim) 'communal' organisations were modelled on highly successful Shia Imam Ismaili projects, initiated by Aga Khan and his followers (1968: 34, 43-44). Ismailis were the most westernised of all Asian groups in East Africa, and their success made them into a 'pace-setter' for developments among the Asian population as a whole.

East Africa was also very close to India - contact with the subcontinent could easily be maintained, by post and by visits over the Arabian Sea. Thus language and cultural ideas were maintained, and developments in India could be translated into developments within East African Indian populations (although not completely). This contact with India ensured that caste-jati groups could remain endogamous and inward looking - since spouses could easily be brought over when necessary. But the emergence of second, third, and fourth generations of East African Hindus produced a situation where a majority of the population were distinctively East African, rather than Indian. To these people, India was a concept rather than a real place, and the transplant of ideas and institutions had resulted in subtle and significant shifts.

### 3.5.1.2 Regional differences

The difference between Panjabis and Gujaratis was perhaps the greatest cleavage between Hindus. Their languages were different, and many of their points of reference differed too. According to Bharati, whenever Gujaratis used the word 'Hindu' to describe a person or a group it was meant specifically to refer to Gujaratis, and not to Panjabis. This was encouraged by the fact that it was Gujaratis who mainly dominated East African Hindu life - particularly through their dominance of the business sphere.

It requires some directive prodding to make them agree (which they do with some amazement) that Panjabi[s]... are Hindus, too (1967: 303).

Such people considered their Gujarati-ness to be 'their most general denominator of identification' (ibid.) - they did not consider themselves to have anything in common with other non-Gujarati Indians. Nearly all Gujaratis shared an

identical ideological content: a highly ritualistic, puritanical<sup>40</sup>, largely anthropomorphical theology (ibid.).

All these factors helped to encourage an idea of separateness among the Gujarati communities - thus they considered themselves to be both separate from other Hindus, and also separate from non-Hindus.

This notion of Gujarati-ness was often divided into smaller sub-regional clusters - particularly between Katchis (from the western extreme of the modern state of Gujarat) and Gujaratis proper (i.e., those from the Saurashtra peninsular and the eastern coastal areas). Katchis speak a different dialect from Gujaratis, although they use the same Gujarati script for reading and writing. Bharati notes that nearly all Katchis in East Africa spoke Gujarati fluently (1967: 300), and most younger Katchis preferred to speak Gujarati rather than their own dialect (ibid.: 308).

The distinction between Gujarat and Katch was in fact quite blurred. In East Africa - all Asians apart from non-Katchi Gujaratis - referred to *both* Katchis *and*

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<sup>40</sup> The notion that Gujarati Hinduism is 'puritanical' will be discussed below (§3.5.1.4), and is mainly argued in Bharati (1976).

Gujaratis as 'Katchis' (or 'Cutchis', *ibid.*: 298). On the other hand, the creation of the Indian state of Gujarat in 1965 (which includes Katch within it) means that Katchis have become, officially, Gujaratis. Over the past few centuries many Katchis in India have migrated into Saurashtra, and other parts of Gujarat proper, because of famine or lack of work. Thus there is now a considerable 'Katchi' population living outside Katch, but yet inside Gujarat. However, this distinction was also based on caste-jati as well as sub-region - most East African Katchis were Lohanas (*ibid.*: 308), one of the main caste-jati groups, which will be discussed below (§3.5.1.3). This made Lohanas a group which was geographically distinct from the Patidars - who originated from central Gujarat, close to Ahmedabad.

Apart from these sub-divisions within the East African Gujarati population, these Gujaratis maintained a common separation from other Hindus - particularly from Panjabis. At the same time, however, this regional (and linguistic) distinctiveness was also important for the Panjabi Hindus. Many Panjabis in East Africa were Sikhs (Bharati 1967: 314), and in fact most Panjabi Hindus saw themselves as having more in common with Sikhs than with Gujaratis.

Bharati points out that Sikhs (in East Africa, as well as in India) did not consider themselves to be very distinct from Panjabi Hindus until the rise of Sikh nationalism in the 1920s (1972: 68), a point which has been discussed earlier<sup>41</sup>. Even during the 1960s, Hindus in East Africa maintained strong ties with Sikh groups - in many cases marrying with them, and frequently bringing up a first born son as a Sikh (Bharati 1972: 69)<sup>42</sup>. Panjabi Hindus certainly maintained separate religious traditions from Gujaratis in East Africa. According to Bharati

Panjabi Hindus, when they are not Arya Samajis, feel more comfortable in the Sikh ritualistic milieu than with the elaborate forms of Hindu ceremony prevalent among the Gujarati-groups in the area. Panjabi Hindu women chant passages from the Sikh scriptures, and the pattern of simile and parable which they use is derived from the Sikh gurus... (*ibid.*: 69).

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<sup>41</sup> See §2.3.1 and §3.3.1, and also in Fox (1985); Kapur (1986); Ballard (n.d.).

<sup>42</sup> This is a fairly common Panjabi practice, see §2.3.1.2.

These Panjabis maintained their own separate temples in most cities in East Africa - run by trustees from their communities, and pandits brought from Panjab. These pandits conducted separate rituals, which were specifically for Panjabis (Bharati 1972: 296).

### 3.5.1.3 *Caste-jati differences*

Within each of these regional groups there were also important caste-jati and sectarian differences, which helped to define and create group membership. Panjabi caste-jati groups were perhaps less important than those Gujaratis, and so, according to Bharati, 'Panjabis would mix with each other socially, quite regardless of their caste' (1967: 300). However, he says elsewhere that Hindu Ramgharias and Jats (two Panjabi caste-jati groups, which are both predominantly Sikh) married freely across *religious* denominations, but tended to practise *caste-jati* endogamy (Bharati 1972: 70), although not strictly so (*ibid.*: 73).

However, the majority of East African Panjabi Hindus were Khattri (Bharati 1967: 316) - these are a group of caste-jatis which have slightly higher status than Jats and Ramgharias, and to which a large number of Sikhs in Panjab belong (although there were few Khattri Sikhs in East Africa). Bharati does not mention any marriages between Khattris and other Panjabi caste-jatis in East Africa, but he does stress that there was quite intense socialising between all these groups.

There was an exception to this trend, however, which was the Panjabi group of Valmikis, who are a 'low' caste-jati of Chamars (leather-workers)<sup>43</sup>, and who were kept socially and religiously separate from all other Panjabi Hindu groups (Bharati 1972: 35, 70, 315-6; 1967: 289).

Amongst Gujaratis there were two main caste-jati groups - that is, Patidars and Lohanas. A great deal has been written about the distinctiveness of these two caste-jati

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<sup>43</sup> For an account of Valmikis in Britain, see Nesbitt (1990a, 1990b).



groups, particularly with reference to their origins, and their marriage systems<sup>44</sup>. This distinctiveness was also marked by different religious organisations for the two caste-jati groups - in fact different sections of these groups often had their own religious organisations or temples (e.g. Barot 1972). Sometimes - although not always - these caste-jati (and intra-caste) group divisions overlapped with sectarian divisions (see Barot 1972, 1980: 18-22).

Patidar and Lohana groups dominated the Hindu Gujarati population in East Africa, and so in general Gujaratis were perceived by non-Gujaratis as being analogous to these two caste-jatis. For example, the Ugandan Railway - built and served mainly by Gujaratis - was jokingly referred to as 'Patel Railway' (Williams 1984: 174-5). 'Patel' is a Gujarati family name, which is usually indicative of Patidar status. There were a small number of other Gujarati caste-jati groups in East Africa, however - about five percent of the Hindu Gujarati population were Baniyas, whilst about one percent were Brahmans (Bharati 1967: 309). Other caste-jati groups were present in small clusters (for a list of these - or at least the groups that later migrated to Britain - see Michaelson 1979).

#### *3.5.1.4 Sectarian differences*

There were important sectarian differences in both the Panjabi and Gujarati populations in East Africa. Panjabis differed according to whether they were Arya Samajis or not, whilst Gujaratis were divided into Swaminarayanis and 'orthodox' Hindus.

Arya Samaj was taken to East Africa by migrant Panjabis - its transfer was not as deliberate as the missionary activities which took Arya Samaj to the indentured Hindu diaspora groups, such as Trinidad and Guyana (see Vertovec 1989: 174-5, Jayawardena 1966: 233-34, 1980: 435). The effects of Arya Samaj among East

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<sup>44</sup> See Pocock (1954, 1957a, 1957b, 1972, 1973); Michaelson (1979, 1983); Bharati (1967); Barot (1972, 1980); Morris (1967).

African Hindus were quite significant, however. About half of the Panjabi population were Arya Samaji (Bharati 1972: 279), and there was a very small group of Gujaratis (particularly Lohanas) who had also become followers of this sect (ibid.: 58, 280, 305).

Like elsewhere<sup>45</sup>, a general distinction was made between Arya Samajis and 'Sanatanis'. In East Africa, the former were considered to be 'modern', progressive, and reformist (ibid.: 279), whilst the latter were followers of 'orthodox' Hinduism - which was (supposedly) still stuck in its old-fashioned ritualistic and idolatrous ways. Arya Samajis practised *Hawan* sacrifices and eschewed those elements of Hinduism which they considered degenerate - such as hereditary caste-jati divisions or post-Vedic beliefs and worship. On the other hand, Sanatanis were eclectic, they followed various religious traditions, most of which were based on *bhakti* models of devotion.

Bharati argues that this distinction between Arya Samajis and Sanatanis was a major cleavage within the East African population - and so any Hindu who was not a Samaji was, by default, a Sanatani. He also argues that the relations between these two groups provided much of the dynamic for cultural and religious change. But although Arya Samajis were a fairly homogeneous group, the Sanatanis certainly were not - and to reduce the many different non-Samaji traditions in East Africa into a single category does a great deal of violence to their diversity<sup>46</sup>. As I have already pointed out non-Samaji Hindus were sub-divided into Panjabis and Gujaratis (which were fairly exclusive groups), and these Gujaratis were further divided into several caste-jati groups, and into even smaller units.

Panjabi Sanatani Hindus were, in many respects, close to their Sikh neighbours. Their religious traditions had also been drastically affected by relations with Arya Samajis - first in Panjab itself, and subsequently in East Africa. In many respects

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<sup>45</sup> For example in Panjab itself (see §3.3.1, §3.3.3), and in Trinidad and Guyana.

<sup>46</sup> This is in marked contrast to Trinidad Hinduism where there was indeed a far higher degree of homogenisation among 'Sanatanists' (see Vertovec 1989, n.d.1).

Panjabi Sanatani Hindus defined themselves as *distinct* from Samajis (as well as from Gujaratis), whilst *sharing* common religious traditions with Sikhs<sup>47</sup> and with these same Samajis. Thus what was generally considered to be ‘sanatanism’ was chiefly the product of intra-Panjabi interaction. This much is admitted by Bharati himself, who says

The distinction between *sanatani* and *Arya Samaj* has proper meaning only where there is a large group of Panjabi Hindus (ibid.: 280).

Gujarati Sanatanis were very different from this - their religious traditions were unaffected by Arya Samaj until Gujaratis settled in East Africa. There were internal divisions within these traditions which created their own distinctive blends of Hinduism - whilst a major reformist influence was that of Swaminarayanism. Contact between Gujarati Sanatanis and (mainly Panjabi) Arya Samajis had become an important part of life in East Africa, but the result of this contact had still produced a very different form of sanatanism among Gujaratis to that found among East African Panjabis. Thus Bharati’s simple binary distinction between Arya Samajis and Sanatanis must be treated with a great deal of caution.

It appears, however, that this distinction was also one that East African Hindus themselves made, and that it was important to them in some ways. There were several temples called ‘Sanatan Dharma’, which obviously alluded to this notion. Morris describes the ‘Sanatan Dharm Mandal’ (the main Hindu temple in Kampala) which was mainly run by and for Gujarati Hindus (1967: 55-59). A temple of the same name in Nairobi was predominantly Panjabi (Bharati 1972: 300). From the descriptions each writer gives of these temples, it is clear that they operated primarily for their respective regional communities - there was no attempt to bridge the gap between the two forms of ‘Sanatanism’. Thus, even if the distinction between Arya Samajis and Sanatanis was important to East African Hindus, the definition of Sanatanism was extremely ambiguous.

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<sup>47</sup> See §3.5.1.2 above, and Bharati (1972: 69).

Bearing this in mind, it is also worth considering the distinctions that were made between these two groups. Bharati stresses that there was a popular conception among nearly all East African Hindus that Arya Samajis were progressive, innovative, and modern (1972: 305; 1976: 329), whilst Sanatanis tended to be 'bound by obsolete "superstitions"' (1976: 329). In fact, Bharati found that almost the reverse was the case, and so sanatanis tended to be more progressive and open to innovations - 'ritualistically eclectic and theologically accommodating' (ibid.) - whilst Samajis were bound by strict adherence to what they thought were Swami Dayanand's teachings. Again this distinction fails to take into account the diversity within the sanatani groups. This diversity, coupled with most sanatanis' basic eclecticism, encouraged a greater measure of broad-mindedness and openness to development than the more strict and exclusive teachings of Arya Samaj.

This leads to Bharati's most surprising conclusion - that is, his claim that all Hindus in east Africa, *sanatani*, Arya Samaj, and non-aligned, share a style of moralization that is Arya Samajist (1976: 329, emphasis in original).

He argues that the puritanism and strict moral code of Arya Samajis had been taken up by all other East African Hindus. This is not a surprising claim to make about Panjabi Hindus, who shared many cultural traditions with Samajis. But the claim is far harder to substantiate for the many Gujarati Hindu groups. What Bharati is claiming is that Gujarati sanatan Hinduism drastically changed in East Africa as a result of contact and conflict with Panjabi Arya Samajis.

He adduces as evidence for this his belief that Gujaratis moved away from the epicureanism of the Vallabhacarya traditions found within Gujarat<sup>48</sup> to more puritan lifestyles and attitudes - such as control over passions, control of family, and the upholding of one's duty to be good in business and as a family member (ibid.: 329-

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<sup>48</sup> As already noted in the previous section (see §3.3.2.1), there was a movement in nineteenth century Gujarat - mainly associated with Swaminarayan - away from the Vallabhacarya traditions, which had become renowned for their adherents' over-indulgent lifestyles (see Barot 1980: 168-70; Williams 1984: 20-1).

333). Likewise, the importance of Krishna was played down, because of his associations with eroticism and sensuality. Instead, the more chaste Ram was honoured, and Krishna was only known for his role as the proponent of the Bhagawad Gita. Bharati argues that these developments created a hybrid version of Gujarati sanatanism, which remained ritualistically tolerant (since many rituals still contained references to the more playful and sensuous elements of Krishna's life), but which had become 'ideologically rigorous' - that is, it had taken on board many Arya Samaji notions.

The abstraction of Krishna from an amorous cowherd to a moral philosopher and teacher was perhaps a small move towards the Arya Samaji rejection of 'idolatry and superstition', but it was still a long way from the absolutism of the Samaji rejection of all forms of post-Vedic Hinduism. Whereas Bharati may believe that this chastening of Krishna's image demonstrated a movement in the direction of Arya Samaji 'puritanism', most Arya Samajis would still dismiss the Krishna of the Gita as much as the Krishna of Braj.

But Bharati is ignoring the huge influence that Swaminarayanism has had on the various Gujarati Hindu traditions. Although Bharati (and perhaps many East African Hindus) makes a binary distinction between Arya Samajis and Sanatanis, the distinction is actually fourfold into:

Arya Samajis, Panjabi Sanatanis, Gujarati Sanatanis, and Swaminarayanis.

The reason, perhaps, why Bharati overlooked the importance of Swaminarayanis is because they were so indistinguishable from other Gujarati Hindus. Many Swaminarayanis regularly worshipped in Gujarati sanatan temples, and vice versa. Thus the importance of Swaminarayanism among Gujarati Hindus was very hard to judge.

In fact, Swaminarayanism has had a crucial impact on Gujarati Hinduism in a number of ways, as I have already discussed above (see §3.3.2). With respect to Bharati's observations about the philosophy of Gujarati householders (described

above), much of what he attributes to Arya Samaj is also very typical of Swaminarayani thinking (see §3.3.2.2 above, and Williams 1984: 136-142). It is quite probable that the forebears of many of the Gujaratis studied by Bharati also attempted to exercise control over their passions and children, and also believed in upholding their duty to business etc. - long before they migrated to East Africa. It appears to be a rather wild assumption to say that this was the result of Arya Samaji teachings. This strain of Swaminarayani tradition is found through much of Gujarat, and it was a major influence on the philosophy of M.K. Gandhi. The 'convergence' between Gandhi's philosophy and that of many Arya Samajis described by Bharati (1976: 331-333) is simply the result of convergence between Swaminarayanism and Arya Samaj on this point, not because they had influenced each other<sup>49</sup>.

The assumed transformation of Krishna from erotic to moral philosopher is perhaps over-stated by Bharati. Many Swaminarayanis - whom Bharati describes as 'Essenic' (1970: 40) - worship Krishna as the lover in the form of Radha-Krishna (Williams 1984: 63-4). Although I have come across instances of East African Gujaratis in Edinburgh who are unaware of this 'erotic' element of Krishna worship<sup>50</sup>, many others are fully aware of both aspects of Krishna and see no conflict between them<sup>51</sup>. If it happened at all, the shift from Krishna the lover to Krishna the moral philosopher was the result of a general shift in Gujarat away from the *perceived* excesses of Vallabhacaryas and Pushtimargis in the nineteenth century described in §3.3.2 above. This shift was one of the factors inspiring the growth of Swaminarayanism, as well as being greatly inspired by it.

Following on from this, Bharati must be exaggerating when he claims that

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<sup>49</sup> The convergence may well be the result of the fact that both traditions arose as reformist movements, within British ruled India, at around the same time.

<sup>50</sup> A Gujarati student living in Edinburgh was amazed to discover the Bhagavata Purana, and to read of Krishna's 'amorous adventures'. He said that when he told his father about this work, the father had denied that such literature exists.

<sup>51</sup> Indeed, pictures of Krishna as lover have been put up in the Edinburgh temple by East African Gujaratis. One of these pictures shows the incident in Krishna's youth when he steals clothes from the (naked) bathing *gopis*. As far as I know there have been no complaints about the presence of this picture from any source.

The chthonic-sexual [sic] Krishna lore was ubiquitous in the parts of India where the grandparents of four-fifths of the [East African Hindu] settlers originated (1976: 332).

Even if such 'lore' was ubiquitous at the time of emigration, it is now no longer so.

The claim that there was a shift from worship of Krishna (in all his manifestations) to worship of Ram is even more speculative. This putative development - on the grounds that Ram is a chaste, and unambiguously moral hero, unlike the more ambiguous Krishna - again assumes that there has been a move away from 'sensualism' and towards 'puritanism', and that this has been inspired by Arya Samaj.

M.K. Gandhi's (along with many East African Gujaratis) attachment to the Gita, suggests that Krishna can be an important focus of worship without being associated with eroticism. In fact, there is no real reason to describe the shift from Krishna to Ram (if it has happened at all) as a rejection of sensuality. Chaudhuri's (1979: 252-292) dismissal of the western pre-occupation with the erotic element of Krishna is highly relevant here. It appears that the importance of Krishna the lover has been 'orientalised' and exaggerated both by western observers, and by western influenced Hindus. The worship of Krishna as a lover does not necessarily entail any degree of sensualism or eroticism on the part of his worshippers. Likewise, a shift away from such worship cannot be assumed to be an indicator of any shift towards puritanism. It is the western observer who is obsessed by eroticism in this case - not the worshippers themselves.

Bharati's claims about the development of Hinduism in East Africa fail to take account of the multiplicity of traditions within the groups that he labels 'sanatanis'. In particular he grossly underestimates the profound influence that Swaminarayanism has had on Gujarati Hinduism as a whole. The development of East African Gujarati Hinduism can only be understood through its interaction with Swaminarayanism - much more so than looking at its interaction with Arya Samajis. Thus there are *at least* two distinct forms of East African sanatanism - Panjabi and Gujarati sanatanism - and

each of these is the product of quite different and separate processes.

### 3.5.1.5 *The importance of East Africa*

It must be remembered, however, that Bharati's observations about East Africa are still extremely useful - even though his speculations (and judgments) tend to be rather idiosyncratic, and his data is rather haphazardly presented. He was one of the handful of ethnographers to write about a situation which developed rapidly, and then equally rapidly disintegrated. The relevance of East African Hinduism to the situation among British Hindus in the 1990s cannot be stressed enough, and it is unfortunate that the type of detailed research that has been done on British Hindu communities was never carried out in East Africa.

A final word about East Africa is worth noting, since it is possibly very relevant to the situation in Edinburgh that I will describe below. Morris notes that

Whenever the members of a particular caste or sect grew large enough for its members to consort mainly with one another it was not long before they began to emerge as a distinct communal group. (1968: 42-42).

This may provide an indication of what *could* occur in Edinburgh. Communal organisations may sometimes arise within which there is a high stress upon the development of an inclusive community organisation. But this may not last for very long. In fact, such pan-Indian communality may perhaps merely be a stage which will rapidly expire, to be followed by more exclusive forms of communality - based on regional or sectarian differences - when the time is right.

## 3.5.2 **Hindus in North America**

### 3.5.3.1 *General trends*

There is a growing body of literature on developments among settled Indian groups within north America, particularly within the United States<sup>52</sup>. What is clear

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<sup>52</sup> For Indians in the US see: Saran & Eames (1980); Fisher (1980a, 1980b); Saran (1983, 1985); Fenton (1988); Williams (1988); Bhardwaj & Rao (1990); Helweg & Helweg (1990). For Canada



from this literature is that these rather recently established groups are quite different from other diaspora Hindus.

Firstly, US Hindus tend to be fairly well-off. Most Indians who settle in America manage to do so because of their qualifications and training, and so have good earning potential. The vast majority of Indian/Hindus living in the US (and in Canada to a lesser degree<sup>53</sup>) are highly qualified professionals - such as academics, engineers, doctors, etc. (Williams 1988: 14-23; Bhardwaj & Rao 1990). Secondly, Indian/Hindus in the US originate from many different regions in India - there is no real tendency for any particular regional group (or groups) to predominate. There are certainly Panjabis and Gujaratis, as well as those from the Hindi-belt of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, but these are matched by equal numbers from other areas (ibid.: 39). The geographical spread of their places of origin is also matched by their geographical spread within the US (Bhardwaj & Rao 1990). There is no tendency for major concentrations of Indian/Hindus in the US. There is certainly a large group in New York (Fisher 1980a, 1980b), and on other parts of the eastern seaboard. But this is matched by a fairly even spread throughout the rest of the country.

The result of these factors is that there are many Hindu groups in the US who are wealthy and heterogeneous. Their spread makes these populations quite isolated from similar groups, and so if any communal activity is desired, it often has to take place on a pan-Indian/pan-Hindu level. Thus many Hindu communal projects in the US have been attempts to overcome regional diversity and to 'homogenise' various traditions into a shared tradition for all members of the population. This development is what Williams has labelled as 'ecumenical Hinduism' (1988: 40-41).

Of course, this has not happened in all cases - more specialised temples and

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see: Wood (1980); Buchiagnani (1983); Goa et al (1984); Buchignani & Indra (1985); Coward & Goa (1987); Beck (1987); Israel (1987).

<sup>53</sup> Canada is slightly different from the US because of the populations of South Asians who were admitted to the country from East Africa, particularly following the expulsion from Uganda.

communities have developed in many parts of the US. If a population is large (or wealthy) enough to support a project based on regional, sectarian, or caste-jati affiliation, then this may happen. A good example of this is the Sri Venkateswara temple built by south Indians in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, described by Clothey (1983). This temple is a reconstruction of the classical Sri Venkateswara temple in Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh. Support and attachment to this temple in Pittsburgh has come primarily from those Hindus originating from traditions to which the Tirupati temple was important. Other Hindu groups in Pittsburgh - particularly those originating from north India - may like the temple, since it represents their tradition (i.e. 'Hinduism') as opposed to white American Christian traditions. At the same time, the traditions associated with the temple are quite alien to their own understandings of what Hinduism should be - and so many of them are affiliated to other temple projects (ibid.: 176-7).

Away from the sphere of communal organisation, it is not too clear what forms of 'ecumenical' Hinduism are emerging in north America, or even if these are substantially different from Hinduism elsewhere in the world, or in India. Coward and Goa have argued that Hindus in Alberta (Canada) place a great stress on guru teachers as a means of maintaining their religious traditions (1987), particularly when there is no local temple project. Other writers have suggested that neo-Vedantin forms of Hinduism are becoming popular - especially among the very well educated groups who find clear expositions of the 'basics' of Hindu 'thought' in writers such as Radhakrishnan and Vivekanand (Williams 1988: 54-6, Vertovec n.d.2). Beck (1987: 60) has rightly pointed out that more emphasis should be placed on understanding the more 'popular' forms of religious expression - the 'yeast' within the dough of Hindu traditions - and so we should look at how these popular traditions are modifying and developing in the new situations.

### *3.5.3.2 Similarities with Edinburgh*

This brief summary of north American Hinduism illustrates a situation which is quite similar in many respects to that in which Edinburgh Hindus live. In particular, there is the geographical isolation of Edinburgh (in comparison with southern British cities), and the demographic structure of the population as a mixed group of middle-class professionals (see §2.1.3). More importantly, however, the Hindu temple community in Edinburgh bears many resemblances to those emerging in the US. In both cases, there is a stress on a homogenised common tradition, based on some common Indian-ness, or Hindu-ness. William's term 'ecumenical Hinduism' perhaps conveys this sense to a certain degree - although it is misleading, since it suggests that most non-ecumenical Hinduism is sectarian or orthodox. If there is such a thing as Hindu ecumenism, then it is certainly very different from Christian ecumenism.

What is also misleading about this term is that we are not seeing the development of a single form of ecumenical Hinduism. Rather, there are various pan-Hindu Hinduisms - each of which are emerging out of the particular situations that bring them about. That is, the concepts of Hinduism which are being constructed within the Edinburgh temple are very different from the concepts being constructed in Chicago, Houston, or Kansas. The processes may be very similar, but the products may differ substantially.

### **3.5.3 Hindus in Britain**

Most of the literature on Hindus in Britain has been concerned with English populations. As yet, there has been no serious study made of Hinduism in Scotland - probably because such Hindus are well out-numbered by those in England. Of course, English and Scottish Hindu populations have a great deal in common, and it is extremely difficult to pinpoint what is distinctive about 'Scottish' Hinduism (if it is at all distinct).

However, some of the factors described within this thesis are rather different

from those found within the main Hindu populations in the south and midlands of England. The smallness of the Edinburgh population, as well as its comparative isolation, require that if people do wish to create communal structures, then they have to overcome (to some degree or other) their differences. Edinburgh Hindus are also living in a rather different situation to English Hindus - the majority population are Scots, who define themselves differently to the English (see §2.4.2.2).

Hindus growing up and being educated in Scotland have very different experiences and attitudes. In particular, a young Hindu in Edinburgh is very likely to have school friends who are non-Hindu, since s/he will be living in an area where there are far less other Hindu families living. This contrasts with the experiences of Hindus (and other South Asians) growing up in many parts of London, Leicester, and Birmingham - who attend schools with high proportions of South Asian pupils.

Edinburgh Hindus are thus different in some ways from other British Hindus, as well as sharing many elements in common. The population of Hindus described in this thesis is similar in many respects to those in Leeds discussed by Knott (1986a, 1987), and those in Bristol studied by Barot (n.d.1, n.d.2). In all three cases, there is a fairly heterogeneous population<sup>54</sup>, who are attempting to resolve their differences to construct some form of community. These three cases are, though, very different from the situation in London and the Midlands - where larger, more homogeneous groups can form and a plurality of temples and communities can co-exist. But the Bristol, Leeds, and Edinburgh temple communities are different from each other in many respects - primarily because they each have different histories and structures<sup>55</sup>.

In the next chapter I shall be examining the ways in which the Edinburgh temple

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<sup>54</sup> The Hindu population of Leeds was approximately three to four thousand in 1980, of which about two-thirds were Gujaratis and a third Panjabis (Knott 1986a: 19-45). The Hindu population of Bristol was two thousand in 1981, of which there were roughly equal numbers of Panjabis and Gujaratis (Barot n.d.1).

<sup>55</sup> For further discussions of the differences between Hindu communities in Britain, see Burghart (1987), Ballard (1992), and §4.4.1, §4.4.2, §8.1.2, footnote 37 of chapter two, and footnotes 3 & 21 of chapter four.

has developed, as well as the plans that are motivating the temple project. Only by understanding the history of the temple, and by seeing how its role is developing among Hindus in Edinburgh, can we understand what is distinctive about the Edinburgh community, and why it takes the form that it does.

## CHAPTER FOUR. THE EDINBURGH HINDU MANDIR AND SANSKRITIC KENDRA

### 4.1 HISTORY

#### 4.1.1 Early history - the East African arrivals

Although in the 1960s and 70s the Hindu population of Edinburgh was very small, there were still enough people to organise some form of communal religious activities. It is very probable that there were informal religious gatherings in Edinburgh during this period - but it was not until the end of the 70s that anything formal was organised. The influx of South Asians from East Africa created a dramatic rise in the Hindu population in Edinburgh during the 70s (see §2.1.3) - by 1980 there were approximately one hundred Hindu families in the area.

This influx of East African Hindus (mainly Gujaratis) provided the necessary impetus for the creation of a temple. These people had lived in East Africa for a number of years - most of them had been born there. In the last chapter I showed how Hindu communities in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania had built temples and formed religious organisations (see §3.5.1), and so they were familiar with the idea of such institutions outside of India. In contrast, the Indians who had come directly from India tended to be less sure if it was ritually possible or even necessary to dedicate Hindu temples on foreign soil. East Africans came to Britain with the intention of settling in this country permanently. Thus they wanted to create permanent institutions for themselves - as they had done in East Africa. Most of the migrants from India were not originally intending to remain in Britain for more than a few years, they had a strong 'myth of return' (see Anwar 1985; Jeffery 1976; Shaw 1988), and it took a long time for them to decide that Britain would be a permanent home.

As soon as East African Hindus arrived in Britain they began to organise themselves. Those people who settled in Edinburgh usually had contacts with family

and friends in other parts of Britain. Social networks which had existed in Africa were transplanted to Britain - the hope was to recreate the life that had been left behind. I have heard that communal religious worship was organised by family groups and friends in Edinburgh soon after these Hindus arrived. Some of this activity was based in Edinburgh itself, some involved Hindus from Edinburgh and took place elsewhere in Britain. It was principally directed at East African Hindus, and when it took place in Edinburgh it tended to be exclusive of other Hindus.

For example, I was told that around 1976 a group of Gujaratis from Kenya and Uganda hired a hall in Grangemouth for Nawratri (the autumn goddess festival). Grangemouth is a town about thirty miles to the west of Edinburgh, and at the time there were a number of East African Gujaratis living there - others from Edinburgh joined them for the festival. Apparently these meetings were organised by and for Gujaratis and no one else. At that time Panjabis in Edinburgh were not very interested in celebrating the Nawratri festival.

#### **4.1.2 The growth of the Mandir**

The main motivating force behind the Edinburgh Mandir<sup>1</sup> was a Kenyan woman called Mrs Anand, who came to Britain during the 70s. Everybody who speaks of Mrs Anand has described her as an incredible woman. She was born in a small village in Gujarat and went to Kenya at the age of 12 to marry. She came to Scotland with her family in 1974 - following the death of her husband and the problems of nationalisation in Kenya - and she decided to settle in Edinburgh, preferring the city to other towns in Britain. She died in 1985 (four years before I began my fieldwork), but her presence is still felt within the Hindu community. Mrs Anand was over 50 when she arrived in

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis 'Mandir' is used to refer to the temple association - while the temple building itself, and the shrine inside the temple where the gods are housed (i.e. what is technically called the *garbhagriha* - see footnote 18 below) are both written as 'mandir'. The word 'mandir' is also used to describe the home 'shrines' belonging to individual households - in this case, I describe them as 'house-mandirs' or 'home-mandirs'. In most contexts the words 'mandir' and 'temple' are used interchangeably.

Edinburgh and she said it was her duty as a 'retired householder' (according to *asramadharm*<sup>2</sup>) to create a Mandir in the city. Her son told me that she had said:

The Muslims build their Mosques everywhere they go and the Christians have their churches - even in small towns of only fifty people. So we need a place where our gods can live and be cared for everyday, otherwise how can we expect the gods to come to us?

By this time most of her children were grown up, some were married, and most of them were still living together in a joint household. Even though she did not speak English, she was able to mobilise her children as translators. Her retirement meant that she had the time to dedicate herself to the hard work of organising such a religious association - she considered it as her duty to do this.

At first the temple consisted of infrequent religious meetings (*satsangs*) arranged at people's homes. At the time there were only a few people (approximately four or five families) involved in the organisation, and these were recruited along the Gujarati - East African network. But Mrs Anand's ambition was to create a Hindu temple for all the people in Edinburgh - so non-Gujaratis were encouraged to join the gatherings too.

It is hard to know when the *satsangs* actually began, some people say that they started soon after 1975, while others mention a later date. It is probable that *satsangs* began to be arranged around 1975-76, but at that time no one thought of them as being part of a 'temple' movement. Instead they were very ad hoc affairs, with little regularity - they simply happened if anyone had a reason for organising one. It took a few years for the participants to realise that these *satsangs* could develop into something more permanent and structured. The creation of temples in other parts of Britain probably acted as an inspiration that such a project could be possible in Edinburgh. The various Hindu groups were also forming links and friendships beyond their original networks through the pan-Indian network of the Edinburgh Indian Association

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<sup>2</sup> *Asramadharm* is the Hindu philosophy that life is divided into four stages. That is: the youth/student stage (*bramacharya*); the householder (*garhastha*); retirement (*vanaprastha*); and asceticism (*sannyasa*). This scheme is an ideal which is open to a lot of interpretation. For example it is usually intended for men to follow *asramadharm*, but in this case the individual was a woman.



- which had been created ('revived' - see §2.2.1 and Appendix One) in 1974. Thus East African Gujaratis came across Panjabis and other groups, and the idea of collective organised religious worship began to blossom.

It was not until 1981 that the Edinburgh Mandir Kendra was actually founded as an institution<sup>3</sup>. At this time it became a structured organisation with a constitution and elected officials. Mrs Anand was appointed the first president, while some Panjabis and Biharis took up other official positions. The satsangs became much more regular, and it was decided that they should be held monthly, on the second Sunday of every month. The idea of having this fixed time is to ensure that people know the time and date of the meeting, even if they have not been informed by anyone<sup>4</sup>. These first regular satsangs were held in a small room in the offices of the Community Relations Council, in the centre of Edinburgh. The attendance must have been quite low, since the room is very small<sup>5</sup>.

In 1983 they began to use a room in Leith Community Centre<sup>6</sup>. This room was very cheap to hire, which made it an attractive proposition. I was also told that Leith is 'central', and so people coming from South Queensferry, Currie, and Dalkeith can get to it easily by car. Although Leith is central in terms of these outlying towns it is a little outside the centre of the city of Edinburgh<sup>7</sup>. However, access to Leith by car is quite

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<sup>3</sup> It is interesting that the process of construction of the temple is very similar to that observed by Barot (n.d.1) in Bristol. The Bristol Sanatan Deevya Mandal was created by East Africans who arrived during the early 70s, it grew out of a wish to hold satsangs, which gradually moved into a public hall, and then eventually a temple building was planned. What makes Bristol different from Edinburgh, however, was that a completed, purpose built Hindu temple was actually *opened* in 1981, which was well in advance of the situation in Edinburgh.

<sup>4</sup> The community is of a small enough size for everybody to be informed about a special meeting if this should be necessary, and this is usually done by the organisers phoning round every family in the week prior to the event. But it was decided that the temple meetings should be regular enough for this not to be necessary, and hence a fixed time was chosen for the monthly satsangs.

<sup>5</sup> I have attended a couple of religious gatherings in this room, and there is not much space to fit many people in it at all. One time was an important annual festival, however, and there were approximately 70 worshippers squashed into a small space.

<sup>6</sup> This is in an area just to the north of the city around the docks (see §2.3.1). This area was known to Indians living in Edinburgh because it has had a Sikh population living there for approximately thirty years, and (at the time) it was the main centre of shops selling Indian goods.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed historically Leith is not part of the city and Leithers still see themselves as distinct from the people of Edinburgh.

easy because it is possible to avoid the congestion of the city centre, and being an out-of-town area it is also easier to find parking<sup>8</sup>.

The Hindu Mandir held regular monthly satsangs at this community centre from 1983 to 1989. Occasional meetings were held at the Community Relations Council offices (for example when the Leith centre was closed in the summer) or in people's homes (these were always supplementary to the monthly meetings). For important festivals a larger room in the community centre was hired, to accommodate the larger numbers attending.

### **4.1.3 The search for a temple building**

#### *4.1.3.1 Factors behind the decision*

Soon after the foundation of the Mandir it was decided that they should aim to create a temple building - a place where the gods could live and be worshipped. This was probably not an easy decision to make, particularly because of the expense that would be involved. If mere attendance at *any* temple was required, then most of the population could easily have driven in their cars to Glasgow to attend the Mandir which is there<sup>9</sup>. But there were a number of reasons why it was decided that there should be a temple in Edinburgh in a permanent home.

Firstly, holding religious gatherings in the hall of a community centre or some other temporary site was not altogether satisfactory. To do so necessitated bringing in the pictures and statues of the gods to create a temporary sacred space for worship, which then had to be dismantled as soon as the worship was finished. There was no real sense of permanence, and there was certainly a feeling that this failed to show the proper respect to the gods being worshipped in this way<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> These factors contrast with the siting of the Leith Sikh Gurdwara (temple) - which is within easy walking distance of most of the Sikh community.

<sup>9</sup> The Glasgow Hindu temple - situated in a converted house in Great Glasgow Street in Hillhead - was founded in about 1970.

<sup>10</sup> A possible solution to this could have been the dedication of a temple in the home of one of the community, but this was never really considered as practical. Although this has been done in

Secondly, Hindus in Edinburgh are aware of the fact that they belong to particular religious and cultural traditions which are quite distinct from those of most of the people they meet - either in their neighbourhoods or at work. They know about churches, and the roles that these play in the religious lives of the various Christian communities, and also about the mosques and the Sikh temple that have been opened in Edinburgh in the past few decades. For each of these communities the religious centre is a badge or an icon of their religious identities, something adherents can show to outsiders to represent what their religions mean to them.

In Hinduism the tradition of building temples is different from these other religions; they are usually built to honour a particular god or gods, rather than to provide the focus for a particular community<sup>11</sup>. Even so, in India the temple can sometimes be used to express a collective religious identity in opposition to other religions. An example of this is the dispute created by the attempt to construct a new Hindu temple in Ayodhya (in Uttar Pradesh) on the site of the birth place of Ram - one of their great religious heroes<sup>12</sup>. This site is (for the present) the place of a sixteenth century mosque. The case for the mosque being demolished and the Hindu temple being built is mainly put in terms of the need to honour the god Ram, but it is understood by most to be an assertive expression of 'Hindu' identity by certain groups against the small but vociferous Indian Muslim population.

Hindus living in Edinburgh may well be using their temple to make a similar statement (from a minority rather than a majority perspective) about their sense of identity. But they are also using it for many other things: for example, to celebrate the

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other parts of Britain (where temples are sometimes based in private houses, or even in private garages), planning permission is required to allow such home temples (in private dwelling places) to be used for public worship, and this permission is often very hard to get.

<sup>11</sup> Some temples may be built in India for a particular community - such as new temples built in 'colony' settlements around factories, or temples built for specific regional groups in city suburbs. But these temples are not intended to be the foci of such communities, they are merely put there for the use of groups and individuals within the community.

<sup>12</sup> Ram (or Rama) is believed to be one of the human incarnations of the god Vishnu, whose life is described in the classic Epic 'the Ramayana'.

fact as British citizens with a future in this country, they are also proud of the rich religious and cultural traditions of the country from which they (or their families) came.

The third reason for the building of a temple in Edinburgh is that this is what has been done in other parts of Britain in recent years. The first Hindu temple in Britain was built about twenty years ago, and now there are about two hundred and fifty throughout the country. At one time Hindu settlers here thought that there was no need to build temples since they would not be staying for long - and some even thought that the creation of a Hindu sacred space would not be possible in this country (Desai 1963: 93). But for various reasons this view has changed and there is now a definite trend towards temple building all over Britain.

This trend has led to a Hindu map of Britain being drawn, if not on paper then at least in the minds of people. Places like Leicester and Southall are perceived as being the main centres of Hinduism in Britain, because it is there that large Hindu populations have built many temples where 'things are done properly'. For a Hindu group to be taken seriously by others they must, therefore, have their own temple where they can do the complex Hindu rituals properly. Thus the opening of a temple in Edinburgh has been done to put the city and its community upon this Hindu map of Britain - to show friends and relations living in other parts that although the community is quite small it still has to be taken seriously. There is also the aim to make the Edinburgh temple 'the best in Scotland' (which is not too great an ambition since there are only two other temples in the country)<sup>13</sup>.

#### *4.1.3.2 The problems encountered*

Once the decision to find a building had been made, the temple committee soon came across the problem that they did not have enough funds. A programme of fund raising was begun - Hindus in Edinburgh were asked to contribute, and applications

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<sup>13</sup> The status of Edinburgh as the capital of Scotland (as well as the perceived cultural capital) are also important motivating factors behind this.

were made for grants from various official bodies (such as Lothian District Council). This fund raising project has proved to be very successful - by mid 1991 the Mandir had managed to raise over £80,000. About half of this figure has been raised from the local Hindu population<sup>14</sup>, and the other half from charitable trusts and other official bodies.

However, the decision to purchase a property for the temple was made too slowly. By the time that they became serious about the project they were not able to afford anything. If the committee had had the money available at the beginning of the 1980s then an old church would have cost somewhere in the region of £10,000. The need to raise funds, however, resulted in a delay during which a house price boom occurred, and the cost of suitable properties spiralled. By the time money was available, the Mandir could not find anything suitable that they could afford. This set the project back quite considerably, and it was not until 1986 that a suitable building was eventually found.

This building was an old Presbyterian church in Leith - very close to Leith community centre - which had not been used for several decades. The state of the building was very poor - most of the woodwork was rotten, there were no windows, no electricity or water supplies, and the floor needed replacing. It would obviously require a lot of work to make it serviceable as a Hindu temple - and that of course would require large sums of money.

The building itself is 'listed', and this is what saved it from demolition - the city council<sup>15</sup> (who owned it) decided that they would let the Mandir Kendra have ownership of the church on the provision that it was renovated. Thus the building could be saved at no cost to the council itself. The Mandir knew that to renovate the

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<sup>14</sup> This is quite a remarkable amount considering the size of the community. Members of the Mandir frequently point out how well they have done to raise so much. But most of this money has been raised through the hard work of a small group of people - who were able to persuade the more sceptical members that they should contribute funds, even if they could not give anything more.

<sup>15</sup> That is, Edinburgh District Council.

church would cost as much as to buy a better building, but by doing it this way they could have it purpose built - so they decided to take up the offer. The quiet location of the old church - in a back street not immediately near any houses or flats - and the availability of a large parking area directly in front of the building, all made it a good potential site for a Hindu temple. Some people have commented to me that the building looks very nice too - it has a neo-classical frontage with four large pillars - and this also made them favour it as a potential site.

Once the decision was made to take on the building, they had to make plans for its renovation. More funds had to be raised, but this became easier now that there was a specific project in sight - and applications could be made to bodies such as the Historic Buildings Trust. The services of an architect were needed to design the interior of the new Mandir, and so the architect mentioned earlier (in §2.3.3.1) was asked to draw up extensive plans - in consultation with other members. The plan developed that the old church would be converted into a two storey building. On the higher level there would be a temple area for regular communal worship, where the *murtis* (statues of gods) would be housed. On the ground level there would be a kitchen and a hall for social gatherings, which could be used by the Hindu community and also by the 'local community' (meaning the white Scottish Leith community) for other purposes.

The intention behind this was twofold. Firstly it would be possible to generate extra income by hiring out the downstairs hall to non-Hindu groups (such as volleyball and youth clubs). This money could then be used to pay the salary of a full time *pandit* (i.e. priest) to work at the Mandir. Secondly the committee were aware that if the building was called a community centre *as well as* a Hindu temple then they would find it much easier to raise money for its renovation. This consideration has been outlined to me by a number of people on different occasions - and it was given as the reason why the official name of the temple association is the 'Hindu temple and community centre' (Hindu Mandir and Sanskritic Kendra).

By 1988 enough money had been raised to begin the work of renovating the

building, and so builders were employed to do the huge task of converting the old church into a temple. I began my fieldwork in the summer of 1989, and by this time there was talk that the building would 'soon' be ready for use. No one was quite sure how long it would take (and I assumed that this had been the state of affairs for some time), but there was a general feeling that something would be happening soon.

#### **4.1.4 The opening of the Edinburgh Mandir**

The building was opened soon after I began my fieldwork. The committee decided that it was now usable, and so they officially opened it at the Diwali festival of the autumn of 1989. Community members were notified that the new temple would be used, and attendance at the festival was fairly good (about 150-200).

But even though the building had been formally 'opened' it took some time for the committee to decide whether the building should be regularly used. There were a number of worshippers who wanted the monthly *satsangs* to continue to be held in the community centre until more work had been done on the temple. This seemed a better alternative than holding the meetings in the large, cold temple building. Although the building was usable and safe, the project was by no means complete (and it is still not at present in 1992). The upper floor had not been installed, and there was no proper heating system. With a large number of people in the building (such as at Diwali time) this posed no problem - the place would heat up quite well. But the small congregation at the regular monthly *satsangs* could not generate enough heat to remove the icy chill from the old building - and so for the first few *satsangs*, held in the winter of 1989-90, the worshippers had to shiver. A solution was found - a large gas heater was installed which vastly improved the atmosphere of the gatherings, although it was still agreed that the place would not be decently warm until the upper storey was built.

Despite this problem of the cold, the temple was open and worship was taking place in it on a regular basis (every month). The images of worship were not the *murtis* desired, but framed lithographs of Hindu deities. The committee decided that there

would be no point in installing proper murtis until the building work had been finished. It would be futile to go to the trouble of finding a pandit to do the complex ceremony of installing the murtis and ritually dedicating the place as a sacred site (i.e. a temple) until the upper floor was completed.

The opening of the building, however, was a significant development for the Hindu population. Many people were only vaguely aware of the temple project, but the fact that there was now a physical place for worship demonstrated that the project was far more than an idea. In the year following the opening of the building the numbers attending the regular satsangs gradually increased. The numbers attending at festival times (in particular, at Janamasthami in August, and Diwali in October/November) significantly increased. The committee members are now more optimistic about the project, saying that the building will be complete and the temple ritually dedicated as soon as they have enough money. However, a sober estimate is that it will not be until 1994/5 (or even later) until enough money has been raised and the building work completed.

Work continued gradually on the interior of the building during the year following the temple opening. By Diwali of 1990 significant improvements had been made, and this was reflected by the high attendance at the festival - nearly 250 - many of these had come out of curiosity to see how the building was progressing.

## **4.2 THE MANDIR BUILDING**

### **4.2.1 The interior**

#### *4.2.1.1 General description*

The Hindu Mandir building is situated on the south side of Leith Links, next to the Leith Academy. The building was once St Andrew's Church, and belonged to the Church of Scotland - but it was not used for a number of decades before the Hindu community took it over in 1986.

The temple is entered through a large set of double doors. A small dark entrance



hall - which has a set of moribund stairs on either side<sup>16</sup> - leads into the main prayer hall. This hall is the gutted shell of the old church - all the pews and furniture have been removed, and the only indication of its former use are a few pieces of stained glass in the windows. The centre piece of the temple is on the wall near the main entrance<sup>17</sup>. There is a row of tables against this wall, upon which have been placed various pictures of the Hindu gods, along with various other items. This area is also referred to as the 'mandir' (temple)<sup>18</sup>, since it is the particular home of the gods. Worship and religious activity in the building is usually directed towards this area.

The area in front of these tables is a sacred space. It is where the worshippers sit during the temple meetings. The area (which takes up about one half of the total floor space of the hall) has a wooden floor covered by carpet (to make it more comfortable). On top of this carpet are placed sheets and rugs (put there at the beginning of *satsangs*) so that people can sit on the floor without dirtying their clothes. Behind this area there is a space at the back of the hall (roughly the other half of the hall) where the floor has not been treated, it is still rough concrete<sup>19</sup>. It is not usually used at religious meetings, apart from when children play in the area. When there is a large festival - especially when there is dancing - mats and carpets are put down over the concrete and the extra space is utilised. For the rest of the time this area is mainly used for the storage of unneeded furniture.

It is the carpeted area in front of the 'mandir' that is the main area of activity during religious meetings. When the first worshippers arrive at a *satsang* they immediately place the blankets and sheets on this area so that others may sit on it.

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<sup>16</sup> These will eventually lead to the upper storey.

<sup>17</sup> When the building was a church the altar would have been at the opposite end.

<sup>18</sup> The English word 'temple' is often used for this, as well as the Hindi word 'mandir'. The more correct word is *garbhagriha*, although this refers to the area in which dedicated murtis are housed in temples that have been properly dedicated. As such an installation and dedication have not yet occurred in Edinburgh, I am not sure if the term *garbhagriha* is applicable to this central focus of worship.

<sup>19</sup> In the summer of 1991 this area was given a wooden floor. As this was very soon before I moved away from Edinburgh, I have not observed how this area is used at times of large scale worship. Thus it is quite hard to know how much this has affected the ways that the two halves are perceived.

Worshippers should not walk on this space in front of the mandir if they are wearing shoes - since this pollutes the area in which the gods live (through the bringing of dirt on the bottom of the shoes). This is a common observance in Hindu temples, both in India and Britain. But I have noticed that people are allowed to walk over other parts of the temple floor in their shoes, and some people walk on this carpeted area in their shoes after the satsang has finished.

It is commonsense that allows worshippers to walk around the back part of the temple - since the surface of the floor has not been completed, and it is fairly dirty. But it is hard to understand why people walk on the carpeted area - it is definitely a sacred space and so should not be desecrated. There are people who say that one should always remove one's shoes when walking over that area, regardless of whether the satsang has finished or not, but others ignore this. It is also interesting to note that during the festival of Nawratri in 1990 - when a small shrine was built in the undeveloped back area of the temple - most worshippers removed their shoes when they walked over this area too.

The removal of shoes is to show respect for areas believed to be sacred spaces, and so the area in front of the pictures is only seen as a sacred space while the satsang is actually occurring. For the rest of the time the place is like any other. This is probably because of the present ambiguous state of the temple - since in fact it is only a quasi-Mandir. The building is a meeting hall where religious gatherings are held, but it has not yet been ritually dedicated (that is, the gods have not been installed into statues in the building), and so it is not a proper sacred space. I think that once the statues have been ritually installed then there will be no such ambiguities about where one can and cannot walk in shoes, and the worshippers will be a lot more careful.

#### *4.2.1.2 The focus of worship*

Most worship takes place in front of the tables on which there are pictures of various Hindu gods. These pictures (framed copies of standard Indian lithographs) are

in place of larger statues of the gods - which are the more normal foci of worship in Hindu temples (although most temples also contain a few of these lithographs). The lithographs were donated to the Mandir by various well wishers, and over the years quite a large collection has grown up.

The main two lithographs are of Ram (with Laksman, Sita, and Hanuman) and of the baby Krishna (holding the world in his hand). The former was given to the temple last year by a relative of one of the Edinburgh community, while the latter was given by the Raja Yoga centre in Edinburgh. There are several other (smaller) pictures of Ram and his entourage, and of Krishna too (as an adult). There are also several pictures of various forms of the goddess - as Durga and as Kali, as well as in other manifestations - and there is one picture of Siva. Behind the tables, there are a number of posters stuck to the wall. These are also of the Hindu gods, including some of the ones already mentioned, and Ganesh, Siva with Shakti (the goddess), several scenes from the life of Krishna, and at one side there is a picture of Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism. There is also an elaborate *batik* cloth painting of Ganesh.

The principle behind the choice of these pictures seems to be to include as many different gods as possible. All the gods seem to have an equal position in the temple, there is no preferred or paramount god - it is left to the individual worshipper to choose who s/he wants to worship. I have been told that a Christian could place a cross on the temple if s/he wished to - and I believe that this would not offend anyone if it was done, although no one has put it to the test<sup>20</sup>. The temple, therefore, is intended to be pan-Hindu, it is a place where all the gods are worshipped. This is in contrast to most Hindu temples, which are nearly always dedicated to one particular god - that is, although there are many gods in a temple, only one (or two) of them is especially worshipped<sup>21</sup> (see §4.4.1 below).

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<sup>20</sup> Knott mentions that a picture of Christ has been put on the wall at the Hindu temple in Leeds, alongside pictures of Guru Nanak and Vivekanand (1986a: 67).

<sup>21</sup> Many other Hindu temples in Britain are dedicated to specific gods - such as the Radha-Krishna temple in Leicester, the Shree Krishna temple in Coventry (Jackson 1981), and the Sri Ram

When the statues are ritually installed then this situation may change, since these statues will be representations of particular gods. No one has said who the statues will be of - I do not think that any decision has been made about this so far. What will probably happen is that a broad cross section of Sanskritic Hindu deities will be installed (although some of the statues will be larger than others). The most likely choices for statues will be Krishna, Ram, Hanuman, Amba-ji (the mother goddess), and Ganesh. The emphasis will be on several gods, rather than only one or two<sup>22</sup>.

The tables below these lithographs are covered with bright cloths, and they are scattered with a lot of general paraphernalia. There is a small metal canopy (some people have called this a *vedi* ) under which one of the large pictures has been placed. There are various bowls into which people put their food offerings when they enter the temple for a satsang; a tray (or sometimes two or more trays) upon which usually sits a small metal lamp for *arti* (although there are sometimes simply a few cotton wool wicks placed on the tray instead of the lamp). There are also some incense stick holders along with packets of incense sticks; several small ornate hand bells (also for *arti* ); cards with prayers and readings written on them (in Hindi); tinsel, beads, fairy lights, flowers, and other similar objects which are usually seen around Hindu places of worship.

#### 4.2.1.3 *Conflicts and compromises*

The temple layout as I have outlined above is similar to the basic layout of most north Indian temples - both in Gujarat and Panjab. It does not appear to have any distinctive characteristics in this respect that are particular to one or other of these two traditions - rather it is a compromise that will be suitable to both groups. The lack of a

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Mandir in Southall, London (Vertovec 1992).

<sup>22</sup> This will be reflected in the name of the temple. It will be called the Edinburgh Hindu Mandir, rather than being named after a specific god.

pandit obviously makes it quite different from both Gujarati and Panjabi temples, since *all* Hindu temples in these regions are structured so that a resident pandit is placed between the main murtis (i.e. the garbhagriha) and the worshippers. Thus the temple layout is on the whole satisfactory for both Panjabis and Gujaratis in Edinburgh<sup>23</sup>. Disagreements between Panjabis and Gujaratis arise over the temple in other areas, such as the role that it should take in the community, and especially what worship should be conducted in the building and how it should be done. Such disagreements tend to be based on the basic cultural/regional differences between the two groups.

However, some disagreements about the temple layout have arisen in Edinburgh between various individuals - not so much over where the statues should be, or what should be the focus of worship, but mainly about the seating arrangements. In both of the examples which I discuss below, the disagreements have not been so much concerned about different regional expectations as with other factors - such as a personality conflict in the first case, and adherence to a strict form of Hindu worship in the second.

The first case was concerned with where worshippers should sit during the satsang. It is usually expected that the worshipper will sit on the floor during religious meetings. There are a few chairs around the side of the worship area - these are not always used, but some people do sometimes sit on them. If anyone does use the chairs it is usually elderly women - some are very old and so do not find the floor comfortable - or young children. There are also some hard chairs outside of the worship area in the back part of the building. It is not expected that these will be used during satsangs, but some men often retreat during the worship and go and sit on these chairs and talk with each other quietly. No one objects to the men opting out of worship in this way, although there are sometimes comments that the men do not like to sing as much as the

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<sup>23</sup> However, it is not quite ideal for other Hindus, especially those from the south of India, who are used to more elaborate and more carefully planned buildings.

women.

The use of chairs in the temple appears to be a sensitive subject. Several years ago, when meetings were held at the community centre, a senior committee member, called Mr Darsan, objected a great deal to their use - and this was the source of considerable disagreement at the time. The man argued that during worship the gods were invited down into their representations (that is the lithographs) and so while the gods were present they should be respected. If people are sitting on the same level as the gods (as they would be if they are sitting on chairs rather than the floor) then this is a sign of great disrespect, and it effectively ruins the worship. He thought that everyone accepts that the floor is the correct place to sit when worshipping. He told me that he had said:

it is done by everyone in India and also the Muslims do it without complaint, so why shouldn't we do it in Edinburgh too?.

The other members told him that this was not necessary, and both Panjabis and Gujaratis who have told me about this incident have echoed this, saying that he was simply being too strict, and that he was wishing to have things too much his own way<sup>24</sup>. Mr Darsan, though, who came from eastern India, believed that the people who argued for the use of chairs were 'diluted' Hindus - that is they had been affected too much by exposure to non-Hindu values. He said that Panjabis had been too influenced by Sikhs, and Gujaratis had been in East Africa for so long that they had also become diluted. Both groups had now lost a lot of their traditions through living in Britain.

Despite this man's protests the use of chairs in the temple has continued, although most people do prefer to sit on the floor. Mr Darsan himself ceased going to the temple, and he has not been involved in the project for a number of years. Although there is obviously an element of regional difference motivating this disagreement, the

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<sup>24</sup> I have heard similar complaints being made against Mr Darsan in other contexts - in recent years he has been involved in the activities of the Edinburgh Indian Association, where he has also had several personal disagreements with individuals.

main factor behind it was a personal disagreement between the individuals involved. It was Mr Darsan alone who chose to describe the dispute in terms of his differences with Panjabis and Gujaratis. Other eastern Bengalis and Biharis were not concerned with this issue.

The second case was more concerned with how people should behave at the satsang, although the question of seating arrangements also figured in it. In September 1990 a visitor from India addressed a small gathering at the end of the monthly satsang. This visitor, a Panjabi who said he was on his way back from a Hindu conference in Canada, had several complaints to make about the ways in which people behaved whilst at the temple.

Firstly, he said it was messy for worshippers to sit around as they do whilst worshipping. Instead, it was more proper for them to sit in rows facing the gods, to show proper respect. Secondly, there should not be any chattering during the worship, since this was not respectful either. By sitting in rows, they would be discouraged from doing this<sup>25</sup>. Thirdly, he criticised the use of English at the temple - since he heard some of the announcements being made in English earlier. He said (in Hindi) that they were all Hindu people, whose 'mother tongue' was Hindi, and so this is the language that should be used. Aside from this he commented that it was good that 'Hare Krishnas'<sup>26</sup> should be interested in coming to the temple, but it was a place for Hindu people and the Hindi language.

This was all given in a fairly long speech at the end of the satsang, lasting for about fifteen minutes. Everybody sat and listened to him politely, even though he was

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<sup>25</sup> Anyone with a knowledge of Hindu religious practice will know that both of these approaches to worship are rarely found within India. Most Hindu worship is conducted in an informal and chattering style very similar to that found in the Edinburgh temple.

<sup>26</sup> This phrase was referring to the many white British people who join the International Krishna Consciousness Movement (ISKCON), and who are commonly referred to as the 'Hare Krishnas'. Thus, he was assuming that these would be the type of people who would visit a Hindu mandir. As I was the *only* white person present (although I was not the only Christian), I took it to be referring to me.

criticising their behaviour and preventing them from going home. It was clear that some people agreed with much (although not all) of what he said (these were mainly Panjabis), but the majority were simply giving him respect as someone who knows about what is proper. In fact, several worshippers (all Gujaratis) told me later that he was from 'one of those fanatic groups in India'<sup>27</sup>, and that he was 'taking things too far'. They said that if they did as he said, then worship would not be worthwhile.

Following his comments on the use of Hindi, I noticed that the announcements that temple leaders made after his speech were made in Hindi that evening. This was not unusual, since many announcements are often made in the lingua franca. However, one of the speakers (a Gujarati) who usually spoke in English made a deliberate effort to speak in Hindi. This was clearly for the visitor's benefit. But his speech did not make any lasting difference in the temple - at the following meeting his points were forgotten. There was no sitting in rows, there was chatting during the worship, and announcements were made in both Hindi and English. It was clear that although this man was worthy of respect, few people in Edinburgh thought that his expectations were appropriate for their situation, and no one was prepared to use his comments as a blueprint for how the temple should be.

#### **4.2.2 Outline of completed temple**

The description that I have given of the temple is of how it was during the time of my fieldwork (that is, around 1989-1991). The plan for the completed temple building is very different from this, and I will attempt to describe the significant features of what the building will probably be like when the project is finished.

I have already noted that the temple will have an upper floor. At first it was

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<sup>27</sup> I took this to be a reference to groups such as the VHP (Vishwa Hindu Parishad) and the RSS (Rastriya Swayamsevak Sangh), who agitate for Hindu revivalism. It is quite probable that this man belonged to one of these groups, or that he was an Arya Samaji, who sometimes put forward a similarly strict attitude to worship (see §3.3.1). This may explain why certain Panjabis (some of whom are sympathetic to Arya Samaj) showed themselves to be in agreement with him.



thought that this upper floor would house the kitchen and a dining area for special functions, whilst the larger downstairs hall would be the place where the mandir (including the gods) would be housed. Objections were raised against this idea, since it was felt this would be a sacrilege - if there was a hall above the mandir, then people would be walking over the temple area in their shoes. That is the temple area would be polluted, even though no dirt would be brought into the hall itself<sup>28</sup>.

Once built, the upper floor will therefore become the temple area, and at that time there will be an official dedication of the building as a Mandir. A *pandit* will be asked to come and perform the necessary rituals, and representatives from other British temples will be invited to the ceremony. This event will also be used as an opportunity for further fund raising amongst other British Hindu communities - and so it is planned that the installation of the statues will be done before the whole project is completed. It is hoped that enough funds will be raised at the opening ceremony to pay for further work on other parts of the building - such as the kitchen and the downstairs hall area.

The building of the upper storey will, however, take a long time to be completed. A member of the committee has been asked to draw up plans for how the floor will be built, but this is a delicate process - not least because the plans have to be approved by all members of the committee. When these plans are ready they have to be approved by the council, and then they can be used for applications for funding. It is hard to know how long it will take to raise the funds, but the work of building the upper floor cannot be started until the money is collected.

It is expected that once the upper floor is in place then statues can be brought over from India to be installed into the area, and then the building will be a proper Mandir - that is, it will be a home for the gods who are represented by those statues. Once this is

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<sup>28</sup> Mr Prasad, a prominent Panjabi committee member, raised this objection, after receiving advice from friends in an established Mandir in Birmingham. He told me that they had warned him not to make the same mistake that they had made, by having people walking above the temple in their shoes. Once this suggested alteration had been made to the committee, however, it was adopted unanimously.

done then the place will have to be used regularly to honour and worship those gods. It is planned that a pandit will be employed soon after the dedication, and he will perform the *arti* ritual at the temple twice every day (at dawn and dusk). There will also be a weekly satsang (instead of it being every month), probably on Sunday morning.

The temple area upstairs will be large enough to accommodate about two hundred people. The hall on the ground floor will be larger than this, and so will be used for special, large scale occasions (e.g. festivals and weddings). The representations of the gods placed in this area will probably be temporary and mobile - like the ones that are used at present. Temporary shrines will probably be fixed up for specific purposes - for example the Amba-ji shrine at Nawratri (see §5.3.2.3), the cradle at Janamasthami (see §5.3.2.1), and the *vedi/mandap*<sup>29</sup> (along with the *kund* - fire grate) used at weddings. This area will also be hired out to non-Hindu groups to provide extra revenue for the mandir.

A kitchen will be built behind this lower hall area, so that meals can be served at all the major religious meetings. It is intended that there will be a meal served after the weekly satsang, as soon as it is practical to do this. At present food is often served at the temple - particularly at festivals - but this has to be cooked elsewhere, and then reheated on a very basic stove in the building. Thus, the presence of the kitchen will be a great convenience. The committee also intend to build a library somewhere in the building, which will contain books about Hinduism and Indian philosophy. This is obviously intended to play an educational role in the community. There will also be - probably on the upper floor - a 'caretaker's flat', which will be a room or two where the pandit can live once he is appointed.

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<sup>29</sup> Two words are used to describe the wooden frame under which marriage rituals take place. Panjabis tend to call this structure a *vedi* (or *bedi*), while most Gujaratis call it a *mandap*.

## 4.3 THE PEOPLE IN THE TEMPLE

### 4.3.1 Membership

The Edinburgh Mandir has a membership list of about one hundred and ten families. Most of these families are married couples with children and so the actual membership is probably about three to four hundred. There are no exact figures - since the membership of the temple is very open. Members do not have to pay any dues<sup>30</sup>, and it is very rare for members to be called upon to vote or to attend general meetings.

The constitution of the Mandir states that membership is defined as such:

Any person professing the Hindu faith or any allied faith is eligible to become a member of the Mandir.

This definition is very vague, and the committee are very flexible in interpreting what the 'profession' of the 'Hindu faith' requires. This is illustrated by my position in the temple during the period of my fieldwork. It was soon accepted by most of the regular temple-goers that I was genuinely interested in Hindu religion, and that I had almost as much right as they did to belong there. I was eventually accepted as a member, and my opinion was sought for communal decisions on a couple of occasions - in the same way that any other members were. At one stage it was suggested that I join the temple committee - since it was obvious that I was very enthusiastic about the temple - but in the end this idea did not come to anything.

The purpose of the membership list is to have the names and telephone numbers of all the community available. If some event is arranged at short notice (as most events are) then it is possible for each person to be contacted and notified. I have not known this list to be used for any other purpose, although I think that it may have a statistical use. That is, a list showing the number of worshippers is a useful demonstration of the community's size when applications are being made for grants.

The distribution of the membership of the temple is as follows: roughly forty

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<sup>30</sup> All members do contribute to the temple funds through voluntary donations, which are usually made at religious meetings.

percent are Panjabi, forty percent are Gujarati, and the remaining twenty percent are from other parts of India<sup>31</sup>. Most of the Gujaratis are from East Africa, while most of the Panjabis are from families that migrated directly from India. The majority of the community are aged between 35 and 50 - there are quite a few older than this, but there do not seem to be many people younger than 30. I noticed a distinct lack of teenagers. There are a reasonable number of young children (less than ten years), and there are several families with children who have finished (or are finishing school) - but I did not meet more than five children who were aged between twelve and eighteen. I think this reflects the newness of the community in Edinburgh - the age gap is between the direct migrants who came to Britain in the 1960s and early 1970s, and the East Africans who came in the 70s and who tended to have children at the end of that decade. Also the 'third generation' is beginning to emerge - these are the children of Hindus who were born and brought up in Britain.

### **4.3.2 Leadership**

#### *4.3.2.1 Power relations in the temple*

As there is no religious specialist (*pandit*) in Edinburgh there is no one person who has responsibility for the way things are done in the Mandir. As already noted, there are plans to change this - the hope is to have a *pandit* recruited within a few years. But for the present the responsibility for running the day-to-day business of the temple is in the hands of the temple committee. This means that the temple leadership is quite informal, there is no single individual in whom power is invested, and there is no single figurehead for the organisation. A *pandit* may not even assume this position when he is appointed - it is not usual for *pandits* in Indian temples to take the roles of leaders - but I believe that the presence of a *pandit* in the Edinburgh temple will give worshippers a greater sense of having leadership.

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<sup>31</sup> These figures are very imprecise, and are based on the general overview of the Hindu population discussed in chapter two (see §2.1.1).

The elected committee is composed of about ten dedicated people (the number can vary). The last annual general meeting was in 1987 - so the present committee has been together for several years. No one objects to this, since the positions are left to those who have the enthusiasm to fill them. If someone is sufficiently interested in becoming a committee member then s/he will be co-opted onto the committee, and once there s/he will be able to remain in the position as long as s/he wishes. The committee is made up of a chairman, a secretary, a treasurer, and eight other non-specific positions. The top three positions are taken up by people who have been involved with the temple project since its inception.

It is not surprising that the individuals filling these posts are members of the most important factions within the community. The president (Mr Shankar) and the treasurer (Mrs Jaya) are from a Panjabi group, and the secretary is from the large Gujarati family (Anand) whose deceased mother was the force behind the creation of the temple (§4.1.1 above). The power relations are not so much between these elected officials, but between the factions that they represent.

The positions of chairman and secretary are roughly equitable, and so in effect the power within the organisation is shared between the two main regional interest groups that they represent. Amongst the Panjabis, Mr Shankar's wife is also a prominent member of the temple, and is a good friend of Mrs Jaya. Mr Jaya is also on the committee, although his role is not so important as his wife's, and his mother (also called Mrs Jaya) appears to have a great deal of power and status within the community. These two families - the Jayas and the Shankars - along with two other Panjabi women (who are both on the committee) are the main representatives of the Panjabi section of the community.

The Gujarati faction is mainly dominated by the Anand family - which consists of five brothers, their wives, and several other individuals related to them through marriage. There are two other East African families who are on the temple committee, both of which are friends of the Anands. Although there are a number of other

Gujaratis who are involved in the temple, most of those who hold power are connected through family ties or through friendship to the Anands. Both of these factions consist of a mixture of families and friends who have invested a great deal (of time, effort, and money) into the temple project and so have the most to gain from its success.

Other members of the committee are interested individuals who are keen to devote themselves to the project. Their motives can vary a great deal, of course, depending on their concept of the role the Mandir should fulfil. Some say that they wish to fulfil a religious duty, while others wish to serve in the creation of an institution for the transmission of their culture to later generations. Most of these committee members have full-time jobs, and so their work for the Mandir entails quite a high degree of personal sacrifice. In all cases it is a sacrifice which they are prepared to make.

The temple tradition that is becoming accepted is the product of the particular political configuration in charge of the project. Although the committee is divided into these two distinct factions, the two groups together are asserting control over how the temple should be run, and what role the temple should play within the Hindu population. The main political concern of both factions is to have control over this process and to create the institution in an acceptable form. This is not a very simple matter, since the Panjabi and the Gujarati factions have differing views of what would be acceptable. These two conflicting groups are putting forward two conflicting traditions. Both groups are in agreement that the temple should cater for the community as a whole, but they are not so agreed on how it should fulfil this role.

#### *4.3.2.2 The religious specialist*

The appointment of the pandit may have a great effect on power relations within the temple. The pandit may or may not be able to assert his own idea of what the temple should be. Of course, much will depend on which faction manages to appoint the pandit - it will make a large difference if he is Panjabi or Gujarati, and also which sort of Panjabi and Gujarati tradition he is from. A Panjabi Arya Samaj pandit will not

be very popular with most Gujaratis, while many Panjabis may find certain Gujarati traditions alienating. A great deal will also depend on the pandit's personality - whether or not he is able to exert effective political influence within the power structures of the community.

I asked one of the temple officials what the committee would do if the pandit decided to change things when he is appointed. I was told that the committee had thought about this and decided that they should over-rule the pandit if they did not agree with him. They thought that the way that they had chosen to perform the temple worship was suitable, and so they did not want a pandit to change things too much. This does not mean that they will not let the pandit make suggestions, but they wish to retain the final word. Of course, in practice they may find that the pandit is harder to control than they expect. But they will have a legal right (through a clause in the Mandir's constitution) to exert influence over him if he does not comply with their wishes (or the wishes of the dominant faction) in this respect. The pandit may also be dependent on the temple for his right of abode in the UK - he will be recruited in India, and his visa will be the responsibility of the Mandir committee. Furthermore, the pandit will be living in a flat within the temple building (which has not yet been built), and so he will have a threat of losing accommodation too. Against this, however, the pandit's wage will probably be quite low, so once he becomes adjusted to life in Britain he may wish to use the threat of finding work elsewhere - either in a better paid post in another temple, or in some other paid employment (if his visa permits this) - to force the committee to follow his wishes<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> Barot (n.d.1) provides an illustration of how these tensions may resolve themselves. At the Bristol Hindu temple a pandit was recruited in India and brought over to Britain - the temple committee organising a work visa and council owned accommodation for him. But tensions developed between the pandit's temple based duties, and those duties that he performed for individual members of the community in their homes. These tensions became unbearable for the pandit, and - dissatisfied with his working conditions, as well as with his salary - he found new employment in another temple in Britain.

#### 4.3.2.3 *Gender and temple politics*

There is a fairly equal balance in numbers between men and women on the temple committee at present. However, the two main posts - the secretary and the president - are held by men (Mr Shankar and Mr Anand). On the other hand, I would argue that most of the important decisions affecting the temple are usually made by women - such as Mrs Shankar, both Mrs Jayas, and several of the women in the Anand family. This could be seen as a separation between status and power. Men tend to hold the prestigious posts which are associated with status - they are the figureheads of the temple group. These men's wives do not tend to hold such important posts, but it is they who have most control over temple business and they exert most power.

The reason for this is because of the mainly informal structure of the temple. Committee meetings are rarely more than opportunities to ratify decisions which have already been taken elsewhere. This is also true of other decision making groups - particularly the temple building sub-committee - where the most important decisions (viz. concerning the temple project itself) are made. It is, therefore, within informal networks that the most important decision making and consultation occurs, along networks of family groups and between friends. When these networks come together it is usual to find that a great deal of temple-related business is discussed by women, whilst men are content to discuss more abstract affairs - such as politics, sport, or work-related business. Again it is necessary to stress that these networks are factionalised - the Shankar/Jaya group frequently meet each other informally, but rarely meet up with the Anands outside of the formal context of the temple. Similarly, the Anands often meet together as a family group, at which time much informal discussion of temple business takes place.

This is an area of a great deal of subtlety, and I reach this conclusion rather hesitantly - since I was not myself involved to a high degree within the spheres of decision making. It is possible that the situation is illusory, and that the male leaders do exert more power than is apparent, and that they are happy *to make it seem like* it is



their wives who have most influence. It is quite unusual to find Hindu temple organisations which are so clearly controlled by women, especially those which cater for both sexes. Swaminarayan groups do have all-female temples which are run exclusively by women - but this is because of the enforced separation between women and male ascetics (see §3.3.2 above, and Williams 1984: 145). Otherwise, temple administrations tend (nearly always) to be dominated completely by men (e.g. the south Indian temples described by Fuller 1984, and Good 1987). Similarly, less institutionalised religious groups also tend to be male dominated - for example, the *bhajana* groups in Madras described by Singer (1972: 236; see also §5.2.1).

The female leaders in Edinburgh are a group of strong personalities who are successful in spheres beyond the temple itself (particularly in their employment). Both of the Mrs Jayas run their own businesses, whilst Mrs Shankar is a prominent government employee. I find it likely, therefore, that these women really are the power brokers that control the temple, and that they have been highly successful at manipulating a vague and ill-defined situation for their own advantages.

#### 4.3.2.4 *The temple as a power base*

It is clear that the temple is being used as a resource for power by individuals in the community. It is an arena in which much social activity occurs - and so to have control over this arena will mean having a certain measure of control over other people. Of course, this is not the only reason why people contribute their efforts to the Mandir project - but it is one inevitable result of having a temple. The perceived need to have a temple in Edinburgh leads to the idea that individuals from the community should be elected to look after it. In this way some people are put in positions of authority over others, and this is justified by the idea that a Mandir is essential in Edinburgh. Their power can also be extended by the encouragement of individuals to participate in temple activities. By expanding the membership of the temple, the leaders may also expand their power base. Those members who become involved with the Mandir through the

encouragement of the leadership will also tend to accept the way that things are organised.

A number of recent writers have also highlighted the fact that 'ethnic' organisations - such as temples - are also important as abstract concepts, to reinforce the external images of the 'leaders' who claim to represent them. Eade (1989) has particularly demonstrated the ways in which a multitude of Bangladeshi 'communities' provide a useful resource for would-be politicians. The interface between these organisations and the 'local state'<sup>33</sup> is important here, especially because of the ways in which official organisations often provide funds for 'community' projects (such as temples and cultural projects). A high profile as a 'community leader' (for example, as an important figure within the temple) can help gain one's community fairly considerable resources from local state agencies. At the same time, the achievement of such funding for a community project can help improve one's own prestige within the community itself.

It must also be remembered that a project such as the construction of a temple involves quite a large amount of money (c.f. §4.1.3.2). A person who has control over spending so much money on the behalf of others (that is, for the 'Hindu community') is in a position of quite considerable power. If the money is spent well (or is seen to be spent well), then this can considerably boost a person's (or people's) prestige.

#### *4.3.2.5 Dissent against the leadership*

Some members of the community do not wish the temple to be used as a power base for certain individuals. Either they do not believe that the community needs leaders, or they do not like the leaders that have been chosen. These dissenters may indeed agree with the idea of having some religious association in the city, and they

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<sup>33</sup> That is, the local level of government administration, particularly the local council - c.f. Werbner (1991: 21); Eade (1989).

may want to have a temple which is organised by a fairly impartial pandit. But they do not like the situation as it is. I have talked to several such people in Edinburgh, and I found that most of them have been involved with the temple project at some stage, but ceased because of a dispute with present members of the committee.

These people are now having to organise their own religious activities, away from the temple's sphere of activity. It is not possible for them to accept the way that the temple is; they frame their discontent by saying that they do not like the way that things are done at the temple. One such person is Mr Darsan, who left the temple committee (and the temple) because of the dispute over seating arrangements (see §4.2.1.3). In some cases, such as Mr Darsan, the dissent has been caused mainly by a personality clash. But other disputes have arisen because of more fundamental differences, especially if the traditions being promoted at the temple are against their liking. For example, several other people have complained about the 'sloppiness' of the way things are done at the temple, or that the people who organise events do not know enough. When such disputes occur the problem arises because the temple is taking a shape which is different from their expectations.

Other Hindus do not feel the need to dissent from the Mandir leadership. These people may not whole-heartedly support everything that is done, but they accept most of it. This means that they are accepting the form of temple tradition that is being created, and by doing so they are accepting the authority of the temple leadership. By sponsoring and supporting the temple project, they are also supporting the idea that certain people should represent the Hindu community - either to make decisions on their behalf, or to communicate on an official level with people outside of the community.

### **4.3.3 Attitudes towards the temple**

In general, there are a variety of attitudes towards the temple among Hindus in Edinburgh. There are some people who are not very happy with the project at all - either because they do not like the way that it is being organised, or because they think

that it is a waste of time. However, there is a general view that it is quite important and significant to have a temple where regular worship can take place. Many people who subscribe to this view do not use the temple very much - they probably attend at the time of a major festival (particularly Diwali) - but for the rest of the time their involvement with the temple is minimal. Contributions to the temple funds are still raised from these people, and most seem content that there is an ongoing temple process.

These same people are also happy to participate in the notion that they belong to a 'community'. That is, because there is a temple, then this temple serves a Hindu community, which links together a certain group of people who share the 'same' religion. These people may have little contact with each other, and little contact with the temple itself, but they still find the notion of attachment to the 'Hindu community' an important concept.

#### **4.4 THE ROLE OF THE MANDIR**

##### **4.4.1 Temples and churches**

The mandir<sup>34</sup> is an important arena in which traditions within the community are developed and reinterpreted. The 'temple' is not a neutral body which provides a standard menu of 'Hinduism' - such orthodoxy of religion is quite alien to Hindu religious traditions. In fact the role of Hindu temples is quite different from the role of Christian churches or Muslim mosques.

A Mandir is intended to be a place where a particular god or gods are worshipped. Mandirs are usually ritually dedicated to one or two named gods, after whom the temple

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<sup>34</sup> Great care must be taken when using the words 'temple' and 'mandir', as I have already discussed (see footnote 1 above). In the context of this section I am intending to use the words 'temple' and 'mandir' to refer to what is commonly understood in English to be a temple - that is, the 'public' access building which is dedicated to a god or gods. As I note later, the Hindi word *mandir* can also refer to the focus and place of worship within the home. To prevent confusion, I will refer to this as a 'house-mandir'. The word 'shrine', which is the usual translation of this term, has too many unnecessary connotations in English.

complexes are also named. There are many such temples in India, and in recent years some of the larger complexes have been the subject of anthropological study<sup>35</sup>. The named deity to whom a temple is dedicated provides the focus of most of the ritual and devotional activity in the building. This does not prevent other deities also being represented and worshipped in the temple. But these other deities do not provide the main focus of activity, and the worship of them is generally on a far lesser scale than that directed to the main deity of the temple<sup>36</sup>.

Burghart has noted that some Hindu temples that have been built in Britain are dedicated to all the Hindu gods, rather than one or two particular gods (1987: 232). This practice seems to be against usual Hindu traditions - in this sense, there appears to be a change of practice of Hinduism in the British context. Burghart uses the example of the 'Shree Hindu Temple' in Bradford, which although it has a central murti dedicated to Ram has an inclusive title which calls attention 'not to the deity in the temple but to the community that worships the deity' (ibid.). In doing so the boundaries of this community can be drawn much wider, so as to attract all Hindus - regardless of regional background or personal preference.

Burghart argues that such a change can be related to the fact that Hinduism itself is changing in the new context of life in Britain. By this he means that Hindus' perceptions of their religion are being modified, especially in the ways in which these choose to present themselves. In India people think of Hinduism as what they do, it is a way of life which is part of the natural social order. In Britain, however, Hinduism is one of many religions that are all labelled as different by the majority white culture. That is, British Hindus are beginning to perceive their religious activities as constituting

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<sup>35</sup> For example Fuller (1984) describes the temple of Minaksi in Madurai; Appadurai (1981a) describes the temple of Sri Partasarati Svami (an incarnation of Vishnu/Krishna) in Madras city; and Pocock (1981) describes the temple of Krishna in Dwarka. Parry (1980, 1985) and van der Veer (1988) have both made studies of pilgrimage centres in India (Benares and Ayodhya respectively), which are focused on a number of such temple complexes.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Fuller's account of the deities worshipped in the Minaksi temple (1984), where the most important worship is directed at Minaksi and her spouse, whilst many other gods are worshipped in other parts of the temple complex.

‘a religion’ - a minority religion - which can be related to other minority religions, such as Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism. A product of this changing attitude is that Hindu religious organisations are becoming modelled on other ‘minority religions’, and - more importantly - upon the organisations of the majority religion (i.e Christianity).

This argument suggests that mandirs are becoming Hindu ‘churches’. That is, they are becoming socio-religious centres where Hindu worship is performed in a communal and congregational atmosphere very similar to the communal atmosphere that Christian churches are perceived as sustaining<sup>37</sup>. This is a large assumption to make, and the majority of Hindu temples in Britain do not appear to have changed as radically as this suggests. Indeed Vertovec (1992) has rightly argued that there is a great deal of diversity between British Hindu temples, and it is impossible to say that Hinduism has ‘become’ (or is becoming) any one particular thing in this new context.

However, it is also clear that the roles of most mandirs in Britain are definitely changing quite significantly. The usual idea of a Hindu temple (i.e. the ‘traditional’ view, as found in most parts of India) is as a place to visit, to worship the gods, and to acquire religious merit. Temples are auspicious places, and auspicious activities are practised at them. The individual worshipper will go to the temple for a particular reason - s/he may attend to see the evening ritual of *arti*, or to make a *puja*, or to fulfil a certain vow to the deity of the temple. Another significant reason for going to the temple is to have *darsan* - to see the god or gods of that mandir, the sight of which is thought to be auspicious. Although these ideas are all equally present in British mandirs, many other ideas are also becoming established as important parts of temple tradition.

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<sup>37</sup> Such a change in the role of Hindu temple worship has occurred in other diasporic Hindu populations, for example Vertovec describes how mandirs have become ‘churches’ among Hindus in Trinidad (1989, n.d.1), and a similar change has occurred in Guyana (Jayawardena 1966: 229).

## 4.4.2 Differing forms of mandir

### 4.4.2.1 Private/public temples

Mandirs in India tend to be fairly public arenas, but activity at such temples cannot be described as 'congregational'. The main communal group for temple worship is usually the family unit that attends together; beyond this level the attenders at a temple do not in any way form a 'congregation' - even though they may be worshipping 'together'<sup>38</sup>. In contrast to this, there are other arenas where congregational religious activity does occur - for example in home based ritual, and home based religious meetings (these are often called *satsangs*). It is in these particular contexts that group participation in collective worship may occur.

This home - or house - based religious activity does often take place in front of representations of deities. These representations are usually lithographs or small statues, in front of which the usual paraphernalia of worship are arranged - incense sticks and ghee lamps are burned to honour the gods. Also the floor is usually covered by sheets or blankets, and worshippers have to remove their shoes before they walk on it. In this sense the house based ritual is usually conducted in a specially dedicated sacred space, where the gods are temporarily present, and which should not be despoiled by impurities - such as the dirt on the soles of shoes.

In fact, there is little difference between the house based *satsangs*, and the religious meetings held in the Edinburgh Mandir (described in §4.2.1 and §5.1). The focus of worship is the same in both cases - that is, lithographic representations of the various Hindu deities - whilst the use of sacred space is almost compatible. The actual *form* of the worship practised at the Mandir is almost exactly the same as at house based *satsangs* - the singing of *bhajans* can be done anywhere<sup>39</sup>. What makes

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<sup>38</sup> That is, they may be worshipping together in the same building, worshipping the same god, and performing the same ritual, but their worship is not congregational and so they are not really worshipping together. For example, when *arti* is performed in India the worshipper arrives, does his/her *arti*, and then leaves - it does not matter what other worshippers are doing.

<sup>39</sup> This will be discussed in the next chapter, see especially §5.2.

worship in homes different from worship in the Edinburgh temple is simply the place itself. In a house, the worship occurs in a living room, or a special 'prayer room'<sup>40</sup>. In the temple, the worship occurs in an area specially set aside for worship.

But this is not necessarily a distinction between private and public areas: during the time when a satsang is occurring, a person's house is as equally public as a temple building. If the satsang is held in a domestic 'prayer room', then there is in fact no linguistic differentiation made between this and a temple - the room itself is called 'mandir', which is exactly the same word that is used for a Hindu temple building<sup>41</sup>. That is, the 'prayer room' *is* a temple. This is something that has been commented upon by a number of writers - in particular by Michaelson (1987). What is also commonly noted is that it is quite usual for Hindus to have a mandir in their homes (although it is more usually a small shrine or area dedicated to a god or gods, rather than a whole room). These mandirs can also be found in other areas of Indian social life - visitors to India soon notice the numerous mandirs that shopkeepers keep beside their cash registers, and which rickshaw-walas have on their dashboards. The adaptation of house based traditions of religious worship to the larger arena of temple worship is thus not altogether surprising. There does not appear to be much difference between holding a satsang in the front room of a house and in holding one in a building dedicated as a temple. If the temple has been ritually dedicated then it is a more sacred place - that is, it is more auspicious - but beyond that there are no real differences<sup>42</sup>.

It is interesting to ask, therefore, what is the difference between these house-mandirs, and the dedicated mandirs which are called 'temples'? They are obviously

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<sup>40</sup> Many families living in Britain have a special room which is set aside (if the house is big enough), and which they often call the 'prayer room' (or 'puja room') in English, and the 'mandir' in Hindi. This room is decorated with pictures of gods, inscriptions (e.g. of the syllable 'aum' and *swastiks*), etc., and is treated in a similar way to how a temple area is treated.

<sup>41</sup> See footnotes 1 and 34 above.

<sup>42</sup> This varies a great deal within India, and the comments made here are certainly more applicable to north Indian temples than to those in the south. South Indian temples are formal institutions, where only certain forms of worship can be performed. In many such places bhakti-style singing may occur (c.f. Fuller 1984: 37-39), but only under certain conditions, and not in the same way as described here.



perceived as being different in some respects, not least because there would be no need to have a 'Hindu temple' built if the home-mandirs were equivalent. The most easy opposition to make between home-mandirs and temples is that the former is 'private' or 'domestic', and the latter is 'public' or 'communal'. In the north Indian context such a distinction is not easy to make, since much depends on the meanings of these terms. Temples in India are usually places where domestic groups worship in a semi-public arena, but home-mandirs can also be used for public rituals or worship. The use of terms such as public and private is itself fraught with difficulties - these are western concepts that do not translate too easily into the Indian context. Furthermore, the terms are relational, and context dependent - for example, it is hard to say whether the large kinship-based units<sup>43</sup> of Indian societies are part of the public or private sphere. In fact, to even try to define these large kin groups as either public or private is a sterile debate.

#### 4.4.2.2 *Temples in Britain*

In the context of Hinduism in Britain, however, I think that it is possible to make a tentative observation about this public/private opposition. The development of the temple building in Edinburgh does seem to be an effort to create an arena for religious activity in the public sphere. By public I mean that it is open to the whole population, regardless of kinship or other factional connections. This 'public' is dependent on the notion of community - the temple is an arena to be made use of by every member of the community on a potentially equal basis. In this sense, the public *is* the Hindu community. In another sense, however, the public may also include non-Hindus - the temple may be used by anyone who is interested in it - regardless of their religious or ethnic affiliations. This makes the temple different from any other religious activity among Hindus in Edinburgh, which by taking place in homes is not accessible to

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<sup>43</sup> That is, the caste-jati networks in which so many Indians live.

anybody outside the community.

Thus it appears that the founders of the temple are beginning to perceive the temple as being public, in opposition to the privacy of domestic life - that is, the temple is beginning to be seen as being structurally distinct from and opposite to the home. This is again partly created by the sense that the temple *should be* open to all members of the community, not only to factions within it. It is also the result of the fact that applications for grants need to be made to local bodies. These non-Hindu agencies usually perceive the temple as a public place of worship - that is, a Hindu church - rather than acknowledging the different Hindu concept of 'mandir'. As Knott has shown among Hindus in Leeds, this discourse can help to encourage a sense within the group of the temple being 'public' (1986a: 77-86). The designation of the Edinburgh Mandir as a 'community centre' stresses the idea of public worship<sup>44</sup>.

Edinburgh Hindus' perceptions of what a temple should be appear to be changing. This change has been remarked on already by several writers (e.g. King 1984, Jackson 1981, Burghart 1987), with regard to other temple groups in Britain. However, this change is occurring in different ways in other parts of Britain from what is happening in Edinburgh. There are over two hundred mandirs in Britain, each of which is the product of specific historical circumstances. Some of these have been created as public arenas to bring together diverse populations, but others serve more exclusive purposes. Vertovec (1992) describes two such temples in south London - a sectarian Pushtimargi temple in Balham, and an Indo-Caribbean temple in Brixton. Both of these temples are used by specific social groups for their own purposes, but are avoided by other Hindus who do not find the styles of worship appropriate. Thus, although these places are 'public' in some respects, they have very different roles to those associated with the Edinburgh Mandir<sup>45</sup>, and serve very different 'publics'.

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<sup>44</sup> It is worth remembering that the decision to make the Mandir a community centre was taken in an effort to qualify for more funding (see §4.1.3.2 above)

<sup>45</sup> And, of course, the mainly Gujarati Balham Pushtimargi temple is very different from the Brixton Indo-Caribbean temple.

#### 4.4.2.3 Functional differences

There are very important functional differences between house-mandirs and temples. It is important to distinguish the types of activity which occur in these places. The house-mandir is most often used for the daily *puja* worship that is practised by individuals. This consists of the lighting of an incense stick and maybe a ghee lamp, and possibly the offering of some flowers. The structure of this puja is very much the choice of the individual - and may range from chanting a few *slokas* (verses from religious texts) or *mantras* (special word formulae that have religious significance), to spending several hours doing special household rituals (such as those set out in the *Grihya sastras* ).

This act of puja is not only done at house-mandirs, however. It may also be performed in a temple as part of a religious gathering (*satsang* ) - I will describe later (in §5.1.3.1) how such pujas are performed every month in Edinburgh. Other activities that are performed at these satsangs - such as *arti* and the singing of *bhajans* - can all be performed at house-mandirs as well as at the temple. In fact, I have attended several satsangs that took place in people's homes and the format and structure of these meetings were almost exactly the same as the temple-based satsangs described in §5.1.3. Most religious activities that are performed at house-mandirs can also be (and often are) performed in a temple. In this sense one can see the house-mandir as a convenience for worshippers - it is a place where ritual, worship, and devotion can be performed easily and comfortably. The same types of worship may also be performed in the temple, but to do so requires more effort. In Edinburgh a visit to the temple is only possible once a month - so worship there is not only inconvenient, it is also only available at certain times.

Temples are places where ritualistic worship is usually performed - that is, the type of worship which involves religious specialists (*pandits* ). This worship depends on the use of complex Sanskrit rituals, which are performed for specific purposes.

These rituals - such as the *Hawan* sacrifices (either Brahmanic or Arya Samaji; see §3.3.1.1) - are seen as being particularly auspicious, especially if they are done at the right place (that is in a ritually dedicated temple), and at a good time (that is a time which the pandit has declared as auspicious)<sup>46</sup>. It is very unusual to see such rituals in the Edinburgh temple, since there is no ritually dedicated temple and there is no pandit to perform them. But there are some rituals of this type that have to be performed - particularly at marriages and funerals. Neither of these require a temple building, however, even though they do require a pandit to perform them.

What has happened in Edinburgh until now is that pandits have been brought into the city from outside to perform these important rituals when required. The Mandir in Glasgow (about 40 miles away) has had a pandit since the summer of 1989, and so some Edinburgh Hindus use his services. This pandit is a Panjabi, however, and so he does not know the rituals that Edinburgh Gujaratis wish to use. He is not always available, and so Edinburgh Panjabis may also have to look elsewhere for a ritual specialist. The most usual solution is to bring a pandit up from the south of England - either from Leicester or London.

Weddings and funerals do not require a temple, so there is usually no problem in finding a place to hold them in Edinburgh. In fact, most Hindu weddings (in India and Britain) are held in a large hall, a hotel, or in the groom's family home, rather than in a ritually dedicated Mandir. It has been remarked by Menski (1987) that it is only in the British context that there is a tendency for Hindu weddings to be held in Mandirs. This has come about because of the requirements for licensing of marriages under English law - there has been a move among many Hindu communities to have their pandits and temples registered as places where weddings can be licensed. However, Good (1987: 21-22) has pointed out that there is a trend in some parts of South India for marriages to

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<sup>46</sup> *Hawan* sacrifices may also be performed in people's homes, especially among traditions influenced by Arya Samaj (see O'Keefe 1980: 155; Firth 1992: 77-78). In these cases, it is not always necessary for a pandit to perform the ritual - a knowledgeable lay-person (either male or female) may take the responsibility.

take place in temples - this appears to be an emulation of the Christian practice of church weddings. There does not appear to be any similar development of marriage in North India, at present most marriages in the north are conducted in other places.

Most of the marriages that I came across among Hindus in Edinburgh took place in hotels, which were specially hired for the purpose. These hotels were used as the venue for the ritual marriage - involving the fire sacrifice and the walk around the fire (these are the two most important elements in North Indian Hindu weddings). The legal marriage was separate from these rituals - in most cases it was performed at a registrar's office, either several months before the wedding, or around the time of the Hindu wedding<sup>47</sup>. There was one case of a Hindu man marrying a white Christian Scottish woman, which involved a church service (thus fulfilling the legal requirement) followed by a Hindu wedding in a hotel<sup>48</sup>.

The rituals involved with funerals are not usually performed in a Mandir either. In Edinburgh it appears that most funerals are performed at the crematorium, where most of the necessary rituals can be arranged. Rituals extra to those performed at the time of cremation are performed in the home of the deceased's family. If these rituals require specialist knowledge then a pandit will be brought in from another part of the country<sup>49</sup>.

I have also seen evidence<sup>50</sup> of other specialist rituals being performed at homes rather than temples. One such ritual is the worship of the goddess Mata-ji, which is a (possibly high-caste) Gujarati form of worship, requiring a pandit to perform specialist

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<sup>47</sup> Menski (1987: 194) has remarked that some South Asians have used the registrar office wedding as a 'form of engagement', and have held it some months before the real (religious) wedding is performed. Some people in Edinburgh have confirmed that this practice is common here too. But I have also been to a religious wedding where the bride and groom left the hall for a brief time so that the registrar could marry them legally.

<sup>48</sup> Many people in the Hindu community were amused by the fact that the sacrificial fire set off the fire alarms at the hotel. It appears that this particular hotel (which is one of the largest in Edinburgh) had never had a Hindu wedding performed there before.

<sup>49</sup> I did not attend any funerals during the period of my fieldwork. My knowledge about this subject was gathered second-hand from informants' recollections of previous funerals. For a detailed account of funeral rituals among Hindus in England (Southampton) see Firth (1992).

<sup>50</sup> This is usually in the form of home videos.

rituals on behalf of the married woman who sponsors the occasion. At the same time as these rituals, there is usually also the chance to worship in the more accessible *bhakti* style - that is *bhajans* are sung, and *puja* and *arti* are performed.

It is possible, therefore, for complex Sanskrit rituals to be performed outside temples. Some of these rituals may be seen as being most effective at temples, that is through being performed in especially sacred (auspicious) spaces that are free from impurity<sup>51</sup>. But there is no especial reason for the temple to be the only place where these rituals can take place. House-mandirs and temples do certainly have different functions, but there are no clear cut lines between these functions. There are certain activities (such as *puja*) that usually take place in house-mandirs, but these can also be performed at temples - as in fact often happens. Similarly, events that usually take place in temples can mostly be performed in the more temporary sacred space of the house-mandir (or some other site which is not ritually dedicated)<sup>52</sup>.

#### 4.4.2.4 Studying temples

The differences between temples and house-mandirs are certainly quite vague, but this does not mean that there are no differences at all. There is clearly a perceived need for Hindus in Edinburgh to make the distinction between these two types of mandir - otherwise there would be no need to build a temple in Edinburgh. That is, many Hindus in the city have decided that worship at house-mandirs is not sufficient, and that religious activity at some form of temple is necessary. It could be argued that the building of such temples in Britain demonstrates the fact that Hinduism is changing in the context of an alien environment. In India there would not be such a need for these

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<sup>51</sup> Fuller (1979) gives a good discussion of the idea of the temple as being 'pure', and the way in which ideas of impurity are associated with it.

<sup>52</sup> There are some rituals which can *only* be performed in temples - particularly the rituals of cleaning and feeding the temple murtis. Ritually installed murtis cannot be put anywhere other than a temple (since the installation of such murtis *makes* the place a temple), and so the rituals of maintaining them must, by definition, occur within temples. These maintenance rituals are obviously an important part of the religious life of temples, and of the people who make use of temples. But for most temple worshippers - especially those in North India - the other elements of worship discussed in this section are probably more important.

temples, since most of the religious needs of the population are satisfied by house-based ritual. But the problem with this argument is that there *are* many temples in India - and new ones are continually being built - and so not all religious needs are satisfied in the house or non-temple arena.

This perhaps counters the arguments put forward by Michaelson (1987) in her article on religious practice among British Lohanas in London. She points out that there are certainly problems associated with focusing on Hinduism as an institution based religion, when so much of Hinduism occurs without reference to temples.

Western concepts of religion expect religious activity to be largely institutionalized, conducted in consecrated buildings, and performed in the presence of officially ordained or sanctioned officers. Contrary to this, the Hindu home is designated as an abode of god and much religious activity takes place here. Second, whereas western concepts of religion expect theological and ritual orthodoxy amongst the followers of various sects and churches, and consistency of belief and practice, this is contrary to the spirit and practice of Hinduism (Michaelson 1987: 33).

To look for the preservation of religious life only in so-called religious institutions (e.g. church, temple, etc.) appears to be a bias from our own western cultural background. In fact, the distinction between the private institution of home and the public religious one of church does not apply in the Hindu context. (ibid: 48)

Most of these caveats do have to be accepted when a study of Hindu religious practice is made - although, as I have noted, the differences between home worship and temple worship cannot be completely ignored. However, by studying a religious institution (whether it is a Hindu temple or a Christian church) one need not necessarily imply that the religion is based *only* in that institution. What is being presented here is one perspective out of many, in a multi-faceted and multi-dimensional subject. Furthermore, my focus on the temple in Edinburgh is also derived from the fact that the institution is an important arena for many Hindus in the city. A lot has been invested into the project by many people. By choosing to examine the ways in which they are constructing the temple - as well as the reasons behind these processes - I do not consider myself to be imposing a westernised slant on the situation.

Bearing this in mind, this study is trying to show that the institution of the temple

is one arena where ritual, worship, and other social activities can take place. The performance of satsangs at the temple does not imply that the institution is any more correct as a setting for this activity than a house-mandir. Rather, the temple is attempting to provide an alternative forum and focus for religious activity. What I have found interesting is the fact that the temple is *becoming* one of the most important arenas for Hindu religious (and social) activity in Edinburgh. Such a development is rather different to the roles that temples in India usually have. It is not extraordinary for Hindus to wish to create a temple as a 'place for our gods', but to attempt to make this place a 'community centre' at the focus of a 'Hindu community' is requiring a reevaluation of temple tradition.

## **4.5 THE INVENTION OF TRADITION**

### **4.5.1 Inventing a temple tradition**

Those Indians who arrived in Edinburgh each brought their own religious traditions and ideas. It is clear that they have changed, reevaluated, and developed their ideas to a certain extent through their experiences of life in Edinburgh. The 'traditions' that they now follow have been invented to some degree - or more correctly, they have been reinvented or reinterpreted. This process is still on-going, in fact the temple tradition in Edinburgh is still being created, and the leaders of the community have a relatively free hand in this. The tradition of temple worship in Britain must be continuous with temple traditions in India, but there is a lot of ambiguity, since there are many traditions upon which the re<sup>in</sup>vention can be modelled.

As I argued in chapter three, there are so many different Hindu traditions, it is very much a matter of choice which forms the observer or practitioner chooses to define as 'Hinduism' (see §3.2). There is more limited choice in Edinburgh, since the members of the community are mainly from two regional traditions, but there are still many variations even within these two broad categories. With regard to the temple, there appear to be several models for what role the institution should have once it is



created, and also what it will be like (in terms of worship, ritual, and structure).

Panjabis and Gujaratis have differing ideas of what a temple should be, and these differ between those who once lived in India, and those who have seldom or never been there (for example, those who were brought up in East Africa or Britain). In terms of layout and structure, there is not much disagreement between Panjabis and Gujaratis - but both groups are aware that it will be crucial to ensure that the appointed *pandit* should come from within their own regional tradition. In terms of what the temple actually does - especially in the field of ritual - there is more room for controversy, and this will be discussed in the next chapter. What complicates the situation further is that participants have another set of models for how a Hindu temple should be, which are also in the process of being created by other Hindu communities in Britain. These are in many respects quite different from the Indian temple models, since they are the product of a process of transformation similar to the one that is occurring in Edinburgh. These newer models of temple tradition are helping to shape the Edinburgh situation, although in the process they are also becoming reinvented.

This is evident whenever Hindus talk about what the temple should be like. It is usual to hear comments being made about what happens in temples in England. For example, the statues should be on the upper floor because other temples have found problems with it downstairs (c.f. §4.2.2). Or the temple should be a community centre to qualify for more funds (c.f. §4.1.3.2). Or the *mandap* should be in the corner or at the front, because that is how they have it in a temple in Leicester. All these ideas become adapted to the situation in Edinburgh, and they soon become traditionalised, so that they become accepted 'tradition' within the temple. Gradually, through this development of other traditions, the shape of the Edinburgh temple is being created.

## **4.5.2 Hobsbawm on tradition**

### *4.5.2.1 'New' traditions*

The collection of papers edited by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1981) on the

'invention of tradition' has several good examples of how traditions can be created and manipulated by various groups of people for their own purposes.

Trevor-Roper (1983) demonstrates the ways in which ideas about Scottish highlanders have been modified. This group was once seen as backward - beyond both Scottish and Irish civilisation. But in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries they began to be seen as representative of Scotland as a whole. Trevor-Roper concentrates upon the two symbols most associated with the Highlands (and with Scotland): that is the kilt and the tartans. He shows that both of these were in fact relatively recent imports that have little to do with pre-eighteenth century highlander life. What Trevor-Roper fails to explain, however, is why the image of Highlanders changed so suddenly from being backward pariahs on the fringes of Britain, to becoming the essence of Scottish identity. He makes no real attempt to examine the power configurations that must have manoeuvred to bring about this startling transformation.

Cohn (1983) concentrates far more upon this political dimension. He traces the imagery of British colonial rule in India, and shows that many of the details of the imperial *durbars* were conscious reinventions of Indian customs. He draws a strong connection between the use of such imagery and the representations of colonial authority. His argument is that the symbols of power have to be manipulated - through such processes of reinterpretation - so that new political configurations can be legitimised. Bloch (1986: 178-195) puts forward a similar argument, although he argues that the structure of the symbolic system - and therefore the tradition itself - remains constant; it is only its interpretation that can change.

From this, it is worth asking what is meant by 'tradition'? It is not possible to make a distinction between tradition and custom as Hobsbawm (1983: 2) tries to do. He assumes that tradition is a fluid category, while custom is static. This cannot be upheld - nearly all tradition and/or custom is negotiable and open to reinterpretation and reinvention. Instead it is more useful to say that tradition is the cultural paraphernalia of a group. It can be used to describe any social activity that has a cultural context. It

does not necessarily have to be associated with the past, but - as will be shown - it usually is.

#### 4.5.2.2 *The importance of tradition*

Hobsbawm (1983) points out that the invention of tradition usually occurs at times of rapid social change, when there is a break in continuity between the old and the new. There is rarely a time when there is no social change - no society is static and unchanging - and so the reinvention of tradition is a very common occurrence<sup>53</sup>. But there are situations when change is greater and faster than usual, and the migration of Hindus to Britain is a good example of this. Among British Hindus there is a definite lack of continuity between the old ways (that is, how things were in India and/or East Africa) and the new ways - how things are in Britain.

Hobsbawm (ibid.: 4-7) notes that the role of the past in the invention of tradition is very important. Most attempts to recreate traditions appeal to some past (real or unreal) which is used as the basis for defining the present. According to Hobsbawm 'ancient materials' may be used to 'construct invented traditions of a novel type for quite novel purposes' (ibid.: 6). It does not matter how real these ancient materials were - it is more important that people believe that the present tradition is a continuation of a tradition that has its roots in the past. In fact, Hobsbawm suggests that the very fact that there is a lack of precedent can itself force the invention of a tradition to justify the present order<sup>54</sup> (ibid.: 7).

The main problem with looking at the ways in which traditions are invented is the fact that 'such traditions are partly invented, partly evolved in private groups, or informally over a period of time' (ibid.: 4). The process is subtle and it is very difficult

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<sup>53</sup> To return to the example of the 'stable' Indian village (discussed in §3.2.2.2), the processes of universalisation and parochialisation discussed by Marriott (1955) are a clear example of ways in which 'timeless' traditions may be reinvented.

<sup>54</sup> The founding of the Edinburgh Indian Association seems to be a good illustration of this point (see Appendix One). The association was founded in 1973, but members point out that its history dates back far beyond this - since there was an Edinburgh Indian Students' Association formed in 1883.

to observe, except with the hindsight of history. This difficulty should not be underestimated - although it does not mean that the processes cannot be understood. The recognition that traditions are often inventions can itself highlight a great deal that would otherwise be impenetrable.

#### 4.5.2.3 *Edinburgh temple traditions*

The traditions found within the Edinburgh Mandir are at present continually changing and being reinterpreted, and the processes by which these changes are occurring are obviously very complex. Indeed the notion of 'Hinduism' itself is developing to suit the needs of those who choose to use it in Edinburgh - it is being related to an age-old concept of '*sanatan dharm*' (i.e. the 'eternal religion', c.f. §3.3.3) - but the religious traditions that this concept describes are quite particular to the present day Edinburgh temple. Such a change of tradition is the result of an overlap of conflicting traditions, which are being brought together within the temple arena. These traditions are not being *replaced* by the new reinvented temple tradition - they are simply being subsumed *within* it. That is, the various traditions are being blended to appear as if they are a single tradition. There is nothing particularly unusual about Hindu temples having their own distinctive traditions, in fact most Indian temples are diverse in this way, having either traditions which are completely unique, or modified traditions based on other temples. What is most unusual about the Edinburgh temple is that so much is still negotiable, and so the processes by which the traditions are being created are more evident.

In the next chapter I shall be taking this further, by describing in detail the forms of worship being practised in the Edinburgh Mandir. This will be followed by a discussion of how these traditions of worship are changing - and being 'reinvented' - because of circumstances particular to Edinburgh (and Britain).

## CHAPTER FIVE. TEMPLE TRADITIONS

### 5.1 THE TEMPLE SATSANG

#### 5.1.1 General overview

The leaders of the Mandir are developing styles of worship which incorporate two divergent needs. Firstly, the individual leaders wish to create a temple which reflects their expectations of Hindu worship. Thus Panjabis try to ensure that the worship is based on predominantly Panjabi traditions, and likewise Gujaratis wish their own traditions to predominate. On the other hand, among the leadership there is also a recognition of the fact that the temple has to be, by necessity, a joint venture, and so compromises need to be reached. Thus although styles of worship should ideally be based on regional traditions, the worship also has to appeal to most, if not all, of the Hindu population living in the city. The resulting compromise is that the styles adopted are a hybrid of the traditions of the dominant Panjabi and Gujarati factions<sup>1</sup>.

Temple worship in Edinburgh takes two different forms<sup>2</sup>. There are regular meetings (called *satsangs*), which are held on the second Sunday of every month, and which have a small but committed attendance. Alongside this, there are also the important annual Hindu festivals, when many more worshippers attend for the religious benefits available at those times. In this section I shall be describing the regular satsang in detail, whilst later in this chapter (§5.3) I shall detail festival worship in the Edinburgh temple.

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<sup>1</sup> This has been confirmed for me by south Indians who say they do not like the way that things are done at the temple. For some of them it is a 'north Indian temple'. Some South Indian Hindus in the city satisfy their religious needs elsewhere. Similarly there are not many Biharis and Bengalis involved in the temple association.

<sup>2</sup> During my period of fieldwork, I attended approximately thirty five different religious meetings organised by the Mandir. Until October 1989 these were held in a room in Leith Community Centre; after that the meetings were transferred to the newly opened building. About half of the religious meetings I attended were regular monthly satsangs, and the other half were to celebrate various festivals. I also attended several satsangs held at people's homes, and these usually followed a very similar pattern to the temple worship.

Religious activity among the Edinburgh Hindu community occurs throughout the year. Much of it takes place in people's homes, but there is always some form of temple worship every month. These monthly meetings - *satsangs* - have been organised for about twelve years (see above, §4.1.1), and they take a simple form, which is intended to please all members of the community. I shall describe what appears to be a 'typical' *satsang*, as it is celebrated at the temple in Edinburgh. This is not an account of any one particular meeting of the temple, but is rather a description of elements that have come out during the regular temple meetings. Embellishments were sometimes made upon this structure (especially at festival times), while I have known some of these details to be omitted.

I am using the word *satsang* to describe the ordinary religious gathering because this is the one I heard most often used by the participants. It is a word more favoured by Gujaratis than Panjabis, but I have heard it used by most people at the temple, regardless of their affiliation. Another common word for the religious meetings is *kirtan*, although it is not used as often as *satsang*. I have only heard *kirtan* used by Panjabis, and so I assume that Gujaratis are not comfortable with it. Whereas *satsang* refers to the social gathering itself, *kirtan* refers to the devotional songs which form such an important part of these meetings. (*Kirtan* can also be used as an alternative to *bhajan*<sup>3</sup>.)

Attendance at these *satsangs* is usually about forty to fifty people, and there is a hard core of regulars who can be seen at the temple every month. Some people are more irregular in their temple attendance - they know that if they miss one month's *satsang* they can go the next month instead. Others are simply pleased to know that the Hindu gods are being worshipped regularly at a Mandir in Edinburgh - even though they only visit that Mandir once or twice in the year at a festival time.

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<sup>3</sup> For an attempt to define the difference between *bhajans* and *kirtans* see Wadley (1975: 41). I am not sure if her distinction - that is the difference in the way in which the song is sung - is applicable to Hindus in Edinburgh. The use of different words to describe the same activity implies that the participants are experiencing different things, or the same event differently.

It is important to remember that these satsangs are in no way dependent on a priest or any other religious specialist to lead them. The role of a Hindu *pandit* (i.e. priest) in India is usually to conduct the complex life-cycle rituals (for births, initiations, marriages, and deaths), and/or also household and temple rituals. A temple *pandit* has particular responsibility for the maintenance of worship to the deity in his temple and this worship may or may not involve a congregation. Pandits are employed for their specialist knowledge of the complex Sanskrit *mantras* and *slokas* that make up rituals, which is often gained through inheritance. They see themselves as apart from any other worshippers, who attend rituals to receive the blessings that the *pandit* obtains for them. Thus the lack of a *pandit* in Edinburgh does not prevent worship being organised in the temple. There are things that only a *pandit* (or a Brahman who is well educated in Sanskrit) can do, but these things do not form any part of the public worship at the temple in Edinburgh (see §4.4.2.3).

The style of worship appears to be quite informal - elements can be added or left out by the consent of those present<sup>4</sup>. The structure of the worship is known to all that attend, and so it is easily reproduced without any one person taking the responsibility for leading or directing the others. To the outside observer the satsangs simply appear to happen of their own accord.

### 5.1.2 Outline of temple satsang

Although satsangs vary a great deal from month to month, they each have a basic structure, which has four main components. These are as follows:

1. Offerings (*Darsan* and *puja*). People remove their shoes when they enter the temple and go to the pictorial representations of the gods (described in §4.2.1.2). They make individual offerings of money and/or food before the gods, and then bow in reverence and supplication, saying a short phrase.

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<sup>4</sup> For example, a temple meeting I attended was finished early one evening because a number of those present were keen to get home to watch the world cup football on the television.

2. Singing of religious songs (bhajans). Worshippers sit on the floor of the temple in the space before the pictures, segregated according to sex. For half an hour to two hours (sometimes for even longer), religious songs are sung by most worshippers in devotion to their favourite gods. This element is congregational and open, insofar as anyone can sing if they wish to.
3. Arti. When the bhajan singing is over then arti is performed. This is a common Hindu ritual found in most parts of India<sup>5</sup> (Bowen 1981; Knott 1986a & 1987). The gods are praised by the singing of another bhajan, as two young girls hold a cloth in front of the pictures - then people take turns to wave a ghee lamp before the now exposed pictures while a special song ('*Om Jai Jagdish Hare...*') is sung. The ritual ends with the chanting of some short Sanskritic phrases, and often a short ritual called *pradaksin* is performed.
4. Individual pujas and distribution of prasad. The arti lamp is then taken round to each person so they can make a small offering to the gods. Worshippers take some of the lamp's heat and light (both seen as being beneficial) by passing their hands over the flames. The food offerings made earlier are then divided up and distributed to everybody present. These offerings, called *prasad*, are believed to be special because they have been partially eaten by the gods<sup>6</sup>.

### 5.1.3 The temple satsang in detail

#### 5.1.3.1 Initial offerings. Darsan

In Edinburgh the regular satsang is held at the Mandir every month. It is scheduled to begin at 6.30pm, but the building is usually not open until a few minutes after that. The temple area has to be prepared before the worship starts: sheets and rugs

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<sup>5</sup> In south India (where it is called *alatti*) it takes a rather different form from that in the north (see Good 1991: 100).

<sup>6</sup> The notion of *prasad* has been the subject of considerable anthropological debate in the past decade or so. See, in particular Babb (1975), Fuller (1979), Eichinger Ferro-Luzzi (1977a, 1977b, 1978, 1981).



are put on the floor for the congregation to sit on, and during the winter the heater needs to be switched on and people given the chance to warm up. The person with the key to the building may often arrive late, so then the whole thing starts even later - thus it is rare for the satsang to start before 6.45pm or even 7pm.

When people enter the temple building they remove their shoes and leave them close to the door. They then go over to the sacred area, and - if the pictures have been prepared - they approach the mandir individually (a husband rarely goes up at the same time as his wife, although the woman or man may go with her/his children). Many women cover their heads with their shawl or the end of their sari when approaching these pictures, but this is not always done. The worshipper makes some offering to the gods (represented in the pictures), usually by placing a note in the tray under the lamp (£1 notes are the most popular notes offered, but £5 and £10 notes are also quite commonly put in), and some people also give food offerings - such as fresh fruit or sweets. This food is later distributed among the congregation at the end of the worship (that is, it becomes *prasad*, see §5.1.3.4) and it is usually put in a bowl to the right of the lamp.

After the offering has been made, the worshipper puts the palms of his/her hands together and says a short mantra (such as '*Om Laksmi*' or '*Hari Om*'), either out loud or quietly. Some take a step back from the table and go down on both knees in supplication to the gods. This gesture of respect (however it is done) is called *pranaam*, and is similar to the respect that is directed towards elders. With this initial gesture of respect completed, the worshippers go and sit somewhere in the sacred space on the carpet and sheets. The seating arrangement is so that men are all together on one side and women together on the other. This gender based division of seating is not rigid, and men sometimes find themselves sitting next to women and vice versa - especially if there are a lot of people present - but there is a distinctive pattern of the sexes being separated.

The initial offerings are made individually, in contrast to the rest of the worship

which gives the appearance of being congregational (even though it may not necessarily be that). But the initial *darsan* is something for the worshipper alone. People continue to make these offerings as they come in, regardless of what else may be going on in the temple<sup>7</sup>. While this is happening the main part of the worship begins. Sometimes a person begins with a reading or a prayer (in Hindi); this is usually from the Bhagawad Gita, although there have been occasions when there have been readings from other religious works, such as the Ramayan, or popular religious devotional texts. These readings are optional and are very much dependent on people having the will to do them. On one occasion, this sort of reading was done to fill in while waiting for someone to bring the instruments for the singing. At other times readings have been made in the middle of the bhajan singing rather than before it. No reasons were given for this, since no one thought it needed any explanation.

#### 5.1.3.2 *The singing of bhajans*

The prayers and/or readings are optional extras and are often omitted, and at most satsangs the singing of religious songs (called *bhajans*) starts as soon as enough people have arrived and are settled. Someone may start singing a bhajan that they like and expect others to take it up. More usually, someone calls out '*bolnee Krishna bhagwan ki jai, bolnee Ramachandr bhagwan ki jai*'. This is a call for the congregation to worship the gods (it literally means 'let us say "Victory to Krishna ... Victory to Ram"'). The congregation take up the last two words (...'*ki jai*'), usually with a lot of gusto. Then the first bhajan begins.

There is no complete agreement among the worshippers about this, but the first bhajan is usually dedicated to the god Ganesh (or Ganapati), 'the lord of auspicious beginnings'<sup>8</sup>. Some people maintain that the order of the bhajans is not important,

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<sup>7</sup> I have seen people go up to the pictures even if this involves having to walk in front of someone giving a talk to the congregation.

<sup>8</sup> Many Hindus believe that the elephant headed Ganesh is the remover of all obstacles from actions undertaken, and worship of him at the beginning of a project is believed to be the way to ensure

while others may complain if they are not done in the right order, but on most occasions the first bhajan is dedicated to Ganesh<sup>9</sup>. The main singer (that is the one who started the bhajan) is generally left to sing one or two lines of the song and then the rest of the congregation take up a refrain together. Not everybody does sing along, however; it is totally up to the individual worshipper whether or not s/he sings. Women are usually far more keen on singing than men, but this is not always the case. Accompaniment to the singing is provided by a drum<sup>10</sup> and several tambourines (shaken in time to the rhythm). People who do not sing (and many who do) usually clap their hands.

The choice of who leads the bhajans is made very casually - it is usually open for anybody who knows a bhajan and wants to sing it. There are some people in the congregation who dominate the singing more than others, and those who have a good reputation as singers are always expected to contribute the most. But it is possible for anyone to lead a bhajan, and some may lead just a single one, and then not sing anymore. The choice of what is sung is left open to the individual, although - as I mentioned - the first bhajan is usually dedicated to Ganesh. I have been told that there is a set order for the first five bhajans<sup>11</sup>, but this is rarely if ever followed. It is far more usual for a person to sing a bhajan that s/he particularly likes or knows, or s/he chooses one that is dedicated to a god that s/he is particularly fond of. I have been told that nobody minds who the bhajans are dedicated to. So if a person wishes to sing one to Ram or Krishna then other people happily sing along with it, even if this is not their

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success. Thus most Hindus will have some representation of the God on the entrance to their homes, and will have him as the first god that is seen when one enters a temple. When projects are begun an incense stick will be lit and offered to a representation of him, and I have seen this done by drivers starting their cars, and on wedding videos where the first shots will concentrate on an image of the god.

<sup>9</sup> For example, bhajans such as '*Deva na deva, Ganapati deva...*' or '*Jai Ganesh, Jai Ganesh...*'

<sup>10</sup> This is a dolak, played by two people together, one beating the skin and the other giving the rhythm by knocking a spoon against its side.

<sup>11</sup> I was told that it should begin with Ganesh, then there should be a bhajan to Siva, then one to Vishnu, and then to other gods. This scheme favours Siva worship to Vishnu, and as the informant is actually a Saivite it shows that this claim is probably partisan and not universal.

favourite god<sup>12</sup>.

A tension that I have observed occasionally is over whether a bhajan should be in Panjabi or Gujarati. There is no open disagreement about this, and I have observed many occasions of Panjabis encouraging Gujaratis to start a bhajan; but I have also known times when a bhajan was started by someone who felt that there had been too many already in a language that they did not understand. Similarly, if there is someone at the temple who is from the south or east of India, then they may try to make sure that they sing at least one song in their own language - even if this means that they have to sing on their own (since no one else understands the words).

The choices of bhajans are usually the same every month, since the same people attend the satsangs. The songs themselves are devotional pieces in praise of a particular god beloved by one of the worshippers. They tend to be fairly repetitive both in their words and their tunes. Many bhajans are so well known that several people remember all the words. For others, however, worshippers depend on small note books in which they have written the words of songs<sup>13</sup>. These notebooks are often handed around amongst the worshippers during a satsang for use by several different people. As Gujaratis write in a different script to Panjabis (even when writing Hindi) these books are rarely shared by members of the different regional groups. The emphasis in the singing is usually put not so much on the particular gods being praised in the bhajan, but on the fact that the gods as a whole are being worshipped, and that people enjoy themselves while doing it. The bhajans are a very devotional form of worship and so seem to follow the pattern of *bhakti* worship (although few people have described it as such to me). During this part of the satsang, the emphasis seems to be upon the private enjoyment of worshipping the gods in a sociable environment.

At the end of each bhajan the worshippers put the palms of their hands together

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<sup>12</sup> Similarly the choice of pictures of the gods in the temple is left completely open - people are free to put a picture of their favourite gods there if they wish (see §4.2.1.2)

<sup>13</sup> These are usually transcribed versions of songs from LP records.

and face the pictures, calling out together '*bolnee Krishna bhagwan ki jai*' or '*bolnee Ganapati bhagwan ki jai*', or whichever god was praised in that particular song (this is the same phrase called out at the beginning of the worship). The length of each bhajan can vary a great deal depending on the singer, so that although the length is usually between five and ten minutes long I have known them last thirty minutes or more on some occasions. In cases such as these, several similar bhajans are run together with no pause between them.

### 5.1.3.3 *Arti*

The singing of the bhajans can go on for as long as the singers wish to, and so lasts from one hour up to two or three hours. On most occasions at the temple the singing is limited to about one and a half hours<sup>14</sup>. This is then followed by the performance of arti. This is the most formal part of the whole service and is a version of the temple worship that is done throughout much of India. It is meant to be an evening-time ritual, to be performed as the sun is setting, and which people attend in a spectator role to worship and have a view (*darsan*) of the gods. I have witnessed such performances of arti in India, and was struck by the non-congregational element of the worship. That is, the ritual is conducted by the pandit in front of the statues of the gods (*murtis*), whilst the worshippers keep very much to themselves - they make their puja and take their *prasad* and then leave, having discharged their religious duty. There seemed to be a large difference between this and what happens in the Edinburgh temple, although I think more congregational forms of arti do exist in India too in other contexts<sup>15</sup>.

Arti starts when two members of the congregation<sup>16</sup> take up a brightly coloured

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<sup>14</sup> The bhajan singing usually ends at 8.30pm, so that arti can begin promptly at a regular time - and so that worshippers do not have to stay too late.

<sup>15</sup> Arti is also performed in home based worship - either when family groups worship together before the house-mandir, or at larger satsangs held in the house.

<sup>16</sup> These are usually young girls (teenagers or younger), but I have known mature women, and even mature men to do this.

(usually red with gold flecks) piece of cloth, and hold it in front of the table so that it obscures the main pictures and the lamp. Another bhajan is sung as the girls hold the cloth (on one occasion two bhajans were sung here). While this bhajan is sung it is believed that the gods become present in their representations<sup>17</sup> and they eat a portion of the food offered to them. People remain seated for this bhajan, apart from the two girls holding the cloth. The bhajan varies every month and I could find no pattern in the choice.

After this bhajan, which usually lasts about five minutes, the girls let the cloth down and the pictures are again in view. Everybody stands up (apart from the two people playing the drum) and the song '*Om Jai Jagdish Hare...*'<sup>18</sup> is sung by the congregation. This song is very popular and I heard it in many parts of India, both during the performance of arti rituals and also being played on the radio. I have met people who know it from Bihar in the east of the country to Gujarat in the west. Unlike most other bhajans, its words are known by everybody and sung with much relish. The performance of arti is meant to be accompanied by a lot of noise, usually the ringing of bells and the banging of drums, and the congregation in Edinburgh try to achieve this to a certain extent.

The main feature of arti is the waving of a lamp in front of the gods. In temples in India this waving is usually done by the pandit, on behalf of the people who come to worship, but as there is no priest in Edinburgh it is left for the people to do it themselves. The lamp - which is either a ghee soaked piece of cotton wool (a *diya*) or (on a few occasions) a simple candle - is on a large round metal tray (a *thali*). The tray is held in both hands and rotated in a clockwise direction away from the worshipper towards the pictures of the gods. There are various ways for the lamp to be rotated - although everybody makes it trace a clockwise circle, some rotate it in the horizontal

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<sup>17</sup> In this case the representations are the pictures of the gods, but in most temples it is the proper statues.

<sup>18</sup> For translations of this song see Jackson (1981: 84-85), Knott (1986a: 121), and Gold (1988: 274-5).

plane, while others rotate it vertically, and others wave the lamp so that it traces in the air the symbol 'Aum'<sup>19</sup>.

This waving of the lamp is popular among the congregation, and there is never any shortage of people wanting to do it. It also tends to be a family, or at least familial, thing for people to do, with mothers or fathers taking all their children up, or friends may do it together. Most people put some money into the tray before they start the waving - either some more notes, or otherwise some coins. I was told that it used to be the tradition to put 5p and 10p coins in the tray as offerings, but these are not worth very much these days and so £1 notes are put instead.

The song '*Om Jai Jagdish Hare...*' usually lasts about ten to fifteen minutes, giving enough time for people to have a chance to wave the arti lamp if they wish to<sup>20</sup>. The last person to take the lamp is usually a certain Brahman man (he is not trained in any special way to do religious rituals, although his grandfather was a pandit). This man<sup>21</sup> waves the lamp in the same way as the other worshippers, but then he takes the tray in his left hand before each of the pictures of the gods and with his right hand he wafts the heat and light from the lamp towards the representations of the gods, passing along the whole row of pictures to do this to each one. By this time the arti song has usually ended, and some Sanskrit phrases are being chanted by those who know them (there are a lot of people who do know these, but not everybody knows all the words). The choice of chants used at this point does vary a little from satsang to satsang, but

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<sup>19</sup> This is:



That is, they wave the lamp as such:



<sup>20</sup> This is nearly always possible because the congregation is quite small. In larger congregations, such as in the Glasgow temple, only a few people get the chance to wave the arti lamp - these will tend to be the ones who are in prominent positions in the temple. In Edinburgh at festivals there are several trays and everybody is encouraged to wave the lamp.

<sup>21</sup> I have also seen other people doing these rituals when the man is not present, although sometimes the rituals are not done at all. Women as well as men can do these rituals, but they are nearly always Brahmans.

there are two chants that are nearly always used. The chant '*tvameva matam cha pita...*'<sup>22</sup> usually comes at the beginning of the chanting (although another shorter one may be inserted before it if people wish) and then the last chant is nearly always '*Om shanti, shanti, shanti...*' (Peace, peace, peace...), even if the longer chant, of which that is a small part, is not used.<sup>23</sup>

While these Sanskrit chants are being said the man at the pictures will have finished waving the arti lamp and has taken a small cup of water and put a little of it into the palm of his right hand. He pours this water so that it trickles out of the side of his palm in a clockwise circle around the outside of the arti tray. He does this three times, and each time the water is poured around the lamp in several circles. This small ritual is called *pradaksin*<sup>24</sup>. Then he takes the lamp in his left hand again and, turning to the congregation, he wafts the heat and light of the lamp with his right hand in their general direction. While he is doing these rituals the other worshippers do not tend to take much notice of what he is doing. If the 'shanti' chant is completed before *pradaksin*, then they may start talking amongst themselves - regardless of the fact that rituals are still being done. These rituals are not essential to the *satsang*, or to the performance of the arti, and *pradaksin* may be left out if no one is present to do it - instead the arti lamp is left on the table in front of the pictures while the Sanskrit chants are said. Otherwise someone else may wave the lamp towards the pictures, or they may perform the whole *pradaksin*.

#### 5.1.3.4 Individual puja and prasad

The chanting of '*Om shanti shanti shanti...*' marks the end of the worship, and

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<sup>22</sup> Knott translates this chant as such: 'You are my mother and father, my brother and friend. You are my knowledge and wealth. You are the greatest god of all.' (1986a: 122).

<sup>23</sup> For translations of the other Sanskritic chants used at this stage of arti in the Leeds temple, see Knott (1986a: 122).

<sup>24</sup> *Pradaksin* is usually the ritual of (clockwise) circumambulation of a temple or shrine - or the *garbhagriha* area of a temple. Knott (1986a: 112, 154) suggests that the *pradaksin* occurring in arti in the Leeds temple is a truncated (and substitute) form of the more large scale ritual, to make up for the fact that there is no way of walking around the Leeds temple. A similar argument has been given to me concerning the ritual at the Edinburgh temple.



after this there follows a period of disorganisation. The arti lamp is taken round on the tray for people to worship individually. They do this by putting some money offering (usually a coin) into the tray beneath the lamp, and then they pass both hands above its flames and put these hands over their hair and their faces. Some may also put their fingers across their eyes and their noses so that the beneficial elements that they have received from the lamp are transmitted to these places in particular. While this is happening, *prasad* is distributed. Prasad is the food that was offered to the gods as people came in earlier, and by this time it is believed that the gods have eaten a small portion of it. This prasad is either a sweet or a fruit (often both). The sweet may be semolina *halwa*, sugar crystals with nuts and raisins, *barfi* (Indian fudge), other Indian sweets, or fruit such as apples or bananas. On one occasion the prasad was *samosa* - which are savoury - these were served out after the arti, even though they had not been placed before the pictures during the satsang itself.

As the prasad is being distributed and the arti lamp taken round, some announcements and notices are made by one of the officials of the temple. These may be either in English or Hindi and are usually concerned with the timing of festivals coming up, or other get-togethers that may be occurring, and any other relevant news. A large part of the announcements are concerned with telling how much people have donated as gifts to the temple in the past month, either at that satsang or before it. The speaker says the name of the person and how much they have given<sup>25</sup>. There may also be an announcement of the reason for the gift being made, and examples of this are on the occasion of a relative's wedding, on someone's own birthday, or on the anniversary of a relative's death. The gift may simply be a straightforward gift to the temple funds, however.

After the announcements are finished the meeting breaks up and people take the

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<sup>25</sup> The figure is usually a multiple of £10 if it is a small amount, but if it is anything more than £40 or £50 then it may be £41 or £51, since there is a belief that such numbers are more auspicious.

chance to socialise - since this may be the only time in the month when Hindus get together on this scale. There may be some form of meal served out, but, as the temple does not have any proper kitchen facilities, this is rarely done<sup>26</sup>.

## 5.2 DEVOTIONAL WORSHIP - BHAJANS AND SATSANGS

The format of worship at the temple is the result of a great deal of negotiation and bargaining. There is no obvious reason why the patterns of worship described above should have been chosen rather than any other forms. It is, therefore, worth asking why worship at the Edinburgh temple takes the forms that it does, and what is the significance of the various components. The singing of bhajans in particular is a very common form of worship among Hindus in Britain - there are many references to this type of devotional worship in the literature on British Hinduism. Bhajan singing is described in Leeds, Bradford, London, Bristol, Coventry, and Leicester<sup>27</sup>. In most of these cases the singing of bhajans is usually not the only form of worship performed at the temple.

It seems clear, however, that devotional worship is common among British Hindus and that a clear pattern is emerging, in which the singing of bhajans at satsangs is becoming established as an important form of congregational worship. Another common trend is the performance of hawan sacrifices - usually following the influence of Arya Samajis (c.f. §3.3.1.1). These are most often performed in temples, although O'Keefe (1980: 155) describes how in East London they can be organised in worshippers' homes. This tendency for hawan has not become manifest in Edinburgh - the temple does own the fire grate (*kund*) for the ritual, but it is rarely used. I have heard a few individuals express a hope that the ritual will be instituted once a *pandit*

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<sup>26</sup> As noted in chapter four there is an intention to introduce meals on a regular basis once the temple is properly open (see §4.2.2).

<sup>27</sup> See for: Leeds (Knott 1986a; 1987); Bradford (Bowen 1981); London (Michaelson 1987; Tambs-Lyche 1980a; O'Keefe 1980; Kalka 1986; Vertovec 1992); Bristol (Barot n.d.1); Coventry (Jackson 1981); Leicester (Teifion 1984).

arrives, but I do not think there is much overall desire for it. This is in contrast to the Glasgow Mandir, where hawan is performed at least once a month<sup>28</sup>.

### 5.2.1 Devotional bhajans

The performance of satsangs in Edinburgh has developed into a form of temple worship - it has become a tradition of activity which is firmly associated with temple life. I have already mentioned that this is not the case in other parts of Britain - Michaelson (op cit.) makes it clear that such satsangs in London are definitely not temple worship. In Edinburgh, these satsangs are not always held in the temple - they are often held in people's homes. But there is now a firmly established tradition that bhajans should be sung whenever temple worship is organised.

The bhajans take up most of the satsang in terms of the time spent, and they are also the part of the worship which participants tend to devote most effort to. I would say that participants now particularly associate temple worship with bhajan singing. A small illustration of this is the remark made to me by an occasional worshipper at the temple. He commented that:

'at the temple all they do is just sing and play', (he illustrated this by making a gesture with his hands to show cymbals being clapped together).

This remark seemed to him to be an indictment of the Edinburgh temple.

This is what is done most at the temple, nearly all religious gatherings are marked by the singing of bhajans at some time or other. The only exceptions to this are marriages and funerals, where the emphasis is on the performance of rituals rather than the singing of songs. But both of these life-stage rituals also have bhajan singing associated with them. There is often a pre-marriage satsang arranged, when bhajans are sung for 'auspicious blessings' for the soon-to-be married couple. Some individuals may sponsor bhajan singing on the anniversary of a loved-one's death,

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<sup>28</sup> The difference in Glasgow appears to be that the temple there is dominated by Panjabis. Arya Samaj is strongest in the Panjab.

particularly if the deceased is a parent.

### 5.2.1.1 *Bhajanas in Madras*

There are a number of descriptions of the singing of bhajans among Hindu communities, both in India and in Britain. One of the best of these is by Singer (1972), who made a study of religious worship among urbanised Brahmans in Madras city during the 1950s. This group usually worship at meetings called *bhajanas*<sup>29</sup>, which both they and Singer equate with *bhaktimarga*, the ‘path of devotion’ (ibid.: 156). Such worship is seen as being in contrast to the ‘proper’ form of Brahmanic practice, which should be along ‘the paths of ritual observance [*karmamarga*] and of knowledge [*jnanamarga*]’ (ibid.: 156).

These Madras bhajanas are similar to the Edinburgh satsangs in several respects. This is not simply because both are ‘bhakti’ worship<sup>30</sup> - although the common element of devotion in both cases is important to remember. I will briefly summarise the description that Singer gives of the Madras bhajanas to show how this worship is similar to and differs from the Edinburgh satsangs<sup>31</sup>.

The type of bhajana which is most popular among the Madras Brahmans is the weekly bhajana, which takes place most Saturday evenings in a worshipper’s home (ibid.: 158). These gatherings are very informally organised, although older men

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<sup>29</sup> This is a South Indian equivalent of the word bhajans (although unlike ‘bhajan’, bhajana is not commonly used outside of urban areas). In the south India context the word appears to have a double meaning, referring to both the religious songs and the gatherings at which they are sung. I have not come across this among the north Indians in Edinburgh, although (as I have already described) some north Indians use the word *kirtan* in this way. Indeed Singer comments: ‘The usual translation [of *bhajana*] is “prayer” or “devotional song”. In North India *kirtan* and *sankirtan* are used as rough synonyms’ (Singer 1972: 205). See also footnote 3 above.

<sup>30</sup> I feel that there are problems with the term ‘bhakti’ since it does not really describe any specific form of worship, while it has many irrelevant connotations. I would agree with Sharma (1987) that bhakti refers to many different types of worship rather than being descriptive of one particular form of religious cult or practice.

<sup>31</sup> In this section I will use the term *bhajana* to refer specifically to these Madras devotional gatherings. I will imply that the terms *bhajana* and *satsang* are roughly synonymous. But I will maintain a distinction between *bhajana* and *bhajan* - the latter I will use to refer specifically to the religious songs that are sung at these devotional gatherings. In practice, as the above footnote (29) suggests, the use of these terms by informants is usually much more fluid than this.

(especially those known for their devotion and knowledge of religious songs) may act as bhajana leaders. Such leaders are not always needed, however, and bhajan meetings may occur without any special leaders. Each session usually lasts about three or four hours. The devotion is directed primarily to Krishna 'who is invoked with songs, in lithographs on the walls, and in a lamp placed on the floor in the centre of a circle of devotees' (ibid.: 159). The songs form 'utterances' (*upacaras*), which are equivalent to those offered by temple priests (ibid.).

The men of the group, usually about a dozen, sit in a circle or in rows on the floor and lead the singing while the women and children sit to one side and join in the refrains. The standard pattern is for the leader to recite or sing a phrase, like "Let us sing the name of Govinda" and for the audience to respond by repeating the name or shouting "Jai, Jai"...' (205)

*Namavalis* are then chanted - these are devotional refrains or the names of gods, which are performed with great emotion by the worshippers. The names of various gods and saints are chanted, and then a few religious songs (i.e. bhajans) are sung.

This is followed by the major ritual of the bhajan, which is 'a *puja* (religious offering) to Krishna and Radha' (ibid.: 206). This is an elaborate version of more brief pujas which occur at the start and towards the end of the bhajana singing. The main puja includes the offering 'of flowers and food to the lithographs of Krishna and Radha on the wall, a recitation of 108 names, and the waving of the camphor or wick lamp (*arati*)' (ibid.). This puja usually takes about forty-five minutes to an hour, and is quite similar to domestic and temple pujas. After this Sanskrit songs and stanzas are sung to 'the three gurus' (ibid.), and to religious figures, such as saints. Some classical bhajanas are sung from various regional traditions. Invocations are made of the major Sanskrit gods, and in particular of Vishnu. A short *arati* (arti) is performed, although it is not clear who is responsible for the lamp (probably the leading devotee).

In the eyes of the devotees, the climax of the bhajana comes when they embrace each other and roll on the floor to take the dust from each other's feet... [T]his part of the bhajana expresses "the spirit of equality without respect to young and old, caste or creed". (160)

At the end of the bhajana, the special food of the day, already offered to the deity in the puja, is distributed to all as a "favour" (*prasada*) of the Lord (208).

### *5.2.1.2 Madras bhajanas and Edinburgh satsangs*

There are several similarities between these bhajanas and the Edinburgh temple satsang, but there are also a number of differences. The Madras bhajanas are obviously more formal than the worship in the Edinburgh temple. The presence of a leading devotee as the bhajana leader means that there is less scope for the Madras Brahmans to share responsibility, and so the worship is more centralised. These bhajanas are also very male-orientated and male-dominated groups, which is quite the opposite of the Edinburgh satsangs. In the bhajanas more stress is put on the performance of the main ritual (the puja to Radha and Krishna), whilst the arti does not appear to be taken very seriously. In Edinburgh it is up to individuals to perform their own pujas, and the performance of arti is seen as being very significant.

Despite these differences it is clear that there are a number of factors in common between the Madras bhajanas and the Edinburgh satsangs. Both are groups based on devotional worship, where the main form of worship is the singing of songs in praise of Hindu gods. Both are inclusive in their aims, and both promote a non-sectarian ideal. In both cases also there is a tendency in the worship for less stress to be placed on ritual than on devotion. This devotional inclination is recognised by the worshippers in both cases. However, among the Madras Brahmans, ritual knowledge is still important and highly valued, but the participants feel that there are times when more emphasis should be put on devotional worship. In fact, Singer's description shows that there is a fairly high ritual content in the Madras bhajanas, although the ritual is performed alongside - rather than instead of - more devotional worship.

### *5.2.1.3 Ritual and devotion in Edinburgh*

There is a similar situation in Edinburgh. Most worship that occurs in the temple is devotional, particularly the bhajan singing at the regular meetings. But such worship often includes rituals as well - for example, arti is a ritual, and this is often accompanied

by someone conducting the ritual of *pradaksin* (see §5.1.3.3). But *arti* is also concerned with devotion, since the *arti* song ('*Om Jai Jagdish Hare...*') is a form of *bhajan* which is performed in a special context. On the whole, though, there is a feeling that most ritual forms of worship are not as easily performed as more devotional styles of worship.

The lack of a *pandit* in Edinburgh is one of the contributory reasons for this - ritual requires specific knowledge, which is usually only accessible to certain elements of Hindu society. Even so, there are a number of Brahman members of the Edinburgh community - several of these have told me that their fathers (or grandfathers) were *pandits*, and so they know how to perform most of the important rituals. It is these people who tend to perform the small rituals such as *pradaksin*. They could easily perform other rituals if they wished to, such as *hawan*. Although this is usually performed by a *pandit*, there is no reason why it should not be done by learned laity - in the case of the Nottingham temple, it is performed by lay women from the local community (Menski, personal communication). *Hawan* is also (potentially) a short ritual - it need not take more than thirty to forty minutes to perform - and so the reason for its non-performance in Edinburgh is not because it takes up too much time.

If it is so easy to perform ritualistic worship in the Edinburgh temple, then the crucial question to ask is why is it not performed? Why have the members chosen a style of worship which tends to be more devotional than ritualistic? Following from these questions, what is it about *bhajan* singing that suits the Edinburgh temple community? There is a definite pool of knowledge within the community that would make the performance of rituals possible. I have asked a few of the Brahman members why they do not lead the worship and perform the various rituals associated with temples, and they have all replied that they would not like to put themselves 'in that position'. To do so would involve them taking on a role of leadership, which none of them desire. Conversely, those members who do wish to be leaders do not have the necessary knowledge to perform most rituals.

However, this is not completely dependent on a relationship in which Brahmans are to non-Brahmans as rituals are to devotion. Some of the most prominent leaders of the temple are Brahmans, a number of whom do have the requisite knowledge to perform complex rituals. Ironically, of these leading Brahmans, those who have the most power also have the least ritual knowledge, and so tend to put the stress on more devotional forms of worship. This may be an accident of history/personality - but it may also be the result of the fact that a delicate balance is required within the temple to achieve the level of compromise necessary for the project to fulfil its aims.

#### 5.2.1.4 *The dynamics of worship*

The performance of rituals - such as hawan - often requires a centralisation of the dynamics of worship. If the ritual is conducted by a hired pandit then people accept this centralisation, but if a lay member takes this role, then problems can arise. This is especially true if the lay member is conducting rituals on behalf of the community, rather than performing the ritual for his/her own benefit, or for close kin. The role of the ritual specialist is partly political, especially when the rituals are conducted in a congregational setting. By performing rituals which are important to other worshippers, the specialist may take on a central position within the dynamics of the temple. This does not always happen, of course - the temple pandit in India does not have any particular political role vis-a-vis the worshippers who use him<sup>32</sup>.

But when the temple is meant to serve a community, then the ritual specialist is in a good position to manipulate his/her knowledge into a position of political power. Without the specialist, the community of worshippers would not be able to function properly. Indeed, the Edinburgh temple community is focused very strongly upon the satsang - this is the main time when Hindus actually come together as 'Hindus'. To have a prominent role within this satsang is thus an important way in which one can

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<sup>32</sup> The important economic *jajmani* relationship between priests and laity in Hindu temples and communities is beyond the scope of this discussion.



have a prominent role within the communal group. To have control over the satsang is to have a strong influence over the ways in which the community is constructed. Of course, there are many other sources of power within the temple (see §4.3.2), but this role as the centre of worship is potentially rather important in this context. It is for this reason that certain people who are capable of performing rituals avoid assuming this role - because they do not want any political prominence.

Even the performance of a small ritual like pradaksin can cause problems. When I have asked people why the ritual is usually done by the same person I have been given a variety of answers. One person told me that 'anybody can do it, it doesn't take any special knowledge'. This may be true, but the ritual is nearly always done by the same person - not everybody does do it. Another person even said that 'the person doing it does not really know what he is doing'. I do not believe that this is true; instead I believe that the comment was an attempt to degrade the role of the ritual specialist, even though, in this case, the ritual is not very prominent or important.

In contrast to these rituals, I would suggest that the singing of bhajans is a decentralised form of worship. It is rare for only one person to lead the singing - more usually a number of different people opt to sing. People comment that it has been a good satsang if a lot of people have sung. The women often tease the men (who generally take a lesser role in the singing of bhajans) by calling out '*bolo*' (sing), or by joking about the men being very quiet. On the few occasions when the singing has been dominated by one or two people, I have heard complaints that this should not have happened. I am given the impression, therefore, that members of the Edinburgh temple wish to maintain a balance of the power relations within the satsang, so that no individual or group is permitted to concentrate authority and the control of worship in their hands alone. To allow one person responsibility as the ritual specialist would encourage such a concentration, as would having a single leading bhajan singer. The performance of arti also illustrates this attempt to balance out or democratise - the waving of the lamp is done by all the worshippers, rather than by a single pandit

(which is the usual way that it is done).

For as long as leadership within the temple is informal - that is, for as long as there is no pandit - I believe that this situation will be maintained. And the best way of maintaining it is to continue with a leaderless form of worship, which is what the bhajan singing happens to be (in this case). This does not mean that political disputes and manoeuvrings do not occur within the temple, but the format of worship helps to regulate the scope for political control. On the other hand, the decision to have worship in this form rather than any other was also a political decision. It was made by certain members of the community for their own political reasons (that is, because it fits with their expectations of temple worship). For those who do not agree with this form of worship the choice is to either put up with it, or to go elsewhere.

### 5.2.2 The satsang as a common forum

Bhajan singing is (potentially) a politically stabilising form of worship, and so it suits the needs of the community. It is also politically convenient for a heterogeneous community, since it is potentially integrative and inclusive of all Hindus. Singer makes this point when he says that the bhajanas among the Madras Brahmans have the potential to be 'ecumenical'<sup>33</sup> and that:

[They] bring together, at least within the religious and cultural sphere<sup>34</sup>, different castes<sup>35</sup> and sects, linguistic and regional communities. Historically, devotional movements have had similar tendencies but have usually resulted in the formation of exclusive sects. The contemporary movement inspired not so much sectarian and denominational formations as a diffuse emotion of brotherhood, which softens the rough edges of group differences (ibid.: 158).

It seems true certainly that the bhajana groups in Madras practised an integrative form of worship. But devotional worship is not always integrative - it can also emphasise

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<sup>33</sup> The term ecumenical is one that has been used a great deal by Williams (1988) about the process of integration of various Hindu groups within the USA (see §3.5.2).

<sup>34</sup> I think that it would be impossible to define what is and is not within these two spheres, especially among Hindus, whose religion and culture encompass all other spheres of activity.

<sup>35</sup> Although the bhajans tend to be organised by Brahmans, Singer stresses that the participants attempted to include members of other caste-jatis in the groups whenever possible (op cit.: 228).

divisions, and lead to sectarianism and exclusiveness<sup>36</sup>. It cannot be assumed that devotional worship is always communal and inclusive. As Singer puts it: 'to interpret the *bhajana* in terms of a democratic ideology can be very misleading' (ibid.: 229).

In Edinburgh, however, the use of bhajan singing does appear to be inclusive and ecumenical. The satsangs are open for all worshippers to participate in, regardless of regional or sectarian differences. The mode of worship provides an ideal common forum for a heterogeneous community - bhajans can be in any language, any style, and directed to any gods, and so it is easy for all people present to participate in the worship.

Singer examines various ways in which the Madras bhajanas can help to overcome social distinctions within the group. He suggests that:

Linguistic regionalism is by-passed by the use of songs in various languages... Caste differences are minimised by inviting non-Brahmans to bhajanas... and by the salutations and prostrations of the devotees to one another irrespective of caste... [And] by holding the bhajanas in private homes or public halls rather than in temples, sectarian differences are also muted (ibid.: 228).

### 5.2.2.1 *Diversity and communality*

The role of languages is certainly very important in the singing of bhajans at the Edinburgh temple. Bhajans can be sung in any language by worshippers, and at most satsangs there are usually songs in all the main languages of the worshippers. The bhajans are usually easy to sing, and individuals can often join in the refrain, even if they do not understand the rest of the song. This catholicism of language is also true of the style of the bhajan - individuals are free to sing bhajans in whatever style pleases them. The songs are usually in regional folk styles, but more classical bhajans may also be sung, and another common style is 'filmi' - that is, songs taken from the many religious films of India<sup>37</sup>. Non Indian songs may be used occasionally - once I heard

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<sup>36</sup> Vertovec (1992: 255-57) describes a Gujarati temple where devotional worship is associated with divisive sectarianism. He also mentions the Pushtimargi tradition, which is a sectarian and exclusive devotional group.

<sup>37</sup> There have been a few complaints made about the use of filmi songs in the temple, which I will

someone sing the Jewish song '*Hava nagela*'. I have also heard westernised Indian styles sometimes, such as the ISKCON<sup>38</sup> chant '*Hari Krishna, Hari Krishna. Hari Rama, Hari Rama...*'. On one occasion a (white Scottish) ISKCON worshipper attended the temple and was encouraged to sing such a song, which the other worshippers joined in with enthusiastically.

Again, it must be stressed that this openness to different languages and styles is only *potentially* integrative. If the satsang group was all Gujarati, for example, then worshippers from other regions would be tolerated, but the satsang would be predominantly Gujarati in style and tone. Likewise, the Glasgow temple is composed of a majority of Panjabis, and so most of the bhajans sung during worship there are in Panjabi, and in the style of Panjabi folk songs. This alienates most Gujaratis, and so very few Gujaratis go to the Glasgow Mandir. This reinforces the temple's status as a 'Panjabi temple'<sup>39</sup>. In a situation like Edinburgh - where the group is mixed, and where there is a desire to maintain a degree of communality - then the satsang is a useful forum for allowing this to happen. The differing regional languages and traditions are given limited freedom of expression through the bhajan singing. It is less clear why such a catholic approach is taken among the more homogeneous Brahmans of Madras.

#### 5.2.2.2 *Caste-jati differences and worship*

Singer's second point concerns the use of bhajans to overcome caste-jati differences. In Edinburgh, caste-jati is probably not so crucial for determining social

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discuss later (§5.2.5.1).

<sup>38</sup> ISKCON is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, otherwise known as the 'Hari Krishna movement' (see footnote 26, chapter 4). For an examination of the links between ISKCON and Indian Hindus in Britain see Carey (1987) and Knott (1986b).

<sup>39</sup> To compensate for this the Glasgow Gujaratis have formed their own association called the 'Gujarati Association', which organises social events (like the Edinburgh Indian Association) as well as religious events - in particular Nawratri and Diwali. It seems likely that this association will one day be developed into a Mandir.

interaction as in Madras - most life necessitates free mixing of different caste-jatis on many levels. Caste-jati identity in Edinburgh is mainly of importance for deciding who one marries. This is in contrast with other areas of Britain, such as in London and Leicester, where much social interaction is determined by caste-jati membership (see Michaelson 1979, 1983, 1987; Barot 1974, 1980; Tambs-Lyche 1980a, 1980b).

There is a great deal of mixing of caste-jatis in other areas of life among Hindus - such as at the Edinburgh Indian Association and on the level of friendships between individuals. Thus there is no real need for the religious worship to overcome caste-jati differences in the Edinburgh community. This notwithstanding, the satsangs do probably play a small role, as an example of caste-jati inclusiveness, since they demonstrate ideologically that co-operation between all members of the community on all levels is the expected norm. Ideas of caste-jati identity are not easily submerged - although there is free mixing of different caste-jatis in Edinburgh there are many occasions when this principle of distinctiveness is important to individuals.

For example, the fact that so many people have told me that they are Brahmans demonstrates that they feel this to be of importance. Also it is unusual to find people who have married outside of their jati. Kanitkar (1972a; 1972b) has also pointed out that even those people who say that caste is unimportant often (unconsciously) use the principles of caste to choose their friends and companions. She describes how many students in London did not realise that all their friends were of the same caste as themselves until she pointed the fact out. Thus although there is a great deal of talk of the breakdown of caste-jati differences, this does not always happen. Singer is aware that the bhajanas do not necessarily help to reduce the differences between the various castes who take part in them. An example of this is his description of how the supposedly egalitarian actions within the bhajanas - such as the rolling mutual prostrations in each others' dirt - are described by the participants as really being prostrations before the gods, and not before their co-worshippers.

Thus the degree of communality may not be very great. The Edinburgh satsang

may be a forum in which differences are partially submerged, but the differences will still remain. Language may still be used to emphasise divisions - a bhajan sung in Gujarati may exclude non-Gujarati worshippers. And Brahmans are still called upon to perform rituals such as pradaksin - so the issue of caste-jati membership is not entirely forgotten. The choice of devotional worship, however, does seem to be a deliberate attempt to minimise conflict and to provide a form of worship which is inclusive of all people who consider themselves Hindu. The divisions still remain, but there is an attempt to play them down for the sake of the success of the temple project.

### *5.2.2.3 The place of worship*

The third point that Singer makes is about the venue for the bhajanas, and it is an interesting one to consider. He says that the bhajanas are not held in temples, because these places are associated with sectarian differences (and probably caste-jati differences), and instead they are held in people's homes or in public halls. In Edinburgh some satsangs are held in people's homes in front of house-mandirs, and for a long time the regular temple meeting was held in a community centre (a 'public hall'). But there was no change of practice when the satsang was transferred to the temple building, and no one has suggested that it will change when the building is ritually dedicated.

I think that this demonstrates an important idea behind the temple in Edinburgh, which I discussed in the previous chapter (see §4.4). That is, the temple should be a pan-Hindu institution which transcends sectarian and regional differences, and it should be for all Hindus in Edinburgh. The choice of temple worship appears to be closely related to this ideal. By arranging bhajan singing every month in the temple, the organisers hope that all Hindus in Edinburgh will feel welcome to attend, and that the temple will benefit from this. Singer suggests that in Madras the temple has a different role, that most temples are not inclusive in nature, and that people do not use temples as the place to organise 'ecumenical' worship. I do not think that this is true of all temples

in India, but it does point out the ways in which the establishment of temples in some parts of Britain is developing and altering the idea of the role of the Mandir in Hindu society.

#### *5.2.2.4 Satsangs as a reaction to external forces*

Singer raises another possible reason why bhajanas have developed in Madras, but he does not really address it. The bhajanas are particularly organised by Brahmans in Madras, in Tamil-Nad (Madras is the capital of this state) - where there is a high degree of anti-Brahman dislike, especially by the Dravidian majority. According to Singer the 'agitation is directed against the Brahmans as an alien Aryan priesthood from the North, which was supposed to have foisted "superstitious" religious practices and beliefs on the south for its own private gain' (ibid.: 229). And so he suggests that

the multilingual, multicaste, and multisect bhajana may be seen as a defensive effort to unify the very groups that the pro-Dravidian movement tends to divide: Tamil and non-Tamil; Brahman and non-Brahman; Saivite, Vaishnavite, and all "believers" in Hinduism (ibid.).

The situation in Edinburgh is very different to that of Madras, but it is interesting to find that the use of devotional worship is partly the reaction of a Hindu population to another external threat - in this case that of the majority white Scottish population, who are indifferent or hostile to Hinduism. In one sense, the satsangs are a case of 'reactive ethnicity' (c.f. Barth 1969), in which an ethnic minority group responds to external pressures by asserting their cultural/ethnic identity. But the reactions are occurring as much between the various groups within the community as between Hindus and outsiders. This theory also does not explain why the group have chosen the satsang as the form for expressing their identity, rather than any other.

#### **5.2.3 Personal devotion**

In this discussion of devotional worship I have, so far, been concerned with the sociological aspects of the worship, and in particular I have been looking at the roles that satsangs have in creating a sense of communality. It must not be forgotten,

however, that this type of worship has great significance on other levels. One of the most important elements of devotional worship is the way in which it encourages individuals in a group to use their emotions as a channel for expressing their religiosity. The bhakti 'movement' in India is famous for this - perhaps infamous - and there are many cases in which Hindu devotional worship has been equated with eroticism and sexuality<sup>40</sup>.

This equation between devotion and sexuality is not only made by external observers (although the subject does appear to be a classic example of the Orientalism that Said 1978 criticises). There are many references to examples of Hindus themselves criticising bhakti as over emotional and overtly erotic (and hence reprehensible). Singer notes the following:

A relatively small group of more educated and sophisticated Brahmans (and non-Brahmans too) have kept aloof from mass religious-cultural activities. To their taste, these activities [the bhajanas] are too emotional, unrefined, and unauthentic (op cit.: 191).

Carstairs (1957) roots this dislike of bhakti in the high-caste Hindu dislike of overt displays of sexuality:

This rapid transfer of associations from devotional fervour to sexuality served to underline the high-caste Hindus' dislike of all forms of overt emotionalism. One Rajput... referred scornfully to a group of bhajan singers: "Listen to them, getting all worked up and baying like animals." (op cit.: 95)

Although Carstairs does not mention this, it is particularly female sexuality that should not be expressed<sup>41</sup>. The overt use of emotions in devotional worship, with its resonances of overt sexuality, may be the reason why in the Madras bhajanas the women tend to take a non-participatory role (Singer op cit.: 160). For a woman to express her sexuality so publicly would be horrific for many Hindu men (even if these men were bhakti devotees themselves).

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<sup>40</sup> See for example Chaudhuri (1979: 255-292); Sharma (1987). Bharati (1965) covers the basics of Tantrism, which is another famous Hindu erotic-devotional 'cult'. Of course, some bhakti and tantric worship is overtly erotic. But, as Chaudhuri (op cit.) argues, much of this eroticism has been misinterpreted by western observers and its importance greatly exaggerated.

<sup>41</sup> Examples of this are given by Rosenthal (1977), who examines some of the ideas behind notions of sexuality among Hindus in Johannesburg, South Africa.



Singer (ibid.) does note that during the 1950s a large number of female bhajana groups developed, but he later states that ‘in contemporary Madras [i.e. during the late 50s] women are not generally active in Radha-Krishna bhajanas’ (p.236). It is apparent that these female bhajana groups are not as acceptable as the ‘mainstream’ male-dominated groups. However, the situation in Edinburgh is very different to this. Women dominate the satsangs, it is they who sing most of the bhajans, and they are generally regarded (by themselves and by the men) as being more ‘religious’ or ‘devout’. I described in a previous chapter how it was through the inspiration of a single woman that the Mandir project was started (see §4.1.1), and how women have a great deal of power within the temple (§4.3.2.3).

This does not mean, though, that Edinburgh Hindus are giving overt expression to eroticism in a way that other Hindus would find disgusting. The worship in the Mandir is definitely in a bhakti style, and the worshippers obviously invest a great deal of emotional energy when they participate in the bhajan singing. It is clear that many derive a great deal of personal satisfaction from this form of worship. But during the satsangs the element of eroticism is not at all present<sup>42</sup> - even if a bhajan describes the worshippers’ love for a god, this is usually expressed in a non-sexual (or, at most, a weakly sexual) idiom. The type of bhakti practised in the Edinburgh temple is the ‘chaste’ version, which is concerned with emotional devotion, but which is without erotic connotations. This chaste type of bhakti is probably the most common version, and it is very different from the portrait of bhakti worship as sensuous or orgiastic.

#### **5.2.4 Singing in non-worship contexts**

Singing is not only performed at the temple or at satsangs. Hindus in Edinburgh also sing on other occasions. It is quite usual for songs to be sung at non-religious social gatherings - particularly at meetings of the Edinburgh Indian Association (EIA).

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<sup>42</sup> At least, not overtly present. What individuals may be thinking or feeling is harder to discover.

The EIA holds two types of social event - those in large halls (such as George Square theatre), at which hired performers provide some cultural entertainment; and at smaller venues where the entertainment is provided by the members themselves (see Appendix One). In the latter type of social gathering, singing is one of the principal forms of entertainment. Members sit around (on the floor or in chairs), and sing their favourite songs- either *filmi* songs (these will be from 'secular' love films, rather than from 'religious' films), regional folk songs, or *ghazals*<sup>43</sup>. A religious song may be sung if an individual feels s/he particularly wants to sing it. Otherwise the stress is on the song for the sake of singing, rather than for the sake of devotion.

These sessions of singing are communal in a similar way to the *satsangs* - although they are different in many ways too. The singing is open to all individuals, and there are no restrictions on the style or language. People are pleased if a song is sung well, and there are no complaints about certain types of songs being 'inappropriate'. The communality of the singing comes from the stress on a common 'culture' (Indian), rather than on a common 'religion' (Hindu religion in the case of the Mandir). There is obviously a distinction between these two categories, but it is not absolute. Hinduism is supposed to embrace all aspects of life, and Indian cultures are very much Hindu cultures. In many ways, the two categories feed off each other.

As an illustration of this, there was one occasion during my fieldwork when the distinction between religious and secular singing seemed to be very fine indeed.

I attended a social gathering in Mrs Makkan's house - it was ostensibly a meeting of the EIA, but it was more of a birthday party for the hostess, and the guests were mainly friends of the committee of the EIA. The gathering lasted most of the afternoon and went on into late evening. After some food had been served, and after a few songs had already been sung, a long session of singing began. The songs that were sung were mainly *filmi* love songs, and were obviously secular<sup>44</sup>. To mark the beginning and end of this main session of singing the hostess - who took the leading role in the singing - called out the phrase '*bolnee Ramachandr bhagwan ki jai*'.

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<sup>43</sup> These are a type of poem set to music, which are popular among many north Indians.

<sup>44</sup> A few English folk songs were also sung by a very anglicised Indian, and an American played a reel on her bagpipes.

She raised her voice as she finished and let other singers join her in shouting the last two words.

This phrase (which means ‘let us say/sing “Victory to Ramachandr”’) is the dedication made by Hindu worshippers at the beginning of a satsang. It is used in the Edinburgh temple (see §5.1.3.3), and it is the phrase Singer describes the Madras Brahmans using at their bhajanas (see Singer op cit.: 205 and §5.2.1.1). Even the way in which she said the phrase - with the raising of her voice, and encouraging others to join in with ‘*ki jai*’ is the same as it would be said in a satsang.

The woman called this out as a piece of fun - she was not intending to make the singing session into a satsang. But she was also drawing a parallel between the singing that was occurring in her home and the religious singing that occurs at satsangs. There are many parallels - satsangs often are held in people’s homes, the singing is for pleasure as well as for devotion. And, in the Edinburgh context, the performance of any Indian form of singing - whether it is religious or secular - is distinct from other activities that they may participate in at other times. The main differences between this singing and bhajan singing is the lack of devotion and the lack of a mandir in the room.

What makes this incident stand out even more is that the same hostess had served glasses of wine to her guests about an hour before the singing started. It was the only occasion during my fieldwork when I saw Indians drinking wine. Until then I would not have expected Indians who were gathering together as Indians (on the basis of shared ethnic identity) to breach such a strong ethnic moral code<sup>45</sup>.

## 5.2.5 The ‘meaning’ of bhajans

### 5.2.5.1 *Text and context in bhajan singing*

Wadley (1975) and Gold (1988) both studied the singing of bhajans among

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<sup>45</sup> Of course, the drinking of wine is similar to other taboos in India, such as smoking and eating meat. They are strongly adhered to by many, but they are freely disregarded by many more. These practices are, however, usually seen as anti-social behaviour, and so even people who may drink in ‘private’ do not drink in ‘public’. In Britain the situation is slightly different - Indians may drink in public with non-Indians, but they rarely drink in public with other Indians. This would be against the idealised code of proper ‘Hindu’ behaviour, which is probably stronger among British Hindus than it is among Hindus in India.

village groups in India, and both of them devote much of their work to the analysis of the content of the bhajans that they came across. Both provide extremely useful translations and analysis of such bhajans, but yet in doing so, they both provide only one element of a complex process.

Wadley begins her book by saying:

[D]espite the visible complexity and apparent chaos present in village religious behaviour, the conceptual system of the practitioner is systematically organised, even if often unself-consciously... In his songs, myths, ritual sayings, and comments on his religious behaviour, the Hindu villager reveals the organisation of this belief system. By analysing the oral traditions of a North India village, we can identify the principal categories in which religious action takes place (1975: 1).

It is certainly true that this is an important - and often neglected - area for understanding local village religious traditions (and other traditions also). However, the approach is problematic if the analysis of worship does not go a step further than this.

Bhajans (and other songs) are a very important means by which religious sentiments and concepts are expressed - in Karimpur and in Edinburgh - but these sentiments and concepts are expressed in action as well as in word. The words of a bhajan are important, but - to use an overworked phrase - it is not what you say, it is the way that you say it (as well as when and where you say it). To put it another way, such an approach can have the problem of most text<sup>46</sup> based analyses - the context of the text is left out.

Gold to a certain degree is aware of this in her analysis of bhajans in Ghatiyali (a village in south-east Rajasthan). She makes it clear that the messages conveyed in the words of bhajans (in this case, bhajans concerned with death) are an 'alternative response' to those which can be found in other areas of social activity, such as mortuary rituals (1988: 99). That is, bhajans may say something different to more formal rituals performed in other contexts. She also alludes to the fact that the

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<sup>46</sup> In Wadley's case, she takes the 'text' to be the words of the bhajans, along with people's statements about their religious behaviour.

'performative context' of bhajans must also be taken into account (ibid.: 102).

For example, most of the bhajans that she cites were performed at a *jagaran* (a form of *satsang*) held on the eleventh night after a person's death, where attendance was exclusively for members of the Nath caste-jati. Gold herself was excluded from this meeting because she was not eligible to take part in the events - since being a foreigner she could not live up to the demands required of devotees within the group. Instead, she had to ask a Nath friend to take her tape recorder to the meeting (pp.101-2). Such context is obviously an important element within the bhajans, and must be taken into account. But beyond this detail, Gold fails to provide any further context, such as which members of the group actually sang the songs, why they chose the ones that they did, and how they were performed.

Who the bhajan is addressed to can make a large difference, as can the way in which the god is addressed in the bhajan (that is, the wording of the song). But in Edinburgh I found that the language in which a bhajan was sung was more important than the god to whom it was devoted or the exact wording of the lyrics. I have already described how several languages are used in the bhajan singing at the temple, because of the differing regional origins of the participants. If a bhajan is sung in Panjabi, and other worshippers do not understand that language very well, this does not necessarily prevent them from participating in the worship - either by attempting to sing the refrain (even if they only partially understand its words) or by providing some form of percussion (clapping hands, playing tambourines or cymbals, etc.).

The style of the song is also very important. Wadley gives a table of thirty-one different styles of song that she came across in Karimpur (ibid.: 38-40), of which she lists bhajans as being one category. But in Edinburgh there are several different styles of bhajan - differing with the various regional, sectarian, and caste-jati origins of the members - which creates a situation more complicated than the one Wadley was working with. Some bhajans may be regional folk songs, while others may be well known pan-Indian religious songs.

*Filmi* songs (that is songs written for some religious epic film) may also be used as bhajans in the temple satsang. These filmi songs usually have a highly devotional content, but it is the connotations that they have (since they are from the ‘popular culture’ of the films) that define them most of all. Some people have strongly objected to filmi songs being used as bhajans, since they are ‘inappropriate to temple worship’. Others have said that filmi songs are not ideal, but at least they are religious. To quote one rather devastating criticism: ‘if that is all they [the singers] know, then it will have to do’. The point is that the songs have a strong lyrical content, since the wording is usually very expressive of the devotional expressions appropriate to the satsang. But it is the connotation of the songs being filmi which define them most of all. These filmi songs each have their own particular resonances depending on their original film source, which playback singer performed them first, and which film star is most associated with them; as well as any subsequent versions that have been recorded. All these nuances go far beyond the consideration of how moving and devotional the lyrics are - and this is why certain people object so strongly to their inappropriateness.

The complexities of the associations that occur when bhajans are sung is a subject that only a native speaker of Hindi/Panjabi/Gujarati etc. can fully understand. It requires someone who has a detailed knowledge of Indian religious music to be able to comment on the subtleties of nuance which determine why a particular song should be chosen, while another is considered to be inappropriate. I was not able to master such expertise, and I think that this is the reason why writers such as Wadley and Gold chose to concentrate on translating the bhajans, rather than giving more details about their nuances and subtleties of association. But the connotations that are associated with certain songs must not be ignored.

As an illustration of this important point, most people who have been educated in an English school will find that the Christmas carol ‘*Away in a Manger*’ usually brings to mind much more than the picture of the infant Jesus in the stable (which is what the words describe). The carol will usually bring back reminiscences of school carol

services, with the image of young children singing without melody or tune, destroying the serenity that the carol is trying to depict. This common association in effect destroys the harmonious and devotional objectives of the author of the carol. Other songs may hold similar connotations, which may be personal or shared, and so when the listener hears the words and music s/he experiences more than the meaning of the words themselves<sup>47</sup>.

#### 5.2.5.2 *Bhajans as symbols*

It is useful to approach the singing of songs - and in this particular case, of bhajans - as an example of the manipulation of symbols. Like many other components of ritual and religious worship, songs can be important non-visual symbols, which tend to signify more than simply their verbal content. To follow Turner's classic work on symbolism (1967), bhajans (as symbols) do not have a single 'meaning' which can be defined, instead they are multi-vocal, they communicate many different things, in different ways, and on different levels. According to Turner a symbol has three properties: condensation, unification of disparate significata, and polarisation of meaning (ibid.: 28). That is symbols condense and unify various concepts, ideas and associations, which can generally be categorised into two kinds - ideological and sensory. Thus, for Turner symbols make various statements about the social order - the example he uses to demonstrate this is the Ndembu milk tree (ibid.: 20ff). The milk tree is a symbol which represents Ndembu matriliney (as well as many other things), and so it communicates to the participants in ritual the ideal Ndembu society<sup>48</sup>.

It is necessary, however, to take into account Sperber's (1974) criticism that

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<sup>47</sup> This is something which has been put to great use by advertisers in television commercials, whose subtle (and often not so subtle) use of background music can have an important influence on the commercial's success.

<sup>48</sup> However, in Edinburgh there is no common notion of the ideal social order, there is a multiplicity of views which often conflict with each other. This is probably found more frequently than the notion of a common social order. It is not possible to assume that simply because people live together in a 'community' that they all share the same outlook. See, for example, Cohen (1987). This will be discussed in a later chapter (see §6.1).

Turner is too concerned with the meaning and interpretation of symbols. That is, for Sperber symbols do not have to 'mean' anything, he is more concerned with how symbols operate. But Turner is aware of the problems of attempting to describe the 'meaning' of symbols, and it is for this reason that he talks of condensation and disparate significata. Turner's approach is that a symbol does not have a meaning, it has *meanings* - some of which can be uncovered, and others that may be inaccessible. His three levels of interpretation of symbols<sup>49</sup> (op cit.: 20) suggest that the users of a symbol do not need to 'get the message' for the symbol to be effective. One 'meaning' of a symbol may only be accessible to the ritual specialist, or to the anthropologist, or it may not even be accessible to them. The point is that it is possible to discover the various meanings that symbols have, and to see what is done with these meanings. This aspect of Turner's analysis is thus similar to Good's description of symbols as 'reagents', whose 'significance resides mainly in their capacity to effect particular kinds of transformation' (1983: 224).

This approach is related to Tambiah's work (1968, 1985 [1979]), in which he argues that ritual is as much oriented towards performance as to the communication of meaning. In the context of symbolism, this suggests that the manipulation of symbols within the context of a ritual is what gives symbols their importance. Thus, the words used within a Trobriand 'spell' have a magical power because the performance of them transfers the meanings of the symbols to the participants of the ritual, and thus changes the way that people conceive the world.

So, for Hindus participating in the Edinburgh bhajans, what is being communicated and transferred? I believe that the notion of congregationalism and communality are - in this context - an important intended message of the songs. It is here that Tambiah's approach is most useful, since it is by performing the bhajans that

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<sup>49</sup> Turner says: 'The structure and properties of ritual symbols may be inferred from...: (1) external forms and external characteristics [of the symbol itself]; (2) interpretations offered by the specialists and by the laymen; (3) significant contexts largely worked out by the anthropologist.' (op cit.: 20)



their meanings (if any) are communicated. That is, by participating in the satsangs the worshippers are becoming part of the message that the bhajans are conveying. Thus by singing, worshipping, and playing instruments together, the bhajans are demonstrating that collective activity among the disparate groups is possible. And by performing the songs in the temple, the worshippers are transforming the ways in which they perceive their social world - so that they are helping to construct the idea of the temple community within their minds.

Alongside this, however, the bhajans demonstrate distinctiveness and divisions. The language in which a bhajan is sung may be exclusive, or the god to whom it is devoted may be a sectarian one. If a bhajan is sung in Panjabi, then most non-Panjabis will not be able to sing it (even though they may join in with the refrain if it is simple, or provide some percussion). A bhajan sung to one's favourite god may not be appropriate to other worshippers - they will have their own favoured gods, and might think the god of the bhajan is of marginal interest. The concept of shared ethnic identity is also transmitted in the satsang. This can be divisive as well as being integrative. Ethnic identity is hierarchical and inclusive<sup>50</sup>, and so the sharing of a common sense of Panjabi identity (for example, by singing a bhajan together in a Panjabi folk tradition) can exclude other Hindus present. At the same time, though, the fact that people are together worshipping in the same temple in a similar way is reaffirming their common sense of all being Hindus together.

The notion of status is also communicated through the bhajans. The use of Sanskrit as the language for a song may appear to be pan-Hindu and inclusive (since the language is meant to be both these things). But few Hindus in Edinburgh know much Sanskrit, it is a difficult language which requires a lot of time and effort to learn. Only people who have been to good schools in India, or who are from Brahman families, or who have taken the time and trouble to learn the language, are able to

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<sup>50</sup> As I discussed in §2.4.2.

understand more than a few words of it. So people singing in Sanskrit are effectively showing their education and superior knowledge. They are showing that somehow they have managed to learn the language. Among many Hindus, status may be derived from knowledge - thus a Brahman's high status is partially derived from the ritual/religious knowledge that s/he has.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, a person who knows many bhajans shows his/her knowledge and hence may gain respect.

The way in which a worshipper sings is also important - the performance must be in the correct idiom. Bhajans are supposed to be devotional, and so if a person shows his/her devotion clearly whilst participating then this will accordingly gain them respect amongst other members of the community. This can be double-edged, however, since what one person may interpret as 'devout' another might dismiss as feigned or simplistic. The message intended may not be the message received.

This list is not intended to be definitive, it is only a sketch of some of the ideas that are associated with bhajan singing. It is into this approach that Wadley's and Gold's analyses of the words of the bhajans in India can be placed. The words that are sung have a meaning in themselves, but they are only one of the aspects of an extraordinarily complex system of meaning. Worshipers also gain aesthetic pleasure and religious satisfaction from participating in the satsangs, as well as personal pleasure from satisfying their ethnic identity. And so it is not possible to say that bhajans are one thing alone - they are multi-vocalic and polysemic, they are a complex arena in which tensions, conflicts, and ideologies are played out but not necessarily resolved.

### 5.2.5.3 *The distinctiveness of satsangs*

The environment in which bhajans are sung also gives them a certain significance.

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<sup>51</sup> Thus pandits are given respect for their (supposed) training in religious texts and practices. As an outsider I could also benefit from this viewpoint - many people showed respect to me for my (supposed) knowledge of 'Hinduism' (c.f. §1.2.2.1). I would often be told that I was an 'expert' and that I probably knew more about the religion than them. One person even suggested that I should take the position of pandit at the temple when I completed my thesis.

The singing is a different type of activity in which

the voices of the participants are not used in an everyday way, that is, the participants use their language in a particular way... (Bloch 1989 [1975]: 21).

They may sing at other times, for example at non-religious social gatherings (see §5.2.4), but they will not sing these particular types of songs, apart from at satsangs. The place where the bhajans are sung is also distinct. It is a building that is set aside - it is only open (at present) once a month for the satsang, and when opened it has to be prepared (i.e. the lamps and incense sticks have to be lit, heaters put on, and sheets and blankets placed on the floor - see §4.2.1.1 and §5.1.3.1). The worshippers have to prepare themselves - shoes are taken off and puja is performed to the deities. It is only when these things are done that the satsang can begin. The end of the satsang is also marked - arti is performed, and then the worshippers make another puja to the ghee lamp. Thus the satsang itself (the singing of bhajans) is 'framed' (c.f. Bateson 1955: 188), the activity is marked out as being distinct and different.

By being marked out, the bhajans are given the quality of being 'sacred', 'religious', and 'devotional'<sup>52</sup>. They give an opportunity for participants to worship in a particular way, which is qualitatively different from other forms of worship that they may participate in. They may perform puja and arti before their house-mandirs, they may sing bhajans at gatherings in houses. But these are all different activities from the satsangs at the temple. At the temple the location is special - it is a permanent quasi-dedicated site, which is marked out as being 'public', and it is unlike other buildings (such as homes or community centres). The principle by which belonging to the social group is reckoned is also different - the emphasis is on congregational *Hindu* worship, rather than personal devotion or kin/caste-jati based worship.

The similarities are also important, though. By the power of metaphor (see Sapir

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<sup>52</sup> I am not using the word 'sacred' to mean the opposite of 'profane'. Such a dichotomy is unhelpful since it is a western distinction which is not readily applicable to non-western religious traditions such as Hinduism. It is for this reason that I use the words 'religious' and 'devotional' as well as sacred - I hope that the three words together may sum up the distinctiveness of the activity that occurs at the temple.

1977; Crocker 1977) the significance of home pujas is transferred to the pujas performed in the temple (and vice versa). Arti performed at home becomes analogous with the arti that people participate in at the temple. And the singing of bhajans becomes associated with other forms of singing (such as the singing of film songs at the Edinburgh Indian Association gatherings). The properties of the two different categories - 'secular' and 'religious' singing - become mutually transferred, and so overlap occurs. This is probably the reason why (religious) film songs are used as bhajans, and why the EIA singing session I described above (see §5.2.4) was started and ended with a religious phrase.

In many ways the temple tradition has been fed by its members' home worship traditions. The reliance on satsangs as the main form of worship is a clear example of this, since satsangs are usually associated with home based worship (see §4.4.1). As the temple becomes more established in the Edinburgh community, this transferral will lead to home based religious practice becoming more influenced by temple practices. The newly developed temple tradition will feed into the traditions of home-worship of the temple members. Temple worship in Edinburgh is becoming the yard-stick by which other forms of worship are measured.

The satsangs are also distinct because of the 'ethnic' symbols that are used at the temples. Obviously the religion and its symbols are distinctly 'ethnic' when used in the Edinburgh context. Hinduism is a different form of religion from mainstream Scottish religions (which are Christian), and its religious symbols (such as the bhajans, the structure of the satsang, the objects of devotion, etc.) are different. But other aspects of temple activity are distinctly 'ethnic' also. The clothes that the worshippers wear to the temple tend to be different from those that they normally wear. This is particularly the case among the women, all of whom wear a *sari* or a *salwar kamiz* to visit the temple (as they do to visit Edinburgh Indian Association meetings). Food that is taken to the temple is also distinctly 'Indian' - if cooked food is taken then it is always *dal*,

*sabji*,<sup>53</sup> and rice: the staples of north Indian home cooking. The sweets used for the *prasad* (which is distributed at the end of the *satsang*) are nearly always Indian varieties, such as *halwa* or *barfi*. There is no reason why British sweets could not be used instead - on a few occasions I have found hard boiled sugar sweets among the *prasad*<sup>54</sup> given to me, but this has highlighted the more usual lack of such sweets.

Other elements of the *satsang* may be distinctly 'Indian', such as the lighting of incense sticks to provide the particular smell of burning sandalwood<sup>55</sup>. Occasionally an individual may play some Indian classical music on a cassette recorder while the *Mandir* is being prepared for the *satsang*. Any other form of music would be inappropriate, as I found on one occasion before a *satsang*.

I was sitting in the car of Mrs Bhatt - one of the leaders of the temple - waiting for the temple building to be opened. She was sitting in the front with her son, while I was in the back seat. The person who had the key to the temple was late, so there was nothing to do but sit and wait. Her son (who was about twenty five) decided to switch on the car radio, to listen to the 'top forty' pop chart. He was happy to do this, but, throughout the time that we were waiting, Mrs Bhatt had a constant battle with him - she wanted to turn the music off, he wanted to turn it up. I think that under normal circumstances Mrs Bhatt would not have minded him playing the music, she is a liberal parent who gives her children a lot of freedom. But in this instance I think that she found the music inappropriate to the circumstances. It was definitely not the right time and place (for her) to be listening to the pop charts.

The worship itself, the clothes, the food, the choice of external stimuli, these all mark the *satsang* out as being different. They make it an ethnically distinct 'Indian/Hindu' event. To a certain degree they help to provide a sense of common ethnic identity. But more than this, they help to create the sense of *identities*. The style of any of these elements may be regional and so divisive - they may be Panjabi or Gujarati, or from some other part of India. They may be from a particular aspect of

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<sup>53</sup> Dal is cooked lentils or pulses, while *sabji* is cooked vegetables.

<sup>54</sup> Hard boiled sweets are also used as *prasad* in India sometimes. But in this case, they are used differently, since they represent a prestigious form of food associated with urbanisation and modernisation. When used in Edinburgh these sweets are the least prestigious of foods, since they are not as 'Indian' as *barfi* or *halwa*.

<sup>55</sup> Incense sticks are burned as a form of worship, as they are in much of India. But the side effect of this is the distinctive smell that they produce, which has profound resonances with India and with Indian worship.

Hinduism - such as a regional, sectarian, or caste-jati based religious tradition - which is not shared by all the participants.

At the same time the participants are attempting to share these elements, to create a sense of a common religion, which is pan-Hindu, and a common identity, which is 'Indian'. Meanwhile, the tradition of the temple is distinctly British Hindu - it may be very similar to Indian Hinduism, but it has also taken on new forms and traditions. In one sense this may be described as 'reactive ethnicity' - it is the result of the reaction of these Hindus to their new situation. But at the same time it is also a 'creative ethnicity' - the participants in the worship are creating a new sense and style of being Hindu and Indian.

#### **5.2.6 From periphery to centre - the satsang tradition**

Although Singer (1972: 228) describes the Madras devotional worship as not occurring in temples, such worship does appear to be associated with some temples in India. Carstairs describes how some low-caste Hindus in Mewar (in Rajasthan) would gather to sing hymns, sometimes the verses of Kabir Das or Mirabai, often others of recent composition. These meetings might take place in one or other of the temples of the Great Gods of the Hindu pantheon (there was a much frequented Hanuman temple in the palace gardens, and several varieties of Vishnu-temple in the village) or they might consist of groups of zealous singers of bhajans (hymns conducted in the popular idiom) meeting in each other's houses (1957: 94).

Gold (1988: 105) also briefly mentions some inter-caste bhajan groups that meet infrequently in a temple in the village where she did her fieldwork (which was also in Mewar). When I was in India I came across organised bhajan singing in a temple - although this was a highly unusual affair. This was at the 'Sri Ram Mandir' in Jamnagar, Gujarat, which has the distinction of being in the Guinness Book of Records for its resident bhajan singing. People have been chanting the phrase '*Sri Ram Jai Ram, Jai Jai Ram*' non-stop for over twenty seven years.

This association of bhajan singing with temple worship is therefore not something

unique to British Hinduism. It is also found in India in certain contexts. What is different, however, is that such bhajan groups in India tend to be peripheral - most satsangs usually occur in people's homes, and are supplementary to many other types of religious practice. In Britain, these satsangs have become firmly established as regular temple worship - in Edinburgh, bhajan singing is by far the most common form of worship that takes place in the temple. Therefore the organisation of satsangs has its roots in many Indian traditions, but its significance has grown incredibly in the British context<sup>56</sup>. Satsangs are now a central tradition of Hindu religious life in Edinburgh - by being chosen as the usual temple tradition/practice they have (for now) been given increased importance over other temple traditions (such as rituals, more personalised worship etc.).

### **5.3 FESTIVAL WORSHIP**

#### **5.3.1 The temple festival calendar**

##### *5.3.1.1 Festival times*

So far the discussion has centred on temple satsangs which occur every month, and are performed for no special religious reasons - other than to give members of the community the opportunity to worship in a temple environment. There are also a number of festivals, of varying importance, which many Hindus desire to celebrate at a temple. However, the immense cultural diversity within India means that groups from different parts of India may well celebrate different festivals. Even when different groups celebrate the same festival, they may be worshipping different gods, or worshipping in very different ways. This diversity is also reflected in the variety of cultural traditions found within the Edinburgh Mandir.

The incentive for which festivals should be celebrated comes very much from the level of demand within the groups that make use of the temple. As a voluntary

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<sup>56</sup> It appears that this practice began to take significance in East Africa - many of the satsang groups were inspired by East Africans (see §3.5.1 and §4.1.1).

organisation it relies on the enthusiasm of its members, and thus activities such as festivals tend to rely on a measure of consensus agreement. If a person, or group of people, decide that a certain festival should be marked at the temple, then that celebration only occurs if enough people are dedicated enough to organise and attend the temple at the stated time. As Panjabis and Gujaratis are the largest groups of people, it is most easy to mobilise members of these factions. When there are different attitudes to a single festival then the enthusiasm of members is tempered by the need to compromise between the different expectations of different factions. Thus a blend of compromise and mobilisation of support shapes the temple festival calendar, and also the ways in which these festivals are celebrated.

In Edinburgh the three main religious festivals which are regularly celebrated at the Mandir are Diwali, Nawratri, and Krishna Janamasthami. A fourth festival, Ram Nawmi was introduced in 1991. Diwali is an 'all-Indian' festival in late October or November<sup>57</sup> - it marks the beginning of the new year for both Panjabis and Gujaratis, and it is the most popular of the festivals celebrated at the temple. Janamasthami is usually in mid-August, and it is an evening festival for the god Sri Krishna's birthday. On the two occasions when I attended this festival it was held on a week day, and there were about one hundred people attending. This is quite considerable since the celebrations go on until past midnight. Nawratri is a long festival spanning nine or ten nights of worship for the goddess Mata-ji (or Amba-ji) in her various forms. It occurs in late September/early October, and the community tries to organise as much worship during the festival as is convenient. Attendance for the Nawratri festival meetings is not as high as for Diwali, but those who do attend are generally very enthusiastic.

It is important to bear in mind that the situation is developing continually, and so what is described here (i.e. what occurred in 1990-91) may well be quite different from

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<sup>57</sup> Since most Hindu festivals are dated by a lunar calendar they occur at different times in the Christian (solar) calendar each year. See Knott (1986a: 271-294), Freed & Freed (1964), Sinclair-Stevenson (1920), Fuller (1980), and Basham (1971: 494-5).



what will happen in 1995 or later. In particular, the temple project is still nowhere near completion - once the building is dedicated as a sacred space and a pandit is in charge of ritual practice, then the choice of festivals and the ways in which they are celebrated may be very different.

### *5.3.2.2 The role of the temple at festival times*

Festival activity in Edinburgh tends to occur in a short space of time between the middle of August and early November. During these three months it is possible for the devoted worshipper to attend the Mandir fifteen or sixteen<sup>58</sup> times - while during the other nine months of the year s/he may only go ten times at most in Edinburgh. There is a sense that this period is the time when the temple is most important in the religious lives of the members of the community - and most efforts are made to ensure any planned building work is completed before the beginning of this time of festivals.

The Hindu calendar has many more festivals than this, however - there are festivals scattered throughout the year<sup>59</sup>. Two important Hindu festivals that most of the community mention are Holi (in March or April) and Ram Nawmi (in April/May). Neither of these were marked in any way at the Mandir in 1990 (although a meeting was arranged for the latter festival in 1991). In fact, Holi fell on the same night as a monthly satsang in 1990 (that is, Holi night was on the second Sunday of March that year), and although most people knew that it was Holi, there was no recognition of this in the worship of that night. I was told that there were not enough people to organise anything for the festival - which did not seem very credible since people were happy to attend other festivals if they were organised. I was also told that Holi is not really a religious festival, it is more a more 'social' event - but this seems to be contradicted by

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<sup>58</sup> That is, once at Janamasthami, ten times at Nawratri, twice at Diwali (once on the night of Diwali and again on the night when the large meeting is held - on the weekend following), and three or four monthly satsangs that fall within this period. Although this sounds a lot of temple-going I found there were about ten to fifteen people (excluding the ethnographer) who were prepared to attend the temple for most (if not all) of these meetings.

<sup>59</sup> See, for example the sources cited in footnote 57 above, and Marriott (1955: 192) for various configurations of such festivals.

accounts of other anthropologists' experiences of the festival. For example, Marriott (1966), Knott (1986a: 279-80), Jackson (1976; 1981: 74-75), and Sinclair-Stevenson (1920: 280-87), all describe Holi festivals where there are strong religious components to the social activities. I can only assume that the reason why Holi is not celebrated at the Edinburgh Mandir is because the members of the temple committee do not themselves feel strongly enough about the festival to organise anything for it. This situation may well change in the future, when the temple is open more often.

Such changes are demonstrated by the recent introduction of Ram Nawmi (the birthday of Ram) into the temple calendar. I could find no reason why this festival was not celebrated at the temple before. When I asked one of the committee members about this I was told that it is as important as Krishna Janamasthami, but they simply had not organised anything for it. The only reason that he could give is that people feel that it is more auspicious to attend the temple on Krishna's birthday. It seems that the choice was a matter of personal preference on the part of the committee members. The preference for Krishna's birthday over Ram's did not mean that the former god is more popular at the temple than the latter - in fact I would say that the opposite is the case, although both gods are well loved by most of the community.

It is important to bear in mind that Krishna's birthday is a festival shared by both Gujaratis and Panjabis, and so enthusiasm could be generated in both factions. Panjabis often celebrate Ram Nawmi also, but I do not think that this festival is very popular among Gujaratis. In fact, the recent introduction of the Ram festival can be seen as an attempt on the part of the Panjabi faction of the community to add one of their own festivals to the temple calendar - perhaps in order to redress a perceived imbalance. Whether or not this becomes permanent is very hard to judge at present.

Of course, the lack of temple worship at the time of such festivals does not mean that people do not celebrate the festivals themselves. If there is nothing organised at the temple then people will usually organise some special activities for their families and friends. This may be a meal together, or a *puja* at a home-temple (see §4.4.2.1), or it

may be some outing - for example, one group of friends celebrated a minor festival (Karwa Chauth) in late November by going to see a large fire-work display<sup>60</sup>. In a similar fashion many people combined attendance at the 1989 Janamasthami celebration with a visit to a fire-work display in Princes Street, which had been organised for the Edinburgh International Festival. Other special activities may be organised for religious festivals by the Edinburgh Indian Association (the EIA), (see Appendix One). The EIA celebrations are intended to be secular rather than religious - although many of the individuals involved would not wish to make this distinction too much.

### 5.3.2 Temple festivals

The festivals of Diwali and Janamasthami are popular among both Panjabis and Gujaratis, unlike Nawratri - which is particularly associated with Gujarat. For Diwali and Janamasthami it has been necessary to find compromises on the form of worship. Panjabis and Gujaratis have distinct traditions for celebrating these two festivals, but at the temple they worship as if these differences do not exist. This is achieved by worshipping in styles which are common to both traditions: these are again based around the singing of bhajans and the performance of arti.

#### 5.3.2.1 *Janamasthami*

Janamasthami is an evening festival, directed to the god Krishna. The festival, which usually occurs in August<sup>61</sup>, is a celebration of Krishna's birth and the events that are associated with that occasion. Some Hindus in Edinburgh have drawn a parallel between Janamasthami and Christmas, since both are dedicated to the births of important gods<sup>62</sup>. The festival is focused on the actual time of birth of Krishna, which

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<sup>60</sup> I am sure that they would have gone to the display (which was for the centenary of the Forth Bridge) even if there had been no festival that night. But the fact that there was a festival gave the trip a special poignancy.

<sup>61</sup> It fell on 24th August in 1989, 14th August in 1990, and 2nd September in 1991.

<sup>62</sup> Most Hindus, however, usually say that the later festival of Diwali is 'our Christmas'. This is perhaps because Diwali is a more important festival, it is associated with gift giving, and it is later

is at midnight on the day of Janamasthami itself. The day prior to this is ideally a time of fasting, and a few worshippers in Edinburgh are strict about this (although not many)<sup>63</sup>. In the evening of this day, at about ten o'clock, the temple is opened and worshippers begin to gather. Worship until midnight takes the same form as an ordinary satsang. Worshippers make their puja and have darsan, and then they sit before the temple pictures to sing bhajans. Most of these bhajans are directed towards Krishna, and other forms of Vishnu. Bhajan singing continues up until the stroke of midnight, with the final song being specifically dedicated to Krishna<sup>64</sup>.

A special feature of this festival is a cradle which is set up for worship. This hangs within a tripod structure, and is decorated with ornate clothes and tinsel. Inside these clothes is placed a small statue of Krishna as an adult, along with a picture of the god as a baby. In front of these images is a small lamp made from cotton wool soaked in ghee, placed on a saucer. During the singing of bhajans the cloth is placed covering the interior, so that the images cannot be seen, and the lamp is left unlit. At midnight, however, after the bhajan is finished, the cloth is pulled aside and the lamp lit, and then worshippers do puja to the baby Krishna. The puja consists of pulling a piece of tinsel attached to the cradle, so that it rocks back and forward, and then offering some money - usually a note - by placing (or throwing) the money into the cradle itself. It is considered auspicious and beneficial to make this particular puja, and so everyone is given the chance - either at this point, or later on.

This is followed by the singing of a few more bhajans, and then arti is performed in the usual manner, with many worshippers having the opportunity to wave the lamp. The focus of worship for the arti is *both* the (usual) lithographs of the gods *and* the

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in the year - it occurs in the period of build up to Christmas in Britain.

<sup>63</sup> This fasting may involve not eating or drinking anything at all. Others may consider a fast to be the avoidance of all foods *except* sweets, whilst I have known one person to fast on every Tuesday for half a year by avoiding ghee and salt. In all these cases, it is the concept and process of fasting that is considered to be more important than the content of the fast.

<sup>64</sup> E.g. 'Hare Hare Krishna...'

cradle - the lamp is waved towards both equally. At the end of arti, pradaksin (the pouring of water around the arti lamp) is done, and then the lamp is taken around for individual pujas to be made to it. Worshippers who have not yet done puja to the cradle do so at this point. Prasad is also distributed - this is the usual sweets and fruit (c.f. §5.1.3.4), but it also includes a special halwa type sweet made from ginger, which is associated with babies (especially the baby Krishna), and also a sweet milk drink, which is poured onto worshippers' hands for them to sip.

This is the end of the worship, but because the occasion is a special festival people remain at the temple to talk to each other for some time. This means that the festivities continue for a long time after midnight, even though it is usually held in mid-week. Janamasthami is one of the times when temple attendance is popular - there are usually about one hundred people present - and so it is a good opportunity for people to meet.

### 5.3.2.2 *Diwali*

Diwali is considered by many to be the main festival of the year. It is seen by most members of the community as the beginning of the Hindu New Year<sup>65</sup>. A large Diwali celebration is usually held at the weekend, possibly several days after Diwali itself - since it is believed that more people will be able to attend then, rather than in the week. As noted above, the fact that Janamasthami occurs late on a weeknight does not prevent many people attending the temple. However, attendance at the main Diwali meeting is usually about twice that at Janamasthami, primarily because Diwali is the most popular festival. In 1990, two Diwali meetings were held - one on the festival day (which was on a Thursday) and another on the following Sunday. The attendance on the Sunday was far higher than on the Thursday, and this was considered to be the

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<sup>65</sup> Panjabis and Gujaratis consider the new year as beginning on the day after Diwali. The year beginning in October 1991 was 2048. However, Bengalis and Biharis say that the new year begins after Holi, the spring festival which occurs around April.

main celebration<sup>66</sup>.

The temple is specially prepared for the Diwali meetings, especially for the large weekend meeting. Small night lights and candles are placed all around the building, and a number of candles are lit in front of the pictures of the gods. This profusion of candles and lights is a tradition associated with Diwali in most parts of India<sup>67</sup>. Other festive decorations are also put up around the temple - in Edinburgh these are mainly tinsel and crepe decorations of the same type used for Scottish/Christian celebrations.

The way in which Diwali is celebrated at the Edinburgh temple again follows a model of worship which is very similar to the regular satsang. If two meetings are organised, then the smaller meeting on the day of Diwali itself takes the form of a satsang, with the singing of bhajans and the performance of arti. This meeting is not well attended, and the small number of worshippers makes it seem more like a monthly satsang than an actual festival. Unlike the other festivals celebrated at the temple, the choice of bhajans to sing is more catholic on this night, they are directed at many different gods. This is in contrast to Janamasthami, when the bhajans are almost exclusively to Vishnu, and Nawratri (described below, in §5.3.2.3), when the bhajans are exclusively to the goddess. The worship at Diwali is far less focused on any particular god. This small meeting is, however, rather different from usual satsangs in several respects, because many worshippers have a different attitude towards the worship. The emphasis is placed less on communal worship, and more on personal puja - several people attend the temple on this night simply to make a puja and have darsan, on what is an auspicious occasion. These people may join in with one or two bhajans, but they do not stay to participate in the communal worship for very long. That is, on this particular night, many worshippers are much more interested in

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<sup>66</sup> This day was not, however, much more convenient than the Thursday. Being a Sunday many people had to work the next day, and many worshippers had children who would need to be in bed early before going to school. There was also a rival event scheduled that night - a bhangra performance held in another part of Edinburgh - and so many Panjabis left the Diwali celebrations earlier than they would otherwise have done.

<sup>67</sup> Indeed the name Diwali itself refers to the *deepak* lights that are lit for the occasion - in south India the festival is called *deepawali*.

performing their own pujas than worshipping with other members of the community. This is despite the fact that the temple meeting takes its usual communal structure.

The meeting a few days later at the weekend is quite different from this. This night - which is the main celebration of the Diwali festival - has a considerable attendance (over two hundred and fifty in 1990). The emphasis at this meeting is very much on celebration and communality - it is regarded as a time of great festivity, and is for some people the only occasion in the year when they attend any temple. The first part of this major meeting is very similar to all other temple meetings. Worshippers enter the building, and then perform their puja and pranaam, having darsan of the images. They then seat themselves and sing bhajans for about an hour in the usual manner. Of course, this bhajan singing is also quite different - there are well over a hundred participants, rather than the usual forty or fifty. During the singing there is also a marked tendency for many of the men to separate themselves from such activity - about half of the total male attenders choose to sit talking at the back of the temple, away from the area where the bhajans are being sung. This creates the impression that this type of worship is mainly female oriented (although there are still several men who make important contributions to the singing).

After about one hour of singing the worshippers perform arti, in the same way that they do at the end of a monthly satsang. The same arti song is sung, and the ritual takes exactly the same form as described above (in §5.1.3.3). However, there are a large number of people wishing to participate in the worship - particularly wanting to wave the lamp in front of the gods. The main temple leaders realise this, and so act as stewards, encouraging people to queue and wait in front of the pictures for a chance to wave the lamp. There are also several lamps for worshippers to wave. Pradaksin (the pouring of water around the arti lamps, see §5.1.3.3) is performed at the end of arti - this has to be done for each lamp, and so requires several Brahman worshippers to perform it. Arti is followed by the taking around of the lamps for individuals to make their own pujas, and at the same time prasad is distributed.

This worship, however, is seen as being a prelude to the activities that follow. Diwali is a religious festival, and so many people feel that it is important to celebrate it with religious activities (hence the bhajan singing, etc.). But the festival is also important socially, and many members of the community expect a large 'social' occasion, with a proper 'programme' of events. Thus the worship is followed by activities which members of the community tend to define as 'cultural' rather than 'religious'. Music is provided for dancing in various styles, there is a large meal provided, and possibly some other entertainment<sup>68</sup>. The festival is a major opportunity for people to meet other members of the community, and so a great deal of the evening is spent catching up on news and talking to people who have not been seen since the previous Diwali. The dancing is performed in the large space at the back of the hall, and it comprises of some Gujarati *dandya* and *garba*, and some Panjabi *bhangra*.

### 5.3.2.3 Nawratri

Nawratri is a festival which extends over nine different nights, followed by a tenth night of festivity. It is a festival dedicated to Amba-ji or Mata-ji - the 'goddess' - in her various forms. Ideally it is expected that there should be some form of worship on each of the nine nights, as well as on the tenth night. Before the opening of the temple in Edinburgh, it was not usually possible to find a room that could be booked for so long. Many people were also sceptical that worshippers would take the trouble to attend for the whole festival. Thus in previous years it was usual for only two Nawratri nights to be celebrated - on consecutive Sundays in Leith Community Centre (the place where the regular satsangs were held). Following the opening of the temple, however, a few members of the community decided that there should be some celebration on every night of Nawratri - and this is what occurred in 1990. Attendance during the weekday meetings was quite sparse, but most people were pleased by the

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<sup>68</sup> For example, in 1989 a famous dancer from India (who was living in Edinburgh at the time) performed at the Mandir Diwali meeting.



mere fact that something was happening, that the festival was being celebrated properly.

The association of Nawratri with Gujaratis appears to have encouraged a different approach to organising the worship for this festival. Many Panjabis attend Nawratri celebrations, but few of them consider it to be an important festival, and thus do not rank it as highly as Janamasthami or Diwali. When I asked Panjabi temple officials about the programme of festivals, they would not make much comment about Nawratri. Reference would be made to Diwali and Janamasthami, but nothing would be said about Nawratri unless I asked about it. Gujaratis, on the other hand, place a great emphasis on it - it is they who ensure that the festival is celebrated, and it was Gujaratis who provided the incentive for holding nightly meetings in 1990.

This autumn festival is also important to Bengalis and Biharis - who call it Durga Puja<sup>69</sup>. Their style of worship is very different from that of Gujaratis - for example, in India the Puja can sometimes take the form of an animal sacrifice, an idea which is abhorrent to the mainly vegetarian Gujaratis. Edinburgh Bengalis who wish to worship at Durga Puja (and there are a reasonable number of them) drive fifty miles to Glasgow - where a 'Durga Puja committee' (run by the Bengali Association of Scotland) organise celebrations for the event in a proper eastern Indian style<sup>70</sup>. Their lack of co-operation in the Edinburgh temple is perhaps because they are outnumbered by Gujaratis - thus there is no real possibility that events for this festival will be organised to their liking in Edinburgh.

The temple is prepared specially for this festival. On the first night of Nawratri three chairs are placed back to back in the large space at the rear of the temple. A cloth is then draped over the chairs, so they create a small structure on which items can be

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<sup>69</sup> Durga is another form of the goddess.

<sup>70</sup> The Glasgow Puja is a large-scale event covering nine nights, with an average attendance of several hundred each night. A hired pandit administers to large statues of the goddess, and then worshippers make their puja (which is in the form of a small twig, thrown towards the statues). A meal is then served for all worshippers, before they return home.

placed. On the top-most of these chairs is placed a small metal water pot, on the lid of which burns a small ghee flame. This is the *diya* (lamp), the focus of the worship. On the seat of each chair is placed a framed lithograph of the goddess in several forms. In front of these pictures are placed the usual items of worship, such as incense sticks, flowers, beads, and trays on which are placed ghee lamps. These trays (*thalis*) are prepared specially each day - women take the trouble to paint patterns on the surface of the trays, marking out auspicious symbols (such as *swastiks* and the syllable 'aum') with red and white powders and rice. The trays are later used for arti, and then are taken home, where the patterns are washed off, to be replaced for the next night of worship.<sup>71</sup>

Because much of the impetus for celebrating Nawratri comes from Gujaratis, the festival itself has a distinctly Gujarati form - there is far less emphasis on the common forms used at other festival times. Each night of Nawratri begins in the usual manner, with worshippers performing their puja and having darsan, as they do whenever they enter the temple. But the remainder of the worship is quite different from normal meetings. Once people are settled in the temple some singing begins. The first song is in Gujarati, it is the same on each night of the festival, and it is directed specifically at the goddess<sup>72</sup>. Transcriptions of this song are written out for worshippers and distributed, but these are in the Gujarati script, and so are only useful for Gujaratis. This song is then followed by one or two bhajans, which are again usually in Gujarati, and are directed to the goddess. All the worship at Nawratri is dedicated to the various forms of Mata-ji. This singing does not usually last for long, however. After a few minutes the worshippers stand up and begin to dance around the special shrine.

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<sup>71</sup> On one night of worship I was given a lift to the temple with Mr and Mrs Kumari. Mrs Kumari was a very dedicated temple goer, and she brought one of these specially decorated thalis to the temple for every night of the festival. When we arrived at the temple she had several other items to take into the building, and so asked me to take the tray for her. Whilst going into the temple I met a couple of other worshippers who had also recently arrived. They greeted me and immediately gave a strange look at the tray that I was carrying, unable to understand how I came to be bringing such an item to the temple. For them it seemed highly inappropriate that I - as a white Christian, and also as a man - should be bringing a decorated thali to the Nawratri worship.

<sup>72</sup> The refrain of this song is: '*Man pari aum bhagvati bhavadhahdu kapo*'.

This dancing is the major aspect of worship during the Nawratri festival, and the dances are exclusively Gujarati. The dances - particularly *garba* and *dandya* - are performed in a large circle around the Mata-ji shrine. There is musical accompaniment for the dancers - one person plays a drum to mark time, others play some other form of percussion (such as tambourines), there is usually some recorded music<sup>73</sup>, and also one or two people sing bhajans<sup>74</sup>. Unlike in satsangs, however, most worshippers dance rather than sing - this is the focus of the worship.

There are three main types of dancing associated with Nawratri, although there are variations on these types. The most common dance is what is generally referred to as *garba* - it involves dancers moving clockwise around the shrine, clapping and stepping in pace with the music, ideally with men and women dancing in separate circles. Different forms of *garba* have different rhythms and tempos, and also different footsteps. According to Logan

The word *garaba* [garba] is literally the plural of the word *garabo*, an earthen vessel with holes in its sides and a lamp burning inside. But when people refer to a *garaba* they usually mean the dance around this lamp or its equivalent... (1988: 163)

The second type of dance is *dandya*, which is usually translated as the 'stick dance', or even as 'the state dance of Gujarat'. This dance is very well known, and the sight of two women knocking sticks together is often used to symbolise Gujarati culture in tourist brochures. *Dandya* requires two concentric circles, each facing the other and moving in opposite directions around the shrine. Dancers knock their sticks rhythmically against those of partners in the other circle, changing partners after each sequence. *Dandya* and *garba* are used most often at the Edinburgh temple - they are both quite easy to learn, and both men and women can participate easily.

The third type of dance includes several distinct styles, which are all linked by the fact that they are almost exclusively performed by women. One of these is a fast and

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<sup>73</sup> The music comes from tapes with titles such as 'Non-stop Puja Music'.

<sup>74</sup> One person told me that these songs are not bhajans, they are *raskunj*, which are songs specially for accompanying *garba*. However, I found that most people still spoke of bhajans rather than *raskunj* when describing the singing.

dangerous dance, in which two women face each other grasping hands and spin around deftly on their feet. This is usually performed on very hard surfaces - particularly in India, where I have seen dancers spin extremely quickly over hard concrete floors. The other women's dance that I have seen performed at the temple is quite different from any of the other dances - again it involves two women facing each other, but they hop in crouching positions in rhythm with the drum, clapping with their hands very close to the floor. This latter dance is not performed very often in the Edinburgh temple, and when it is done I have found that most men are quite baffled by it. It is something that is quite out of their usual experience. This type of dance is more usually performed in all-female groups of worship, such as the large scale Nawratri gatherings that used to occur in Nairobi, or in specially sponsored festivals held in worshippers' homes. These women's dances are obviously distinct from dandya and garba, and it appears to be a recent development for them to be performed in the temple in mixed company. Both of these dances are associated with worship of Mata-ji, and so they are particularly appropriate for Nawratri.

There is a particular way in which these different dances should be performed. At Nawratri there are five specific dances, each distinct from the others, which should be performed in a certain order for the festival to be celebrated correctly. I was told that ideally this should be a couple of different garba dances, then dandya, then the spinning women's dance, and then another garba. Other dances may be added to this, but this is supposed to be the basic core of worship for the festival. In fact it was quite usual for only three dances to be performed on most nights of Nawratri in 1990. This was garba, dandya, and then another garba. Most people considered this to be adequate, even those who had previously told me that the minimum should be five different dances. Garba and dandya are the most popular dances - only very devout worshippers or regular temple goers are able to dance anything else - and so the majority of worshippers are content so long as these two dances are included. The main aim is to make sure that the festival is correct, so that Mata-ji is worshipped in the Edinburgh

temple by the local community. But in reality, the process of holding Nawratri meetings is often enough to satisfy most worshippers, without having to worry too much about specifics.

This dancing is the major form of devotion during the Nawratri festival, and in some ways it is similar to the singing of bhajans at other religious meetings. Dancing takes up the most time during the meeting, and it is positioned between the initial pujas and the performance of arti. Many dancers actually sing as they dance, and the dances are accompanied by bhajan singing. Dancing, like singing, is also a very devotional form of worship, and each dance ends with worshippers calling out '*bolnee Mata-ji/Amba-ji ki jai*' - which is the same phrase used at the end of bhajans (see §5.1.3.2 above).

At the end of the meeting, after the dancing is completed, arti is performed in the usual fashion. This arti is held around the Mata-ji shrine - rather than the main temple area - and the arti lamp is waved at the lithographs of the goddess. In fact there are usually a few lamps, each one placed on the decorated trays which have been brought specially, and so all worshippers are encouraged to wave an arti lamp<sup>75</sup>. While the goddess is being worshipped at this shrine, another lamp is taken up to the pictures in the main temple area, and the gods represented there are also worshipped at the same time. This is obviously to ensure that all the gods in the temple are honoured, but only one or two worshippers take the trouble to ensure this, the majority stand around the Mata-ji shrine. The song for the Nawratri arti is very similar to the one used at other times - the tune is almost exactly the same, but the words are slightly different. As the festival is dedicated to the goddess, she is also the focus of the arti, so the song is '*Om Jai Ma Jagdambe...*'. Ma Jagdambe is a female form of the usual arti god Jagdish (the

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<sup>75</sup> In fact, I was encouraged to wave the lamp on several occasions during the 1990 Nawratri meetings. This has been the only time in which any members of the temple encouraged me to participate in this ritual - I am not sure if this is because Nawratri is a particularly special festival for the people involved, or because by this time I had become very well known by the individuals involved.

‘Supreme Lord’; c.f. Knott 1986a: 121, Jackson 1981: 84). At the end of arti some Sanskrit phrases are said, as is usual with arti. A special element of the arti which I did not observe<sup>at</sup>/<sub>f</sub> any other time was that at this point a small piece of wood (sandalwood possibly) is placed into each of the arti flames (including the one at the main temple) and made to burn. The person who does this then performs the pradaksin ritual, by pouring water around the flame. The arti lamps are then circulated amongst the worshippers, for them to make their own puja. At this time, prasad is also distributed.

At one weekend Nawratri meeting this part of the meeting was elaborated by holding an auction for the privilege of performing arti. This appears to be a rather common practice among Gujaratis<sup>76</sup>, although it has only happened once at the Edinburgh temple (to my knowledge). The leaders of the temple encourage worshippers to bid against each other with money, and whoever bids highest is allowed to hold the arti lamp. The proceeds from this auction are then donated to the temple funds. The idea is obviously to raise money, although whoever bids highest does not really achieve anything. Even if s/he does buy the privilege of performing the arti, all other worshippers are allowed to wave one of the lamps as well. Some people complained to me that this was a rather vulgar idea, and that it somehow spoilt the idea of arti. I noticed that no Panjabis took part in the bidding, and that in fact it was mainly members of one large Gujarati family who participated most in the whole affair. Thus the auction was not so much of a success as the organisers had hoped<sup>77</sup>.

Nawratri is, of course, also a social event, and on certain nights it is used as a

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<sup>76</sup> Logan (1988: 164) describes it occurring in London, Jackson describes such bidding in Coventry (1981: 78); and Barot describes it at a Bristol temple (n.d.1); while Banks found it among Gujarati Jains in Leicester (1991: 239-42).

<sup>77</sup> Banks also found that this bidding for arti was more of a gimmick than a useful method of raising money, or of inspiring interest in the temple project. When such bidding occurred over several nights of a Jain festival in the large Jain temple in Leicester, he observed that it was rare for more than one person to bid for any one arti (1991: 241). However, Barot describes how this bidding had become a very popular and lucrative form of fund raising, with bids sometimes reaching over a thousand pounds. The people who have attempted such bidding in Edinburgh most probably have experience of the practice being successful elsewhere, and were expecting it to be more popular than it turned out to be. It is very likely that such bidding was common (and popular) among Gujaratis in East Africa.

time when the community meets together. Thus the Nawratri meetings that are held at the weekend are more important than the weekday meetings. The attendance is higher on these days, and the meetings start earlier and finish later. Unlike Diwali, however, there are no other special activities organised for Nawratri - there is no special 'programme' of events apart from those related to worship. The dancing itself is considered to be fun, as well as being devotional, so there is no real need to provide any extra entertainment. On weekend nights some food is provided, but this is usually a matter of a few samosas and sweets - it is never in as large quantities or as varied as the food provided at Diwali.

### **5.3.3 Festival styles**

#### *5.3.3.1 Regional conflicts*

The content of worship is mainly the product of compromise between the two main regional traditions. It is clear that most of the festivals take a very similar form, which is close to the model of worship used in the monthly satsang. Thus Diwali and Janamasthami are celebrated mainly with the singing of bhajans and the performance of arti - other elements of worship are added to this basic framework. The celebration of Ram Nawmi, when it was first introduced in 1991 - also took a similar form. Nawratri is different from this model, however. Although the style of worship is still predominantly devotional (i.e. bhakti), the main form of worship is dancing rather than singing. This difference is the result of Nawratri being celebrated in particularly Gujarati styles - rather than as an attempt to blend different traditions.

Panjabis at the temple appear to have allowed a concession to the Gujaratis over this festival - there is little conflict about the fact that the worship is predominantly Gujarati in style, and is in marked contrast to the usual compromise forms of worship. There is no clear reason why the Gujaratis have been so successful in making sure that this festival is observed, while Panjabis are not so concerned about festivals particular to their region which they may wish to observe. This may be partly because there is no

Panjabi equivalent to Nawratri; there is no festival particular to Panjab which Panjabis feel that they need to celebrate in the temple. Panjabis certainly have other concerns that they believe should be observed - such as making sure that the style and content of worship is how they wish it to be, and even that the monthly satsang is at a time which suits them<sup>78</sup> - rather than bothering too much about which festivals are celebrated.

Meanwhile certain Gujaratis<sup>79</sup> have made considerable efforts to ensure that Nawratri takes the form that it does. To them Nawratri is an extremely important festival, and should be marked in a certain way. The stress on the festival itself is less exceptional than the form of worship chosen. By ensuring that Nawratri is primarily about dancing, and about Gujarati forms of dancing, this faction are - in this situation - placing more emphasis on their own needs than on compromise and communality. It is important, therefore, to examine why it is that this obvious differentiating factor - i.e. dancing - is so important, and why such a form of worship has been chosen for the one particular festival.

### *5.3.3.2 A new tradition*

Most Gujaratis stress the fact that the way that they organise Nawratri in Edinburgh is 'traditional', that they are doing it the way that it should be done. Most of them refer to East Africa to justify this - rather than to India - describing Nawratri festivities that they experienced in their youth in Kenya and Uganda. At the same time, however, they often express a complaint about the fact that although they are recreating the tradition, somehow the recreation is inadequate, and that it is nowhere near as well done as it could be. They say, for example, that in East Africa the dancing went on all night, that there was more competition between the dancers, and that the men and

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<sup>78</sup> The satsang begins at 6.30 on a Sunday evening, which means that people running shops and restaurants have time to close their businesses before attending the Mandir. Most of the members of the committee who run such businesses are Panjabi, and so the choice of time is of most convenience to them.

<sup>79</sup> Particularly those within the Anand family group.



women should really be dancing separately. In fact, there appears to be a recognition that although the festival is being performed in a 'traditional' way, it is also having to be modified to take account of the new circumstances. The modifications appear to be small in this respect - for example, there are limitations on how long the meetings last, the numbers present are much smaller, etc. But there is a general feeling that some changes are necessary for the Edinburgh situation.

As well as being traditional, the use of dancing at Nawratri is also partly done as an expression of cultural/ethnic identity by Gujaratis. By performing 'their' dances, they are helping to maintain and demonstrate the continuance of a sense of their distinct 'ethnicity' as Hindus. Other elements are involved with this - women wear new clothes on each night of the festival, often spectacular *saris* which they would rarely wear at other times. Thus by participating in the festival they are marking out their cultural distinctiveness vis-a-vis the other cultures that they live alongside<sup>80</sup>. But this is not only an expression of 'Indian/Hindu' identity: the ethnicity is not only a reaction to white-Asian cultural contact. At Nawratri there is an emphasis on Gujarati-ness, as opposed to other regional forms of 'Hinduism' - they are expressing their identities as Gujaratis in relation to non-Gujarati Indians (particularly Panjabis). This is tacitly accepted by most Panjabis, who although happy to attend the celebrations do not attach much significance to the whole affair.

### 5.3.3.3 *Devotion and dancing*

On the other hand, though, it is important to stress the devotional element of garba and dandya - these dances are not only performed to express a concept of cultural distinctiveness. The word that is most commonly used about the dancing is 'playing' - the English word is used as a translation of the Gujarati/Hindi word *khelnaa*. There are

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<sup>80</sup> This argument of ethnicity is supported by the fact that many Gujaratis were pleased when I (as a non-Indian outsider) made the effort to learn the dances. This was taken as a compliment - that I was learning and performing 'our dances'. But they were seeing this not only as Indians, but as Gujaratis in particular.

words in Hindi and Gujarati which can be directly translated as 'dance' (*ras* in Gujarati, *naacnaa* in Hindi), and these are used in other contexts<sup>81</sup>. But garba, dandya, and other Gujarati religious dances are always forms of *khelnaa* or playing. It is this concept that is most stressed by worshippers at the Edinburgh temple. Whenever I attended Nawratri celebrations Gujaratis would ask me if I would be 'playing', and I would smile and say that I would do so quite soon. This was never enough, however - I would be told that I should start 'playing' straight away, that I should not wait and ask to begin. The dancing (playing) is for the gods - it is done to worship them, and so I should be keen to join in.

This notion of *khelnaa* has many complex associations behind it which are perhaps undervalued by translation into the English word 'play'. The word defines this type of dancing as a form of devotion - somewhat like bhajan singing, but obviously distinct from it also. This notion of 'play' is found throughout much of India, in many different forms. Much Krishna worship in north India stresses the idea of worship as play, especially in terms of the Krishna *lila* (which is also translated as 'play' or 'sport') - although the emphasis placed on this as a form of worship varies a great deal (c.f. Kinsley 1979; Ostor 1980). A similar theme of play may also be found in some south Indian rituals, such as those observed by Good in Terku Vandanam, a village in Tamil-Nad (1985). In this case, the playing is directed to a local village goddess<sup>82</sup>, and takes the form of throwing turmeric water and the performance of a drama (ibid.: 156-57). Various theological arguments can be given to explain the meanings of this notion of playing - particularly that it helps worshippers to see reality through the illusions (*maya*) of life. No such theological explanations were given to me by worshippers in Edinburgh, although it was certainly clear that the notion of playing/dancing is at the

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<sup>81</sup> I did ask why they did not use these other words, but nobody was able to tell me. To complicate the situation further, however, this type of dancing is also called '*ras*' (i.e. dance), although the act of performing it is always referred to as '*khel*' (playing).

<sup>82</sup> The goddess herself is thought to be playing throughout much of the annual festival held for her, and certain rituals enact this on her behalf (Good 1985: 156-57).

heart of the Nawratri festival. It is considered to be the most appropriate way in which the goddess should be worshipped, and the festival would not be the same without it.

#### *5.3.3.4 Dancing as performance*

At the same time, dancing is important because it is an enjoyable form of entertainment. Many people join in the dancing because it is fun to do. Although they are aware that it is an appropriate way in which to worship the goddess, and also that it is an expression of their cultural traditions, they stress very strongly the performative and entertainment element. This is also recognised in a negative way, since some of the more high minded worshippers at the temple have cynically commented to me that most people at Nawratri 'only come to dance and to eat'.

This role of dancing as an entertaining form of worship is employed as a means of involving the younger generations in temple activities. The large scale Nawratri meetings that are held every year in London and Leicester are a frequent topic of conversation among Gujaratis at the Edinburgh Nawratri meetings. I have frequently heard comments about how these meetings are mainly used as an opportunity for young men and women to meet and to date. Although such openness between sexes is not strictly approved of by older generations, many have a tacit acceptance of the fact that it is better for such dating to occur at a Hindu/Gujarati religious festival than at a disco, bar, or nightclub. Despite the fact that most Hindus would dismiss this as worship for the wrong reasons, they approve that it is worship nonetheless, and so why should the young not enjoy themselves.

Bhajans themselves are intended to be entertaining. It is expected that worshippers should enjoy singing, clapping, and participating in the songs. Singing does not engage a person quite as much as dancing, but both styles of worship are important at the temple particularly because they have such performative and entertaining aspects. Tambiah takes up Radcliffe-Brown's observation that dancing is a very important form of ritual activity (1985 [1979]: 123-4). Although he dismisses the

great structural-functionalist's reduction of dance to the level of social cohesive, he brings out the fact that Andaman Islanders, as well as many other people, make use of dancing, as well as singing and music, as multiple media of symbolic concepts.

That is, the dancing at Nawratri has a performative element which helps to communicate and to transform through the act of performance, in a way that is similar to bhajans (see §5.2.5.2). The dances of garba and dandya are important symbols which communicate certain key ideas to the participants, and the performance of which engages and then transforms individuals' views of the world. However, unlike the bhajans sung at satsangs, these dances do not communicate the notion of pan-Hindu communality to the performers - rather they suggest a more divisive form of communality, one based on Gujarati regional traditions. To a certain extent this is muted by the presence of Panjabis and other non-Gujaratis in the temple at the festival, and to a greater extent when Panjabis make the effort to join in and learn the dances. But garba and dandya cannot be anything but Gujarati, and so it is their regionality which is most distinctive about them in this context.

When garba and dandya are performed at other festivals, particularly at Diwali, they have a quite different role. Despite the fact that they are performed at a religious gathering, they are performed as part of the 'programme' of entertainment, which includes other social (and non-devotional) activities such as eating and watching some professional performances (c.f. §5.3.2.2). In such a case the stress is put more on dancing garba for fun, rather than on dancing as worship. At Diwali the dancing is still referred to as 'playing', and several performers take it as seriously as they do at Nawratri, but the dances have rather different meanings. In fact, these Gujarati-style dances have to be balanced by some other dances, in particular a Panjabi form of dancing called *bhangra*. This bhangra is quite different from garba - although it was originally a Panjabi 'folk dance' it has developed new forms in Britain, where it has been given a disco style beat and form, and is now associated with night clubs (Banjeri & Baumann 1990, Baumann 1990). It is this modern bhangra that is performed in the

temple at Diwali, not the 'original' folk dance - and it is thus very different from the Gujarati dances, which are specifically meant to be devotional in orientation. The emphasis appears to be upon balancing a Gujarati dance against a Panjabi dance, rather than matching like for like. Thus at Diwali both dances convey a similar meaning, that is they are folk dances belonging to different regional traditions, which can be balanced against each other at a festival where the different traditions are meant to be worshipping together.

#### *5.3.3.5 Festival traditions*

The celebration of Nawratri best illustrates the tensions that exist within all aspects of temple life - that is, the wish to balance the strains of factionalism against a desire for communality. In the festival, the rhetoric of pan-Hinduism is retained, and everybody is expected to participate as if there are no regional differences. But at the same time, the regional differences are manifest and explicit - the styles of worship are different from usual, they belong to a particular faction. Moreover, the language in which the worship is performed is particular to this group, it cannot be easily shared. Although it is possible for Panjabis (and others) to join the dancing, they cannot and do not share the verbal component of the worship, which makes it extremely difficult for the festival to become truly communal for Edinburgh Hindus.

Worship in all cases is a forum for the tensions between communality and factionalism. It can allow the expression of these tensions, in one way or another, but it cannot resolve them. The satsang itself belongs to various Hindu religious traditions - and so various regional groups in Edinburgh are able to use it to share what appears to be a common religious tradition which encompasses their diversity. But the various traditions associated with bhajan singing divide these Hindus as well as unite them - there is nothing particularly 'traditional' about Gujaratis and Panjabis singing bhajans together as a congregation.

This is all part of the creative process, in which the temple tradition is being

constructed. The Mandir is putting forward versions of what Hinduism, and Hindu temple traditions, should be in Edinburgh. By determining which religious festivals should be celebrated - and how they should be performed - the temple committee are defining what is and is not important for the community. The traditions that they are promoting are not carbon copies of what can be found in India. Instead we find a reinvention of the various traditions that have been brought to the city by the various members.

It appears that certain ground rules have been established - thus most worship is directed towards congregational and communal attitudes, and the temple is expected to be a forum in which the 'community' meets and develops. Following from this, the regular satsang is an opportunity for differences to be expressed and possibly overcome, since it is a time when people behave as if there is a single Hindu temple tradition. In the next (concluding) chapter, I shall be examining why there should be community oriented ground rules, and if there is anything about a religious centre (such as the Mandir) which encourages (or discourages) communality.

## CHAPTER SIX. RELIGION, SOCIETY, AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF COMMUNITY

### 6.1 THE CONSTRUCTION OF COMMUNITIES

#### 6.1.1 Communities - real and imagined

##### 6.1.1.1 *External constructions*

It is very easy to discuss 'ethnic minority communities' in Britain without having a clear understanding of what these communities are actually composed of. In particular, the word 'community' is frequently used in a variety of extremely ambiguous ways to describe disparate populations and groups of people. The term is usually a self-proclaimed designation, employed by people to assert their common bonds, and to distinguish themselves from outsiders, but it is also used by external agencies and forces to construct heterogeneous groups into convenient structures.

A good example of this is given in Eade's discussion of 'community' politics among Bangladeshis in East London (1989). He draws attention to the importance of the context within which Bangladeshi politics operates - in particular, the relations between Bangladeshis and the 'local state' agencies. These (white British) local agencies expect to have dealings with 'community' representatives, and so there are frequently individuals from within the diverse Bangladeshi groups who attempt to make use of this notion. Thus people claim the status of 'community leaders', although in most cases, the communities that they claim to lead are more abstract than real. This use of the notion of 'community' appears to be primarily for the individuals' own political ends, whilst the concept of community they are actually using is often more of a rhetorical device than an objective reality.

The external pressures for such communities to be created (if only on paper) are also important in many instances. From a white British perspective, it seems reasonable to assume that if Muslims have communities based around mosques, and

Sikhs have them based around gurdwaras, then Hindus should also have communities based around temples. Thus a local council which tries to be aware of the 'needs' of 'ethnic minorities' may well expect a population of Hindus to form a community and to set up its own temple. If this council has resources allocated for such ethnic communities, then it may even look for assistance from individuals who can be identified as 'leaders' from within the ethnic minority population to help in the realisation of these expectations. These individuals may or may not make use of such opportunities for their own political purposes. But the process of reification - done both by the local state agencies, and by the self-appointed community leaders - usually has very little to do with the people who make up these putative 'communities'.

Thus the notion of an 'Edinburgh Hindu community' can be reified by individuals and by local state bodies, without any reference to the experiences and real needs of Hindus living in Edinburgh. Indeed, much discourse about 'the Edinburgh Hindu community' (and other such ethnic minority communities in Britain) is about an 'imagined' community (c.f. Werbner 1991: 21; Anderson 1991 [1983]). For an anthropologist doing research about this particular population, I find it very difficult to avoid participating in this discourse of reification - both on a formal level (e.g. when writing about Hindus in Edinburgh), and on an informal level (e.g. when being asked about my research).

However, it is important to remember that *all* communities are symbolic constructions - that is, the sense of belonging to *any* community is the product of a creative or imaginative process, which involves both internal *and* external perspectives. According to Anthony Cohen

the reality of community lies in its members' perception[s] of the vitality of its culture. People construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning... (1985: 118).

If we accept that the concept of community is symbolic, then it is possible to see that a community will always have many *meanings* attached to it - not simply those meanings associated with a particular perspective. In fact, *all* symbols have multiple



meanings, and these meanings are extremely flexible. This approach to symbolism - which derives in part from Turner's seminal studies - has already been discussed in an earlier chapter (see §5.2.5.2), with reference to bhajan singing. The extension of the notion of symbolism to understanding what is meant by 'community' highlights the fact that when we talk of communities we are not talking about objective realities, but about subjective constructions.

When politicians and outside agencies make use of the notion of community, they are, therefore, attempting to manipulate a symbolic construction in a certain way. It is, of course, very important to understand the ways in which this is done. Firstly, because the discourse of the outsider is internalised (in various ways) into the discourse of the community members themselves. Cohen draws attention to this process, when he discusses how the debate *amongst* Welsh nationalist groups in the 1970s and 80s was very much shaped by British government attitudes and policies (ibid.: 107). That is

the [notion of community] provides [people] with a model for the political formulation of their interests and aspirations - a model which may have been provided unwittingly by authority at a higher echelon (ibid.).

Secondly, the local state bodies are also very important agents of power - they have control over various resources which can be used for the benefit of the members of a community. The fact that the Edinburgh Hindu temple was named a 'community centre' to be eligible for more finance is illustrative of this (see §4.1.3.2). Although it is primarily a religious institution, the accommodation of the external perspective (i.e. funding bodies) is helping to shape the roles that the mandir will take as it develops. Quite what is meant when it is called a community centre is not clear, but there is clearly a case to be made here that internal factors are being encouraged to a certain degree by the expectations of external funding agencies.

#### 6.1.1.2 *Internal constructions*

It is important to remember that many 'ethnic communities' also exist *for*

*themselves* - the construction comes from within the populations as well as from outside. It is certainly true that the Edinburgh Hindu community has been imagined - and subsequently encouraged - by certain political leaders and local state agencies. But at the same time, the notion of 'community' is also an important symbol for many Hindus living in Edinburgh. Most people who attend the temple, or know about it, are happy to define themselves in similar terms to those used by their community leaders - that is, as members of a 'Hindu community'. Of course, this phrase is extremely vague, polysemic, and multi-vocal - there are many different understandings of what the community actually is. The vagueness of the symbol is one of its strengths - the variety of meanings which are attached to it allows for variety among the membership of the community itself (c.f. Cohen *ibid.*: 108). This is especially important within such a heterogeneous group - if the common understanding of the 'Hindu community' was made more explicit or more exclusive (e.g. if it became solely a *Panjabi* Hindu community), then large sections of the group (i.e. Gujaratis, and other non-Panjabis) would not wish to participate in it. If this occurred, then it is unlikely that such an ambitious project - namely the temple building project - would be at all successful.

There is, however, a very vague common understanding of what the Edinburgh Hindu community means, which is probably shared by all self-declared members of that community. Thus it is clear that most people think of the 'Hindu community' as *the* group of people who share *the* common religion of 'Hinduism' and who worship according to 'Hindu' custom at the Edinburgh Mandir (or, at least those people who could worship there, if they wished to). Beyond this, there are further elaborations on the meanings of what 'Hindus', 'Hinduism', and the Mandir are and should be. Each of these notions are also multi-vocal symbols. But these disparate understandings are brought together by a definite common understanding that worshippers at the temple form a congregation and that this congregation forms a community.

### 6.1.2 Community and congregation

In chapter four I examined the fact that the relationship between 'community' (or social group) and temple is rather different among Hindu traditions in India than in Christian cultures (see §4.4). That is, Indian Hindu temples are not usually the foci of communities. Despite this, there is a definite pattern that many Hindu temples in Britain (although not all - see Vertovec 1992) are *becoming* 'community centres' and so are becoming like Christian churches. This development is relying on a greater emphasis on congregational forms of temple worship - since although congregational worship is important in many temples in India, there are other forms of Hindu worship which do not involve congregations. The particular bhakti styles of bhajan singing being developed in British temples appear to be a good medium through which congregational worship can develop (see §5.2.2). The development of temples into community centres is, however, also relying on another construction - that is, the construction of 'communities'. Thus, a community centre can be based around a caste-jati community (e.g. Lohana associations in London and Leicester), a regional community (e.g. exclusively Panjabi and Gujarati groups), or a 'Hindu' community (e.g. the Edinburgh case).

These two elements are then being associated with each other through a very subtle conceptual manipulation - that is, the temple *congregation* is becoming defined as a *community*. Or, to put it another way, the self-constructed community is defined as the potential congregation for a temple. Both concepts are fused to create a new concept, which is *both* a congregation *and* a community.

This has not happened among all Hindu groups in Britain. Vertovec (1992) aptly points out that a certain Gujarati temple in Balham, south London is not associated with any particular community, nor does it serve as a 'community centre'. Instead members of many different communities make use of the temple at different times. For example, he describes how most worshippers during Nawratri attend a different temple for each of the nine nights of the festival, without identifying themselves with any particular

temple (ibid.: 256). Although they may be present at the Balham temple sometime during Nawratri, they are never really part of that temple's community. These worshippers are perhaps the product of the circumstances of London Hinduism - where there are sufficient numbers within a fairly contained geographical space for more specific social groups to meet practically. Thus it is possible to have caste-jati based communities - such as the south London Lohanas - or sectarian based communities, such as the Pushtimargis that Vertovec describes (ibid.: 255-57), or the various Swaminarayan *sampradayas* (sects) described by Barot (1972, 1980) and Pocock (1976). The Balham temple has no single community attached to it - instead it is a resource used by several different communal groups. Despite this, worship that in the Edinburgh context is congregational - i.e. arti, bhajan singing, and Nawratri celebrations - does still occur at this Balham temple also. Although Vertovec denies that this worship is congregational (he says that it is 'individualistic'), it is clear that the worshippers do form a congregation<sup>1</sup> in these contexts.

Vertovec is falling into the trap of equating congregationalism with community - which is obviously very easy to do. But a group of worshippers may be worshipping together as a congregation without considering themselves to be a community - as is the apparent case with the Gujaratis who sing bhajans together at the Balham temple. The ideological equation of congregation with community occurs in some contexts and not in others; thus the congregation at the Edinburgh temple consider themselves a community (and vice versa), while the Balham congregations do not. There are obviously reasons for this construction of a congregational community - many of which come from within the group itself.

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<sup>1</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary (2nd Edition, 1989) states that the most common understanding of the word 'congregation' is 'a body of persons assembled for religious worship or to hear a preacher'. Of course, this definition is primarily concerned with Christian worship, but even so, there is no suggestion that the persons assembled together in a congregation share anything more than the act of worship.

### 6.1.3 Determinants of community

#### 6.1.3.1 'Ethnicity' and boundaries

The most obvious explanation for the creation of a Hindu community is that of socio-economic determinism, which has been used by a variety of writers (c.f. Miles & Phizacklea 1984, Rex & Moore 1967, Rex & Tomlinson 1979; Eade 1989: 2-12) to account for the emergence of ethnic religious communities and/or associations. These arguments usually equate race and class, and explain the emergence of ethnic identities and communities as a manifestation of the problem of being an underprivileged 'black' underclass of British society<sup>2</sup>. There are various ways in which this process can work, accounting for the emergence of an ethnic group in terms of access to work, housing, education, or simply through general exclusion and exploitation within the economy.

Such arguments do not appear to be applicable to middle-class Edinburgh Hindus, and they cannot fully account for why there is a Mandir in Edinburgh, nor why it has taken the form that it has. It is apparent that Edinburgh Hindus do not occupy any 'ethnic niche'<sup>3</sup>, and are too diverse in occupation to be described as an economic self-interest group (c.f. Cohen 1974a). This level of diversification is apparent among the temple congregation/community - worshippers include petit-bourgeois shopkeepers, manual workers, wealthy business owners, as well as doctors, dentists, teachers, and so on. Neither - as I argued in an earlier chapter (§2.4.1.2) - does the problem of racism appear to be the cause of a sense of ethnicity.

In chapter two, I looked at the various approaches to understanding ethnic identity (see §2.4). Such notions of ethnicity are of course, also very much concerned with socio-economic factors. But if the creation of a Hindu temple community is not a direct

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<sup>2</sup> John Rex, perhaps the most famous and influential writer on the sociology of 'race and ethnicity' within Britain, has subsequently moved away from his use of socio-economic theories to analyse the creation of 'ethnicity'. In a recent conference (Rex n.d.) on social change among minority religions, he put forward the argument that religion can be an equally important factor in the creation of such ethnic communities. This new approach appears to be born out by the situation in Edinburgh.

<sup>3</sup> This is in contrast to Edinburgh Pakistanis, who mainly dominate the retail/wholesale outlets which are commonly associated with Gujaratis in other parts of Britain (see §2.3.2).

result of socio-economic pressures, nor is it simply a cultural reaction to white British cultural expressions. As in many other cases of 'ethnicity', there are a great many different dimensions to the ethnic identity of Edinburgh Hindus - who are Scots, British, and Europeans, *as well* as Hindus, Panjabis, East Africans or whatever. The diversity of cultural expressions that occur within the Hindu temple suggests that ethnicity is as important *within* the community as it is between community members and members of other ethnic communities. Thus, although we can say that there is an element of reactive ethnicity occurring among Hindus in the Edinburgh temple, this is not the only reason why they are forming a community, and it may well not be the most important reason either.

The notion of reactive ethnicity derives very much from the work of Barth (1969), and his stress on the need to understand cultural boundaries (see §2.4.1). He argued that we should not look at the content of cultures themselves, but at the ways in which the boundaries between cultures are created and maintained. As I showed in my discussion of his work earlier, it is often difficult to know where to draw an ethnic boundary. Recent anthropological writers have developed this approach to a high degree of sophistication - particularly the contributors to the volume edited by Anthony Cohen (1986). Cohen himself points out that these boundaries are always symbolic (like the communities that they bind - see §6.1.1.1), and so they can have many different meanings.

The Cohen collection also draws attention to the multiplicity of different groups that boundaries can be drawn around. Although anthropologists like to stress the boundaries around cultural or ethnic groups, there are smaller and larger segments of society which can also be represented and maintained by symbolic boundaries. For example, James discusses the boundaries that exist around age-groups, particularly the betwixt and between experiences of teenagers (in her case, in north-east England). Bouquet, Wallman, and Rapport all discuss boundaries that are drawn around and within households, whilst Macfarlane examines the complexity of trying to understand

the symbolic boundaries between religious/sectarian groups. What is striking about all this, is not so much that boundaries are drawn and manipulated, but rather that people live with so many boundaries, each of which are significant in their own ways. As well as being created and maintained, many of these boundaries are also being crossed - either partially or completely - frequently, within the context of everyday life.

To return to the Edinburgh Hindu situation, this thesis has been focusing on a set of boundaries that are being constructed around a few related ideas - those of Hinduism, Indian-ness, and regional identities. But this should not make us lose sight of the fact that the people described live across many different boundaries - the majority of which have little to do with these 'ethnic' boundaries. For example, a woman can 'commute' from British to Indian, from Indian to Hindu, from Indian to Gujarati, from Gujarati to Brahman, from Gujarati to being a mother/sister, from being a temple worshipper to being a temple official, from being a mother to being a G.P., and so on, almost *ad infinitum*. Each of these different identities are marked by a different set of symbolic boundaries, which she can manipulate and cross in her own way.

And this is not only an 'ethnic' phenomenon, it is equally important to all people in Britain, regardless of their cultural background. As an ethnic English male, now living in London, I cross a number of different symbolic boundaries within the course of a day. I begin the day as a family member (a husband) and then on reaching work I take on a number of different identities - either as a lecturer to a class of students, or as a junior colleague in the staff room. On returning from work I take on the identity of a silent commuter as I travel on the train home, conforming to appropriate cultural standards. Goffman highlighted the fact that each of these different identities require us to take certain roles, and that it is possible to manipulate each role in order to effectively manage the 'presentation of the self' (1971 [1959]). Each of these roles is bounded by certain symbolic ideas - the performing academic, the unobtrusive passenger etc. - which people attempt to conform to, maintain, and also manipulate.

If it is true that so much of our social life is marked by so many different

symbolic boundaries, and that we cross as well as manipulate these boundaries constantly, then why is it that some boundaries are marked out as being more significant than others? Why is it that the Indian and the Hindu (as well as the Gujarati and Panjabi) boundaries are considered to be so important? Why are they manipulated into shared and meaningful symbols? All these boundaries are constructions - both personally constructed and socially constructed - the trivial ones as well as the important ones. But some boundaries are endowed with high levels of personal and collective significance<sup>4</sup>. And the significance attached to such boundaries may well vary according to the context - for example, 'Hindu-ness' may be important at the temple, but not when doing one's shopping.

This seems to suggest that although the analysis of boundary construction and maintenance is important and illuminating, it still does not give any satisfying causal explanations of why certain boundaries are chosen to be significant and others are not - any more than we know why certain communal identities are stressed (and constructed) and others are not. Anthropologists have made a great advance by accepting that boundaries are fluid, and especially that they are polysemic and multi-vocal symbols. But that should not blind us to the fact that much of this analysis leads us no further than recognising distinctions which are readily apparent.

### 6.1.3.2 *The importance of tradition*

The recreation of tradition - or to be more precise, traditions - is a very important influence on many Edinburgh Hindus. I found a definite feeling among temple worshippers that Hindu/Indian traditions were worth maintaining in the context of life in Scotland - not only through a sense of reaction against the traditions of indigenous Scots, but also because of the perceived need for tradition *in its own right*. This

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<sup>4</sup> The presence of 'ethnic' conflicts during the early nineties is testament to the way in which boundaries that are at some times down-played may at other times become regarded as the most significant and important of all boundaries. The tension between Sikhs and Hindus in Panjab, and the conflict between Serbs and Croats in (what was) Yugoslavia are both graphic illustrations of this.



happens within nearly all religious diasporas and it often tends to be overlooked - tradition is not simply a looking back to a past situation, it is also a reconsecration of the present. Traditional values are upheld because they are seen as right, and usually also because it is fun to uphold them - not simply because they are different/opposite to the dominant values of the majority population. But recreation of traditions also entails some form of reinvention - in trying to recreate new things begin to happen. Thus the need to uphold tradition requires forward looking, it is an attempt to shape the future, as well as to retain the past.

In a similar way, it should be remembered that religious adherence cannot be reduced merely to sociological, cultural, or politico-economic determinants. Anthropologists and sociologists tend to overlook the simple fact that people worship, do puja, pray, or simply attend a festival *because they want to*. They may have other motives as well, but the need to worship a particular god, or to uphold a particular tradition, is driven by motives other than sociological. The power of religious ideas/practices (and other symbols) cannot be seen as an adjunct to social forces (c.f. Fuller 1979). There is a relation between the two, but sociology does not determine the symbolic.

However, the need to maintain traditions, or to express religious devotion, does not give any satisfactory explanation for the emergence of a Hindu temple community in Edinburgh. Nor does it explain why it is taking the shape that it is. The limited applicability of other more sociological theories suggests that causal explanations in this particular case are perhaps pointless. There are many causes, none of which are fully explanatory. It may well be necessary to regard the development of the temple as a product (or even accident) of history, which can only be understood as a specific process, which could have emerged in a multitude of other ways.

## 6.2 RELIGION AND COMMUNITY

### 6.2.1 Pilgrimage and community

#### 6.2.1.1 *The temple as a 'pilgrimage centre'*

I ended the previous section with a recognition of my lack of success in finding any satisfactory explanations for the construction of a Hindu congregational community. In this section I shall be changing my approach, by looking at various anthropological theories about the role that religious pilgrimage has in constructing the sense of community - and hence, at the role that religious practice has in constructing social entities. I hope to demonstrate that some of these theories are relevant and useful in understanding certain aspects of the Edinburgh temple. By using this comparison, however, I am not meaning to suggest that Hindu worshippers use the Edinburgh temple as a place of pilgrimage<sup>5</sup>. The temple is not a pilgrimage centre, it is a place of regular worship for Hindus living within the locality. Despite this, there are a number of elements which the temple does have in common with what are usually understood to be pilgrimage centres.

Firstly, attendance at the temple requires a degree of effort by most worshippers. The temple is in a rather marginal part of Edinburgh where few Hindus live (c.f. Turner 1974a: 193).<sup>6</sup> To get to the building, the worshipper has to travel - either by car, or by public transport. Some worshippers have to travel a fairly considerable distance to attend - for example, worshippers often come from across the Forth in Fife, while others drive in from Livingston, Dalkeith, or South Queensferry. These journeys may not be significant by the standards of most pilgrimages, but they are still journeys

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<sup>5</sup> According to some writers, there is a case to be made that Hindu pilgrimage is not very different from Hindu temple worship, which I will be discussing below (§6.2.1.2).

<sup>6</sup> The reasons for the temple being located in this area have been discussed in an earlier chapter (see §4.1.2 & §4.1.3). These are because of the low costs of renting a building in Leith, together with ease of parking away from the city centre, plus the fact that Leith is (or was once) a part of Edinburgh known by most Indians (because of the Sikh grocery shops). The first two factors are probably quite crucial to the temple members. Therefore, I am not suggesting that the marginal location of the temple helps to make it a 'sacred' or special place, but that a similarity with other pilgrimage sites does exist. If the criteria of peripherality alone was used, then it would be equally possible to argue that large 'out-of-town' shopping centres in Edinburgh (c.g., Cameron Toll, the Jewel, and Newcraighall, etc.) are also sacred centres.

specifically oriented towards worship at a special 'sacred' site (c.f. Turner 1974a: 173).

Following from this, the meeting that the worshippers travel to attend is marked out in several ways - spatially, socially, and temporally (c.f. §5.2.5.3). It is held at a specific place (the temple building), for a specific group (Hindus), and at a specific time (the second Sunday of each month, or on the day of a festival). The area of worship is particularly important, thus a great deal of money is being spent to construct it, special statues will be flown in and dedicated by a religious specialist (pandit), and other rituals of consecration will also be performed. Once these are done, the temple will be a 'proper temple' (c.f. §4.2.2). Even before this happens, however, special efforts are made to mark out the temple space - through the removal of shoes, the preparation of the 'mandir' area<sup>7</sup>, the lighting of incense sticks and lamps, etc. (c.f. §4.2).

These factors do not make temple worship *into* pilgrimage, they make it *somewhat like* pilgrimage. Against this, however, must be considered certain dissimilarities. Edinburgh Hindus do, in fact, make journeys which are more like proper pilgrimages - they like to visit temples in London and Leicester where 'things are done better'. Some of them have even travelled to India (the 'sacred mother country'), where they have done orthodox pilgrimages to special pilgrimage centres - such as Haridwar, Dwarka, Vrindhaban, and so on. These dissimilarities, as well as the similarities, must be borne in mind. I do not wish to blur the distinction between pilgrimage and other religious activity any more than is necessary (although the distinction *is* already extremely vague). But it is still very useful to apply the various approaches to pilgrimage to the particular context of the Edinburgh temple community.

#### 6.2.1.2 Pilgrimage in Hindu traditions

For most Hindus, pilgrimage is about *tirtha* - usually translated as a 'place of crossing' or a 'ford' (van der Veer 1988: 6; Morinis 1984: 48-51) - and the journey that

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<sup>7</sup> That is, the area at the front of the temple, where the representations of the gods are kept - see §4.2.1.2).

is made to a special place (or person, c.f. Morinis *ibid.*) which is designated as *tirtha*. The pilgrimage, or journey (*tirtha yatra*) to this special place is quite different from that found in Christian pilgrimages. According to van der Veer 'pilgrimage in Hinduism is to a great extent "sacred sight-seeing"' (1984: 6) - in most cases the pilgrim expects to have *darsan* of the special place, and to perform some *puja* there, and by doing so to acquire special merit (*punya*), or some favour from the gods.

Morinis points out that the distinctiveness of such pilgrimages is quite ambiguous, since it is often very difficult to define the boundary between pilgrimage and 'ordinary temple-going' (1984: 2n). Thus 'every trip to a temple, if only to the shrine next door, is a "journey" to a sacred place' (*ibid.*). Gold found that there are two different attitudes to pilgrimage among the Rajasthani pilgrims that she studied (1988: 136-37). Firstly there is pilgrimage to proper *tirthas* - that is pilgrimage centres such as Haridwar and Puri - which are usually described by informants as *yatra* (a Sanskrit word meaning journey). There is also pilgrimage made to more local religious sites, which are 'shrines' dedicated to 'goddesses-and-gods' (*ibid.*). This second type of pilgrimage is usually described in the local Rajasthani dialect as *jatra* (obviously a mutation of *yatra*). Although the long and arduous *yatra* journey to large pilgrimage centres is clearly a special event, the more local *jatra* does not appear to be very different from ordinary temple going.

However, both of these writers make a distinction between pilgrimage and temple-going according to the participants' perceptions of what they are doing. For Morinis, Hindus going on a pilgrimage only do so when they conceive of themselves as participating in *tirtha yatra* (i.e. 'pilgrimage'). But even this has its problems - a journey may be made which can include an element of pilgrimage, but which is not completely a *tirtha yatra*. For example, Hindus travelling from Edinburgh to temples in England make the journeys primarily to be with their families, but they also do it to worship in the important temples near which their relatives live. Or otherwise, a journey to Disneyland, or Howarth, may not be regarded as a 'pilgrimage' *per se*, but

may also include elements of pilgrimage within them.

Gold makes a more subtle distinction, based on informants' views of *yatra* and *jatra*. A *yatra* (that is, what one would consider to be a proper Hindu pilgrimage) is undergone to a site associated with major Hindu gods, with the expectation of some high ideal - such as *moksha* (salvation/liberation) - and possibly with other ideals such as the acquisition of merit and the 'removal of sins and sorrows' (1988: 146). *Jatra*, on the other hand, may include these ideals, but will mainly stress more immediate concerns such as the fulfilment of a vow, or the seeking of a cure (ibid.: 142-43). Although Gold does not attempt to draw a distinction between *jatra/yatra* and more local temple going, it appears that for the Rajasthani villagers most ordinary temple going is more *jatra* than *yatra*. That is, it is the general motivation of the pilgrims, along with with the status of the pilgrimage centre, that makes *yatra* distinct not only from *jatra*, but also from other temple going.

In a definition of pilgrimage that Morinis gives later in his work, he also associates the distinctiveness of pilgrimage with a special site, which 'is purported to have been the historical location of a manifestation of divine power' (op cit.: 279). Although this is important, it must be remembered that this cannot be a prescriptive definition, since a pilgrim does not need to know the history of a place to want to go on a pilgrimage to it and worship there. But it accords with Shulman's assertion that all south Indian pilgrimage centres are given importance because they are places where sacredness is contained and controlled, and where 'a sacred presence is revealed in individual localised manifestations' (1980: 88).

Even so, this notion of the sacred is still rather ambiguous, as Stirrat (1984) has pointed out . He argues that most religions deal with at least two different types of sacredness - the transcendent, which is beyond the sphere of human activity, and the pragmatic, which is much more concerned with the 'here-and-now' (ibid.: 204, 208). The transcendent form of sacredness is pre-eminent, and not related to human concerns, and so could be associated with the idea of *jatra* in the Rajasthani

classification, whilst the pragmatic form of sacredness is more about social and personal concerns and is hence what yatra is about. To befuddle the situation further, however, Stirrat suggests that there is a third type of sacredness which is the result of the combination between the transcendent and the pragmatic, which by coming together threaten the bounds of the social order. This combination of sacredness is particularly associated with pilgrimage centres because of their use of the notions of liminality and *communitas*, as I shall outline below.

Thus the journey, the motivation behind the journey, and the character of the place itself are the main factors which distinguish pilgrimage from other areas of worship in most Hindu traditions. Even so, these elements are all relative, rather than absolute, and so 'pilgrimages' can be more or less pilgrimage-like than others. Concerning the distinction between yatra and jatra, Gold notes that it is often difficult - for the anthropologist and for the participants themselves - to clearly define a particular journey as either one or the other. In such a case the distinction between yatra and jatra is very vague, and most importantly it is contestable, since arguments could be (and are) made either way.

The difference between temple worship and pilgrimage among Hindus in Edinburgh is not such a contestable matter. I have not heard the Edinburgh temple described by anyone as a *tirtha*, although it is an important 'sacred centre'. But its role is certainly vague, it is a special place where one can make *darsan* of the gods, and do *puja* to them - and by doing so, one can acquire merit ('blessings'). In terms of Gold's distinction, a journey to it is more yatra than jatra.

### *6.2.1.3 Pilgrimage and social structure*

Most anthropological theories of pilgrimage derive very much from Durkheim's classic study (1964 [1915]). For him, it was the act of religious worship - in whatever form - which brings societies together and gives social groups a 'collective consciousness'. A very straightforward extension of this theory is that the sacredness

of a pilgrimage site inevitably binds together the worshippers who attend it. Thus important pilgrimage centres can become the main points of integration of large regions, countries<sup>8</sup>, or even supra-national groups (such as with Islam).

A more sophisticated elaboration of this approach is that pilgrimage centres are cohesive on a level which goes beyond that of the collective effervescence of vulgar Durkheimism. These centres may also be political and economic centres, or act as the centres of integrative super-regional networks. Thus they may play a very practical role by integrating the diverse groups which make use of them (c.f. Cohn & Marriott 1958, on the great centres of Hindu pilgrimage in India). Otherwise, they may play a culturally integrative role, by imparting the orthodox version of culture and religion - the 'Great Tradition' - to the unsophisticated masses (c.f. Vidyarthi 1961; Srinivas 1967; and also §3.2.1.1). All of these theories assume some linkage or correspondence between religious practice and social groups, but none are able to adequately demonstrate any one-to-one correlation. Instead, the processes of religious worship appear to divide as much as unite in all cases.

Victor Turner also developed a sophisticated form of Durkheim's argument, taking up the classic study by van Gennep (a contemporary of Durkheim) as the basis of his understanding of pilgrimage<sup>9</sup> (Turner 1974a, 1974b, Turner & Turner 1978). He stressed the notions of liminality and anti-structure - both of which are crucial elements within van Gennep's tripartite scheme of ritual<sup>10</sup>. One of the most important elements of this stage of liminality is *communitas*, the levelling out of social divisions,

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<sup>8</sup> C.f. Wolf 1958, on the shrine of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico, and Obeyesekere 1966, on Buddhist pilgrimages in Sri Lanka

<sup>9</sup> Of course, van Gennep was primarily concerned with more local level rituals - i.e. rites of passage/transition - rather than the large scale pilgrimages that Turner discussed. Thus an extension of Turner's argument about pilgrimage to more routine worship is perhaps to bring the theory round a full circle. What it also suggests, though, is that the distinction between pilgrimage and other forms of worship is not too important on a sociological level - and that perhaps there are elements of pilgrimage within all forms of worship.

<sup>10</sup> In 1978 he modified this slightly, by distinguishing *liminoid* from *liminality*. The former, he said was voluntary, and was the anti-structural stage found within pilgrimage. The latter, on the other hand, is initiatory and obligatory, and found only within rites of passage. Thus, according to Morinis, even Turner recognised eventually that 'pilgrimage cannot be equated to a rite of passage' (1984: 258).

and the bonding together of participants<sup>11</sup>. He observed that many pilgrimages are very much concerned with liminality and *communitas*, they are times when normal structures are suspended and special anti-structural behaviour is expected. This state of *communitas* can never be complete, however, normal structures do still usually exist even in the context of liminality<sup>12</sup> - and what is most often found is an interplay between structure and anti-structure. Through this interplay, the structures of society are created, that is, the form of society is bound together by relations forged in pilgrimage.

Although he does not explicitly state it, Turner appears to suggest that the *communitas* experienced in pilgrimage (and other rituals) is an important mechanism to create social cohesion. Myerhoff - a student of Turner - takes this argument further in her study of Mexican Huichols, when she attempts to demonstrate that the anti-structure of pilgrimage (in this case a 'Peyote hunt') brings to life a system of values and symbols which give meaning to (and thus reinforce) the social structure (1974).

Following more recent writers, however - particularly Sallnow (1981) and van der Veer (1984, 1988) - it appears that the importance of *communitas* and liminality may vary according to context. For example, the pilgrimage of many south Indian Hindus to the temple of Ayyappan, in central Kerala, is very much about these notions of liminality and *communitas* (Daniel 1984: 245-78). In this case, the whole process of undertaking the pilgrimage requires the participants to separate themselves from ordinary social activities, to dress differently, to observe ritual taboos (particularly celibacy), and to behave towards other pilgrims without regard to status differences

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<sup>11</sup> According to Turner *communitas* is 'a relational quality of full unmediated communication... between definite and determinate identities... It is a liminal phenomenon which combines the qualities of lowliness, sacredness, homogeneity, and comradeship' (Turner & Turner 1978: 250).

<sup>12</sup> Turner makes a clear distinction (1974a: 169) between full *communitas* (which he called 'existential *communitas*'), in which there is complete anti-structure, and *communitas* in which the structures of everyday life still have some influence (which he called 'normative *communitas*'). In pilgrimage, it is normative *communitas* that one usually finds in most cases. A case can be made, however, for full *communitas* within certain pilgrimages, such as the Muslim hajj to Makkah, or the pilgrimage to the Ayyappan temple described by Daniel (1984), which I will be discussing below.



(ibid.: 247). Thus the pilgrim stays within a very liminal state for the duration of the pilgrimage to Ayyappan, very much as Turner's general theory suggests. In terms of *communitas*, Daniel stresses that although vestiges of status differentiation are maintained for much of the pilgrimage, during the final part of the process (as the shrine of Ayyappan is being reached) all residues of social differences of rank and status are eliminated (p.250).

However, Daniel's observations about this particular pilgrimage centre are in no way typical of Hindu pilgrimage as a whole. In contrast to this, van der Veer (op cit.) points out that while pilgrimage to Ayodhya (in north India) can be about the expression of *communitas*, it can also be about the more Durkheimian functionalistic expression of structural values. Neither one nor the other is given predominance in this context. Indeed, in other contexts, although *communitas* may often be a part of pilgrimage, there are other equally important elements which can divide groups of pilgrims as well as bring them together. Sallnow argues that in the context of pilgrimage among Andean Indian Christians in Peru, new social *divisions* can be created, and that pilgrimages are usually more important for distinct and separate communities, rather than for the wider society which is meant to be bound together by *communitas* (op cit.: 172).

#### 6.2.1.4 *Structure and anti-structure in the Edinburgh temple*

Activities at the Edinburgh temple can often be about *communitas* - for example, much of the worship stresses equality between members, any language of singing is acceptable, to any god, and by any person. In some respects, this is the potential communality that the worship tends to encourage. But at the same time, much of the activity in the temple is more concerned with structure than with *communitas*. Indeed, the leaders (and many members) of the temple are attempting to impose a blueprint of structure upon the still emerging institution. There is an attempt to assert ('traditional') norms of appropriate behaviour for a Hindu community, and to assert norms and

structures for what 'Hinduism' should be, based around the idea of a common religion and a common ethnic identity.

But if we should choose to place an emphasis on such structures, then it is possible to argue that these structures of the temple community are actually anti-structural in relation to the dominant norms of the white Scottish population. That is, the temple community stresses structural criteria which are *different* from the generally Christian, Anglo-Celtic norms that permeate most social life in Edinburgh. Furthermore, if we choose to argue that the expression of Hindu ethnic identity is the product of reactive ethnicity, then the norms and structures of the Hindu community would certainly be anti-structural, since they would be inversions of the dominant 'normal' social order. At the same time, elements of normal structure permeate temple activity. For example, the structure of the temple committee is modelled on other British committees, while some aspects of temple worship (e.g. the emphasis on congregationalism, and the role of the temple as a community centre/'church') appear to be influenced by Christian religious notions. These elements suggest a form of 'normative' anti-structure, the blend of structure and anti-structure that Turner (1974a) argued was the hallmark of pilgrimage.

I am not intending to suggest that this validates Turner's theory of pilgrimage - in fact this suggestion relies on a number of ill-defined suppositions (such as the notion of reactive ethnicity, and also that the temple is like a pilgrimage centre). I am simply trying to draw attention to the fact that there do appear to be some elements of Turner's anti-structure and *communitas* within the context of the Edinburgh temple as well as some contradictory elements (c.f. van der Veer 1984, and Sallnow & Eade 1991). By equating the notion of reactive ethnicity with the concept of anti-structure I do not see any reason to limit the field of observation to purely religious contexts. If the assertion of ethnicity is usually an assertion in reaction to external forces, then all ethnic groups who live integrated into larger societies participate in this use of anti-structure, whenever they try to use their identity. That is, most ethnic associations (such as the

Edinburgh Indian Association) make use of the notion of anti-structure (and possibly liminality).

But if we assume that there are processes of ethnic discourse occurring between Hindus and non-Hindus, there are also similar processes happening among Hindus themselves. There are different understandings of what being a 'Hindu' means, which differ according to a person's regional origins, their experiences in life, etc. All these interpretations may or may not become expressed within the temple community - those elements that do become expressed could be described as anti-structural (i.e. against the normative temple structures), or even as anti-anti-structural (i.e. since the temple structures are in some ways against the normative white Scottish structures). This approach does not lead us anywhere useful - we could continue this almost *ad infinitum*, by saying that there are further subdivisions within the construction of structures, and that the notion of anti-structure can be found on many different levels which begin with and extend down to the individuals concerned. None of this really gives us any decent explanation for why the processes are happening in the Edinburgh temple - rather they tend to obscure an already fragile understanding of the complexity of the situation.

#### 6.2.1.5 *Competing discourses among pilgrims*

Sallnow and Eade (1991) make a strong argument against using either of these approaches which rely on structural interpretations of pilgrimage. If pilgrimage can be about structure *and* anti-structure, then neither theory is saying very much. Furthermore, these 'correspondence' theories<sup>13</sup> of pilgrimage do not take into account that pilgrimage is

not merely a field of social relations but [is also] a *realm of competing discourses* (ibid.: 5; emphasis in original).

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<sup>13</sup> That is, they propose direct correspondence between the structures of society and activities based around pilgrimage (Sallnow & Eade 1991: 3-5).

Thus the emphasis should shift

from positivist, generic accounts of the features and functions of pilgrimage... towards an investigation of how the practice of pilgrimage and the sacred powers of a shrine are constructed as varied and possibly conflicting representations by the different sectors of the [pilgrim] constituency, and indeed by those outside it as well. (ibid.)

This again takes us away from the explanatory framework - there does not appear to be any direct relationship between the cohesion of a congregation at a shrine and the act of pilgrimage itself. On the level of the Edinburgh temple, this would suggest that the process of attending and performing worship does not necessarily entail the formation of a community of worshippers. Of course, this is born out by evidence from other Hindu temples - such as the Balham temple described above (§6.1.2), and in fact most temples in India (c.f. Fuller 1988b; Michell 1977: 62-65) - where the act of attending the mandir does not in any way help to create communities (see also §4.4).

If we follow the approach outlined in the Sallnow & Eade collection of papers, it becomes clear that pilgrimage (and indeed worship at the Edinburgh temple) can only be understood through its diversity and complexity, and not through attempting to construct simplistic and grandiose sociological relationships. Thus participants worshipping together in the same pilgrimage cult will differ substantially in their attitudes and understandings of what they are participating in. For example, Bowman (1991) gives a clear account of the multiplicity of attitudes and expectations that Christian pilgrims have when visiting Jerusalem. They may be worshipping in the same places, and even at the same times, but Greek Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant pilgrims all participate in different versions of Jerusalem. In fact 'there are as many Jerusalems as there are religious denominations visiting the city' (paraphrased by Sallnow & Eade op cit.: 10).

However, the differences may not be as wide or pronounced as denominational differences - the point of this approach is that in every case the pilgrimage centre is recognised to be a symbolic construction, which is multi-vocal and polysemic (like all other symbols). Therefore, there are multiple understandings of what a particular

pilgrimage centre is, or should be - and these may vary along denominational or regional lines, as well as varying between individual participants. That is,

a pilgrimage shrine, while apparently emanating an intrinsic religious significance of its own, at the same time provides a ritual space for the expression of a diversity of perceptions and meanings which the pilgrims themselves bring to the shrine and impose upon it. (ibid.: 10)

This is as equally true for Hindu pilgrimages as it is for Christians. I mentioned above that the distinction among Rajasthani pilgrims between yatra and jatra was vague and contestable (c.f. §6.2.1.2). In such a case, the meanings and purposes of a pilgrimage are also open to different interpretations by those participating in the event. Similarly, van der Veer has given an interesting discussion of the ways in which the concept of Ayodhya as a tirtha (along with the role of its various holy sites and religious sects) has been constructed and reconstructed a number of times in the past few centuries (1988).

Similarly, the Edinburgh temple has many meanings which have been developed through a number of political, cultural, and religious conflicts, and which are still in the process of being developed. That is, the symbolic meanings which are attached to the concept of the temple are (like among tirthas in India) the products of historical processes, and have multiple meanings which vary according to the groups and factions which use the building.

## **6.2.2 The construction of the temple community**

I shall now attempt to draw some of these themes together, in the specific context of the Edinburgh temple. It appears that the clearest and most accurate observation that one can make is that there is no single, simple process occurring. In fact, there are several different (and in some cases conflicting) processes happening simultaneously.

### *6.2.2.1 Communal forces*

In this thesis I have tried to demonstrate that there is a real effort to create a 'Hindu community' in Edinburgh. Insofar as a number of people refer to this entity,

both from within *and* outside it, we can say that there is a Hindu community. There appears to be no conclusive evidence that the ritual activity at the temple encourages the development of this community. Attendance at temple meetings is voluntary, and contact away from these meetings is also optional. Of course, people meeting together at least once a month may become friends and wish to deepen their contacts - and thus develop into a 'community' - but it is equally likely that they will have no contact at all beyond the temple meetings.

We cannot assume that there is some mystical process occurring through which participation in the temple activities actively creates communality. If individuals wish for an Edinburgh Hindu community to be constructed, then they need to make deliberate efforts to bring this about. If they did not make that effort, there would be no community, or otherwise there would be no more than a small handful of family and friends claiming to be a 'community' - not a collection of different factions and groups, as there is now. Having said this, however, because there are a group of people who choose to work together to construct a Hindu community, the forms of ritual behaviour that are used in the temple can provide a useful forum for these ideals to be expressed. The singing of bhajans, and especially the worshippers' attitudes to this singing, enable people from different religious traditions to worship together *as if* they belonged to a single community with a single religious tradition.

In this sense, on an abstract level, they have re-invented their various traditions, and amalgamated them into a single tradition for a single group of people. The satsang has a distinct form, which has become established as the main form of worship in the Edinburgh temple. But this new tradition has *not* superseded the other traditions that gave rise to it - it exists alongside them. Panjabis and Gujaratis go to other temples elsewhere in Britain, as well as attending other religious gatherings, where they participate in forms of worship which are far more particular to their regional and local (or caste-jati based) traditions. Some do this more than others. And they may attempt to bring some of these traditions into the arena of worship at the Edinburgh temple -

perhaps by singing a new song they heard at a satsang held in a cousin's house in Leicester, or by performing a ritual which is particular to their own caste-jati group whilst at the temple<sup>14</sup>. Even so, the communalising forces within the temple provide the space within which this can happen.

#### *6.2.2.2 Multiple meanings in a single context*

If we return to the recent work by Sallnow & Eade (1991), we find that important religious centres are usually presented as centres from which a unified concept of sacredness emanates. Thus, Christian Jerusalem is both a single place, and it is a multiplicity of places, each existing for the many groups that use it. The Edinburgh Hindu temple community is very similar to this. There is definitely a single Hindu temple, and a single community which attempts to act as a unified entity. However, this community is made up of diverse elements - with various factions, and several distinct regional groups - which are not being completely fused into the unified concoction.

Such a situation has been recognised by anthropologists in many different situations - for example, there is the classic example described by Turnbull among Mbuti forest people of central Africa (1964: 63-70; 1983: 66-71). These Mbuti participate in the Nkumbi circumcision ritual, which unites, whilst also providing scope for diversity. In this ritual - which is mainly organised by Bira (Bantu) villagers who live on the edge of the forest where Mbutis live - there is a common structure of worship for all participants, but also different attitudes and understanding of the symbols involved. Bira villagers tend to see the Nkumbi as an initiation into adulthood, something which should be taken extremely seriously, and so they must bear the pain of the circumcision with great stoicism. On the other hand, Mbuti have a

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<sup>14</sup> At the same time, the temple tradition is also feeding into the traditions which are practised away from the temple. Indeed, it is the hope of the temple leaders for the temple tradition (or traditions) to become established as a form of orthodoxy, which will become the norm for 'Hindu' religious behaviour in Edinburgh.

more relaxed and playful attitude, they run from the knife if they can, and scream and kick about because they see no sense in being hurt if they do not wish to be. Yet it is still important for Mbutis to participate in the ritual - it provides them with a vital link with the village world - but for very different reasons than their Bira neighbours and co-initiates.

### *6.2.2.3 Turner, Sallnow, and Cohen*

Despite Sallnow's devastating criticisms of Turner's approach to pilgrimage, the former's approach - which is extremely useful in understanding the present context - is itself a reassertion of another of Turner's important contributions. The combination of multiple understandings within a single symbolic entity (in this case, the many constructions of the temple, within a single temple community) is nothing other than Turner's basic definition of symbolism as 'unification of disparate significata' (Turner 1967: 28, see §5.2.5.2 above). What Sallnow has quite rightly achieved, is to extend Turner's ground breaking understanding of symbols away from the (rather limited context) of the ritual process, and into the structures and concepts which we consider 'social institutions'. As I have already discussed earlier in this chapter (§6.1.1.1), this is an approach which has been followed by Anthony Cohen in another context - that is, the construction of social boundaries. Both writers have developed (and extended) Turner's understanding of the importance of symbolism, whilst not being constrained by Turner's reliance on the more limited concept of social structure (and its corollary, anti-structure).

Thus, instead of assuming structure and anti-structure to be fixed concepts, which are imposed upon individuals from outside, it becomes evident that both are symbolic constructions which are open to manipulation and can be understood in different ways by those who live within them. A Hindu community can have no fixed boundaries, and yet its boundaries are meaningful to those who consider themselves to be part of it. These meanings themselves have no fixed boundaries, and differ according to



individuals' perceptions of them. Similarly, a shared institution - whether it is a pilgrimage centre, a temple, or even a school or university - is perceived in different ways by the diverse groups and individuals who make use of it. These understandings rely on symbolic constructions, they are not rigidly fixed.

It is important that we do not lose sight of the importance of political control within the use of social symbols. These symbols are not subject to cultural determinism, but rather are the product of political manipulations on a number of levels (c.f. Asad 1983). Various versions of what the Edinburgh temple should be suit the temple leaders better than alternative constructions. The notion of community itself is very useful, for the reasons outlined at the beginning of this chapter, and elsewhere (see §6.1.1, §2.2). These political constructions - often relying on the diverse arts of coercion, diffusion, and persuasion through rhetoric - are themselves merely symbolic, and so the meanings intended by community leaders may not be the meanings understood by community members.

#### 6.2.2.4 *One temple, many temples*

This creates an arena in which one would expect chaos and confusion to be prolific, and yet they are not. There are multiple understandings of the concepts of temple and community, and alongside this, there are indeed many different temples and communities which are existing within the single entity. What appears to keep everything together is that people are prepared to behave as if they are all talking about the same thing, that they are a cohesive group, and that their differences are less important than their similarities. There is a real desire among a number of people to ensure that this unification should take place, and many talk and behave *as if* it has. But because these people all have different expectations of what that single entity should be, there is conflict between them which is never quite resolved. Thus although the aim is one temple, each person and group establishes a different construction of what the temple project should be.

Thus, although there is a single 'Hindu' temple, there are also several temples existing within it. It is impossible to map out exactly all the different understanding of the temple, but there is certainly a Panjabi temple, a Gujarati temple, a north Indian temple, an East African temple, and so on. Some of these temples overlap - for example the Gujarati temple is mainly an East African one - but others tend to be exclusive. There are as many different versions of the temple as there are worshippers because each of these different worshippers have different expectations of the single organisational/institutional structures.

When Panjabis and Gujaratis sing together at the monthly satsang, the former tend to say that they are singing '*kirtans*', whilst the latter say they are singing '*bhajans*' (see §4.1.1 above). The kirtans are usually the same as the bhajans (although not always). This may appear to be a minor linguistic point, but it highlights the fact that there are different perceptions of what is happening in the temple, even when people are doing the same things. In this case, we find that people are talking as if they are participating in different forms of worship, whilst in practice they are participating together.

The satsang and the festivals play out the forces of diversity and coalition to a large degree - within each of these religious gatherings it is possible to find both unity *and* allowance for variation. The main exception to this is the choice of *garba* and *dandya* dancing at the Nawratri festival (see §5.3.2.3 & §5.3.3), where the stress is much more on a particular (Gujarati) regional tradition, which alienates members of other traditions (particularly Panjabis). Even here, however, it is possible for Panjabis to participate in the worship - some attempt to learn the dances, whilst others are content to attend and to sit and watch. Thus, although the emphasis is on a distinctly regional form of worship, most worshippers (of all backgrounds) try to participate as though there were no differences and the multiple versions of the temple were also a unified whole.

It is worth asking whether it is merely a coincidence of history that the singing of

bhajans (the most important part of temple worship) should be used as the main tool for encouraging this concoction of unity and diversity. Bhajans are sung in the Edinburgh temple because the people who have settled in Edinburgh brought these bhakti traditions from the areas of India from which they originated. Bhajan singing is an important part of religious life in both Panjab and Gujarat (see §3.3) - although in both places, the traditions of bhajan singing have been extremely influenced by conflicts between various Hindu groups which have occurred in past centuries. At the same time, however, bhajans are being used in a new way in this new context. The strong association that we find between bhajan singing and temple worship does appear to be rather new - especially among British Hindus. This may not be a complete invention *ex nihilo* - since bhajans are often sung in temples in India - but the emphasis has changed quite considerably in comparison with other Indian traditions.

The creative role within the process of temple construction - and indeed the process itself - must be strongly emphasised. The temple project is not complete, the sacred place is still being created, and it is certain that it will take a number of years (and considerable sums of money) before the temple takes a final shape (see §4.2.2). For many members of the community it is enough for them that the temple project is happening - even though the project is a long way from completion and the temple is not a proper temple. The project provides them with a marker of identity, they can associate themselves with the fact that something important and significant is happening in Edinburgh, a centre for the maintenance of *their* religious traditions is being constructed in the heart of the city in which they are now living. And if people make fiscal contributions, as well as other occasional non-monetary contributions, and also keep in touch with temple leaders, then they can hope that the project will emerge as their own kind of temple (and as a good place for their children).

The process of constructing the temple and resolving differences is as important as its completion. While it is still in this stage - when not everything has been finalised, and there is much room for change and alteration - projections can be made into the

future of what the temple *should be*. This can be a great aid in allowing diversity to be easily tolerated - each person can expect that *in the end* things will be exactly how *they* want them to be. Of course, there are different expectations, and not everyone will be satisfied by the end product. But at the moment this can be glossed over (especially by those who do not have very much to do with the organisation of the project), and a more satisfying future result can be expected<sup>15</sup>.

### 6.2.3 Final comments

This thesis has examined ways in which the notion of a Hindu community is being constructed among a particular group of Hindus living in a diaspora situation (i.e. in Edinburgh). To unravel the complexities of this process, it has been necessary to demonstrate that the cultural forms which the actors are relying on are themselves constructions to a large degree. Thus, their concept of self-definition as 'Hindus' - sharing a common religion called 'Hinduism' - has been shown to be the product of centuries of discourse within India, a discourse which Edinburgh Hindus are now continuing on their own terms. Likewise, the forms of worship - their religious 'traditions' - as well as the ideas associated with their place of worship, are all being developed and re-invented to suit their particular circumstances.

In the end it has been necessary to eschew any form of determinism - whether it be socio-economic, cultural, structural-functionalist, or theological determinism - because in many cases each element is created by the others. Each appears to determine and to be determined by all the others. Relations between religion, society, culture, and community are circular - each acts as a building block in a multi-dimensional construction which appears to have no foundations. The metaphor of building

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<sup>15</sup> The completion of this project may be as problematic as the actual process. Once there is a finished product people will have to decide if they like it or not, there will be less scope for change and development. This has already happened in other Hindu temples in Britain - such as that described by Barot (n.d.1), where the temple was finished in 1981, and a general dissatisfaction grew in the decade subsequent to its completion.

construction - which suggests Marx's notion of infra-structure and super-structure<sup>16</sup> - seems to be rather apposite when describing an actual temple building project. Although I have not heard any Edinburgh Hindus discuss it in such terms, they are constructing their concepts of Hinduism, temple worship, community, and Indian-ness at the same time as they are constructing the temple interior.

But perhaps the metaphor of a kaleidoscope is equally useful - since this suggests a complex and attractive pattern in which some indescribable order can be found, but which cannot be predicted. To make some sense of this, it is necessary to understand the historical processes which helped to create what is happening now, as well as the interactions between individuals and groups which gave them shape. I cannot claim to have been exhaustive in trying to follow this approach - even in the rather limited context of the Edinburgh Hindu temple. But I hope that this thesis has conveyed the difficulties, as well as the importance, of understanding the complexities of this situation.

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<sup>16</sup> A terminology which he based on house-building also.

# APPENDIX ONE - THE EDINBURGH INDIAN ASSOCIATION

## 1 THE STRUCTURE OF THE ASSOCIATION

This thesis has mainly concentrated upon activities within the sphere of the Edinburgh Mandir. The temple is an obviously religious institution, whose prime objective is to function as a place of worship for Hindus in the area. However, I have made frequent references to a different and potentially rival institution - the Edinburgh Indian Association - and for the purposes of clarity it is necessary to provide a brief sketch of this body. The Edinburgh Indian Association (EIA) was formed in 1974, soon after the arrival of substantial numbers of East African Indians in the city. The association was a revival of an old organisation - the Edinburgh Indian Students' Association - which was founded in 1883, but which had been almost defunct for a number of years up until 1974. Members of the present day EIA recognise a continuity between the old and the new organisations, and so in 1983 the EIA celebrated its 'centenary'.

At the time of this centenary a prominent member (P.D. Mehta) of the EIA wrote a short history of the association for a celebratory brochure. This history was the product of his research into archive material in the hands of the leaders of the EIA. Since, to my knowledge, no other researcher has had access to this material, Mehta's version of the association's history is the only one available. In this thesis I have been relying on his article for the history of the EIA, along with information given to me by other members of the association, who were in some way involved with its reformulation in the 1970s.

### 1.1 The history of the Association

In 1883 six Indian medical students decided to form an organisation for

themselves whilst they were studying at Edinburgh University. They called this organisation the Edinburgh Indian Students' Association (EISA), and their aims were 'primarily to meet the social and cultural needs of Indian students at the University and to promote appreciation of the arts and culture of India' (Mehta n.d.). It was the first such organisation to be formed outside India, and present day members now take pride in the fact that the association is even older than the Congress Party of India. By the turn of the century the association had grown to such a size that it was moved into large premises at 11 George Square, which included a 'debating hall, a dining hall serving Indian food, a library and a billiard room' (ibid.).

But the association was not only developed for the benefit of the large numbers of Indians who were coming over to study at Edinburgh. It was also used as a centre to prepare 'Scotsmen and members of the University' who were to go to India to serve as administrators, soldiers, or missionaries. Much of the funding for the large George Square building came from important English and Scottish dignitaries, such as the Marquis of Linlithgow (father of the later Viceroy of India), the Earl of Minto, and the Duchess of Buccleuch. This colonial connection is not altogether surprising, considering the era - especially when one considers that the Indian students being sent to Britain at that time were usually from the most wealthy families who were benefiting from British rule.

The loss of the Empire, and the drastic decline in the number of Indian students coming to Edinburgh in the middle of the twentieth century made the association almost redundant. Severe factionalism within the organisation also helped to weaken it, and by the 1960s and 1970s the students' association was hardly functioning at all. Sometime in the 1930s, the EISA moved into a new building in Potterrow - which was also very close to the university. This building was given to the association by a wealthy Indian student, although for how long it was used is not known. Students who were at Edinburgh University in the 1960s remember that the association operated out of a small office in a tenement in Lauriston Place (near to the Edinburgh College of

Art). It is very probable that the Potterrow building was demolished during the university reconstruction of the 1960s<sup>1</sup>.

It is clear that the association would probably have died out by the 1970s if it had not been for two things. Firstly, although the Indian student population had drastically declined, there was by this time a growing population of Indian settlers in Edinburgh. It became possible to restructure the organisation to cater for these people's needs. Secondly, the association still had a fairly large sum of money, which was kept in the hands of trustees at the university for some years following the decline of the EISA. In around 1973 the university trustees contacted some recently arrived Indian settlers and suggested that this money could be put to use by Indians who were now living in Edinburgh. Thus a group of Indians - who were mainly East Africans, but also contained several other families<sup>2</sup> - came together and reformed the association, renaming it the Edinburgh Indian Association (EIA). This change of name reflected the fact that at this period its

emphasis shifted from a purely student body to a broadly based organisation promoting appreciation of Indian culture and at the same time attempting to meet the needs of the Indian community (ibid.).

Since its reformation, the EIA has grown in size to a membership of between 50 and 100 families (the membership fluctuates very much from year to year). As mentioned above, the EIA celebrated its centenary in 1983, for which special gatherings were arranged and a colour souvenir brochure was produced; with messages from the Duke of Edinburgh, the Prime Minister, the President and Prime Minister of India, along with the Indian High Commissioner, and local Scottish dignitaries. This appeal to its past history is in many ways a use of tradition as a form of justification (see §4.5). The fact that the association has such a long and illustrious past helps to give it far more

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<sup>1</sup> The former premises, at 11 George Square, were also demolished at this time.

<sup>2</sup> Many of these founder members were Indian men (from East Africa or from India) married to English or Scottish women. This obvious link between Indians and the indigenous populations perhaps indicates the orientation of the EIA as a group that attempts to cater for both Indians and interested natives.



legitimacy in the present. It is not merely a cultural association formed by migrants in recent years - it has the tradition of a long history which goes back further than the Congress Party of India.

## **1.2 Present roles of the Association**

From its revival, the EIA has had rather vague and ambivalent roles to play. The association is obviously meant to be a secular body, to encourage membership from across the religious spectrum of Indians in Edinburgh. Thus it has come to assume very different roles from the Mandir - which developed after the EIA. The leaders of the EIA define the association's role in rather vague terms, as a 'promoter' of Indian culture. A fairly recent newsletter, produced by the association, stated their 'aims and objectives' as follows:

to provide a common forum for the fulfilment of sociocultural needs of the Indian community living in Edinburgh, and to provide appreciation of the social ethos and cultural values of the two countries [Scotland and India] by organizing social and cultural events which are of interest to the Indian and the host community. ...Furthermore, it is one of the foremost objectives of the Association to get in touch with Indian students coming to Edinburgh to pursue various courses and to help them settle down... (EIA newsletter, January 1989).

This avowed secularism and definition as a 'sociocultural' organisation is obviously in opposition to the temple - which is, by definition, religiously orientated. The secular stance of the EIA seems to mirror the present secular ideology of the Indian state itself. Like India, the leadership promotes the ideals of a non-religious configuration of groups dominated by a large Hindu majority. These officials are proud of the fact that they count among their members not only Hindus but also Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and Buddhists, and that for a number of years there was a Muslim helping to run the association.

But the overall membership, and the programme of events that they organise, reveals the fact that the EIA is a mainly Hindu organisation. Figures for membership are always very vague, but attendance at most social gatherings and functions is usually

about 70-80% Hindu. In fact the only group that ever outnumbers Hindus at EIA gatherings are white Scottish. There is a large majority of Hindus on the committee, and these tend to outnumber the one or two non-Hindus who serve. Celebrations organised by the EIA mainly tend to be based on 'All India' festivities such as Holi and Diwali, which are of course Hindu festivals. I have not known any specifically Sikh or Muslim festivals to be celebrated by the EIA, although of course Diwali is as important for Sikhs as it is for Hindus. It thus seems fair to deduce that the EIA is a secular Hindu organisation, as much as it is an 'All Indian' one, and that the type of Indian culture and tradition that it is aimed at promoting/preserving is basically Hindu.

At the time of Independence and Partition, when the association was still the Edinburgh Indian Students' Association, there was a split within it along religious/national lines, and a splinter group was created called the 'Edinburgh Pakistani Association'<sup>3</sup>, which was (and still is) a predominantly religious organisation for Muslims. In the same way that there are Indian Muslims in India so there are also Indian Muslims in the EIA - but this does not prevent the EIA from being a predominantly 'Hindu' organisation, as the Indian state is.

### **1.3 Association gatherings**

Meetings of the Indian Association are organised as 'social functions'. These take various forms, ranging from small gatherings of mainly Indians, to concerts held in large halls (such as George Square theatre). The small gatherings, which are held two or three times each year<sup>4</sup>, are usually organised in hired rooms - such as church halls, or the rooms of social clubs. A suggestion that the EIA make use of the temple's facilities has not been taken up - even though this would be cheaper and quite convenient. These gatherings are often no more than fifty to sixty people, and involve

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<sup>3</sup> Its present title is the Pakistan Association of Edinburgh and the East of Scotland.

<sup>4</sup> These are usually for festivals such as Diwali, Holi, Indian Independence Day, or Indian Republic Day.

a chance to talk to other people, some singing of songs (*bhajans*, *ghazals*, and *filmi*) by members of the association, and often a meal which is brought by various members. There is no charge for such meetings, and the emphasis is put very much on people meeting together.

The concerts are rather different from this - they are much more formal, being held in proper concert halls, for which an admission price is most usually charged. The standard of the performers can vary greatly - from international stars (such as Alla Rakha, Zakir Hussain, and Mamta Shankar) to semi-professional dance troupes from Leicester and London. The emphasis is far less upon socialising - as one person described it: 'All you can do at these concerts is sit and look at the back of other people's heads'. The concerts rarely start on time, however, and so there is plenty of opportunity for people to meet other members of the association before and after the performance. The interval in the middle of the programme is often marked by intense socialising, with people meeting up with friends they do not otherwise see (during these intervals Indian snacks - usually samosas and spiced tea - are served).

Leaders of the association place a great deal of emphasis upon these large performances. There is a general awareness that a big name will probably attract a good audience, and this will enhance the reputation of the association. At a performance given by Zakir Hussain and Alla Rakha, there was an audience of over two hundred and fifty, and the president of the EIA had cannily managed to invite the Lord Provost of Edinburgh as a special guest. The success of such a meeting obviously made a public demonstration of the vitality of the Edinburgh Indian community.<sup>5</sup>

These large events do not actually help to generate any resources for the EIA. In fact, unless there is a very large audience, it is more likely for them to make a loss. The artists ask for substantial fees for their performances, whilst the cost of hiring the

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<sup>5</sup> The opportunity was not lost on this occasion for the president to also make a plea to the Provost for further funding for 'the Indian community' from the district council.

concert halls is usually very high. In some years the EIA has been able to negotiate help from the Scottish Arts Council - so that the performance of cultural events are underwritten, with the SAC paying for any losses that the EIA may incur. Thus the association benefits in two ways - firstly as a promoter of major Indian (and ethnic) cultural events, and secondly as being a beneficiary of a prestigious body such as the Scottish Arts Council (SAC). On the other hand, the SAC is seen as being a sponsor of 'ethnic arts'. When such funding is not available, then the EIA attempt to raise money from other official bodies, such as the district council. If they cannot raise any such money, then less well known artists are brought up to perform in Edinburgh. These usually do not draw in so many members of the association, which thus means even less revenue.

Although the membership is about one hundred, many of the Indians (and also white British) who attend these music concerts do not actually belong to the Association. There has been an attempt in recent years to recruit members from 'the Scottish community', and in fact many of the present members are white British, who have an interest in 'Indian culture' and 'Indian arts'. Many Edinburgh Indians keep themselves informed about EIA events and attend many of its functions without bothering to rejoin it every year. A number of these people attend the smaller informal gatherings also, as well as the large concerts.

#### **1.4 The politics of the Association**

Like most other Indian organisations, factions and competing political groups play an important role. The students' association which existed before 1974 was dominated by bitter divisions between rival groups, and I have heard hints that this was a major reason for the association's decline. There are many differences between the various members of the present day EIA, and such differences have been expressed quite openly at times during its history. The leadership of the EIA have control of quite considerable material resources. The annual turnover of the association is

approximately £10,000, and thus to have some say in the way in which this money is spent gives a person the potential of considerable power. If the association is run successfully then it can also reflect a lot of credit upon those who are leading. If they are engaged in some form of business associated with Indian culture (i.e. as restaurateurs, or as importers of Indian goods), then this may also benefit.

For most of the EIA's history (that is, since 1974) the association has been run by a group of East African businessmen, and it is they who have developed the links with outside bodies such as the Scottish Arts Council. Occasionally, however, other factions have attempted to take control - this happened once in the mid-eighties, and again in 1988-89. I was able to observe this second development (a 'coup' is the way that some people described it), since it occurred during the time of my fieldwork. The change of leadership was made possible by the fact that the EIA must hold an annual general meeting each winter. At this AGM the president and committee are re-elected, most usually getting a straightforward majority vote. In 1988, however, the supporters of the dominant East African faction were outnumbered by others, and so when prominent figures stood up and called for a change of leadership there was a general consensus that such a change was desirable.

The long-standing president (Mr Sharma) was replaced by a neutral figure (an elderly Indian who had been living in Edinburgh for sixty years). Meanwhile opponents of Sharma took control of the remaining executive offices, and so put themselves into a position of power in the association. But this was not only a straightforward transferral of power from one faction to another. At the same time there was a marked shift of membership in the committee - from long settled, mainly East African Indians, to more newly arrived, and predominantly student Indians, who were not intending to remain in Edinburgh for very long. About half of the new committee was made up of such students - all of whom were Indian nationals, rather than British - who made up for their lack of experience with a great deal of enthusiasm.

The new committee attempted to organise a programme of events which would

make the association more relevant to the Indian 'community'. The large concerts were still organised, but these were balanced with more frequent social events - at which members of the community were encouraged to perform, by singing or dancing, and at which meals would always be provided. The leaders of this committee claimed that under their leadership the membership of the association was growing, and that the association was being run much more for the benefit of the community. Meanwhile, Mr Sharma and his associates did not attempt to intervene in the running of the EIA, and it looked (to an outsider) as though the changes being made might become permanent).

At the end of 1989, however, another AGM was held<sup>6</sup>, and this time Mr Sharma managed to mobilise support for his faction and staged a counter-coup - retaking control of the association, and filling the committee with his supporters. Several of the students who had been involved in the committee had returned to India, whilst others ceased taking an active role in the running of the association. Some more permanent residents who had held office on the 1988-89 committee ceased attending EIA functions completely. The new committee of 1990 began their rule by putting together a very full programme of events for the year. This included several very famous artists, as well as several other smaller artistic groups and performers, and a few small social gatherings. They said that the financial state of the association was very poor after the previous administration, and that it would take some time to improve this situation. In fact, the 1990 programme proved fairly successful, and at the end of the year the treasurer reported back that the finances were much more healthy.

The following AGM (which was not held until early in 1991) saw this committee returned, with various officials simply taking up different posts. The AGM was held on a day of very bad snow, and the attendance was very low indeed (nine in all). By using a legal technicality, Mr Sharma was able to argue that a sufficient quorum of the

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<sup>6</sup> To my great regret I was in India at this time, and so I was only able to hear selective accounts of this meeting.

association were present to make the AGM constitutional (since few people had actually renewed their memberships yet for the coming year), and so the meeting was held to be proper and valid. No opponents of Sharma's faction were present, and there were no attempts to change the way in which the association was run in 1991. The amount of activity in 1990 was not maintained in 1991- there were very few meetings arranged, and interest in the association appeared to decline. As I left Edinburgh in late summer of this year, it is very hard to judge how the politics of the EIA will develop.

## **2 THE EIA AND THE MANDIR**

### **2.1 General similarities**

There is clearly quite an overlap of membership between the Association and the temple, and several people have said that they find it strange that there are two organisations for the same population. There was talk a few years ago of combining the two associations, and though nothing was ever done about this there are some who still think this would be a good idea. The association obviously caters for those people who want to meet fellow Indians without having to worry about the issue of religion - either because they do not consider themselves to be religious at all, or because they believe that religion is a divisive issue among Indians<sup>7</sup>. There are only a very few Indians in Edinburgh who do not care about religion, but there are a number of religious Hindus who think it is good to keep it somehow separate from their Indian-ness.

Thus at the present time the Indian Association is seen as being much more of an 'ethnic' organisation for Indians than the Mandir, and its leaders see themselves as being the spokesmen<sup>8</sup> of the 'Indian community' as a whole. Whether or not this will change when the temple becomes fully functional is hard to predict, but the fact that the temple has its own premises, and will have much more regular meetings than the Indian

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<sup>7</sup> Or, of course, because they consider themselves Indian but are not Hindu.

<sup>8</sup> I use this word literally, since the present officials of the Association are all men.

Association, makes me think that it could easily become the main ethnic centre for Indians in the area.

## 2.2 General differences

Despite the overlap in membership of the two associations, there are also certain differences. Many people attend both the temple and the Indian Association gatherings, but there are others who only bother with one or other of the two. Some of those who are only attached to the Indian Association are non-Hindu Indians, who do not wish to bother with a Hindu religious organisation. But there are some Hindus who are far more keen on the EIA than the temple. What is most obvious about this latter group of Hindus is that they originate from diverse regions in India - many of them are not Gujarati or Panjabi, but from elsewhere. They probably do not feel very happy with the temple traditions, although they may visit the temple at important festivals (particularly Diwali).

Whereas these people tend to be excluded at the temple, they find the Indian Association a more comfortable environment. Members of the EIA tend to come from more diverse regions, and so the outlook of the association is more diverse. Thus no particular regional group or groups dominate its activities so much<sup>9</sup>. The pan-Indian ideals of its leaders are matched - to a large degree - by the membership. This contrasts with the Mandir, where there is diversity, but two main regional traditions dominate.

At the Mandir, there is an attempt to bring together various traditions to construct a more homogenised tradition. At the EIA, much less emphasis is put on unifying diverse traditions - instead there is more acceptance of diversity. This is probably because the EIA is much more of a meeting place than the temple. The temple has a *prima facie* role as a place of worship - people visit the building to do puja and to

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<sup>9</sup> The faction that has dominated the politics of the association for so long are not particularly associated with any single region. Several of them do originate from Gujarat, but there are others from many different parts of India.



respect the gods. The more social and communal elements of the temple are ideologically subordinate to this role. In contrast to this, the EIA has a stated communal function: it is deliberately intended to be a place where different people can meet together as Indians. There is no need to have a common tradition to do this, EIA meetings merely have to be a common forum. It does not matter that these Indians have different traditions, since on the level of the EIA their common Indian-ness can unite them.

Of course, the different Indian cultural traditions can play a significant role in the EIA - particularly differences of language, food, music, or religion. The leaders of the association even attempt to put forward certain traditions as being representative of India as a whole - by the promotion of classical Indian arts (e.g. *bharat natyam*, *kathak* dancing, sitar and tabla, samosas and spiced tea, etc.). But people gathering at an EIA function do not need to overcome these differences in order to participate fully with others (nor do they need to appear as if they have). At the same time, there are influences at the Mandir which are attempting to make the temple a communal meeting. That is, there are attempts to make it a community centre not only where diverse cultural traditions are brought together, but also where people from diverse areas of India can meet together. To a certain extent this is successful - especially at the large scale festivities of Diwali - but in comparison it is not as successful as the EIA.

### **2.3 Secularism and Hinduism**

I discussed earlier (in Appendix §1.2) the fact that the EIA is a 'secular' organisation, but is predominantly Hindu in make-up and outlook. When differences between the EIA and the Mandir are mentioned, it is this notion of secularism that is used to distinguish between the functions of the two organisations. The notion of secularism in India has come under a great deal of strain in recent years - a development which has not been overtly manifest among Indian groups in Edinburgh, but which may have important repercussions for both the EIA and the Mandir. Secularism as a

pan-Indian idea - to unite the various traditions, religions, and ethnic groups of India - was very much the child of Independence, and was promoted most actively by Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, and founder of the Gandhi dynasty<sup>10</sup>.

According to Madan (1987b) this secularism was an attempt by Nehru to imitate what he thought was the progressive development which had happened in Europe and North America - that is, industrialisation and secularism went hand in hand. Thus for India, a country which aspired to the role of a modern industrialised nation, secularism would be the key to success. What this has achieved is majority Hindu rule over the diverse elements of India, and more particularly the rule of a certain group of Hindus who make political use of communal religious differences in order to govern, whilst also espousing a secular (i.e. non religious) ideology. Indeed this ideology has encouraged religious differences, since by denying 'the very legitimacy of religion in human life and society [they] provoke a reaction' (ibid.: 757). Thus, in Madan's view, the pursuit of secularism within India only encourages the divisive religious tensions that it seeks to overcome.

Furthermore, he notes that the form of secularism espoused within India - which mainly derives from Nehru himself - was too tolerant to be effective in achieving its aims. In contrast to Lenin's authoritarian secularisation programmes in the Soviet Union, and Ataturk's in Turkey, Nehru refused to use the coercive powers of the state to promote his vision of secular harmony within India. Thus the principle of secularism within India today is a vague, liberal, and rather diffuse concept which is used by the mainstream political elite to protect their position, and has become the target of many religious groups that seek to express the wishes of people beyond the political centre. Also the notion of secularism is not found within the mainstream religious traditions of India, and is instead an ideological product of the Christian Reformation.

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<sup>10</sup> The problems of secularism within modern India have been debated at great length by Indian intellectuals, and more recently by Indian politicians. See in particular Madan (1987b), Dube & Basilov (1983), Nandy (1985, 1990), Strend (1979), and Smith (1963).

Thus, it is inevitable that there will be tensions within a predominantly Hindu country that attempts to unite around such a vague and alien principle.

Therefore, a cultural organisation in Britain which attempts to eschew religion, and instead attempts to present itself as 'secular', and open to members of all South Asian religious groups, may itself also find this notion problematic. For example, although the Edinburgh Indian Association is clear in its purpose to cater for all Indians, there are very few Muslim Indians who are involved in its activities - there is one important exception, who I mentioned earlier, but he is very untypical. The population of Sikhs in Edinburgh have chosen for their own reasons to avoid the EIA (see §2.3.1) - in fact their reasons are related to Indian politics, and the growth of religious nationalism (in this case Sikh separatism) in reaction to the secular Indian state. In this respect, the failure of secularism in India to include many Sikhs is mirrored in the failure of the Edinburgh Indian Association to contain Edinburgh Sikhs within a similarly embracing secularism.

The secularism of the EIA is successful in some of its aims, however, primarily in the sense that it is secular in contrast to the Mandir. Thus the EIA is able to attract Indians - mainly Hindus, but also small numbers of non-Hindus - because it is not religious, and it is not attempting to establish a religious tradition. As I showed in the previous section, the pan-Indian secularism of the EIA provides a better forum for those Indians in Edinburgh who do not belong to the two main regional factions (Punjabis and Gujaratis). But this success is more because the EIA avoids regional manifestations of religious traditions, rather than because it avoids religion *per se*. As I have already noted, many EIA events are based on the Hindu calendar, with Hindu festivals such as Holi and Diwali figuring quite importantly as times when the EIA puts on social gatherings. But because the emphasis is not so much on devotional or ritualistic forms of religion, but on its more 'ethnic' or cultural significance, then this is seen as being in accordance with the secular nature of the organisation.

In comparison with some other South Asian groups in Britain, it may appear

surprising to find that secularism is used as a positive notion among many Hindus in Edinburgh. Many Muslim groups in Britain consider secularism - in the form of British secularism - to be a great threat to their traditional values, more so than British (i.e. Christian) religious values. These Muslims hear a great deal of the British 'secular' society (although the degree to which Scotland is secular is harder to judge), and fear that this secularism will ignore or exclude devout religious followers, particularly those of radically different faiths. Such a view is rarely expressed by Indian/Hindus in Edinburgh, perhaps because of India's own more positive traditions of secularism. There are fears amongst some people that members of the younger generation of Hindus may succumb to the processes of 'secularisation' in Britain. That is, the significance of Hindu religious and cultural traditions may be lost because of pressures to conform to British society, and perhaps because of the perceived 'freedom' which a British secular society may offer.

But this secularisation - the British version - is quite different from Indian secularism. The former is more concerned with assimilation, and the loss of significance of religious values - in the case of Hindus it entails becoming virtually indistinguishable from other British people<sup>11</sup>. The other type of secularism - the India type - is not so much a process as a state of mind. This secularism does not require the loss of significance of religion, but rather is an attempt to ignore religious differences for the sake of finding a common pan-Indian unity. In this case secularism - or even secularisation - is not a challenge or threat to Indian (or Hindu) traditions, but is actually used to strengthen and promote these very same traditions.

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<sup>11</sup> This may perhaps be impossible to achieve entirely, because of South Asians' distinct skin colour. This view is frequently put forward amongst those Hindus who discuss the problems of becoming secularised and assimilated. I often heard such people say 'you can never change the colour of your skin, no matter what else you change'.

## 2.4 The need for two organisations

In many respects it is clear that the EIA and the Mandir play complementary roles. Both aim to provide a forum for Indians to express and maintain certain elements of their cultures, and they function differently in the ways in which they do this. The EIA puts a great deal of emphasis on being a meeting place, where cultural diversity can be subsumed, but not forgotten, within the notion of the rich tapestry of 'Indian culture'. In having explicitly secular aims, the leaders also make a close identification with the aims of the present day Indian state. The Mandir, on the other hand, certainly attempts to be a meeting place also, but it is primarily a place for Hindus to come in contact with their gods, as well as with each other.

This difference in function is very much the result of the different ideals of the organisations' leaders, who put forward separate views of what they expect. Thus, the dominant faction within the EIA are less interested in religion, and more interested in the idea of the rich cultural heritage of India. On the other hand, the leaders of the temple consider the notion of Hinduism to be a vital part of this cultural heritage. In some ways, one could argue that the two organisations are separate and distinct *because* of the differences between their leaders. This may be true up to a point, but it ignores the fact that there are several individuals who play important roles of leadership in both the EIA and the Mandir. It also does not take account of the fact that both organisations rely on the support of their members - who attend the social, cultural, and religious functions, and donate essential effort and funds. In this respect, the differences between the EIA and the Mandir reflect the different priorities of the majority of members of the Indian/Hindu population, as much as they represent the differences between the organisations' leaders.

What appears to be most questionable is that such a small population can support two organisations which - although they are complementary - have a great deal of overlap. Not only do their roles overlap, but also their membership and (in a few cases) their leadership. Why does this small population continue to support two

groups, when a single group could fulfil both roles? This question is especially pertinent when - as discussed earlier in this thesis (§2.2.2, §4.1.3) - the population has deliberately not created more than one temple organisation, despite obvious factional differences. That is, if the different regional groups of Panjabis, Gujaratis, and others do not wish to divide into different and potentially rival temple organisations, then why has there been a split into a secular pan-Indian association, and a religious pan-Hindu organisation?

There does not appear to be any clear answer to this question, but it does seem significant that both of these groups are stressing - in one form or other - a global approach to Indian/Hindu culture. The EIA is stressing the common traditions of Indians, regardless of their regions of origin, whilst the Mandir is attempting to bring together Hindus in the sphere of worship, to promote an idea that Hinduism is a single religious tradition. In both cases there is, at the institutional level, a reluctance to admit or promote the centrifugal forces of regional diversity. This may be because leaders of the groups have seen how such forces can weaken and debilitate communal groups in other areas - either in southern England, or previously in East Africa - and so they wish to create structures that may be more permanent.

There may simply be a feeling that the population is too small to support projects that work on a more regional level. It must be remembered that the EIA was established first, and so the founding of the Mandir itself created the potential for institutional rivalry within the Indian population. The founders of the Mandir may well have been aware that two institutions would be more than sufficient for a population of one thousand, and that there would be no way in which a third or fourth institution (i.e. other Mandirs, based on regional factions) could survive. Thus the only way that different regional institutions could succeed - either as cultural associations, or as temples - would be for the EIA to be 'knocked out', or rendered redundant. That is, only if the EIA were to lose its role as the prime focus for Indians to meet, or more particularly if it were to lose the support both of the majority of Indians *and* of

important funding bodies such as the Scottish Arts Council, then there may possibly be room for the development of other projects.

But preventing this, however, is the long 'history' of the EIA, which gives it a great importance to a population who are attempting to put down roots in a relatively new environment. When most of the Hindu-Indian population have only been living in Edinburgh for twenty to twenty five years, there is a lot of importance attached to an institution which has represented Indians in the city for over a hundred years. This is not to say that the EIA may not be made redundant at some later stage - such a development is always possible. It may even possibly be taken over by a distinctly regional faction, who will retain its pan-Indian ideology whilst providing an exclusive programme of events. But for the present this has not happened; a certain status quo has been maintained, presumably because the present configuration suits the needs and wishes of those who make use of either or both of the organisations.

# GLOSSARY

## OF FOREIGN AND AMBIGUOUS TERMS USED IN THESIS

Words printed in bold type refer to separate entries within the glossary.

**acarya** - A Hindu religious leader, usually an ascetic (sannyasi). Acaryas are respected for their knowledge, wisdom, or spiritual powers, rather than for their ability to perform rituals.

**ahimsa** - A principle of non-violence and respect for all forms of life, generally associated with Jainism, and also with many Gujarati Hindu traditions.

**Aksar Purusottam Sanstha** - A branch of **Swaminarayanism** founded in 1906, and led by **Pramukh Swami**. The sect differs from mainstream Swaminarayanism because of the principle that the supreme being was manifest in a follower of Sahjanand, and his descendants - as well as in Sahjanand himself. Aksar Purusottam Sanstha is very important among Swaminarayani groups in East Africa and Britain.

**Amba-ji** - A form of the goddess, worshipped particularly by Gujaratis. Amba-ji is perceived of as a mother goddess, and is worshipped during **Nawratri** (see also **Mata-ji**).

**arti** - A devotional ritual that can be performed in a temple, or in a **house-mandir**. It comprises a small (usually ghee) lamp, being waved in front of representations (**murtis**) of gods, whilst a song is sung (*Om Jai Jagdish Hare*). At **satsangs** - particularly in Edinburgh - the performance of arti concludes the worship.

**Arya Samaj** - A **reformist** Hindu tradition, founded in the nineteenth century by Swami Dayanand, based on an attempt to rediscover the 'pure' Hinduism of the **Vedas**, rejecting all post-Vedic Hinduism as corrupt. Arya Samaj has been strongest in Panjab, and is found among many Panjabis outside India.



asramadharm - The philosophy that life is divided into four stages. That is: the youth/student stage (*bramacarya*); the householder (*garhastha*); retirement (*vanaprastha*); and asceticism (*sannyasa*). This scheme is an ideal which is open to a lot of interpretation.

aum - A syllable which is regarded as having important religious connotations by many Hindus. The sound of the syllable is an important mantra, or is used in other mantras or slokas. The written form of the syllable is used in a number of different ways - for example, it is painted on the **thalis** used at **Nawratri**, the **arti** lamp is meant to trace the shape of the syllable, and it is often used as an auspicious decoration.

barfi - A very popular Indian sweet which is similar to fudge, and is made primarily from milk, sugar, and spices. It is frequently eaten in many contexts in India and Britain, and is often used for **prasad**.

Bhagawad Gita - A sacred Sanskrit text, revered by many Hindus, and which has become known as the 'Hindu gospel'. The Gita is based on an exposition made by **Krishna** to his friend Arjun in the context of the great battle of the Epic Mahabharat. It consists of a discourse on philosophical and religious concepts, such as duty, the paths of salvation, and the nature of existence.

bhajan - A form of devotional song used frequently in temples, and in home based gatherings. There are various styles and traditions of bhajans, all linked by the fact that they are devotional and so can be used to worship the gods. Bhajans are often sung at **satsangs**. **Kirtan** is often used synonymously with bhajan.

bhakti - An inclusive term which describes the many forms of devotional worship, which have developed in India during the past few centuries.

bhangra - A form of dance associated with Panjab. Originally a folk dance in India, it has become a form of 'western' music, performed in night clubs and discos in Britain. Bhangra musicians are at present attempting to make this style a mainstream form of British music, in the way that reggae already is.

caste-jati - Throughout this thesis I use the term caste-jati to describe the social groups that are in English called 'castes', but which are called '*jatis*' in Hindi - that is groups based on the principle of shared kinship, and which are ranked hierarchically according to status, occupation, and other criteria. I use this term 'caste-jati' because the word jati is not always used by British Hindus - many of them prefer to use the English word caste instead. On the other hand, 'caste' has a number of unnecessary connotations when used in English.

dandya - A form of dance associated with Gujarat. It involves dancing in two concentric circles, knocking wooden sticks together in time to music. It is often danced at the **Nawratri** festival.

darsan - The act of seeing the gods (through their representations), usually at a **mandir**. Darsan is an auspicious and important form of worship, and in the Edinburgh temple it is done at the beginning of the **satsang**.

Dasera - The last (usually tenth) night of the celebration of the autumn goddess festival, immediately after **Nawratri**.

dharm (dharma) - The Hindi concept of 'order', 'way of life', 'duty', which is often translated as 'religion'. In fact, it is a word that cannot easily be translated. Each person and creature has a dharm, whilst there is also a cosmic, eternal order (see **sanatan dharm**).

Diwali - An important Hindu festival occurring on the 15th day of the dark fortnight in Aswin (in October/November). In Britain the festival is sometimes called the 'Hindu Christmas' - primarily because it is one of the most important festivals in the calendar, and also because it happens soon before Christmas. In Edinburgh, the temple is fitted out with small lights and candles, and other decorations, and large numbers attend for a special programme of worship and entertainment.

Durga - A form of the goddess worshipped by Gujaratis during the festival **Nawratri**, and by Bengalis at Durga Puja. See also **Amba-ji** and **Mata-ji**.

ecumenical Hinduism - The phrase used by some writers (particularly Williams 1988) to describe the inclusive, pan-Hinduism that is being encouraged among certain Hindu diasporas.

filmi song - Songs that originate from Indian films, usually first performed by play back singers. Many such songs have religious/devotional content, and may be used as **bhajans**.

Ganesh - The god of 'auspicious beginnings', an important Sanskrit deity who is associated with beginnings and entrances.

garba - A form of dance associated with Gujarat. It involves dancing in a large circle around a shrine, clapping and stepping in time to music. It is often danced at the **Nawratri** festival.

garbhagriha - The area within a **mandir** building where representations (**murtis**) of the main temple gods are kept. These gods have usually been installed by a **pandit** in a special ceremony, but the term may be used in Britain to refer to the pictures or statues of gods which are worshipped in temples where this ritual has not been performed.

ghazal - A form of song which is popular throughout much of north India. Ghazals are not specifically religious or devotional, rather they are most commonly about love and the affairs of the heart.

halwa - A form of sweet which is very popular in India, usually made from milk, sugar, spices, and either semolina or some other grain. It is eaten in large quantities on special occasions (such as weddings), and also as **prasad** after temple meetings.

hawan - A fire sacrifice performed in a metal grate (**kund**) to the accompaniment of Sanskrit chants (**mantras**). Hawan is particularly associated with **Arya Samaj**, who use it as their main form of worship. The Samaji hawan is made up of mantras from the **Vedas**, brought together by Swami Dayanand.

Hindu - A very loosely used word, generally referring to a practitioner of '**Hinduism**'. The term is used in this thesis to refer to people who define themselves as Hindu, as distinct from non-Hindus (such as Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, Muslims, or Christians). The term has certainly become a meaningful label for many Hindus in Edinburgh, who use it as a principle of common identity in certain contexts (e.g. in the Hindu Mandir).

Hinduism - An inclusive term used to refer to a wide collection of religious traditions, viewpoints, and practices originating in India, but which are not non-Hindu religions (such as Buddhism and Jainism). The term is extremely vague and problematic, although in the context of Edinburgh it is being used to refer to the religion of a particular group of people who call themselves Hindu.

Holi - A festival on the 15th day of the light fortnight in Phalgun (usually in February/March), marked in many parts of India. The festival is not primarily religious (although there are a number of religious stories associated with it) and it is not celebrated in the Edinburgh Mandir (but it is marked in other British Hindu temples).

home-mandir/house-mandir - An area within a domestic house where gods are worshipped. It is usually a small corner of a room in which pictures and statues of gods are placed, but some house-mandirs may be a whole room dedicated as a 'temple' or 'puja/prayer room'. Such rooms are decorated with pictures of gods and inscriptions (e.g. of the syllable '*aum*' and *swastiks*).

Indian - A descriptive term used in this thesis to refer to any South Asian who identifies culturally with the present day Indian state (rather than Pakistani, Bangladesh, or Sri Lanka).

Indian/Hindu - Descriptive term used in the thesis for a person who is *both* **Indian** and **Hindu**.

Janamasthami (Krishna Janamasthami) - The auspicious eighth day of the dark fortnight of Srawa (usually in August), when the birth of **Krishna** is

celebrated. This is one of the few Hindu festivals that are celebrated at the Edinburgh Mandir.

Karwa Chauth - A festival found throughout much of north west India, which occurs on the fourth day of the dark fortnight of Aswin (in October/November). It is a time when women fast on behalf of their husbands.

khelnaa - The Hindi verb 'to play', which is used to describe the act of dancing as a form of worship - especially the dancing of **garba** and **dandya** at **Nawratri**.

kirtan - A form of devotional song, similar to **bhajan**. The word is particularly used by Panjabis in Edinburgh, but it is also used by ISKCON (the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, commonly known as the 'Hare Krishnas') to describe their songs of worship. Kirtan may also refer to the devotional gathering itself (which is also called a **satsang**).

Krishna - An incarnation of the god **Vishnu**, who is worshipped by many Hindus. Krishna is the preacher of the **Bhagawad Gita**, and also has many other stories associated with him (mainly stressing the importance of righteousness, duty, and devotion). He is worshipped throughout the year round Edinburgh, but particularly at **Janamasthami**.

kund - A rectangular metal grate in which combustible materials are placed for **Hawan** (the fire sacrifice), and for marriage rituals.

kurta - A loosely fitting shirt worn by Indian men.

mandap - See **vedi**.

Mandir - In this thesis, this is used to refer to the Edinburgh temple association (as distinct from the temple building itself, and the shrine inside the temple where the gods are housed, which are both written as '**mandir**', in the small case).

mandir - The Hindi term which is commonly translated into English as 'temple' - that is, a 'public' access building which is dedicated to a god or gods. However, the word *mandir* can also refer to the focus and place of worship within a home. To prevent confusion in the thesis, I refer to the latter as a '**house-mandir**' or

- 'home-mandir'**. The term *mandir* is also used in Edinburgh to refer to the *garbhagriha* within the temple building.
- mantra** - A phrase or a syllable, which is recited as a form of worship or meditation, usually in Sanskrit.
- Mata-ji** - Another form of the goddess, worshipped particularly by Gujaratis. The name refers to 'mother', and she is very much a mother goddess (see also **Amba-ji** and **Durga**). Mata-ji is especially worshipped during **Nawratri**.
- murtis** - Representations of Hindu deities, sometimes called 'idols'. These are usually stone, wooden, or metal statues, but they may often be framed lithographs with pictorial representations. A temple murti is usually 'installed' by a **pandit** in a ceremony called *pratistha*, to give it life.
- Nawratri** - A festival occurring in the first (light) fortnight of Aswin (in September/October), which is marked particularly by Gujaratis. The festival spans nine nights, and on each night there is meant to be some worship of the various forms of **Mata-ji**, the mother goddess. **Garba** and **dandya** are often performed as a form of worship during Nawratri.
- neo-Vedantism** - An interpretation of Hindu traditions that has developed in the last hundred years, and is associated with writers such as Radhakrishnan, Vivekanand, and Krishnamurti. Much of the stress of this interpretation is to demonstrate the rationality of 'Hindu thought', and its applicability to the modern world. The various forms of Hindu philosophy are emphasised, whilst more devotional forms are played down.
- pandit** - A priest, usually a Brahman, who has knowledge of rituals to be performed either in a temple, or in homes. Most British pandits have knowledge of both forms of ritual.
- pradaksin** - A circumambulation of the inner part of the temple, often occurring after the performance of **arti**. In many British temples, such a circumambulation is not

possible, so it is performed by a single person in a symbolic form, by pouring handfuls of water in a clockwise direction around the arti tray.

**Pramukh Swami** - The title of the leader of **Aksar Purusottam Sanstha**, a fairly recently developed sect within **Swaminarayanism**. The title literally means 'president' swami, and reflects the fact that he has a major centralised role within the movement. Pramukh Swami is revered (and consulted) by many Gujaratis in Britain, regardless of whether or not they are Swaminarayani.

**pranaam** - The act of showing respect, either to elders or to the gods. It can take the form of putting ones hands together and saying 'Namaste' (or 'Namaskar', or 'Pranaam'), or of bowing down to show obeisance. On beginning worship at the temple **satsang** in Edinburgh, one performs pranaam at the same time as taking **darsan** and doing a **puja** to the **murtis**.

**prasad** - Food which has been offered for gods to eat during puja, and which has subsequently been returned for worshippers to consume. Prasad is 'grace', and implies the grace that is bestowed by gods on worshippers who perform puja for them.

**puja** - The act of worship to god or gods. Puja can take many forms - usually involving the offering of something - for example, a flower, a light, a prayer, some food, or some money. In its simplest form, a puja may merely be the act of **pranaam** and the silent recitation of a **mantra** or **sloka**.

**Puranas** - A group of Sanskrit sacred texts, which were probably written after the Vedas and Upanisads. The Puranas contain stories about various Sanskrit gods (such as Vishnu and Siva), and also about moral codes of behaviour.

**Ram** - An incarnation of **Vishnu**, who like **Krishna** is worshipped by many Hindus. Ram's life is told in the epic story of the Ramayan, in which he is portrayed as the epitome of righteousness. Ram is worshipped throughout the year, and particularly at **Ram Nawmi**.

Ram Nawmi - A festival on the ninth day of the light fortnight of Chaitra (in March/April). The festival is a celebration of **Ram's** birth, and was celebrated at the Edinburgh Mandir for the first time in 1991.

reformist - The term used to describe the various movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that developed within Hinduism - such as **Arya Samaj** and **Swaminarayan** - and which aimed to make religious traditions more 'true' to their ideals and relevant to the modern (colonialist) world.

salwar qamiz - A form of women's clothes, comprising a long shirt, and trousers that are usually baggy. The salwar qamiz is a particularly north Indian form of clothing, and is most commonly associated with Panjabis and Muslims.

Sanatani/Sanatan Dharm - 'Sanatan dharm' literally means the eternal order/ way of life/religion. The phrase has come to mean 'orthodox' or mainstream Hinduism, particularly in distinction to **Arya Samaj** (and **Swaminarayanism** to a lesser extent). The notion of Sanatanism is extremely inclusive, and has many different meanings in different parts of India, and in different parts of diaspora Hindu populations.

Sanskritik Kendra - Literally 'Sanskritic centre', this is the title used to describe the Edinburgh temple. It is also translated as 'Hindu community centre'.

sari - A very common form of women's clothing, consisting of a long piece of cloth (up to nine metres), wrapped around the waist, and then draped over a shoulder.

satsang - A religious gathering associated with devotional worship. Satsangs usually consist of **puja** and **bhajan** singing, and can occur in homes or in temples. In Edinburgh, the satsang has become the principal form of temple worship.

Siva - One of the most important Hindu gods, worshipped by many followers (Saivites) in various parts of India.

sloka - A phrase in Sanskrit from one of the sacred texts (such as the **Vedas**). These are often used in worship, where they are said or chanted.



Swaminarayan - A **reformist** form of Hinduism, associated primarily with Gujarat.

Founded in the early nineteenth century by Swami Sahjanand (also called Swaminarayan), the movement has had a profound influence on Gujarat and on Gujaratis outside India.

swastik - An auspicious design, used to decorate homes, temples, and other items (such as rickshaws and lorries in India). The Nazi swastika was based on this symbol.

thali - A round metal tray, commonly used for eating in India (and among British Hindus). Thalīs are also used in temples - food offerings are placed on them; the **arti** lamp is put on a thali; and at festivals (particularly Nawratri), women paint auspicious designs on them and bring them to the temple to use for arti.

Upanisads - A group of texts in Sanskrit which provide detailed commentary on the **Vedas**, as well as expositions of complex philosophical viewpoints.

Vedas (Veds) - The canon of ancient texts attributed to Vyasa. Written in Sanskrit, these are often held to be the basis of all forms of Hinduism. Most Hindu traditions rely on later texts, such as the **Upanisads**, **Puranas**, and Epics - but **Arya Samajis** maintain that Hinduism should be exclusively Vedic.

vedi (or mandap) - A canopy structure which is used in various forms of worship. A groom, a bride, and a bride's parents sit underneath the vedi whilst marriage rituals are performed. The vedi may also be used as a place in a temple to do **puja** to the gods.

Vishnu - A very important Hindu god, worshipped by many followers in India and abroad (Vaisnavites), usually through his incarnations (either **Ram** or **Krishna**).

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