'Let us Live as Hindus': Narrating Hindu Identity Through Temple Building Processes in Amsterdam Zuidoost (1988-2015)

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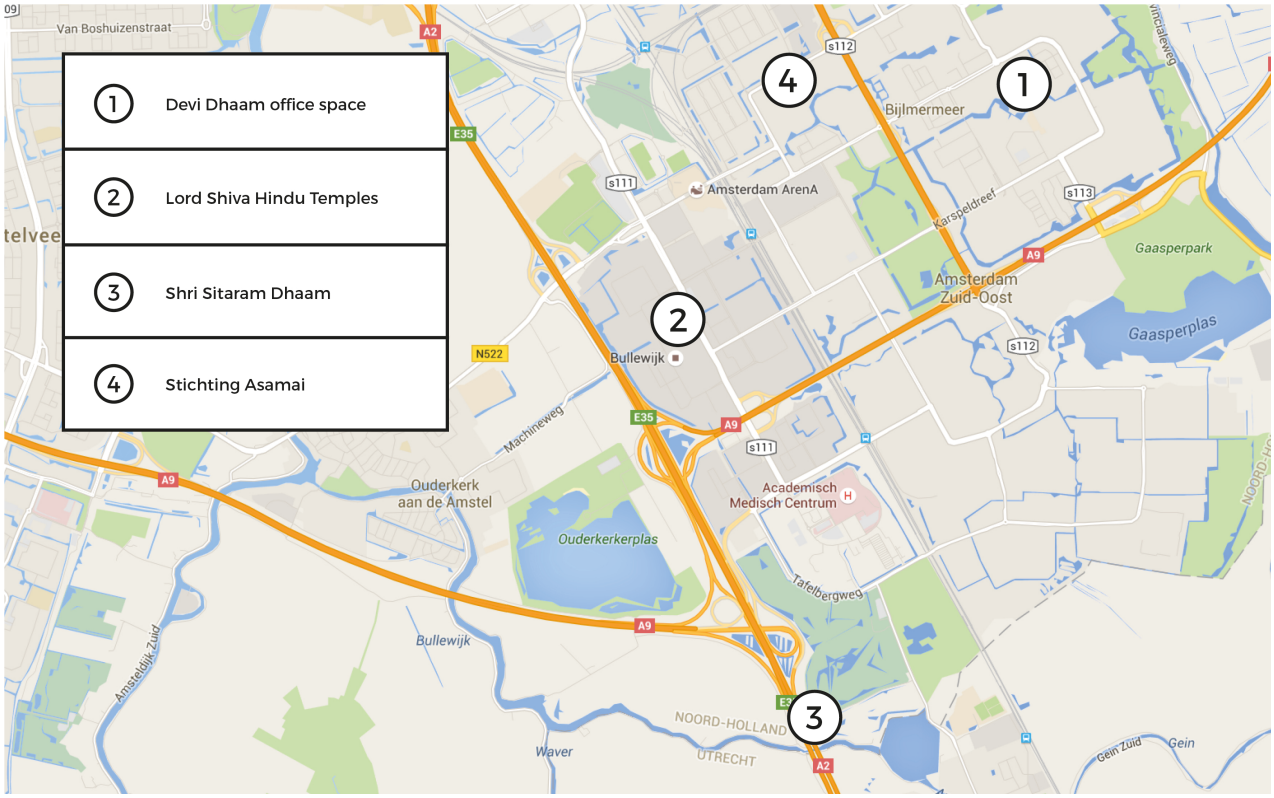
CHAPTER 3: TEMPLE SPACES IN AMSTERDAM ZUIDOOST

In the case of religious newcomers in Amsterdam, Sunier (2009) notes that places of worship are 'prime signifiers of the process of localisation' (162) to the outside world. In the struggle to produce a Hindu locality, the need for a purpose-built temple emerges as the key symbol of legitimacy and representation in Amsterdam Zuidoost. Often, temple building processes in the diaspora, particularly the initial plans and the final realisation of a purpose-built temple, are framed as 'utopian' projects where temples come into being imaginatively as the stuff of dreams (Pati 2011, 2) and divine visions (Narayan 2006, 232).

That templeisation takes place in stages, marked by a period of 'struggle' (cf. Nesbitt 2006, 200) or transition has been well documented (Nye 1995, Knott 1986, 2009). However, the nature of this as a reality rather than a transitory phase on the way to 'owning' a purpose-built temple has not yet been fully examined, especially in the case of the Netherlands. Indeed, as Sunier (2009) notes, the processes before public places of worship are established reveal much about the nature of religious freedom and the contested nature of public space (162-3). I argue that in addition to these state-based concerns, the processes before temples are established are rich moments in which to the idea of Hindu identity is debated and mobilised. This chapter is particularly interested in the way that Hindu-ness is articulated and spatially ordered in makeshift and temporary spaces in Amsterdam Zuidoost.



7: Four temple spaces in Amsterdam Zuidoost (Source: U. Lunel Verduyn)

Temple Spaces as Heterotopologies

Purpose-built temple complexes in the US, UK and the Netherlands have often been framed as perfect, grand spiritual havens that are open for all. However, the reality of makeshift spaces in Amsterdam Zuidoost reveals that temple spaces are 'heterotopologies[44]' (cf. Soja 1990, Foucault 1986) that attempt to order and produce Hindu space in the neighbourhood. Unlike utopias, sites of perfection that exist nowhere (Foucault 1986, Hetherington 1997, viii, Marin 1993), heterotopias are located in reality, and are simultaneously connected and 'contain[ing] all other places represented, contested and inverted in all their lived simultaneities' (Foucault in Soja 1996, 158).

Foucault identifies two categories of heterotopia, those of crisis and of deviation. A crisis heterotopia represents spaces of in-betweenness, associated with rites of passage and liminality (van Gennep 1960, Turner 1969), such as spaces where potentially polluting and in-between stages of life (such as pregnancy, adolescence and premarriage) are contained (Soja 1996, 159). Foucault argues that crisis heterotopias are features of 'primitive' societies, yet there are still remnants of these spaces in contemporary societies (specific hospices to give birth, and old age homes are two prominent examples). Deviation heterotopologies have been the focus of Foucault's research, particularly the prison and the madhouse. These spaces accommodate behaviours and performances that deviate from the 'norm' (ibid.)

As Soja (1996, 159) notes, it is not clear whether these are the only two types of hetereotopias that exist. I suggest here that Hindu temple spaces in Amsterdam Zuidoost can be considered a diaspora heterotopia, in which situated and context-based notions of home and belonging are related to the ordering of that space. As Werbner (2002) notes, heterotopia in the diaspora 'constitute openings for new ethical imaginings and performances of what 'community' or 'culture' might mean in the future' (273). In this way, the temple as a heterotopic space involves a constant negotiation of constantly shifting imaginations of Hindu-ness and community among community actors.

Soja (1996) notes that heterotopologies are not unchanging: they respond to time and can shift in form and content. Foucault gives the example of the cemetery in the 18th century, which was once the centre of the city and was then placed outside the city in suburban areas, as the

[44] The problems of working with the Foucauldian idea of 'heterotopia' have been well addressed by Soja (1996) and Hetherington (1997), who both point out that Foucault's work 'Of Other Spaces' (on which the discussion of heterotopia is based) remained unpublished during his lifetime. Nevertheless, the aforementioned scholars, as well as others such as Gregory (1994) have seriously grappled with the concept. My treatment of heterotopia is much indebted to these examinations, and particularly mobilises Soja's outline of heterotopologies (1996, 159-63) and Hetherington's ideas of the heterotopologies as 'social orderings' (1997 ix).

connection between 'sickness' and death became more apparent (160). This fluidity indicates that Hindu temple spaces in Amsterdam Zuidoost juxtapose in one space several different spaces, even if these sites are opposing or incompatible with one another. Foucault uses the example of the theatre stage where, in one rectangular space, many spaces can be enacted (160) This is particularly significant as the temple spaces in Amsterdam Zuidoost function at once as a sacred space, cultural centre and educational space (cf. Knott 2009, Zavos and Reddy 2009, Ramey 2011). During my fieldwork, this idea was well illustrated during the anniversary celebrations of Lord Shiva Hindu Temples (LSHT, see below). After ritual offers were made into the sacred fire (*havan*), the area where people sat and prayed was arranged as a makeshift stage. Although there was no elevated stage or physical boundaries around an area, one was nevertheless cleared away at the front of the room so that people could perform in the dance and singing competition.

In this way, space is inextricably linked to time: some spaces, such as museums and archives, accumulate time indefinitely, while others, such as the makeshift stage at LSHT, are bound to specific, fleeting moments (Soja 1996, 160-1). Werbner and Fumanti (2013) argue that these temporary moments are part of the aesthetic experience of everyday life in a diaspora community that provide fleeting moments of ownership in a site of exile and non-ownership (151).

What is more, temple spaces in Amsterdam Zuidoost are run out of offices, industrial warehouse spaces, converted farmhouses and garages that are invisible to the public eye (apart from minor physical markings like flags and signs). While the community often sees these spaces as transitory or impermanent places before the establishment of a large-scale temple, at the same time they are treated as real, permanent temples. In reality, many of these spaces do not have access to funds, so there is no urgent desire to move to a bigger space, and talk of a purpose-built temple remains a distant goal. I turn now to the separate temple spaces, sketching out these varied heterotopologies according to the defining features listed above.

One of the significant features of the Hindu temple spaces in Amsterdam Zuidoost is that they are isolated, yet penetrable, which makes them an exception to the idea of freely accessible and recognisable'public' space (Soja 1996, 161). The entry and exit into temple spaces are regulated, often through cleansings and purifications (as Foucault argues is the case with the hammam or sauna) (*ibid*). Although temples are often envisioned as public spaces open to all and serving the wider community, they are at the same time explicitly Hindu spaces where ritual and being in the presence of the gods temporarily satisfies one's private 'longing to belong' (Nugteren 2009, 145). These spaces therefore dually function as representing Hinduism to the wider, non-

Hindu public, as well as closely guarded spaces of worship and sacredness. As I will demonstrate below, each of the four temple spaces in Amsterdam Zuidoost represent alternative social orderings of Hinduness in simultaneously open and closed public spaces. The ongoing struggle to produce a Hindu locality is represented through the establishment of a multi-functional, purpose-built temple, yet the reality is that there exist four liminal, alternative orderings of Hindu-ness in the neighbourhood against the backdrop of promises, hopes and dreams of a 'new' temple in the future.

Devi Dhaam Temple (DD temple) and the PBKS association 1989-2010

In 1989 an already existing association known as the PBKS foundation reorganised its temple board and elected a new chairman in order to become the organisation that represented Hindu interests in Amsterdam Zuidoost, particularly the efforts to establish a temple called 'Devi Dhaam' in the neighbourhood. This organisation expressly conflated Hindu interests with Hindustani interests, as the organisation also viewed itself as a platform for commemorating Indian migration to Suriname. While tensions did arise around issues of caste (see chapter 4) between Indian and Hindustani devotees, the temple continued to have a very strong Hindustani focus. Unlike Lynnebakke's findings (2007, 244) where joint cultural initiatives between Hindustani and Indians most often failed because Indians wish to 'control' the situation, the Indian members of the DD community I spoke to said it was necessary to have a Hindustani-run space, as they were fluent or native Dutch speakers of Dutch who could speak to the government about lobbying for a new temple. Another important factor is that neither community had the financial means to set up independent temples, which Baumann (1999) has noted is often why culturally and ethnically diverse Hindu groups come together to worship in one space.

The history of the DD temple can be broken down into three periods: the first, from the 1970s up until 1997 is characterised by meetings in the open air and in community centres. This period also saw intensive lobbying inside and outside of the community in order to develop a temple space in the area. The second period, from 1997-2009 is marked by their use of a temporary space allotted to them by the local district government, and the third period, from 2010-present is distinguished by their move into a local office space belonging to a member of the DD community.

1970-1997

The narrative of the DD temple community[45] begins under a tree. After Hindus from Suriname and India had migrated into the Netherlands in the late 1970s and into the 1980s, a member of the

[45] I use 'community' here as a term to describe those who consistently associate themselves with a temple. However, as Nesbitt (2006) notes, temples are but one space in a series of sacred spaces that define Hindu communities (205). It should also not be assumed that belonging to one temple

community arranged a Sunday meeting to offer prayers under a tree in the neighbourhood. Although the DD temple struggled to raise funds in the 1990s to lease a plot of land to establish a temple, Amsterdam Zuidoost's Renewal Plans encouraged them, as the local government offered to reserve a small space for the temple to be established.

In anticipation of this, the PBKS contacted two local architects to conceive of a lavish plan to establish their dream temple and cultural annex building, to be built in Amsterdam Zuidoost's Geinwijk area. They sent a press release to the local government detailing the reasons behind developing a cultural centre near the temple complex, and even laid a symbolic 'first stone' in the area to mark it off as a Hindu space, gathering there on Sundays:

Such a cultural centre shall not only offer a facility or a place for the Arsha Dharma [Sanatan Dharm] *stream inside of Hinduism, but also grant hospitality to other related Hindu currents…Further*[it is open to] *anyone who has an interest in what cultural and intellectual Hinduism has to provide. Therefore we have already implicitly given the most important argument for the foundation for a temple and cultural annex…*

According to the architectural plans sent to the local government by temple board actors, the temple space itself was estimated to be 875 square meters in order to host large groups of devotees and house life-sized deities:

1. *An altar with three statues (Gayatri, Lakshmi and Durga) lifesized, and four (Ganesh, Lingam, Brahma and Vishnu) small. Lockable altar. Place for priests and for guest speakers. Statues*[placed] *in the east*-[for] *sunlight. Hanuman statue by the entrance path around it so people can freely walk around the deities.*

2. Modern vision, therefore a space for everything—darshan, kirtan [devotional singing]*, temple dance, katha* [reading of stories]*, guest speakers, priests and the public.*

3. Space for 400 people.

4.Meditation room under the altar.

5. Study/office for the priest.

6. Simple residence for 2 or 3 people (guest priests).

7. Hall, toilet, coatroom, etc. a bell at the entrance.

8: Smoke exhaust during puja, water above lingam.

9. Showcases in the windows. Window drawings or holy texts in the windows.

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means there is no contact with others in the locality. However, there is a marked difference between those who attend weekly or daily and those who come in only on holidays, and it is in reference to these regular visitors that I use the term 'community'. It will also become clear throughout this chapter and Part II how loyalty to various temple spaces is produced through templeisation struggles.

10. Music and video room. Music system.

11. Canal or water around the temple. A fountain.

The culture centre was estimated at 2385 meters squared, with 12 specific points outlined in the proposal in relation to how the space would be used:

1. Multipurpose room with separable podiums and changing rooms to fit 750 people.

2. 3 living spaces: priests, director and guests.

3. Office room and meeting room

4. Classrooms: dress making, Hindi, music and dance, cooking

5. 2 x 2 rooms for bride and bridegroom, including bathrooms

6. Mobile 'mantap' [ritual canopy] *for marriage ceremony*

7. Library

8 Restaurant for visitors, dining room for marriages, kitchen

9. Storage space

10. Film projection room, music/video, music system.

11. Large hall, toilets, coatroom, etc.

12. Corridors, walls, miscellaneous

In order to realise this large scale plan with multipurpose rooms and facilities, state of the art music equipment and specifically designed educational and cooking spaces, the estimate for the total investment into the project, including land costs, facility costs, recovery costs for architects and gardeners, levies and miscellaneous costs would convert today to approximately 3 million Euro. They also projected that a temple and cultural centre built according to this scheme would earn the community money by renting out rooms to people during weddings, financial donations that are collected in the temple, and sales in the restaurant. The temple and cultural centre were estimated to bring in approximately 200,000 Euro combined.

While the plan may seem overly ambitious and out of place in light of the Netherlands' limited space, especially in urban areas, it is clear that the early plans for Devi Dhaam temple complex and cultural annex aimed compete with such grand temples like the Swaminarayan BAPS temple in Neasden, London (established in 1995) or even the Penn Hills temple in the US (established in 1976). As Narayanan (2006) notes in the United States, large-scale temple complexes like the one the temple board actors proposed are not considered uncommon or out of place: the success of temples like the Penn Hills Venkateswara temple outside of Pittsburgh attests to the fact that Hindu immigrants have achieved their goal of re-creating grand 'sacred space where the lord graciously abides' (231-2). However, unlike these temple complexes in the US and the UK that are often patronised by wealthy members of the community (see Kurien 2007, Kim 2012, Narayanan 2006), those wanting to set up a temple in Amsterdam Zuidoost were

predominantly of a working class background who had left Suriname hurriedly, and resources were not immediately available to support community projects.

The temple plans also point to what Hawley (2010), Lutgendorf (1997), Srinivas (2006) and Waghorne (2004)[46] have respectively described as features of middle class Hindu religiosity in India. Besides the extravagant plans, the fact that many temple deities can be housed together relates to a greater accessibility (Narayanan 2006) and 'fullness' of experience within one temple space, where all deities can be housed and experienced at once (Waghorne 2004, 24). These elements are also found in diaspora temples that often favour a more inclusive , 'multi-functional' form of worship in order to accommodate groups of Hindus across ethnic and sectarian backgrounds (Ramey 2011).

What is more, the temple functions not only as a religious space, but a cultural and educational body that serves the needs of Hindus as well as educates the wider Dutch public. The idea of the temple as a cultural centre is particularly significant in the diaspora (Rao and Bhardwaj 1992). These elements are also found in diaspora temples that often favour a more inclusive form of worship in order to accommodate groups of Hindus across ethnic and sectarian backgrounds.

However, the symbolic 'first stone' of this lavish temple was placed without receiving permission from the local district government, and was ordered to be removed. After realising that such a plan for a temple was unrealistic, the temple board re-focused attention on trying to acquire a piece of land through government donation. This campaign was unsuccessful, as the local government maintained that any donations would violate the separation of church and state[47] in the Netherlands. The DD temple community reached a compromise with the local government in 1997: For a minimal rental price a temporary space in the Engeldonk was given to the community that could be used as a temple from 1997-1999. In the meantime, members of temple board and the local government would search for properly designated spaces in the area where a temple could be established. As a gesture of goodwill, the local government provided water and electricity to the space so that cooking was possible.

1997-2009

The second period in the history of the DD temple began in 1997, when the community finally found a (temporary) home, leased to them for two years at a minimal price from the local district government. However, rather than give up the space in 1999, the community continued to use it

[46] Each author relates this to specific cases in India. For more on middle class ethos and temple building in the Hindu diaspora, see Narayanan 2006.
[47] Chapter 4 examines this in more detail.

and delayed finding another space to move. Although many were happy with the temporary space, the idea was always to move to a purpose-built temple that would be constructed according to the grand plans of the board members. As time went on, however, these plans became increasingly distant and fuzzy, and people began to consider the space a temple in its own right.

Today, there is a pervading sense of nostalgia to return to this small, temporary space among the community. Across generations, my respondents recalled stories of crowded festival days, smells of Indian cooking, and volunteering to keep the space neat and clean as a community. My younger respondents between the ages of 18-30 felt as if they had 'grown up' there. Although the space was modest and did not appear on the outside to be a temple, they felt as if the presence of the deities and the sense of community that was fostered in the building made it feel like 'home'.

8: The Devi Dhaam Temporary Space (Source: http://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/hindoes-krijgen-tempel-in-zuidoost~a278245/)

9: Devi Dhaam Temple from the inside (Source: http://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/hindoes-in-zuidoost-krijgen-nieuwe-tempel-op-oude-plek~a4143384/)

Although the DD temporary temple space is not the 'stuff of dreams' or visions that contribute to large scale temple complexes in the diaspora (Narayanan 2006, Pati 2011, Ramey 2009), it took its place somewhere between the fantasy of a completely new, purpose-built temple that would mark the presence of Hinduism in the neighbourhood, and the reality of what the community could afford.

Over a decade later in 2009, tensions between the community and the local government rose as the local district government began to put pressure on the community to vacate the space. Members of the community were outraged at the idea that the government would try and move a sacred Hindu space, particularly because the deities had been installed meticulously according to strict religious rites. As pressure mounted on the community to move, they decided to take the case to court: In July 2009, the court ruled in favour of the local district government, judging that the community had to vacate by April 2010:

'The above considerations show that the Amsterdam municipality has not acted unacceptably in regard to standards of fairness by terminating the lease [Of the DD temple]*...It is sufficiently clear that PBKS must vacate the premises and leave the site ready for building, and it is not possible after that day for temple conduits to be let in. The Judge sets the evacuation date no*

later than 1 April 2010: shares of the PBKS will be cleared and returned to the former renter, the plot will be cleared and temple completely stripped and made available to the city of Amsterdam.'

The community was heartbroken and furious; they would have to abandon their house of worship and their deities that had been strictly installed would have to be removed. More alarmingly, there was no space for them to move. They had spent most of the money that had been diligently raised in the community on irretrievable legal fees: they were left with too little to lease an appropriate piece of land. While some in the community decided to stay and fight to get back the DD temple in the exact space it had been before, others were tired and disillusioned with the temple board and joined other temple communities around the neighbourhood.

Despite the trauma that many people suffered when the temple closed, my respondents still look back at the DD temple and say it felt like 'home'. Moving to a different temple for some was an uncomfortable adjustment. There is still hope among many devotees that they can build a new temple in the neighbourhood. Others were deeply traumatised by the events and choose not to associate with the ongoing struggle.

2011-Present: From Temple to Office

Soon after the court ruling, there were many problems that needed solutions. One of the most divisive issues was where to put the deities, as many devotees feared they would have to go into storage. After much deliberation and a very short period of storing the deities in a garage, they had the deities moved into the office of a devotee, a decision that many supported, but others found inappropriate. The office used to open on Sundays so that people could come and worship, but this soon proved to be a strain on the community. Now, the office is open on festival days, filled with people who used to come to DD temple, and others who are curious to see 'the temple in the office'. The office space is at the bottom of a honeycomb style apartment complex. Spaces around the office include the Zuidoost community centre 'Z/O', a Ghanaian church association and a Brazilian barber shop.

Upon entering the office space, you are welcomed by the large, smiling deity of the Goddess. She stands alone at the top of small staircase that leads down into two separate offices. All the other deities—including Krishna, Ganesha, Shiva and Parvati and a Shiv Lingam[48] are arranged in a row in a separate room.

[48] This is an aniconic form of Lord Shiva, worshipped most often by performing ritual ablutions.

10: The Devi Dhaam Office Space during *Navratri* festivities (Author's image)

11: The Devi Dhaam Office Space with the deities (Author's image)

The office now approaches what could be labeled a 'crisis' heterotopia (cf. Soja 1997, Foucault 1986), a liminal space to temporarily house the deities and the community until the purpose-built temple can be financed and built. The community members who gather here wait anxiously for a new space to become available in which to establish the new DD temple.

Hindus in the DD office space use their 'spacelessness' and their ongoing struggle to push forward templeisation processes as their way of engaging with the political situation in which their

temple community was involved[49]. Although the community has been greatly reduced since 2010, members of the DD visit the office became an important symbolic act: it demonstrated a respect for the goddess, but also showed that the community was committed to staying together, even though there are other temples spaces in which to worship. Navratri celebrations[50] in both Spring and Autumn iterations are busy times: people bustle around the small space volunteering and cleaning, arranging small packages of consecrated food and preparing all the ritual substances for offerings over the nine days. Each day, a member of the community would sit with the priest and perform rituals dedicated to the goddess. Some were familiar with them and others, especially young second-generation women, were performing such rituals for the first time. They were given guidance and support from older members of the community. As Tina told me, the earliest arrivals at the office during festival days were the 'die-hards': those who had volunteered at the temple when it was open and those who had protested its closing.

Not all devotees were content with the office space, however. Payal expressed that the move to the office was merely a watered down version of what they had at the DD temple, despite the fact the goddess was looked after well. She had only recently discovered that the DD deities were still being worshipped in an office space: Along with her older sister Namiesha and her father, Frenk, she had come to visit during Navratri in the autumn of 2014. She told me that as a child she had loved going to the DD temple, and was always running after her father and playing with the other children. Her father was very involved in temple life and often volunteered as a cook. He was interested in devoting his time again to working with the DD community.

Although Payal was a young girl when the temple was open, she told me that she always felt 'at home' in the space. She had visited other temples in Amsterdam Zuidoost, but told me: '*When I go there, I'm a stranger, people look at you, people don't know you'*. She found this very uncomfortable. Although she could not recognise many of the 'aunties' and 'uncles' at the office space who knew her when she was very young, she still felt that this was more familiar than other temple spaces. At the same time, I heard her say many times as we would leave the office space together after an evening of Navratri worship, that being in the office space would never 'feel the same' as the DD temple did.

Her father, Frenk, was much more positive. He had come from Paramaribo much later than my other respondents, in the 1990s, and had settled in Amsterdam. He had tried to avoid as much of the political situation at Devi Dhaam as he could, and instead devoted his time to volunteering to cook and clean the space after festivities. He was very keen to bring both of his daughters to the

[49] I explore this in more detail in chapter 8.
[50] Navratri translates literally to 'nine nights', a nine-day festival celebrated in the Spring and Autumn seasons dedicated to the goddess in her nine forms.

temple, as his wife worked long hours and was not able to accompany them to the temple. For many years after the Devi Dhaam temple closed, he did not attempt to become part of other temple communities. When he heard that the Devi Dhaam temple had 're-opened', he was very happy, even if it was in an office: '*If it wasn't an office, the deities would have been in a garage! It is very good they opened the space.'*

Unlike Payal, Frenk was less bothered by the office, he was happy that he could reconnect with the community after so many years without them.

An older woman named Sheela, who had two grown up children and several grandchildren in the Netherlands, also told me that her attachment to the deities made her feel at 'home' even if they had to be moved to an office space. She had grown up in Nickerie in a well-respected religious family: her father had opened a small temple dedicated to Shiva in her village. Religion continued to be an important part of her life after she moved to the Netherlands with her children and she had been active at Devi Dhaam until the day it closed. Although she had no problems visiting other temples in Amsterdam Zuidoost, she made sure that on festival days she spent her time with the deities of DD temple, as she felt that they were hers: '*This is my temple, Devi Dhaam is my temple',* she said to me when I asked her why she had chosen to come to the office instead of the other temple in which I saw her in more frequently.

While many felt it served as an ideal (albeit transitional) Hindu space, other saw it as a place of business that is highly inappropriate for worship. Sharlinie, while recounting for me the trauma she felt as the temple closed, she curtly expressed to me her anger about putting the deities in a place of work:

They put the murtis [deities] *in an office. In an office! How could they do that?'*

Despite the protests from some of my respondents, the fact that contemporary temple spaces can simultaneously (or previously) function in different ways is not uncommon, especially in the diaspora. Dempsey (2006) demonstrates in her study of a newly constructed Tantric shrine to the goddess in upstate New York that the use of a former barn is not considered ritually polluting, but is actually celebrated for its connection to animals and other living things. The seat of the goddess is proudly considered to have spent much time absorbing the earth, where the feces and urine of barn animals had long 'seeped into the soil' (158).

Especially in the diasporic context, where considerable effort is put into consciously adapting and re-establishing rituals and ritual space (Vertovec 2000, Williams 1992, Pocock 1976), strict rules that dictate appropriateness of spaces and temples can be replaced with more practical orientations of what suits the here and now. As Waghorne (2004) points out, these spaces also can be improved through renovation, community clean up and redecoration (156-7).

In the end, the loss of the DD temple, even if it was only a small, temporary space, represented a failure to produce a Hindu locality. As Tina put it: '*Closing DD is the same thing as closing a pharmacy in a community...A lot of people who are going to other temples are saying they are not happy. They miss their own* [temple]. *DD is old, it's connected…If the purity is not there,*[in other temple spaces] *if a lot of other intentions are there, you can feel the vibrations.* [Other temples] *only opened because they wanted to say they are doing* [making] *a temple…but you have to be connected* [to the cause]*, not to just say it.…the Afghans* [Asamai foundation] *were first connected to the DD. It was just misunderstandings with the board…All the appointments they made with the chairman were not fulfilled, so they were disappointed and they opened their own temple…But the DD temple was the first in the area.'*

The DD temple in its three stages represents the Hindu community's struggle to 'go public' with Hinduism and build a purpose-built temple. Its closing not only led to the establishment of the office as a controversial transitional temple space, but other temple spaces like the Lord Shiva Hindu Temples (LSHT).

Lord Shiva Hindu Temples (LHST) as Alternative to Devi Dhaam

LSHT occupies an invisible space in the Bijlmermeer neighbourhood of Amsterdam Zuidoost in a group of industrial spaces behind a Honda automobile dealership. Amidst a cluster of storage spaces used by various clothing shops in the Netherlands, I arrived at one marked with a large yellow banner reading 'LORD SHIVA HINDU TEMPLES'. Despite its invisibility, it is by far the most well attended temple on festival days and special celebrations. I met people from as far

12: Lord Shiva Hindu Temples (Author's image)

away as Groningen in the North of the Netherlands who drove in to attend anniversary celebrations and participate in the lively (although haphazardly organised) song and dance competitions that accompanied various Hindu festival celebrations.

13: Downstairs at Lord Shiva Hindu Temples on a crowded festival day (Author's image)

14: Downstairs at Lord Shiva Hindu Temples on a quiet morning near the shrine (Author's image)

15: The upstairs dining area of Lord Shiva Hindu Temples (Author's image)

The space is divided into two floors. On the first floor there is a room with a row of North Indian style marble deities, including Lord Shiva beside his consort Parvati, and at the front left side of the temple, there is a Shiva lingam available for ritual anointment or bathing (*abhiśekam*) throughout the day. Although the seating area looks modest, it has been known to seat one hundred people at a time: often LHST has to run events in 'shifts', where half of the devotees worship downstairs while the others file into the kitchen to enjoy a meal or snack. On some days, the space is so crowded that people fill the stairway and wait anxiously in the hall, peeking their head around the door to make sure they do not miss any important rituals.

During a series of interviews, the chairman and head priest of the temple, Mr. Chandra, told me flatly that he would not have opened LSHT in Amsterdam had he not seen that Hindus were 'suffering without a place to worship' after DD temple closed. He felt that the DD temple community had failed to rise to the occasion and build up a temple in the area, and for that reason there needed to be someone who could step in and take control of establishing a new space for the community. At the same time, he felt it was important to show the community how a temple based on 'love and devotion' could be run so that those people who had lost the DD space would be free to worship again.

He felt that the DD priests had used their ritual knowledge and power in the community wrongly to better serve the political situation. He, on the other hand, was unafraid to perform the deity *visargan* puja (the ritual removal of life from the deities) when no one else would. When I asked him to recall his involvement with moving the deities from the DD temporary space, he sketched the following narrative:

'When I arrived, the DD temple was also about to be closed. The government was taking back the place…They were there for 14 years…The old trustees didn't build up a temple, they just took the money and 'ate it up'…Funds misused, you understand? Then the temple closed and then I saw that the Hindus were suffering about where to go and how to worship. Then I decided to make the LSHT temple…I bought the money from India and invested it here [in LSHT]*…I did* [performed] *the removal of the DD temple deities, because the Surinamese priests did not want to move the deities for political reasons…There is no problem* [with this in Hinduism]*, if the temple is going to be demolished then you can do murti visargan*[ritual to remove the presence of the divine in the statue]*…You have to chant mantras…They were going to call the police, they sealed the area, they didn't let anyone in…These Surinamese guys* [sic] *kept on increasing and increasing in number…I got threatened by them, they said, 'Don't even come to this area, you're going to be killed'* [laughs]. *I said, 'From today there won't be a temple anymore, why would I come to this area? Anyway I am standing in front of you right now, do what you want to do to me…'*

This narrative reveals much about Mr.Chandra's way of carrying himself in the community: he was considered a loveable, dedicated man who spoke his mind and was unafraid to make changes in the community. At the same time, his strong opinions also meant that many people, especially DD devotees, saw him as a 'trouble-maker', especially due to his involvement in moving the deities. Although it was opened up in an effort to attract DD's devotees to a new space, Mr. Chandra wanted to diverge radically from DD. This divergence meant moving towards setting up a temple space that moves beyond the worship space/cultural centre that so many diasporic temple fulfill, but to treat the space as an enactment of various 'worlds' associated with his vision of Hinduism.

In the beginning, he advertised classical dance lessons, music lessons, yoga classes and 'sunday school' classes, although these were poorly attended and were cancelled. However, in April 2015, yoga classes were advertised again every Sunday for a small fee, run by a recent migrant from India who is trained in Hatha yoga. During the course of my fieldwork, a 'summer camp' for young children was also planned for every weekday in July 2014. The chairman had planned to give classes on philosophy, Hindi and even English, although the plans were

remarkably fuzzy and advertisements for the camp only circulated very late in June. Still, the temple space remains committed to diverse practices.

Mr. Chandra has also made it a point to advertise that the LSHT follows the protocol of Indian temples while maintaining elements of Surinamese worship—it is open 365 days of the year for twelve hours a day. During the course of my research, the temple hired a full-time cook and also a full-time priest who is on site to perform rites whenever a devotee wishes. He told me that LSHT's biggest goal was to establish Hinduism as 'a permanent fixture in Dutch society' while involving the whole Hindu community. While this is important to him because of his own Indian background, he told me that it was more an act of devotion and a way to show that 'god is welcome here, no matter what has happened in the past' and to 'improve' upon the DD temple:

'…I have seen that this temple[DD temple] *was only open on Sunday for 2,3, hours. I felt very strange, how can a temple not be open every day? Temple means morning prayers, shower the deity, worship, feeding* [the gods]*...God can't be hungry can it? We eat three times a day, we must also offer god whatever we eat or drink… It seemed as if sitting on a chair was the most important thing* [At DD temple]*…To come and sit and relax. How can you dare to sit similarly to* [at the same level as] *the gods?...But there was no one to teach them* [the Surinamese Hindus] *and no one to guide them…Then the temple closed and what did they have? Nothing'.*

Constructing a narrative of Hindu suffering in the neighbourhood, the chairman of LSHT convinced himself and the community that they needed a new temple space to start 'again'. Not only would this space be an alternative to DD, it would foster deeper devotion by staying open every day of the week.

Although LSHT temple is (to date) the first 'Indian run' temple in Amsterdam Zuidoost, conflicts between Hindustanis and Indians are virtually absent. Some Hindustani respondents quietly complained that certain groups of Indians (mostly elderly Punjabi ladies) were unfriendly, but Hindustanis and Indians worshipped together cordially at the temple. I observed that typically regional festivals like *karva chauth,* an autumn fast performed by married women to honour their husbands, was beginning to influence Hindustani women as well[51], who participated in celebrations under the guidance and encouragement of Mr. Chandra. Mr. Chandra was particularly proud of this conflict-free zone, saying that it was part of his 'vision' to have Hindus come together without any 'problems or petty fights'.

LSHT has served as a key meeting and 'discovery' point for direct migrants from India, particularly Punjabis. As one of my respondents, Prakash, told me, he had come to the

[51] Karva Chauth is a popular practice initiated and guarded by women from the Punjab region of India (Purewal and Kalra 2010).

Netherlands from Gujarat in 1976 looking for work. He had first gone to Norway for a few months and tried to go to Germany, but was not successful in finding work or developing a network that would allow him to stay in the country. Finally he found that he could go to the Netherlands, but without a work permit. Like many direct migrants from India, he married a Hindustani woman in order to speed up his work permit (Lynnebakke 2007) and settled with her in Amsterdam Zuidoost, and now has two grown children. He said when he arrived in the Netherlands, there were very few Indians in the area, and that he was so preoccupied with trying to earn a living, he did not have the time to network with other Indians or visit a temple.

When Prakash became ill, his eldest daughter began to take her religion more seriously. She searched for a temple in the area—she went to other temples and became irritated when she saw they were mostly closed during the week. She found LSHT after searching again, surprised to see it was so close to her own house. On the first day that she visited the temple, she met the chairman who welcomed her and invited her to visit the temple as often as she wanted. They developed a close relationship and she began to seek astrological advice from him about her personal life and her father's illness. As her relationship with the chairman grew, she encouraged her parents to visit the temple as well. They came and felt immediately welcome; they sought religious and astrological advice from the chairman, dropped off food for him whenever they could, and invited him to social occasions at their house. Sitting in Prakash's living room one day, he told me that 'he would never have known what a large Indian community' there was in Amsterdam, had the chairman not opened the temple.

Besides an older, more established community of working class and lower middle class Indians, the temple attracts many recent Indian migrants who work in I.T. companies or international business firms. A number of these devotees come from South India although no one I spoke to or observed seemed uncomfortable with the style of worship in the temple. Even though a South Indian style Sri Lankan Tamil temple had opened in the Netherlands, most South Indians I spoke to were more inclined to come to LSHT because it was more conveniently located. As one of my respondents, a man in his 40s named Amit, told me, his strong attachment to the chairman and his vision to promote Hinduism has inspired him to get involved in the temple. He grew up in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh but has worked in Delhi, Bangalore, the US and the UK:

'*As far as the temple management here, they are really into promoting Hinduism and* [to make people] *know that they are here, that there is something called 'Hinduism'…They also ensure that each and every festival is celebrated with the proper zeal…If you're* [from the] *outside and you get to see something like this it's really special…I've lived in two different countries and to have a proper temple in such close proximity it's good…I was amazed. I wasn't expecting it to be so nice. I can't compare it to temples that I saw in the States because in the States they have*

very good temples, huge infrastructure, the deities are big…But what I had seen in Milton Keynes (UK)…They only had one gurudwara then they had a very small temple in a community centre, every Saturday they'd bring their deities to the temple…Then when I came to Amsterdam I saw Devi Dhaam…Soon after it closed. But now look at the facilities we have? Having food every day, 365 days, I haven't seen it even in the U.S….It's magical, I'd say…'

Even though Amit had travelled to large temple complexes in the US, he was particularly impressed that the temple could not only remain open, but manage to serve food to its devotees every day of the week. This way of ordering the Hindu-ness of the neighbourhood somehow impressed him more so than the elaborate 're-creation' of Hindu-ness through architecture and scale that many show-temples in the US boast. He felt that LSHT is 'special' in his life, which is why he took on a very active role in promoting the social media presence of the temple along with the chairman. The LSHT was incredibly important in his life because he had a five-year-old son who often accompanied him on Tuesday evenings. It was important for Amit to be able to show his son how to practice Hindu religion and culture, especially because he was being raised outside of India. Amit felt that LSHT promoted the right kind of atmosphere for his son to learn about Hinduism and know that there is 'such a thing as a temple' in the world.

Across ethnic, cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, the LSHT is a connecting space for various Hindus. For recently arrived I.T. professionals and members of international organisations and companies, this temple allows them to re-create their experiences of Indian Hinduism (cf. Narayanan 2006), for working class Indians in the area, it connected them to a community of people they did not know existed in such large numbers, and for former devotees of DD temple, this space became a new home for those who had suffered through the trauma of losing their old place of worship.

The fact that LSHT was hidden from public view inside an industrial area did not seem to bother my respondents who attended the temple. They felt that the space was more of an authentic temple than the DD space had been, especially because of its long opening hours every day of the week.

'A Home for Everyone'

Mr. Chandra does not come from a brāhman background, and he is very proud of his roots. Although he wished to open an 'Indian' temple space that catered to many visions of what 'Indian' entailed, he was not interested in reproducing brāhmanical ideals of hierarchy, as the temple should be a 'home for everyone'.

While he maintains that he has been trained as a priest, he is more comfortable referring to himself as a 'mediator' or spiritual man, focusing on the ways in which he has mastered certain ascetic practices:

'*My father was a textile engineer and my mother was a housewife. I am an only child. I was born in Rajasthan, and then I went to Punjab, then I went to Bombay…20 years I was in Bombay, from there I went to London, 10 years I was in London. And I've been here* [Amsterdam] *almost 5 years…I am a meditator, I was doing tapas* [literally, to generate 'heat' through ascetic practice]*, you lock yourself away for many many days and you don't leaving the room and no one can see you and you can't see them… I've done 20 of these sessions in my life…I got an offer for a priest in Southhall at a temple and they badly needed a priest…I was a priest for 6.5 months, then I started my private work without any temple…Then I registered my own temple, Lord Surya temple in Southall…'*

During the course of my fieldwork he also made frequent trips to Canada as he was establishing a temple outside of Brampton, Ontario, and also to Aruba, where he was buying land to develop a second LSHT. Most recently, he has set up a meditation centre in the South of Spain.

His life as a priest runs alongside his life as an astrologer: he has practiced astrology in the UK, Canada and the Netherlands, and has a substantial following of people who come to see him for consultations daily, both inside and outside of the Hindu community. Often, the temple kitchen and dining room serves as a waiting room for people who have come from across the country to seek his advice. He also works to assist people applying for their Indian visa, handling the paperwork and ensuring that all documents are filled in correctly. I observed that the chairman himself draws many people into the temple, although he is very firm that it is Lord Shiva and his presence that keeps people coming back into the temple.

The community at LSHT is made up of dedicated volunteers who spend their time cleaning, organising, officiating ritual, and cooking every day. While a few Indian migrants are employed exclusively to take care of the temple, there are always members of the community present that help with the daily running of the temple. Food is provided twice a day, and members of the community would often pick a day to come and cook in the temple as part of their weekly routine. When I asked the volunteers why they spent so much time working in the temple, they told me it was 'because of panditji'. People between the ages of 16 and 30 were particularly fond of the chairman, as he would speak English and even a bit of Dutch and encouraged young people to join events in the temple. As Prakash had told me:

'*He* [the chairman] *has some power over people. He is a powerful man and he helps everyone, that's why everyone wants to help him, too'.*

Many devotees confided in Mr. Chandra, trusting him as a non-judgmental priest who was open-minded, yet knowledgeable about spiritual life and everyday problems. Jaya, who spent much of her free time arranging events in the temple and helping the chairman with paperwork, felt she owed much of her current happiness to 'panditji's' watchful eye and insightful astrological sessions after she suffered personal problems her life. Although he was a self-described maverick[52], the LSHT community respect and revere him.

A young I.T. professional from Delhi named Vijay had been coming to the LSHT since it opened, He remembered that the DD temple used to open every Sunday in an office, but began to attend the LSHT when it opened. He told me that LSHT is so successful and fostered such an inclusive atmosphere because of the chairman's enthusiasm to speak to young people and to celebrate Hinduism. He felt that, especially for people raising children outside of India, maintaining their religious and cultural identity is difficult. He felt that maintaining ties to language was especially difficult in the Netherlands, and somehow was easier in a country like U.K. or America. Still, he felt that LSHT has provided a space where people can experience how Hinduism is 'supposed to be practiced'.

Negotiating his own vision of festivals and ritual practices, the chairman's unique vision is to create a space that heals the trauma that arose from the DD temple closure, and to remind devotees of how to love and worship together in a space that focuses not on conflict, but on the sheer pleasure of devotion to the gods and to developing a united 'Hindu' community.

Shri Sitaram Dhaam (SSD) Temple

The Shri Sitaram Dhaam (SSD) temple lies on a rural road at the very end of Amsterdam Zuidoost, before the city limits of Abcoude. From the outside, it looks like a quaint farmhouse, much like any other in the area, except that outside the house is a large Indian flag. On a Sunday when you enter into the space through the kitchen, you are met with the smell of Indo-Surinamese cooking. People are busily assembling packages of consecrated food to be handed out at the end of worship, while others are sitting and chatting. In the prayer room adjacent to the kitchen a group of devotees sit comfortably on pillows on the floor, reciting the *Ramcharitmanas*, the vernacular

[52] As Dempsey (2006) demonstrates in her discussion of the charismatic leader at the Sakta temple in Rush, New York, a strong personality can often hold a temple community together across class, ethnic, regional and sectarian ties. Like the chairman, Aiyya is a vocal, unconventional non-brāhman priest who runs the temple as an egalitarian space where devotees are encouraged (much like at LSHT) to participate in daily rituals (106-28). It is Aiyya's pure devotion to the goddess that encourages people to trust him and dedicate their time to the temple (*ibid.*). This is also the case with Mr. Chandra, who has developed a loyal following of community actors across age, gender and social status and ethnicity.

16: Shri Sitaram Dhaam (outside) (Author's image)

story of the life of Rama. Behind the pillows, rows of chairs are set out where other devotees can sit during worship.

The SSD temple space narrative begins with its own controversy outside of the events around DD temple space. Before the problems with the local government and DD temple erupted, a young, self-taught spiritual teacher rented out the farmhouse to use as his own spiritual haven. Devotees remembered singing devotional songs on peaceful evenings in the country, performing rituals and celebrating festivals. However, the spiritual teacher had also employed brāhman priests to help smoothly run the rituals, which caused friction. Many of the brāhman priests disliked that the young Swami did not come from the proper background to be initiating certain religious rites. In the end, the young Swami left with his deities, frustrated at the lack of respect from the priests, and the temple fell into the hands of more orthodox brāhman priests. Currently, the head priest and chairman of the temple, Mr. Ravi is a proud brāhman who believes not only in the strength of the caste system, but also principles of Hindutva.

17: Shri Sitaram Dhaam (Shrine) (Author's image)

A Hindutva space in Amsterdam Zuidoost

As Bhatt and Mukta (2000), Rajagoal (2000), Raj (2000) and Anderson (2015) note, in the diaspora, Hindutva rhetoric articulates itself beyond the binary of home and host countries and becomes more about representation, respect, and pride in a multicultural and globalising world. Hindutva rhetoric in South Asia and the diaspora often hinges on the 'glory' of ancient India and Hindu culture at the centre of the world. The presence of Hindutva rhetoric in diaspora communities in Great Britain and the United States has been tied to popular understandings of multiculturalism that allows for pride in a distinct culture within the accepted public parameters of one's national identity (Rajagopal 2000, Mukta 2000, Bhatt 2000). Hindutva rhetoric especially allows second and third generation Hindus outside of India to be proud of their minority status, often through the utopian visions of a glorious Hindu past:

> For Indians, to be 'Hindu' is to bask in Orientalist visions of an ancient civilization and so compensate at the present time for its bygone glories while muting the stigma of racism. In an environment where multiculturalism is influential in sanitizing cultural difference without interrogation or introspection, 'Hindus' can take pride in being placed within the trim precincts of a pluralist society.
>
> (Rajagopal 2000, 472).

A similar trend can be observed in the Netherlands, as minorities and citizens who boast high levels of integration (see Gowricharn 2009, Verstappen and Rutten 2007, also chapter 3), can also appeal to their ancient culture from which all knowledge derives. This contributes to a sense of Hindu pride that globally circulates through such narratives in diaspora communities.

As I mentioned in the introduction, the idea that politicised Hinduism in the Netherlands does not exist must be nuanced further, as the ideological and culturally superior Hindutva narrative (Bhatt 2000), is nevertheless prevalent in the SSD temple space. The SSD temple space is overtly associated with Hindutva: the space represents a repository of Hindu culture and ancient history and religion. Spreading the message of Hindu pride is often the impetus behind hosting educational events such as 'Hinduism and Science' and 'Hinduism and Health'. The chairman of the temple has adopted a cow in Groningen, for example, under the 'World Cow Protection' foundation. The community has produced an ongoing petition folder with the name of countless local supporters of the cause. The community also hands out flyers about the protection of Hindus in Pakistan in relation to their minority rights, and solicits donations locally for the cause. In this temple space, the world is ordered to revolve around the role of Hindus, where, as Mukta aptly observes, '…The politics of religious identity is linked up with the ambition to dismantle the ideational structures of Western civilization and to replace this with a Hindutvacentric worldview'(2000, 447).


18: Hedgewar (L) Golwakar (R) (Author's image)

Unlike other temples, the chairman told me that he is committed to hosting public events that encourage reading Sanskrit religious texts in Dutch translation while also practicing rites and rituals that can be traced to 'ancient Hinduism'. A proud brāhman from Varanasi, he boasts that he has come from a family of ritual specialists and that he is 'especially interested' in teaching the 'Dutch population' to appreciate the culture of ancient India and the rituals of Hinduism. During an interview, Mr. Ravi narrated his experiences as an enthusiastic member of the RSS in India, and has expressed this enthusiasm by hanging portraits of early RSS leaders beside the deities in the temple. Mr. Ravi told me that it was important to assert the presence of the RSS in the temple because it represents his 'vision' of Hinduism:

'*RSS has given me a new life, a new idea about life…I have one purpose, and this purpose is to work for people. Work for Hinduism, the people who call themselves Hindus. I do puja, every week I read and tell people what is meant by Hindu tradition, I talk about Ram...Ram has worked his whole life for other people. Ravan was a terrorist of the whole world and Ram had taken down the terrorist, he must work against them. Now we have terrorists just like in the time of Ram… that's the idea* [about life] *that RSS gives me. I have been a member since I was 15. Sometimes I talk about it with people, some people understand it and some people don't…If people in this temple understood and knew about the RSS, the whole of Amsterdam Zuidoost would have peace…'*

At SSD temple, there is a clear preoccupation with re-drawing the boundaries of civilisation from a Hindutva point of view. The priest's references to the Ramayana and the defeat of Ravan 'the terrorist' spoke to the ways in which Hindu mythology could neatly be grafted onto contemporary politics and international affairs, and was an example he often returned to during his discussions of contemporary Hindu practice.

Another important indication that politicised Hinduism is not entirely absent from the Netherlands comes from my SSD respondents who spoke about a once-lively *shakha*[53] community in the Netherlands, overseen by Dutch branch of the RSS. *Shakhas* are 'branches' of the RSS around the world. In keeping with the educational and disciplinary focus, these meetings for children consist of exercises and physical games as well as educational sessions on Hinduism and ancient India. There were many *shakhas* open in the Netherlands during the 1990s, and there are still active groups in the Hague, Amsterdam and Groningen. However, my respondents say that interest in *shakha* today is much lower than in the 1990s. My respondents often use the term *shakha* and 'RSS' interchangeably.

However, there is unease around the presence of Hindutva in the temple. In 2014, I spoke to Sharlinie's daughter, Maya, about her experiences at SSD temple. Maya had faithfully attended the DD temple as a young girl and was, like her mother, devastated when it closed.

Maya had also grown up attending *shakha* in the Netherlands. She had enjoyed the earlier years of learning about Indian culture and celebrating Hinduism. However, especially as she grew up, she found the way members of the *shakha* talked about Hinduism and other religions increasingly problematic. She also disliked that *shakhas* separated young boys and young girls. As an adult, she had attended the SSD temple with her mother before, but she felt uncomfortable with the priest:

[53] For more information on *shakhas* in the Netherlands, see Kumar (2013). For more on *shakhas* in the US, see Kurien (2007).

'*It's a nice place…but I'm not used to it. Once I had a discussion with the priest over there… He is provoking the community by saying 'Hindus are attacked'…He is also from shakha, and that's exactly the thing that I was against when I was in shakha and I see it in him still…'*

Maya maintained that although many people remained unmoved by what was being said, there were some who took the idea that 'Hindus are attacked' quite seriously:

'He had one discussion and I could see two kinds of people [listening]*: those who believe and those who said 'No, I don't want to believe'… Half of the people said 'We have to do something!' and the other half was silent and said 'Yeah, tough, but…when is the food coming?!'*

Similarly, Maya's mother, Sharlinie, had told me that SSD had the reputation of having a 'radical priest', which she believed was highly problematic. As she had been very involved in sending her children to *shakha* when they were younger, she was not necessarily put off by his general involvement in the RSS, but by his assertion that 'Hindus are suffering' in the Netherlands and India, particularly because there is such a strong Muslim presence in the world.

It has been established that Hindutva narratives in the diaspora tend to obfuscate the political elements of its message and focus on 'cultural' or 'religious' aspects (Maira 2002, 140, Bhatt and Mukta 2000). Even though Maya and Sharlinie did not agree with the messages presented to them at *shakha* or at SSD temple, they still maintained that the cultural and the religious 'strength' that these messages gave them were worth listening to, despite the political aspects of these narratives.

A female respondent in her early 50s named Sheryl also shared Maya and Sharlinie's concern that people were indeed taking seriously the priests' Hindutva rhetoric. She had spent months after the closing of DD temple feeling lost, and one day felt that she needed to attend the temple again. She had heard about the SSD temple and, seeing as she lived close by, she decided to go and visit. She said that she had immediately sensed that the priest's strong support for the RSS was problematic, but that she had also felt 'good' and 'at peace' at the SSD.

When she first heard the priest discussing the RSS at the temple, she had immediately gone home and done research on the RSS to learn more about the organisation. When she returned to the temple the next week she was surprised that she was the only person who had bothered to do such research. She maintained that most people in the temple simply believed what the priest had said and felt no need to question it, or must have ignored what he said entirely.

The SSD temple presents a Hindutva space wherein time and space are coloured by the idea of the ancient Hindu past and its claims as the foundation of modern European society. At once an educational space and a site of ancient Hindu ritual, this temple space aims to re-order and to reclaim the glory of Hinduism by placing Hindus and Hinduism at the centre of the world.

Asamai Foundation

The Asamai Foundation narrative begins in 2003 when the founder donated his former office as the possible location of a temple and cultural centre specifically for the Afghan Hindu community. It is located in the Venserpolder area of Amsterdam Zuidoost, a residential area lined with the honeycomb apartment housing blocks that were built in the 1970s. The temple is inside a parking garage of a residential apartment building completely unmarked from the outside. The parking garage also houses a Ghanaian cultural association directly beside the Afghan Hindu space.

I met two prominent members of the community who had been involved many years with the temple as soon as I walked in during my first visit. A man named Naveen dressed in a full suit offered straight away to put me in touch with members of the community that may be able to help me with my research. As I was writing down his contact information, he said: 'You can help promote our culture…If you become our ambassador…Then why not [help you with your research]? You can take this Afghan culture to the rest of the world'.

An Invisible Hindu Temple in Amsterdam Zuidoost[54]

Unlike the Afghan Hindu community in Germany (Baumann 2009, Hutter 2012), the Afghan Hindu community in the Netherlands is virtually invisible. Apart from Asamai foundation, which remains hidden away in parking garage, the community currently has no other formal organisational bodies. Unlike LSHT and SSD, the space is not concerned with reaching out to a 'wider' audience or promoting Hinduism, but with connecting the close-knit Afghan Hindu community to each other and creating an appropriate 'Afghan-Hindu' space, rather than accommodating their rituals to spaces that already exist in the neighbourhood. As two board members told me, approximately 80% of the 200 Afghan Hindu families living throughout the Netherlands belonged to the Asamai foundation.

[54] To my knowledge, the Afghan Hindu community has not yet been addressed in studies of Hinduism in the Netherlands. What is more, the wider community in Amsterdam Zuidoost and other parts of the Netherlands are often surprised when I say that I carry out research at an Afghan Hindu temple. Comparatively, much more information exists on the German situation: As Baumann (2009) notes, although Afghan Hindus make up a minority population of Hindus in Germany, they are often better organised and have since the 1990s set up seven Hindu temples around the country (156). What is more, they are the second biggest Hindu group in Germany, after Sri Lankan Tamil migrants.

19: Asamai Foundation (outside) (Author's image)

The board members were also very particular about the fact that Asamai is more than a temple: It is also a cultural centre. When I asked what other cultural events the board organises besides religious worship, they mentioned Diwali celebrations with singing and dancing competitions, and in their early days they had offered Indian music lessons. Today, however, the most important events they organise are religious in nature, especially festivals like Navratri. While devotees told me the temple represented a uniquely 'Afghan Hindu' space, they often struggled to provide an answer to questions of what specifically makes it 'Afghan Hindu'.

However, one of the alternative orderings of Hindu space at Asamai that is highly observable is its use of both Hindu and Sikh elements of worship. As Hutter (2012) explains, Hindu practice around Kandahar shares many elements with Sikh religious traditions, especially the veneration of Guru Nanak (the founder of the Sikh religion) and the *guru granth sahib* (the Sikh holy book). On festival days in the Netherlands, Afghan Hindus often read from this text among others such as the *Bhagavad Gita*, the *Ramcharitmanas* and the *Shiva Purana*. However, devotional songs to Guru Nanak can be heard across all festival days and events.

Hutter attributes this to the fact that Afghan Hindus who settled in Kandahar have ancestors who came from Multan in what is now Pakistan, bringing with them elements of Sikh worship (2012,354). However, practices in Kabul do not usually include Sikh elements. In Cologne, at the Hari Om temple, Hutter (2012) describes that the tension between Kabuli and Kandahari forms of worship led to a separate temple being established in the city by the Kabuli community (355). As the community in Amsterdam is much smaller, the need for a separate Kabuli style temple is not necessary.

20: Inner sanctum of Asamai, with Sikh and Hindu elements of religious worship (Author's Image)

The presence of Hindu and Sikh elements of worship has led many of my respondents from different backgrounds to view the Afghan community as an 'other within' (Brooks 1993). While the few respondents who did know about the Afghan community felt that their presence represented the wide range of Hinduism, many were reluctant to visit the temple.

For example, I planned a visit to Asamai along with my respondent Jaya and the chairman of LSHT. As a Punjabi, the chairman had many contacts within the Afghan Hindu community and many Afghan Hindus would come to visit him at LSHT, especially during the LSHT anniversary celebrations or other public events. When I told Jaya she should accompany us to the Afghan temple, she immediately corrected me and told me it was a *gurudwara,* a Sikh place of worship. As I explained to her that the space functioned as both a temple and a gurudwara, she still denied that the space could be a temple if it was also a gurudwara. Deciding not to push the matter, I quickly changed the subject as we made our way to Asamai and entered the space. She told me afterwards that she found it 'different' to see pictures of guru Nanak alongside a Shiva Linga, and Hindu deities.

During the closing of the DD Sharlinie spoke to the Afghan temple about trying to seek out a viable place to temporarily store the deities from DD after the 2010 evacuation. She claimed that

she had approached the Asamai foundation, asking if they could be temporarily housed, but was not encouraged:

'*When I told them many Hindustanis would show up at their temple to worship, they backed off, They didn't want so many Hindustanis in the space, It's different, It's a different kind of temple'.*

Rather than express this to me with any disdain or discomfort, she seemed very sympathetic to the position of the Asamai temple board, and was relieved deities did not end up there. It seemed that she, too, understood this as an *Afghan*-Hindu space, one whose simultaneous openness (as I was told, by a respondent, 'everyone is welcome in the temple') is accompanied by a much stricter closed-ness than other temple spaces (Soja 1996, 201) based on its specific cultural and religious ethos.

Saskia also told me she was curious about the Afghan community that 'met in a garage', but was discouraged from visiting their temple by her mother, who had told her that 'bad people' go there. Saskia had found this problematic and stood up to her mother, saying that 'any place with god is not a bad place'. However, she still avoided the space and told me that she would 'probably never end up visiting it'.

It is also immediately apparent that the people who attend Asamai are all closely connected and that very few people outside the community come into their space. Many times I was asked who I was, once by a particularly curious eight-year-old girl who wanted to know why I was writing in a notebook. Once I explained my research, however, most devotees were interested to know my background and to help me with my project.

Many people described the community as a 'family' to me, and that visiting the temple was an all day, social affair. Nina, a young woman in her twenties who had come to the Netherlands when she was two told me: *'In this temple they are all from Kabul…Everyone is your family…In other temples you go just to pray but here you come to meet people and socialise.'*

A crucial part of this close-knit narrative was the idea of the 'Kabuli', as the majority of my respondents from the Afghan Hindu community identified as 'Kabuli'. After my initial fieldwork at the Asamai Foundation, it appeared that all my respondents were from Kabul. However, after speaking to two members of the temple board, it became clear that 'Kabul' and 'Kabuli' were identity markers for the Hindus despite coming from smaller villages and cities like Kandahar. This may also account for the style of worship in the temple, which according to Hutter, would be identified as 'Kandahari' as opposed to 'Kabuli'.

The most prominent aspect of Afghan Hindu culture I observed is a strong emphasis on Indian origin, but a resistance to simply be called 'Indian'. More so than reinforce a sense of cultural superiority as it may do for Hindustanis in the Netherlands, the historical relationship

between Afghan Hindus and India appeared to be a way to distance themselves from current ideas about Afghan culture and Islamic fundamentalism and to deal with the harsh realities and trauma of war.

For example, when I first asked her to tell me about her background, Nina talked about her ancestors and her relationship to India. Her 'great great great great' grandparents had been Indian and involved in trade, which brought them to Afghanistan. Other than these two facts, she had little information about her ancestors and when they came to settle in Kabul. When I asked Nina about her interest in visiting Kabul, she told me that Kabul was a 'foreign place' to her, because she could not remember living there. Although she identified Kabul as her birthplace, she felt uninterested to visit Kabul or even to know more about the place from her parents:

'I was born in Afghanistan…My ancestors come from India, they came to Afghanistan for business and they met each other in Kabul…In Kabul, most people are Muslim but there is a small community of Hindus…Most of the Hindu community was killed during the war in Kabul…My grandfather was killed by the Taliban and I never knew him so I don't remember him…It's too dangerous for us to go back…When my dad sees pictures of Kabul on Facebook, he says 'I knew this place—I knew this place'…But I don't know [the places] *and I don't want to know them…It's like someone is talking to you about a place that you've never been to…'*

She went on tell me that her parents, despite being born and raised in Kabul, felt much more attached to India not only because they were Hindus, but because memories of war alienated her and her family from mainstream Afghan culture and identity. Furthermore, any romantic ideas of Afghanistan as an ancestral homeland were overridden by the reality of Kabul as a war torn, insecure city out of which her family had to flee:

'My parents feel more attracted to India than Kabul even though they are actually from Afghanistan[as opposed to Nina who was only born there]*...they have been to India for holidays and it's just like it's their country. My family talks a lot about India because we're Hindus…They talk more about India than they do about Afghanistan…They talk more about India because they don't like the things they remember about Afghanistan…Because of war…They don't want to remember…I'm not interested to go to Kabul…I don't remember it and I don't miss it. There are so many other interesting places to visit like India and Malaysia…Places that are calm…Not places that have war, that have no landscape…What will I do there* [In Afghanistan] *?*

Goel (2008) notes in her study of constructions of 'Indianness' among various groups in Germany that many Afghan Hindus in Germany feel as if there origins are Indian, although they do not know or speak of actual migratory patterns, as in the case of one young man who traced his family back to Sindh, but provided no additional details (111). For her respondents, Afghanistan

is a Muslim country (109), to which they cannot relate, and instead build up a sense of Indian identity based on what Goel calls 'cultural competences', including language, religion, Indian values and familiarity and sense of belongingness with India (113).

This attitude is not unlike that of second and third generation Hindustanis who feel a greater affinity with India rather than Suriname and connect through cultural and religious phenomena (Gowricharn 2009, Choenni 2011, 2015). In both cases, national identities such as 'Surinamese' or 'Afghani' represent stigmatised or traumatic circumstances, the former of indenture (Torabully 1992, Torabully and Carter 2002), and the latter of war and displacement. In both cases, these traumatic collective histories foster a conscious re-attachment to India[55]. At the same time, much like my Hindustani respondents, it is not simply a matter of abandoning 'Afghanness' or national identity in favour of 'Indianness', but complex negotiations in-between (cf Bhabha 1994, Soja 1996, Young 1996) and across identities.

While Nina is not very positive about Afghanistan and Kabul, she still identifies as someone who was born there. When I asked her about her relationship to the Netherlands, she acknowledged that she has some difficulties making people understand that she is an Afghan Hindu, especially because people associate Afghanistan with Islam:

'I don't feel like a real Dutch person…But I feel like if I go anywhere, I want to go back to my country—as in Holland! It's difficult to say...I don't feel 100% Dutch, but if someone says 'What is your country'…Then I say 'Holland'. If someone says 'What are your roots', then I say Indian. But I was born in Kabul…So it is a bit difficult…If you say you're from Kabul the they think you're a Muslim…But my roots are Indian, and India is a Hindu country…But I do say I am born in Kabul…And then they say 'How is that possible?!'

Afghan Hindu space, as an 'other within' other spaces, functions as a 'haven' (Duyvendak 2011,44-5) where cultural, linguistic and ritual differences need not be accommodated to Indian or Hindustani forms of worship. Often described to me as an extension of a 'family living room', the temple space functions as a safe environment that allows for the complexity of their religious and cultural identities to be performed without questioning or outside scrunity.

Temple spaces in Amsterdam Zuidoost represent the realities of migrant religion: while trajectories of templeisation processes often do result in large-scale, purpose-built temples, the ongoing struggle for a temple in Amsterdam Zuidoost reveals how lower middle class and working class Hindus carve out heterotopic spaces that can serve their immediate needs. As Hetherington (1997) notes, heterotopia are 'spaces of deferral, spaces where ideas and practices

[55] This is a preliminary exploration of this connection, as it is outside the scope of this dissertation to explore this issue here. It would be interesting to comparatively explore second-generation Afghan and Hindustani constructions of 'Indianness' in a future study.

that represent the good life can come into being…'(ix), and so the temple spaces in Amsterdam Zuidoost, which may not adhere to visions of dreams of large-scale, monumental temples, serve the purpose of housing and representing a space of order and Hindu-ness within their four walls, reflecting the reality of the community's resources, but also unlocking the potential of various makeshift spaces to provide a temporary home for Hinduism in Amsterdam Zuidoost.