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

Swamy, P.

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PART II

1989-2015: NARRATING HINDU HURT IN AMSTERDAM ZUIDOOST

Introduction

Early on in my fieldwork, I visited the only purpose-built temple in Amsterdam, the Radha Krishna temple in Osdorp, Amsterdam. As I sat quietly through the worship, observing and recording the events in my notebook, a young woman approached me. After I told her that I was a researcher carrying out work on temples, she immediately asked: ‘Don’t you think we need more temples? There are so many mosques, but not enough temples’. Throughout our conversation, she repeated: ‘We need more temples’.

As my respondents have pointed out, the importance of temple-building was not exclusive to Amsterdam Zuidoost, in fact, other cities and neighbourhoods had been much more successful at it. Besides the purpose-built Radha Krishna temple in Amsterdam, the Sri Vishnu temple, a garage space in the old south neighbourhood of Amsterdam has existed since the 1990s.

The fact that Amsterdam Zuidoost had continually failed to establish a purpose-built temple has made templeisation processes in the neighbourhood central to the articulation of Hindu identity, and entwined with local politics. The issue of templeisation in the neighbourhood is foremost one of public representation and legitimacy: while having a space for worship is still important, various community actors articulate Hindu equally important based on rights and freedoms for Hindus to have a visible space in public.

Part II explores how templeisation processes in Amsterdam Zuidoost have become voiced through the affective strategy of Hindu hurt (cf. Mukta 2000, 451, see also Zavos 2008, 331). It does so by focusing on narrative registers that demonstrate the ways in which Hindu identity is related to the lack of temple space—often in ways that manipulate and negotiate certain strategic stereotypes that stakeholders and community members feel will help their cause. There are three groups of actors involved in constructing these narratives: first, the DD temple board actors from 1982-1996 and the civil servant actors with whom the board entered into a lengthy correspondence, second, various Hindu and non-Hindu media actors who covered the closing of DD in national and local mass media, and third, the DD community itself—those who worshipped and volunteered at the temple and fought to keep it open.

Chapter 4 begins by laying out the legal parameters from which the local district government articulated the problems donating a piece of land to the Hindu community on which

to build a temple. It then examines a body of correspondence between temple board actors and the local government where Hindu identity is conflated with Hindustani identity, as ex-indentured labourers who were victims of Dutch colonial policy. It interrogates how elite board members begin to frame templeisation processes as a form of Hindu campaigning (Zavos 2008) that involves strategically deploying stereotypes of Hindu experiences and identity. In particular, they construct an image of Hindus as docile and hardworking, who are treated as ‘aliens’ by those around them. Having few resources of survival apart from their family values and Hindu religion, their attempts to establish a temple are continually ignored by the Dutch government. At the same time, they are citizens of the country, and temple board actors articulate their right to a temple squarely within their rights and freedoms as citizens of a ‘multicultural’ or ‘plural’ society. This reinforces the relationship between representation, legitimacy, and Hindu identity.

Chapter 5 moves forward to the 2010 legal ruling to evacuate the temporary space that the DD community had occupied from 1997-2010. It questions how mediatised images have become affective strategies of ‘social suffering’ (cf. Kleinman and Kleinman 1997). These mediatised images signal a major shift from the articulation of Hindus as marginalised because of colonial history or agendas of multiculturalism to Hindus as victims of deception by corrupt temple board actors. Crucial to this narrative is the image of the ‘crying mother’, circulated by actors inside and outside of the community, as a symbol of victimisation that recalls the Hindu nationalist symbolism of *Bharat Mata*, or the violated personification of India as a mother-goddess.

Chapter 6 examines present-day narrative registers from within the community in order to ask how affective strategies of Hindu hurt have continued to focus on the role of the community as victims. Interviews and conversations reveal how a lack of group solidarity has become equated with ignoring Hindu dharma. Demonstrating a marked shift from the temple board actors’ correspondence, the lack of a united Hindu identity is seen as a barrier to templeisation processes. The chapter concludes by detailing the formation of the first umbrella Hindu organisation in the neighbourhood expressly dedicated to templeisation processes.