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

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PART III

TEMPLEISATION PROCESSES AND 'ACTIVE HINDUISM' AFTER 2010

Introduction

On one uncomfortably warm summer afternoon in Amsterdam, I sat outside on a terrace with Tina to share a drink and discuss the closing of the DD temple space. We sheltered as best as we could from the beating sun and began to talk about Hindu identity today in relation to everything that had happened since 2010. As the afternoon went on, we began to focus more upon the connection between politics and temple building in the Netherlands. At one point, she paused and firmly said to me: *'Don't forget, the political is part of our society'*. She went on to discuss how trying to separate politics from religion and everyday life had become virtually impossible.

Although recent research has noted that Hindustani participation in politics, especially voting in national elections, is lower than that of most other minorities in the Netherlands (Choenni 2015, 252), I suggest here that the templeisation processes, particularly the events of 2010 have played a large part in my respondents' renewed interest in civic involvement, including voting and more creative ways of increasing their political involvement in Dutch society. As Tina's comments above demonstrate, current ideas of what it means to be Hindu reveal a renewed relationship between Hindu identity and civic life. The values and norms that are increasingly defining Hindu practice in Amsterdam Zuidoost are articulated from within emic ideas of citizenship, as well as globally circulating Hindutva rhetoric that focuses on the glory of ancient Hindu practice, its tolerance, openness and freedom of choice.

In order to contextualise what I identify as an emerging Hindu moral economy as a process of civic integration as well as cultural and religious pride, Part III explores the ways in which the past traumatic experiences with templeisation processes in Amsterdam Zuidoost are connected to current discourses of active and affective citizenship in the Netherlands. Part III demonstrates how narrative registers of Hindu hurt that I have discussed in Part II have shifted to reveal a counter-narrative of 'active Hinduism', which I define as self-disciplined performances of 'Hindu-ness' as civic involvement as well as spiritual purity and 'goodness'. Hindu activeness narrates the ways in which Hindus in Amsterdam Zuidoost ought to be (or in some cases, are) disciplined, engaged citizens working against rigid caste hierarchies in order to establish transparent, democratically run temples.

The emerging ideas of active Hinduism often run counter to the model minority stereotype that circulates both outside and inside of the Hindu community in the Netherlands. Part III will

therefore contest the idea that Hindus value socio-economic status and education rather than political involvement as markers of status and integration in Dutch society.

Chapter 7 examines how, after the events of 2010, ideal performances of ‘Hinduness’ are governed by non-hierarchical principles of purity—what Nugteren (2009, 2014) calls ‘sattvification’. It focuses on two markers of dignity within the emerging Hindu moral economy: increased political involvement and democratic values and ethos. I begin by presenting ethnographic accounts of how community members define ‘Hindu’, illustrating how the vocabularies that define ideal Hindus do not necessarily relate to Indian cultural heritage, and instead often mirror that of ‘ideal citizens’ in the Netherlands.

I then discuss Tina’s narrative of her particular involvement in political processes since 2010. While Tina has the social and cultural capital to involve herself formally in political decision-making, I also turn my attention to those community members who see their attendance at the DD office space as an act of political engagement itself. I also revisit the symbolism of a mother-goddess as protector that was previously explored in chapter 5, as the deities of DD play a crucial role in symbolising the struggle of working-class and lower-middle class devotees to become actively involved in protesting the closure of the DD temple space in 2010.

In chapter 8, I demonstrate how the post 2010 Hindu temple space in Amsterdam Zuidoost has become a symbol of democracy and egalitarianism. This shifts focus onto various temple spaces around the neighbourhood to build upon the idea of an emerging Hindu moral economy. Here, I highlight a second significant marker of dignity and articulation of active Hinduism: that of a democratic, egalitarian ethos at an individual and collective level. I first examine how community actors narrate their disdain for brāhmanical hierarchy and brāhmanical ritual control in temple spaces, while also highlighting the powerful counter-narratives that fight to preserve the role of the brāhman priest.

I then focus on specific events in temple spaces in the neighbourhood to demonstrate how the principles of democracy and openness are informally fostered. I begin by discussing the event ‘Hinduism and Democracy’ held at SSD temple, highlighting how prominent community actors inscribe ideal Hindu identity through performances of active citizenship and voting. Finally, I explore how the Asamai temple space and the DD office space attach value to a temple that is democratically run and organised by highlighting the performances and discussions that accompany accusations of non-democratic behaviour and organisation.