Chapter 9
Transnational Religious Organisation and Flexible Citizenship in Britain and India

John Zavos

Abstract John Zavos extends the idea of the political-cultural entanglement of Asian-European citizenships. He argues that religious organizations have the potential to be significant actors as dynamic new ideas of citizenship are fashioned in the challenging contexts of global transnationalism. The chapter focuses on one particular religious organization, the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (or BAPS), examining its location in two different but related arenas of citizenship development, Britain and India. The chapter explores ways in which religion can operate as an ordering discourse in this context. Religious organizations, Zavos suggests, can navigate the public discourses opened up by these trends in order to enhance their sense of belonging, their status, and their access to rights in relation to national, social, and political arenas.

This chapter will explore the ways in which religion has become associated with and affected developing notions of citizenship in and between two related sites: Britain and India. The colonial domination of India by Britain means that the connections between these two nations have a long and tortuous history. This historical relationship is relevant but the most compelling context to this concern is the recognition that citizenship has become an increasingly dynamic idea in the late modern era. As Mitra states, in postcolonial states citizenship needs to be understood as "layered" and "shifting" (2008: 345, 347), and as Aihwa Ong argues, "in the era of globalization, individuals as well as governments develop a flexible notion of citizenship and sovereignty" (1999: 6).

This flexibility develops as a response to the challenges posed by global flows of capital, ideas, goods, and of course people. Ong's first concern is to map out the mobility of postcolonial elites as they negotiate an adaptable sense of belonging between different sites in which they have a stake, be it economic, social, or

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cultural.[1] In addition, however, she explores the role of postcolonial states in responding flexibly to the mobility of transnational populations. There is, she says, sometimes a tendency to locate the issue of transnationalism as contiguously postnational: globalisation is seen as undermining the role of the nation state in securing or fixing the status of the subject, as people form identities and allegiances which cut across the constraints of established political, economic, and social formations. Flexible citizenship is partly a retort to such positions, as it indicates the enduring capacity of the nation state to adapt to rapidly developing conditions. There are, Ong says, "diverse forms of interdependencies and entanglements between transnational phenomena and the nation states—relations that link displaced persons with citizens, integrate the unstructured into the structured, and bring some kind of order to the disorderliness of transnationalism" (1999: 15–16). As this suggests, the action of states in this way is often governed by a conservative impulse, as they seek both to mediate the threat and exploit the (primarily economic) potential of transnationalism. It is a tendency also noted by others who encourage a refocusing of scholarly attention "away from abstract third spaces and on to the social networks and fields whose creation and maintenance locks states and (transnational) populations into recursive and mutually constitutive relations" (Dickinson and Bailey 2007: 759). Much of this work has focused on the relationship between migrant communities and their countries of origin. Dickinson and Bailey, for example, explore the idea of "transnational governance," whereby the Indian state seeks to "give shape to and manage (its) overseas population" (ibid: 761) by developing forms of mediated citizenship. This kind of relationship is certainly significant, but here it will be seen as part of a web of culturally contingent "conceptual flows" (see Mitra this volume) associated with notions of citizenship, through which the "disorderliness" of transnationalism is negotiated. As Ong notes, the relationship between states and transnational communities is characterised by "diverse forms of interdependence and entanglements." This chapter seeks to demonstrate how such interdependence and entanglement plays out as it explores the flow of citizenship-related ideas between states, organisations, and communities.

Citizenship may be understood in terms of a set of three interrelated and mutually implicated dimensions: status, rights, and identity (Joppke 2007: 38; see also the introduction and Lall in this volume). Citizenship as culturally contingent, conceptual flow is configured by the operation of different, sometimes contested notions of belonging associated with each of these dimensions. For example, Mitra locates citizenship as connoting a *status* oscillating "between territorially defined national communities within state borders and non-territorial (frequently transnational)

[1] Although Ong is not exclusively focused on elites in her work on flexible citizenship, it is to this group, as I say, that she first turns. My concern in this chapter is to pursue this lead by focusing on the relationship between nation states and a mobile flexible citizenry with the capital (variously social, cultural, and financial) to negotiate diverse institutional forms and national spaces. This focus does not preclude the existence of other forms of flexible citizenship, and indeed a whole range of comparatively "rigid" citizens, unable or unwilling to engage with the possibilities opened up by Ong's "era of globalisation."

communities defined in ethnic and functional terms" (2008: 347). Parekh highlights the dynamic impact that cultural and ethnic identity can have on the ability of groups to access *rights* and benefits associated with citizenship (2002). In the field of *identity* different notions of belonging are implicit. Here, what Joppke describes as "the behavioural aspects of individuals acting and conceiving of themselves as members of a collectivity" (Joppke 2007: 38) are performed as a means of demonstrating, asserting, or affirming citizenship as belongingness. Painter emphasises that full citizenship comes partly through "identification with an imagined community" of fellow citizens (2002: 95), and as we shall see later in the chapter, Ong speaks of the significance of a "civilisational discourse" deployed by Southeast Asian states as a means of staking out the values of citizenship, the identity markers, as it were, of full belonging. This field of identity, then, is an area where concepts of imagination, culture, and ethnicity inform and contest notions of citizenship, and in particular those notions of flexible citizenship which are fashioned in the context of transnationalism.

The focus on religion in this chapter is framed by this concern. Of course, religion can and does operate in relation to status and rights as aspects of citizenship as well, and we should remain cognisant of the mutuality of Joppke's dimensions. This chapter, however, is most concerned with identity, as this field offers the most scope for the operation of citizenship as conceptual flow; that is, the exchange and translation of ideas and attitudes associated with citizenship in the context of transnationalism. A central contention in the chapter is that religion can operate here as an ordering discourse, part of the multivocal negotiation of transnational disorderliness, in the manner noted above as a conservative impulse associated with nation states.[2] However, this is not just a function of nation states (although these are certainly apparent), but also of transnational religious organisations, which carefully navigate a range of public spaces or social fields (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004)[3] in a manner which increases their ability to perform citizenship identities, and so enhances their sense of belonging (and, hence, their status and access to rights) in relation to national social and political arenas.

This argument is predicated on the understanding that religion, like citizenship, is a concept on the move. The idea of religion as a stable cross-cultural and trans-historical phenomenon has been subverted by the deconstruction of the world religions paradigm (for example, see Asad 1993; Fitzgerald 2000; Flood 1999; Hirst and Zavos 2005). Theorists such as Kim Knott argue that religion rather needs to be conceptualised as "a dynamic and engaged part of a complex social environment or habitat, which is itself criss-crossed with wider communications and power relations"

[2] Although I am noting here the operation of religion as a conservative force, it does not follow that this is the only way in which religion operates in social and political arenas in relation to transnationalism (see below). Indeed, there is plenty of literature to demonstrate the operation of religion as a progressive and even subversive force in this environment (see, for example, Hefner 1998; Maduro 2004, and the works of Robert Beckford, such as Beckford 2001).

[3] Levitt and Glick Schiller define a social field as "a set of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices, and resources are unequally exchanged, organized, and transformed" (2004: 1009).

(2005: 119). Implicit here is the idea that particular manifestations of religion are always already intertwined with a variety of discourses constituted in different social fields. This study then is not so much based on the premise that religious organisations may or may not operate in particular ways in relation to state formations and notions of citizenship. Such a premise would demand comparative work between different religious organisations, and perhaps even between different "religions." Rather, the work rests on examining possible ways in which religion as a discourse may be deployed by different agents in order to mediate the development of notions of belonging associated with citizenship in the dynamic, shifting context of late modern state-subject relations. Although it rejects the idea of religion as a stable universal phenomenon, however, such an approach does not preclude the operation of dominant discourses of religion. Indeed, the world religions paradigm noted above is just such a dominant discourse, although there have, in recent years, been some significant developments in this discursive formation. In certain national and transnational arenas, we see a subtle shift towards the identification and articulation of common religious values underpinning the normative plurality of the world religions—values such as peace, environmental responsibility, respect for human (and religious) diversity, which are commonly projected as "spiritual" or "faith" values—in a manner which frequently marginalises the subversive potential of religious worldviews.[4] In this chapter we will note the presence of this discursive development, as different agents seek to fashion orderly notions of belonging in the context of transnationalism.

In order to pursue this objective, the chapter focuses on one transnational religious organisation, the Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (or BAPS), and its role in these processes in the context of India and, first of all, Britain. Examining BAPS in these interrelated contexts will provide a significant example of what Ong refers to as the "diverse forms of interdependencies and entanglements between transnational phenomena and the nation-states," which produce different models of flexible citizenship. In each case the focus is first on the state's development of new forms of citizenship-as-identity in response to the "disorderliness" of transnationalism, before exploring the ways in which BAPS works with these developments in its efforts to establish a sense of belonging premised on the centrality of "religion." As we shall see, the transnational character of BAPS enables it to perform citizenship as conceptual flow in a manner which reverberates both in Britain and India, as these states continue to develop new ways of addressing the challenges, opportunities, and threats associated with transnationalism.

Citizenship, Ethnicity, and Religion in the United Kingdom

British citizenship is in many ways intensely layered and contestable, and these qualities derive largely, and ironically, from a condition of postcoloniality. For much of the colonial period the single category of "British subject" theoretically

[4] For an elaboration of this argument, see Zavos 2008.

encompassed all those who nominally came under the jurisdiction of the British monarchy including, of course, colonial subjects. As the Empire unravelled, however, the category of British subject was increasingly unable to capture the complex relationships developing through the emergence of independent states which were nevertheless still constitutionally tied to Britain through the institution of the Commonwealth. The British Nationality Act of 1948 for the first time established the idea of a British citizen of the United Kingdom and colonies; other former subjects of the British Empire were henceforth known as commonwealth citizens in addition to being citizens of their own independent states. Fears about so-called "New Commonwealth" immigration have since led to a progressive complication of the idea of British citizenship. Perhaps most significant in the current context has been the introduction of the notion of patriality as a qualifier for the status of British citizen under the 1968 and 1971 Commonwealth Immigration Acts. The idea of patriality brings the notion of ethnic identity quite clearly into the arena of British citizenship, as it makes a distinction between British subjects on the basis of their descent, with full citizenship rights being available to those subjects who could prove that their parents or grandparents had been born in the United Kingdom (Carter 2000: 134).

A kind of "ethnic citizen," then, appears as part of the legal structure of the UK's approach to citizenship, reinforcing dominant understandings of Britain as a nation of white islanders in the context of the inward flow of non-white migrants in the second half of the twentieth century. As it developed these defensive strategies against non-white immigration however, the British state was concerned with mediating the presence of those migrant populations who were already here, and in doing so, a new and different kind of "ethnic citizen" begins to emerge. In the nineteen seventies and eighties, the British state gradually developed inclusionary policies loosely termed "multiculturalist" as a means of mediating pluralism. Multiculturalism, in as much as it was a coherent policy strategy, was predicated on the principle of equal respect for difference, and an attempt to embrace cultural diversity as a valid factor in the imagining of British identity; what Kymlicka and Norman identify as an acceptance that "ethnocultural identities matter to citizens, will endure over time, and must be recognized and accommodated within...common institutions" (Kymlicka and Norman 2000: 14).

A range of factors during the 1990s and beyond have destabilised the multiculturalist approach as it has developed in Britain. The year 2001 in particular witnessed scenes of violent unrest in northern English towns with large South Asian Muslim populations, closely followed by the events of 11 September. In the wake of these events, the government moved to embrace the idea of community cohesion, an approach to pluralism which criticised previously pursued policies of multiculturalism for encouraging segregation and differentiated values. In a move which owed a good deal to the theorisation of social capital in the United States (Putnam 2000, 2007), community cohesion advocated a new approach to pluralism in which respect for difference was predicated on the recognition of common core values. The then Home Secretary David Blunkett signalled the new focus by explaining that "citizenship means finding a common place for diverse cultures and beliefs, consistent with our core values" (*The Guardian* 14 December 2001). As illustrated here, the ideological shift to community cohesion is often expressed

explicitly in terms of citizenship. This link was only emphasised by the introduction of citizenship tests in 2004 through which new migrants are required to answer questions designed to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of aspects of British life, culture, institutions, and governance.

The role of religion in this ideological shift is explained by Tony Blair in a speech to the Christian Socialist Movement in 2001: "Our major faith traditions—all of them more historic and deeply rooted than any political party or ideology—play a fundamental role in supporting and propagating values which bind us together as a nation" (see Furbey and Macey 2005: 97). Here the role of religion or more specifically "faith" is identified as a key means of identifying those core values at the heart of community cohesion. In fact, the state had for some time been cultivating connections with religious organisations as a means of managing diversity. From the early 1990s, for example, the Inner Cities Religious Council looked to represent the views of different religious communities in the context first of inner city regeneration, and increasingly in relation to the government's overall approach to the mediation of pluralism. Critically, the council was to operate on the basis of what its first Chair Robin Squire MP called "some of the common values which people of faith share—the intrinsic value of people; the importance of nurturing communities; respect for the environment; the importance of love and justice in society" (see Taylor 2002: 217). In invoking this commonality, Squire was drawing on that increasingly prominent understanding of the location of religion in global terms, referred to in the introduction, through which a common "discourse of faith" is identified as informing the plurality of religious traditions (Zavos 2008). This kind of approach dovetailed neatly with the trajectory of community cohesion in the early twenty-first century to produce what some commentators have termed a "faith relations industry" in Britain (McLoughlin 2005: 58); that is, a set of emerging state institutions that implicitly read ethnic difference in terms of religious identity. This development is matched by a strong desire amongst some South Asian communities in particular to articulate their identity in Britain in religious terms, rather than in terms of the catch-all "Asian" identity which had for so long distinguished South Asians from Afro-Caribbean migrants. "Don't call me Asian" has become a familiar refrain, particularly amongst groups representing Hindus and Sikhs in Britain in a post 9/11 context. The idea of religious identity as ethnic identity, then, is becoming increasingly significant in the politics of ethnicity in Britain, and a variety of religious organisations and those claiming to represent religious communities have become prominent collaborators with the government (Zavos 2009).

To summarise the argument so far, in the twenty-first century a new kind of "ethnic citizenship" is being projected through shifts in the British state's approach to the plurality of society. In effect, this is an example of "flexible citizenship" as state strategy, as the earlier move to secure a racialised ethnic British citizenship through patriality is now supplemented – or "layered" over – by the imagining of ethnically defined minority communities as citizens. Religion provides a key language for the expression of this new notion of ethnic citizenship, in that "faith identities" both chime with the principle of community cohesion and represent an opportunity to promote particular types of ethnicity as legitimate.

Religious Organisation and Ethnic Citizenship in Britain

The new visibility of religion in the British politics of ethnicity is reflected in the performance of religious identity as a kind of model minority identity by an increasing number of representative groups. Some of these groups, such as the Muslim Council of Britain and the Hindu Forum of Britain, are clearly in the political field; they seek to represent an ethnic community defined first and foremost in terms of religious identity, and they have responded eagerly to the community cohesion agenda. As the President of the Hindu Forum stated at the launch event of the organisation in 2004, "it is incumbent upon us all, that we strive as a collective, rejoice in our diversity and work towards community cohesion" (*Asian Voice* 27/3/04). Others are less overtly political, yet nevertheless strongly project the idea of the ethnic citizen, as marked out by the community cohesion agenda, through social action and the arrangement of social space. By practicing what Kymlicka and Norman describe as "civic virtue" (2000: 6), these organisations acquire valuable social capital not just for their own institutions but for the ethnic/religious identities they have come to represent.

BAPS is an example of this type of organisation. It represents one specific grouping of the Swaminarayan *sampradaya*, a devotional Hindu movement which developed initially in Gujarat in the nineteenth century. It is now a global movement with a formidable organisation of temples, centres, and devotional groups, as well as development and educational programmes. It is primarily popular amongst Gujarati communities, and it has a particularly powerful presence in the United States and in Britain, as well as Gujarat itself and some other areas of India. BAPS is, then, an organisation with a strong transnational profile. Steven Vertovec has described it as a form of "cosmopolitan Hinduism," reflecting a capacity to mould its practice to multiple environments and acknowledge the play of multiple identities amongst its modern devotees (Vertovec 2000: 164). In fact, in offering this model, Vertovec draws on the work of Peter van der Veer, who has argued that contemporary theories of cosmopolitanism need to take more account of the historical development of this idea in contexts of colonialism (van der Veer 2002). Acknowledging such "historical entanglements'" (ibid: 178) enables a clearer understanding of "alternative cosmopolitanisms" to those framed by a post-Enlightenment vision of secular engagement[5] in which, for example, transnational Hindu and Muslim organisations may be "creatively developing new religious understandings of their predicament, entailing an encounter with the multiplicity of Others and with global conditions on their own terms" (van der Veer 2004: 16). Van der Veer argues that these terms may well be articulated in a framework of traditionalism, but "this traditionalism requires immense ideological work that transforms previous discursive practices substantially" (ibid: 12).

It is in this sense of "creative traditionalism," then, that we may speak of BAPS as a transnational organisation articulating a kind of "cosmopolitan Hinduism." In fact, van der Veer's work on the colonial genealogies of cosmopolitanism are again

[5] Such as those "cosmopolitan norms" explored, for example, in Benhabib 2007.

pertinent, as he identifies the emergence of a discourse of Indian spirituality in the nineteenth century as a kind of anti-colonialist cosmopolitan project, fashioned through the flow of ideas between Euro-American theosophists and emerging representations of Hinduism in colonial civil society. "Western discourse on 'Eastern spirituality,'" he argues,

> is reappropriated by the Indian religious movements of this period... Spirituality is a comparative, polemical term used against Christian colonialism. As in Britain itself, it contests the very colonial domination of scientific knowledge by showing that there are either earlier or alternative forms of science available in Hinduism (2002: 176).

It is this kind of "comparative, polemical" Indian spirituality which was taken by Swami Vivekananda to the World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893. Here, he contested the space of modern religion with other parliamentarians, arguing that what he presented as the spiritual essence of Hinduism[6] provided a model of tolerant, rational, and universal religion which neatly encompassed the other, "less ancient" religious traditions (Brekke 2002: 25). Although normally in somewhat less combative forms, this model has been very influential in the development of modern notions of cosmopolitan Hinduism, such as that propagated by BAPS; it also resonates strongly with the emerging global discourse of faith we have noted as congruent with the idea of community cohesion in the United Kingdom.

It is no coincidence that Vivekananda was also very influential in developing a modern notion of *seva* as a feature of his spiritual approach. *Seva* in its broadest sense means any kind of devotional service. It is often related to *bhakti* devotionalism in Hindu traditions, framing forms of worship and modelling the guru-disciple relationship. In establishing the Ramakrishna Math and Mission, however, Vivekananda fashioned *seva* more particularly as the obligatory delivery of social service or service to humanity (see Beckerlegge 2006). Vivekananda's notion of *seva* as social service articulates it as a selfless act—indeed, its selflessness is an indicator of its legitimacy as a form of devotion (see also Warrier 2005: 59). The idea of *seva* has become a central feature of virtually all modern Hindu organisations as they have developed during the twentieth century (see, for example, McKean 1996 on the Divine Life Society). As a guiding philosophy for full-time disciples in modern Hindu movements, *seva* provides the motivation for the full range of management and practical activities associated with particular movements (Warrier 2005: 59–60; Williams 1998: 853–4). For devotees, it provides similar motivation for a range of voluntary activities. As will be demonstrated, in multiple social contexts it also provides a critical religious framing in the performance of civic virtue. For the Swaminarayan Sanstha, this is enacted on multiple levels, including that configured by the British state's articulation of community cohesion.

Since 1995 the focal point of the Sanstha in Britain has been its temple complex in Neasden, North London. As its website proudly states, this *mandir* is recognised

[6] An interpretation of Vedantic philosophy developed through a variety of nineteenth century thinkers and sometimes known as "neo-Vedanta" (see Halbfass), combined with the promotion of "yoga as the Indian science of supraconsciousness" (van der Veer 2002: 177).

by Guinness World Records as the largest Hindu stone built *mandir* outside India. Opposite the temple is a private school run by the Sanstha, which caters for children from the age of 2 up to 18. These institutions create a powerful presence for the Sanstha in London. The *mandir* is recognised as a major tourist site (again as the website tells us, *Time Out* magazine listed it in 2007 as one of the "seven wonders of London"). But the complex is also a deeply civic site, in which the civic virtue of BAPS – and by extension the Hindu community – is reiterated in a number of ways. Firstly, the spatial arrangement of the *mandir* expresses a powerful sense of order. It is a spectacular site, a white marble, intricately carved building standing heterotopically in the suburban sprawl of North West London, close to the North Circular, a major road route in the city, and to large retail outlets such as the Swedish furniture manufacturer IKEA.[7] Entering the *mandir* grounds means leaving these concerns behind, as the carefully manicured lawns and immaculately clean spaces both inside and outside reflect the care and attention of the volunteers who are always in attendance. The orderly nature of the site extends to physical movement, as visitors are encouraged to follow set routes from area to area (in this sense, providing a strong sense of heterotopia, as this managed movement seems to echo the forms of movement encouraged in the nearby IKEA store[8]). These features seek to configure Hindu sacred space as calm and serene, drawing deeply on the dominant discourse of religion as faith, and the associated notion of cosmopolitan Hinduism.[9] The main managed route at the *mandir* leads the visitor to the entrance of a permanent exhibition called "Understanding Hinduism," in which the "glory and greatness of Hinduism and the significant contributions by India in all fields" is represented (http://www.mandir.org/exhibition/index.htm). The exhibition provides further strong indications of the values underpinning Hinduism as a globally significant religion (and, at the heart of Hinduism in this representation, the importance of Bhagwan Swaminarayan in propagating these values).

A proportion of the exhibition including a film is given over to explaining the building of the *mandir* itself. The key thrust of this part of the exhibition is to demonstrate the devotion and sacrifice of *satsangis* who contributed to the project. The *mandir* was built entirely through private donations and the community also offered voluntary labour as a form of *seva*. The idea captured here of an organised, selfless community working together for a common goal is highly influential in

[7] See Johnson 2006 on different uses of the term "heterotopia." My particular interest lies in heterotopia as a sense of difference or "specialness" associated with a space, without it being entirely removed from the parameters of quotidian reality. This sense of familiar difference provides an appropriate kind of context for paradigmatic values which are nevertheless applicable in everyday life, throwing them, as it were, into sharper relief.

[8] I am grateful to Dr Rohit Barot for drawing this similarity to my attention some years ago.

[9] The link to van der Veer's anti-colonial cosmopolitan Hinduism is again evident here, as this representation of Hinduism in a serene, spiritualist key is developed in contradistinction to the classic colonialist stereotype of this religion as a kind of riot of disorderly divinities, beliefs, and practices. See, for example, the commentary of ICS officer Alfred Lyall in the 1880s, as explored in Metcalf, 1995. Lyall describes contemporary devotional Hinduism as "a mere troubled sea, without shore or visible horizon, driven to and fro by the winds of boundless credulity and grotesque invention" (Metcalf 1995: 136).

projections of the Sanstha in wider community environments, It is reproduced through elements of the *mandir* website, and through activities of the Sanstha and the School in the local community. As the school's website comments:

> in line with the Hindu ethos with which The Swaminarayan School operates, the School sees its role not only as a participator within the local community but also as a contributor. Hence the School has been involved in several charity drives in recent years. As a result, the children are taught with important character-building values such as giving, sharing, treating each other as equals, and helping those less fortunate than themselves.
> (http://www.swaminarayan.brent.sch.uk/charity-work.html)

The school, then, contributes to the community both through charitable work and by developing the civic virtue of its students. The combination of this attitude of selfless service with the representations of orderly Hinduism at the temple site produces a kind of moral tableau which acts as a metaphor for the model status of Hindus as "ethnic citizens" in Britain. The Neasden complex projects core values as Hindu values (including *seva*) which clearly resonates with the idea of community cohesion and the associated notion of ethnic citizenship.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the site has emerged as iconic in terms of Britain's multicultural profile, and is frequently visited by prominent politicians and other figures of the state. The *mandir's* website features comment from such figures as Tony Blair, the Prince of Wales, the late Diana Spencer, and the MP William Hague. The tone of this comment is remarkably consistent, focusing on one or both of the two issues explored here: first, the peace and tranquility of the space, and second, the selfless commitment of the community which its building represents. This latter point is emphasised by the Prime Minister Gordon Brown in a message sent to the Sanstha at the time of its centenary celebration in 2007. Mr. Brown states that the devotees "espouse ideals of community and voluntary service which are an example to us all," hence locating BAPS as exemplary in the performance of community cohesion.

During 2009, both the temple and the school featured prominently on the personal website of the Prince of Wales, as he and his wife visited to celebrate the Holi festival. The video recording this visit is instructive. It features a highly choreographed and orderly representation of the normally rather chaotic practice of Holi. There is also a visit to a classroom, where young children are making chains of daffodils in celebration of another festival that falls in the spring, St David's Day. This scene clearly invokes the commitment of the Swaminarayan movement to community cohesion, as the diversity of Welsh and Hindu festivals is brought together in the context of the royal visit to the school, as is represented by the image in Fig. 9.1 of the Prince with a tilaka and a traditional Hindu welcome garland only made of Welsh daffodils. The hybrid is fashioned in the context of the religion as faith discourse, which recognises the underlying commonality of these diversely framed festivals, hence reinforcing the idea that BAPS is ideally positioned to operate within the context of the UK's strategy of community cohesion.

In this way, then, the activities, statements and even the spaces fashioned by BAPS exemplify the role of the Hindu citizen as a model minority with a great deal to offer to the civic life of the United Kingdom from a specifically religious point of view.

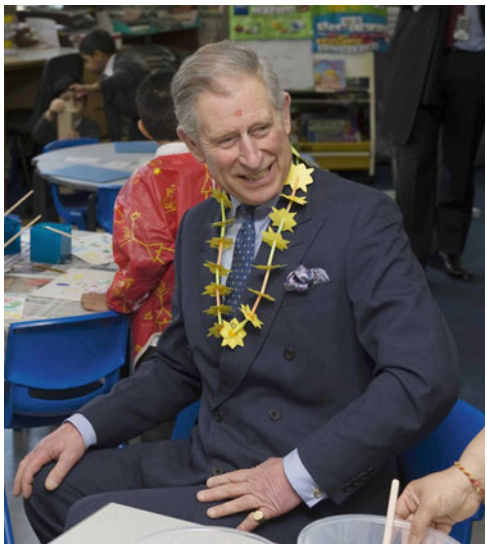

Fig. 9.1 Prince Charles at the Swaminarayan School, Neasden, North London, March 2009 (Courtesy Press Association Archives)

This point is again reiterated by the Sanstha's Annual Review, which highlights BAPS initiatives in a range of social arenas. The 2007–2008 Review touches, for example, on the Sanstha's work in organising health campaigns and regional family seminars, anti-bullying workshops and summer camps for children, and a range of welfare related work in local communities. As the review states, "whether observing international days of significance or reaching out to those often left neglected on the fringes of society, we have sought to make a positive, lasting impact on as many lives as possible" (BAPS, n.d: 8). One particularly interesting feature of the review is the "Global Highlights" page (see Fig. 9.2).

This page highlights the worldwide reach of the organisation and its ability to deliver the same kind of community centred activities outlined above on a global scale. The page brings together religious activities such as the Holi festival, as celebrated in Sydney with education-related activities such as a parents evening in Johannesberg, and development activities such as disaster relief. The arenas, then, in which the Sanstha can deploy strategies of civic virtue, are radically expanded, reflecting the mobility of this transnational organisation. One interesting feature of development activity is the representation of relief work as occurring in two sites: Texas and Bihar. As sites for such work, these two are of course at opposite ends of the index of human development; the Sanstha brings them together in a way which seems to accentuate its global reach. It is an organisation with the power and the aspiration to provide support throughout the world. Its concept of citizenship in this sense is intensely flexible.

Flexible citizenship is almost consciously produced in some BAPS materials. For example, a webpage focusing on the Santha's family building initiative comments that "a strong family produces strong, productive citizens of the future" (http://www.bapscharities.org/ services/community/family.htm). This statement may resonate as much in Altrincham as it does in Ahmedabad, and in fact there is no indication on this

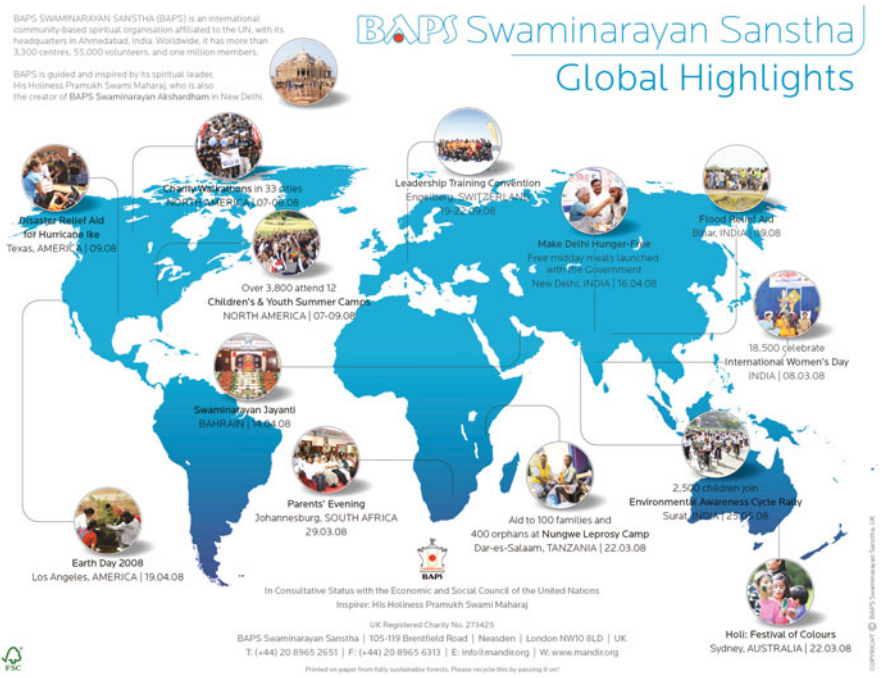

Fig. 9.2 The "Global Highlights" page of the BAPS Annual Review 2007–2008 (Courtesy BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha)

page about whether this activity is focused on any particular location. Citizenship is invoked as a general mode of responsibility, a general feature of global society, which the Sanstha is ideally placed to deliver precisely because of its transnational character. My interest now is to see how this plays out in the context of India. Before looking more specifically at BAPS, the next section explores the way in which notions of Indian citizenship have developed in recent years. Interestingly, some of the same migrant communities perceived as so influential in developing different notions of citizenship in Britain are also critically important here.

From PIO to OCI: Flexible Citizenship and the Indian Diaspora

> As a young kid in Britain people would look at me and ask me where I was from. I'd say, 'Scotland', and they'd say, 'yes, but where are you really from?' Somewhere at the back of your mind you're wondering about this country that your parents came from and wondering if maybe you belong there.
> (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/5290494.stm)

This statement features in a BBC news report posted in 2006, entitled "Indians head home in brain gain." Attributed to a young South Asian woman born in Glasgow who was by that time living in Mumbai, the statement expresses reasons for her

migration to India. Although she was partly driven by new opportunities fashioned in the context of India's booming twenty-first century economy, this informant, as with others in the article, expressed an emotional attachment to the land of her parents, a sense of belonging, as a key factor in her decision to migrate. The persistence of this affective relationship between the Indian diaspora and the "homeland," even amongst the second and third generation, is also something which is recognised by the Indian government.

In 2000 the Indian Ministry of External Affairs appointed a High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora. Although the committee saw its brief primarily in terms of the potential for inward investment, the significance of the diaspora was also recognised in social and cultural terms. For example, the committee's website explains that

> The Diaspora is very special to India. Residing in distant lands, its members have ... retained their emotional, cultural and spiritual links with the country of their origin. This strikes a reciprocal chord in the hearts of people of India.
> (http://www.indiandiaspora.nic.in/)

The committee envisaged an opportunity to build on these attachments in terms of India's development and geopolitical status, and as a result, a range of initiatives designed to strengthen the relationship between the Indian state and the diaspora were recommended by the committee in its report submitted in December 2001.

One key area of recommendation was in relation to citizenship. The committee concluded that "the grant of dual citizenship to certain members of the Indian Diaspora *with appropriate safeguards* would facilitate the contribution of the Diaspora to India's social, economic and technological transformation and national development" (High Level Committee on Indian Diaspora 2001: xxxvi, emphasis in original). A mode of citizenship did emerge from this recommendation, although not necessarily in the manner anticipated by many eager members of the diaspora. In 2005 the Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) scheme was introduced.[10] This scheme allowed people with a descent connection to India[11] to gain unrestricted rights of entry, residence, and work in India, plus certain restricted investment rights. It did not allow any political rights (such as the right to vote or hold political office), nor the right to hold an Indian passport.[12] In this sense, despite the use of the term "citizen,"

[10] The OCI scheme followed on from the introduction of the Person of Indian Origin (PIO) card scheme in 1999 (and modified in 2002). Both schemes worked on the basis of allowing special rights to people who could claim a descent connection to India.

[11] To be eligible for OCI status, an individual should be "a foreign national, who was eligible to become citizen of India on 26.01.1950 or was a citizen of India on or at anytime after 26.01.1950 or belonged to a territory that became part of India after 15.08.1947 and his/her children and grand children" (Ministry of Home Affairs, Government of India, Overseas Citizen of India Brochure, see http://mha.nic.in/pdfs/oci-brochure.pdf, last access: 9 June 2010)—interestingly, the idea that one could qualify for this status on the strength of prior status of your parents or grandparents seems proximate to the idea of patriality noted earlier in relation to British citizenship.

[12] It is worth noting that by the initial definition of citizenship offered in the introduction of this volume, drawn from the work of Michael Walzer—that is, membership of a political community—the OCI scheme is already on shaky ground as a form of citizenship.

the OCI scheme falls short of granting citizenship rights, something which has led to a degree of confusion amongst diaspora Indians, and a welter of clarificatory statements on consular websites around the world. As the Delhi US embassy notes, "a person who holds an OCI Card in reality is granted an Indian visa, not Indian citizenship" (http://newdelhi.usembassy.gov/acsdualnation.html, last access: 27 April 2009). In effect, the OCI scheme is little more than an extension of a measure introduced in 1999 called the Person of Indian Origin (PIO) card scheme which granted similar entitlements to OCI, but for the more limited period of 15 years and with a requirement for registration for stays beyond 180 days.[13]

Deploying the language of citizenship is significant, however, because of the way in which it invokes the idea of flexible citizenship, particularly as this relates to culture and ethnicity. This is represented by the transition from PIO to OCI.[14] In the earlier formalisation of the relationship between India and its diaspora, the emphasis is, in a sense, on the detachedness of diaspora Indians from the land of India. They are persons of Indian origin—that is, they originated from India and so have a connection, but are nevertheless contemporaneously "other." Time and space conspire to demonstrate their separation. The Overseas Citizen of India is, on the other hand, a kind of extension of the idea of India itself, outwards towards its diaspora. Belonging is not indexed by space and time in the same way; it is indexed primarily by the power of ethnicity, which seems to confirm a close association regardless of geographical distance or even attachment to another state. The symbolic nature of OCI status only enhances this point, as it does not complicate citizenship status for diaspora Indians striving for security in their place of settlement.[15] The OCI scheme in this way invokes citizenship on a different kind of level; the legal connotations of citizenship seem almost to be secondary to the image of citizenship as a symbol of an ethnically imagined community. The symbolic nature of this connection is represented by the appearance of the OCI registration card, which self-consciously echoes the form of an Indian passport, whilst, as the US embassy site indicates, it is "in reality" an Indian visa.[16]

[13] See Achal Mehra's article on the website "Little India," entitled "fool's gold": "As presently formulated, overseas Indian citizenship is nothing but a glorified PIO Card scheme, which was introduced to a resounding thud a few years earlier. In one important respect, overseas Indian Citizenship offers less than even the PIO Card, which was modeled after the U.S. Green Card. The Indian Embassy explains the distinction, 'The essential difference between PIO Card and Registration Certificate is that while a PIO Card can also be used as a travel document, the Registration Certificate cannot be so used.'" (http://www.littleindia.com/december2004/FoolsGold.htm, last access: 27 April 2009)

[14] It is worth noting here that although both the High Level Committee and the PIO scheme were initiatives taken by the BJP dominated National Democratic Alliance Government, which held power between 1998 and 2004, the OCI scheme was sanctioned by the Congress dominated United Progressive Alliance government which came into power after 2004 (see also Lall, this volume).

[15] But note the problem with UK citizenship as indicated on http://www.emediawire.com/releases/2005/8/prweb270791.htm (last access: 7 June 2010).

[16] The PIO card is also marked by a similarity to the Indian passport, although its resemblance is mediated by a markedly different colour (light grey), whereas the OCI card's dark blue brings it closer to the black of the full passport.

In keeping with this emphasis on ethnicity and identity, the committee envisages overseas citizenship in terms of a profound cultural connection. The report notes that "deep commitment to their cultural identity has manifested itself in every component of the Indian Diaspora. The members of the Diaspora are, together with Indians, equally the inheritors of the traditions of the world's oldest continuous civilization" (*Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspor, Executive summary,* p. xxvii). Indeed, the report goes on to imply that it is this deep commitment and the "value systems" it engenders which has enabled Indian diaspora communities to be successful and live harmoniously in their multiple diasporic contexts. The maintenance of this connection and the values it enshrines is perceived as a key element in the continued success of the diaspora and in the strengthening of the relationship with the homeland. As an arena in which symbolism and representation reside, then, culture emerges as a fertile ground through which to express the kind of ethnically configured symbolic citizenship that is projected by the OCI scheme.

As part of its projection of the diaspora as a repository of Indian culture, the committee's report makes reference to the role of religious organisations. In particular, the report identifies organisations like the Chinmaya Mission and the Ramakrishna Mission as carriers of Indian culture in diasporic contexts, and as such they should be "provided assistance" by the Indian government (*Report of the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspor, Executive summary,* p. xxviii). There is no detail as to what form such assistance should take, but clearly there is a role recognised by the government for religious organisations in preserving and transmitting the values which have enabled the success of the Indian diaspora.[17] Although the report does not mention the BAPS Swaminarayan Sanstha explicitly, we have already noted the ways in which the Sanstha reflects citizenship values in London, and other more expansively imagined community contexts. The next section focuses on the ways in which these values are reproduced in the context of the Indian capital, Delhi.

Transnational Sanstha in the Nation: The Delhi Akshardham and the Values of Indian Citizenship

One feature of the "Global Highlights" page of the UK Sanstha's Annual Review discussed above was a reference to a meal provision project in New Delhi. This project, known as Aap ki Rasoi, was initiated not by BAPS but by the Delhi government. Seeking cooperation from a range of corporate and NGO partners, such as the Taj Hotel group and the Akshaya Patra Foundation, as well as religious organisations such as ISKCON and BAPS, the programme was initiated to provide free midday meals to homeless people in Delhi. BAPS' involvement in the scheme is coordinated from its massive base in Delhi on the east bank of the Yamuna at Nizamuddin Bridge, the New Delhi Akshardham monument. This enormous complex houses a Shikharbaddha *mandir* like the one in Neasden, as well as a range of

[17] Dickinson and Bailey note that through the OCI scheme the Indian state is "imagining and constructing a diaspora around three poles of membership: professional success, ecumenical Hinduism and multiculturalism" (2007: 765).

exhibitions and other attractions associated with Hinduism and the movement, a management complex and large accommodation block, ornate gardens, and the enormous monument which forms the centrepiece of the site. This site was opened in 2005 amid some controversy, as it is sited in an ecologically sensitive area next to the river.

The Akshardham site is, much like the Neasden *mandir*, a deeply ordered site. Security is tight, but beyond this, the space is marked by its cleanliness and the efficiency with which large numbers of visitors are directed from one to another sector by impeccably dressed volunteers. This sense of order and cleanliness is, it goes without saying, in marked contrast to the general bustle of the busy city beyond the walls of the complex. A sense of heterotopia, similar to that mentioned earlier in relation to the Neasden *mandir*, is evident at the Akshardham. Entering the complex, one is entering a space which is different, although recognisably familiar. This sense of familiar difference provides the context for the articulation of civic values which again is reminiscent of Neasden. At the Delhi site, however, there is a stronger emphasis on the nation in this transmission of values. The exhibits include a boat ride which travels through "10,000 years of India's heritage;" the Hall of Values in which the "timeless messages of Indian culture" are delivered through an animatronic telling of the life of Bhagwan Swaminarayan; the Garden of India is populated by "exquisite bronze statues of India's child gems, valorous warriors, national figures and great women personalities" which "inspire visitors with values and national pride." There is, then, in these extensive exhibits, a very strong sense of the values of Indianness which is delivered in spectacular style by this transnational organisation.

As in Neasden, *seva* is again a key part of this space, and of the narratives associated with the presence of BAPS in the capital and beyond. It appears not only in the exhibits and through the presence of the volunteers, but also on the website where local, national, and global activities are highlighted. Aap ki Rasoi is part of this portfolio. It is particularly significant because it is also part of the local politics of Delhi. Launched in 2008 by the Chief Minister of Delhi, Sheila Dikshit, it is self-consciously a feature of the Congress administration's political programme in the Capital Territory. As such, the scheme has a profile in the press and it indicates the collaboration of the Sanstha with the local administration. In this sense it may be said to represent a kind of interface to political and civil society through which the Sanstha is able to demonstrate its particular values. In fact, although the scheme provides the opportunity for publicity, the author's own experience of the Sanstha's daily operation (during a visit in November 2008) was that it was relatively low profile. The kitchens of the Akshardham, which provide food for the many visitors to the complex through its extensive canteen, provides meals each day at a site in Nizamuddin, close to the Akshardham site, which is primarily occupied by Bengali Muslim migrants living in makeshift shelters. The meals are delivered by *satsangis* from the back of a van to about a hundred people each midday. Perhaps the only real sign of the influence of the Sanstha, apart from the uniforms of the *satsangis*, is the orderly queues, which are controlled regularly by a municipal worker in charge of a nearby public toilet, who made an agreement with the santsangis to take on this role in return for food.

Seva, in this example, is carried out effectively and without any flamboyance. Indeed, this lack of flamboyance may be seen as an indicator of the selflessness of the act, which, as indicated earlier, is critical to its legitimation as *seva*. This point was reiterated by the two Swaminarayan Sadhus who accompanied the author on his visit to the scheme. At the same time, the presentation of *seva* activities such as this forms a major element of the Sanstha's self image, its representation of itself on its websites and in its literature. This is understandable, given the charitable nature of these activities and the need to fund them through donations,[18] but it also didactically projects the values of the Sanstha. These values, as noted above, are transnational in scope. In Neasden we noted the way in which these transnational values were imbricated with new notions of British citizenship fashioned in terms of community cohesion through, for example, the simultaneous celebration of St David's Day and Holi. At the Akshardham, they appear to be primarily imbricated with a discourse of Indian nationalism, or perhaps more precisely, Indian civilisation.

Ong notes the development of a "civilisational discourse" in a South East Asian context, where governments have conflated Islamic ideals with notions of regional distinctiveness to fashion a kind of "Asian Renaissance" in response to the West. She quotes the then deputy prime minister of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim, to demonstrate this point:

> The Renaissance of Asia entails the growth, development and flowering of Asian societies based on a certain vision of perfection; societies imbued with truth and the love of learning, justice and compassion, mutual respect and forbearance, and freedom and responsibility. It is the transformation of its cultures and societies from its capitulation to Atlantic powers to the position of self-confidence and its reflowering at the dawn of a new millennium. (Ong 1999: 227)

In an Indian context, this passage is interesting for the resonance that it has with a similar kind of discourse which has developed in India during the colonial and postcolonial period. The idea of Vedic civilisation as deeply sophisticated and spiritual is a feature of nineteenth century reformist approaches to Hinduism, and persists in a range of political, cultural and religious interpretations of India in the contemporary period (see Lipner 1994: 63–73). Indeed, there is more than a hint of this in the High Level Committee's discussion of culture and the diaspora noted above. The exhibits at the Akshardham draw deeply on this civilisational discourse, projecting it not just as a kind of pride in India's past, but as an inspiration for what can be achieved now—as the BJP politician L. K. Advani comments: "Just until now, people who come to India, who are visitors, who are keen to see what are the marvels of India, they invariably go to Agra, to Taj Mahal, to several other places, where they get a glimpse of India's architectural achievements and a glimpse of history as well. But if they come to Akshardham in Delhi, they would see how spiritualism has flowered in India—how India has become a spiritual giant in the

[18] The Sanstha's charitable activities are now coordinated by BAPS Charities, which was registered as a charity in the United States in 2000—see www.bapscharities.org

world" (http://www.akshardham.com/opinions/national.htm; last access: 9 June 2010). Advani's comment projects the idea of a vital role for the "spiritualism" of Indian/Vedic civilisation as represented by Akshardham in the modern world. As with Ibrahim's "Renaissant Asia," this spiritualism is implicitly offered as an antidote to the materialist rapacity of "Atlantic powers," providing an indication of the new role which Asian civilisations can play in the development of global culture and global values (the very same kind of values as are extant in the development of a global "discourse of faith").

Ong goes on to argue that the civilisational discourse deployed in South East Asia operates as a kind of weapon of exclusion and suppression wielded by governments; it "lends spiritual authority to the practices of individual regimes in managing and suppressing profane others, who are excluded by such discourses" (1999: 231). Advani's pointed reference to the Taj Mahal (above) is a possible indication of the way in which an Indian civilisational discourse could also be deployed in this manner. To a certain extent, this kind of approach is reflected in the Swaminarayan representation of Indian civilisation. It is no surprise, for example, that Islamic India and even to a certain extent low caste India is elided in the Akshardham's exhibits.[19]

The confluence of civilisational, spiritual, and welfare discourses in the Swaminarayan Sanstha provides us with an interesting example of how the Indian state's aspirations to develop an ethnically-configured flexible citizenship, in the context of transnationalism, may be developing some concrete manifestations. The Sanstha is self-evidently a transnational organisation which, at times, erases borders in the name of a global community, in a way that seems to echo the idea of the global Indian community invoked by the OCI scheme. This transnational organisation is also clearly a carrier of Indian culture in the way envisaged by the High Level Committee on the Indian Diaspora. Not only does it preserve and promote Indian culture in the diaspora, but it also supports the regeneration of that culture in India itself. In addition, it contributes to the development agenda of the committee and the state through philanthropic activity, channelling diaspora resources towards welfare and educational work in India, including state-led schemes such as Aap ki Rasoi.

Conclusion

In his exploration of postcolonial Indian citizenship, Mitra suggests that at the heart of the developing notion of "the prototype Indian citizen," a set of "core systemic values" needs to be established as a means of mediating the "supra-political identities" of different communities (2008: 365). We have already seen in this chapter how the moral vision of the Sanstha, building on a global discourse of

[19] It is notable, for example, that the statues of national figures in the Garden of India do not include BR Ambedkar.

religion as community value, is able to work with the community cohesion agenda in the United Kingdom, to popularise the idea of ethnic citizenship being developed in that context. There is a discernible similarity between the idea of community cohesion and that of "core systemic values" in India. The analysis in the second half of this chapter suggests that this transnational organisation is able to deploy its infrastructure and its approaches to society in a way which sits comfortably in both environments. In particular, it produces hybrid concepts of civic virtue/*seva* and narratives of Hindu/Indian civilisation which flow between these sites, constructed in different but connected ways according to context, and persistently framed by a globally resonant discourse of religion. The Sanstha in this sense operates as a resource of order and coherence, making sense of the disorderliness of transnationalism for these two very different nation states in overlapping, interconnected ways. To return to a notion drawn from Ong in the introduction, this situation seems to demonstrate some of the "interdependencies and entanglements between transnational phenomena and the nation states," through which concepts of citizenship as cultural and conceptual flow travel between contemporary Europe and Asia.

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