

Chapter 74

Lived Experience of Religion: Hindu Americans in Southern California

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74.1 Introduction

Contrary to predictions by theorists that with secularization religion would fade from the public realm, in recent years there has been widespread acknowledgement that far from disappearing religion is continuing to play a significant role in the lives of people (Berger 2007; Leonard et al. 2005). This realization has led to a renewed interest in scholarly research on the topic of religion (Cadge and Ecklund 2007; Leonard et al. 2005; Carnes and Yang 2004; Eck 2001; Min and Kim 2002; Warner and Wittner 1998; Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2006, 2009a, b; among others). Much of this scholarship has focused on understanding the role of religion in the lives of “new” (post 1965) immigrants (to the United States) from Asia, Latin America, Middle East, and Africa.

Several important themes have emerged from this literature (for a detailed review see Cadge and Ecklund 2007; Stepick 2005). Studies have pointed to the multifaceted functions of churches, temples and mosques, including provision of economic assistance, social and psychological support, fostering of transnational ties and preservation and transmission of culture and ethnic traditions (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Guest 2005; Levitt 2001; Lin 1999). From these we learn that temples in New York’s Chinatown facilitate employment opportunities by connecting the newly arrived with a network of restaurants owned by their members (Guest 2005), churches in Long Beach target Cambodian youth as potential converts and provide them with economic, social, and educational support (Douglas 2005),

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and that Chinese Buddhist temples sponsor classes aimed at teaching art, calligraphy and language (Lin 1999). Other studies have focused on understanding change, such as the adoption of the congregational model (Yang and Ebaugh 2001; Warner and Wittner 1998), as well as on documenting the role of women, their greater participation, involvement, fundraising, volunteerism and activism (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Abusharaf 1998; Douglas 2005; Leonard 1997). Some of this research has been limited in scope, focusing primarily on the congregational and institutional structure of organized religion in public space (Berger 2007). This is unfortunate because it gives a partial and incomplete understanding of a complex social phenomenon (Berger 2007). Although religious organizations, institutions and structures continue to be significant, as Berger (2007: iii) points out, “much of religious life takes place outside these institutional locales.” But only a few studies (notably Ammerman 2007; Williams 2010; Joshi 2006; McDannell 1995; Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2003, 2009b) have taken a more nuanced approach to the experiences of lived religion, examined the ordinary spatial settings of everyday religion (such as home spaces, dormitory rooms, cars, etc.), expression of religious values in lifestyle choices, such as food, or the ways people engage with the sacred through the physical environment and landscape ecology.

74.1.1 Indians and Hindus in America and Southern California

This study is about Hindu immigrants in Southern California, so a brief introduction. The first significant migration from India occurred primarily from the state of Punjab in the early 1900s. Of these early migrants, only a small number were Hindus, the vast majority being Sikhs (Kitano and Daniels 1995). The immigration act of 1965, with its “detailed preference system based on professional or occupational skills needed in the United States and on family reunification” (Williams 2000: 214), dramatically affected immigration from India. According to the 2010 census there are 3.18 million Asian Indians in the United States. Indians have tended to settle more in urban areas and on the coasts. California, with its premier universities, medical centers, high tech industries and temperate climate, has been a major destination. According to the 2010 census there are 528,176 Indian Americans in California (360,392 in 2000). Approximately 167,800 Indians reside in Southern California’s Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA).

There does not seem to be an accurate count of the number of Hindus in the U.S., and estimates vary between 40 and 80 % of the total Indian population, from 1 to 1.5 million (Joshi 2006: 19; www.ask.com/wiki/Hinduism_in_the_United_States). The number of Hindus in Southern California MSAs could be estimated to be between 67,100 (40 %) and 134,200 (80 %).

74.1.2 Research Questions of Interest

How do Hindu Americans conduct their religious lives? What are their experiences and in what manner and where do they create meaningful religious lives for themselves? This paper examines the everyday reality of lived religion among Hindu Americans in Southern California in public and private spaces, in homes and temples, through food, music, art and commerce. We will focus primarily on three spatial settings, namely the home, temple, and ethnic enclave.

74.2 Method

To answer the above research questions a Naturalistic Field Research method was employed. The primary objectives were to study the social group in its natural setting, to learn in an in-depth way about it and its practices, and to understand as much as possible from an emic point of view. Scholars have used a number of labels for this kind of research, for example, “naturalistic social research” (Blumer 1969; Lofland 1967), and “qualitative social research” (Taylor and Bogdan 1984; Schwartz and Jacobs 1979). A major difference in this research is an intentional examination of space, buildings, and physical objects and representations, mostly ignored in the social science literature.

Several strategies were used to collect data. The focus was on spatial settings, buildings, artifacts, merchandise, particularly those considered sacred, and on religious rituals, music, and art. Naturalistic data were collected through fieldwork. Detailed observations were made of homes, several Hindu temples as well as the ethnic enclave commonly known as Little India located in Southern California.

Interviews were conducted to obtain answers to questions and to enable people to provide descriptions, verbalize their thoughts, views, aspirations and feelings. This included short, casual unstructured interviews, and intensive in-depth unstructured interviews as well as multiple interviews over several sessions with knowledgeable members.

Ethnic newspapers, newsletters, and other publications of the immigrant community were also examined. The use of multiple data collection techniques was designed to capture a wide variety of information, to cross-check when needed and to help increase the validity of the data.

The research, which was part of a larger on-going team project on ethnic and immigrant groups, was conducted in the Indian immigrant community in Southern California. For the home portion, 30 Hindu immigrant families were studied. Initial contact with a few families led to introduction to others. This “snowball” technique helped provide entry to study settings such as homes, and interior sacred spaces, artifacts, and gardens. Quotes from interview data are included to enable description and expression of the participants. The codes at the end of data quotes refer to their location in the data (much like citations), but the names are pseudonyms.

74.3 Experiences and Practice of Diasporic Hinduism in Southern California

74.3.1 Religion in Homes

Home plays a very important role in the religious lives of Hindu Americans. Within their homes, they express, engage and experience religion through art, artifacts, music, landscape ecology and food. This is evident in both interior spaces as well as in outside décor and landscaping. Sacred artifacts are placed at the front entrance, on the threshold, or on the door/doorpost. These provide a blessing for the dwelling, its occupants and visitors. In one home, for example, a miniature *Ganesha* is strategically located above the entry doorway – anyone entering and leaving then walks under the protective gaze of *Ganesha*, the remover of obstacles. In others, the threshold is decorated with flowers, mango leaves, *torans* (above-door hangings of or resembling mango leaves and/or particular flowers), sacred sandalwood paste, sacred symbols such as the ॐ (*Om* or *Aûm*) (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2009b), and pictures of deities, as exemplified in the following description:

Outside the front door, we have a piece of red felt symbolizing good fortune. We also have three pictures of Lord Venkateswara, Goddess Lakshmi Devi, and Bhagwan Sri Satya Sai Baba. (Intrv: HIR/Sita/000590)

On important days of the Hindu calendar, such as *Diwāli*, the front entryway receives special attention. On this day, it is auspicious to invite Goddess *Lakshmi* into the home. Decorative patterns (*rangoli* or *alpona*) executed by women adorn her pathway and the warm glow of candles and clay lamps light her way, creating an ambiance that is both ethereal and inviting especially when juxtaposed against the dark, moonless autumn night.

Inside the home, religious artifacts add to the home aesthetics, and also act as reminders of religion (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2009b). They facilitate the practice of devotional Hinduism, which mostly is a multisensorial experience (Eck 1981). As Eck (1981) points out, this involves “seeing,” “hearing,” “touching,” “tasting” and “smelling” the sacred. One or more senses may be engaged from time to time or all together.

On entering the home one sees the sacred artifacts that adorn the walls, hallways, doorways, shelves, tables, and alcoves. These could be pictures, paintings, sculptures and other forms of religious art (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2009b) (Fig. 74.1). Maya describes her home in the following way:

Religious artifacts are ubiquitous yet subtle in my home from the moment you step in. Upon entering the front door is a large three-foot tall representation of the Goddess Lakshmi. In Hinduism, Lakshmi is the Goddess of prosperity, light, generosity, wisdom, and fortune. The statue is hand carved from wood and was made in India ... Continuing through this formal living room you encounter a small corner table with a statue of the Lord Ganesha on it, who is widely revered as the remover of obstacles. This statue was handmade in India upon my mother’s request, from fiberglass and stands at around two feet ... Moving into the kitchen, there is a small nook with a counter and a cabinet above it, which houses a small prayer area. (Intrv: HIR/Maya/000012). Most significant is the seeing of one’s deities in



Fig. 74.1 Kitchen altar (Source: Cultural Ecology Research Team)

one's home *mandir* (temple). Every day a devotee seeks *darsan* (visitation) a time for one-on-one personalized devotion and communion (see also Eck 1981). The following is a description of the *mandir* in Kanchana's home:

The home temple is [located] in a room facing east—the direction of the rising sun. The temple holds representations of [several] Hindu deities, each aligned against double glass doors, enabling sunlight to enter. A main theme color of the room is red ... Every morning and evening, a diya (lamp) is lit and burns throughout the day, illuminating the deities along with the sun. (Intrv: HIR/Kanchana/000012W)

Sounds of devotional music, which may be played at specific times during the day or at any time, may greet visitors. Some families consider it auspicious to be awakened by the sounds of sacred music.

Religious music is played daily in Kanchana's home ... From the time a person wakes up until 10 p.m. bhajans (devotional music) are playing in the background. The same CD is placed on repeat in the home temple, and the sound softly fills the downstairs. On Saturdays, the CD is switched to that of the Hanumana Chalisa, since Tuesdays and Saturdays are widely revered as days to celebrate Lord Hanumana. Hanumana is central to the Indian epic Ramayana, and is a symbol of strength and devotion. (Intrv: HIR/Kanchana/000012S). There may be live music performances at other times. In Maya's home, her mother and grandmother (when she visits) often sing during daily *pooja*. This too, is seen as an offering to the gods and deities. Some families host collective *bhajan* (devotional songs in praise of the gods and goddesses) or *kirtan* singing sessions wherein families get together on significant days or weekends and collectively sing *bhajans* and/or *kirtans*. There is a lead singer accompanied by traditional Indian musical instruments. The following is a description of a *bhajan* session.

In our family we host bhajans once a month. Forty to fifty people are invited to participate. It usually takes place in the living room. Furniture is rearranged so that guests can sit on the

floor. Everybody joins in the singing ... There are Indian drums (*tablā*), and Indian keyboard (harmonium) and cymbals. One person usually leads and the congregation follows. (Intrv: HIR/Sita/000390). The sounds of religion can include the chanting of *mantras* and *shlokas* (verses from the holy texts), the ringing of bells and the blowing of *shankha* (conch shells) for special occasions. And, it can also include (the sounds of) silence to facilitate the tranquility and quiet of meditation.

Sacred smells—the scent of fresh flowers—roses, jasmines, gardenias comingling with the fragrance of sandalwood paste, incense, and camphor help create a sacred microcosm. Home gardens and landscape ecology further contribute to this ambiance. Maya explains:

In my garden, we have a plethora of flowers and fruits that are used during poojas (prayers). Each plant that we have was chosen either for its connection back to India, or something that my mother saw as beautiful and good to offer during prayer. Some of the flowers we have are roses, calla lilies, irises, jasmines, hibiscus ... We also have fruits, that are offered during pooja—such as the sacred mango...mango leaves are used in décor and during most Hindu ceremonies ... some other fruits that are offered from our garden are oranges, strawberries, guavas, passion fruits and loquats. (Intrv: HIR/Maya/000012W). Similarly, Kanchana says:

Flowers are used in prayers or pooja as an offering for the gods. Many of the flowers are grown at home so that they can be cut and offered fresh ... Significant are jasmines, roses, and small flowers that look like elephants, representative of Lord Ganesha. (Intrv: HIR/Kanchana/000012S)

Immigrant Hindu families express their devotion through *pooja*, as described by Radha:

Pooja is a daily process. In our home pooja begins with prayer to Lord Ganesha. Before prayers, we put kumkum (vermillion) on the base of the feet of all the deities. Next, we place fresh flowers or garlands, on the pictures of all the deities. We light incense. After that we offer water, this can be coconut water, plain water with karpuram (camphor) or plain water with tulasi (holy basil) to the gods and goddesses and then we drink it three times. We offer fresh fruit to be blessed by the gods and goddesses. After all of the above is done we prostrate in devotion called *ashtanganamaskaram* (body prostration). (Intrv: HIR/Radha/000095)

Engagement with the sacred also involves food, the preparation of celebratory/ritual food, eating consecrated food, fasting, and the enforcement of food taboos. For Kanchana's grandmother, each of her daily meals is seen as an offering to the Gods; she meticulously prepares them in the kitchen, refraining from tasting or consciously smelling any of the cooked items; the first taste and smell are reserved for the deities; it is only after the offering is made that she serves herself and sits down to eat. For most families however serving cooked food at the altar is only done on special holidays and/or *poojas*. On such occasions a vegetarian meal may be prepared or *payasam* (rice pudding) may be offered which when transformed into *prasaad* (consecrated food) through offering, prayer and blessing, is distributed and consumed by family members and invited guests. For holidays such as *Ganesha*

chaturthi, ritual food is prepared, particularly those that are believed to be favored by *Ganesh*. Families take special care to prepare *modakam*, steamed balls of rice stuffed with coconut and dipped in brown sugar syrup. Ritual foods for other holidays, include *pongal* rice, which is rice cooked with milk and jaggery. While cooking, it is considered auspicious to allow the rice to spill over, symbolizing prosperity for the family. This item is prepared for the *pongal* holiday.

Various food taboos are also enforced in many families. Some of the senior household members exercise more stringent control. Maya's grandmother practices the strictest version of vegetarianism refraining from all meat and meat products (beef, chicken, lamb, goat), fish, eggs, and even onion and garlic. Kanchana's mother and grandmother do not consume any meat. Most Hindus refrain from eating beef, but a few do not follow any food related restrictions.

74.3.2 Religion in Vehicles and on the Body

In transportation vehicles too Hinduism can become evident. Many families take their newly acquired cars to their temple to be sanctified and blessed. This makes them expressive of religion as they place pictures or representations of *Ganesh* in their vehicles to protect the driver, the occupants and the car and to ensure safe journeys.

Amrita explains:

In each one of my parent's cars, they have a small round Ganesh on the dashboard above the stereo. The Ganeshas in each car are of different colors, but they are smooth in texture, about 2-1/2" in height ... They are all stuck using a small white sticky double-sided tape pad. They put the Ganeshas ... to protect the driver and any passengers from harm or danger when the car is being used. Also, my parents just like the idea of having something sacred and spiritual not only in their homes but in their cars as well. (Intrv: HIR/Amrita/000012S)

Others may play religious music while driving as described by Maya:

My mother ... keeps a few CD's [of religious music] in her car that she will listen to on her way to work. (Intrv: HIR/Maya/000012S)

Similarly, Savitri's parents when they first enter their car always listen to *bhajans* (devotional music) before they listen to anything else. Furthermore, bumper stickers and car number plates can also be used to express religion.

Additionally, religious jewelry, medallions, amulets and lockets are worn on the body. Of special significance are ॐ ("Om" or *Aum*) and *Ganesh*. Made of gold or silver, these may be purchased or acquired during pilgrimage or may be given as gifts, marking important life stage milestones. Individuals also carry pictures of important Hindu deities in their wallets and purses for emotional comfort, blessing, and protection.

74.3.3 Religion in Temples

Temple Hinduism represents another aspect of the religious experience of Hindu Americans. In Southern California, Hindu temples have incorporated different styles and genres of temple design and architectural form.

Some are monumental structures, built from scratch on land purchased by devotees. One example is the Sri *Venkateshwaraswamy* Temple in Calabasas, Southern California, located on a site in close proximity to nature (Fig. 74.2). The architecture follows the South Indian style of temple design with towering *shikharas* (spires), *gopurams* (gateways) and appropriate location of the *garba-griha* (womb chamber), the sacred sanctorum, innermost shrine of the Hindu temple. Inside the temple complex, adjacent to the main shrine dedicated to Lord *Venkateshwara*, are several smaller shrines. There is a spacious courtyard where a large gathering can be accommodated for collective prayers and singing. This space can also be used to create a temporary fire altar, when needed in Hindu ritual (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2009b).

Pre-built structures may be “modified” to create a place for deities and worship (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2006; see also Weightman 1993). Such is the case with the *Mandir* in Irvine. Being located in a commercial building, its external décor is devoid of any ornamentation and lacks the appearance of a “traditional” temple. Inside, a large hall has been transformed. Arranged around the wall, on elevated platforms are a number of mini altars or shrines to different Hindu deities such as Lord *Venkateshwara*, *Radha*, *Krishna*, *Jagannath*, *Rama*, *Sita*, *Lakshman*, *Hanumana*, and *Shiva* among others. This modified space functions as individual and as collective prayer space.

The third kind is home temples. Homes or parts are converted into temples with the installation of one or more deities along with space for devotees to pray.



Fig. 74.2 Sri *Venkateshwaraswamy* Temple in Calabasas, North Face (Source: Cultural Ecology Research Team)

Home temples permit people to attend and participate in prayers or pray individually. The *Kālī Mandir* in Laguna Beach is an example. Here the organization of the sanctuary, the arrangement of niches with deities, a courtyard with the sacred *tulasi*, a garden landscaped with sacred trees and placement of outdoor shrines in the midst of flowers and foliage, all provide an intimate and personal ambiance for prayer, meditation, devotion and spirituality.

Although different in architectural style and design, these temples form important settings for individual prayers, collective rituals, and for observance and celebration of Hindu holidays. For example Hindu Americans from the state of Orissa, India, gathered at the *Mandir* in Irvine, to celebrate *Ratha Yatra* (literally translated the journey of the Chariot). On this holiday, in the sacred city of Puri in India, Lord *Jagannath* ritually leaves his temple abode in a glorious chariot pulled by his devotees to symbolically visit the neighborhood. Following this tradition, the diasporic Oriya community, assembled an elaborately decorated *ratha* (chariot). After morning *pooja* (prayers) at the *Mandir*, devotees, some singing and dancing, accompanied by the rhythmic beat of drums and the clashing of cymbals, carefully placed Lord *Jagannath* on the *ratha* (chariot) for a short ride through the streets of Irvine adjacent to the temple (Fig. 74.3). Men, women and children helped pull the chariot in a processional ritual that was colorful, joyous, and spiritually charged.

Besides, collective rituals and celebrations, temples are also settings for performance arts. Singers and dancers “offer” their talent to the deities and provide “live” entertainment for the Gods and Goddesses, many of whom are patron deities for the arts. All classical Indian dance performances begin with an invocation to



Fig. 74.3 Rath Yatra parade on street (Source: Cultural Ecology Research Team)

Lord *Shiva*, who is the Lord of Dance (*Nataraja*) and to *Ganesha* to remove any impediment or glitches in the performance. Goddess *Saraswati* is the patron deity of music and is represented with a *veena* (a stringed instrument) in her hand. In *Kālī Mandir* devotees sing *bhajans* (devotional songs) on a regular basis after evening prayers. Some lead the assembled devotees in singing while at other times they sing individually. The songs are in praise of the gods or renditions of *shlokas* (sacred verses and mantras). Sometime, traveling musicians from India come to the temple to “offer” their music to the deities. Similarly, exponents of classical Indian dance forms such as *Bharata Natyam* or *Odissi* also perform in temples. For the celebration of *Durga Puja* or *Navaratri* women from the local Gujarati community in Southern California come to *Kālī Mandir* to dance the *Garba*, a colorful, rhythmic, joyous dance performed with *dandiyas* (sticks).

74.3.4 Religion in Ethnic Enclaves

Religion is practiced and experienced not only in homes, temples, and cars, but also in commercial enterprises and businesses. Little India in Artesia, Southern California, is an example of an ethnic enclave where religion plays an important role especially in the marketing of religious commodities and merchandise. Located on Pioneer Boulevard, this enclave with its many stores and extensive goods, restaurants and markets, caters to the religious needs of Hindu Americans. (Although religious products of other religions are also sold, these are not the focus here and so are not being included here.) Objects and artifacts such as simple and elaborate pre-designed *mandirs* (home temples), large and small *murtis* (carved representations) of Hindu deities: *Shiva*, *Parvati*, *Saraswati*, *Lakshmi*, *Ganesha*, *Krishna* (among others) made out of different materials including gold, silver, brass, marble, wood, and gypsum plaster, some hand carved in India, are sold in shops in the enclave (Fig. 74.4). In addition, ritual objects, used during *pooja*, such as *kalasham* (copper/brass vessels), *deepam* (lamps), pre-made cotton wicks for oil lamps, *karpuram* (camphor), *dhoopam* (incense), *ghanti* (bells), artifacts for creating a *havan* (fire altar), *shānkha* (conch shell), sandalwood, flowers and *torans* (floral wreath/garlands), decorative items such as religious art (for example *Shiva* as *Nataraja*), wall hangings, paintings depicting narratives from the Hindu Epics the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, religious texts religious CD’s and videos, Hindu calendars decorated with religious art, as well as protective accessories such as medallions worn as necklaces, bracelets, amulets, religious bumper stickers for automobiles and more are available for purchase.

Businesses in Little India cater to the celebration of Hindu life-cycle rituals of *annapraasana* (ritual feeding of an infant), *upanayan* (thread ceremony for adolescent Brahmin boys), and *vivaha* (wedding). They sell merchandise that include ritual objects, such as silver plates, bowls, cups, spoons, *jayamālas* (floral garlands) exchanged by bride and groom during wedding ceremony, decorative *mandapam*



Fig. 74.4 Religious icons on sale (Source: Cultural Ecology Research Team)

(altars) for the ceremony, and so on. In addition, for special Hindu holidays stores advertise and market relevant products such as *rakhis* (decorative bracelets exchanged between brother and sister) for *rakshā-bandhan*, *gulal* (colored powder) used in Holi, the festival of colors and *diyas* (clay lamps) lit for *Diwāli*, the festival of lights. Since new clothes are worn on *Diwāli*, clothing stores offer sales and discounts on clothes, such as sarees, *salwaar-kameez*, *ghaghra*, *cholis*, for the occasion. *Diwāli* is also time for families to get together and for friends to visit one another, exchange sweets and host parties. Stores do brisk business in selling varieties of candy and sweets, such as *jalebis*, *laddoos*, *peras*, among others.

Besides products and merchandise on sale, many storeowners have in-store small altars where *pooja* is done every morning before opening the doors for business (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2005). Flowers and fruits are offered, incense lit and religious music played; some stores have religious art displayed on the walls such as framed and unframed pictures of Hindu deities and statues and sculptures displayed in glass cabinets. Auspicious signs, such as the ॐ (*Om* or *Aūm*), are visible as well and floral garlands and mango leaves decorate store entrances on special days of the Hindu calendar. Inauguration of new businesses and opening of new stores often involves religious ceremony, such as *pooja*, with or without the presence and involvement of priests, and the lighting of lamps. In addition, restaurants have incorporated Hindu food taboos in their menu; many will not serve beef or beef products in keeping with the Hindu dietary restrictions and some are strictly vegetarian with no meat, eggs, fish, or chicken on their menu.

74.4 Concluding Discussion

Several important themes emerge from this study. First, this study reinforces the idea that place is important in religious practice, as pointed out by Sopher (1967) (also Weightman 1993; Singh 2011). This study further suggests that the conceptualization of place should be expanded to include temporary, transient, transitory, and unusual places. Religious lives and practices are conducted in various locations and so lived-religion is not confined to one kind of setting. For Hindus, most important, in addition to temples, are homes. Homes are seen as sacred space and set up accordingly. In homes, permanent and fixed altar spaces are where gods and goddesses reside and prayers are offered, but other spaces in the home may be converted temporarily for religious purposes (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2009b; Mazumdar 2012). Home gardens can serve as spaces for growing flowers and fruits required for worship rituals, and for religious activities (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2012). For Hindus in America, other locations for religion are natural settings, restaurants, shops, work places (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2005), ethnic enclaves, streets, and vehicles. Religion and the sacred sphere can be located, fixed, permanent, and formal (as with temples), or transportable and carried along by an individual on the body and in vehicles. Sacredness lies within and without the person.

Second, is the significance of “ordinary” places and spatial settings in the religious lives of immigrants. Attempt is made to transform the “ordinary” into sacred space through the placement of artifacts and performance of rituals. This study documents how homes, vehicles and commercial spaces become important sites of religion. Religion is thus present, visible and relevant in everyday routine activities such as lighting incense in the store/restaurant before opening for business in the morning, or driving to work with sacred music playing in the car.

Third, is the relationship between religion and the arts. In Hinduism, included in lived religion are artifacts (made or purchased), art making, music and dance performance, actions, activities and rituals conducted singly or with others. The making of art, and performance of music and dance are seen as expressions of this intimate personal and devotional connection. Musicians and dancers view their performance not merely as artistic display and of mastery, but also as an act of devotional offering of their talent to the divine in gratitude and self-effaced humility.

Fourth is the symbolic meaning of food and the role of religion in regulating food choices, establishing boundaries through taboos, promoting self-discipline through fasting, and expressing joy through celebratory foods.

Fifth is the experiential aspects of religious behavior and how ordinary everyday activities from landscaping, nurturing fruit trees, selecting flowers for prayer, decorating homes, choosing colors, lighting lamps and candles can help cultivate a deeper sensitivity and engagement with religion and with nature (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2009b). Experiencing religion does not only take the form of congregational prayer or sermon on a mandated day and time, but can include the nuanced embrace of religion in every day life and activities.

Sixth, individual communion is seen as very important. This implies that many activities and events might be individual and family focused. Co-presence of large numbers of persons, and collective activities may also occur and be significant.

Seventh, this study was about the practice and experience of Hinduism by immigrants in Southern California. Increased focus on lived religion and how religion affects everyday activities and spaces may reveal more about how this happens, or does not happen in other religions. There is evidence that some of the practices and experiences described here may not be peculiar to Hinduism alone but may occur in a few other religions (for example Shintoism and Buddhism) (see also Mazumdar et al. 2000; Mazumdar 2011).

Finally, this study supports Berger's (2007) claim that secularization theorists were not entirely correct and that religion is continuing to play an important role in various settings. However, the lens to study religion should be widened to include at least the settings described here, namely formal temples, home temples, homes, neighborhoods and public spaces, workplaces (Mazumdar and Mazumdar 2005), vehicles, the body, and more. Not doing so results in missing important aspects of religious practice and experience. The geography of religion seems to be much broader than previously thought.

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