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The Practice of Hinduism in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study investigates the vibrant expression of Hinduism in Malaysia, focusing on the Indian diaspora that has predominantly settled in the region over the last three to four generations. The Indian community, initially brought in during the colonial era for work in plantations and construction, has managed to maintain a distinct cultural and religious identity through the establishment of temples, vernacular schools, and cultural institutions such as drama-sheds. These institutions play a pivotal role in preserving and fostering communal bonds. Methods and Methodology: This research employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating fieldwork and library studies. Fieldwork includes participant observation and in-depth interviews with community members, religious leaders, and cultural practitioners. The library study involves an extensive review of historical records, religious texts, and contemporary scholarly works on Hinduism in Malaysia. This dual approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the socio-religious dynamics within the community. Implications: The study highlights the critical role of subaltern social institutions in promoting cultural cohesion and continuity among the Malaysian Hindu community. It reveals how these institutions have enabled the community to navigate and adapt to historical and contemporary challenges, ensuring the preservation of their cultural and religious heritage. The findings contribute to broader discussions on migration, cultural resilience, and the integration of traditional practices within modern societal frameworks. This research underscores the importance of recognizing and supporting the role of community-driven institutions in sustaining cultural diversity and religious pluralism in multicultural societies.

Keywords: *Domestic Observances, The Public Shrine Practices, The Temple Practices, Guru Devotion Embedded, Hidden Practices, Hindu Religious, Rationalist Practices*

INTRODUCTION

Indians are deeply spiritual people." This is an everyday truism. Just like the Muslim or the Jew, to an average Indian, religion matters much. An Indian to create his private religion in the end, and no two persons can agree as to the tenets of their religion. These are deeply insightful observations for which the researcher must add what is true of all religionists as well. This is an important assumption. What an individual Hindu constructs of his religion is a deeply personal understanding of faith, and one cannot label it 'Hinduism' without qualification. The fact that a Hindu can draw such a boundary suggests a boundary does exist, and a very nuanced boundary; therefore, readers must take caution about drawing too sharp a conclusion about the Hindu phenomenon that I describe in this chapter. Here, I will describe the multi-faceted aspect of Hinduism and its practices in general in Malaysia. However, before doing so, this paper wants to present some broad sociological factors that define the practice and the self-definition of Hinduism.

First, the general character of the present-day Hindu Indian community in Malaysia is the fact that the general population is of recent migrant origin, that is within the last three or four generations. The bulk of Indians arrived between 1890 and 1940 largely to be employed in the plantations, railways, and construction sectors. Though there was a small population of Indians who arrived as prisoners to do menial labour prior to 1890, in the main, they were not part of the British slave trade. That means attempts were made to preserve a semblance of community wherever the Indians were settled. Their arrival was documented, and their settlement, welfare, and administration were policy driven that was supervised by the Government of the day. That is not to say it

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was the best of conditions in which they arrived and lived, but it was not slavery. One cannot gloss over the often-abject impoverishment, labour exploitation, and marginalization that the Indian people suffered, and it is an intrinsic part of their history.

Some writers have characterised the post-1824 colonial labour movement as a "new form of slavery", but it is an unwarranted generalization. The conditions of slavery would be disruptive to the social bonds of the community and would have created the conditions for cultural dissolution. However, what we do find in the Indian community are temples, vernacular schools, newspapers, drama sheds, and a few ambiguously toddy shops. These represent, for want of a better expression, subaltern social institutions around which cultural elements of the people find expression, i.e. give cohesion and continuity to the community. The cohesion and continuity of the people was not only between the plantation and their village of origin but also in Malaya between the plantation and the city, where the urban Indians lived.

The rural Indians were culturally and politically dependent on a sliver of English-educated and urban Indians who had access to political power via the British policy of representation. This particular class of emergent elite Indians in Malaya created and perpetuated, until recently, a political narrative explaining the social conditions and ills of the poorer Indians who, in turn, were, in many senses, cocooned in the rural plantations. The narrative was designed to inculcate a sense of victimization and dependency upon the political leadership that only they, the urban, could provide (Janaki Jeyaraman, 2009). In the pre-war Central Indian Association of Malaya (CIAM) and likewise with the war-time Indian Independence League (IIL) of Subhash Chandra Bose, it was so with the post-war Federation of Indian Organizations (FIO). It was so with the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC). However, today, this has broken down so completely that a deep mistrust of the Indian traditional leadership has set in. With better education and urban migration of the Indians, a sea change was possible, and it precipitated into an uprising or, more accurately, a near-uprising, the Hindraf Rally in 2007.

However, the importance of the Hindraf Rally is its failure to become a national uprising, which was thought of as a natural consequence of the public outpouring of grievances. Instead, it became evident that the Hindu values are not that of disenfranchised slaves (adimai), the core Hindraf narrative, but of a people who are clearly rooted in values that are oriented towards a continuum of family, ethnicity, society, and nation. These are what one may call Indian middle-class values. It is researchers' observation that Malaysian Indians value citizenship, respect labour, understand the meaning of material assets, believe in God's providence, honour their ancestors, desire a political say in their social life, know there has been an incremental improvement in their access to social amenities; they seek and place a high cultural premium in school, education and language; exhibit a deep interest in the arts such as drama, poetry, dance, and music; and perhaps exhibit a pinch of pride in the particularisms of being Indian.

The fact that the vast majority of Indians in Malaysia are not of merchant origin shows itself in the general lack of understanding of commerce, investments, and modern economics. They fare poorly in corporate wealth, and it was only since the late 1990s that Indians have become very well represented in marketing and sales, management, and professional sectors (Labour et al. 1997). The new generation of Indians is highly motivated to innovate, achieve, and work hard for material progress. The reason for this shift of their cultural gears so fast is a complex one that is somehow tied up with their can-do attitude, a sense of ethnic pride, and willingness to learn. The narrative often touted by Indian political leaders, of course, runs counter to this. They would point out the pockets of backwardness, criminality and poverty within the community as a sign of systemic oppression and exploitation. However, they are not representative of the general community which is more self-confident and willing to take responsibility for their social objectives. Moreover, of late, they are willing to call the bucket by its name.

It is important to mention that part of this vigorous cultural development of Indians is also due to the freedom experienced in Malaysia. The “divide-and-rule” policy of the British is often vilified among certain quarters of scholars and politicians, but the fact remains that after Independence, the national leaders did not choose to impose any hegemonic policies either. Apart from the wisdom of learning Bahasa Melayu as a national language, other languages were respected and allowed to prosper. Very few people remember today that there were primary schools for Punjabi, Malayalam, Gujarati, and Telegu in Malaysia. Tamil is well-represented in the media

as well. This respect for cultural boundaries also spilt onto religion, and the festivals of Deepavali and Thaipusam are public holidays in most states. More than five hundred Tamil schools are allowed to observe Pongal and Saraswathi Pooja. This sort of maturity and acceptance has allowed ethnic pride to become part of the national character. It is not felt out of place to be Indian or Hindu as a Malaysian. This fundamental freedom is a vital tenet of the social doctrine of Malaysia, and it has proved wise. It is also foundational to understanding Hindu expression in Malaysia.

Hindus and Co-Religionists

The majority of Hindus in Malaysia are Indians. The word "Indian" may denote one's place of origin, but in the everyday life of an Indian, it is not so much a reference to India but a counter-reference to Chinese and Malays. When a Hindu says that he is an Indian, he is saying that he is not Chinese or not Malay. This is important to an Indian, because that is how the resources of the nation are divided and allocated. In the same way, part of the Hindu self-identity in Malaysia is defined by their relationship with their co-religionists with whom they share the national space and against whom they interrogate their identity. The below basic statistics are culled from the Census of 2000 and 2010. See Appendix A.

It is possible to see from these tables a diversity within the Indian community, the majority of whom are Hindus. 84.5% in 2000, and 2010, that figure went up to 86.2%. Their co-religionists in the main are Christians, who, despite their growth in number, were 7.7% of the community in 2000 but dropped to 6.0% in 2010. Then there are the Indian Muslims, whose population made up 3.8% in 2000 and went up to 4.1% in 2010. Another equally significant group of people co-existing among Indians, co-religionists, they may be the rationalists or anti-religionists – they are in decline, dropping from 2.7% of the community in 2000 to 2.0% in 2010.

The increase in the overall Malaysian population over this period between 2000 and 2010 was 15.9%. The Indian community increase computed likewise shows a 12.7% increase, but the Hindu community had registered a rate of 14.3%, and the shortfall of the overall figure was due to the shrinking number of the Indian Christian community that shrunk by 12.0%! This effectively makes the Indian Christians a "diminishing community", but do not mind that for now, Hinduism has proved to be a growing religion appealing to people even outside the Indian community. For example, the Chinese represent a slight shift in the way Hindus will understand their social identity in the future. See Table 3 below.

The statistics also show Hindus in 2000 were predominantly distributed among the west coast states of West Malaysia, contiguously between Kedah and Negeri Sembilan, with a large pocket in Johore. 93.4% of the Hindu population live in these states, with 43.9% concentrated in the Klang Valley. In 2010, there was hardly any change in the distribution of the Hindus. 92.8% of Hindus still live in Kedah Negeri Sembilan and Johore, with 43.8% living in Klang Valley. It is also interesting to note that in 2000 Indians were lumped up with "others" in East Malaysia, and an indirect inference indicated 14,084 residents there were Hindus, and this showed a marginal increase to 15,505 in 2010. This is interesting because it shows that except for a steady internal migration to Klang Valley, the Hindu population is largely stable and did not experience any major economic upheavals that pushed people into the cities. It is upon this background of Indian migration history, cultural continuities, vibrant politics and modern progressive policies that Malaysian Hinduism finds expression.

The Religious Observances of Hindus

The Hindu religious landscape of the Indians in Malaysia can be demarcated by (a) domestic observances, (b) the public shrine practices, (c) the temple practices, and (d) the guru devotion embedded in the total phenomenon called Hinduism is what I call (e) hidden practices; and contingent to all Hindu religious practices is the (f) rationalist practices. These categorizations are merely an imagined layered configuration with no real primacy of one stratum over the other. There are other very impressive and scholarly ways to configure the religion, taking into account carefully built history, archaeological findings, analyses of sacred texts and their philosophy, and modern sociological constructs such as social stratification, feminism, and economic issues. Each area mentioned here overlaps and is driven by the intensely polarised debate that brings into the ring such issues as regional, caste, and linguistic rivalry. Here, the researcher has presented a structure upon which to posit the currently observable practices of the phenomenon of Hinduism in Malaysia. It should not be a

facsimile of the religion but a fairly good road map to navigate inside the phenomenon. The starting point is the domestic observances, but it could be any of the other categories mentioned.

Domestic Observances

Within the ambit of domestic observances are wedding rites, funeral rites, and memorial rites. These rites are religious and are governed by religious understandings, but here, the paper focuses on worship. Moreover, it is centred around what the Hindus call the sami-medai. It is often translated as 'altar' to mean a place where offerings are made, but very often, it is decorated like a shrine. It may be a simple, flat surface of a cupboard with a picture propped against the wall and a lamp, but it can also be a stylized wooden structure that is meant to resemble a temple within which the images of deities are placed. In certain homes, the room itself is set aside for the shrine (sami-medai-arai) and can reach elaborate proportions with various paraphenali of worship placed there. Some homes have a true altar where sacrifices are offered, usually a cockerel, but these are usually maintained on the compound of the house. They can be anywhere the family had deemed suitable - even in the backyard of the house, away from the view of visitors.

The most common is the shrine located inside and outside of the house itself. The basic item placed there is primarily the agal - the lamp. The other items found there are: thubakal for the incense (sambrani); suda-thatu or a stylized sudakal for the camphor (karpuram or sudam); a copper sembu for water (thirtham); bathi-stand for incense sticks (udhubathi); kaparai for the ashes (thiruniru or vibudhi); and chimil for the saffron powder (kungumam). These items are called small vessels or kurumadal. Besides these, there is a small brass bell (mani); a machete (aruval) for the breaking of coconut and a basin (pathiram) for containing its water (ilanir). One can see immediately that the paraphenalia that the terracotta or brass lamp is more primitive in origin than the Arabian imports of incense, incense sticks, and their 'stand'; and though saffron powder is known to Tamils in medieval period of Tamilnadu, it too is not native to the land. Therefore, it is safe to say that the puja (also called kumbududhal or arathanai) that follows has evolved from more primitive forms by assimilating new cultural inputs. Therefore, the most primitive form of setting up an altar or a shrine is a lit lamp. Moreover, indeed, that is what is found in the poorest of homes.

For conducting the pujai where there is no shrine, as in a new house, a kalasam is made. In a metal or earthen kudam, which is a stylized pot, some scented water and cow's urine (komiam) are placed. A ring of mango leaves (ma-ilai) pointing outward is placed on the rim of the mouth of the kudam. A Pealed coconut, often yellowed with turmeric, is placed on the mouth of the kudam. This is the kalasam that has the effect of a stylized image of a sitting person. This is treated as the devotee's patron deity. Moreover, thus, a very temporary domestic shrine is improvised. If the patron deity is Ganapathi or if Ganapathi is to be invoked, a fist-sized mound of sandal paste mixed with tumeric is made and the holy grass called arugampul (Cynodon dactylon or in gardener's language "bermuda grass") is planted on its head.

In most cases, the typical domestic observance begins with the daily morning obeisance at the family shrine. After the morning ablutions, even before the moisture of the wash dries, one puts fresh oil and, lights the 'altar lamp' and beseeches the deities for blessing and protection for the family. The use of freshly picked flowers, incense, bells and the sacred hymnal (thevaram) may be offered as a daily ritual. The placing of the kurumadal on the shrine is random but the worship or pujai follows a pattern. After the shrine is cleaned and wiped of the dust from the previous pujai, and flowers are placed wherever possible, the agal is lit. The smouldering charcoal is placed on the thubakal. Fresh water is placed in the sembu.

The saffron powder and the ashes are replenished. Incensed smoke (thubam from scattering bits of sambrani on smouldering charcoal) and fire (thibam from burning karpuram) are offered before the images of the deities while the bell is sounded. Incense sticks are lit and placed near the lamp. Certain days may be deemed auspicious, but Fridays are commonly held to be auspicious for this familial observance. During these special days bananas (vaḷai), coconut (thengai), betel leaves (vetrilai), and sahvings of betel (paku) are also offered. The coconut is also shaved and prepared for the ritual. It is carefully split into two with the machette and the water in it drained into a basin. Two betel leaves are placed in each half of the coconut, upon which two yellow ripe bananas are placed, and two lit incense sticks are stuck into it. These are placed on either side of the main lamp of the shrine. If there are pictures of ancestors, pictures of other deities in the house, or the holy basil (thulasi) is planted at

the entrance, smoky incense is also offered to them as well. Usually, the person perambulates around the house at this point. After returning to the shrine, petitions are humbly made either audibly or silently. The ritual is concluded by taking some holy ash by the finger and anointing one's forehead.

Moreover, if others were around the ash is offered to them. A married woman usually asks that the deity bless their marriage string (thali) and will anoint herself and anoint the strings or the ornaments strung to it. This is an indirect way of asking for the longevity of the husband. Anyone who missed the ritual time, may enter the place where the shrine is and annoint oneself of the ash. There are variations to this domestic ritual peculiar to the family customs, the deity concerned, or the custom of the people.

Much expectation for this observance is placed upon the women of the family. Closely related to domestic observances is the adornment of the forehead with a potu. This has been a source of contentions among Christians and Muslims arising from the fact, that it has various purposes (Kalaimuthu, 2008). There are mainly vasambupotu for infants, karupupotu for children and unmarried girls, kungumapotu for married women, bakthipotu to denote piety to a particular deity, kavupotu to denote participation in blood sacrifice, inapotu to denote racial identity; and aḷagupotu that are purely cosmetic use. Except for the bakthipotu and kavupotu, which are primarily religious and which is marked distinctly differently for each type of devotional practice, the kungumapotu and the aḷagupotu can overlap into religiousity; the rest are purely domestic. A potu is adorned each morning during the morning obeisance.

The shrine itself often is decorated with the images of various deities. A cursory survey of domestic shrines seems to convey a random collection of deities, but the Tamil religious observances in Malaysia include principal deities of an entire practice: Siva (saivam), Vishnu (vainavam), Amman (sathvigam), Murugan (kaumaram), and Ganapathi (ganapathyam). The worship of Suriyan (saumaram) has fallen out of practice. The female counterpart of Siva is parvadhi, and that of Murugan are theivanai and vali but usually they are not worshipped on their own. The female deity that are included within these traditions are sarasvathi, and lechumi. There may be images of those outside this pantheon such as Buddha, Krishna, Rama, Hanuman or the newly popularised kuberan; or someone with regional or ancestral connection such as madhurai-viran, muniandi, nagamal, sangili-karupan, muniswaran, aiyapan, or aiyanar.

Furthermore, pictures and figurines of sages, gurus, ancestors, shrines, or temples may be placed on the altar. On a rare occasion, one may find placed among the images of other lesser-known deities, symbols or pictures of one's private Tantric goddess, or a representation of a datho. The researcher did not observe a charm or talisman on the family shrine except for plates called yenthiram, but objects placed there include the following: sacred books; conch; a single large rudraksha seed or a chain of smaller seeds; other prayer beads; packets of vibudhi from the temple; Hindu Calendar; small pieces of cloth; peacock feathers; a glass of water and oil with a lit wick floating on top; musical instruments; and images of admired persons such as Swami Vivekananda and Gandhi.

This daily routine is usually further amplified by reckoning the holy days and the auspicious hours. The Hindu system of monthly, daily and hourly auspicity is so complex that there are professionals who produce almanacs to keep track of it. Moreover, this is the primary locus where a professional priest gains a role in the family. He is the soothsayer and time keeper in the rites of passage – birth, eating of solid food, coming of age, marriage, getting pregnant, motherhood, widowhood, death, and memorials. He also determines the lesser observances set aside for fasting, ablutions, clearing out the pantry, and days of special food observances. Sometimes, this time keeping can get out of control and lead to domestic conflicts when a more observant elder demands the keeping of the auspicious time (nala-neram) to leave the house to work, collect debts, travel time to return home, purchase a vehicle (or to take possession of it); have a hair-cut; and, moving into a new residence. These are moveable days that sometimes require computations based on the astrological signs of one's birth. Priests have, over a period fixed such domestic observances as praying for metal mechanism in the house or office (iyanthara-pujai); and the auspicious day for purchasing gold (akshaya-trithya) based on common astrological computation.

One of the most important aspects of domestic observance is Deepavali (thibavali). It is a feast that observes a memorial offering of food for one's ancestors and relatives who have died or have died in far away places. However, it is somewhat baffling to find it is fast becoming a temple-going observance, with the mythology of Krishna becoming associated with the festival. The other important domestic observance is the harvest festival of Ponggal, the highlight of which is a feast of vegetarian delights. Strictly speaking, these two observances are not a Hindu festival, but most Hindus observe it anyway. In fact, in 2008, the Tamilnadu Government shifted the Tamil New Year to coincide with Ponggal. Other minor holy days for Hindus are thaipusam, panguni vuthiram, karthigai, adiperuku, navarathiri, maha-sivarathiri, and so forth. These observances are fundamentally domestic in character but also bring the Hindu to the temple to see the deity and to offer worship (pujai).

Domestic events sometimes give rise to a devotional practice that may lead to a shrine cultus, a primitive sort of ancestral cult. The Indians traditionally observe Deepavali to honor the ancestors who have died far away from home and kith but there is beneath this tradition a deeper believe that the ancestors should not be grieved so that they will happily look after their living kin. This desire for the peace of the dead and the goodwill of the dead is an important motivation behind the many sorts of rituals of Deepavali. If a dead wife appears in the dream of the husband or shows signs of presence (imputed by signs of auguries), she is said to have become a guardian of the family and is prayed to as the 'family deity' or 'clan deity' (kulatheivam). This devotion can be intense and often confined to a particular clan or caste. If the family grows and prospers, the family deity may be worshipped in a shrine specially built for her. Blackburn calls this practice "deification" (a problematic word, no doubt) and traces numerous such regional practices having similar domestic rationale. Such is the cult of 'the good sister' (nalathanga), where a righteous daughter-in-law commits suicide with her children; or 'burden bearer' (sumai thangi), where a righteous woman dies at child-birth and is buried at the crossroads; or pechayi if she is buried near the village dump; and popular in Tamilnadu the cult of 'the seven virgins' (eḷu kanigai) who also died in tragic circumstances.

Such a phenomenon of "deification" in Malaysia is rare, but it exists. There are two cases: the Arulmigu Sannasimalai Andavar Temple in Cheng, Melaka, and Samiammal Temple in nearby Batang Melaka, Negeri Sembilan Solomon Rajah (2000). Here, the circumstances of the death of the good person were less tragic. In India, the temples of clan gods can be very large, but this tradition has yet to take serious roots in Malaysia.

The "home altar" or domestic shrine can take various degrees of elaboration, from a simple tabletop to a little concrete structure. However, since the 1990s, there has been an emergent practice dubbed 'house temple' (ilakoyil) where the shrine is elaborately constructed or an entire room is specifically allocated for it and the idol of the deity consecrated, i.e. a kumbabishekam is conducted by a priest. This is a new development that has come under severe criticism from the learned community. First and foremost, domestic shrines are, by default, temporary structures that are easily dismantled and moved to new locations or left untended when the family is absent. However, once consecrated, the daily observances become compulsory, and the shrine lamp cannot be put off.

Moreover, if the principal devotee who plays the role of a priest is either incapacitated or dies, and there are no worthy successors to the role, the deity is shamed. People outside the family will be reluctant to enter the homes of others to conduct the many temple-like rituals. Moreover, if the family itself needs to move, they will run into real estate issues because uncertainty has been created as to the continuing occupant and purpose of the house.

The reasons generally proffered are that an ancestor or a deity appeared in a dream and told them to consecrate a temple to them in the residence. However, this phenomenon may be linked to the inordinate concern with 'warding off evil effects' (thishti) among Hindus. In most Hindu homes there will be some image of their favourite deity, or shrine, or a wide variety of fetishes that are thought to bring good luck. One will also find one or more ritually invoked fetish items at the entrance or inside of their home to ward off evil or bad luck. These things include a mirror (kanadi), a horseshoe (ladam), a painted mask, or a clay pot (chati) set upon with black spots (potu), or an ash gourd (pusanikai) spotted likewise. Instead of dots a face with large prominent eyes may be painted on the pot or gourd. The not-so-apparent fetishes are deliberately hidden from plain view. These fetishes can be simply green limes (yeḷumichai) smeared in red lead powder (kungumam); twisted twigs

of thorns; strips of knotted black or yellow cloth; nails at odd places; and certain plants with thorns such as cacti or agave. There are fetish items such as inscribed metal plates (iyanthiram) placed strategically or nine gems (navakarkal) buried along with a white conch (sangu) at the entrance of a home. These are meant to increase the good luck and ward of bad luck but all these can be done away with, if the deity itself takes residence in one's home. The logic of consecrating a temple in one's own home is enticing. Then again, it still remains conjectural. Then again, there does exist the phenomenon of burnout, where a Hindu, one day, decides to gather all the thishti fetishes and throw them away and return to simpler devotional practices.

The controversial idea of consecrating a temple to protect private homes is further extended by Hindus to making miniature shrines to protect or sanctify personal space in offices and factories. This is something more than placing the framed picture of one's favourite deity or guru on one's desk for inspiration. A devotee places a miniature idol in some platform and places sacred ashes and other paraphenalia along with it, and regular prayer is offered there. Sometimes, a lamp is lit temporarily; sometimes the scented bathi is also lit; and sometimes a split coconut, betel leaves, and bananas are also placed, all depending on its allowability. Prayers are offered as quickly and discreetly as possible. This miniature-shrines are commonly found in lockers/cupboards in dormitories and factories; and discreetly in drawers or side-cupboards in offices. Another common innovation found in the same vein is to place a picture or plastic object of their favourite deity in cars. However, this practice has increasingly become elaborate, with metal or stone figurines affixed on dashboards of one's vehicle with careful attention to rituals meant to improve the potency and power of the deity to protect the car and its users. Ashes, a glass casing for the deity, anointments, flowers, braided hair, small fetish items, and the like are not uncommon. Adorning the tail end of the car with a fetish to ward off evil is now becoming popular, too. Of course, in an accident these objects do become dangerous projectiles, but the practice has nonetheless persisted as a matter of one's devotion.

The Public Shrine Practice

Hindus generally keep Fridays holy for worship either at the family shrine or at a public temple or shrine. The average Hindu does not make a distinction between a shrine and a temple. A public shrine is one of the most common outward forms of animistic practice that lies at the root of many Hindu sacred traditions. It is an affirmation that all things are imbued by a personal power that can be ritually summoned and worshipped. A shrine is basically a crude abode ranging in size from a dollhouse to a large hut. An idol or a stone is erected at its centre. A deity is named: Datuk (datho), Aiyanar (aiyanar), Muniswaran (muniswaran), Muniandi (muniandi), Sangili Karuppan (sangili-karupan), Mathurai Veeran (madhurai-viran), Kali (kali), Nagamma (nagama) and so forth; and is conferred with a title or a term of endearment such as sire (aiya), brother (anan), anchorite (andi), or simply 'Sami' (sami) for male deities; and mother (ama or atha) for female deities. It is uncertain which gender predominates.

Usually, a shrine is maintained at the private expense of an individual, group of friends or family, who will bring to it their familiarity with other Hindu practices, symbols, and overall character. If, after some time, there is no wider appeal for what goes on here, the shrine falls into disuse and eventually will be forgotten. With some effort, this is avoided. A definite process begins to unfold. First, a subscription is taken from recognized regular devotees, and an annual feast is observed as the day of the temple. This core group of devotees tend to attach great importance to this celebration, with animals offered as blood sacrifice as the main event. On rare occasions, some devotees may even offer a sacred palanquin (kavadi), which normally takes place from the nearest river bank to the shrine. Food is often cooked on the premises and served to the deity as an offering first, and the balance is served to the devotees. This is temple food (koyil prasadham).

There would be at varying regularity a caretaker-priest appointed by this group who could be either at the shrine full-time or serve part-time. He is expected to learn the liturgical chanting and sacred rituals by heart that involve the daily oblation of food (of milk, water, oil, sandal paste, and cooked fruits) to bathe the idol and the offertory of praise (aruchanai) chanted on behalf of any devotees. There are other aspects of rituals and chants that a priest can choose to learn, namely that of weddings (kalyanam), funerals (yelavu), consecration of temples (kumbabishegam), memorials (thidhi), of the fire-sacrifices (homam); and blessing of houses, vehicles, and machineries.

However, something else emerges at the shrine. Often a devotee pays simple obeisance at the shrine of a power-that-be of which he or she has become familiar. There is a simple acknowledgement that the deity therein is honoured once a year on a given date (perunal) chosen by the caretaker or the caretaker priest. If the shrine can physically accommodate a larger congregation of devotees, a priest may initiate a service to the devotees by going into trance (arul) or to be possessed of the deity. The type of activities that entails include trance dance (veriyatam); divination (kuri-soludhal); exorcism (pei-votudhal) or removal of evil eye (thitu-kalithal). Talismans and fetishes of various forms are offered to devotees for their well-being. A talisman band (kanganam) of string or beads is tied around the wrist of devotees in the name of the patron deity of the temple. On occasions, a fetish or charm is requested of a priest indifferent to moral scruples – it is called asking for harmful deeds through spells (mandhiram) or rituals (seyvinai or sometimes called bili-suniyam). Hindus who wish to harm an enemy, spiritually poison the land, cripple someone, alienate the love of a spouse, or even cause someone to harm himself engage these priests who are also called 'shaman' (mandhiravadhi). Some are practitioners skilled in removing or causing afflictions, but most priests are simple keepers of rituals. These aspects of a shrine are sometimes practised in the open, but more often, they are hidden from view and conducted at important hours in difficult-to-access places. The uninitiate and the unbelievers are encouraged not to see the rituals and are usually asked to leave. This is a form of hidden practice. See below for a more detailed narrative of the hidden practices.

Many of these shrines, when it becomes a temple proper, often adopt a deity from the Hindu pantheon as their principal deity. The original deity of the shrine may be called the 'origin deity' (mula-dheivam) and a shrine to the diety is subsumed into the larger temple superstructure. Such temples may be named after the principal deity such as muniswarar (literally the anchorite god) or a man and so forth, but the temple names give us an idea of the intimacy of the people with the deity as well as its highly localized sense of relevance. Here are some examples from Malaysia: paranjothi Vinayagar; angkasapuri Kaliamman; athangarai Vinayagar; kandedutha Mariamman; jada jada padhinetu jada Muniswarar; or the more concerted effort jegan matha sri vira vetaikara Muniandy. In India there is a more florid custom in naming the gods pari-luka Amman (named after St. Luke's Convent school in the vicinity); or bodigad Muniswarar (after the fact that the bodyguards of the governor founded the temple) that has no imitation in Malaysia. There are also the consecration of temples to the local deity whose names are not often heard in this country: sigarat-kari; ponanga; vadikarupa; ochandama; velaiyama; chevathiya; pidugatha; pechi/pechayi; silakari; rakachi; angalama; vengalama; nagama; yanachami; mulachami; anjarika; andikarupa; mulakarupandi; munadiyan; karupananchami; idumba; kupa; avadaiyapa; virabathira; vetaikara; thurai-rama; sangili; aiyapa, etc.

The Temple Practices

If the shrines become popular, money is invested, and the hut is expanded to accommodate a larger crowd. A committee is formed to manage the business of the shrine, which is now called a temple, and a proper name is selected. Something curious takes place after that. In most cases, it is now considered appropriate for the temple to be dedicated to a god or goddess from the Hindu pantheon. A priest of an Iyer caste (an Iyer is a Tamil Brahmin) is often hired to dedicate the temple in a ceremony literally called 'the ablution of pots' (kumbabishegam). This ritual is ideally repeated every twelve years or sixty years, depending on the financial capacity of the temple management. The original shrine is still preserved in a spot facing the main sanctorum, and animal sacrifice is offered there either on the third day after Thaipusam or during the first day of Chitthirai (the first month of the Hindu year) or on the fourteenth day after that depending on the scruples of the local community. A professional priest may be hired to attend the daily worship at the temple proper. Their appearance is customarily a traditional saffron veti and bare upper body. Sometimes the younger ones affect a fashionable tuft at the back of the head (kudumi) and the older ones usually wear a beard. However, looks can be deceiving because some priests are well educated and theologically astute.

The services of the shrine such as soothsaying and so forth are now supplemented by the services of the temple priest, namely horoscope (josiyam), divination for marriage (jodi-porutham), hymnal lessons or catechism classes (thevara-vagupu), and quasi-religious activities such as dancing and traditional music or singing classes.

This additional aspect reflects middle-class practices, and sometimes, the temple prayers are expected to be chanted in Sanskrit, though no one really understands the language. These affectations of upward mobility are loosely called "Sanskritization" of a folk practice (Ambedkar, 1917).

The concept of Sanskritization is a process whereby non-Brahmins, by emulating perceived Brahminic customs and religious affectations, aspire to be something held to be culturally superior. An important instance of the process of Sanskritization in Malaysia is seen in Deepavali. This has traditionally been an important festival for all Indian Diaspora – especially so for the Tamils, Punjabis, Gujaratis and Nepalese. This has got to do with the culture of travelling: traders, soldiers and seamen tend to die far away from home, where no kith or kin are around to mourn or perform the proper rites of passage. Very often, family members receive news of their demise after a long period, if at all. As a result, the night before Deepavali is reserved for families to honour the dead relatives and to make prayers and offerings of food for the departed who had joined their ancestors. A lamp is lit to mark hope and life on an otherwise very dark night (the moon is in full eclipse on Deepavali). There is another aspect of this festival. It falls at the beginning of the rainy season, and the Sangam literature (particularly the agam literature of the pathirpatu) suggests that able bodied men must return from the battle front to plough the earth to prepare for the next harvest. A failure to do this could spell a political disaster for the king. Returning officials also bring news of the fallen who had to be mourned, and the families compensated for their loss. Perhaps, Deepavali for the South Indians, especially the Tamils, is vestigial remains of the link between people and their past kings. However, in recent years, this older aetiology has somewhat faded. The local temples are increasingly becoming a focus for Deepavali, and the significance is shifting to a universal interpretation of victory of good over evil, drawing upon the myth of Krishna, the deity, defeating Naragasuran, the demon. This is an interesting development because Krishna was never a significant deity of the southern people. It is this sort of development that is called Sanskritization (Vineeta Sinha, 2005).

Another aspect of Sanskritization is pseudo-Sanskritization. Anything dubbed "Vedic" or shown to have some Sanskrit textual mention is considered a cultural upward mobility. Over a generation, it is not difficult to see successfully Sanskritized temples taking more elaborate architectural forms. This is considered pseudo because the origin of all the so-called "Vedic science" of Vasthu is, in reality, of Tamil origin. It must be noted that this phenomenon is peculiarly found in Tamil Nadu and by historical association in Malaysia. These temples generally enshrine a major deity such as murugan, sivan, ganapadhi or pilayar, or aman and their associated deities in their mythological pantheon. In these temples, the original shrine and its lesser deities are not supplanted but given a subordinate role as guardians of the temple. It is quietly maintained within its compound usually tended by its original caretakers.

In contrast, the Hindi belt folk temples are a democratic fare where every imaginable god and goddess of the pantheon is maintained within the compound, almost as if the temple is a collection of shrines. And the people from the Deccans have a penchant for building oversized images of their deities. A sprinkling of both sorts can be found all over Malaysia.

In India, there are larger temples called Great Temples (perunggoil), which have municipal jurisdictions. However, those Great Temples located along the Tamilnadu borders have either been Sanskritized or have undergone pseudo-Sanskritization. A good example is the Venkateswarar or Balaji Temple of Thirupathi. The origin shrine of this establishment is the Alamelammal Koil, a temple in its own merit now. This shrine-temple is seldom given right of place in order not to betray the Tamil origin of the main Venkateswarar Temple. In Alamelammal Koil, the name of the deity has been changed to Padmavathy, and the Tamil inscription of the shrine gilded over completely. In fact, all the temples in the municipality of Thirupathi have been given Sanskrit or Telugu names, a process that one may now also refer to as "Telugufication". The greatest of Malaysian temples are smaller by comparison in terms of size and wealth, and this sort of pseudo-Sanskritization takes place where the devotees, predominantly non-Tamil, insist on the exclusive use of Sanskrit for the pujai.

An important feature of temple practice is pilgrimage. It is one of the traditional spiritual disciplines of Hinduism. Hindus undertake such journeys to gain spiritual merit (puniyam) by travelling to various holy sites and performing rituals that often include bathing as the central feature. Many Malaysians travel to India to pay homage to their gods - Aiyappan at Sabarimalai; or to Venkataswarar at Thirupathi; but seldom to bathe in the

many holy rivers north of the Deccan. The bathing at temples is often off a well and the waters are often told to be springing from some well-known holy river. Hindus from all over the world go to Rameshwaram at the southern tip of India to wash away the sins (pavam) accumulated by the deceased they love or their own that was owed to the deceased. The main temple there, the Arulmigu Ramanathaswamy Temple, is touted to have twenty-two wells with each springing from a different holy river! Others go to visit their gurus and their ashrams. Malaysian Hindus are not partial to India when it comes to pilgrimages - the Subramaniar Temple in Batu Caves (Selangor) and the Marthandavar Temple in Maran (Pahang), are observed with much vigor. It is important to note that some temples do take on roles that regulate community affairs. Temples are seldom a centre for social development; their function may be focused on rituals and worship, but temples built by caste associations are often purposed to regulate some aspects of their cultural life.

An exceptional example is the Chettiar trading caste community - they regulate their social affairs around their temples; and vide their trade associations, schools and public halls were built. This is unique to the Chettiars. In many present-day temples, the management tends to reflect linguistic, regional origin, caste or class identity. It is not uncommon that dissatisfied groups often break away and set up their temples nearby. Not unlike in India, this caste-religious concern is usually tied up to temple revenue protectionism. The fact that this exists in Malaysia is not surprising since in Tamilnadu itself, temple doors were not open to all castes until 1937 when the then Chief Minister of Madras C. Rajagopalachari pushed for its legislation, and the monopoly of caste associations in temple management was finally ended by the Chief Minister Muthuvel Karunanidhi in 2006.

Greater affluence among the Hindus in Malaysia has led to the physical development of the temples. Many of the rude shrines of corrugated iron and planks common in the 1970s are now concrete structures of various magnificence. This means a great deal of commercial activities for builders who employ sculptors and painters. It also provides business for those who supply manufactured ritual paraphernalia for worship. Temple musicians and garland-makers depend very much on Temple demands. Traders of ethnic goods find temple festivals a good place to market their wares. Devotion to temple practices has also created the possibility of various literature such as the magazine Thungeesam, Manggala Theebam and Sakthi.

Furthermore, temples that are the focus of pilgrimages and communal festivities also generate millions of ringgits in income both for the temple and for the nation in terms of tourist dollars. One of the most colourful features of the Hindu temple is the great carnival-like festival of Thaipusam.

Hindu temples in Malaysia have a long history, which Hindus are proud of. There is evidence to suggest that there was a temple on the shores of Melaka during the Melaka Sultanate that was destroyed by the Portuguese in 1511, and the temple stones were re-purposed for their city fortification. The earliest known Hindu temple is probably the ruins of the Hindu-Buddhist complex in Lembah Bujang in Kedah, which probably dates back to the 11th century A.D., but the archaeology of this place has become politically complex. Indians have a proverb that 'no place is fit for living if it does not have a temple', so traders often built their temples, makeshift structures that perhaps lasted the duration of the settlement. If the settlement prospered the temples acquired more permanent buildings. One such temple is the Poiyatha Vinayaga Murthi Alayam of Melaka, which was built in 1781 by the Chettiyar business community. The Mariamman Koil in South Bridge Road, Singapore, was built in 1828. The Sri Mariamman Temple in Georgetown, Penang, predates that, but the present structure was built in 1883. In the Malay States, the first temple to be built is the Kallumalai Arulmigu Sri Subramaniyar in Gunong Cheroh, Ipoh, which was probably set up around 1888 when the first Tamil community settled around that vicinity. More importantly, the Subramaniar Temple at Batu Caves was established by the famous Thambusamy Pillai in 1891 and was contested by the District Officer then. The devotees there won the case and began celeberating Thaipusam there the following year, and it has remained a festival of importance ever since then. However, the vast majority of the active temples in Malaysia do not seem to operate within the framework of municipal or statutory regulations. Attempts to even enumerate them have been an arduous task.

The Guru Devotion

A vital aspect of Hindu practices is the practice of Guru devotion, and there are three aspects to this tradition. First, there is a large corpus of sacred writings in Hinduism, both in Sanskrit and other native tongues, and gurus present themselves as learned proponents of such works. However, turning to sacred texts as a basis for

faith is different from the mindset of the average Hindu. One may recognize this or that text as sacred or even place one on the shrine in the homes, but seldom does anyone master the sacred languages – Tamil, Sanskrit or any other - sufficiently to read or understand them. They turn to the gurus, who, in turn, tend to be versed variously in some sacred work. Second, the gurus of India almost always rose out of a need for political reform within the Hindu world, and as such, it is natural that their work inevitably co-opts political activism. This is not new. Sikhism, though a religion, whose succession of gurus and the eventual culture they shaped were a response to Islamic persecution. The southern Saivite sages – principally, sambandhar, apar, sundharar, manikavasagar rose in the face of Jain, Buddhist, and Vaishnavite missionary success through royal patronage. As a result, Jainism and Buddhism were wiped out, and Vaishnavism was co-opted into the general Tamil religious infrastructure. Three, there are modern corporations that deliberately mimic guru organizations. Such organizations impart a service, sell an idea, actively gather membership, and own corporate wealth. They, however, differ from the rest by their credo of personal development and a social doctrine that is avowedly apolitical. Apart from these three types of organizations that exhibit guru devotion, there is one class of guru devotion that is a tradition in itself called the chithar-vaḷi, and this subject is dealt more externsively in chapter four.

Guru organisations tend towards devotion of the guru as a disciple of a given deity or an ancient teacher and sometimes as the manifest epiphany of the divine itself. As a result, most modern gurus take great pains to establish their guru lineage, and most give it added emphasis by granting their guru some evidence of miracles to authenticate their calling. All organizations claim that their teachings are ancient or eternal, and only their founders or gurus are historical.

Hindu sacred texts are found in almost all written languages of India. However, Sanskrit gained a reputation as the language of the gods for two reasons – one, its initial favour among European scholars, and two, it was the academic language for India akin to Latin in Europe. Most gurus who are learned enough tend to favour Sanskrit texts since they have a larger corpus of expository commentaries (in English) to aid learners, compared to the other sacred language. This is the direct result of the bias found in the early European Oritentalists. This, in large measure, was due to the European fascination with Sanskrit, which shared the same parent language of the European language family. Sanskrit is considered the direct descendant of Proto-Indo European – the language of the ancient Aryans. No native languages of India ever achieved a pan Indian usage. As a result, gurus who are indeed learned tend to favour Sanskrit as the language of gods (devabasha) and are favoured by Hindus who are especially untutored in their native tongue.

As a result, the guru cult embedded within Hinduism often acts as the catalyst for Sanskritization. These organizations are diverse and tend to draw members from the middle class who are attracted to institutional teaching and discipleship, something which is conspicuously absent in temples. Most of these organizations variously promote meditation, yoga, fire sacrifice (homam or yagam) and scripture-reading or memorizing as part of their core spiritual discipline. Although the guru tradition represents a shift away from the florid temple rituals, a measured devotional ritual actually forms the focus for its members to congregate. The participation in these rituals bonds the members and forms a boundary of who is a devotee and who is a guest. These organizations tend to be intensely guru-centred and not given to larger hierarchical associations, and if there are any affiliations, they tend to be informal and borne by mutual respect. It must be noted that although Hindus in Malaysia draw their inspiration from India, there is also a local vitality that is peculiarly Malaysian. The following examples are indicative of the character of the guru organizations. Though there is a slight proliferation of guru based organizations, the percentage of the Hindu population who participate in guru organizations has yet to be ascertained.

Of historical curiosity is the Theosophical Society. Founded by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky and her associates in 1875 in New York, it had its head office moved to Bombay in 1879. At the turn of the 20th century, this was politically one of the most active guru organizations in India. In 1916, its then leader, Annie Besant (1847-1933), founded the All India Home Rule League with the express aim of working towards the Independence of India, and whose activism helped turn the Indian National Congress into a mass movement. This close

relationship between political activism and Hindu religiousity remains a feature of most guru-centred organizations.

Until recently, all guru organizations came into being with an inordinate emphasis on social development or political activism as its core principle. There was a clear social doctrine that decried poverty, casteism, illiteracy, abuse of women, and meat-eating. Furthermore, the organizations felt there was a dire need for reform in Hinduism and such reforms were always framed in anti-colonial narratives; after the Indian Independence, it was modified into anti-Christian or anti-Muslim narratives. The Arya Samaj, Persatuan Sri Ramakrishna Sarada, and the Ananda Marga Malaysia are cases in point. Social upliftment, personal discipline, and awareness of religious boundaries often are part of the culture of all the guru organizations of this period. The emphasis on the spiritual growth of the individual as a goal in itself is an emergent phenomenon within this guru tradition. Representatives of this later sort of gurus will include the Mata Amritamandamayi and Shree Mataji Nirmala Devi. Though the Brahma Kumaris have been around since the late 1930s, their presence in Malaysia is recent. Unlike the earlier movements, these are largely apolitical.

Much in vogue in the early half of the last century were organizations that sprung revering the teachings of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902). Vivekananda, born Narendranath Datta, though he died young was a great orator and a populariser of Hinduism in the West, and a crisp, prodigious writer. He was also an anti-British nationalist. He founded the monastic order of the Ramakrishna Math (based in Kolkata) and a missionary organization, the Ramakrishna Mission (based in Belur). The Vivekananda Ashram, Kuala Lumpur, was founded in 1904, and in the name of Vivekananda's much-revered teacher, the Ramakrishna Ashram in Penang was founded in 1938.

An important development in Malaysia towards the end of the last century was the development of associations not only linked to Indian anti-British nationalism, but associations linked to the anti-secularist ideology of post-Independence India, namely the Hindutva. In the 1980s, the Hindu Sevai Sangam was founded by Mr TM Ramasamy (Ramaji Maniventhan) in Seremban - they consider themselves the "Southeast Asia organizer" of Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) of India for humanitarian work. The thrust of this organization is amorphous. They are the inspiration behind the Hindu Rights Action Force ("Hindraf") and the Swami Vivekananda Youth Movement. Their mode of operation and narratives mimic that of the RSS – Vedic purity, nationalist pride, and a need to be vigilant against Christian and Muslim influence. Generally speaking, the drive for Vedic purity rejects Orientalism as a just source of knowledge. Particularly in Malaysia, their nationalist pride translates into racial pride, and any municipal action against temples or conversion of Hindus is perceived as injustice and humiliation. That is why they came into prominence as a vanguard against the perceived arrogance of some local authorities dealing with Hindu temples in Selangor and Negeri Sembilan. Strictly speaking, not a guru organisation, Hindraf is an expression of non-traditional Hinduism in Malaysia. See Chapter Three for more details.

The Divine Life Society was founded in 1936 by Swami Sivananda Saraswati (1887-1963), who found his vocation while serving as a doctor in Negeri Sembilan of British Malaya. Swami Pranavananda (a disciple of Swami Satyananda Adigal of Pure Life Society) formed the Malaysian branch of the Divine Life Society in 1950. This active society hosts a large number of Tamil sacred literature on the Internet.

The Arsha Vidya Nilayam was founded in Coimbatore in 1986 by a vociferous Hindutva supporter, Swami Dayananda Saraswati (1930-2015). As a respected guru of Mr Narendra Darmodra Modi, Prime Minister of India, he was given the highest civilian award in India - the Padma Bhushan before his passing. Though Tamilnadu in origin, he was unabashedly Sanskrit in his emphasis. A Malaysian branch was formed in 2000 by Swami Jitatmananda Saraswati, and a centre was founded in Ipoh. Vedantist schools normally trace their lineage to the 9th-century sage Sankarachariyar, and initiates normally carry the title "Saraswati" with their name, and so do the gurus of this organization.

The Sai Sadhana Satsang Malaysia made its appearance in Malaysia in the late 1970s and their members are encouraged to participate in welfare programmes as an intrinsic part of their spiritual development. South Indians of Deccan origin tend to favour this guru who was born Sathya Narayana Raju (1926-2011) but was better known as Sathya Sai Baba. His followers claim the spiritual descent of another guru who is said to be

Shirdi Sai Baba (c.1868-1918). Both the Babas have a following in Malaysia. With a renowned successor, it is clear how this movement will evolve.

Another organization that had some appeal among Malaysians is the Persatuan Kesedaran Krishna Antarabangsa (i.e. the International Society for Krishna Consciousness or, more popularly, "ISKCON"). The parent body was founded by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Srila Prabhupada (1896-1977) in the 1950s, and the Malaysian arm was established in Kuala Lumpur in 1980. Their public chanting used to be a common feature in many urban centres, but nowadays more appreciated for the regular food alms (ana-dhana) around Kuala Lumpur.

However, there are organizations whose Hindu inspiration is from the US! For example, the Saiva Siddhanta Church Satsang in Malaysia (founded in 1986) refer to themselves as the "local mission" of the Hawaii-based Kauai Aadheenam. It is headed by a Caucasian, Satguru Bodhinatha Veylanswami, and the organization is famed for their particularly well-designed periodical Hinduism Today. It has proved to be a powerful voice of Hinduism among the Diaspora.

Another US-based outfit is The Self-Realization Fellowship, based in Los Angeles and is built around the personage of Pramahamsa Yogananda, who is renowned for his book Autobiography of a Yogi. Paying members receive their spiritual instructions through the postal service. Although not obligatory, students form groups to practice their meditation. This organization traces their spiritual ancestry and American destiny to Mahaavatar Babaji of India. In the 1970s and the 1980s this organization was popular in Malaysia.

Another guru-organization currently gaining importance is the Eckankar Satsang Malaysia Bhd/ECK Centre Bhd established in Malaysia in 1970. John Paul Twitchell founded their Minneapolis-based parent body, Eckankar International, in 1965 in Las Vegas. Many ECK followers in Malaysia have a curious relationship with The True Realization Centre.

There have always been men in Malaysia, known for their charisma and erudition, who had gathered people around them to form a guru-devotee organization. One such illustrious person was Ipoh-born Satyananda Swami (1909-1961), who founded the Pure Life Society Shuddha Samajam Corporation. K.L. in 1949. They ran a large orphanage in Kuala Lumpur and were an important and politically influential organization until the demise of the founder. Today, it is run solely as a charitable organization (as opposed to a missionary organization) by the Swami's disciple, Mother A. Mangalam. This orgnization is avowedly non-confessional as to faith but remains within the cultural milieu of Hinduism.

A feature of more recent homegrown Hindu organizations is their peculiar penchant for combining the ancient with the modern. Mr. AJA Peter is well known as the person who brought into Malaysia the Toastmasters International (1977) and Silva Mind Control International (1978). However, among the Indians, he is better known as the founder of the Institute of Motivation Dynamics in 1973. His work generated a great deal of interest in motivational programmes among the Indians who found themselves hampered by the Western modalities and the use of English. The central aspect of Peter's programme was a five or seven-day intensive, highly focused, emotionally charged group therapy which he termed the "Experiential Unfoldment Sessions." This was adapted into Tamil and was called anubava payirchi. One of Peter's students, Mr G Subramaniam (now styled Nyanavallal Paranjothi), founded the Self Awareness Centre, but he supplemented the programme with the yoga of Paranjothi Mahan, which was meant to develop the spiritual powers of kundalini. An offshoot of this organization is the True Realization Centre founded by Mr K M Sivaswamy - here, Paranjothi Mahan was abandoned in favour of the Eckankar system of belief! This resulted in many of the followers of Sivaswamy also becoming members of the Eckankar Satsang Malaysia.

Another aspect of guru organizations is the non-governmental organizations found in the workplace and centres of learning. Typically, they are not centred around a guru but claim one either as a spiritual guide for the organization if alive, claimed as the patron of the organization. This form of coming under the tutelage of a guru who does not know the student is to become a manasiga-manavan. Student clubs such as Persatuan Mahasiswa Hindu (of Universiti Teknoloji Malaysia), Persatuan Hindu (of Universiti Putra Malaysia), or Persatuan Hindu Universiti (of University Malaya) often evinces a guru as the inspirer of its founding. The formation of the Hindu Youth Organization (HYO) by the university alumni continues their "service above

self" work. The spiritual adviser behind HYO was Swami Satyananda of the Pure Life Society and later Swami Pranavananda Saraswati of the Divine Life Society. HYOs have been in existence since 1949, and they form the main component of Majilis Belia Hindu Malaysia, which in turn is a component organization of the Malaysian Youth Council. The university students' spiritual fervour was also the inspiration behind the formation of the Sri Murugan Center (SMC). It was organized in 1982 by Dr. Thambirajah, then president of the Education, Welfare and Research Foundation. SMC's primary objective is to organize a volunteer workforce to provide extracurricular tutoring for secondary school students. Strictly speaking, not a guru organization, its membership with Malaysia Hindu Sangam and its explicit Hindu name, logo, rituals and motivational pilgrimage to Batu Caves makes it primarily an expression of the Hindu faith, a non-conventional one.

There are many lesser guru-centred practices in Malaysia. Chinmaya Devotees Society Kuala Lumpur was formed after Swami Chinmayananda Saraswati (1916-1993). Osho (born Chandra Mohan Jain, sometimes Baghwan Sri Rajneesh, (1931-1990) has a great number of admirers, but they do not have an organization here. The medieval sage Swami Raghavendra (1595-1671) has a surprising following in Malaysia, especially since the ever-popular star Rajinikanth acted as the sage in the hagiographic movie Sri Raghavendra in 1985.

Hidden Practices

There are a whole lot of Hindu practices that are hidden from plain view, practised in private or is understood in non-conventional terms, or intended to manipulate hidden powers. Moreover, basically, such practices are only for the consumption of those initiated into such knowledge. The word 'deeper knowledge' (thanthringam) is used by Hindus, but not all practices are explicitly defined as such. Some Hindus may even saythat these are ‘superstitious beliefs’ (muda-nambikai). Scholarly enquiry into these practices is recent. The word thanthringam has given rise to the English word 'Tantrism', and some enquirers use the term 'Shakti worship', but these words are almost solely associated with Kali worship or Devi worship. There are indeed large aspects of Kali or Devi traditions that are hidden, but hiddenness is embedded in every aspect of the Hindu religion where something has an importance that is not apparent to plain reason. The practices as such subsist logically in its system of referents.

Therefore, to strike a balance, The researcher chose the word 'hidden' in the senses mentioned above, i.e. hidden from plain view, practised in private or understood in non-conventional terms, or intended to manipulate hidden powers. This allows for a more meaningful enquiry. Not all Hindus agree as to its significance, and there are layers of attitude towards what is hidden. Take, for example, the practice of animal sacrifice during the Hindu New Year. Some offer it on the first day of the Hindu New Year during sunrise, and they consider those sacrifices done at midnight as a "hidden practice". The rationale for the time is obscure, but the fact remains that one is indeed hidden. Some Hindus may even consider the entire practice immoral, such as the followers of Vallalar Ramalingam. Others consider it as an open practice essential for the devotion of the deity. In fact, one informant said the origin of this custom arose out of an ancient practice of sharing a communal meal and had little religious significance beyond needing to be grateful. Alternatively, take the practice of idumban-pujai on the third night after Thaipusam. Not many Hindus know that part of this offering involves a cockerel sacrifice. It is hidden from plain view but has nothing to do with Kali or Devi. Moreover, the prayers and rituals of blood sacrifice even where it is not considered occult suggests appeasement of malevolent spirits (kathu-setai) known only to the priest, and these sub-rituals constitute hidden practice that is embedded in a practise that may or may not be considered hidden.

There are other practices kept from public view that are not prevalent but are known nonetheless. Take, for example, female infanticide, a ritualized killing of infants for various non-religious reasons. The mid-wife normally administers poisoned milk to the infant and buries the body in a nearby communal rubbish dump (kupa-medu) usually in the cover of night. Usually, a crude shrine like a broken brick is set up with a lighted lamp perched on it or before it. The person perpetrating this will call upon the deity pechayi to receive the child and protect its soul. It is a very sad event, and the practice is called 'giving to death' (savuku-kodukiradhu). Sometimes, women with no children will go to pechayi in desperation and in secrecy to request a child since she is the mother of many infants given to her keep. What is interesting is the plant that is used to poison the milk - the Thevetia peruviana (yellow oleander or thanga arali) or the Thevetia thevetioides (pacha arali)(

https://toxindia.wordpress.com/category/botanical-poisons/). The plant has bright yellow flowers which are used by affected women to approach any deity and by offering these flowers may speak to pechayi; or these flowers may also be offered to any deity regularly by devotees who are grieving such loss. This devotion is intensely private and certainly hidden.

Earlier mentioned how certain plants are planted to urge well-being or ward off evil. Hindus, however, consider a whole lot of flora sacred or meant for sacred use. Though there are attempts in certain quarters to codify its significations with limited success, in Malaysia, the following are commonly held to be sacred. The thulasi (holy basil - Ocimum basilicum) plant itself is considered sacred. Flowers such as maligai (jasmine - Jasminum officinal); nandhiavatai or simple velaipu "white" (pinwheel - Tabernaemontana divaricata); kanagambaram (Crossandra infundibuliformis); and sembaruthi (hibiscus – particularly the Hibiscus rosasinensis) are considered suitable offering to deities and the plants are often found in temple compounds. The pink lotus (Nelumbo nucifera) is sometimes offered but they come from ponds and lakes. The vepalai (margosa or neem - Azadiracta indica) and the arasamaram (peepal – Ficus religiosa) are considered sacred trees. The wood of sandhanam (sandal - Santalum album) and the arugampul grass (Cynodon dactylon) are also considered sacred. Certain fruits such as the banana, coconut, lime and mango are generally offered to the deities. In modern times oranges and apples are also counted as suitable offering for the gods.

Other flora suitable to the gods and goddesses come in the form of food, and it is an inherent aspect of all Hindu worship. There are special dishes offered to the deities, and they may contain rice, nuts, honey, sugar, spices, jackfruit, ghee, butter, oil, and any sort of vegetables. The dishes prepared sepcially for the deity (pirsadham) are namely panjamirdham; puliyodharai; and koyil-pongal. More often than not, ordinary food prepared for the family is also served to the deity. The commonly preferred dishes are vegetarian, but then some deities prefer otherwise. It is believed that certain dishes are the favourite of certain deities, and there is a strong association between the deity ganapadhi and modhagam and pidi-kolukatai.

Some flowers are intensely associated with certain deities. The earlier mentioned arali is for pechayi; neem and hibiscus are for kali; lotus is for lechumi; arugampul is strictly associated with ganapadhi. These associations are so strong that the mere flora invokes the deity or laying the flowers reverently at any other deity pays obeisance to the one associated with the flower. Though the association of flora to deities is common knowledge, the practice is private, and in this sense hidden. Take another good example: Kali is the goddess of pox – the giver and taker of it. So when someone is afflicted with chickenpox (varicella) or deadly smallpox (variola) – Peria-amai and china-amai, respectively - the margosa leaves are used as a medicinal ameliorative property. Patients are even fed small balls of paste of these leaves to heal the intestines. It is also traditional to tie a bunch of leaves at the doorposts to tell people there is pox in the house. In pre-modern times, the leaves meant kali or aman or kali-aman have been invoked. She is in visitation.

Many native scholars and thinkers do not like to associate 'hidden prcatices' with the Hindu religious infrastructure due to the ambiguity that the learned Hindus themselves nurse of these practices. It is, therefore, said to have arisen not out of Hinduism per se but out of the peculiar "worldview worldview" of the pre-Hindu practitioners. This argument is not tenable because the so-called worldview is largely definable and not individualistic at all. First of all, there is the universal belief that there is indeed one formless God, a universal force whose brilliance and glory cannot be approached directly. As a result this God is refracted through the multitude of gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon and all pantheons, and deserve our worship. This pantheon is revealed through the mythologies, which has its cosmogony of principal gods and goddesses, the demi-gods (i.e. gods/goddesses who serve the principal deities), the sages who could regularly commune with the gods/goddesses, the privileged principal devotees who are often granted visions of the deity; the ordinary folk (the good and the wicked); and finally the demons who battle the natural order of the world.

This worldview is sometimes called "shamanistic", and it overlaps with the textual tradition of Indians. First, there is a belief that well-meaning people, or people who demonstrated authority, strength, and steadfastness in the face of adversity to care for and protect those who were important to the person, continue to do so even after death. They become guardians (kula-dheivam) of the family or clan and remain in the folklore and oral traditions of the people. Second, there is a belief in the elemental beings (butham or butha-ganangal) who

govern the wind, the storm, huge waves, volcanoes, earthquakes, and lightnings. Sometimes, famines and epidemics are also attributed to these forces, and during such periods of distress, these beings are appeased by offerings of peace that often entail the oblation of blood. However, more often nowadays elaborate rituals are prescribed by the village priests to remove any offenses (thosham-kalithal).

Third, there are the god-like beings who populate the physical world. They are often invisible to the eyes but stake out forest groves, trees, river banks, ponds, byways, and ruins. Some Hindus call it pei-pisasu in a slightly derogatory way, saying they are all evil in nature. However, some pay reverence to such spirits (pei), sprites (kathu-setai), and demons (pisasu). They should not be offended. The practice of making an offering before a fishing trip, upon launching a new boat, or starting a building construction is often made to such beings. In Malaysia, most Hindus are familiar with the names, attributes and appeasement rituals pei-pisasu that are of Malay origin. The Dato (datho) is treated like a grand older man who should be respected and paid obeisence to, and he is often given the form of a Malay gentleman and is sometimes given a place of respect in Hindu shrines or temples. The Toyol (thoyol) on the other hand, is animal-like, mischievous and intent on thievery and harming; likewise there are such beings called ponthianak, polong and pelesit. The traditional Malay system has incorporated Islamic jin and iblis into their spirit worldview, but Hindus generally disregard them.

The Hindus have their classification of 16 types of demons that can possess people and do numerous other harm. They are the Agni, Bhagavata, Brahma, Brahmanda, Brahmavaivarta, Garuda, Kurma, Linga, Markandeya, Matsya, Narada, Padma, Shiva, Skanda, Vamana, Varaha, Vayu, Vishnu. The lesser puranas also called ubapurana are the Sanat-kumara, Narasimha, Brihan-naradiya, Siva-rahasya, Durvasa, Kapila, Vamana, Bhargava, Varuna, Kalika, Samba, Nandi, Surya, Parasara, Vasishtha, Devi-Bhagavata, Ganesha, Mudgala, and Hamsa. It is not uncommon in India to have shrines built for pidari which is interesting because the word pidari is Tamilization of the Sanskrit word pisasu, which in turn is related to Aramaic pazuzu and then the Hebrew twist to the word that leads to the Biblical Greek bilzebul.

The common aspects of this belief system are as follows: (a) they are both good ones and wicked ones; (b) they can be offended and ritually appeased; (c) a devotee can own them. The ownership can be inherited; (d) can do the bidding of the principal devotee; (e) often demands blood sacrifice of chicken, goats, cows, etc.; (f) can be allowed to possess the principal devotee; and (g) the principal devotee has a responsibility to care, and feed it. The principal devotee is sometimes called witch-doctor (mandhra-vathi) or, in Malay, 'bomoh'. Such people are generally considered wicked and social contacts are avoided. The practitioners of this sort of religion will often see it as an integral part of Hinduism. The Hindus who oppose it say they are superstitious practices of Hindus.

Conclusion of hidden practices: Ther Researcher must mention the great number of overlaps into the animistic practices of the Siamese people. The border towns of Thailand are a favourite holiday destination of Malaysian Indians, and it is therefore not uncommon to find that Hindus pick up many of the Siamese shamanistic ways. One of the common practices is the wearing of one or more amulets with the image of a powerful and dead Buddhist monk. They are prayed over and are cheaply available. If one wears one with the relic of the deceased monk in the amulet, it is, of course, not so cheap. Another very common practice is taking ritual baths to wash away bad luck and attract good luck. Another practice that is gaining popularity is the fetish for the Thai Sak Yant tattoo – also called "spirit tattoo" is a magical diagrammatic writing to ward off evil or to gain spiritual power. It is written on car numberplates or back windshields with indelible inks or on paper and framed to hang in homes. It is also tattooed on the body, and it can range from a simple diagram to something that can cover large parts of the body. The Sak Yant Wai Kru is a festival for tattoo devotees held annually in Bangkok(http://expertvagabond.com/sak-yant-tattoo-festival) where the tattoos are re-charged! Devotees become possessed of their tattoos and go into a frenzied trance in the form of a demonstration of their prowess thought to have been acquired by the agency of the tattoo. Marking the body with such tattoos is not uncommon among the younger and lesser educated temple priests of the smaller temples and shrines in Malaysia. While tattooing is an old Indian practice, it used to denote caste and rank in society and was seldom about one's religiosity. However, with the new admiration among the younger Indians for thug culture and their penchant for tattooing, tattooing seems to be spilling onto their Hindu religious fervour that is finding a home in Thailand's Sak Yant tattoo.

CONCLUSION

From the preceding survey of the phenomenon called Hinduism, it is possible to see that. First, religion is a continuum of overlapping boundaries. There are the domestic practices, the shrine and temple practices, the guru traditions, the philosophical traditions, and the hidden practices. These are not two-dimensional checkered boundaries where one area is mutually exclusive of another but rather a three-dimensional layered phenomenon where the overlapping itself can be apparent or need not be apparent. It is important to understand that ideas, practices, self-understandings, and their aetiology in each of these areas overlap and both complement and, at times, contradict each other without losing their overall character of shared culture, languages, and history. This sort of understanding, however, is purely academic. One cannot expect a practising Hindu to accept the entire continuum to be an authentic expression of Hinduism in itself. For example, to state that blood sacrifice is part of Hinduism would strike as an offensive overreach by someone who is a devotee of Krishna or a disciple of Vallalar. Though the diametrically opposite aspects of Hinduism are still part of the whole, to the adherents of the religion, those that do not conform to one's construct of what is thought to be authentic are simply aberrant forms that need to be abolished or sublimated. While to take one part of Hinduism and call it Hinduism is offensive, taking the entirety of the phenomenon and calling it Hinduism is also equally offensive. Moreover, that is why the old bishop said that every Hindu carries in his mind a very private configuration of his religion.

However, there is a school of Hindus who want to promote and maintain that a slice of this phenomenon must become the one true authentic religion. This gives rise to the possibility of two frames of reference for Hinduism – one is an ideological product framed as "orthodox" by a political class. The other frame of reference the researcher mention in the main is a product of a sustained Orientalist project, that there is a frame of reference for Hinduism that is dynamic, integrated and is the preoccupation of scholars. These two frames of reference are not mutually exclusive, and they interrogate one another and compete against each other in constructing Hinduism.

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