Letter to the Editor

I was interesting to read Shalini Sharma’s report regarding ‘The Life of Hindus in Britain’ published in the IIAS Newsletter (IIASN 27, p. 23). Apart from its higher philosophies, there is not much interest in the West for Hinduism (cf. Buddhism). The important part of the article was the fact that finally some kind of concern is raised for Britain’s Hindu minority community – in a country where many different ethnicities or religious groups live. Seeking to identify long-under-represented peoples through research, building temples, and more such things are indeed positive steps. Interestingly though, Sharma does not mention the large numbers of Nepalese living in Britain. Her report gave the impression that she was emphasizing Hinduism more than the respective minority groups, as well as of political or cultural ‘representation’.

The agenda of the research is not to bring positive input into people’s lives or to simply end up as another unneeded academic report (Mr Giri’s inferences). Neither is ‘actual change for the Hindu community’ a driving force behind this work. Such policy-driven agendas make too many assumptions about the existence of a homogeneous Hindu community and a distinct identity of interests amongst such a group.

The research is merely a first step in recording the life stories of first generation migrants who call themselves Hindus. The archive that will hold the interviews could be of great interest to future research, whether journalistic or academic, can spring. The archive will undoubtedly have far-reaching consequences for the ASEM process. It can be expected that these countries will, in due time, express their interest in participating in the Asia-Eurasia dialogue. On several occasions and informally, the ASEM members of ASEAN have on their part indicated that such a paradigm shift is something they would welcome.

I welcome Mr Giri’s response to my research report on ‘The Life of Hindus in Britain’ (IIASN 27, p. 23) for a dual reason. First, the initial motive behind writing the report – to introduce the research to interested individuals and subsequently encourage the academic community as a whole – is still an avenue the ASEM is still quite a slow and vibrant, numerically dominant Cujarati community which generates much of the temple building and community activity in specific areas of Britain such as Leicester and Neasden. However, smaller centres of concentration constitute more recently immigrated groups such as the Sri Lankan Tamils and also have developed in the inner cities. Each group, be it Bengali, West Indian or Swami Narayan, brings with it different practices of worship and religious spaces.

Temples, have been attempting to draw the various Hindu communities together, but members of each organization complain of representatives’ is itself an attempt to counter charges of academicism. It is also an attempt to engage with the voices and thoughts of individuals about their faith and their notions of community rather than assuming their consciousness from their class, caste or social positions. While the agency of individuals is philosophically questionable, at least a few aging voices will be recorded and preserved for posterity; voices that quietly challenge sweeping generalizations.

So far the research has only been undertaken in hand-picked samples of British Hindus as an all-encompassing agent. Rather, what is apparent is a very strong and vibrant, numerically dominant Cujarati community which generates much of the temple building and community activity in specific areas of Britain such as Leicester and Neasden. However, smaller centres of concentration constitute more recently immigrated groups such as the Sri Lankan Tamils and also have developed in the inner cities. Each group, be it Bengali, West Indian or Swami Narayan, brings with it different practices of worship and religious spaces.

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