



## ALBERTINA NUGTEREN - RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

### RITUAL DYNAMICS AND SHIFTING FORMS OF IDENTITY FORMATION IN THE HINDU TEMPLE IN WIJCHEN

To date, the presence of Hindus in The Netherlands has received relatively little attention. Not only do recent developments in that community remain largely unnoticed, the academic studies available usually focus on the general situation. In line with increasing numbers of studies of local Hindu diaspora communities elsewhere in the world, in this project a small community (in the sense of 'a particular real-life collectivity') is being made the object of study.

The Hindu community around the *mandir* in Wijchen, Gelderland, is atypical in various respects. For instance, it is the first temple to be custom-built outside the four largest cities in The Netherlands; to a large degree this temple congregation is supported by the initiative of one family, while the *pandit* is not a brahman. There are daily, weekly and lunar-calendrical services in which both Hindi, Sarnami, and Dutch are used. In these devotional services, strongly defined by ritual, there are identifiable tendencies towards both a dynamic flowering of ritual, and towards musealisation and detailed explanation to an audience that is partly ignorant and partly estranged.

One part of the research design focuses on the description and analysis of these two tendencies. It makes connections with the discourse of Ritual Studies, acculturation strategies and multi-directional processes of defining religious identity in diaspora. The second part of the research design investigates the above developments in light of the interplay between a local Hindu community and surrounding Western European culture, the globalisation of the Hindu diaspora, and the reorientation to India as an idealised model.

By studying a local community in this manner, both in its particularity and in its participation in larger networks and worldwide developments, data can be obtained which may produce nuanced insights into processes of both globalisation and localisation, as well as of ritualisation and intellectualisation. The key theoretical concepts are longing/belonging, belonging/believing, multidirectional shifts, ritual transfer, multiple attachments, narratives of identity, and the move away from an ethnoscape to a religioscape.

### FROM 2010 ONWARDS, THE FOLLOWING SPECIFICATION HAS BEEN FORMULATED:

A subtopic: Hindu processions in the Netherlands

Religious processions (*yātrā*) are of great importance in South Asia, and appear to be so also in the South Asian diaspora. Hindu processions are impressive both in number and size. Religious processions are happy occasions for display: showing the deities to the crowds for the benefit of all. They are joyful occasions on which the unity of the group and its shared identity under the protection of the deity are celebrated. Often they are associated with calendrical festivities, of which they are the high points. As such, religious processions are also about identity and proselytisation, and mark a temporary sacralisation of public space.

In Hindu diaspora some of these processions are reduplicated on a smaller scale all over the world. My special attention goes to the celebration of the famous chariot procession of Puri (*rathā-yātrā*) as mirrored in the ISKCON/Hare Krishna processions held every summer in many major cities worldwide. During my participation in the first procession organised around the temple in Wijchen, Winter 2007, I was able to observe many improvised details normally hidden from bystanders. This position laid bare the changing perspective caused by the unprecedented experience when a bounded minority community leaves the confines of the temple ground and temporarily takes over public space. This predicament induced me to start investigating the four related processions held every summer in Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague, and Eindhoven. Special attention will be paid to ritual continuity and adaptation, as also to ritual proliferation.

At present she combines her major research interests (religion, nature, diversity, ritual) in a progressive research profile within the Religion & Ritual expertise group by focusing on Hindu rituals in the public domain and especially those characterised as religious processions (such as the *rathayātrā*, about which her ongoing research will result in various new conference papers and book chapters) and rites of disposal in so-called death ritual. Her special attention goes to material and symbolic aspects of representation. For instance, the environmental 'costs' of cultural-religious traditions may become highly problematic when and where wood for the traditional open cremation fire is increasingly scarce. With this research objective she lived in Bhaktapur (Nepal) in the Summer of 2011. One article in Dutch on Hindustani cremation rites in the Netherlands appeared in 2012, and some in English are in the press, such as 'Through fire. Creative aspects of sacrificial rituals in the Vedic-Hindu continuum.'