Urbanism and the "Death of Religion": Strategies of Religious Manifestation in Modern Society[1]

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Abstract

Some scholars have argued that as modern society becomes increasingly complex through processes of urbanisation and technological advancement there will be greater deviation from traditional forms of social cohesion. Generally speaking, the rise of secular lifestyles is linked to this modern phenomenon; that is, the notion that traditional belief systems and religious institutions will, inevitably, become less relevant. This paper presents a counter-argument to this thesis by drawing on two case studies from the Hindu community in Natal, South Africa and analyses the way in which religious values are transmitted from one generation to the other within the Hindu Diaspora.

Introduction

Although there has been much opposition to the notion that "God is dead" (see Luckmann, 1967) by those who have argued that secularism has not necessarily undermined the role of religion in modern society; recently, scholars such as Steve Bruce (1992; 2002) have reasserted the argument that modernity impedes the transmission of religious and other traditional values, and will therefore, eventually, lead to the demise of religion. Generally, it is true that in modern and technologically developed societies such as Britain, Europe and North America, religious practice has been drastically affected in that there are less people attending churches, less people raising their children with religious up-bringing and so on. It is interesting to note that this has been accompanied by a rise in spiritualism and a growing interest in New Religious Movements[2] but

some scholars have argued that it is less likely that these kinds of religious values will be passed on to the next generation (as in the case of conventional forms of religious transmission) as these new forms tend to be individualistic and centered around a personal spiritual quest. If the trend of modern society's inability to transmit religious values continues, even if there is a rise of individual based spiritualities, it should be cause for concern to those who are optimistic about secularism's failure to eradicate religion from modern life.

Since the assumption regarding the "death of religion" is based on the obser-vation that, in modern society the transmission of conventional forms of beliefs is gradually breaking down in the face of growing number of options for indi-viduals, it is important to test this transmission thesis in other contexts and see if there is a global trend in this regard. Steve Bruce's analysis is largely based on data from Britain and North America where religious *belonging* is perhaps more common than religious *practice*. In this paper, I look at two case studies from the Hindu Diaspora in Natal, South Africa and analyse the various strategies that this religious community has used to transmit its beliefs and values to the next generation. I will argue that the transmission thesis, before it can be accepted at face value, has to take into account the subtle strategies engaged by social groups to maintain their religious and cultural traditions. Before proceeding on to the actual case studies, I would like to make some preliminary comments on two important and related aspects: the first one deals with conventional strategies that religious institutions use to transmit their beliefs and worldviews; the second is the relationship that exists between religion and culture. These two aspects will illuminate the basic argument of this essay.

Conventional Strategies of Religious Institutions

Religious institutions follow certain methods to propagate and ensure that their beliefs and practices are continued into the future. In this regard, two areas of religion are important, namely, ritual and doctrine. Every religion has certain practices that are considered religious, or sacred, and particular to that tradition. For instance, in the case of Christianity the rituals of baptism and attending church every Sunday constitute some of the most central religious acts that all Christians are expected to follow in order to be a Christian. Likewise, in the case of Hindus, the performing of religious acts such as the lighting of the lamp in the morning before their chosen deity, or meditating on the chosen deity at sun rise, going to the temple on certain days in the week and offering flowers and fruits to the deity, constitute some of the religious acts that Hindus perform in order to be Hindu. These religious acts are the means through which religious worldviews are transmitted from one generation to the other. In a traditional society, these religious acts are followed with a certain routine and any deviation from such a routine is easily noticed by others who might frown upon this. Also, in order for

such a routine of religious activities to be followed, it is assumed that there is a certain degree of homogeneity within the social group. In other words, in a typical Christian village/suburb in Britain or a Hindu village in India, one would not find it difficult to follow the routine of religious activities because of the presence of a distinct religious and cultural ethos, as well as relevant institutional structures such as churches or temples.

Part of the assumption outlined in the above scenario is, that in urban and modern societies where diversity is a central feature, religious practice becomes more difficult in the absence of a homogeneous religious and cultural ethos, and the availability of institutional structures in the area. This is compounded by the fact that modern life is much more complex than traditional lifestyles of the past. Since modern life with all its many dimensions and aspects that pervade both work and leisure time, individuals and their families tend to be more disconnected from each other than they were in the past. With the increasing demand on their time, both adults and children are preoccupied with the things that they are generally attracted to or interested in. In the market place of modern life where there is no shortage of activities, traditional activities such as going to a sacred place to perform a ritual becomes less interesting to a modern person. In general, individuals are less preoccupied with religious ideals and desires than with the daily activities of going to work, attending meetings and earning a living in the competing job market. Naturally, the desire for going to a religious occasion is only secondary to the desire to going to a music concert or a gym. This means that the general religious consciousness that is assumed to be present in traditional society is absent in the modern society. As such, the transmission of religious rituals and doctrines becomes more difficult.

From the scenario outlined above it is no wonder secularist theorists have predicted the gradual disappearance of religion from modern society. David Martin's useful narrative provides some clues to the ideological underpinnings of the secularism theory and documents how sociology – a discipline inextricable from modernity - considered it out of fashion to be dabbling in religion; even in the mid 20th century when some sociologists showed interest in religion, it was treated as a remnant from the past (Martin, 1995: 296-297). When interest was shown, it was assumed that it was non-European societies that needed to be understood with some reference to religion. The rise of the religious right in America and its role in the most recent presidential election might make such assumptions vacuous. Martin was one of the first scholars who recognised in his 1978 study, *A General Theory of Secularisation* that, secularism happened differently in different places and it was not an inevitable phenomenon that happened in modern society everywhere. Although secularism has happened differently in different parts of the world, even in places like the USA, Steve Bruce (2002: 227) has shown that,

> mainstream Christian churches are declining in popularity
> and the conservative Protestant churches are losing their
> doctrinal and behavioural distinctiveness. Privatization, in-
> dividualism and relativism are now affecting the US churches
> in the way they did the British churches in the middle of
> the twentieth century.

It seems to me that the transmission thesis forwarded by scholars such as Steve
Bruce has taken into account modern society's prerogatives and tendencies (see
Bruce 1996: 29ff; 1990: 29). Whereas Thomas Luckmann (1967) attributed the
decline of religion in modern society to the privatisation of religion (i.e. the
quest for inward spirituality) Steve Bruce attributes it to the inability of modern
society to pass social aspects of religion, such as ritual, on to the next generation.
Bruce argues, "[C]rucial to the fate of liberal, diffuse, denominational religion is
success in transmitting it to the next generation" (Bruce, 2002: 239).[3] It is true
that, by and large, in urban societies there is a decline in attendance at religious
meetings and functions, especially by people who have a higher level of educa-
tion and higher levels of income which allows them access to more elite social
habits such as leisure and sporting clubs, intellectual associations and so on.
Although it might be a little too simplistic to generalise as such, one might be
able to make the assumption that the more people move in elite social groups
the less interested they are in religious activities, such as practicing rituals and
adhering to religious doctrines. This does not have anything to do with their
being elite, but rather as Steve Bruce has argued, that the cultural and religious
pluralism that is characteristic of modern society presents greater choice (Bruce,
2002: 236f), which, as Peter Berger has pointed out, undermines any certainty
regarding ones belief (Berger, 1998). In general, in modern, Western societies
today there is the tendency among people to abstain from religious places and
frequent other social spaces that reflect their daily life. Some of them might
entertain a belief in God, but such belief is not necessarily linked to any institu-
tional form of religion with their associated rituals and doctrines. This phenom-
enon might be noticed not only in the modern West but also in countries that
are thought to be highly religious in nature, such as India. Scholars who saw
secularism as a way of life that would eventually preclude a place for religion in
modern society have generally assumed that such a vague belief in God is not a
sufficient variable that would significantly contribute to the sustaining of reli-
gion as an institution in modern society. What is important and necessary for
religion to continue into the future as an important institution of human life is
to have strategies that would make it possible. The transmission thesis implies
that these strategies need to include a strong dimension of ritual participation by
the adherents of religion. In other words, by participating in a ritualised lifestyle
and by ensuring that the present religious orientation and worldview is passed

on. Secular society has made it difficult for the transmission of ritual and thereby the possibility of its continuation into the future.

What both the transmission and secularist theorists do not take into account is that modern society might present new opportunities for religious people to per-petuate their worldview in ways other than conventional ones, such as attending church/temple, the performance of rituals and so on. Also, modern and urbanised people might engage in religious activities for other reasons than religious. In other words, the transmission thesis might assume that to perform religious activities one has to be religious; as exemplified in Bruce's example of the marriage between a liberal protestant and non-practicing Jew (see Bruce, 2002: 239), there is little possibility for a sustained religious transmission in this situation. Or to put it differ-ently, it assumes a co-relation between performing religious activities and being religious. My argument is that in modern society the two need not be related.[4] Those who rely too heavily on the argument that modern society has to be able to transmit religious rituals and doctrines to the next generation in order for religion to survive seem to ignore the intrinsic relationship between religion and culture, and that religion provides people with identity.

The Relationship between Religion and Culture

All religions were born in a specific social, historical and political context. Jewish religion emerged from a Semitic worldview, Christianity initially grew out of an expectation of the coming of a messiah forecast in the Jewish prophetic tradition and Islam grew out of a claim that Mohammed was the final prophet — all these three great religions have a Semitic worldview as their common cultural back-ground. Likewise, one could look at all the religions that grew out of India[5] such as Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism as well as innumerable variants of tribal reli-gions—all of them have a common cultural ethos within which the conceptualisation of various philosophical and theological positions were articu-lated. Whether ultimately there is a transcendental or transempirical reality be-yond the perceived world might be a moot point between those who believe and those who do not, the issue of how people articulate their worldviews is without doubt a culturally constructed process. Cultures within a social and political con-text provide the necessary conceptual tools for expressing those worldviews, doc-trines, rituals, myths and so on. Without those conceptual tools various religions cannot be made sense of. Despite Christian missiologists' attempts to universalise Christianity, they were the ones who most acutely conceded this close relationship between culture and religion. Thus, as one scholar in the field of the sociology of religion put it "[the] relationship between culture and religious expression is very close, in many cases indissoluble. A religious current loses its vitality if it ceases to be rooted in the cultural reality of a people" (De Santa Ana, 1995: 99).

If the relationship between religion and culture is so intrinsic, then what is

conducted in the name of religion could not be radically separated from the allegiance that people have for their respective cultures. Performing religious rituals and adherence to religious beliefs, albeit that people do so for religious reasons, cannot entirely be seen in isolation from their affinity for, and their desire to, perpetuate what they have received from their descendants. In other words, such acts more often than not are intrinsic to who they are and where they came from, and their desire to pass on to the next generation. When people are driven by their desire to perpetuate and pass on their beliefs and practices to the next generation, they do so in many ingenious ways that often result in new inventions of rituals and narratives about their past. Even in the face of modernity when individuals are less inclined to go to religious places and institutions for religious reasons, they still gather in great numbers when festivals and other communally-based religious ceremonies occur as such events invoke their past. In my view, such events enable people to preserve and sustain their past traditions either in a meticulously preserved manner and with close attention to detail, even if they do not fully comprehend the meaning of it; or in some instances they devise many new ways and invent new rules and procedures to preserve something of their past. When the social and cultural location remains unaffected, i.e. when people continue to live in the same location and within the same cultural milieu, religious communities can preserve their traditions for many centuries, as illustrated by the Nambudiri Brahmins in south India who continued to perform their ancient Vedic rituals often unknown to the rest of the world (Staal, 1983). On the other hand, there are cases where rituals are reinvented or modified to suit the new context in which people live. This is clearly illustrated by Diaspora communities who move from their original homeland and create a completely different cultural and social context within their adopted home (Kumar, 2000). In either case, in many societies it is common to observe people wanting to preserve their traditions through rituals and belief systems that belonged to their cultural past. I think it is in the very desire of people to preserve their past lies the *raison de etre* for the continuation of ancient belief systems. Continuation of religious beliefs is therefore tied to this desire to preserve the past and often has nothing to do with one's religiosity or spiritual quest. The foregoing generation may pass on to the next generation some of their values not necessarily through regular temple or church based ritual activities, but by simply creating occasions such as festivals that contribute to the sustaining of a cultural ethos. That is why, for instance, Christians may not all attend church on a regular basis but most will observe a Christian festival such as Christmas or Easter. Similarly, most Hindus celebrate *Divali*, the Festival of Lights, even those that do not consider themselves as very religious Hindus. My point, therefore, is that the survival of religion is no longer tied to visits to temples and churches (although there is still not overwhelming evidence that temples, mosques and churches are not filling up, at least in the less affluent countries) but rather in the desire of cultural groups to publicly celebrate their rituals in the context of a

pluralistic society. This does not mean that people do not perpetuate their beliefs due to religious convictions. The examples of Mariamman and Draupadi Amman rituals indicate that faithfully performing those rituals enables succeeding generations to imbibe those beliefs and practices, and see them as solutions to their psycho-physical and social needs. Despite gaining higher education and becoming more scientific in terms of their worldview, even the very same educated people in most societies continue to value traditional knowledge systems that they have been received through cultural and religious beliefs; especially in times of crisis.

Much of the discussion on the survival of religion and secularisation is based on the distinction between religious belonging and religious practice (Davie, 2000; Martikainen, 2006). Religious belonging assumes that people may belong to a religion but may not practice it and hence do not actively pass on those beliefs and practices to the next generation. Such an assumption ignores the possibility that even though one does not practice religion, it still provides available resources for public transmission of beliefs and practices. The proliferation of temples and organisations among Hindus in South Africa is testimony to this. Even in the European context, for instance, studies in religious pluralism in the Diaspora context reveal that in the last decade of the 20th century, a substantial number of religious organisations from non-Western societies were established in Finland (Martikainen, 2006)[6]. The example of the Festival of Chariots, in Durban, is a case in point in that not everyone who comes to the festival is a keen devotee; some are barely interested in the religious aspect and come simply to enjoy the spectacle. Such festivals not only fulfill the religious aims of devotees but, more importantly, serve to generate social awareness of the religious group's presence. In multicultural societies, the desire to create awareness among outsiders is not to be considered, by any means, less important. It is an important tool for a religious group to gain social acceptance and legitimacy. It is for this reason that the involvement of government officials and politicians in various ceremonies is noteworthy.

I shall now identify and explore two innovative strategies that modern Hindus in South Africa have used to sustain their traditional worldview, namely, the invention of homogeneity and through public performances.

Inventing Homogeneity

One important clarification needs to be made at the outset, that is, the people whom we refer to as "Hindu" did not come to South Africa as a homogenous group. Rather they came from a variety of locations, mainly rural areas and with a variety of traditions and cultural beliefs. I do not need to make the point here that the category "Hindu" is an outsider one, as much scholarly literature exists on this issue. The people whom we as scholars, as well as practitioners themselves, refer to as Hindus are characterised by their heterogeneity in that they

practiced seemingly diverse beliefs and rituals as is evident in the context of South Africa. There are mainly four linguistic groups identified in South Africa: Tamil, Telugu, Hindi and Gujarati- speakers who can each be distinguished by their particular denominational, sectarian and cultural beliefs. Generally, Tamil people are identified as worshippers of Shiva and his cognate gods; the Telugus have been worshippers of Vishnu and his cognate deities although they have become integrated into the Tamil community over time by assimilating their beliefs and practices. The Hindi-speaking people generally worshipped Vishnu and Rama who is considered an incarnation of Vishnu.

The Hindus who came from various villages in India in the 19th century had a certain homogenous worldview belonging to their respective village traditions. So, when they left India and boarded ships to Natal their homogeneity began to disintegrate as they had to mix and live among other Indians from north and south with their different linguistic, cultural and religious beliefs. For the first time, their sense of being "other" began to dawn on them. When they eventually reached Natal, the plantation owners selected the Indian labourers not on the basis of their linguistic and cultural unity, but rather on the basis of their knowledge and ability as sugarcane farmers. As such, they lived on farms not as homogenous communities but made new alliances and bonds with other Indians who did not necessarily speak the same language or perform the same rituals. When they freed themselves from the indenture contract, they began to regroup on the basis of the same language and culture, this time in the proximity of urban locations. They began to buy small landholdings nearer the urban areas in order to be able to reach town easily and sell the fruits and vegetables that they started growing on those small farms. For Indians, this marked the beginning of their desire to forge a new identity in a new land. It seems to me, that fundamental to this new identity was a sense of homogeneity that they began to invent. Since their original homogenous life world had collapsed, it was incumbent upon them to find new ways of finding this new homogeneity, which they did through the religious, cultural and linguistic institutions that they began to build. Their original village-based and language-based cultural identity began to give way to a broader sense of being either a south Indian or north Indian. The Tamils and Telugu-speaking people began to oscillate towards becoming integrated into one cultural group and, in a similar process, the north Indian linguistic communities eventually became integrated into what is commonly known today as the Hindi-speaking community. This meant that, for instance, the south Indian communities integrated their various village-based ritual practices into their new temples and shrines that they began to build from as early as the 1870s. The rituals associated with *Kavadi*, (fire walking), and Mariamman worship became part of their new programme of homogeneity. The temples began to integrate different worship patterns and deities within the same complex. In other words, the inclusion of shrines with the images of Vishnu, Shiva, Muruga and Mariamman or Draupadi has become the norm to cater to the different ritual

traditions of south Indians. The mixing of such diverse ritual traditions in temples and shrines in India is rather uncommon, but in South Africa it became a tool to be deployed in the reinvention of a new homogeneity for south Indians. By the second and third generation, even north Indian communities began to assimilate such new ritual traditions to the extent that, today, there exists a pan South African, Indian ritual tradition. As each temple developed its own character around the priests, elders and families that worshipped in it, new rules of ritual procedures, conventions and even local legends as to how a temple came to be in that location had to be invented. For instance, unlike in the case of India, anyone who knew how to perform the rituals and not necessarily the one who belonged to the caste of Brahmins with all its sub-groupings could assume the role of the Brahmin (priest) in the South African Hindu community (Kumar, 2000:35). Over time, new rules and conventions became norms, for example, a coconut cannot be broken in the temple as it happens in temples in India because of local health restrictions and had less to d ɔ with ritual procedure, therefore it is something that Hindus had to invent to accommodate local municipal laws.

In the South African Hindu Diaspora, a new social structure also began to emerge, as caste rules that guided social life could not be observed anymore in the new context due to their inability to live in single and homogenous caste groups. Some Hindus were able to elevate their caste status by acquiring new caste names and by observing new rituals. Cognate caste groups began to enter into marriage alliances which gave rise to a new social organisation in which caste, for all intents and purposes, gave way to a broad cultural unity. This process of the homogenisation of different ritual practices and caste identities provided Hindus with a sense of belonging to a community. As such, discovering a new way of finding homogeneity was fundamental to their survival in a new place. Hindus in South Africa dug deep into their old cultural and religious practices and integrated them in ways that would make sense to their own context. The succeeding generations followed suit. For the new generations, the old inventions, assimilations and integrations became a tradition that they could call South African Hinduism. These are expressed in their many religious institutions that they had built during the last one and half centuries in South Africa. Their proclivity for building temples and religious institutions or organisations is part of their ongoing homogenising strategy. In his study of the south Asian Diaspora in Germany, Baumann (2002: 95-98) has pointed out that religious institutions are the most commonly built social organisations within the Diaspora and, in my view, is an attempt to pass on ancient beliefs and practices to the next generation. Such an invented homogeneity does not always mean that Hindus do not pursue their specific forms of worship. The three different festivals outlined below indeed reflect diversity amongst South African Hindus.

Public Performances as Transmissions of Beliefs

During the Easter weekend in the greater Durban area, three festivals associated with Hinduism take place. While the three festivals, in isolation, may not have anything in common, each represent different social groups within Hindu society who wish to ensure their beliefs and practices are transmitted to future generations. These festivals are: the Festival of Chariots celebrated by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), the Mariamman Festival, and the Fire Walking Festival dedicated to the worship of the Hindu goddess, Draupadi.

The case of ISKCON in South Africa is an example of how a religious institution uses its public dimensions, such as festivals, to ensure that their beliefs and practices are widely spread and are continued into the next generation. For the last eighteen years the Hare Krishnas in Durban have been organising the annual Festival of Chariots (*Rathayatra*) on the beachfront. The selection of the beachfront during the Easter season beginning on Good Friday is interesting as it is the central location of many sporting activities sponsored by the major cellular phone industries in the country. The television coverage of these events is extensive and it in the midst of these "materialistic" pursuits or activities, that ISKCON locates its festival in an effort to bring to the people, what they call, "Krishna Consciousness". Billboards boldly advertise the focus of their festival, the words: "Yoga, Mantra, Astrology and Philosophy" appear on the one side and on the other: "Food, Fashion, Vedic Art and Meditation". The classical and the ancient on the one hand, and the modern and contemporary on the other seem to indicate ISKON's ability to make itself relevant to contemporary society. The fusion of traditional and contemporary culture is reflected in their opening dance performances which includes classical Indian dance forms as well as modern fusion dance and African rhythms. Various stalls are set up offering a range of activities from spiritual aspects to material products—stalls for meditation, Krishna artworks, question and answer sessions, devotional music stall, stalls for food and drinks, Eastern wear, gifts and souvenirs, Krishna Seva stall (service to Krishna) — all of these are put together to produce a heightened consciousness of Krishna. The sacred chant of "Hare Krishna, Hare Rama" is emblazoned on the banners at the entrance and is chanted continuously to the accompanying music.

The festival begins on Good Friday evening with the gathering of some of the high-ranking monks of ISKCON from around the world. The various activities and celebrations attract a large and diverse crowd: some are devotees, some are visitors, some are tourists who happen to be on the beach and some are homeless people who come for the free food. Everyone is encouraged to partake in the free food offered in the name of Krishna. On the following Saturday, the procession carrying the chariot of Krishna begins at the City Hall with the City Manger opening the event. The procession's route is marked out, and the local police and the traffic department are on hand to ensure that the procession proceeds smoothly. The chariot is decorated with symbols associated with Krishna

and the image of Swami Prabhupada is seated in the chariot. Singers and dancers accompanied by hundreds of devotees pull the chariot across the streets of the city along the demarcated route. Ahead of the main chariot is a smaller cart carrying the image of Lord Chaitanya, who began the movement of Krishna devotion, in Bengal, in the 15th century. Many centuries later, Swami Prabhupada in the mid 1960s took the movement to the West and reinvented it as a popular and modern one known today as the International Society for Krishna Consciousness. The massive success and popularity of the movement is attributed to its ability to transmit their philosophical and religious ideas throughout the world through festivals and public chanting of the name of Krishna. In the last two decades of its existence in South Africa and especially in Durban, ISKON has managed to raise enormous resources, both human and material, to become one of the most successful religious organisations in the modern world.

The Mariamman festival takes place in a number of local temples solely dedicated to the worship of Mariamman. The most famous being the one that is organised in the south of Durban at a place called Isipingo. The other one is held at a temple which is over a hundred years old, and is located on the sugar estate at Mt. Edgecombe, another Indian suburb. There are two older temples built here, one is for the worship of Mariamman, a village goddess still worshipped in many parts of south India; the other one is a small shrine of Kali. The Kali shrine may have been established by the Hindi speaking north Indian Hindus, but has now been appropriated by the Tamils. The red flags, which are usually associated with Hindi-speakers, hoisted at the Kali temple hints at its earlier association. While the Mariamman temple has a male non-Brahman priest, the Kali temple has a female non-Brahman priest. Both temples are also marked with the presence of the anthill, which is usually associated with village goddess worship in India. At both places, worship includes both vegetarian and non-vegetarian offerings such as chicken, eggs and goats or sheep. Some devotees slaughter the animals, prepare food and distribute it to the devotees that come to these temples during the festival period. In general, there are no outsiders who come to this festival, as it is highly regulated and restricted through various ritual rules. At the Mariamman temple, however, in 2006, as part of the festival the organisers felt it appropriate to have a debating contest for the youth. The topic of the debate was "Public Speaking and Critical Thinking" and was organised in cooperation with the local African National Congress (ANC) members. Mrs. Ela Gandhi, the grand daughter of Mahatma Gandhi was the guest of honour. The debate included both black and Indian participants.

The Fire Walking festival is celebrated at the temple in the old suburb known as Cato Manor on the banks of the Umgeni River. This former township was inhabited, initially, by indentured Indians as well as blacks until the apartheid government, under the Group Areas Act, forcibly removed all its inhabitants. Although the apartheid government intended to turn it into a whites-only settlement, it remained unoccupied for decades, until recently. The temple that was

built at Cato Manor for the worship of the goddess Draupadi remained untouched along with the small shrine of the goddess Gangamma on the roadside of Bellair road which is the main road to reach Cato Manor. Fire walking is an annual ritual that takes place at the Draupadi Amman temple. Devotees take vows during times of need such as in the case of a financial or family crisis, or when illness has affected themselves or their loved ones. They fast for a period of ten days before the fire walking ritual and abstain from non-vegetarian foods, alcohol, cigarettes, sex and other activities that are considered non-conducive to their spiritual growth. On Good Friday, the Fire Walking festival takes place during which devotees put themselves through extremely painful rituals that involve the piercing of their bodies with sharp hooks. Some pull festival carts with these hooks. The devotees are said to enter into a trance state and do not feel the pain. The festival culminates in the final event of walking on the hot coals that have been burning during the day. The devotees who have taken vows are the only ones allowed to walk on the fire. One of the devotees interviewed by a local journalist says, "[y]our state of mind is altered and all you focus is the Mother. Your body is numb and you do not feel any pain when you are pierced, or when you are crossing the fire" (*Sunday Tribune*, April 16, 2006). The festival is attended mainly by devotees but it does attract a fair number of visitors, tourists and Hindus who come to see the spectacle rather than to participate in the ritual of walking on hot coals.

Like ISKON's Festival of Chariots, these festivals also attract a great number of devotees, but they are characterised by the specific groups of Hindus who attend these rituals and festivals and they are located within the temple complex, unlike the Festival of Chariots which ventures out on to the beach. Such public manifestation of religious ceremonies and festivals, albeit driven by religious devotion, are clearly organised ways to ensure their survival into the future. The Festival of Chariots, Mariamman and Kali worship, and the Fire Walking ritual may not have much in common from a theological point of view, but they do represent the multifaceted Hinduism that we find in the Diaspora. A caveat needs to be made. It is perhaps assumed that everyone who attends these festivals is a religiously inclined devotee. The various activities provided at the Festival of Chariots do not necessarily attract only devout Hindus, but a whole range of people—from curious ones to serious ones. Modern, urbanised transmission strategies of religious groups attract people from all walks of life and there is no evidence to suggest that everyone participating in the festivals is doing so for spiritual nourishment. In order for the secularisation thesis and the accompanying transmission thesis to be conclusively proved, the instances that I have cited above need to be taken into account. The continued relevance of these rituals in the lives of people depends on their motivation to pass them on to the next generation as values from their past. It is unlikely that this sense of the past will simply vanish in the increasingly scientific and modern world despite the many options that modernity might present. If anything the return to traditional, ritualised life from time to time may seem

romantic as modern life becomes more and more complex.

As a counterpoint to the "death of religion", Heelas and Woodhead have suggested a subjectivisation thesis which can account for the decline of religion ("life-as religion") on the one hand and growth of spirituality ("subjective-life") on the other. They have argued that the Durkhemian principle which says, "people are more likely to be involved with forms of the sacred which are 'consistent with their ongoing values and beliefs' than with those which are not" is the basis of their subjectivisation thesis. (Heelas and Woodhead, 2004: 78). This would mean that people do not subscribe to beliefs if they are not related to their daily life. My own study indicates that people do not necessarily relate their religious beliefs to their everyday life. They can easily compartmentalise their lives by pursuing a modern lifestyle, while at the same time, follow their age-old rituals because that is what previous generations have passed on to them. With the exception of a few devout Hare Krishnas, the ...ajority who participate in their rituals do not necessarily structure their lives in accordance with the beliefs of the Krishna Consciousness philosophy. Similarly, the Mariamman and Druapadi goddess worshippers do not necessarily live their everyday life trying to make sense of their activities in line with their rituals that they perform at these festivals. Nonetheless, they participate in them and thus sustain them, for it is these rituals and practices that give them a sense of who they are and where they come from, and which they then pass on to their next generation. Therefore, my study indicates that both the transmission thesis and the subjectivisation thesis are problematic in explaining the survival of religion in modern society. Religion will survive not because people can or cannot follow what they preach, but rather in their ability to separate their idealised beliefs from their daily working lives.

Notes

1   Paper Presented at the XVI ISA World Congress of Sociology, Durban, South Africa, 23-29 July 2006

2   Paul Heelas et al. have argued that there is a correlation between the rise of spiritualism and decline of attendance in traditional religious institutions. (Heelas and Woodhead, 2004).

3   It is important to note that when Steve Bruce refers to decline, he is mainly referring to denominational or mainstream religion.

4   Others have argued that even the classical rituals such as Vedic rituals are performed not with any religious intentionality such as gainng religious merit, but simply to perpetuate cultural continuity, for example, see Frits Staal's notion of the meaninglessness of ritual (1979).

5   A new term is in vogue to refer to the religions of India, viz., Indogenic religions. I came across this term first in a speech given by the president of the Hindu Council of United Kingdom recently (February 2006).

6   Although one could site examples from all over Europe to illustrate the recent emergence of religious organizations in Europe, Martikainen's study is the most recent one that is conducted albeit in a relatively less talked about place in Europe. But it does provide a good example in that Finland is a relatively rare example regarding immigration of people from non-Western societies.

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