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Permalink

https://escholarship.org/uc/item/10n3w3kz

Journal

Environment and Behavior, 41(3)

ISSN

0013-9165

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Publication Date

2008-05-06

DOI

10.1177/0013916508320459

Peer reviewed

Religious Placemaking and Community Building in Diaspora

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Community and loss of community have received much scholarly attention, whereas community formation and placemaking have been less well studied. Similarly, several studies have documented the role of religion in the lives of new immigrants, but little has been written about religious placemaking and community formation. Through an empirical study of a new immigrant group—the Hindus of Southern California—this article shows how religious placemaking helped build community. It details three salient components, namely, place planning and organization, place design, and place rituals, and also how these helped form and sustain community. It describes some challenges encountered and strategies used to negotiate, mitigate, or minimize them. In providing these delineations, it shows how *religio loci* and place nostalgia influenced and aided community building.

Keywords: religion; placemaking; community; temple building

Introduction

Does religious placemaking help in community building for immigrants in diaspora? We begin by describing what the literature teaches us. Very little has been written about religious placemaking by immigrants, although there has been much writing on religion and the new immigrant, and on community but little on the physical aspects of place and community formation.

Religion and the New Immigrant

In recent years, there has been an increased interest in understanding the role of religion in the lives of immigrants (Carnes & Yang, 2004; Ebaugh &

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Chafetz, 2000; Eck, 2001; Iwamura & Spickard, 2003; Leonard, Stepick, Vasquez, & Holdaway, 2005; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2003, 2004a, 2005, 2006, 2008; Min & Kim, 2002; Orsi, 1999; Yang & Ebaugh, 2001; Warner & Wittner, 1998). By facilitating immigration from Asia, Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East, the U.S. Immigration and Reform Act of 1965 helped begin a new chapter in America's immigrant history. These new non-European immigrants brought with them a plurality of religions that has altered the American religious landscape (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000). Examples of these religions are Buddhism, Islam, Sikhism, Bahaism, Zoroastrianism, and Hinduism. At the public level, followers of these religions have created their own sacred spaces, religious institutions, organizations, support services, and transnational linkages (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Leonard et al., 2005; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2005, 2006; Warner & Wittner, 1998). At the private level, religion has continued to influence gender roles, mate selection, and family lives, and is used by some to maintain or "re-negotiat[e] these relationships" (Carnes & Yang, 2004, p. 3). Religion continues to define and structure the personal and community identities of many new immigrants (Leonard et al., 2005).

That immigrants are practicing their religions with a new vigor is attested by the upsurge in the building of places of worship. Sikh Gurdwaras, Buddhist Pagodas, Hindu Temples, and Muslim Mosques are visible in several major metropolitan areas such as Boston, New York, Houston, Los Angeles, and Chicago (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Eck, 2001). Religious festivals, celebrations, processions, fiestas, music, and art have added to the richness of American urban life (Carnes & Yang, 2004; Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Eck, 2001). This has been accompanied by a rise in religious consumerism, evident in the marketing of articles of faith among new immigrants and even among native-born Americans (Diamond, 2000, 2002; Giggie & Winston, 2002; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2005), and in the proliferation of support services, such as religious schools, camps, banking, travel agencies, bookstores, grocery stores, butcher shops, restaurants, and cafes (Diamond, 2000; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2005) aimed at facilitating and sustaining a religious lifestyle.

This growing body of literature has focused on several important themes, such as the increased congregational focus (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Warner & Wittner, 1998; Yang & Ebaugh, 2001), the creation of transnational identities (Suh, 2003), contestation and conflict (Bhardwaj & Rao, 1998; Fenton, 1988; Lin, 1996), the role of women (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; George, 1998; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2004a; Rayaprol, 1997), and the transmission of an ethnoreligious identity to the second

generation (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Bankston & Zhou, 1995; Min, 2003). However, very few studies have focused on the meaning of sacred places and the role they play in the formation of community.

Place and Community

According to Orum and Chen (2003), "Place has a distinctive and unique role for human beings, their communities and cultures" (p. 15). Over the years, this connection between people and place has been the subject of extensive scholarly research in anthropology, geography, sociology, and environmental psychology (Altman & Low, 1992; Gieryn, 2000; Relph, 1976; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1993, 2004b; Mazumdar, Mazumdar, Docuyanan, & McLaughlin, 2000; Milligan, 1998; Orum & Chen, 2003; Proshansky, Fabian, & Kaminoff, 1983; Twigger-Ross & Uzzell, 1996 among others) leading to the development of such important concepts as place identity (Proshansky et al., 1983), topophilia (Tuan, 1974), spatial identity (Fried, 1963), settlement identity (Feldman, 1990), and place dependence (Stokols & Shumaker, 1981). In his pathbreaking book *Place and Placelessness,* Relph (1976) succinctly outlined the role of place in the lives of people:

> there is for virtually everyone a deep association with and consciousness of the places where we were born and grew up, where we live now or where we have had particularly moving experiences. This association seems to constitute a vital source of both individual and cultural identity and security. (p. 43)

From these studies, we learn that "significant places" (Relph, 1976) provide "stability and security" (Brown & Perkins, 1992), act as "anchors" (Marcus, 1992), and become "symbolic life line[s]" (Hummon, 1989), and "fields of care" (Relph, 1976). Attachment to place "facilitates a sense of security and well-being, defines group boundaries and stabilizes memories" (Gieryn, 2000, p. 481).

Places not only foster a "sense of individual identity, of who we are" but also a "sense of community, of being part of a larger group, whether a family or a neighborhood" (Orum & Chen, 2003, p. 11).

> Just as individuals come to have a sense of themselves through their connections to places in their lives, so, too, social groups, ranging from families and friends to neighborhoods and communities, develop a powerful sense of affiliation and common identity based upon their connections to places. (Orum & Chen, 2003, p. 12)

Physical settings such as homes, plazas, ethnic enclaves, neighborhoods, cafes, and temples can all "reflect and shape people's understandings of who they are as individuals and as members of groups" (Brown & Perkins, 1992, p. 280). Several scholars (e.g., Hillery, 1955; Hummon, 1989, 1992; Mazumdar et al., 2000; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1999; Molotch, Freudenburg, & Paulsen, 2000; Orum & Chen, 2003; Park, 1936) have emphasized that community has a spatial component. Relph (1976) elaborated,

> The relationship between community and place is indeed a very powerful one in which each reinforces the identity of the other and in which the landscape is very much an expression of communally held beliefs and values and of interpersonal involvement. (p. 35)

This reciprocal relationship between community and place suggested by Relph (1976) has been described by Rivlin (1982) and Abrahamson (1996) in their studies of the Lubavitchers of New York. Members of this Jewish community, through strong group ties to their *rebbe* (spiritual leader) and complete immersion in their religious life, have developed a deep sense of attachment to their Crown Heights neighborhood, and their neighborhood in turn with the *rebbe*'s home, synagogue, and *yeshiva* (religious school) embodies the community's values, beliefs, and interpersonal relationships. Residents in such communities "share an identity, a commitment to a place, and a way of life in which religious institutions provide the central organizing theme" (Abrahamson, 1996, p. 2).

Places come to be invested with deep emotional meaning so much so that collective sentiments strongly resist attempts to change or alter the setting. Drawing on his study of Boston, Firey (1945) demonstrated that despite serious economic dysfunction for the Central Business District, several of Boston's landmarks, such as Beacon Hill, Boston Commons, and the burial grounds, have been preserved because the collective sentiments and attachment of people prevailed over economic and commercial interests. In instances when significant spaces have been altered, destroyed, or defaced, residents have felt a deep sense of loss (Fried, 1963; Gans, 1962) "with devastating implications for individual and collective identity, memory and history—and for psychological well-being" (Gieryn, 2000, p. 482).

Some residents go through a prolonged grieving process following such loss (Abrahamson, 1996; Fried, 1963; Gans, 1962). They revisit lost places to remember and relive their collective past. In Boston, a group of middle-aged Jews meet regularly to "recall the street life of their beloved inner city

neighborhoods" (Levine & Harmon, 1992, p. ix). Similarly, Abrahamson (1996) described how a "few dozen Jewish men originally from the Brownsville section of Eastern Brooklyn hold an annual reunion in New York . . . to reminisce about their old neighborhood." Based on his study of Boston's West End, Gans (1962) described place visits and revealed similar feelings of grief and bereavement related to place loss, poignantly saying, "I was told that before the West End was totally cleared—and even afterwards—West Enders would come back on weekends to walk through the old neighborhood and the rubble-strewn streets" (p. 308).

Displacement and loss of such places, can lead to "identity discontinuity" (Milligan, 2003, p. 381). At such times, individuals and groups often rely on nostalgia "to regain" a "sense of identity continuity through recognizing and redefining a shared past" (Milligan, 2003, p. 381). Others try to return, to reclaim and rebuild (if possible) their familiar places. Residents of Yungay, Peru, left homeless by a devastating earthquake, were determined to rebuild near the old site rather than relocate elsewhere as preferred by the authorities. "Although the plaza was destroyed, residents created and used new gathering places—in shops, on soccer fields, in the church, and by the gravesites on the scar itself" "to regain a tangible place" (Brown & Perkins, 1992, p. 295). Similarly, residents of a village in Philippines destroyed by a volcanic eruption "returned to the place where [the] community had been. They took up their lives in the half-structures, reassembling the pieces of their religious life around the visible portions of the old church" (Orum & Chen, 2003, p. 2).

For first generation immigrants, places of the past continue to be an important component of their personal and group identities. Leaving behind familiar places, homes, neighborhoods, and communities, they too experience feelings of environmental deprivation (Mazumdar, 1992), displacement (Milligan, 2003), placelessness (Relph, 1976), place loss, and place nostalgia (Milligan, 2003). Places from the past are "engraved" in their "collective memory" (Halbwachs, 1980) and serve as important reminders of who they are. Monterey Park, Little Saigon, Little India, among others can be seen as attempts made by the new immigrants to "transport with them their communities from abroad, and reconnect to the new places" (Orum & Chen, 2003, p. 22; see also Mazumdar et al., 2000). Re-creating significant places in the new setting thus becomes an important step in forging new place ties and helps provide an immigrant with a "symbolic life line to a continuous sense of identity" (Hummon, 1989, p. 219).

Does creating or making a sacred place help immigrants develop a sense of community and how? How does a sacred place get built in a foreign

environment? What challenges are encountered? How are place connections formed and transformed? Once built, how is community sustained? Our objective here is to answer these questions through an in-depth study of the building of a Hindu temple in Southern California. We focus on how one immigrant community established new place ties and yet reconnected with the past through the building of a temple. Our study demonstrates how the creation of the temple, with its specific architectural elements as well as its ritual and sociocultural activities all helped to foster, integrate, and solidify a sense of community. We posit that there exists an important relationship between religion and place, between sacred placemaking and community building and identity, and that sacred places not only express a group's religious identity, they can also play a significant role in the formation of community.

Method

The primary method used for this research was Naturalistic Field Research, a main objective of which is to study phenomena as they occur naturally in their natural settings. Minimizing disturbance and obtrusiveness is important. It is an

> investigation that is directed to a given empirical world in its natural ongoing character instead of to simulation of such a world or to an abstraction from it (as in the case of a laboratory experimentation) or to a substitute for the world in the form of a pre-set image of it. (Blumer, 1969, p. 46)

A second important goal of this method is to learn about a social group or community in an up-close way. Similar approaches used by others are naturalistic social research (Blumer, 1969; Lofland, 1967) and qualitative social research (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). This goal involves apprehending the emic view as closely as possible, and obtaining a deep and rich understanding, called for in the parallel methodology of *verstehen* first proposed by Wilhelm Dilthey (see Ermath, 1978) and adapted into the social sciences by Max Weber and also Alfred Schutz (1967). For this, there is a need to collect rich data:

> ideally, a wide and diverse range of information [is] collected over a relatively prolonged period of time . . . that collection is achieved again ideally, through direct, face-to-face contact with, and prolonged immersion in some location or circumstance." (Lofland & Lofland, 1984, p. 11)

Third, careful attention is given to socially negotiated arrangements, situated rationales, shared understandings, views, mores, norms, rituals, and social relations. A fourth component consists of the physical setting, artifacts, and objects and the ways a group views and interacts with these.

The purpose of this study is not to test meta theories or a predetermined hypothesis but rather to use thick description (Geertz, 1973) to provide a detailed understanding (*verstehen*) of the physical and social world of the Hindu Temple in Southern California and the meanings attached to it by social actors.

To collect rich and good data a two-pronged approach was followed. On the one hand, a broad number of data collection techniques were used, and on the other, search for depth was intensified in each technique.

A major data collection technique was in situ or field observation through fieldwork at the temple site done in vivo. This observational information was recorded by means of notes, sketches, and photographs. Detailed observations were conducted of several components as described below.

The physical setting was the subject of careful examination. This included study of the design, the design philosophy or approach, the buildings constructed over time, the spaces and amenities provided, inspection of selected details, and the facilities in use by staff and visitors. It also included an experiential component, where the researchers spent time in the buildings obtaining first-hand experiences of the various spaces. Including the physical setting in this way is unusual in social scientific research, but we contend, very fruitful and a much neglected area. Rare in suggesting that "taking in the physical setting" is useful, Berg (2004, p. 170) offered three reasons: (a) to think about how to cover the various areas, (b) wandering around can help get acquainted with inhabitants, and (c) it can lead to first impressions which can become points of reference. Although this is a beginning, it does not do the physical setting full justice, as it overlooks the energy and commitment of those who invested in its creation, how it enables, structures, and sometimes constrains social relations, how it displays cultural ideals, and how it reflects community formation.

People were the second subject of observation. It included observing those who work at the temple, including the priests, the manager and managerial staff, in addition to visitors, including elders, adults, and children. The persons, their locations, and their activities and actions were noted.

A third subject of observation was the social interactions among the various persons. How adults interacted with other known adults and with children, how children were taught the proper way to do things, and how groups of persons or families related to others were also observed.

A fourth focus of observations was the religious proceedings, rituals, and ceremonial events. Included were not only the formal events but also preparation for the events. It included community ceremonies as well as individual prayers. Less formal events were also observed.

Observation sessions were of varying lengths; they were at least an hour long, and most were much longer. Initial sessions were general and broad with subsequent sessions more focused on particular happenings. Observations were unstructured; the intent was to be present for special events, rituals, and prayers, and also on nonceremonial days, on weekdays, and weekends so that a good variety of conditions could be observed.

Participant observation was conducted through participation in several activities, such as religious and ritual events at the temple, purchasing food at the kitchen and eating in the dining area, and using the facilities.

Interviews were also used to collect data. Unstructured interviewing included long in-depth interviews and also multiple interviews with key informants. As Kvale (1996) pointed out,

> The qualitative research interview aims at obtaining nuanced descriptions from the different qualitative aspects of the interviewee's life world. It works with words and not with numbers . . . Precision . . . measurements. Precision in description and stringency in meaning interpretation correspond in qualitative interviews to exactness in quantitative measurements. (p. 32)

Some interviews were carried out at the setting and were brief, and others were conducted at the university and were more detailed and longer. For the interviewer, knowledgeable informants can take on the role of teachers as aptly pointed out by Spradley (1979):

> I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. Will you become my teacher and help me understand? (p. 34)

In this regard, "quality rather than quantity" (Kvale, 1996, p. 103) takes on added meaning and seeking out, and learning from key informants becomes an important component of qualitative research (see also Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Finally, additional information was gathered from written records, archival material, such as temple newsletters, booklets, and other temple records, and

examination of newspapers and Web sites, and so on. Thus, unlike studies that depend entirely on interviews as their sole source of data, where the interviews are expected to provide all information, to be complete, this research utilized many sources and kinds of data, including interviews.

Data were collected over a period of several years (beginning in 1991 and still continues), which provided the opportunity to see history unfold, attendance increase, and the temple expand. Although these various forms of data were collected as part of a larger project, and they helped the researchers obtain a better understanding, not all forms were equally utilized for this article. This article draws more on observational and archival information.

The Hindu Community of Southern California and the Transplantation of Religion

The Hindu community of Southern California is a relatively new immigrant group arriving largely following the changes brought about by the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. In the early years, temple building was not foremost in the mind of this fledgling community. The population was small and dispersed and focused initially on establishing a financial foothold in the new country (Fenton, 1988; Jain, 1989). In addition, the community was aware that transplanting their Hindu religion in the public realm in America would be complex and difficult. Unlike the prevailing Judeo-Christian traditions, Hinduism does not focus on a text (such as the Bible), or on collective prayer, and instead of avowal to a singular god includes multiple manifestations of god. These and other differences leave Hindus and their practices in public space vulnerable to suspicion and even overt hostility (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2003).

As practiced in India, Hinduism is primarily noncongregational, with no mandated day and time for collective prayer at the temple. Although temples are many, ranging from simple roadside shrines to monumental, ornate structures, visits to the temple are left to the individual and/or family. This focus on the individual is further reinforced through the domestic practice of religion. Private ritual at home constitutes an important aspect of religion with the family altar representing the temple of the home (Fenton, 1988; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2003). As a result, even when temples and other institutional structures and support systems were lacking, in large part due to the nature of the Hindu religion described briefly above, early Hindu immigrants could continue to be religious at the private, individual, and

personal level by relying on home-based practice and foregoing collective space for congregational temple-based prayers. The need for a temple as an auspicious place for prayer, however, was left unfulfilled.

As the community grew, personal domestic ritual practices were supplemented with group activities held in homes. Some of these were special prayers, and others were to commemorate important life cycle rites, such as birth of children.

Other collective celebrations were sponsored by regional associations and clubs, which focused primarily on regional celebrations of Hinduism, such as *Durga Pūjā* for Bengalis, *Pongal* for Tamilians, and so on. These events were held mostly in rented halls and auditoria.

By the early 1970s the Hindu community had matured; it had established itself financially; many had decided to stay permanently (see also Fenton, 1988; Jain, 1989); families were formed and children were now growing up in predominantly Christian America where Hindus were a religious minority lacking their own public sacred spaces and the services of their trained *purohit*s (ritual specialists or priests). These were significant developments. The need for appropriate abode for the gods, proper priest-mediated prayers and rituals, as also for collective, ceremonial prayers not possible in the domestic practice of the religion came to be felt more intensely. Along with in-home worship and family observances, it was important for Hindu American children to experience temple-Hinduism, its architecture, priest-led religious practices, and symbolism. In addition, their Hindu identity needed to be molded, established, and affirmed through family socialization and community interaction, participation, and celebration. Domestic Hinduism now needed to be reinforced and supported at the public level. In this, Berger and Luckmann's comments (1967) have particular relevance for the transplanted Hindu community:

> The individual living for many years among people of a different faith and cut off from the community of those sharing his own may continue to identify himself as, say, a [Hindu]. Through prayer, religious exercises, and similar techniques his old [Hindu] reality may continue to be subjectively relevant to him. At the very least the techniques may sustain his continued self-identification as a [Hindu]. They will, however, become subjectively empty of "living" reality unless they are "revitalized" by social contact with other [Hindus]. To be sure, an individual usually remembers the realities of his past. But the way to "refresh" these memories is to converse with those who share their relevance. (p. 155, Catholic has been substituted with [Hindu])

This growing number of Hindus needed to converse with other Hindus and revitalize their religion through social contact in their own sacred center.

In the next section, we take up the building of this sacred center in Southern California and its implications for the Hindu American community. Although we focus primarily on the temple at Malibu, examples from other temples will also be used.

Sacred Placemaking and Community Formation

For Hindus in Southern California, building a temple was a result of the community's desire to make a place for practicing their own religion in their new setting in America. In doing so, they engaged in sacred placemaking. According to Schneekloth and Shibley (1995),
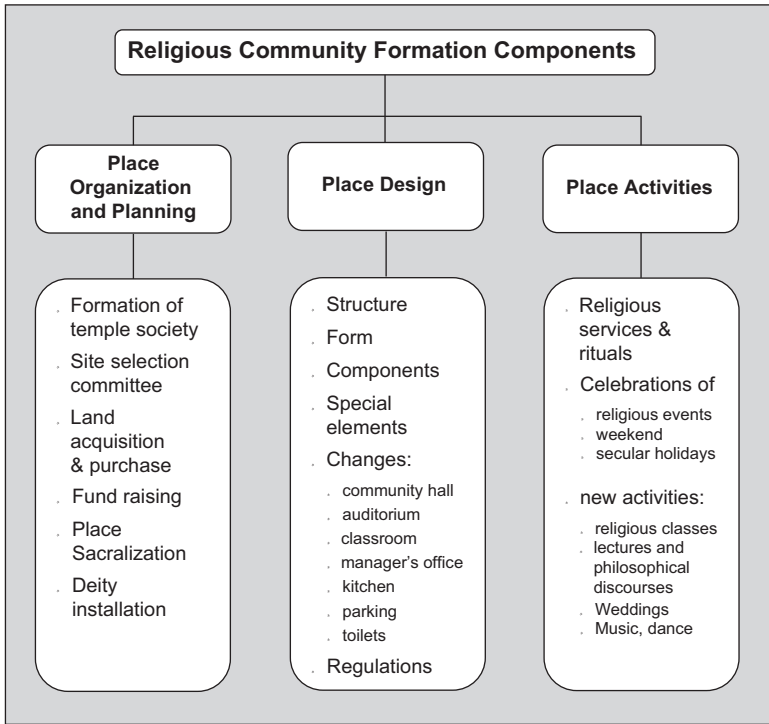
> place making is the way all of us as human beings transform the place in which we find ourselves into places in which we live. The making of places . . . not only changes and maintains the physical world of living; it is also a way we make our communities and connect with other people. In other words, place making is not just about the relationship of people to their places; it also creates relationships among people in places. (p. 1)

Other scholars have elaborated on different aspects of this process. Gieryn (2000, p. 468) focused on the role of place makers: "upstream forces that drive the creation of place with power and wealth"; place professionals such as architects, planners, and policymakers; "and ordinary people who experience places" and attach meaning to them.

We add other dimensions to this literature. Most significant, in contrast to the writings cited above which looked primarily at secular placemaking— plazas, enclaves, and so on—we explicate on the connection between sacred placemaking, involving religious values, beliefs, and symbolism, and community formation. We describe collaboration between place professionals (religiously trained temple architects and secular designers) as well as ritual specialists, such as priests, in the creation of a sacred place. Furthermore, we point to modification of design for the sacred due to secular laws.

Our analysis focuses on three interrelated components (see Figure 1). First is place organization and planning, which helped bring the community together to appropriate, purify, and transform space. Second is place design, which needed to conform to religious requirements, promote special relationships between spaces and activities, as well as the spatial modifications needed to facilitate a sense of community and meet local civil regulations. A third set is place activities; once built, the activities in place needed to

Figure 1
Community Formation Components for Sacred Placemaking

Religious Community Formation Components		
Place Organization and Planning	**Place Design**	**Place Activities**

. Formation of temple society
. Site selection committee
. Land acquisition & purchase
. Fund raising
. Place Sacralization
. Deity installation
	. Structure
	. Form
	. Components
	. Special elements
	. Changes:
	  . community hall
	  . auditorium
	  . classroom
	  . manager's office
	  . kitchen
	  . parking
	  . toilets
	. Regulations
		. Religious services & rituals
		. Celebrations of
		  . religious events
		  . weekend
		  . secular holidays
		. new activities:
		  . religious classes
		  . lectures and philosophical discourses
		  . Weddings
		  . Music, dance

cater to the religious as well as the social and cultural needs of the immigrant community. Through this 3-part process, sacred placemaking helped to build, foster, and solidify a community.

Place Organization and Planning: Building Community

Place organization and planning was a set of acts leading to the formation of a community and requiring participation of community members at several levels. In the early stages in particular it required decision making and selfless contributions of time, resources, and labor.

Several Southern California Hindus met in April 1977 to discuss the idea of building a temple. At this meeting, they decided to form an organization, the Hindu Temple Society of Southern California Incorporated (HTSSC; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2006). At their July meeting, they resolved to build

a temple in Southern California that would not only be a religious center where Hindu gods could be worshipped in their sacred microcosm, but whose architecture would be authentic and where religion and cultural identity could both be developed through ritual, music, and dance (HTSSC, 1984).

The next step was the selection of an appropriate site. This task was delegated to the Site Selection Committee, which after a careful search in seven Southern California cities chose a 4.5-acre plot located in Malibu. This site had *religio loci* or religious sanctity of place and was considered particularly auspicious because it was near an ocean and surrounded by hills both of which had great symbolic significance for Hindu sacred space (Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2006; see also Eck, 2000; Figure 2).

The group faced several difficulties. The organization lacked the funds to purchase the property. Despite this and other problems, the Hindu community remained strongly committed to the site. Financial hurdles were overcome when a group of 30 community members bought the land in June 1978 and donated it to the society for the construction of the temple.

Opposition from local groups was strong: "Ecologists and nature lovers argued [that] the temple, located amid the hills would be out of place. 'It took us a long time to convince them,' says a trustee" (Pais, 1993, p. 60c).On overcoming these obstacles the community shifted attention to taking steps toward building the temple.

Although auspicious, the site was located in an area generally considered profane. The site needed to be prepared for temple construction. This involved spatial differentiation and ritual purification of the site from the surrounding profane spaces. Through *bhūmi pūjā* (*bhoomi pooja* or groundbreaking prayers and rituals), the Hindu community ritually cleansed a piece of American soil by plowing and planting seeds and in so doing prepared the site for the building of a temple (Clothey, 1983; Fenton, 1988; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2006). The site was now ready for temple construction.

Deity installation was another special occasion for community building and participation. It also marked the completion of a long community project. *Mahā Kumbhabhishekham* (deity installation and inauguration) ceremonies enabled the community to celebrate the arrival of the deity at the new temple. These were conducted over a period of 7 days, from May 7, 1984, through May 13, 1984 (HTSSC, 1984). During this period, the community participated in a series of significant ritual activities. Several *kumbham*s (decorated pots) containing water from the sacred rivers were collected and sanctified through the chanting of *mantra*s (prayers). On the appointed days, priests and the community of believers gathered at the temple to collectively conduct

Figure 2
Temple Site Surrounded by the Hills

the ritual process of deity installation. Some devotees were active participants; they carried the *kumbham*s around the temple and bathed the deity with the sanctified water, a process known as *abhisekham*, and a few even climbed to the top of the temple sanctuary and poured water from above, whereas the rest of the assembled crowd watched reverentially from below (see also Eck, 2000; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2006).

Accomplishing the sacred center required continued community support, participation and commitment, from inception and fundraising, through site selection and ultimately temple construction and installation of deities. Lack of funds, from being an initial hurdle, became a community catalyst when a few Hindu American families bought the land for the temple. This contribution is gratefully acknowledged by the community through the inscription of each name on a plaque displayed in the lower level of the temple (Figure 3). Others from the community, such as architectural and engineering consultants, donated their time and professional services. In addition, Hindu religious organizations helped by enabling the importation of trained temple architects and craftsmen for the temple project. Actions of a few were supplemented by actions of many. By building in America a temple where their gods could find a permanent home, Hindu Americans had "begun to build a new Hindu community" (Eck, 2000, p. 222). They successfully created a

Figure 3
Plaque Acknowledging Land Donors of Hindu Temple
Society of Southern California

sacred microcosm that was completely and uniquely in their cultural image (Clothey, 1983). Hindu Americans took "an important step toward community formation. . . . Establishing such a place mark[ed] the beginning of their transformation from the short-term attitudes of temporary sojourners to the long-range expectations of permanent residents" (Fenton, 1988, p. 169).

Place Design: Facilitating a Sense of Community

Architecturally, the Malibu temple is designed to be an authentic center. Authentic in the sense that it was designed following the formal canons and guidelines of temple architecture laid out in the Śilpa Śāstras (Shilpa Shastra or manual of Hindu Temple Architecture). To build the temple according to the principles and exacting codes of temple architecture laid out in the Śilpa Śāstras, the community sponsored and brought to America, Hindu temple building specialists including a sthāpati (temple designer) and śilpis (shilpi or artisans), all of whom had been rigorously trained in the

Figure 4
Temple Gopuram, Side View

ancient art of temple architectural design. The temple was designed by the sthāpati from India, but a local Hindu architect in Southern California donated his services in preparing and conforming the plans to local building codes (see also Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2006; Fenton, 1988).

Built in the Chola style of architecture, it contains many important features of traditional South Indian Hindu temple architecture. Its (*shikhara* or spire) tower over the surrounding landscape; massive *gopuram*s (gateways; Figures 4 and 5) with elaborate Hindu sculptures on its side lead into the temple interior. In its physical design, the temple is a replica of similar sacred centers in India. One young Hindu high school student, born and raised in America summarized it the following way: "When you go to the temple you find a little place of India transplanted in America. You see priests in their traditional clothing (Figure 6) perform ancient rituals. You see beautiful Hindu architecture. You see an ancient culture survive." (Interview, HTSC\Hema\ 6\94).

However, complete authenticity was still not possible. Building a Hindu temple in the United States required compromises and modifications in design, function, and role. These adjustments were driven by a number of factors: to meet local building regulations, to permit a more congregational orientation, to cater to a disparate and dispersed Hindu community, to adequately meet the needs of the immigrant community, to accommodate work

Figure 5
Temple Entry Gopuram

schedules—that did not allow for Hindu observances—and holidays, to enable education and socialization of children, and also to adjust to the changed status of the Hindu religion from a dominant religion in India, with followers

Figure 6
Priest in Temple Entry

constituting the majority, to a minority religion in a predominantly Judeo-Christian society.

One was a change from a focus almost solely on the individual to accommodating the congregation. Hinduism as practiced in India is essentially noncongregational in nature, and there is no mandate for the presence of a congregation for prayer. This is unlike the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions, which require the presence of a congregation and have "different

arrangements of space" (Sopher, 1967, p. 27) suited for congregational prayers: "Judaism has the synagogue or *beth ha-Keneseth*, 'the house of the assembly (or congregation).' The Muslim building, usually called a mosque in English, is properly the *jami*" (Sopher, 1967, p. 27). At Hindu temples, formal prayers are offered by priests and may be repeated by those present, but mostly prayers are individual acts, personal, and sometimes even private. Hindu temples, in contrast to worship places of congregational religions, are not designed for community worship and only rarely include prayer or assembly halls: "As the house of a god, the Hindu temple has architectural and spatial features which distinguish it from church or mosque. It does not need a large, closed interior space" (Sopher, 1967, p. 27; see also Richardson, 1985). The modified approach of accommodating community activities requires changes in temple design to include spaces for collective prayers, where the community could meet and conduct their religious practices.

The Malibu Temple is designed to primarily be an abode of god (Sopher, 1967), but also a space for community participation in religious activities, for the promotion of both individual and collective prayer, and to be a cultural center. The innermost chamber of the temple, the *garbha griha* (literally translated as womb-chamber) is the sacred sanctorum of the temple. Housed here is the resident deity of the temple. Only temple priests enter this sacred interior. A door and threshold separate the *garbha griha* from a dimly lit, small vestibule. In this limited space, only a few devotees at a time are able to gather to seek *darśan* (viewing and visitation) with the deity (see also Eck, 1981). Here, the officiating priest greets them. Devotees bring offerings of flowers and fruit, sometimes request the priest to offer a prayer on their behalf, follow the priest in prayer, humbly prostrate and then leave (see also Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2006). In front of the *garbha griha* and vestibule is a large, well-lit prayer/assembly hall. The floor here is made of stone with a carpet on top. There is no furniture. The spacious hall accommodates collective prayer, rituals, and celebrations especially during weekends. These can be sponsored by the temple, different community groups, or even by families. At other times, on weekdays, and in the absence of a collective, individuals use this space for quiet prayer and meditation.

Important changes were directed at including and creating a broader pan-Hindu community (Bhardwaj & Rao, 1998). Traditionally, most temples in India, particularly in the south, are dedicated to a singular presiding deity, usually Vishnu or Shiva. The main temple in the Malibu Temple complex is dedicated to Sri Venkateshwara or Bālāji (the South Indian name for Vishnu). Thus, in the facilities and architecture, the temple has a dominance

of South Indian themes. Nonetheless, attempt has been made to accommodate the spiritual needs of the North Indian community with temples and shrines dedicated to Rāma, Lakshman, Sitā, and Rādhā and Krishna at the main level, and Shiva and Ganesha among others at an adjacent but separate complex, named Kailāsha Mandapam, constructed later at the ground level.

In a change from tradition, the Malibu Temple has incorporated a 500-seat auditorium, located at the lower level. Hindu children dressed in their regional, traditional clothing can observe, interact, pray, and learn with other Hindu children in the supportive presence and comfort of a Hindu congregation. The temple sponsors Indian music (vocal and instrumental) and dance recitals by local artists and visiting artists from India. This space also facilitates community activities, participation, and interaction.

Other important spatial modifications include the following. A large kitchen has been included where vegetarian meals are prepared or heated. For a nominal charge visitors, who come especially on weekends, can eat here after their prayers. This provides them with an opportunity to socialize and interact with friends and family as well as to network and meet other members of the Hindu community. Classrooms for religious instruction have been added. A small library is the repository for religious books. Teaching and keeping the faithful within the fold, and not losing the second-generation to the proselytizing religions dominant in America is seen as an important challenge for the Hindu community. A storage area has been incorporated for keeping miscellaneous items and furniture not in use. Neutral spaces (e.g., classroom, library, and storage) are currently used also for occasional prayers dealing with impurities, such as *shrāddha* (prayers for the deceased), usually not held at the temple.

Another adaptive strategy incorporated into temple design in America is the inclusion of office space for use by the created positions of manager and administrative staff. It is located downstairs below the central shrine. The manager supervises the day-to-day management of the temple. His office is responsible for making and canceling appointments for the services of the priests and for use of temple facilities, record keeping (including fees charged, donations made, receipts mailed), maintaining Web sites, updating mailing lists, advertising upcoming events, and so on. Fundraising and marketing of services are considered important to successfully compete in the American religious marketplace and to identify and retain its community of believers. This is particularly significant because Hinduism is a nonproselytizing religion and does not actively seek converts. Nor does it have a system

of tithing that would have led to a constant stream of funds. Pin-up boards have been added at the lower level where announcements of upcoming temple events are posted. Pinned here are also messages regarding dance classes, matrimonial searches, and others posted by community members.

Parking lots have been added to enable temple visitors to drive to the temple and park there. In India, one leaves one's car, bicycle, scooter, or other forms of transportation outside the temple gate and humbly walks into the temple. In comparison, it was a stark contrast to see one of the priests at the Malibu Temple, dressed in his traditional attire, drive his blue Honda automobile from his quarters on the temple grounds to the shrine area, covering a distance that takes a mere five minutes to walk. The parking lots, almost empty on most days, are inadequate and overflow during special events.

In an unusual change, the Malibu Temple has included restrooms. This has involved suspension of certain rules regarding purity and pollution. Restrooms are traditionally defined as profane space, contact with which contaminates or defiles the sacred (Douglas, 1975; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 1994), and in India, such spaces are not located on temple premises. In the United States, restrooms are included inside the temple complex to comply with building codes (Fenton, 1988). Furthermore, unlike neighborhood temples in India, temples in the United States are not usually located close to home in residential neighborhoods. Some families travel long distances to come to the temple and depending on the occasion may spend an entire day there. Not having access to restrooms would pose a serious problem, especially for families with young children. At the Malibu temple to minimize pollution, they are located downstairs, physically removed from the sacred shrine areas (see also Fenton, 1988). Because bathing is an important step in ritual purification, the Malibu temple has shower facilities located in close proximity to the toilet facilities.

Most temples in India do not have classrooms, libraries, offices, kitchens, car parking, or toilets in the temple building. The Malibu Temple is not unusual, however, among Hindu temples in America in making these design modifications.

Place Activities: Fostering Community Participation

Facilitating greater community involvement, interaction, and participation in temple events and activities is important for the Malibu Hindu Temple. For this purpose, it has departed from traditional temples and incorporated several significant changes.

First is the increased inclusion of community rituals (see also Yang & Ebaugh, 2001). These are sponsored by the temple, a local or regional group, and occasionally by one or more families. For example, the Malibu temple has sponsored congregational prayers and collective celebrations such as *Mahā Shiva rātri* (a religious celebration dedicated to Lord Shiva), *Diwāli*, and *Janmāsthami* (among others) and helped bring community members together. Local regional groups, such as the Telugu Association, have held congregational prayers on *Ganesha chaturthi* (honoring Lord Ganesha).

The Malibu Temple organizes *kathā*s or reading sessions from scriptures, spiritual discourses by scholars in the field, and sponsors Indian music (vocal and instrumental), dance recitals, and plays. These are mostly held in the 500-seat temple auditorium and hosted during weekends to facilitate greater community participation.

Second, the Hindu lunar calendar provides the most auspicious dates and times for Hindu religious events, prayers, and services. However, Hindus in non-Hindu America have difficulty attending at these times because these may not be local holidays. In a major and significant accommodation, the Malibu temple holds dual celebrations: once on the *tithi* (the Hindu auspicious time) and again during a weekend. In the United States, this helps to maximize community attendance (see also Narayanan, 1992; Fenton, 1988).

Third, to make temple activities more relevant to the lives of immigrants, particularly the second generation, the Malibu Temple celebrates and has special events on secular holidays such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, and Graduation Day, and also for Christian religious ones, although not exactly the same way they do in church. On Christmas, a national holiday, many Hindu families go to the temple to offer prayers and celebrate as if it were a Hindu holiday (see also Fenton, 1988). This enables Hindu American children not to feel left out. Hinduism's syncretic nature makes this possible.

Fourth, is the transformation of the temple from solely a place of worship to a multipurpose socioreligious center (Bhardwaj & Rao, 1998; Mazumdar & Mazumdar, 2006). Weddings are an interesting example of how the Hindu temple in America has changed to meet the religious needs of the community. In India, marriage rituals traditionally take place at the bride's house. Family *purohit*s (priests) from both families officiate. Some couples who elope and wed without parental consent choose to get married in a temple. In the United States, Hindu weddings are being held at temples. Although priests do make house calls for a fee, the temple with a large hall is better equipped to accommodate a large gathering. As described for another temple, "The infrastructure is all there: almost all of them have

large halls that can accommodate over 600 people, a stage equipped with proper lighting, a public address system and a modern kitchen with a large scale catering facility" (Jha, 1995, p. 64b). The courtyards in the temple can be used for creating a fire altar important in Hindu weddings. Some families have two celebrations: a religious one at the temple and another, a secular one, at a hotel or another facility. In this way, beyond serving the religious needs, the Malibu Temple also provides for socioreligious activities: "They are the social and cultural meeting places. Venues where Indians catch up with the grapevine, attend language, dance, and music classes, concerts, plays and discourses and hold birthday parties. And of course, weddings" (Jha, 1995, p. 64b).

Another example is the use of temple facilities for conducting the rituals related to death. In India, these rituals are traditionally performed at the home of the deceased. In the United States, some families go to the temple to perform these rituals. In accommodating such activities the temple is becoming a substitute for home, conducting functions normally performed at home.

The temple has become a site for memorial services as some families have incorporated Judeo-Christian practices and use temple facilities to hold these (see also Fenton, 1988). In a unique move, the Malibu Temple sponsored a memorial service for the Oklahoma City victims: "On April 25, a memorial service was conducted at all the shrines at 5 p.m. to seek *Atma Shanti* (prayers for the peace of the soul) for the innocent victims of the tragedy of Oklahoma City last week" (*HTSSC Newsletter,* May, 1995).

Discussion

Several important themes emerging from this study help us understand the role of religion in place and community formation for a new immigrant group.

For Hindus, building a temple helped to symbolically legitimate a new land (America) and their presence in it (as immigrants; Clothey, 1983; Fenton, 1988; Narayanan, 1992). This is important to understand, because traditionally to a Hindu, all territory outside of India was considered "polluted" and therefore "illegitimate" (Berger, 1967; Figure 7). "Such journeys into darkness were to be shunned not only because the company of . . . cow defilers caused ritual impurity, but more importantly, because their company threatened the 'purity' of the Hindu world" (Berger, 1967, p. 50).

A temple could be built only in a ritually pure setting. Building a temple required removal of pollution associated with an alien, unknown land. By purifying this profane space through *bhūmi pūjā*, a portion of the American landscape was ritually integrated into the sacred Hindu universe (Fenton, 1988). Through the process of purification Hindu immigrants were able to create a setting, where their religion could be successfully transplanted, thereby legitimating their new social world.

Furthermore, as Fenton (1988, pp. 170-171) pointed out, "The exercise of religion in groups and the dedication of a place for group worship are necessary ingredients in the process of becoming at home."

By physically installing at the Malibu Temple the deities brought from India and invoking god to reside in "his [or her] new home" (Kramrisch, 1976, p. 137) through the *Kumbhabhisekham* ceremonies, the Hindu immigrant community not only engaged in invigoration and empowerment of statues and investiture of objects with meaning but also ritually legitimized their presence in a land outside of India and created a new home for themselves (Clothey, 1983; Fenton, 1988; Narayanan, 1992).

Creating a temple was an important step also in establishing new place ties, building a community in a foreign land, and reconnecting with the larger religious community left behind. Sacred place nostalgia and even nostomania (an irresistible desire to return to familiar places) for some, was partially resolved by the construction of an "authentic" center that incorporated significant design elements from traditional temple architecture and became physical and visual reminders of sacred places left behind. In addition to familiar sights, also recreated were familiar sounds (temple bells, chanting of *mantra*s, singing of devotional songs), smells (incense, camphor), and taste (food prepared in the temple kitchen). These facilitate for the believer a more complete re-creation of near-ideal experience of the sacred in diaspora, provide continuity and stability in a new setting, and have become a mechanism through which the second generation could be socialized into their religious identity. Sacred placemaking has involved continuity and accommodations, as well as change.

Building a community in diaspora required spatial, ritual, and organizational modifications and changes. For a number of reasons, this temple is different in spatial layout, ritual, and activities sponsored. One set of reasons is related to local requirements and regulations, another to context, and yet another set to actions on the part of the temple to be more relevant and central to the lives of immigrants. Hinduism's diversity of practices and architecture required within-community negotiations and compromises (see Fenton, 1988 for examples of charged debates). Spatial modifications

Figure 7
Depiction of Pure and Impure

Sanctified, pure

Unsanctified, impure
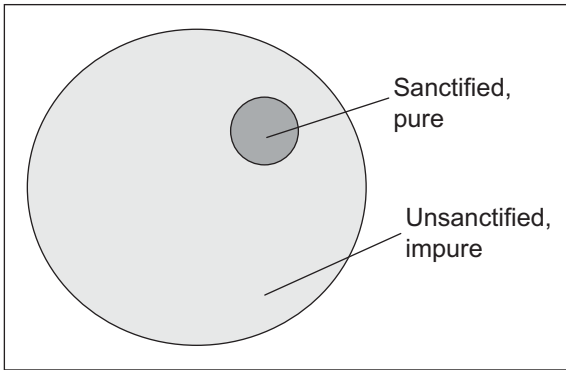
include the provision of nonsacred spaces, such as the manager's office, neutral spaces, for example, auditorium, and even profane spaces, such as restrooms. Ritual adjustments comprise holding or repeating prayers at nonauspicious times, the suspension of certain rules related to purity and pollution, the use of temple facilities, such as neutral areas, for multipurpose activities, weddings, religious education and even performance of death rituals. Organizational changes were related to the management and daily operation of the temple. The temple society has a board of directors that advises the manager, who along with his staff oversees the day-to-day management of the temple. The temple priest's role has been expanded from only temple rituals to offering some services provided by family priests in India, further linking the community with the temple.

In a religion not based on a congregation, collective, or community, but on individual actions, strategic choices regarding continuities and adjustments were made to enable community formation and participation in the United States. Located amidst congregational religions that emphasize community feelings and actions, such as congregational prayer services requiring not only a quorum but the community to be present at a particular place at a scheduled time, such as Sunday, Saturday, or Friday services, and in a nation where holidays recognize and enable participation in congregational religious activities, adjustments were necessary to enable Hindus to perform temple activities on holidays of the Christian calendar. Being surrounded by religions that value proselytizing along with their hierarchical worldview,

whose church building and activities are supported by tithing, led to adjustments in approach and practices as described. Nonetheless, construction of the temple, even with its adjustments, enables priest-mediated religious practices (an important component of Hinduism) that are unavailable where temples do not exist or temple building is outlawed.

Hindus need a place for their gods to reside in. To be a proper abode, it needs to be located in place laden with *religio loci*, be properly sanctified, the building designed according to principles described in the sacred texts, be sanctified after the installation of the deities, and be properly maintained by trained *purohit*s. It is this desire to build a house for god, to do it in the appropriate way, to re-create the right conditions that form the bases for the drive to build a temple. Even though adjustments are accepted, the desire to follow the ideal as closely as possible remains strong. In this, the familiar is re-created which itself is comforting. Once completed, the temple becomes a sanctuary and a refuge. Yet in achieving these, a community becomes necessary, a task made more difficult because there are no directives in the religion for congregation, tithing, or proselytizing. When these beliefs and practices are viewed as strange by the surrounding residents, the task becomes even more difficult.

The temple itself can be seen as a metaphor for community formation. The *garbha griha* or womb chamber needs to be constructed as a home for god. Connected to this is an umbilicus—a lifeline making possible the bringing of specialized services unavailable locally, such as *sthāpati*, *śilpi*s, deities, *purohit*s, *gangā jal* (holy water from the Ganga), and so on, to service it (see also Narayanan, 1992). These provide the new fledgling community with a proper place for god, prayers, and rituals, thus making life in diaspora relatively complete, acceptable, and good, at least from a religion's perspective. The building of the temple and subsequent availability of these enable community formation and help sustain it as well.

In the ways described, temple building became a catalyst for community formation. Aspiring to achieve a religious and cultural ideal, despite modifications, was an important drive.

A few general conclusions may be ventured.

Purposeful community formation requires an initial few whose energy, vision, efforts, and perhaps sacrifices, spur others into participating and contributing. Religion can provide an impetus for community formation. Contributing to place planning and organization, enabling place design by building structures following principles of building design and aesthetics the community values or is familiar with, and holding place activities and enabling wider participation, help even those without much resources or

state support to form meaningful community. Putnam (2000) claimed that membership in existing voluntary associations helps build community, but we can go farther to suggest that it seems that the creational acts described above can help community in ways deeply meaningful to those involved. Difficulties although they seem insurmountable at the time, and may divert or even thwart some effort, later become war stories that help bind.

In this era of the Internet and virtual communities, it has been asked, "Is place *necessary* to produce community?" (Driskell & Lyon, 2002, p. 378, italics in original). This study affirms that despite religion on the Web, Web sites, chat rooms, online prayer sites, and virtual pilgrimages (Bowen, 2002), physical place continues to be an anchor in the religious lives of immigrants. Memories of past places, the desire to create new place ties, place activities and rituals all play significant roles in building a community in diaspora.

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