

**Shifting Sites of the “Sacred”: Contestations Around  
the Regional, the National and the Global  
in Contemporary Hindu Temple Architecture in Delhi**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation titled, 'Shifting Sites of the "Sacred": Contestations Around the Regional, the National and the Global in Contemporary Hindu Temple Architecture in Delhi' submitted by Anne Hartig, of the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, for the award of Doctor of Philosophy is an original work and carried out by the candidate under my supervision. It has not been submitted so far in part or in full for any other degree or diploma of this or any other university. We recommend that this thesis be placed before examiners for evaluation.

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DECLARATION

I, Anne Hartig, hereby declare that the PhD thesis titled, 'Shifting Sites of the "Sacred": Contestations Around the Regional, the National and the Global in Contemporary Hindu Temple Architecture in Delhi' submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Visual Studies, to the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University is a bona fide work. No part of this work has been submitted in part or in full for any degree or diploma to this or any other university.

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## CONCLUSION

- Fig. 6.1: Wat Khmer in New Delhi (by A. Hartig).

## ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	Akshardham Cultural Complex
ADMK	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
AIADMK	All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
ASI	Archaeological Survey of India
ATM	Asynchronous Transfer Mode
BAPS	Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha
BHU	Benares Hindu University
BITS	Birla Institute of Technology and Science
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BSBRT	Bihar State Board of Religious Trust
CCTV	Closed-circuit Television
CP	Connaught Place
CPWD	Central Public Works Department
CR Park	Chittaranjan Park
CSIR	Council of Scientific and Industrial Research
DDA	Delhi Development Authority
DITIB	Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs
DMK	Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam
DNA	Daily News and Analysis
EITA	Encyclopedia of Indian Temple Architecture
HRCE	Hindu Religious and Charitable Endowment
INA Market	Indian National Army Market
INTACH	Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage
IPS	Indian Police Service
ISKCON	International Society for Krishna Consciousness
MGR	Maruthur Gopalan Ramachandran
NCTD	National Capital Territory of Delhi
NDTV	New Delhi Television Limited
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OBC	Other Backward Classes
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
RCC	Reinforced Cement Concert
RIBA	Royal Institute of British Architects
RK Puram	Ramakrishna Puram
RSS	Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh
SDA	Safdarjung Development Area
SDS	Shraddhananda Dalitudhar Sabha
SSJ	Satsaṅgijīvanam
UGC	University Grant Commission
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
USA	United States of America
VHP	Vishva Hindu Parishad
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

## PREFACE

Almost two decades ago, when I was a student of Asian (Indian) Art History, Indology and European Art History in Bonn and in the process of completing my Magister, I heard the story of a student who was planning to travel to India and requested his Indology professor for a letter of recommendation. As the story goes, the department denied the student's request by suggesting something on the lines of: "Everything you need to study is here, in our library. Why do you want to go to India?" Being trained as art historian in a discipline that emphasises the significance of first-hand experience with the original/actual object, the professor's response made little sense. On my part, I felt a great urge to at least get a glimpse of India and its art/architecture that were known to me then only through images, books and museum exhibitions, and luckily, I was not denied this opportunity.

I had expected to find something familiar in the unfamiliar when I came to India for the first time. But having travelled across continents, my first day in Delhi's Paharganj left me crying and wondering how to survive the five-week long trip to India. The thought of staying inside the windowless, suffocating room in the rundown guesthouse was as frightening as the thought of leaving it. Having recovered somewhat after a good night's sleep, ensconced in a taxi without seatbelts, my classmate/travel companion and I, ventured to explore the tourist spots of Delhi. I vividly remember how we dashed through the city with not the slightest sense of direction and afraid of dying in an accident amongst the teeming unruly traffic, on the streets of Delhi. Out of the taxi window, I glimpsed at a haphazard city-scape that did not look like what I had imagined Delhi would be. I sincerely regretted not having read more about the city as I was convinced that there would be a way to find an answer to this question and a possibility to understand *what it is*. My friend never wanted to come back. But on the second day, I decided that I would have to return to India. The taxi driver-cum-tour guide not only showed us the Qutb Minar, Humayun's Tomb and the Lotus Temple but also the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir. However, having come to India to see India's 'superstars' of architecture, such as the Sanchi *stupas*, the cave temples in Udayagiri and the temples in Khajuraho, we were not overly interested in this obviously modern temple. Led by a judgement arising out

of discourses of Indian Art History and Indology, I shrugged off many 'late' temples while travelling across Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Orissa, Manipur, Assam, Maharashtra, Karnataka, Pondicherry and Tamil Nadu.

Thus, my first visit to Akshardham, a few months after its inauguration in November 2005, was actually accidental. But, unlike the first visit of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, this first visit to Akshardham left a lasting impression on me. I was particularly puzzled by Akshardham's interior that resembled little of the interior of the (ancient) temples I had seen before on my various journeys. In fact, the openness of the design, (later restructured), the display of Swaminarayan in the temple's centre and the lack of a priest, incense, flowers, *etc.* were, for me, rather reminiscent of modern museum space. However, it was not until my MPhil during which I was "stuck" in Delhi that has little to offer with regard to ancient temple architecture, that I got interested in these fascinating and little explored 'late' temples and decided to "shift" my focus.

But while my count of these temples continued to rise, they remained invisible to most others as an object of 'serious' study prompting puzzlement and bewilderment as to where I could find temples 'worth' studying in Delhi. I have often encountered the statement that the temples that I am studying are "not authentic." However, instead of shifting my focus, these comments provided me with an impetus to not only interrogate the object of my study more deeply but also the framework from which I was trying to look at these temples. What do people expect from a Hindu temple? Why are some temples considered *authentic* and others *inauthentic*? What does *authentic* even mean? Is there at all such a thing as an *authentic/ inauthentic* temple? And, *who* decides whether a temple is authentic/ inauthentic? Armed with these questions, I embarked on the pain and pleasure that is doctoral research, the results of which are here for all to see. That one's questions may light up the path for others trudging along in the same field is the hope that sustains years of doctoral work. I particularly wish that the thesis reflects my great immersion into the civilisation of the Subcontinent, just as so many others before me. My decision to come here, and to stay put, remains one of my best ones.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Eight years of life in India gave me many times to my own self making me realise my own potentialities to invent strength at each moment when it was challenged. Hence, I want to begin my acknowledgement saying that I cannot thank India enough for what it has been to me.

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Anne Hartig

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## INTRODUCTION

It has been argued that sooner or later religious practices would give way to modernism, secularism and capitalism; religion would be restricted to the private sphere; and the secular sphere (state, economic and science) would be (completely) separated from religion.<sup>1</sup> India's modernisation, however, did not erase religious sensibility but has seemingly transformed it—markets flooded with god posters, god figurines made of cement and plastic, god screen-savers and online *darshan* suggest a seemingly unquenchable enthusiasm for religion or religious commodities.<sup>2</sup> Also, the insistence to make space for manifestations of the *sacred* even at places where there seems to be no space (Figure 1) might be read in the same context.<sup>3</sup> However, it gives us an idea about the meaning and power associated with the *sacred* in the contemporary; *sacred* can be viewed as something *untouchable*, *ungraspable* and *undefinable*—therefore, it is also distant and outside.<sup>4</sup>

If the space of religion was being transformed and reaffirmed in post-liberalised India, this has had direct implications for the political climate of the country. In May 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Narendra Modi were elected with what was touted as a thumping majority to lead the country. This electoral victory of a party and a man following a right-wing Hindutva ideology was followed by various other breathtaking electoral victories, such as the Uttara Pradesh Legislative Assembly election in March, 2017, in which BJP was represented by Yogi Adityanath, erstwhile leader of the influential Gorakhnath Math of North India, and the founder of extremist Hindu organisation, Hindu Yuva Vahini, that defines itself as “[a] fierce cultural and social organisation dedicated to Hindutva and nationalism” (<http://www.hinduyuvavahini.in/>). Less than three months after his election as the

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<sup>1</sup> This theory has been referred to as Secularisation thesis (Norris and Inglehart, 2004: 3-32; Casanova, 2006; Kalpagam, 2006: 4595). See, for instance, Wilson and Luckmann (Wilson, 1966; Luckmann, 1967). Compare also with Menon, 1997: 23; Nandy, 1995, 1997 and Vanaik, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Compare with Nandy's account of gods and goddess in India (Nandy, 2001). See also Nandy, et al., 1997 [1995].

<sup>3</sup> This practice has also been read more as an attempt to gain power over precious land or to prevent people from urinating than as a religious practice. Compare with Hoskote, 2004; Kalpagam, 2006; Rao, 2008; Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 19-31; Ghassem-Fachandi, 2012, 2015; *etc.*

<sup>4</sup> Secular, however, is considered as something that cannot be religious or cannot be governed by any rule. Thus in general, secular is considered to be the opposite of sacred and that cannot be included in the sacred.

Chief Minister of one of India's most populous states, on May 31, 2017, Adityanath paid an official visit and offered prayers at the makeshift Ram Mandir in Ayodhya. As if the mere visit to a site with its bloody legacy of riots and bombings throughout the nation is not a powerful enough political gesture, Adityanath's visit came a day after the Lucknow Central Bureau of Investigation framed charges against senior BJP leaders, such as L.K. Advani and M.M. Joshi, for criminal conspiracy in the 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya.

As scholars such as Jones, Van der Veer, Jaffrelot, Zavos, Prashad, Rajagopal, Brosius and Bapu discuss, the normalization of religious fundamentalism and its imprint upon public culture in India have been a growing process since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Jones, 1986; Van der Veer, 1992; Jaffrelot, 1993, 1999 [1996], 2000, 2003, 2007; Zavos, 2000; Prashad, 2001 [2000]; Rajagopal, 2004 [2001]; Brosius, 2005; Bapu, 2013; *etc.*). According to what was outlined by these scholars, the demolition of the Babri Masjid in the early 1990s was not an unexpected, suddenly occurring event but an event that was prepared by proponents of Hindu nationalism since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Further, the focus on architecture has been a sustained one—throughout history and around the world, controversies and conflicts have been fought on the back of architecture.<sup>5</sup> The destruction of the World Trade Centre in New York (2001), the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan (2001), Nimrud near Mosul, Iraq (2015) and Palmyra in Syria (2015) and the public outcry each of these destructions caused, particularly in the Western world, indicate that architecture holds a very significant place in practical realities of power politics. As the case of the World Trade Centre exemplifies, any architecture, no matter whether modern or

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<sup>5</sup> Van der Veer emphasises that “[r]eligious shrines are often contested spaces”, thus pointing to their *inherently* contested status (Van der Veer, 1992: 85). For instance, the planned demolition of a part of the Machli Bazar Mosque in Kanpur in course of a city government sponsored road construction triggered a riot in 1913 (Lavan, 1974). A comparable situation occurred in 1914 in Delhi. According to Singh, the government had acquired land within the walled precincts of the Gurudwara Rakab Ganj and was planning to pull down a portion of this wall to construct a straight road. However, like in Kanpur, this plan unleashed a controversy (Singh, 1972: 198-215; Gupta, 1999: xii). To refer to a more recent case, in 1990, violence erupted in Nizamuddin between Muslims and Hindus, “when a large gathering of Hindus began building a boundary wall [for an Arya Samaj burial ground] without police sanction [...] on a piece of land that is disputed between the Wakf board and the municipal corporation of Delhi” (Datta, et al., 1990: 2487). Similarly, in other countries the construction/demolition of architectures (seemingly more so religious architectures) can unfold controversies. For instance, the construction of the DITIB-Zentralmoschee (Cologne Central Mosque) in Cologne led to a nation-wide controversy about visibility of Islam in Germany.

ancient, secular or religious, *etc.*, can become a target of political contestations as long as *meaning* is given to it.<sup>6</sup>

As scholars, such as Rancière emphasise there is no meaning *in* an object, meaning is given from *outside*.<sup>7</sup> The act of giving meaning can be understood as politically motivated—what can be shown or said and unshown or unsaid is governed by the discourse.<sup>8</sup> It is here that the question of power is linked to the idea of meaning: *Who* decides *what*? Although definitions such as *sacred/secular*, *authentic/inauthentic*, *architecture/non-architecture*, *etc.* are constructions, having carried on for a longer period of times, they have become the *truth* and *real* that decides and shapes all kinds of knowledge. Within this knowledge system, certain symbols, styles and forms (for example temple architecture) are read as signifiers of identities. In other words, architecture is viewed as a representation of identity. Thus, such conflicts and controversies are viewed as clashes between communities/religious groups/nations/*etc.*, underlining that architecture is commonly linked with the question of *identity*—of the community, the religion, the culture, the region and the nation.<sup>9</sup> Noticeably, the demolition of such architectures is nowadays frequently responded with the construction of *new* architecture.<sup>10</sup> As the news of the destruction of the Babri Masjid circulated, it was clear that religious and political realignments

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<sup>6</sup> Flood emphasised this aspect in the context of the demolition of the Bamiyan Buddhas (Flood, 2002). See also Davis and Guha-Thakurta, who discuss how meaning of objects changes in different contexts with regard to the Indian context (Davis, 1997; Guha-Thakurta, 2007, 2009, 2013, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Compare, for instance, with Rancière's *The Politics of Aesthetics*, in which he discussed art in the context of politics (Rancière, 2004). See also Foucault's *The Order of Things* (Foucault, 1973 [1970]). Saussure explained the idea of arbitrariness in his *Course of General Linguistics* (Saussure, 1959).

<sup>8</sup> Foucault explained the idea of power with reference to the idea of the discourse, according to which all kind of existing knowledge and perceptions are analysed as a result of "the order of the discourse" (Foucault, 1981).

<sup>9</sup> The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan, the World Trade Centre in New York, Nimrud in Iraq and Palmyra in Syria have been read as political acts against the non-Muslim Western world. Compare with Flood, 2002. See also conflicts that erupt between Thailand and Cambodia over Khao Phra Viharn/Preah Vihar (Croissant and Trinn, 2009). <sup>†</sup> On the concept of community see, for example, Delanty (Delanty, 2013). The power associated with architecture also shows in a case that unfolded around Delhi's Jama Masjid. In 1987, the Imam decided to close Delhi's Jama Masjid and cover it in black fabric demanding legal actions for those responsible for the Hashimpur massacre—the government finally accepted the demands (Ahmed, 2013: 54-55).

<sup>10</sup> At Bamiyan, for instance, a 3-D light projects the destroyed Buddhas on the niches in which they have stood. Today, organisations such as CyArk use advanced technologies such as 3D laser scanning to (digitally) *preserve* sites across the world trying to make them digitally accessible for infinity. CyArk justifies its project, as "mission to save these cultural heritage sites digitally before more are ravaged by war, terrorism, arson, urban sprawl, climate change, earthquakes, floods, and other threats" (<http://www.cyark.org/about/the500/>).

would be effected through an embodied engagement with religious architecture.<sup>11</sup> While in Europe, and elsewhere, churches are closed or reused for different purposes (as art gallery, restaurant, bar, *etc.*), in India, apparently, temples are “mushrooming” throughout the country, despite a general notion that newly built temples are less powerful/sacred than places as those that have been in worship for a longer period (Waghorne, 2004: 4; Kalpagam, 2006: 4595, 4600; Kurien, 2007: 11; Rao, 2008: 83; Jain, 2011: 52, 54; Magnier, 2011; Ghassem-Fachandi, 2012, 2015; Jain, 2017: S24; *etc.*).

There is a rich corpus of research focusing on India’s modern history, the emergence of nationalism, Hindutva ideology and nation-building also with reference to art/image-making. What is surprising, however, is that despite playing a significant role within this context, the Hindu temple as an object of study has drawn comparatively little attention, especially in the field of art history.<sup>12</sup> Against this backdrop, the thesis intends to engage with the very question of Hindu religious architecture focusing on Delhi, to telescope into questions about the relationships between communities, identity, architecture and the ideas of the ‘sacred.’

Why does architecture—that is eventually nothing more than a structure made of stone, concrete, steel, glass, *etc.*—play such a significant role?<sup>13</sup> Why is so much meaning given to some kinds of architecture and not to others? And what role do religion and religious architecture play in this context? How is the notion of *identity* linked to architecture and place, the capital city and the nation? Is the capital city just like any other city? What role does religion play especially with regard to space? Can the construction of a Hindu temple in Delhi be understood in the same context as the setting up of, for instance, of shops that sell commodities from ‘home’ or is there more to it? If a temple is merely a means to create a *home* away from home then why

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<sup>11</sup> Much has been published on the case of the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the Ayodhya dispute. See, for instance, Van der Veer, 1987, 1992; Davis, 1997; Nandy, et al., 1997 [1995]; Guha-Thakurta, 2003b; Jaffrelot, 2007: 279-298, 2011 [2010]: 175-177, 364, 377; *etc.* Rajagopal discusses the role of media and images with regard to the events leading to the demolition of the Babri Masjid in depth (Rajagopal, 2004 [2001]).

<sup>12</sup> See Mitter, 1997 [1994], 2007; Pinney, 2004; Ramaswamy, 2010; *etc.*

<sup>13</sup> See Flood’s discussion on the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas (Flood, 2002). Flood highlights that Bamiyan was targeted because the West had given great meaning to it (Flood, 2002).

is so much effort put into its construction? Why should a government put money into construction of temple for a handful of people? Why is there a need for creating such communal spaces within the limited space of the capital city? What does it tell us about the conceptualization of the Hindu temple? What does it mean in this context to build a temple in the national capital city? What is it that connects the capital city with the people of the nation-state and how is it related to the idea of identity, representation and nation-building processes? It seems as if the construction/demolition of religious architecture has to be looked at through a political and communal lens, which might seem paradoxical, as religion/sacred is conceptualised as separate from the day-to-day/political/secular.

## THE CONTEMPORARY TEMPLE AND THE SPECTACLE

In a similar way, in which other spheres have seemingly been transformed in the course of modernity, the temple and its architecture seem to have taken on modern/contemporary forms. Rapid economic growth has spurred the utilisation of cars and demand for highways making the urban peripheries easier accessible and the spaces along highways attractive sites for the construction of large-scale god images/temples that can be viewed/worshipped while driving by (Jain, 2016: 329, 2017: S15, S22, S24).<sup>14</sup> This shift of temples from the centre of the city to the urban periphery must not only be looked at in the context of greater mobility but also in the context of urbanisation that causes a lack of space within the city. Yet, even within the most cramped space a temple might suddenly emerge and continue to grow and transform into a full-fledged temple also without the help of a trained *sthapati*/architect.<sup>15</sup> The Hindu temple also served as the locus of modernity and was the site of experiments with modern technologies, materials, forms and different forms of display. Drawn into this process were modern, professional architects such as Sris Chandra Chatterjee, Achyut Kanvinde, Sumit Ghosh, Suchitra Ghosh and

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<sup>14</sup> Modern lifestyle has not only affected the temple with regard to its location and scale but seemingly also with regard to its form. People's lives are hurried and that people hardly find time to visit a temple, trustees are in favour of going against the *shastras* and build a *gopuram* that would allow people "to have a quick *darsan* and make some small gesture of devotion as they pass by on foot or in vehicles" (Parker, 2003: 15). Compare also with Jain, 2017: S22. See also Asher, who emphasises that Hindus can worship deities from the street as long as the image is visible (Asher, 2003: 367).

<sup>15</sup> On roadside temples see, for instance, Hoskote, Kalpagam and, Bharne and Krusche (Hoskote, 2004; Kalpagam, 2006; Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 19-31; Bharne, 2013; *etc.*). Bharne and Krusche emphasise that some of these places have transformed into some of India's greatest temples (Bharne, 2008; Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 19).

Sameep Padora.<sup>16</sup> Although these temples feature the Hindu temple's most significant features (*shikhara* and *garbhagraha*), a question exists on their status of being 'proper' temples in the conventional sense, as they have been built by modern architects with the use of modern technology, form and material and not according to traditional methods.

Looking at the contemporary temple-scape around the world and taking RK Puram's Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir, RK Puram's Ayyappa Mandir and Hauz Khas Village's Jagannath Mandir in Delhi as examples, it seems as if for many people a 'proper' or 'authentic' Hindu temple is a temple built by a traditional architect (*sthapati*) in traditional techniques and material. The Gujarat-based organisation Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) has pushed and continues to push this practice rigidly; not only does BAPS build temples as traditional temples but it also tries to popularise a particular reading of these temples.<sup>17</sup> A most impressive outcome of BAPS' efforts is Delhi's Akshardham Cultural Complex (ACC) and Akshardham, said to be the largest temple in the world. However, within a few years, Akshardham might lose this status to the Viraat Ramayan Mandir currently under construction approximately 120 kilometres from Patna (Bihar) or to one of two other ongoing projects that intend to take the Hindu temple beyond limits, viz. the Temple of the Vedic Planetarium in Mayapur (West Bengal) and the Vrindavan Chandrodaya Mandir in Vrindavan, both patronised by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Delhi's Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, that will be discussed in the third chapter, was built by Sris Chandra Chatterjee. ISKCON's Sri Sri Radha Parthasarathi Mandir in East of Kailash was built by Achyut Kanvande. The Dakshin Delhi Kalibari Mandir in RK Puram was built by Sumit and Suchitra Ghosh and the Shiv Mandir in Wadeshwar near Pune was built by Sameep Padora. With the exception of Padora's Shiv Mandir, these temples will be discussed in more detail in the second chapter. On the emergence of the architect profession in India see, for instance, Lang, Desai, Desai, Glover and Parimoo (Lang, et al., 1997: 138-146; Glover, 2012; Parimoo, 2015; etc.).

<sup>17</sup> See fifth chapter.

<sup>18</sup> For more details on the Virat Ramayan Mandir and its construction see the conclusion of the thesis. The Vedic Planetarium is built at Mayapur, ISKCON's headquarter. For more information see, for instance, unknown author, 2013. See also <https://tovp.org/>. It goes without saying that this also holds with regard to the costs for the construction. The construction of the Viraat Ramayan Mandir will come for a cost of five hundred crore rupees. The Temple of the Vedic Planetarium will be constructed at a cost of seventy-five million dollars (around five hundred crore rupees), of which Alfred Brush Ford great-grand son of Henry Ford already contributed thirty-five million dollars (almost two hundred crore rupees) (unknown author, 2013). On the Vrindavan Chandrodaya Mandir see <http://www.vcm.org.in/>. Compare also with the construction of Mayawati's Monuments discussed by Jain (Jain, 2014).

What these contemporary *avatars* of the Hindu temple seemingly have in common with many of the temples that can be seen throughout India is that the creators of these temples want to attract people at any cost.<sup>19</sup> That being the case, they turn to means such as special effects and technology, creating mesmerising displays. The temple authorities of the Bengaluru's Maha Ganapathi Mandir, for instance, provided the temple's *murti* of Durga with a mechanical apparatus for moving the goddess's arm so that it looks as if she is thrusting her trident into Mahisasura's body (Srinivas, 2004: 68-69).<sup>20</sup> Another form of display that can be found in temples throughout India seemingly enjoying great popularity is the diorama, a display technique used in natural history museums trying to teach onlookers about nature by imitating the natural world. In Delhi, the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir, ISKCON's Sri Sri Radha Parthasarathi Mandir and BAPS' Akshardham, for instance, feature comparable displays, meaning to not only entertain but also educate its onlooker/reader.<sup>21</sup> However, there are many other ways in which modern forms of display, technology and media have transformed and continue to transform the temple.<sup>22</sup> Print media and cinema, for instance, have paved the way for the upcoming of temples such as the Madhuri Dixit Temple in Jamshedpur (Jharkhand) dedicated to the actress Madhuri Dixit and the MGR Temple in Nathamedu (Tamil Nadu) dedicated to the actor and politician Maruthur Gopalan Ramachandran.<sup>23</sup> It remains to be seen how mobile phones, social media, selfies and the internet will affect the temple and its architecture.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Compare with Lutgendorf and Srinivas (Lutgendorf, 1994; Srinivas, 2004, 2006; Jain, 2016, 2017; *etc.*). Compare with Akshardham that will be discussed in the fifth chapter.

<sup>20</sup> According to Srinivas, onlookers were "thrilled" by the display and "even clapped" (Srinivas, 2004: 69). Similarly, the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir in Jhandewalan (Delhi) features a mechanism that allows movement of the hands of the towering Hanuman to expose *murtis* of Ram and Sita and thus impress onlookers. The temple will be discussed in more detail in the second chapter. On the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir in Jhandewalan see, for instance, Pati (Pati, 2011). The temple was also briefly discussed by Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 242-243.

<sup>21</sup> The Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir features a walk-through, cave-scape diorama that tries to imitate/replicate the famous Vaishnodevi shrine. Jain discusses the issue of replica temple with regard to Gujarat (Jain, 2009). See also Trouillet and Guha-Thakurta (Trouillet, 2012; Guha-Thakurta, 2009, 2013, 2014). Such displays are not only used in the context of the Hindu temple. The St Mary Church in Varanasi, for instance, houses a dioramic show called Holy Bible Jeevan Darshan.

<sup>22</sup> Waghorne, Srinivas and Kakar mention, for instance, how to date Bollywood and the fashion industry play and increasingly important role with regard to dressing *murtis* (Srinivas, 2004: 67-68; Waghorne, 2004: 162; Kakar, 2009: 393-394).

<sup>23</sup> Kakar discusses the Madhuri Dixit Temple in detail (Kakar, 2009). See also the case of Santoshi Maa that has been discussed by Lutgendorf, 2002b.

<sup>24</sup> Though the scope of the thesis does not allow exploration of the field in more depth, it should not be overlooked that modernity affects not only the ways in which Hindu temples are built or present

## THE HINDU TEMPLE AND ITS LACK OF 'AESTHETIC' QUALITIES

In addition to centrality of architecture in the question of identity, what then, accounts for the study of temples through categories that are heavily marked by concerns, typologies and epistemologies of the 19<sup>th</sup> century? For instance, if one would draw a map of Delhi's architecture according to what is discussed in (art and architectural history) books, contrary to the above described impression that temples are mushrooming, it would show not even a fraction of temples exists in the city.<sup>25</sup> Contemporary Hindu temples in India seem to fit none of the categories that art history has defined/identified, and are thus excluded as an object of study.<sup>26</sup> Michell remarks that it is "too common among art historians and architectural historians that India's 'late' temples are unworthy of serious scholarly attention" (Michell, 2015: 9).<sup>27</sup> This persisting reluctance to engage with the Hindu temple (as well as other religious architectures such as mosques, Buddhist temples, *gurudwaras*, etc.) in the contemporary has also been observed by other scholars; for instance, in 1992, Parker, called on scholars to

acknowledge the culturally contingent character of our aesthetic preferences and expand our practice toward sympathetic understandings of contemporary indigenous aesthetics, in South Asia and elsewhere, regardless of whether we find them distasteful or not (Parker, 1992b: 107).

Surprisingly, not much has changed since then. In 2004, Waghorne, for instance, noticed that scholars "refused to see the construction of new temples" concluding that for many people "[t]he words 'new' and 'temple' were an oxymoron" (Waghorne, 2004: 43). Until date, the contemporary Hindu temple in India is by and large viewed as a curious object but not as an object that deserves more scholarly attention.<sup>28</sup>

Studying late or contemporary Hindu temples and Hindu temple architecture can serve as means through which we can also critique the prevailing concepts and

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themselves today but also the Hindu temple of the past; today, older temples are equipped with electricity and modern technologies such as CCTV cameras.

<sup>25</sup> See, for example, Peck, 2005; Khanna, 2008 and Bansal and Kochupillai, 2013.

<sup>26</sup> This will be discussed in more detail below.

<sup>27</sup> By "late" Michell means temple built between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century (Michell, 2015: 9).

<sup>28</sup> See Parker, 1992b 107 and Michell, 2015: 9. Compare also with Nandy's reading of Akshardham (Nandy, 2010).



practices (Parker, 1992b: 107). Thus, the thesis will consider these questions and argue that the idea of *authenticity*, and associated ideas such as *pure*, *origin*, *essence*, *etc.*, are (like the idea of *the Hindu temple*) conceptual constructs deriving from an essentialist reading that has for long been asserted by the colonial and modern discourse.<sup>29</sup>

It seems as if temple architecture has to be different from secular architecture, which indirectly also suggests that it has to be defined *distinctly* from the secular. The art historical discourse that unfolded in the context of colonial modernity has defined/identified the Hindu temple according to certain structural elements—the temple as having a *shikhara* and *garbhagraha*, for instance.<sup>30</sup> However, what one can see at present is temples that in various ways contradict the definition of the temple, as defined by the art historical discourse. Taking the example of a roadside temple, can we refer to a selection of images, posters, figurines and unidentifiable objects carefully arranged around a tree without any form of a (permanent) structure (Figure 2) as Hindu temple? Does a niche in a wall, housing a *murti* of Hanuman qualify as a Hindu temple (Figure 1)? When/how is a temple a temple? Can a metal frame in the middle of a busy road around a tree be a temple (Figure 3)? How can a structure that looks like a Muslim tomb be a temple (Figure 4, 5)? Can a temple feature rides, theatre halls, musical fountains, restaurants, bakeries, shops, research centres, libraries, *etc.*? Can a temple built outside India be ‘Indian’? Can a temple be national? It is a discouraging exercise to read contemporary temple architecture with an already fixed definition of the temple in mind, for the contemporary temple seemingly slips away from all categories.<sup>31</sup> As Sridharan puts it, “[e]xamining the contemporary practice makes one realize certain problems in directly applying the orientalist

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<sup>29</sup> It is not least because of the art historical discourse and the readings it produces that the Hindu temple plays the significant role it plays today. This will be discussed, though not in the depth that this issue deserves, the context of BAPS and the ways BAPS tries to locate its own practice within the larger context of Hindu temple architecture. See first and fifth chapter.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, Kramrisch, 1946: 161-223; Eck, 1985 [1981]: 61-63; Michell, 1988 [1977]; Hardy, 2007; Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 93-98 and BAPS, 2014: 75-76, 89-97; *etc.*

<sup>31</sup> According to Mathur and Singh, Akshardham’s “architecture blurs the distinctions between the museum, the theme park, the temple, and the shrine” (Mathur and Singh, 2007: 147-148). With reference to Akshardham, Brosius notices: “There is a constant shifting between references to cultural heritage and religious practice, one form of action connected with secular consumption, the other with devotional engagement, both closely intertwined”, which shapes “new forms of religious devotion and religious consumption” (Brosius, 2010: 219, 221). According to Brosius, the “‘masses’ are transformed into citizen-consumer-devotees” (Brosius, 2010: 223). This will be discussed in more detail below.

methodology of art historical reading to the study of temple architecture” (Sridharan, 2003: 268). Holding on to the concept of the temple through a fixed meaning that is based on predefined criteria leads only to exclude contemporary temple architecture as an object of study. If the definitions and theories that have so far been used to identify and name the temple do not provide space for the contemporary temple to be studied, it means that there is a need to rethink and re-question these definitions and theories, in order to develop a framework which can meaningfully interact with the spaces that stand *outside* the constructed borders.

Today, various scholars seem to agree that the time in which we were able to classify and categorise architecture in clear-cut categories and say *what it is* has passed. Seemingly trying to translate this notion into words, today’s temples are *named*: “temple-cum-exhibition”, “temple-cum-museum”, “temple-cum-shopping mall”, “temple-monument-complex”, “temple-museum-theme park”, “hi-tech religious and nationalist them park”, “museum-temple”, “exhibition-temple”, “museum-like structures”, *etc.* (Menon, 1997: 28; Mathur and Singh, 2007: 147-148; Kakar, 2009: 392; Srivastava, 2009: 338; Kim, 2010: 142; Singh, 2010: 47, Jain, 2011: 52, 54; Puri, 2015: 257; Mukerji and Basu, 2015; *etc.*). Unlike with a *blend word* (also called *portmanteau word*) that *blends* two or more words and concepts into a single entity, these *hyphenated compounds* seem rather try to *string*, assisted by *cum* and *hyphen*, words and concepts together.<sup>32</sup> Noticeably, the thereby created entities try to join or bridge concepts that for many centuries scholars have tried to identify/define as binaries/opponents. However, the manner in which these words have been put together seems to speak of a certain unease—each component stands unaffected as if to indicate that it is *essentially* against its *nature* to join forces with its opponents. Do these neologisms do justice to what they name? Do they name what is there? How do these makeshift words or concepts such as *fusion*, *hybridity*, *juxtaposition* and *mixture* help us to understand *what it is*? What do these concepts and words tell us besides saying that two (or more) distinct things have come together? To know what a “temple-cum-exhibition”, *etc.* is, it would be necessary to know/define *what a temple* and *what an exhibition is*. Thus, we are left with the same

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<sup>32</sup> See Derrida’s examination of linguistic and cultural identity in *Monolingualism of the Other; Or, The Prothesis of Origin* (Derrida, 1998 [1996]: 10-11).

problem that we are somehow not able to say *what it is*.

## THE CONTEXT OF DELHI

The thesis is an attempt to critically engage with these issues with reference to a selection of temples in India's capital, Delhi. Being the capital of the nation, it is a privileged site for a study that examines the Hindu temple in the context of concepts, such as the regional, the national and the global.

Although located on the banks of the Yamuna river, Delhi is not a city that is particularly known as a city of Hindu temples or pilgrimage sites, unlike cities such as Haridwar, Jammu, Varanasi and Mathura.<sup>33</sup> At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there were approximately one hundred temples in Delhi.<sup>34</sup> This number has gone up considerably until the present; temples constructed in Delhi by people and communities with different linguistic, cultural, socio-economic, caste and class backgrounds include the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir (Jhandewalan), Yogmaya Mandir (Mehrauli), Kalkaji Mandir (near Kalkaji Flyover), Baba Ganganath Mandir (Munirka), Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir (Mandir Marg), Valmiki Mandir (Mandir Marg), Shiva Mandir (Green Park), Sri Jay Ram Mandir (Bikaji Gama), Bhairon Mandir (near Pragati Maidan), Hanuman Mandir (Baba Kharak Singh Marg), Ramakrishna Mission (Paharganj), Nili Chattri Mandir (Nigambodh), Dakshin Delhi Kali Bari Mandir (RK Puram), Jagannath Mandir (Hauz Khas Village), Ayyappa Temple (RK Puram), Arya Samaj Mandir (Mandir Marg), Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir (RK Puram), Kalibari Mandir (CR Park), Kailash Pati Mandir (SDA), Vishvakarma Mandir (Paharganj), Kali Bari Mandir (Mandir Marg), Gauri Shankar Mandir (Old Delhi), Citragupta Mandir (Paharganj), Charandas Mandir (Chaurwi Bazar), Vaikunatha Mandir (Ber Sarai), Venkateswara Mandir (RK Puram), Swaminarayan Mandir (near Akshardham), Devi Kamakshi Mandir (Aruna Asaf Ali Marg), Durga Mandir (RK Puram), Chhattarpur Mandir (Chhattarpur), Kunni Ka Shivalaya (Krishna Gali), Sri Sri Radha Parthasarathi Mandir/ISKCON Temple (East of Kailash), Sai Baba Mandir (Lodhi Road), innumerable so-called roadside temples and, not to forget,

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<sup>33</sup> This has also been pointed out by Singh and Rajagopalan (Singh, 2010: 52-53; Rajagopalan, 2011).

<sup>34</sup> Compare with Sanderson 1916; Page, 1919 and Blakiston, 1922a, 1922b.

Akshardham.<sup>35</sup> It is this diversity that makes Delhi's temple-scape remarkable and an engaging space to study contemporary Hindu temples and Hindu temple architecture.<sup>36</sup> Delhi as a geo-political space makes it an apt arena to interrogate the idea of the 'sacred' in the context of the Hindu temple, through frames such as the national, the regional and the global. These categories or frameworks can be understood as negotiating and competing in an environment that is controlled by the city itself.

The city's current setting can be understood in the context of the country's colonial and modern history. As Singh, Gupta, Lahiri and many other scholars describe, the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were troubled times for Delhi that were marked by communal conflicts and a revolt against the British, in 1857, that the contemporary Griffiths described as "one of the most cruel and vindictive wars that the world has seen" leaving Delhi deserted (Griffiths, 1910: 99; Singh, 1972: 1-12; Gupta, 1986 [1981]; Lahiri, 2003; *etc.*).<sup>37</sup> According to Gupta, after 1857 many houses remained uninhabited "and their bricks had been stolen, so that they caved in under pressure" (Gupta, 1986 [1981]: 52).<sup>38</sup> However, during the

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<sup>35</sup> On temples in Delhi built prior to 1857 see *List of Muhammadan and Hindu Monuments* (Sanderson, 1916; Page, 1919; Blakiston, 1922a, 1922b). Sanderson who was responsible for compiling a list of monuments in Delhi at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century writes: "The work of listing these Delhi monuments has proved a far greater one than was at first anticipated [...]" (Sanderson, 1916: vii). According to Nanda, it took around one and a half years to do a survey of sites in Delhi looking at between ten and twelve structures on one working day (Nanda, 1999: xv). At the scope of this thesis it was not possible to consider *all* temples. To get an impression of how many temples or places of worship exist in Delhi see "Places of Worship" listed in Eicher's *Delhi: City Map* (Eicher Goodearth, 2010: 301-302).

<sup>36</sup> Menon emphasises: "Delhi 'looks' different" (Menon, 2000: 143).

<sup>37</sup> In the course of the events, the city was literally stripped naked—anything considered of value was taken away (Griffiths, 1910: 245-246; Singh, 1972: 1-12; Gupta, 1986 [1981]: 21-22; Varma, 1992: 44-46; Lahiri, 2003; *etc.*). Houses and *havelis* were demolished, temples ransacked (Griffiths, 1910: 245-246; Singh, 1972: 5; Gupta, 1986 [1981]: 22; Varma, 1992: 44-46; Lahiri, 37-42; *etc.*). Griffiths describes how he entered a temple having in mind that in the 11<sup>th</sup> century Mahmud of Ghazni found a great treasure in the Somnath Mandir. He says: "A hideous idol stood on a raised structure in the centre of the building, and was soon demolished in iconoclastic style with our hammers [...]. Soon a ringing sound from a blow disclosed a large silver casket imbedded in the *chunam* [...] forcing the casket open, our sigh was regaled by a brilliant show of jewels and gold [*etc.*]" (Griffith, 1910: 245-246). As Saunders, Commissioner of Delhi describes it, Delhi was "deserted by all living beings except a few stray cats" (Saunders quoted in Singh, 1972: 1). See also Gupta, 1971 and Hosagrahar, 2005.

<sup>38</sup> Since the British government believed that the revolt was led by Muslims, a policy of repression towards the Muslims followed the revolt's aftermath; while Hindus were allowed to return to the city by October 1858 Muslims were allowed to return only in August 1859 (Singh, 1972: 8-11; Gupta, 1986 [1981]: 24; Jones, 1986: 334). According to Blake, the percentages of Hindus and Muslims was given for the first time in the 1845/1846 census, 54 percent of the population were Hindus and 45 percent Muslims (Blake, 1991: 173-174). In 1864, 60 percent of the population

Coronation Durbar in 1911, George V revealed the well-kept secret that the British would transfer their capital from Calcutta to Delhi, which eventually entailed the British to construct an entire new city adjoining the old city (Singh, 1972: 155-163; Gupta, 1994: 258; Peck, 2006; Legg, 2007: 1; *etc.*).<sup>39</sup> As might be expected from plans of this nature and scale, it triggered a public debate based on the assumption that architecture carries meaning and represents something.<sup>40</sup> In Menon's words, "the production of architecture became a *self-conscious exercise*" (Menon, 2003; italics added).<sup>41</sup> During that time, the Hindu nationalist movement was gaining momentum and experimenting with the Hindu temple as an institution. It was only a matter of time that Hindus would demand and build a Hindu temple in the British Raj's centre

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were Hindus and 39 percent Muslims; in 1881, 57 percent of the population were Hindus and 42 percent Muslims (Blake, 1991: 174). Compare also with Gupta, 1986 [1981]: 46-47. The presence of the new ruler was also marked by drastic structural measures that changed the city's urban-scape dramatically. Large areas inside and outside the Red Fort that was occupied by the army were razed (Singh, 1972: 10-11; Varma, 1992: 44-46; Lahiri, 2003: 40; *etc.*). Moreover, a wide strip was cut through the city from west to east for the railway (Gupta, 1986 [1981]: 26-32, 84; Varma, 1992: 44-46; Lahiri, 2003: 40-42; Hosagrahar, 2005: 38-39, 57-58, 86-90; *etc.*). Several alternatives were debated among them whether entire Shahjahanabad should be razed and/or replace the Lal Quila and the Jami Masjid with a cathedral (Griffiths, 1910: 207; Gupta, 1986 [1981]: 25-26; Varma, 1992: 44). At the same time, new building such as the Delhi Institute that contained a Darbar hall, a museum, a library and a ballroom were built. See also Masselos and Gupta, 2000.

<sup>39</sup> As Gupta remarks, after the above mentioned controversy that unfolded around the Gurudwara Rakab Ganj, the government was more sensible to the meaning given to certain architectures/sites (Singh, 1972: 198-215; Gupta, 1999: xii). Thus, Sanderson was commissioned to compile a list (*List of Muhammadan and Hindu Monuments*) of structures that would clarify the meaning of a specific architecture and thus determine its future (Gupta, 1999: xii). Huge plots of land including the area around Jantar Mantar and the Raisina Hill were cleared of structures to build the new city (Mann and Sehrawat, 2009: 557; Johnson, 2015: 161-182). Some structures such as the Jantar Mantar, the Hanuman Mandir on Baba Khark Singh Marg, the Zabta Ganj Masjid and the Sunhari Masjid were (somehow) absorbed into the complex system of interconnected roundabouts and the structure of the newly-built city that visually tried to culminate in the Government House (later called Viceroy's House and Rashtrapati Bhavan). Chakravarty, who points out examples such as the Masjid on Irwin Road which obstructs the road, reads this situation as "tolerant exclusion" (Chakravarty, 2016: 124). Another peculiar example which has not been mentioned by Chakravarty is the Masjid Ghareeb Shah that stands on platform number three surrounded by the New Delhi Railway Station. Some structures such as the Citragupta Mandir were relocated in 1915. Not always matters were handled sensibly. The making of the new city and its relation to the already existing old city/structures occupied many scholars and created many different readings—according to Peck, for example, the idea was to "link the new capital with the older cities", while according to Dupont it was a "deliberated segregation between Old Delhi and New Delhi" (Peck, 2005: 259; Dupont, 2004: 158). On the building of New Delhi see, for instance, Metcalf, 1989: 211-239; Gupta, 1994; Lang, et al., 1997: 151-154; Peck, 2006; Bansal and Kochupillai, 2013: 62-67; Ahuja, 2016 and Mitter, 2016. Hosagrahar, Legg, Johnson and Chakravarty have also studied the city at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hosagrahar, 2005; Legg, 2007; Johnson, 2015; Chakravarty, 2016; *etc.*).

<sup>40</sup> See, for example, Gupta, 1994; Metcalf, 1984, 1986, 1989: 211-239; Lang, et al., 1997: 1; Ahuja, 2016 and Mitter, 2016.

<sup>41</sup> Lang emphasise that "[a]s institutions sponsored and developed by Indians were founded, so questions arose about the appropriate architecture for the buildings required to house them" (Lang, et al., 1997: 131). See, for example, Havell's perspective on the issue (Havell, 1913: v-viii, 242-249, *etc.*). See also Metcalf, 1989: 212-239.

of power that until then had housed a few temples, none of which were considered particularly impressive.<sup>42</sup> How could there not be an impressive Hindu temple in India's capital? Eventually, through the efforts of Madan Mohan Malaviya, the British government allowed the Sanatan (Hindu) Dharm Sabha to build the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir. This is significant if one considers that this period was viewed as formative stage of Indian nationalism, which eventually led to the creation of the Indian nation. India becoming a nation-state coincided with the partition of the British Indian Empire—with one stroke the meaning of belonging to a place was overwritten by the question of belonging to a religion (Pandey, 1997, 2003 [2001]). It is here that the Hindu temple is linked to the concept of the nation. Having his finger on the pulse of the time, Sris Chandra Chatterjee, the architect of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, created a modern temple that is popular to-date amongst visitors to the city and recommended by tour guides and guidebooks.<sup>43</sup> Arguably, like the buildings built by the British, the temple's architecture was meant to impress its onlooker and mark the Hindu community's presence and significance in Delhi, the British Raj and the world.<sup>44</sup>

Besides changing Delhi's architecture-scape, the shift of the colonial capital to Delhi also brought about changes in the city's demographic profile pulling people from different corners of the country into the city and slowly turning Delhi into a

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<sup>42</sup> The *List of Muhammadan and Hindu Monuments* lists almost hundred temples in and around Delhi but includes only those built prior to 1857. I have seen temples in and around Paharganj constructed in the years between 1857 and 1947, however, as of now they seem not to have attracted the attention of scholars. The layout of the new city provided much space for the construction of modern structures such as a new railway station, post office, shopping areas, cinema, offices, residences and museums as well as for the construction of some churches but seemingly not for a temple (Caturvedi, 1982: 42; Peck, 2005: 260; *etc.*). See also Mann and Sehrawat, 2009: 558. The cathedral as well as the "museological hub" that Lutyens envisaged at the intersection of Kings- and Queensway, however, were never built (Gupta, 1994: 259; Singh, 2015: 121-124). Churches built during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century include Cathedral Church of Redemption, Free Church on Sansad Marg, Holy Trinity near the Turkman Gate, Sacred Heart near the General Post Office, St Martin's Church in Delhi Cantonment, Methodist Church on Boulevard Road, St John's Church in Mehrauli and St Thomas Church on Mandir Marg.

<sup>43</sup> As mentioned in the Preface, following the suggestion of a tour guide, the first temple that I visited in India was the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir in Delhi. But I had come to India to see its remarkable ancient architecture and temples, the 'classics' of the Hindu temples with little interest in late temples. That being the case, I have but a faint memory of this first visit of Delhi's Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir.

<sup>44</sup> Well known temples such as the Yogmaya Mandir—which Stephen says has "not the slightest pretension to beauty" and Duncan declares has "no pretension to beauty"—were seemingly not considered *appropriate* (Stephen, 1876: 29; Duncan, 1906: 72).

microcosm of multitude of nations.<sup>45</sup> India's Independence/Partition and Delhi's new role as capital of the new Republic fuelled this process. As scholars such as Dupont discuss, ever since Delhi was declared to become the capital of the British Raj, the city saw a constant influx of people from different parts of India (Dupont, 2000: 230).<sup>46</sup> To date, Delhi has been read as a city in which "almost every Indian community has made space for itself" (Ganesh, 2002).<sup>47</sup> According to McDuie-Ra, who particularly looks at northeast communities in Delhi, such processes of place-making materialise through the means of building as well as through other means such as the physical presence of people from the same community, cloth, food, music, *etc.* (McDuie-Ra, 2012a, 2012b: 112-113, 152). Noticeably, today, many of Delhi's numerous and varied enclaves, villages, colonies, *etc.* are imagined and known as pockets of certain communities.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> With the shift of the capital, many people, for example, from Bengal moved to Delhi (Peck, 2005: 192; Gupta, 1986 [1981]: 49, 57). See also fourth chapter.

<sup>46</sup> For general overview see Pandey's *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*, with regard to Delhi see Pandey's "Partition and Independence in Delhi: 1947-48" (Pandey, 1997, 2003 [2001]). According to Pandey, "by mid-September, perhaps 60 per cent of the Muslims of Old Delhi and 90 per cent of those in New Delhi had fled, seeking refuge. Between 20,000 and 25,000 were said to have been killed" (Pandey, 1997: 2263). According to Dupont, 320,000 Muslims left Delhi (Dupont, 2000: 229). Almost half a million refugees from Punjab and Sindh as well as people from other parts of India, mainly north India (Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Bihar) came to Delhi, where they lived in refugee camps such as the old Kingsway (to date Kingsway Camp) (Pandey, 1997: 2265; Dupont, 2000: 229-230, 235-238; Peck, 2005: 284-285; *etc.*). According to Dupont, Delhi "expanded from almost 7,00,000 inhabitants in 1941 to 1.4 million in 1951" (Dupont, 2000: 229). According to the *Master Plan for Delhi: With the Perspective for the Year 2021*, since 1981 the population of the National Capital Territory Delhi (NCTD) increased due to migration every ten years by at least 39 percent (Singh, 2007: 19). The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) expects a growth of the NCTD's population from approximately fourteen hundred lakh in 2001 to twenty-three hundred lakh in 2021 (Singh, 2007: 18-19).

<sup>47</sup> See also Singh, 2006. Dupont emphasises that many people migrated from neighbouring states such as Haryana, Punjab, Rajasthan as well as Bihar for work, employment and education (Dupont, 2000: 235-236).

<sup>48</sup> Colonies such as Lajpat Nagar, Nizamuddin East, Malka Ganj and Punjabi Bagh were built for the refugees of Independence/Partition. Around 1960, the Indian government allowed Tibetan refugees to settle at a place near ISBT Kashmiri Gate. To date, the colony is popularly known as Majnu Ka Tilla. RK Puram and Karol Bagh are known to have a high density of population coming from South India (Ganesh, 2002). Old Delhi, Mehrauli, Zakir Nagar, Chirag Delhi, Okhla, Nizamuddin, *etc.* are known to have a high concentration of Muslims (Kirmani, 2008: 57). Tilak Nagar is associated with Sikh community. Sengupta emphasises how great the difference of these colonies are pointing to the neighbouring colonies CR Park (earlier called East Pakistan Displaced Peoples' Colony) and Kalkaji (Sengupta, 2007: 122). While CR Park "had a very consciously Bengali flavour [...] Kalkaji, on the other hand, was robustly Punjabi refugee [...]" (Sengupta, 2007: 122). Munirka, Humayunpur (Safdarjung), Kishangarh, *etc.* are popular among people from Northeast India (McDuie-Ra, 2012a: 72, 2012b: 99). See also Singh, 2006.

In this context, religious affiliation and the community's position within India's comity of nations seems to be a decisive criterion. According to a survey conducted by Kirmani among Muslims in Delhi's Zakir Nagar, it seems as if people decide to stay within what they consider as stronghold of their community even if that means they have to stay in colonies with lesser facilities than what they could afford as they are under the impression that they are *safe(r)* staying with their community (Kirmani, 2008).<sup>49</sup> Although scholars emphasise the meaning of the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the subsequent riots in 1992/1993 as formative event in the history of communal politics, according to Chakravarti and Kirmani the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots seem to be much more deeply inscribed in the collective memory not only for the Sikh community but also for other communities (Chakravarti, 1994; Kirmani, 2008).<sup>50</sup> Regardless of which event is given (greater) meaning, the Indian city—perhaps particularly Delhi—often seems to be imagined as some kind of battleground on which each and every one struggles for daily existence and/or space.<sup>51</sup> It has been pointed out that even “[t]he [Tamil] community finds itself transplanted [to Delhi] in an unfamiliar and hostile environment where their identity is at stake” (Subramaniam, 1996: 669).

Identity politics is enmeshed in an “us and them” logic and a certain lack of trust and mutual suspicion. How *real* this notion of the mistrust of the *others* and the fear of sudden eruption of uncontrolled violence is across different communities (not only in the context of Delhi but also in the larger context of India) is through the following instance: evidently in 2012, following threats that were received by and

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<sup>49</sup> Compare also with McDuie-Ra's study of people from Northeast India in Delhi (McDuie-Ra, 2012a: 149, 151-152).

<sup>50</sup> According to Kirmani, the 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots left a stronger impression on Muslims in Delhi than the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the 2002 Gujarat riots (Kirmani, 2008: 59). According to Chakravarti, the Sikh community remembers 1984 Anti-Sikh Riots also as loss of *their* nation (Chakravarti, 1994). As, for example, Singh described the situation in Delhi, it seems as if there have always been communal tensions, not only between Hindus and Muslims but also between Jains, Christians and Sikhs (Singh, 1972). See also the case of migrants who come from Northeast India, as discussed by McDuie-Ra (McDuie-Ra, 2012a: 161-163).

<sup>51</sup> According to the architect Gautam Bhatia, the Indian city in general and Delhi in specific runs through mistrust (Bhatia, 2012). See also Bhatia, 2001. For Bhatia, the city itself seems to be an unbroken sequence of intruding space, for example, through public urinating, blocking of roads with cars, cement bags, bricks, *etc.*, rising illegal structures, *etc.*—“social anarchy” reigns the city (Bhatia, 2001, 2012, *etc.*). Vidal, Tarlo and Dupont do not find the “loyalty and affection” which people have towards Mumbai and Calcutta amongst the inhabitants of Delhi—“hardly anyone is ready to declare a passion for Delhi” (Vidal, et al., 2000: 16). See McDuie-Ra on the issue of safety (McDuie-Ra, 2012a: 112-114, 149, 151-152).



circulated in the form of anonymous text messages, thousands of ‘migrants’ from Northeast India took the rumours and threats at face value and instantaneously left behind studies, work, *etc.* trying to rush *home* in overcrowded trains.<sup>52</sup> According to McDuire-Ra, with regard to different communities in Delhi coming from Northeast India, there is a close relation between the notion of home, safety and belonging (McDuie-Ra, 2012a: 152). Thus, he says that amongst the migrants from Northeast India “[t]he sense of belonging is not to Delhi itself, but to the localities within Delhi, where a little piece of *home* is recreated” (McDuie-Ra, 2012a: 69, 152; italics added).<sup>53</sup> McDuire-Ra, however, also emphasises that religion plays a significant role in creating a space of one’s own (McDuie-Ra, 2012a: 157-160). According to McDuire-Ra, places where people from Northeast India practice their faith are also important spaces for networking and for all kinds of support (McDuie-Ra, 2012a: 157, 160).<sup>54</sup> The spaces “invigorate a sense of belonging and an untethered link to *home*”, as McDuire-Ra says (McDuie-Ra, 2012a: 159; italics added). Moreover, he says that the practice of religion “is also a way of refuting north Indian society by creating alternate spaces [...that] help to reinforce Northeast identities” (McDuie-Ra, 2012a: 159; italics added).<sup>55</sup> In short, McDuire-Ra tries to show how religion and religious-place-making are essential elements for the creation of identity and community. While communities that have built temples in Delhi seemingly justify the construction of a temple by the lack of temples dedicated to the respective god, McDuire-Ra believes that “[r]eligion epitomises the interlinked practices of place-

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<sup>52</sup> According to *Frontline*, within three days thirty thousand people boarded trains to Northeast India in Bengaluru (Sharma, 2012: 18). Moreover, see how Dalrymple describes Delhi in relation to violence (Dalrymple, 2004 [1993]: 35-37). According to Vidal, Tarlo and Dupont, Delhi is an “unloved city” (Vidal, et al., 2000).

<sup>53</sup> McDuire-Ra also says that these migrants try to create “small *spaces of their own* in Delhi” (McDuie-Ra, 2012b: 69; italics added). As McDuire-Ra says, “Northeast migrants rarely own property or capital in Delhi, they have limited means of controlling the urban environment” and suggests that (in the case of these migrants) place-making not only through the means of building but also other means such as neighbourhood, food, *etc.* (McDuie-Ra, 2012a: 112).

<sup>54</sup> According to McDuire-Ra, the church can be a “space where communities divided by international and internal borders join another in a new place” (McDuie-Ra, 2012a: 157). According to McDuire-Ra, these places help for example those people who are new to the city finding a house, *etc.* and at times even given financial support (McDuie-Ra, 2012a: 160).

<sup>55</sup> However, it seems the “newcomers” to Delhi from Northeast India have not marked their presence by building *outstanding* churches or religious places. McDuire-Ra describes that the smaller churches hold services “in existing churches shared with other communities, in schools, in community halls, and in rented rooms” (McDuie-Ra, 2012a: 158). The migration of people from Northeast India is a comparatively recent phenomenon. Accordingly, the community/communities are still small with little financial means.

making and expressing identity” (McDuie-Ra, 2012a: 157).<sup>56</sup>

Arguably this idea of identity is central and cannot be overlooked in discussions on religious architecture. Prior to the construction of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, there were few and with regard to their architecture, unimpressive temples in and around Delhi. This changed with India’s Independence/Partition and the influx of migrants from different parts of India; the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir that has been built by a Tamil community with great support from political and religious Tamil authorities is a seemingly typical example for such a temple.<sup>57</sup> Like in the case of the Jagannath Mandir (Hauz Khas Village), the Ayyappa Temple (RK Puram), the Kali Bari Mandir (CR Park), the Dakshin Delhi Kalibari Mandir (RK Puram), the Durga Mandir (RK Puram) and the Swaminarayan Mandir (near Akshardham) all of which have been built by ‘migrant’ communities, great attention has been paid to the temple’s architecture trying to make it look like the temples at ‘home’ and different from other temples in Delhi.<sup>58</sup>

A more complex set of motivations, however, exists when one considers ‘local’ and national architecture to a global audience, as seen in the case of Akshardham. Inaugurated in November 2005, one of the latest, and for various reasons, controversial, additions to Delhi’s city-scape is Akshardham, part of the Akshardham Cultural Complex (ACC). The temple is superlative in more than one way—according to the Guinness Book of World Records, Akshardham is the “world’s largest Hindu Temple” (<http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/largest-hindu-temple>).<sup>59</sup> BAPS draws on the tradition of Gujarati temple architecture, reminiscent of the idea followed by the creators of ‘regional’ temples such as the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir, the Jagannath Mandir, the Ayyappa Temple, the Kali Bari Mandir, the Dakshin Delhi Kalibari Mandir, the Durga Mandir and the Swaminarayan Mandir.<sup>60</sup> However, what distinguishes Akshardham from these

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<sup>56</sup> See second chapter.

<sup>57</sup> Tamil Nadu became a Federated State of the Republic of India in 1969.

<sup>58</sup> Each of these temples has been built modelled on architecture from different parts of the country.

<sup>59</sup> For instance, allegations had been made that BAPS did not have clearance to build Akshardham. See fifth chapter.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Singh, 2010: 56 and Hartig, 2012: 68, 80-81.

temples is that, unlike the communities that pushed the construction of the temples mentioned above, it was built by an organisation named Bochasanwasi Sri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS), which currently has over one million followers worldwide. BAPS has its roots to a small regional movement in Gujarat but it does not insist on this link in the way other communities do. Why? How can this refusal or indifference to locality/regionalism be understood? If we claim that Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir is a national temple and Malai Mandir a regional temple then what can be said of Akshardham? If taken into account that BAPS is currently building a third Akshardham in Robbinsville, United States of America, it is especially tempting to conclude that Akshardham makes a much bigger claim that goes beyond the regional and national. But then is that at all possible? In whose name does it speak? Can architecture be linked to a community? What role do Hindu temples play in the context of the diaspora? Can architecture be regional, national and/or global? If so, under what conditions?

Thereby, the thesis will question the tendency to view architecture, art and religion as 'fixed' entities that can be named and defined/identified. Instead, the sacred will be taken as a complex articulation that finds varied manifestation through the cultural politics of the regional, the national and the global. Therein, mobility of the community not only in terms of location but also in relation to time and various processes of transformation, for example through technology, are to be considered.

## **ORIENTALIST LEGACY AND THE HINDU TEMPLE**

European travellers have been discussing and sketching India's architecture-  
scape at least since the end of the Middle Ages; however, it was in the context of  
colonialism that the study of Indian architecture and the Hindu temple was undertaken  
systematically.<sup>61</sup> The colonial discourse looked at architecture and the Hindu temple  
in India as remains of a glorious past contrasting it with the contemporary. Fergusson,  
for instance, has little good to say about India's contemporary architecture and Hindu  
temples, describing a temple in Thanjavur as "so inexpressibly ludicrous and bad, that

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<sup>61</sup> Compare with historiographies of Indian art history written, for instance, by Chandra, Mitter, Hosagrahar, Guha-Thakurta and Dhar (Chandra, 1983; Mitter, 1992 [1977]; Juneja, 2001; Hosagrahar, 2002; Guha-Thakurta, 2004; Dhar, 2009, 2011b; *etc.*). See also essays published in Dhar's *Indian Art History* (Dhar, 2011a).

one hardly knows whether to laugh or be angry” (Fergusson, 1862: 418).<sup>62</sup> Many researches have been undertaken on art and architecture shaping the discourse and knowledge within the field. Thus, the way Indian art and architecture are viewed and theorised are closely tied to India’s colonial past and must be understood in this context.

The discourse emerging from the colonial setup was governed and organised according to Western ideas, theories and methods.<sup>63</sup> It places art, architecture, language, culture, *etc.* in a linear time frame creating a certain notion of historicity that represents the past as glorious, and therefore important to be discovered and rescued, for instance, by declaring it a monument or moving it into a museum. However, discourse is a means and mechanism to create, shape, organise and govern a certain psychological, socio-economic and political environment that creates and maintains power relations.<sup>64</sup> This discourse in relation to *art* and *architecture* is taken forward by the formation of institutions such as the Asiatic Society, museums, colleges of art and architecture and the Archaeological Survey of India, which all played a major role in defining, classifying and categorising the Indian cultural landscape.<sup>65</sup> Although some of today’s scholars such as Tillotson emphasise the role of William Hodges, Ram Raz, Rajendralal Mitra and others as significant in the institutionalisation of Indian art history, it is James Fergusson’s work that has, “remained the definitive source for years to come” (Hodges, 1787; Raz, 1834; Fergusson, 1862, 1867, 1910 [1876]; Chandra, 1983: 9-25; Tillotson, 1993, 2000; Hosagrahar, 2002: 356; *etc.*). Fergusson conducted extensive surveys on Indian architecture that are preserved in a vast body of documentation and publications such as *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, which was preceded by various other publications, such as *History of the Modern Styles of Architecture* and *A History of Architecture in all Countries, From the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (Fergusson, 1862, 1867, 1910 [1876], *etc.*). Fergusson’s approach, observations and conclusions were framed by reason and logic. In a meticulous and systematic manner, he named,

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<sup>62</sup> Fergusson was not only critical of Indian contemporary architecture but also of Western contemporary architecture, speaking of it, for example, as “monkey style” (Fergusson, 1849: xv, 1862: ix-x).

<sup>63</sup> Said has discussed this in great detail in *Orientalism* (Said, 2003 [1978]).

<sup>64</sup> Foucault discusses the meaning of discourse, for instance, in “The Order of Discourse” (Foucault, 1981).

<sup>65</sup> See, for instance, Cohn, 1996 and Guha-Thakurta, 2004.

classified, categorised, defined, and mapped Indian architecture—just like naturalists study flora and fauna—in accordance to geo-political context, time-periods and religious affiliation. Drawing from these methods, scholars such as Alexander Cunningham, James Burgess, Percy Brown, and Henry Cousens based their studies of Indian architecture on the descriptive and comparative method.<sup>66</sup> Havell, for example, acknowledges Fergusson and Burgess as his chief authorities “for chronological facts and measurements of buildings” (Havell, 1913: vii). Indeed, when the Archaeological Survey of India commenced its initial activities, through the initiative of Cunningham, the reports and surveys produced by the ASI continued to follow the contours of the methods laid down by Fergusson’s early documents.<sup>67</sup>

What these studies have in common is that before generating a valuable corpus of data, they worked upon the categories that needed to be created.<sup>68</sup> What will be included/excluded in this study/survey? What defines architecture? What defines a monument? What defines a *temple*? What is worth being listed and what not? When is *architecture* a ‘monument?’ Where to draw the line between *monument* and *non-monument*, *architecture* and *non-architecture*, *temple* and *non-temple*, *etc.*? Thus, definitions were introduced that did not exist earlier in this form.<sup>69</sup>

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, India’s socio-economic, political and cultural situation was transformed and the wish for an independent nation began to take shape; the discourse on art and architecture was also reshaped by these movements. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Stella Kramrisch and Ernest Binfield Havell, amongst others, reframed the then dominant colonial discourse while at the same time continuing several of its frameworks by addressing the question of *intrinsic meaning*.<sup>70</sup> These scholars showed a greater interest in looking at indigenous sources and contexts, attempting to understand their objects of study from *within*—i.e. understanding and

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<sup>66</sup> For a selection of publications see bibliography. See also Havell, 1913: v. Compare also with Juneja, 2001: 7-29.

<sup>67</sup> For more details on Cunningham’s methods and the early days of the ASI, see, for instance, Imam (Imam, 1966).

<sup>68</sup> Compare with Jones’ discussion of Indian Censuses (Jones, 1981).

<sup>69</sup> See, for example, Fergusson’s *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* (Fergusson, 1910 [1876]).

<sup>70</sup> Compare also with Chandra, 1983: 32-34 and Dhar, 2009: 334, 2011b: 5-7. For a selection of publications by these scholars, see bibliography.

claiming the ‘Indian-ness’ of Indian art, as Dhar puts it (Dhar, 2011b: 5). They were driven to understand or unfold a *hidden meaning* in their objects of interest that they tried to uncover through symbolism, iconography and iconology, founded upon the utilisation of *texts*.<sup>71</sup> This was done without questioning the text as a means that asserts certain power relations within the society, rather as embodiment of the *truth*.<sup>72</sup>

Although the temple remained an object of great interest for these ‘nationalist’ scholars, architecture was only a fragment of a much larger picture that they were interested in. Thus, this discourse, shaped by Coomaraswamy, Kramrisch, Havell and others, opened up the possibility of defining South Asian art and architecture as *fine arts*. Nevertheless, this definition brought along a whole set of theories and frameworks that distinguished between *painting, sculpture, architecture, music* and *poetry*.<sup>73</sup> It can be seen that the discourse on the modern and contemporary is generally divided into two different fields—art and architecture. Although perhaps better known for his attempts to understand Indian art and architecture, Coomaraswamy also discussed concepts such as nation and nationalism.<sup>74</sup> In the “Preface” of *Essays in National Idealism*, he emphasised the meaning of art as the foundation of unity and the Indian nation because art is the materialisation of the spiritual (Coomaraswamy, 1909b: ii-iii). Coomaraswamy’s rationale was that the “causes which have led to the degeneration of Indian art, and prevent its revival, are identical to those that prevent the recovery of her political efficiency” (Coomaraswamy, 1909b: iii). His contention was that India would be politically united only when there was a unity of the national culture (Coomaraswamy, 1909b: iii). For a nation, more essential than racial or linguistic unity are “geographical unity, and a common historic evolution or culture” (Coomaraswamy, 1909c: 7).<sup>75</sup> Similarly,

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<sup>71</sup> Kramrisch’s *The Hindu Temple* might be understood as a key text in this context (Kramrisch, 1946). See also Coomaraswamy and Rao (Coomaraswamy, 1918; Rao, 1997 [1914]; *etc.*).

<sup>72</sup> Pollock, Parker, Sridharan, Maxwell and other scholars discuss problems with regard to the use of (*shastric*) texts, which dealt with art/architecture (Pollock, 1985; Maxwell, 1989; Parker, 1992a: 120, 2003; Kaimal, 1999; Sridharan, 2003: 268-269; *etc.*).

<sup>73</sup> Compare with Held and Schneider, 2007. Thus, these scholars also paid attention to other fields such as painting, sculpture and art practices. See, for example, Coomaraswamy’s *The Indian Craftsman*, Havell’s *The Basis for Artistic and Industrial Revival in India*, Kramrisch’s *Artist, Patron and Public in India* and Rao’s *Elements of Hindu Iconography* (Coomaraswamy, 1909a; Havell, 1912, 1913; Kramrisch, 1956, 1958; Rao, 1997 [1914]). Compare also with Chandra, 1983: 37.

<sup>74</sup> See Coomaraswamy’s *Essays in National Idealism* (Coomaraswamy, 1909b).

<sup>75</sup> Compare with Savarkar’s idea of nation that will be discussed in the third chapter.

Havell criticised Fergusson's approach of discussing the history of India's architecture and classifying it in "archaeological water-tight compartments according to arbitrary academic ideas of style" as it ignores that it is a "history of national life and thought" (Havell, 1913: v).

Although there was clearly some concern for contemporary or living practices among the colonisers as well as the nationalist scholars, *all* of the contemporary architectures of the period remained at the margins of Indian art history.<sup>76</sup> The *History of the Modern Styles of Architecture* dedicates barely fifteen pages to modern architecture in India focusing on the effects of colonialism on India's architecture-*scape* (Fergusson, 1862: 408-422). Brown has even less to say on the topic. In *Indian Architecture*, he addresses the issue of contemporary architecture and architectural practice in India in his three-page long conclusion titled "The Modern Position" (Brown, 194-: 129-131). For Brown too, modern/contemporary architecture in India means colonial architecture. Like Fergusson, he emphasises the influence of the Portuguese, Dutch, French, Danish and British, ending his brief investigation outlining contemporary architectural practices in India as artistic, traditional and as ignorant of modern construction methods, processes, devices and material (Brown, 194-: 129-131). Thus, like Fergusson's approach, Brown's approach on contemporary Indian architecture is rather limited.<sup>77</sup>

Perhaps the first publication that specifically and systematically (though not in great depth) discussed late (religious and secular) architecture in (North) India was compiled by Gordon Sanderson, at that time Superintendent of the ASI's Northern

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<sup>76</sup> ASI officer Sanderson, mentions that the Indian Society suggested in a letter the Archaeological Department to investigate "the principles and practices of the living art and craft of India" (letter by the Indian Society quoted in Sanderson, 1913: 6). On Sanderson see remark by Menon (Menon, 1997: 24). Amongst the few works that have been published around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century discussing contemporary architecture are, for example, Fergusson's *History of the Modern Styles of Architecture*, Kipling's *Indian Architecture of Today*, Havell's *Indian Architecture: Its Psychology, Structure, and History from the First Muhammadan Invasion to the Present Day* and Brown's *Indian Architecture* (Fergusson, 1862; Kipling, 1884-1886; Havell, 1913; Brown, 194-: 125; *etc.*).

<sup>77</sup> Since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, the field of colonial architecture in India and elsewhere has attracted several researchers such as Nilsson and Stamp. See, for instance, *European Architecture in India* by Nilsson (Nilsson, 1968). See also Stamp, 1981; Metcalf, 1984, 1989; Davies, 1985; Tadjell, 1990; Volwahren, 2004; *etc.* See Lang, Desai and Desai for an exhaustive bibliography on late architecture (Lang, et al., 1997).

Circle in Agra (Sanderson, 1913). But, since he was assigned the more important task of preparing a report of Delhi's architectural remains, he had to end this investigation that had clearly caught his attention. Grasping the enormity of the exercise, he concluded that it "needs handling [preferably] on a far larger scale" (Sanderson, 1913: 6).<sup>78</sup> This report of Delhi and the surrounding areas that Sanderson prepared for the ASI in 1916 was critical because it was meant to be used to plan the construction of New Delhi and to avoid the demolition of any structure of historical or religious value (Sanderson, 1913: 6, 1916; Gupta, 1999: xii). Perhaps also because of this reason, Sanderson's report is unusual in that it includes architecture "up to the date of the Mutiny [1857]" as well as architecture that might seem "comparatively unimportant at present, but in time to come may be of considerable interest" in this survey (Sanderson, 1916: vi-viii).<sup>79</sup> Eventually, with a total of 1317 sites, the List of Muhammadan and Hindu Monuments records more sites in Delhi than any earlier account and is thus an invaluable source of information.<sup>80</sup> More importantly, with regard to the topic of this thesis, the report gives us a detailed insight about the constitution of the city's architecture-scape and more importantly its temple-scape—out of the 1317 listed sites, approximately one hundred are temples (Sanderson, 1916;

<sup>78</sup> Accordingly the survey covers only a limited number of locations (Delhi, Agra, Allahabad, Lucknow, Ajmer, Bhopal, Bikaner, Gwalior, Jaipur, Jodhpur and Udaipur) and sites. Compare also with Juneja, 2001.

<sup>79</sup> According to Gupta, in 1847 that is ten years prior to the Mutiny in the course of which many buildings were destroyed, a list was compiled for the first time by Khan titled *Asar-ul-Sanadid* (Gupta, 1999: xi). It was published for the second time in 1854. According to Quraishi, listing around 125 objects, Khan's account is "a fairly comprehensive description of Delhi's architecture" (Quraishi, 2012: 2). In 1860 and 1861, Tassy published a French translation of some fragments of the text in the *Journal Asiatique* (Khan, 1860, 1861). See also Khan, 2010. Many of the later publications such as Cooper's *The Handbook for Delhi*, Beglar's *Report for the Year 1871-72: Delhi* and Stephen's *The Archaeology and Monumental Remains of Delhi* draw from Khan's *Asar-ul-Sanadid* (Cooper, 1865; Beglar, 1874; Stephen, 1876). Although there are, as later accounts show, numerous temples in Delhi, only three of them (Nili Chattri Mandir, Kalkaji Mandir and Yogmaya Mandir) seem to be considered significant enough to be mentioned in these lists. Also, the updated sixth edition of Keene's *The Handbook for Visitors to Delhi and its Neighbourhood* by Duncan titled *Keene's Handbook for Visitors* contains short sections on these three temples (Duncan, 1906). Gupta and other scholars refer to ASI's *List of Muhammadan and Hindu Monuments* as "The Zafar Hasan List," after Sanderson's assistant "who did the hard work" (Gupta, 1999: xi-xii). Its first volume was published under the supervision of Sanderson (1916, *Vol. I: Shahjahanabad*), the second volume under Page (1919, *Vol. II: Delhi Zail*) and the third as well as the fourth volume under Blakiston (1922, *Vol. III: Mahrauli Zail* and 1922, *Vol. IV: Badarpur Zail, Badli Zail, Nangloi Zail, Bawana Zail, Kanjhaola Zail, Najafgarh Zail, Palam Zail and Shahdara Zail*). In 1997 and 2008, all four volumes were reprinted with a new introduction and images by as *Monuments of Delhi: Lasting Splendour of the Great Mughals and Others*. The latest "listing" of Delhi's monuments was undertaken by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) and is published as *Delhi, the Built Heritage: A Listing* (Gupta, et al., 1999).

<sup>80</sup> In *Types of Modern Indian Buildings at Delhi*, Sanderson has not included any of Delhi's temples (Sanderson, 1913).



Page, 1919; Blakiston, 1922a, 1922b). Although Delhi's Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH) tries to keep an eye on these (some of these) sites, none of these temples have attracted scholarly attention.<sup>81</sup> This situation presents itself contrary to the situation in South India, where scholars such as Fuller, Parker, Branfoot and Waghorne have been studying temples and temple architecture in the context of the contemporary in great depth (Fuller, 1979, 1988, 2001, 2004a, 2004b; Parker, 1992a, 1992b, 2009; Branfoot, 2002, 2003, 2013; Waghorne, 2004; etc.).<sup>82</sup>

It can be observed that the period which saw scholarly attention lavished on pre-modern Hindu temple/Hindu temple architecture and its meaning—the early 20<sup>th</sup> century—was also the period which saw an indifference towards contemporary temple architecture. From the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the growing corpus of material generated more specialised and fine-tuned studies of the Hindu temple, for instance, with a focus on certain regions. This led to the production of in-depth regional case studies such as *Canons of Orissan Architecture* by Bose, *The Gupta Temple at Deogarh* by Vats, *The Early Wooden Temples of Chamba* by Goetz and Dhaky's studies on Gujarat's architecture such as "The Genesis and Development of Māru-Gurjara Temple" (Bose, 1932; Vats, 1952; Goetz, 1955; Dhaky, 1961, 1975; etc.).<sup>83</sup>

A common problem that these studies faced was the intractable question of how to read and discuss their object of study. For instance, is it appropriate to use Western language speaking about the Hindu temple?<sup>84</sup> Can one understand the Hindu temple in a Western language? What is the most appropriate language to speak about the Hindu temple?<sup>85</sup> Time- and labour-intensive projects such as P. K. Acharaya's

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<sup>81</sup> Asher mentioned a few of these temples in the context of her work in which she focuses on Jain temples (Asher, 2000, 2003, etc.). Sutton has compared Kalkaji Mandir with Humayun's Tomb (Sutton, 2012). See also "The Kalkaji Mandir (Temple), Delhi: An Audio-Visual Essay" by Sutton ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjFMkp-GE1A](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VjFMkp-GE1A)).

<sup>82</sup> This has been justified on the ground that South India has been less impacted by Muslim conquest and rule (Fuller, 1988: 58; Asher, 2000: 121). Hegewald, who studies Jain art and architecture, has also extended her focus into the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Hegewald, 2009).

<sup>83</sup> Compare with Dhar's detailed historiography of studies on the Hindu temple and its architecture (Dhar, 2009, 2011a, 2011b).

<sup>84</sup> See also Ragavan, 2014.

<sup>85</sup> This issue will be addressed in the first chapter taking Derrida's ideas as backdrop. Many studies have operated in terms of naming, defining and fixing *the* meaning making architecture as space of finitude.

*Dictionary of Hindu Architecture* and M. Meister and M. A. Dhaky's *Encyclopaedia of Indian Temple Architecture* (EITA), the latter published over eighteen years in seven volumes, demonstrate the great significance given to the use of terminology and the idea that it is possible to understand Hindu temple architecture through meticulous descriptions (Acharya, 1927; Meister, et al., 1983-2001). But, not only with regard to terminology, the EITA is considered a foundational resource for the studies of the Hindu temple; the geographical area systematically documented by the scholars is especially remarkable (Meister, et al., 1983-2001). However, like above mentioned publications, the EITA's investigation includes North Indian temples only if they were built before 1100 and South Indian temple only if they were built prior to 1798 (Meister, et al., 1983-2001).<sup>86</sup>

While the EITA tries to understand each and every Hindu temple through detailed descriptions, Michell and Hardy's publications try to understand the Hindu temple conceptually, discussing its underlying principles in a historical, religious and regional context (Michell, 1988 [1977]; Hardy, 2007). Akin to the impatience with which Brown deals with the issue of contemporary architecture in India, Michell and Hardy cursorily glance over it; in the case of Michell, in two pages (Michell, 1988 [1977]: 183-184; Hardy, 2007).<sup>87</sup> Hardy dedicates a few more pages to sum up centuries of architectural development and history as "What Happened Afterwards" (Hardy, 2007: 234-241). He highlights that in recent years "there has been an increasing demand for new temples" (Hardy, 2007: 238). In the above outlined tradition of feature-based classifications, seemingly without further ado, he declares:

Contemporary Indian temples can be divided into three categories: folk/popular; those designed by 'traditional architects'; and those designed by architects qualified in the modern profession (Hardy, 2007: 239).

Hardy draws his classification from Menon, who has discussed it, taking up various examples of late religious architecture including Delhi's Chhattarpur Mandir and the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir in "Contemporary Patterns in Religious

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<sup>86</sup> Compare with Michell, 2015: 10-11.

<sup>87</sup> In 2015, Michell published *Late Temple Architecture of India*, in which he tried to provide an overview of temples that have been built between the 15<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century (Michell, 2015).

Architecture” (Menon, 1997).<sup>88</sup> However, while Hardy uses the word “category”, Menon seems more careful in the usage of words and speaks of “trends” (Menon, 1997: 26; Hardy, 2007: 239). According to Menon, one can distinguish three categories in contemporary Hindu temple architecture: Firstly “continuity of traditions” through the employment of traditional craftsmen, secondly “proclivity for kitsch,” and thirdly the “few attempts to develop a ‘modern’ temple building idiom” (Menon, 1997: 26). Bharne and Krusche too hold on to a similar categorisation, distinguishing “[1] as bricolage; [2] as replica; and [3] as polemic” (Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 249).<sup>89</sup> Mehrotra’s *Architecture in India Since 1990* is exceptional as, unlike other publications, it discusses a wide range of late architecture irrespective of its purpose (Mehrotra, 2011). But nevertheless, Mehrotra breaks down this huge pool of data into categories such as “Global Practice,” “Regional Manifestation” and “Alternate Practice” eventually determining all religious architecture (Akshardham in Delhi, Global Vipassana Pagoda in Mumbai, ISKCON’s Sri Sri Radha Krishna-Chandra Temple in Bengaluru, Oneness Hall of Awakening in Varadaiahpalem, Dadamiyan Mosque in Ahmedabad, *etc.*) as “Counter Modernism” (Mehrotra, 2011: 306-307). Critical of these classifications and categorisations, Mukerji and Basu, who, similar to Mehrotra, are practitioners, suggest that certain architecture is rather Post-Modern; however, they too draw a clear-cut line between Traditional and Modern/Post-Modern architecture (Mukerji and Basu, 2015).<sup>90</sup> Doing so, as the above-mentioned studies, they operate in terms of naming, defining and fixing a meaning based on certain features, marking architecture as space of finitude.

While in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, studies which focused on detailed and specific aspects of *ancient* (Hindu temple) architecture were widely produced, another field of investigation emerged that focused on architecture built from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. In fact, the first comprehensive and systematic study on late architecture throughout India was published in 1997 by Jon Lang, Madhavi Desai and Miki Desai titled *Architecture and Independence: The Search for Identity, India 1880-*

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<sup>88</sup> The idea of “traditional” temple will be discussed particularly in the fourth and the fifth chapters.

<sup>89</sup> See also introduction of the second chapter.

<sup>90</sup> Compare also with other articles written by Mukerji and Basu in which they discuss this idea in detail (Mukerji and Basu, 2011, 2013). According to Mukerji and Basu, “Post-modern architecture is the architectural style which evolved from middle to late twentieth century, as a response to the perceived failure of the modern movement in architecture” (Mukerji and Basu, 2011: 12).

1980. As the title of this important publication suggests, the study unfolds around the issue of identity (of the community, region and nation), or, to be more precise, the study searched for a modern/contemporary Indian identity in architecture. This was also the case with many studies of India's 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century architecture that were published afterwards (Lang, et al., 1997; Gast, 2007; Khanna, 2008; Lang, 2010 [2002]; Scriver and Srivastava, 2015; *etc.*).<sup>91</sup> In these studies, architecture and its development are viewed and presented as representative(s) of a process of negotiation, of the present with reference to the past, tradition, colonialism, modernity, authenticity, and origin shaped against a radically transforming socio-economic, political and cultural backdrop. In other words, the discourse unfolds in a knowledge system governed and organised along classifications and categories of *ancient/modern*, *art/non-art*, *secular/sacred*, *authentic/in-authentic*, *local/global*, *rural/urban*, *etc.*

The discourse attaches architecture to the ground by reducing it to singular meaning in terms of identity and ignores other potentialities that architecture holds. Accordingly, in this framework, there is no longer space to study ancient architecture. Also, the study of the Hindu temple in this context is limited—only a temple that features certain aspects, for example, if it is designed by a modern architect in a certain modern style, can be included in such a formulation, while all others structures such as temple constructed by local societies and architects of lesser fame and so on have to be excluded.<sup>92</sup> Thus, the framework within which these publications function

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<sup>91</sup> Numerous articles and books have been published focusing on specific aspects of modern and contemporary architecture, such as certain architects, regions, cities and so on. However, it can be argued that there is still a dearth of information and awareness on the topic; therefore there is a need for further research on the issue, as Menon emphasises (Menon, 2000: 143).

<sup>92</sup> The majority of research on late architecture in India at best marginalises religious architecture. According to Menon, “religious architecture is seldom the topic of architectural discussion amongst contemporary architects. Anyone analysing the architecture of India since Independence will have rare a occasion to refer to the religious architecture of the period” (Menon, 1997: 24). See publications such as Lang, Desai and Desai's *Architecture and Independence: The Search for Identity*, Gast's *Modern Traditions: Contemporary Architecture in India*, Khanna's *The Modern Architecture of New Delhi: 1928-2007* and Scriver and Srivastava's *India: Modern Architectures in History* (Lang, et al., 1997; Gast, 2007; Khanna, 2008; Lang, 2010 [2002]; Scriver and Srivastava, 2015; *etc.*). See also publications by Menon and Brown (Menon, 1997, 2000, 2003; Brown, 2009a, 2009b; *etc.*). In *A Concise History of Modern Architecture in India*, ISKCON's Sri Sri Radha Parthasarathi Mandir in East of Kailash designed by Kanvinde and the Dakshin Delhi Kalibari Mandir in RK Puram designed by Sumit and Suchitra Gosh have been discussed (Lang, 2010 [2002]: 27, 124, 168). In *The Modern Architecture of New Delhi: 1928-2007*, Khanna discusses only the Sri Sri Radha Parthasarathi Mandir/ISKCON Mandir (Khanna, 2008: 170-173). As mentioned above, Mehrotra's *Architecture in India since 1990* is exceptional; he includes a few

is drawn from definitions like Pevsner’s definition of architecture—“a bicycle shed is a building; Lincoln Cathedral is a piece of architecture [...] the term architecture applies only to buildings designed with a view to aesthetical appeal” (Pevsner, 1948 [1943]: xix). In other words, the discourse draws a clear-cut line between architecture and non-architecture. A look into the *Architectural Guide Delhi*, which means to provide a survey of Delhi’s modern and contemporary architecture, exposes the limit of this framework: out of the 204 listed sites in Delhi, there are only two Hindu temples—both of which have been built by architects trained in modern institutions (Bansal and Kochupillai, 2013).<sup>93</sup> Bansal and Kochupillai’s *Architectural Guide Delhi*, is a significant publication that has been published recently. The *Architectural Guide Delhi* is the first of its kind discussing not only Delhi’s early architecture but also late architecture. However, as mentioned earlier, Bansal and Kochupillai cling on to the conventional definition of architecture, excluding temples that have not been built by ‘modern’ architects (Bansal and Kochupillai, 2013). Another useful publication on Delhi’s architecture is Khanna’s *The Modern Architecture of New Delhi: 1928-2007* (Khanna, 2008).<sup>94</sup>

It also seems as if the distinction, which was created long ago in the European context, between painting, architecture, sculpture, *etc.* although challenged many times in many different ways, has not lost its strength with regard to art historical discourse; within this schema, modern and contemporary architecture in general and the temple in specific are at best marginalised.<sup>95</sup> Contemporary religious architecture is thus often considered as everyday architecture and falls *as such* within the given framework into the context of the popular and vernacular and not within the realm of (Indian) art history (Garimella, 2003: 173). The categories, frameworks and theories

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examples of late temple architecture such as Delhi’s Akshardham, Mumbai’s Global Vipassana Pagoda and ISKCON’s Sri Sri Radha Krishna-Chandra Mandir in Bengaluru (Mehrotra, 2011: 251-301). However, he discusses these examples as “Counter Modernism” (Mehrotra, 2011: 307).

<sup>93</sup> Like in Lang’s publications, the *Architectural Guide Delhi* lists Kanvinde’s Sri Sri Radha Parthasarathi Mandir/ISKCON Mandir and Gosh’s Dakshin Delhi Kalibari Mandir (Bansal and Kochupillai, 2013: 179, 227). No modern mosque is discussed.

<sup>94</sup> On Delhi’s colonial/modern/contemporary architecture see also Metcalf, Menon, Volwahren, Hosagrahar, Sengupta and Brown (Metcalf, 1986; Menon, 1997, 2000, 2003; Volwahren, 2002; Hosagrahar, 2005; Sengupta, 2007; Brown, 2009b; *etc.*).

<sup>95</sup> See Held and Schneider on the formation of art history (Held and Schneider, 2007). See for example publications such as Kapur’s *When was Modernism in Indian Art?* and Mitter’s *The Triumph of Modernism and Art and Nationalism in Colonial India* (Kapur, 2000; Mitter, 2007; *etc.*). Brown’s *Art for a Modern India* can be highlighted as exceptional, it covers art, architecture as well as cinema (Brown, 2009a).

that have been created and constructed through the centuries provide, in fact, a very limited purpose and reason to study contemporary Hindu architecture and gives, therefore, seemingly limited space to the subject—the structure is self-sustaining and limited.

Within this context, Kudelska, Staszczyk and Świerzowska’s on-going systematic and descriptive study of Birla Mandirs is a rare attempt to study late temples and their architecture that considers temples as individual works of art neglecting the larger socio-economic and political context in which the family built these temples (Kudelska, et al., 2014, 2016).<sup>96</sup> The great majority of studies discussing contemporary Hindu temples focus less on architecture and more on temple as a space of practices and, as such, has also become a concern of disciplines such as anthropology, history and religious studies. On the whole, scholars find it more relevant to address issues such as modernity, class, consumer culture, the Indian middle-class, capitalism, nation, nationalism, diaspora, global capital and globalisation in relation to the temple than to get a picture of India’s contemporary temple-scape; even fewer provide close readings of the architecture.<sup>97</sup>

Thus, the temples that are seemingly viewed as outstanding or particularly interesting in India are temples that are read as contradicting or challenging the existing concept of the Hindu temple and drifting into the sphere that has been defined as *popular, low* or, in other words, *everyday architecture*.<sup>98</sup> Thus, for instance, Lutgendorf in his article with the telling title “My Hanuman is Bigger Than Yours,” observes the transformation of Hanuman from a comparatively minor god into one of the most popular contemporary gods in India; he notes that since the mid-1970s communities compete in “having the biggest Hanuman on the subcontinental block”

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<sup>96</sup> How little is known about contemporary Hindu temple architecture shows well in that Kudelska, Staszczyk and Świerzowska are not yet certain about how many temples have been built by the Birla family (Kudelska, et al., 2014, 2016).

<sup>97</sup> Noticeably, a greater number of studies have been undertaken and published on the Hindu temple in the diaspora than on the Hindu temple in (North) India, many of them examining the Hindu temple with regard to the concept of identity. See, for example, Bhardwaj and Rao, Eck, Knott, Zavos, Younger, Trouillet, Reddington and Jones (Bhardwaj and Rao, 1998; Eck, 2000; Knott, 2000; Zavos, 2009; Younger, 2010; Trouillet, 2012; Reddington, 2014; Jones, 2016; etc.). Especially the work on temples constructed by BAPS around the world by Kim should be mentioned (Kim, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2016).

<sup>98</sup> I am borrowing the term “everyday architecture” from Garimella (Garimella, 2003: 173).

(Lutgendorf, 1994: 244). Arguably, unlike sites such as Sabarimala and Tirupati Temple that have attracted people (and thus money) for centuries because of their reputation, new temples have to create a sensation to attract a following. Similarly, Srinivas in her work discusses that contemporary urban temples have to factor in the incorporation of technology and the language of international imagery and have to make themselves accessible to people with different sectarian backgrounds (Srinivas, 2004, 2006).<sup>99</sup> Contrary to Srinivas, who understands her paper as “a counterpoint to the recent spate of work on Hindu fundamentalism”, Jyotindra Jain, Sumathi Ramaswamy, Tapati Guha-Thakurta, Saloni Mathur and Kavita Singh amongst other scholars try to explore the concepts not only of nationalism but also of the nation in the context of religious image- and space-making, which makes their work relevant in the context of the thesis (Srinivas, 2004: 59, 74, 2006: 325, 337; Jain, 2007; Mathur and Singh, 2007; Guha-Thakurta, 2009, 2014; Ramaswamy, 2010; Singh, 2010; *etc.*).<sup>100</sup>

One of the first studies that discusses selected Hindu temples and their architecture in this context is Jyotindra Jain’s article *Curating Culture, Curating Territory: Religio-political Mobility in India*, in which he discusses various late temples as sites that spectacularise the religious to serve communal nationalist goals (Jain, 2007). In the same year when Jain’s article was published, Mathur and Singh published “Reincarnations of the Museum,” in which they explore recent and upcoming projects by religious communities (including Akshardham in Delhi) in terms of representation, display and exhibiting while questioning these methods as means to shape ideas and ideologies in the context of identity, nation and religion (Mathur and Singh, 2007). In “Temple of Eternal Return,” Singh takes a second look at Akshardham, now studying it as a site of identity politics (Singh, 2010). With regard to Akshardham, however, one cannot by-pass Brosius’ thorough investigation of Akshardham; she questions Akshardham in the context of India’s middle-class studying its landscape, soundscape, people, rituals and so on, in order to understand its meaning in the context of identity, politics, global consumer culture and capitalism

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<sup>99</sup> Padma discusses the idea that the meaning of *murtis* and gods changes when they move from the village to the city (Padma, 2001).

<sup>100</sup> According to Srinivas, “the recent theoretical focus on ‘fundamentalist’ Hinduism has muddied the study of religion in India” (Srinivas, 2006: 325).

(Brosius, 2010). The Indian middle-class is also foregrounded in Waghorne, in *Diaspora of Gods*, who finds the middle-class involved in various practices related to the temple, such as construction, renovation and so on—to create its own version of God and the sacred (Waghorne, 2004). Many more studies such as Kakar’s article “‘Starring’ Madhuri as Durga” in which Kakar discussed the curious case of a *chaat*-shop that has been transformed by its Sikh owner into a temple dedicated to Madhuri Dixit (Kakar, 2009). Jain’s articles “Post-reform India’s Automotive-Iconic-Cement Assemblages” and “Gods in the Time of Automobility” study the effects of India’s late 20<sup>th</sup> economic reforms on the country’s religious landscape focusing on the construction of monumental god images and temples (Jain, 2016, 2017). Similarly, studies on roadside temples, for example, by Kalpagam, Bharne, Krusche and Ghassem-Fachandi deserve attention (Kalpagam, 2006; Bharne, 2008, 2013; Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 19-31; Ghassem-Fachandi, 2012, 2015). More than any other contemporary temple, Akshardham has received scholarly attention (Mathur and Singh, 2007; Jain, 2009, 2011a, 2011b; Brosius, 2010; Singh, 2010; Guha-Thakurta, 2014; *etc.*).<sup>101</sup> Akshardham is often read as example in which boundaries that have been sustained for long are blurring—for example, between the temple and the museum, the temple and the theme-park, the temple and technology, *etc.*<sup>102</sup>

However, the present study tries to emphasise the necessity of rereading, rethinking, readdressing and questioning architecture, religion and language to redeem them from the locus of representation and the everydayness. Consequently certain structures, theories and frameworks need to be deconstructed, addressing certain questions like: *What is architecture?*, *What is art?*, *What is a temple?*, *What is sacred?*, in order to open up the space for *architecture to come*. Therefore, the study believes that it is important to take Hindu architecture as an *event*—to view, question, and to unfold the constructed structures that create a *closure*. It has to be highlighted that *Hindu* itself is a definition and category that gets its meaning from outside, thus undergoing transformations day by day. However, this is not only in reference to Hinduism, but also to any other religious community—Christian, Muslim, Jain, Sikh

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<sup>101</sup> Compare with fifth chapter.

<sup>102</sup> See fifth chapter. Compare with Menon, 1997: 28; Mathur and Singh, 2007; Kakar, 2009: 392; Srivastava, 2009: 338; Kim, 2010: 142; Singh, 2010: 47; Jain, 2011: 52, 54; Puri, 2015: 257; Mukerji and Basu, 2015; *etc.*



and Buddhist. It is, therefore, more out of practical reasons and my familiarity with the subject that the study will only focus on Hindu architecture. The thesis argues that temple architecture along with religion and art cannot be reduced to any particular identity that comes within the discourse of representation. Therefore, the present research will underscore the necessity of viewing architecture, art and religion as that which keeps *travelling across* already constructed borders in terms of time and space due to their *passive* existence which is constantly and infinitely exposed to the *outside*. Hence, the research will try to bring the importance of *opening up* the already existing forms and definitions within the discourse of temple and architecture.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The existing dominant discourse posits temple architecture within the politics of identity formation, as discussed above. Emphasising the need of questioning these discourses, in order to open up the field of temple architecture beyond identity-politics, the study will analyse the linkages between the discourse of art history and the discourse of identity. Thus, Foucault's ideas on power of discourse and its function as well as Benjamin's ideas on translation will be of relevance. Further, Derrida's idea of text that emphasises the undeniability of outside and the idea of sacred and secular that unfold in his discussion on name and naming are of importance throughout the research. Viewing art and architecture as something that can never be grounded with a certain fixity due to their constant mobility, and, consequently, the impossibility of placing art and architecture within identity politics will be approached through Deleuze.

In order to ground the work in the context of India/South Asia the works of numerous other scholars and thinkers have been taken into consideration with regard to issues and processes such as identity, identity politics, postcolonialism, nationalism, secularism, secularisation, communalism, modernisation, modernity and religion. For instance, Ashish Nandy's works such as "An Anti-secularist Manifesto," "The Twilight of Certitudes: Secularism, Hindu Nationalism, and Other Masks of Decultuation," and "A Report on the Present State of Health of the Gods and Goddesses in South Asia" are accounts that have problematised the understanding of

the ideas of secularism in post-colonial India (Nandy, 1995, 1997, 2001, *etc.*).<sup>103</sup> The formation of the 'Hindu' identity is a significant strand of enquiry that constitutes the work, and hence the work of scholars such as Christopher Jaffrelot, John Zavos will be critical to the study. The Hindu identity and its relationship to the Indian nation is another theme that is explored in the work. Seguing into this enquiry is the question of Indian nationalism; for this, Partha Chatterjee's work and his ideas on Indian nationalism as different from Western nationalism, that he elaborated in "Secularism and Toleration," *The Nation and its Fragments* and "Whose Imagined Community?," for instance, served as a theoretical backdrop to develop ideas in the thesis (Chatterjee, 1993, 1993 [1986], 1994, *etc.*).<sup>104</sup> Given the work's focus on contemporary temple architecture, the thesis aims to comprehensively annotate the shifts within religion, architecture and identity in India of the post liberalization era, and the nexus between religion and the media. For this, the thesis draws from Kajri Jain's work in which she discusses the use of new media and technologies to create new imageries. Moreover, it turns to the analysis of Aravind Rajagopal with its full frontal engagement with issues around the media, religion and the public sphere. These issues coalesced around the site of Ayodhya and its Ram Temple—a benchmark in Indian history, and one which has defined the course of national politics and society. This touchstone also brought into relief questions around the status of 'mythological' beings such as Ram and venerated historians such as Romila Thapar have engaged with the ontological status of Ram, proving that far from being issues 'confined' to religious spaces, the temple remains an unstable site of identity politics. Thus, the study has attempted to develop a methodology that fully engages with questions around Indian and Hindu identity while insisting on the impossibility of identity *as such* at the outset by working *through* these questions.

In understanding and analysing the field of research, the study will document respective sites mainly by descriptions and photographs. Since July 2010, I have visited, documented and studied nearly seventy temples mainly in Old Delhi, Paharganj, New Delhi and South Delhi. I intend to study these sites over a longer

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<sup>103</sup> On secularism in the Indian context see also various articles published in Bhargava's *Secularism and Its Critics* (Bhargava, ed., 1998).

<sup>104</sup> Compare, for example, with Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (Anderson, 2003 [1983]).

period in order to study the processes of change within the contemporary.<sup>105</sup> Moreover, I have visited, documented and studied sites such as the Indraprastha Millennium Park, the Buddha Jayanti Park and the Prithviraj Chauhan Memorial that occupy important spaces in the context of the city. Material such as pamphlets, *sthalapuranas*, publications, photographs, inscriptions and the temple's homepage provided by the temple and its authorities will be considered. Also, conversations and interviews with priests, visitors, devotees, *etc.* as well as newspaper articles will be taken into account.

The history and construction of the respective temple relies largely on material provided by the temple authorities. With regard to other aspects of the temples discussed in the thesis, great differences can be observed worth mentioning. While BAPS, for instance, maintains various interconnected websites thus providing a platform to study the organisation and its temples in great detail, studying or collecting information about the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir presents several difficulties. Although it is today not uncommon for temples to maintain websites, the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir does not maintain one. The only publications that I managed to locate are: A small postcard booklet (*Birla Temple, Shri Laxmi Narayan Temple: Forever*) sold by street vendors in front of the temple that provides little more information than a guidebook and a pamphlet (*Hinduism: A Philosophy of Life*) distributed inside the temple that tries to outline the idea of Hinduism in a few pages. A small booklet published by the All India Arya (Hindu) Dharma Seva Sangha with the promising title: *A Glimpse of Lakshminarayan Temple, New Delhi* is helpful as it outlines the concept of Arya Dharma, but not when it comes to issues concerning the temple's architecture and history, though it contains a few old photographs of the temple and its adjoining park (All India Arya (Hindu) Dharma Seva Sangha, 19-). A written request for the permission to take photographs inside the temple and get access to the temple's upper floors remains unanswered. The most informative source with regard to the temple's history proved to be an inscription on a pillar on the temple's premises capturing the circumstances of the temple's construction in a few

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<sup>105</sup> In the course of time temples are renovated and old elements are replaced with new. An old bilingual inscription at the Yogmaya Mandir in Mehrauli above the temple's entrance recently disappeared with the construction of a new ceiling. And, in the course of renovation work at the Agarwal Mandir in Paharganj an older glass mosaic was overpainted. See also second chapter.

words and images. Additionally, Caturvedi's book written in Hindi on modern Hindu temples is a helpful source of information, though uncritical (Caturvedi, 1982). How little is known about the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir and other temples build by the Birla family is best demonstrated by the fact that we do not even know how many temples the family has constructed and helped to construct (Kudelska, et al., 2014: 27, 2016: 150; Świerzowska, 2015: 119).<sup>106</sup>

In the case of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, the temple authorities and the Birla family are seemingly scarcely concerned about presenting the temple and its fascinating history that is closely tied to India's journey to nationhood, to a larger audience. However, the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir and Akshardham, both present themselves in a very different light. In both cases, the responsible authorities put great effort in the presentation of *their* temple and its story in text, image, *etc.* Like Akshardham and many other temples, the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir maintains a website.<sup>107</sup> However, the main source of information on the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir is the temple's *Sthalapuranam*, "compiled" by two of the temple's founding members and former presidents of the temple trust Kattalai V. Ramachandra Iyer and S. Pattabhiraman and "edited" by the Samaj's Vice President M.K. Venkatachalam (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-).<sup>108</sup> Earlier available at the temple premises, a digital version is now available for download on the temple's website. As older generations of *sthalapuranas*, the temple's *Sthalapuranam* is a chronicle or narrative of events, facts and stories illustrated with images and photos. As Branfoot says, typically *sthalapuranas* try to prove the site's antiquity and elevate its religious, mythological and historical importance (Branfoot, 2013: 47). However, architecture and other issues of concern for art historians have been little discussed. The Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir's *Sthalapuranam*, as well as its website, are written in (occasionally faulty) English, presumably to

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<sup>106</sup> Compare with second and third chapter.

<sup>107</sup> See [www.malaimandir.org.in](http://www.malaimandir.org.in). Scheifinger works extensively on the use of the internet in the context of Hinduism (Scheifinger, 2006, 2009b, 2010, 2012, *etc.*).

<sup>108</sup> Compare also with the *Sthalapurana's* "Preface" and "Editor's Note" (Subrahmanian, 20-: 12; Venkatachlam, 20-: 13-14). According to Parker and Branfoot, in the context of South India, or, to be more precise, Tamil India it seems to be common for temples to maintain a *sthalapurana* (Parker, 1992a: 112; Branfoot, 2002: 207, 239, 2013: 47; *etc.*). According to Branfoot, "the bulk of the *sthalapurānas* [...] were written down exactly when so many temples were being expanded or founded" that is during the Nayaka period that "was marked by political instability and substantial temple construction" (Branfoot, 2002: 207, 2013: 47).

reach a larger audience. However, taking South India's and Tamil Nadu's resistance to Hindi into account, one might also interpret this use of English as a political statement.<sup>109</sup>

As BAPS does not allow any form of documentation of Akshardham (not even pen and paper are allowed to be taken into the premises), studying Akshardham was somewhat different but not necessarily more difficult than studying the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir and the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai. This is because BAPS puts great efforts into the documentation, archiving and publishing information about the organisation and the temple. BAPS utilises a wide range of media such as photography, film, audio books, print media and digital media trying to address different audiences such as followers, non-followers, children, Gujarati-speakers, English-speakers, *etc.* The quality of these means of mass communication is ensured by well-trained BAPS' *sadhus*, who use scholarly- and technical-sounding language without being too theoretical and abstract, suggesting objectivity and validity.<sup>110</sup> Akshardham's website offers a wide range of picture-perfect photographs for download. Publications such as *Hindu Rites and Rituals: Sentiments, Sacraments and Symbols*; *Gems From Shikhsapatri*; and, *Hinduism: An Introduction* are useful resources to understand BAPS' philosophy and practices (BAPS, 2010 [2002]; Mukundcharandas, Sadhu (2010 [2007]); Vivekjivandas, 2011 [2010]; *etc.*). However, due to the focus of the thesis, I have concentrated on publications related to Akshardham such as *Swaminarayan Akshardham: Making and Experience*; *Swaminarayan Akshardham: New Delhi* and *Gajendrapith: The Incredible Story and History of the Elephant Plinth* that explain Akshardham, its history and its architecture (Vivekjivandas, 2009; BAPS, 2010 [2007], 2010a; *etc.*).

That BAPS' understanding of architecture and significance given to it greatly differs from that, for example, of the Sree Saminatha Swami Seva Samaj is best seen through one of BAPS' latest publications: *Mandir: Faith, Form, Function*; the book, discusses Swaminarayan Mandirs and Akshardham in the context of the history of Indian temple architecture self-consciously inserting Akshardham and other BAPS

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<sup>109</sup> See, for instance, Barnett, 1976: 129-131 and Pandian, 1996: 3323.

<sup>110</sup> This will be discussed in the fifth chapter.

temples, within the history of Hindu temple architecture (BAPS, 2014). Thus, thanks to BAPS' efforts to elaborate on each and every detail of Akshardham, it seems as if one can easily and quickly grasp Akshardham in facts and figures.<sup>111</sup> One way of looking at this practice is to argue in terms of transparency; nevertheless, this transparency also carries notions of a pre-determination of the discourse. Accordingly, this seemingly liberal distribution of photos and information cannot be understood as contradicting the ban of cameras, *etc.*—it guarantees BAPS a monopoly over the narrative created. By doing so, BAPS tries to fix the meaning of Akshardham and tries to prevent alternative readings of Akshardham. The material provided by BAPS must be read keeping BAPS' larger agenda in mind.

## CHAPTERISATION

The first chapter will trace the different ways in which (Indian) architecture in general and the Hindu temple in specific have been read. This is particularly significant as it seems as if the ways in which architecture and the temple are viewed/imagined to-date are closely linked to how the temple has been read in the past. It will argue that today, the Hindu temple (not only the ancient Hindu temple but also the contemporary Hindu temple) attracts considerable attention because of how it has been viewed and highlighted.<sup>112</sup> Thus it will try to engage with questions such as: Why and for whom is the Hindu temple important? Why are so many new temples built across the country?<sup>113</sup> How did architecture/the Hindu temple become a signifier? What does it signify? How did architecture/the Hindu temple become a marker for *identity*?

By and large, scholars have situated the beginnings of Indian art history in the midst of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and although it has been emphasised that those who wrote about Indian architecture did so from a colonial perspective, scholars usually do not

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<sup>111</sup> Compare with my MPhil dissertation, Hartig, 2012: 64. The perpetual repetition of the facts and figures or tropes makes it easy to memorise the narrative (Hartig, 2012: 87).

<sup>112</sup> Chatterjee tries to trace intervention of research on the "real world" (Chatterjee, 2008).

<sup>113</sup> This question is particularly interesting in comparison with what is happening in other parts of the world; in Germany and the Netherlands, for example, churches are closed or reused in many (non-religious) ways. Luckmann and Wilson discuss the possibility that with modernity and secularism religion will become irrelevant (Luckmann, 1967 and Wilson, 1966).

follow the path into the history of European architectural theory further.<sup>114</sup> However, as will be discussed in the first chapter, in order to understand the ways in which architecture has been viewed, it is helpful to look at the text to which generations of architects and scholars have been referring to Vitruvius' *The Ten Books on Architecture*. The first chapter will emphasise the significance of Vitruvius' choice to name architecture and its elements after communities as Doric, Ionic and Corinthian that affects the conceptualisation of architecture right up to the contemporary period. Moreover, the chapter looks at William Hodges' reading of architecture that he outlines in *A Dissertation of the Prototypes of Architecture: Hindoo, Moorish, and Gothic* tying architecture to the *nation* and tries to trace how related ideas and frameworks are dealt with by Fergusson, Coomaraswamy, Kramrisch, *etc.* All of these texts will be read through thinkers such as Foucault, Benjamin and Derrida, while specifically paying attention to the notion of identity, community and nation in relation to art, architecture and religion.

While the first chapter tries to introduce and provide an overview about how temple architecture has been read in the past and its continuing legacy with regard to temples that have been built in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and later, the second chapter will discuss a selection of temples existing at present in Delhi. Thereby, it tries to explore the many *avatars* of the Hindu temple with particular reference to Delhi and its historical context. Is there something that unites all these different places and architectures? What defines them as 'Hindu temple,' in terms of architectural style, forms, features and elements? What role does the temple play in the context of a community? While many of these temples do not strictly adhere to the idea of the Hindu temple as such, then what is it that makes the Hindu temple a 'Hindu' temple? Is it possible to pin-down the temple to something such as minimal features (*shikhara* and *garbhagraha*) as has been suggested by scholars? What is it that separates the temple from the secular, as in the "everyday"? And what role does architecture play in articulating these distinctions, if any? It is here that the idea of the temple, generally represented in the art historical discourse that defines/identifies certain characteristics

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<sup>114</sup> Pramod, Guha-Thakurta as well as Dhar focus on the colonial and post-colonial period (Chandra, 1983; Guha-Thakurta, 2004; Dhar, 2009 and 2011b). Mitter, however, discusses also the perception of India and its art/architecture in the pre-colonial period (Mitter, 1992 [1977]). See also Tillotson who reads Hodges' *Dissertation* looking at it with reference to 18<sup>th</sup> century European architectural theory (Tillotson, 2000: 135).

as being different from secular architecture, will be questioned. At the same time, the chapter will emphasise the meaning of the temple in relation to the community, also with regard to the question of untouchability. It will point out the problematics of categorisation, naming and defining with respect to issues such as *sacred/secular*, *Hindu/non-Hindu*, *etc.* that came up in the colonial discourse as well as categories such as *regional*, *national* and *global*; it intends to examine if these categories or readings can be sustained on closer reading.

Beginning with the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir in the third chapter, each of the following three chapters will discuss the case of one of Delhi's temples. The third chapter looks at the entanglement between the emerging Indian nationalism and the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir that was built during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The chapter discusses the formation of the nation as a powerful mechanism that grounds, fixes meaning and sets boundaries not only in the geo-political sense but also in terms of art, architecture and religion. It will argue that these boundaries are fixed within a framework that works in terms of exclusion and inclusion. In such a context, the idea of the 'Indian' nation reduces its meaning to a homogenous and unifying matrix, narrated through ideas such as Indian History, Indian Culture, Indian Art and Indian Architecture through which certain *sacredness* is assigned to the identity that comes in terms of nation. These ideas are constructed within the colonial and modern framework, driven forward through binaries, where the idea of presence and essence become highly relevant. What kind of role does temple architecture play in this context? The Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir and its stylistic, architectural, structural and iconographic elements will be analysed within this framework.

The fourth chapter will foreground the tension between the region and the nation. It is here that the question of the community, identity and architecture will be posited together. Accordingly, the chapter seeks to understand how the community or ethnic nation is defined within the *Indian* nation and how the community defines and represents itself within the construction of the nation and its capital city. The relation between religious architecture and identity particularly within the context of the nation can be studied through the innumerable temples that exist in Delhi, built by



communities with different socio-economic, cultural and religious backgrounds. In the fourth chapter, I focus on the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir (commonly referred to as Malai Mandir) the most popular Tamil temple in Delhi dedicated to Subramanya, who has been viewed as a Tamil God *par excellence* (Ganesh, 2002; Trouillet, 2012: 6-7).<sup>115</sup> Like many other temples such as the Jagannath Mandir in Hauz Khas, the Ayyappa Temple in RK Puram, the Kali Bari Mandir in CR Park, the Swaminarayan Mandir and the Dakshin Delhi Kalibari Mandir in RK Puram, the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir was built by a community not *native* to Delhi but coming from a different part of the country, which must not only be understood as geographically different but also linguistically, socio-economically, politically and culturally distinct. These differences have been highlighted in the Dravidian nationalist movement and later in Tamil nationalism that views Tamils as a nation. This makes a study of the Malai Mandir interesting in the context of concepts such as region and nation with regard to the temple. In what ways are these ideas associated with the temple and its architecture? The temple will be considered as a representative and example of the various *regional* temples that were constructed after 1947. The chapter argues that there are various possibilities and modalities of defining and capturing the sacred which are community specific. It will engage with issues such as: How are ideas of past and tradition articulated in the context of the contemporary and the capital city? What role does the popular play in the context of the temple? How do communities make their architecture look similar/different from other architecture and other communities? The chapter turns its attention to the anxiety about *authenticity* and tradition as reflected in a certain style and material, and, as in the case of the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir for example, in the choice to build the temple by Tamil sthapatis; this is true not only with reference the Malai Mandir but also with reference to many other temples. The chapter will argue that the idea of the community that crosses its boundaries by entering the space of the city challenges the reading of architecture and the temple in terms of its reducibility to one meaning and its attachment with the framework that has been formulated within the

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<sup>115</sup> While in the context of Tamil Nadu Subramanya is not only worshipped in every village but also as “the Tamil God (*tamil kaṭavu!*) *par excellence*” in North India he plays a subordinate role (Rao, 1997 [1914], Vol. II: 415; Trouillet, 2012: 6-7). In some sense perhaps comparable with Hodges’ idea that communities try to hold on to their (own) architecture (Hodges, 1787). Nietzsche says: “*Ein Volk, das noch an sich selbst glaubt, hat auch noch seinen eigenen Gott*” (Nietzsche, 1899: 232). This might be translated into English as: A people/nation/folk that still believes in itself has its own god.

colonial and modern discourse.

In the fifth chapter, the temple and the sacred will be discussed within the context of the *contemporary* that has been interpreted as the period of radical transformations in terms of mobility, knowledge system and technology by studying the case of Akshardham as part of the ACC, which was inaugurated only a few years back in 2005. How does the idea of the temple fit into this framework and in the rapidly changing socio-economic and political context of the Indian nation? How do the nation and the community define and negotiate their role in relation to the temple? Akshardham and its creator BAPS will be analysed in terms of a community that constantly seeks to negotiate its identity and position in relation to the contemporary that has to be seen with regard to nation and the rest of the world—national and global. It will argue that BAPS understands architecture as a means of power to define and represent its identity and ideology *within* and *outside* the nation. Moreover, the chapter will discuss the interpretations of many scholars and visitors that see in Akshardham the blurring of boundaries—*sacred* and *secular*, *sacred* and *political*. However, while the fourth chapter addressed the issue of mobility in relation to community within the Nation-state, in the fifth chapter, Akshardham and its patron BAPS will be taken as an example of a community crossing the border marked in terms of the nation. Here it will seek to address the questions: How does the community define and represent itself *outside* the nation? And, with the *border-crossing*, in what way can we hold on to the idea of *Indian* Architecture that is supposed to be identified with a certain *Indianness*? With this final chapter, the thesis will bring to a close a set of inquiries around the Hindu temple in contemporary India, particularly through the urban-scape of its capital city, Delhi. Critical to this discussion is an analysis of the interrelationships between the elements of architecture—as constituted through praxis and discourse, and questions of identity—Hindu, Indian, contemporary, ancient, modern, *etc.* The Hindu temple, as the thesis sets out to prove, escapes static definitions; paying close attention to its multifarious paths is as critical to cultural life as it is to the life and space of the nation.

## FIGURES INTRODUCTION



Figure 1: Wall with Hanuman *murti* in Old Delhi (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2: Roadside Temple in Delhi (by A. Hartig).



Figure 3: Mandir in Lodi Colony (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4: Shiv Mandir on Africa Avenue (by A. Hartig).



Figure 5: Interior of Shiv Mandir on Africa Avenue (by A. Hartig).

## FIRST CHAPTER

### READING INDIAN ARCHITECTURE: IDENTITY POLITICS AND THE HINDU TEMPLE THROUGH THE AGES

The chapter traces the different ways in which (Indian) architecture in general and the Hindu temple in specific have been read over time. It focuses on the questions of identity as it is displayed/demonstrated through architecture, particularly religious architecture. The practice of writing about Indian architecture in general and the Hindu temple particularly, gathered force in the context of the colonial project though it was later taken forward by nationalist scholars. As scholars such as Havell, Chandra, Mitter, Juneja, Hosagrahar, Guha-Thakurta and Dhar note, it is in the colonial context that the Hindu temple was ‘read’ through a framework that looked at architecture via geography, chronology, ethnicity and religious affiliation and remains so until date central to the way in which the Hindu temple is understood (Havell, 1913; Chandra, 1983; Mitter, 1992 [1977]; Juneja, 2001; Hosagrahar, 2002; Guha-Thakurta, 2004; Dhar, 2009, 2011b; *etc.*).<sup>116</sup>

Art history developed as a discipline forced to reckon with the differences in visual language across ages and cultures.<sup>117</sup> This led to the constricted development of theories that have long been based on the conceptual conflation of community—often defined in terms of race, and visual language. With architecture, this association carries perhaps more weight as compared to painting, music or literature—because architecture is bound to a *location*. However, it seems as if naming art and architecture *Asian, South Asian, Indian, Tamilian, Delhiite, etc.* not only refers to a geographical location but also defines a certain kind of *belonging*—an *identity*.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Although much research has been undertaken since then, Fergusson’s framework “remains central to the teaching of South Asian architectural history”, as Hosagrahar says (Hosagrahar, 2002: 356). Compare with introduction.

<sup>117</sup> See, for example, studies by Johann Joachim Winckelmann and Alois Riegl.

<sup>118</sup> To date, architecture is often discussed with reference to identity. See, for example, Correa’s

What does that imply? In what sense can architecture be any of these, i.e. identity or produce a sense of belonging? On what grounds do we identify/define *what Indian, etc. is*? What do we mean by saying *Indian architecture*? Can we identify/define architecture along the borders and boundaries of an community/nation and/or a nation-state? Can the Rashtrapati Bhavan in Delhi be called *British* because it is constructed as the British Viceroy's House by a British architect at a time when large parts of South Asia were part of the British Empire? Is a temple built by ISKCON *American* or *Indian*?<sup>119</sup> Will our answers depend on whether the temple is built *inside* or *outside* the boundaries of India?<sup>120</sup> And, what if the patron of a temple that is located somewhere outside India *comes from* India, as is the case with nearly forty Shikharbaddha Mandirs built by BAPS around the world? Along what borders and boundaries can the myriad kinds of temples and shrines that have been built in the world by different communities, be named? Are they *Indian*? What do we mean by defining a temple as *Indian*? Is there an *Indian* temple *as such*? Can architecture have a national identity? And what about the deities that reside in these temples? If a temple can be Indian, does that mean that god is also Indian? Does god have a nationality? Or is god, as Nietzsche says, a cosmopolitan (Nietzsche, 1899: 234)? If it is possible to identify/define architecture with reference to a nation, then is it also possible to identify/define architecture with reference to a community, a city, a region, a nation, a state and a continent? How *Delhiite* is a temple like the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir that has been built by a Tamilian community? Is it possible for a city like Delhi, that sees a perpetual influx of people from different parts of the country, speaking different languages, eating different food, following different customs and beliefs, to have its own architecture? Can a city that, as the poet, journalist, and writer Vijay Nambisan says, no longer has its own native tongue have

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"Quest for Identity," Lang, Desai and Desai's *Architecture and Independence: The Search for Identity*, Prakash's "Identity Production in Postcolonial Indian Architecture: Re-Covering What We Never Had," and "Epilogue: Third World Modernism, or Just Modernism: Towards a Cosmopolitan Reading of Modernism," Asher's "Mapping Hindu-Muslim Identities through the Architecture of Shahjahanabad and Jaipur" and Mehrotra, Shetty and Gupte's "Architecture and Contemporary Indian Identity" (Correa, 1983; Lang, et al., 1997; Prakash, 1997, 2010; Asher, 2000; Mehrotra, et al., 2009; etc.).

<sup>119</sup> ISKCON's founder Prabhupada was born in 1896 in India and moved to the United States of America, where he has his first followers and founded ISKCON in 1966. Later, Indian-Hindus joined the movement. Some followers 'returned' to India, where in 1975 one of ISKCON's most important temples was inaugurated. See, for example, Rochford, 1991 [1985]; Knott, 1997; Eck, 2000: 228-229; Vande Berg and Kniss, 2008. For more details on ISKCON and ISKCON temples see second chapter.

<sup>120</sup> The first ISKCON temples were built in the United States of America.

its *own native architecture* (Nambisan, 2010 [2001]: 233, 236-237)? Is there something that links the city to its architecture and architecture to the city? If it is true that those who rule Delhi rule India, then what meaning is given to the architecture in the city? On what grounds is architecture built in Delhi? What is 'Delhi' architecture? What qualifies/disqualifies architecture as *Delhiite*?<sup>121</sup>

Another significant framework through which scholars have tried to identify/define architecture is *time*. How do we distinguish *ancient* and *new/modern/contemporary*? What does it mean to name architecture *ancient* and *contemporary*? If we look, for instance, at the Kalkaji Mandir, in Delhi, built in 1764 as a flat-roofed twelve-sided structure but to date surmounted by a *shikhara* and surrounded by a number of shrines, we might agree that it is difficult, perhaps impossible, to distinguish *what is ancient* and *what is contemporary*?<sup>122</sup> Why are such definitions needed? Of what use is it to *date* something that is transforming day-by-day? It seems as if some of the more recently constructed temples, such as the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir and Akshardham, have been built to look as if they are *ancient* temples.<sup>123</sup> Why should *contemporary architecture* look like *ancient architecture*? And, why not? How are these concepts understood and used? When is architecture *ancient*? When is it *contemporary*? Is an *ancient* temple (or for that matter *any* ancient architecture) rising in the midst of a 21<sup>st</sup>-century metropolitan city not *contemporary*, at the same time? Why do we care for the *ancient*? How is the *ancient* connected to the *contemporary* and *vice versa*?

The primary category created by art historians, according to Held and Schneider, identifies/defines architecture depending on its purpose—architecture is either *sacred* or *secular* (Held and Schneider, 2007: 64). But can the line that distinguishes these two be identified/defined as neatly and clearly as suggested by this framework? What if a temple features its own museum, theme-park, cinema, restaurant, shop, *etc.*?<sup>124</sup> Can the museum, the shop, the theme-park and for that

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<sup>121</sup> Compare with Menon, 2000: 143-144.

<sup>122</sup> Compare with the description of the temple in the second chapter.

<sup>123</sup> For a discussion of Akshardham, see, for example, Singh, 2010: 56 and Hartig, 2012: 80-81. See also fifth chapter.

<sup>124</sup> Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, Ramakrishna Mission, Chhattarpur Mandir, ISKCON's Sri Sri



matter, other places identified/defined as *secular* be (or become) *sacred*?<sup>125</sup> How is the transformation of a place explained and theorised within this discourse? If, for instance, the purpose of architecture changes, does that imply that its meaning also changes?<sup>126</sup> Can *sacred* rituals transform a *secular* place into a *sacred* place?<sup>127</sup> On what grounds do we draw the line that distinguishes *sacred* from *secular*? What is it that makes architecture *sacred/secular*? Can we measure how *sacred* or *secular* a place is depending on specific features such as its purpose, usage, iconography, opening timings, and entry fee? When Narain compares Sunil Gbomer's *puja* room with his Hanuman museum, she emphasises that the *puja* room is "not lit up, labelled or organised" and "while the museum contains the 'unusual' images of Hanuman [...] the *puja* room has the more conventional images" (Narain, 2015: 252). How do we deal with subjects that do not fit into these categories? In the inauguration speech of the Bhakra-Nangal dam in 1954, Jawaharlal Nehru calls the Bhakra-Nangal dam a *holy place*—to date Nehru is remembered as the Architect of India's modern temples and dams, power plants, *etc.* as *Modern Temples* and *temples of modern India*.<sup>128</sup>

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Radha Parthasarathi Mandir, Akshardham, Lotus Temple and Gurudwara Bangla Sahib are amongst the religious spaces in Delhi that feature a museum, *sangrahalaya*, dioramic show, or the like. This phenomenon can also be found outside Delhi. See, for example, the St Mary's Cathedral in Varanasi and the Maitreya Project in Kushinagar (Uttar Pradesh), as well as the so-called Megachurches, such as the Willow Creek Community Church in South Barrington, Illinois, in the United States. These churches contain often cafeterias, bookstores, meeting rooms and so forth, as well as up-to-date technology. On Megachurches see, for example, Kilde, 2006, 2008.

<sup>125</sup> According to Findlen, the museum has its origin in the *musaeum*, "traditionally the place consecrated to the Muses (*locus musis sacer*), a mythological setting inhabited by the nine goddesses of poetry, music, and the liberal arts" (Findlen, 2012: 24). Thus, one could argue that to date's secular museums have their origin in the *sacred*. According to Kakar, the Madhuri Dixit Mandir in Tatanagar started off as a *chaat*-shop (Kakar, 2009).

<sup>126</sup> According to Davis, purpose and meaning of an object are not fixed once and for all (Davis, 1997). This is the case not only in India but around the world. The Hagia Sophia in Istanbul (Turkey), for instance, has been used as church, mosque and museum. As mentioned earlier, in the West (for example Germany and the Netherlands), churches are sold and used as galleries, shops, restaurants, *etc.* In 1982, BAPS purchased in Preston a synagogue and converted it "into a mandir." Also in India, there are cases of architecture (including religious architecture) being re-used. See, for example, the Kalu Sarai Masjid in Kalu Sarai (Delhi); today the mosque is occupied by various families and used for living.

<sup>127</sup> Duncan and Paine, for example, discuss the museums and its relation to religion (Duncan, 1995; Paine, 2013). Atak mentions that every Monday, in the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Vastu Sangrahalay the staff breaks a coconut in front of a Shiva sculpture from Parel (Atak, 2015: 226). Viegas observed during her fieldwork in the Prince of Wales Museum of Western India, Mumbai that some women touch the exhibits of gods and "perform the regular obeisance" (Viegas, 2001: 20). In the National Museum in New Delhi one can observe visitors from across the world praying in front of a showcase that houses relics of Buddha. Although, the Surya temple at Konarak had been documented in 1896 as "deserted", Russel later raises concern over the worship of a sculpted lintel to "find the museum transformed, effectively, into a temple" (Sutton, 2013: 157-158).

<sup>128</sup> See Jawaharlal Nehru's speech "Temples of the New Age" (July 8, 1954). See, for example, article "Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964): Architect of India's modern temples" published in *The Hindu* (unknown author, 2003).

Does that mean that our distinction is arbitrary?<sup>129</sup> Is it at all possible for something to be *either* religious *or* secular? Is it not that there always something *secular* in the *sacred* and something *sacred* in the *secular*?

Architecture that is labelled as *sacred* is usually also identified/defined with regard to a certain *religion*. That means one will attempt to associate *architecture* with one of the major religions such as Hinduism, Islam, *etc.* and even more precisely with one of the various sects/traditions existing within each of these religions. If one wanted to, one could perhaps try to trace back these different religions to see *what* each of them *is*. With regard to Hinduism, one might find that “[e]ven though the term ‘Hinduism’ is extremely problematic, it seems intuitively clear that there *is* such a thing as Hinduism (although there is disagreement amongst scholars as to what this might be)”, according to Scheifinger (Scheifinger, 2009a: 5-9).<sup>130</sup> Then, without being able to say *what Hinduism is*, how can we say *what a Hindu temple is*? Even if we agree that there is still such a thing as religion *proper*, we will find it difficult to fit each and every place and architecture into this precisely defined system. The Buddhist temple of the World Buddhist Centre in Delhi, for example, seemingly tries to withdraw itself from existing definitions—providing space for architectural idioms, images and other items that if one wanted to, one could trace back to different traditions of Buddhism.<sup>131</sup> Tatanagar’s Madhuri Dixit Mandir, formerly a *chaat*-shop, is now dedicated to the actress Madhuri Dixit and, thus, houses images of the actress, Durga and Guru Nanak; it is owned by the Punjabi Sikh Pappu Sardar and refuses to fit into any neatly defined categories.<sup>132</sup> In the same vein, how can one theorise *temples* dedicated to Sachin Tendulkar, Indira Gandhi, MGR, Sai Baba, Swaminarayan, and Bharat Mata?<sup>133</sup> Are we witnessing here the decay of Hinduism? If so, then, where can we see *authentic* Hinduism? These examples bring us to the

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<sup>129</sup> Compare with Saussure, 1959.

<sup>130</sup> According to Scheifinger, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British colonisers “lumped together” diverse beliefs and practices and referred to it as *Hinduism* (Scheifinger, 2009a: 5). Compare with the case of the Lal Begis/Valmikis discussed in the second chapter (Prashad, 2001 [2000]; Lee, 2014).

<sup>131</sup> Its founder, Gyomyo Nakamura came in 1976 from Japan to India where he became a Buddhist monk. According to him, the Buddhist Temple is “non-sectarian.” He also built the Shanti Stupa in Ladakh.

<sup>132</sup> For more information about the Madhuri Dixit Mandir see Kakar (Kakar, 2009). At times, images, for example, of Buddha and Jesus can be found spaces defined as ‘Hindu.’ See, for example, Shiv Parvati temple in Bhagsunag near Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh.

<sup>133</sup> Not always these temples are built to the liking of the person concerned.

question: is religious architecture bound to something? If so, then what is the temple bound to?

Further, is *religion* bound to specific architecture, architectural forms, idioms and styles? How to read cases of churches in India (also in Delhi) that, according to Collins, are “[...] built deliberately in a style which *combines* elements of Hindu and Muslim architecture [...]” (Collins, 2006: 199; italics added)?<sup>134</sup> Or, the temples in Goa that, according to Bharne and Krusche, “*combine* the canonical Hindu temple with the Christian church” (Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 76, italics added)? Sikand’s studies emphasise that in India there are (or have been) many places that are used by people from different religious backgrounds (Sikand, 2002, 2003).<sup>135</sup> Sikand also notes that “from the late 1980s onwards, the Hinduisation of syncretic shrines in Karnataka has been particularly noticeable”, and elaborates in a footnote: “Hindu idols and images were installed or Hindu-style architectural features added” (Sikand, 2002: 67). What is it that ties architecture to religion and *vice versa*? Is there something, beyond architectural forms, idioms and styles that makes a temple a ‘temple,’ a church a ‘church,’ and so forth? Is it possible for architecture to *belong* only to a specific religion?

In short, we are looking at a dense, complex, paradoxical and constantly transforming constellation of concepts that are in one way or the other linked to each other, difficult—perhaps impossible—to understand, break and overcome entirely. Or, as Agamben argued in his lecture “What is a commandment,” that contradiction lies with each and every word. The chapter discusses how the reading of architecture and its relationship with identity are deeply entwined in the practical issues of power and power relations. A central question of this chapter is thus how did architecture/the Hindu temple become a symbol of identity? Thereby, the chapter traces different discourses through which Indian architecture and the Hindu temple have been viewed to date.

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<sup>134</sup> See, for example, St John’s Church built by the architect Alfred Coore in Mehrauli.

<sup>135</sup> Compare also Prashad, 2001 [2000].

## ON THE ORIGIN OF ARCHITECTURE AND ARCHITECTURAL THEORY

Scholars seem to agree that Indian art history originates from the colonial discourse during the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>136</sup> The cornerstones for the discipline's foundation, however, were laid much earlier.<sup>137</sup> Tavernor, for instance, notes,

Marcus Vitruvius Pollio's *De Architectura Libri Decem* (*Ten Books on Architecture*) is the oldest surviving treatise on architecture that "has influenced two millennia of architectural theory and practice" (Tavernor, 2009: v).

Vitruvius, so it seems, was driven by the idea that it is possible to *understand* architecture and built architecture with reference to its *origin*. According to him, the *origin of architecture* coincides with the *origin of humankind* (Vitruvius, 2009: 37-41).<sup>138</sup> These first humans, as Vitruvius believes, replicated what they saw in nature, giving "their seal of approval to those things which, explained in rational argument, have the force of *truth*" (Vitruvius, 2009: 98; italics added).<sup>139</sup> In other words, this first architecture is born *pure*—without lies.<sup>140</sup> Thus, for Vitruvius every piece and every form of this *architecture* has its function and thus meaning. There is something *in* architecture that determines its character—some kind of *essence*. *Essence* (the word derives from Latin *esse* and is translated into English as "be") as in something that is of intrinsic and indispensable nature, something *pure* (*uncontaminated*). In other words, according to Vitruvius' reading, these first buildings are *authentic*,

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<sup>136</sup> Attempts to read and discuss South Asian art and architecture, that have been undertaken prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, are viewed as subjective, fragmentary and unsystematic—in short, unscientific. Compare with Mitter, 1977; Chandra, 1983; Guha-Thakurta, 2004 and Dhar, 2009, 2011b. According to Guha-Thakurta, it is James Fergusson's comprehensive and systematic approach towards Indian architecture that "foreshadows" the "birth of a new disciplinary field" (Guha-Thakurta, 2004: 7). The *origin* of the discipline is located at a point of time when the subject is approached in a seemingly more systematic and comprehensive manner. Hereby, also the formation of institutions such as the ASI and the Indian Museum in Calcutta, that affirm such systematic and comprehensive approaches, is understood as significant. See Hosagrahar, 2002: 356; Dhar, 2011b: 2-5 and Guha-Thakurta, 2004.

<sup>137</sup> Compare with Mitter, 1992 [1977].

<sup>138</sup> At a time when "men were born like wild animals in the forests, caves and woods [...]", so Vitruvius imagines, some men "began to make shelters of foliage, others to dig caves at the foot of mountains and yet others to build refuges of mud and branches in which to shelter in imitation of nests of swallows [...]" (Vitruvius, 2009: 37-38). Compare also with Laugier's and Chambers' descriptions both of which are very similar to Vitruvius' (Laugier, 1755: 9-14; Chambers, 1759: 1-2).

<sup>139</sup> Thinkers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century discuss and trace back not only the *origin* and *evolution* of architecture but also of humankind, language, art, *etc.*

<sup>140</sup> On the *primitive hut* and its effects on architecture and architectural history see Rykwert, 1984 [1972].

*perfect, pure, etc.* and can, according to this definition, not have any *wrong, fault* or *imperfection*. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century this architecture is known as *primitive hut*.<sup>141</sup> This idealisation of ‘simple’ architecture and the idea that it is in this form that architecture is at its *most*, still prevails to date. Marc-Antoine Laugier and Marc Chambers, leading architectural critics at their time, imagined that the first humans built architecture for profane/secular/non-sacred reasons, later, the “primitive hut” and its *avatars* are frequently considered as *sacred/religious* places for retreat from the modern life—*sanctuaries*, so to say (Vitruvius, 2009: 37-41; Laugier, 1755: 9-14; Chambers, 1759: 1-2; *etc.*).<sup>142</sup> With reference to the Hindu temple we find the concepts of essential, sacred and simplicity linked to each other. The Mumbai-based architect Sameep Padora and his clients, for instance, decided that for the construction of the Shiva Mandir near Pune only what it is “integral to the essence of temple architecture in memory” would appear in the temple (unknown author, 2015c: 43).

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<sup>141</sup> In 1753, Laugier published *Essai sur l'Architecture*. A second edition and a translation into English were published in 1755. Laugier writes of “petite cabane rustique” that is translated into English as “little rustic cabin” (Laugier, 1755: 11, 13). In 1759, perhaps for the first time, Chambers referred to this first architecture that Vitruvius discussed, as “primitive hut” (Chambers, 1759: 1). The term and the motive can also be found in other writings of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that are not specifically concerned with architecture. See Rousseau’s *Discourse upon the Origin and Foundation of Inequality amongst Mankind* (Rousseau, 1756). Compare also with Smith’s *Wealth of Nations* (Smith, 1776). Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so Forty claims, “primitive” (with reference to architecture) is understood in the sense of “at the origins” or “original”; that means close to the meaning of its origin the Latin word *primus* that is translated into English as “first,” “foremost,” “chief,” *etc.* (Forty, 2006: 3-5). However, when European travellers come in other parts of the world across simple designed architecture and call this architecture “primitive hut,” the meaning of *primitive* in the sense of *first, original, etc.* converges with words and concepts such as *savage, exotic, backward, uncivilised, naïve, authentic, native, tribal, erotic, traditional, outsider, vernacular, etc.* (Forty, 2006: 3-5). Compare also with Fischer von Erlach, who discussed architecture around the world several years before Fergusson and Fletcher (Fischer von Erlach, 1725). Unlike Laugier and Chambers, Fischer von Erlach does not appear to trace back the origin of *all* architecture to one source (Fischer von Erlach, 1725).

<sup>142</sup> It would be interesting to explore this idea more carefully. Primitive life or life at its origin has been defined/identified in opposition to modern life, also on moral grounds. See Rousseau, 1756. The romanisation of *primitive* plays a significant role in this context. Heidegger, for example, described *die Hütte (the hut)* near the village Todtnauberg in Germany’s Black Forest, to which he frequently retreated from the urban modern life, as a place where his thoughts and work are “einfach” (*simple*) and “wesentlich” (*essential*), a place of *creativity* and *creation* (Sharr, 2006). Le Corbusier perhaps had a similar notion when he built a little log cabin *Le Cabanon (The Shed)* for himself on France’s Côte d’Azur and, designed it in such a way that everything had a function. Le Corbusier associated the concept of *sacred* with this hut, wondering if “One day will this hut not become the Pantheon in Rome, dedicated to the gods?” For Bhatia, Rishikesh’s skyline was an eye-opening experience. He says: “Across the turbulent splashing river I could glimpse Hinduism’s benign skyline [...] A simple life expressed simply. But on the side where I stood, the city gave a more distressing contemporary view. Along the main highway lay the slummy standard North Indian town [...]” (Bhatia, 2001). Because not each and every urban dweller can escape to such sanctuaries, city planners began to create “recreational areas” within modern cities. With regard to Delhi see Singh, 2007: 116-119. This concept should be looked at more closely in the context of temple-building in cities.

According to Vitruvius, keeping the principles of nature and these first buildings (later referred to a *primitive hut*) in mind, humans learned to improve this *prototype* into architecture (the Greek temple) (Vitruvius, 2009: 38-39). This arboreal model that is depending on the notion of genealogy, progression and development with regard to architecture has been developed further by following generations of architects and scholars.<sup>143</sup> Analogical to other fields such as natural sciences and linguistics, art/architectural historians, such as Banister Fletcher, outlined arboreal schemes to illustrate how *different* architectures emanate from a common *origin* (Fletcher, 1905, 1928).<sup>144</sup> It seems to illustrate the idea that it is possible to trace back each species (of architecture) to one solid principle that makes all growth possible and unites them. Some scholars see problems with this system and the identification of the *primitive hut* as *the origin* of architecture; instead they suggest searching for the origin of architecture in *nature*, which does not solve the issue. Over time, this arboreal model has been expanded quantitatively for instance by adding more branches of different architectures.<sup>145</sup> However, these attempts failed to address that this model implies a certain order and hierarchy. According to this framework, *all* architecture can only have *meaning* with reference to the *original*. In the context of this framework, architecture that could not be traced back to the ‘prototype’ was understood as non-architecture.<sup>146</sup> In other words, the model proves a powerful means to justify certain architectures and architectural styles and dismiss others. The model is singular and non-repeatable. It outlines a closed unity, thus it is problematic.<sup>147</sup> However, the idea that architecture can be understood through genealogy is still much at work.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> On evolutionary trees in the context of art, see Schmidt-Burkhardt, 2005. See, for example, *Digital Archetypes* that was published recently by Beynon and Datta. Beynon and Datta argue that “[t]he movement of religious, cultural and technological ideas through the region are documented in an examination of the architecture of extant temples and their compositional connections with archetypes as well as their compositional relationships with each other as constructed examples” (Beynon and Datta, 2016 [2014]: 15).

<sup>144</sup> Similar to Fergusson, Fletcher tried to cover architecture around the world covering all times. Fletcher’s *A History of Architecture on the Comparative Method* was published in 1896. This first publication was followed by twenty edited reprints. The earlier editions contain a different image of *The Tree of Architecture* than later editions. Compare for example Fletcher, 1905, 1928: III. See also Zerffi’s *Chart of the Historical Development of Art* (Zerffi, 1876).

<sup>145</sup> Compare, for example, with Fletcher, 1905, 1928: III.

<sup>146</sup> Laugier, for example, dismissed the work of architects who do not follow the rational principles discussed by Vitruvius (Laugier, 1755). Compare also with Chambers, 1759.

<sup>147</sup> As discussed below, this Euro-centric framework that locates the *origin* of architecture in antiquity creates a closure that affirms power relations.

<sup>148</sup> See, for example, Beynon and Datta, 2014.

Vitruvius, however, did much more to architecture. *De Architectura*, produced a vocabulary to define architecture that is used to date. Through a feature-based analysis, Vitruvius distinguishes three orders: “Doric order,” “Ionic order” and “Corinthian order” that have been adjusted to other contexts as well (Vitruvius, 2009: 90-94). Following Vitruvius’ footsteps, Raz, Cunningham and Fergusson have introduced terms such as “Hindu Order,” “Indian Order,” “Arian Order” and “Hindu-Corinthian Order” in order to read Indian architecture (Raz, 1834: 22, 40; Cunningham, 1848; Fergusson, 1910 [1876]: 298). These terms, however, sneak in the understanding that architecture is somehow determined by the community. It is here through such definitions/identifications that the idea of architecture as a symbol of the community and identity is generated. This relationship or link between architecture and community is most curious especially when considering that community itself does not exist as natural entity but is a social construction built in the process of mobilisation in view of political exigencies, as scholars such as Benedict Anderson have discussed in detail (Anderson, 2003 [1983]).<sup>149</sup> What does it mean to identify architecture with a certain community? If certain properties or features of architecture can be identified and defined as Dorian, then, this should imply that one can define *what Dorian is*. That implies that the Dorian column is in its essence Dorian. In other words, *pure* Dorian. But, how to *define/identify* what Dorian is? What is *in* the architecture that allows us to identify it even to date in relation to these ancient ethnic communities? Can architecture have identity? Can we define/identify *what it is* by pointing to what it is *most*? What is Dorian *par excellence*? What is the *essence* of Dorian-ness?

In the light of these questions, it is arguably more fruitful to think about the Hindu temple through the model of the rhizome, that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari discussed in *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 3-26). Unlike genealogical or arborescent models that are grounded on the idea of progress, the model of the rhizome neither develops from one source nor progresses in any particular way/trajectory.<sup>150</sup> Further, it does not have a *beginning* or *end*, as Deleuze

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<sup>149</sup> Compare also with Delanty, 2013.

<sup>150</sup> Compare with Vitruvius’ theory that architecture progresses from something simple such as the hut to something monumental/complex such as the Greek temple. The idea of progress is linked to logic which the rhizome does not follow.

and Guattari emphasised (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 12). Also it is acentered (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 17). It is open and can be entered and grow from any point. According to Deleuze and Guattari, unlike the tree, the rhizome does not follow any logic and thus it is not dominated by binaries (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 5). In its development it does not follow any hierarchy. It constantly creates unsystematic and unexpected links and connections—any point can be connected to any other, when broken, it will create a new connection. In short, taking the model of the rhizome as theoretical backdrop, complexities such as interrelations, multiplicities and contradictions can be taken into account.

## ORIGINS OF ARCHITECTURE

Travellers have spread images of India through narratives and drawings long before the colonisers set out to study the sub-continent, and the art, architecture, religions that could be found there, as, for example, Mitter discusses in detail (Mitter, 1992 [1977]). Modern scholars such as Chandra, Guha-Thakurta and Dhar, usually designate the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century as the birth of Indian Art History, as it is then that people such as James Fergusson and Alexander Cunningham began to study art, architecture, *etc.* methodologically (Chandra, 1983; Guha-Thakurta, 2004; Dhar, 2009, 2011b; *etc.*). However, these scholars fall short of acknowledging William Hodges' short but significant bi-lingual *A Dissertation on the Prototypes of Architecture, Hindoo, Moorish, and Gothic*; his paintings however, have been described as valuable visual records. (Chandra, 1983: 9; Guha-Thakurta, 2004: 8-10; Dhar, 2011b: 1). Tillotson on the other hand discussed not only Hodges' paintings but also his *Dissertation* in various publications underscoring that Hodges was the first foreigner trying to understand Indian architecture through a Western theoretical framework (Tillotson, 1992: 209, 1993, 2000).<sup>151</sup> Writing at a time when Vitruvius' theory defined the discourse, Hodges could not free himself from the power of Vitruvian or genealogical thinking; however, he objected to the discourse's exclusive

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<sup>151</sup> In 1789, the *Dissertation* and two one-page descriptions were translated into German titled: *Monumente indischer Geschichte und Kunst*. In 1790, these short descriptions were published in *Monats-Schrift der Akademischen Künste und mechanischen Wissenschaften zu Berlin*. In 1793, *The Edinburgh Magazine or Literary Miscellany* published the *Dissertation*, along with accounts of Hodges' journeys to Madras, Calcutta and Benares. Further, *Travels in India, During the Years 1780, 1781, 1782, and 1783* which contains an edited version of the *Dissertation*, was published in the same year, in German titled: *Wilhelm Hodges Reisen durch Ostindien, während der Jahre 1780, 1781, 1782 und 1783*. In 1794, *Travels in India* is re-printed with corrections. The first French translation of *Travels in India* that I know of was not published until 1805.



focus on Greek architecture; Hodges claimed that he admired Greek architecture but at the same time questioned, whether that meant that one could not admire any other architecture (Hodges, 1787: 2). Arguing for the inclusion of more architectures into the discourse, he pointed to Chinese architectures noting that they were “evidently imitations of the tent made with bamboo and other timber [...]” (Hodges, 1787: 4).<sup>152</sup> Further, according to his studies of architecture in different parts of the world, Hodges concluded that

the Chinese idea of the beauties of their architecture must differ from that of the Greeks, and the Greek rule of architectural beauty cannot, under any pretence of justice or reason, be applied to the prototypes and materials of Chinese buildings (Hodges, 1787: 4).

In other words, he suggested that art and architecture should be read within its *own* (aesthetic) context ,which, according to him, is bound to the concept of the communities/nations.<sup>153</sup> As outlined above, if Vitruvius linked architecture to communities, Hodges took this idea further. He argued that

each of these *nations* or *tribes* will look upon their primitive habitations as the *very best*, with the same eye of partiality as they are prejudiced for their respective mother countries, whatever they are (Hodges, 1787: 3, italics added).

Not only does Hodges assume that each community or nation gives importance to architecture, the same way Western architects and scholar do, but also that they, like the West, hold on to the past in the same way the West does. He also introduces here the idea that a community (or nation as he says) is not only united but also distinguishes and defends itself from other communities, through its architecture. According to Hodges, “[w]hen emigrations to foreign climates take place, their *prototype* will follow the colonist” and “the different builders remain *independent* and *unmixed, unconnected*” (Hodges, 1787: 3; italics added). Hodges pushes the idea that “nations or tribes” have some kind of a communal sentiment and sensibility towards its own architecture to the extent that he proposes that there is something like a

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<sup>152</sup> Hodges, however, struggles to find the *primitive hut* of other architectures/architectural styles/architectural elements and, thus, suggests that architectures/architectural elements such as “obelisk, spiry steeple, and minaret” are “imitations” of “caverns”, “grottos”, “rocks”, *etc.* (Hodges, 1787: 5-6).

<sup>153</sup> See also discussion below.

“*national primitive hut*” (Hodges, 1787: 3).

Although this theory opens up the possibility to interrogate architecture that has been earlier excluded from the discourse, there are several issues with Hodges’ theory. Hodges grounds his reading on the premises that there are *different* architectures. It is true, one can perhaps believe that (*all*) architecture is *different*; however, at the same time, there has to be something common, or the same, in whatever is called *architecture*.<sup>154</sup> How can one measure how *different* and/or *similar* architecture is? The properties through which *difference/sameness* are measured are as problematic as the distinction itself. In order to define the relation of things to each other, one must *a priori* define what things *in general* are.<sup>155</sup> How can one define *what Greek, Chinese, Indian, etc. (architecture) is in general*? When and where does something *begin/end* to be Greek, Chinese, Indian, *etc.*? What is *in* architecture that makes it Greek, Chinese, Indian, *etc.*? What is its *essence*? According to Hodges, the borders that he outlines for the “nations or tribes” are also the borders of *architecture*; each nation/tribe has its own architecture. It seems, for Hodges, there are clearly defined indivisible lines that separate *inside* and *outside*. But, is that ever possible? Can “nations or tribes” be independent? What about acculturation? Will not trade, wars, colonialism, *etc.* contaminate the *essence* of each of these “nations or tribes”? Moreover, even if we assume that it is possible to define “nations or tribes”, how can we assume that all of them give the same *meaning* to architecture, and that all this architecture of different “nations or tribes” develops in the same linear manner as all others? Thus, the idea of plurality, or multiplicity, as discussed by Hodges does not solve the problem but merely shifts it. Hodges thinks of the multiple origins as clear-cut entities that within themselves are *pure* and homogeneous. Hodges’ reading does not get us very far.

## ARCHITECTURE, STYLE AND RACE/NATION

As scholars such as Chandra, Guha-Thakurta and Dhar emphasise, unlike earlier studies or descriptions of India and its art/architecture, Fergusson and his contemporaries approached their objects of interest methodologically—sites of

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<sup>154</sup> Compare with Derrida, 1998 [1996].

<sup>155</sup> See Derrida 1998 [1996]: 11.

interest were ‘objectively’ described, measured, sketched, photographed and depending on certain features categorised (Hosagrahar, 2002; Guha-Thakurta, 2004; Dhar, 2009, 2011b; *etc.*). These categories are generated in the need of *defining* and *organising* the space of the discourses that can be seen in terms of community and religion, in order to maintain their sovereign space that operates through exclusion. However, the strict classification and categorisation is depending on the self-centred discourse that functions through the mechanism of exclusion and inclusion, operating through dichotomies manifested in the formation of the European Modernity.

Unlike Peleggi and Chua, who underscore the role played by the so-called “racial science” that dominated 19<sup>th</sup> century Western discourse, in the formation of Southeast Asia’s History of Art, Southeast Asian Art History and Southeast Asian architecture, little attention has been paid to this aspect in the context of Indian Art History, *etc.* (Chua, 2012, 2014; Peleggi, 2013). Considering the focus of the thesis, another significant aspect that deserves more attention in the context of Indian art history, that is the formation of the discipline was conflated with racial theory. Working within the discourse of 19<sup>th</sup> century colonialism, Fergusson and his contemporaries were eager to *understand* the world by studying its past and looking at the *traces* that the different “races” had left behind (Fergusson, 1893: 52).<sup>156</sup>

In the introduction of *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* Fergusson emphasises the significance of political history and ethnography in order to understand the artistic history (Fergusson, 1910 [1876]: 7). Following the genealogical path of thinking, like Hodges, Fergusson imagines multiple origins of architecture because according to him in India, one could find different races: Aryas, Dravidians and Dasyus (Fergusson, 1910 [1876]: 9-18).<sup>157</sup> Similar to Hodges, Fergusson foregrounded the idea of *purity* (unmixed); he emphasises:

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<sup>156</sup> Hosagrahar, for example, writes: “Fergusson proposed a system of classifying buildings based on religious and stylistic characteristics and identified key buildings within those categories [...] Fergusson’s choice of buildings, framework, and approach remain central to the teaching of South Asian architectural history” (Hosagrahar, 2002: 356). See also Dhar, 2009: 332-335. In “A History of Art History: The Indian Context,” Dhar mentions race as category but does not discuss the issue in more detail (Dhar, 2011b: 5).

<sup>157</sup> Fergusson also mentioned the Turanian race (Fergusson, 1910 [1876]: 28, 30, *etc.*). Compare also with the races (Turanian Race, Semitic Race, Celtic Race, Aryan Race) that he discussed in the first volume of *A History of Architectures in All Countries* (Fergusson, 1893: 52-86).

[...] India has always been occupied by three or four different races of mankind, who have *never amalgamated* so as to become one people, and each of these races has been again subdivided into *numerous* tribes or small nationalities nearly, sometimes wholly, independent of each other [...] (Fergusson, 1910 [1876]: 7; italics added).

Fergusson's approach was not exceptional at that time. Similar to Fergusson, in his account of Ladakh, Cunningham speaks, for example, of the "Tibetan race," the "Musalman race" and the "Hindu race" (Cunningham, 1854: 24, 290-302). Cunningham, later, took more interest in architecture and archaeology, studied Ladakh's history, geography and climate in a similar way in which he studied the physiognomic features of Ladakh's people and their "nature." Reminiscent of Darwin's studies, Cunningham's observation, of the Ladakhi peoples was that "[t]heir superiority in bodily strength is perhaps owing partly to the bracing climate of their elevated country, and partly to the former infusion of Hindu blood" (Cunningham, 1854: 292). While Cunningham discussed race seemingly attempting to cover all aspects that define Ladakh Fergusson discussed race as he believed that studying people and race one can understand architecture and its development viz. progress (Fergusson, 1876: 55).

Another example of how the concept of race was implanted in the discourse of architecture is Gustave George Zerffi's *A Manual of the History of Art* in which he takes Vitruvius' reading of architecture not only in relation to race but also in relation to the human body, further (Zerffi, 1876).<sup>158</sup> Like his contemporaries, Zerffi, a lecturer at the National Art Training School in South Kensington and a Hungarian spy, distinguished between different races (Negro, Aryan and Turanian) stressing that *art* originated from these races (Zerffi, 1876).<sup>159</sup> He emphasised that

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<sup>158</sup> Besides, linking architecture with certain communities, Vitruvius tried to read architecture with reference to the human body. He suggests, for instance, that architects "borrowed manly beauty, naked and unadorned, for the one [Doric column], and for the other [Ionic column] the delicacy, adornment, and proportions characteristic of women" (Vitruvius, 2009: 91-92).

<sup>159</sup> Compare with Zerffi's *Chart of the Historical Development of Art* (Zerffi, 1876). See also Viollet-le-Duc's *Histoire de l'habitation humaine*, in which Viollet-le-Duc outlines different architectures around the world according to different races (Viollet-le-Duc, 1875). An English translation of Viollet-le-Duc's work was published in 1876, the same year in which Fergusson's *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture* and Zerffi's *A Manual of the History of Art* were published (Viollet-le-Duc, 1876).

[t]hough art, undoubtedly, belongs ‘to the magic circle of the imagination, and the inner powers of the mind,’ those powers are dependent on our very bodily construction, the amount of brain and the facial angle (Zerffi, 1876: 27).

On this premise, he concludes:

Faithful to [the Turanian or *yellow man*] nomadic traditions, and the lines of his head and face, his architectural constructions take an according form. Like his facial lines, the roofs of his houses are twisted upwards” (Zerffi, 1876: 24-25).<sup>160</sup>

In short, Zerffi draws analogies between human features and architecture, tying architecture to the concepts such as race/community/nation/*etc.* In a similar way in which colonialism affected other spheres of life on the Indian subcontinent, it introduced categories and concepts such as art and architecture and thus eventually affected the ways in which temples were viewed and contextualised. Arguably, if colonialism would not have emphasised the meaning of architecture and especially the temple in the way it did the temple would not have had the significance it has today. As the following chapters will discuss in more detail, it was against the backdrop of colonialism that organisations such as the Arya Samaj and the VHP identified the Hindu temple as a structure of great significance and as symbolising Hindu/Indian identity.

## ARCHITECTURE AS SYMBOL

As mentioned earlier, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, India’s socio-economic, political and cultural situation transformed and the demands for an independent nation began to grow louder. The modern idea of a nation and “Indian” identity took shape in this context.<sup>161</sup> In the period, scholars such as Ananda K. Coomaraswamy and Stella Kramrisch tried to reframe the colonial discourse and explore the idea of Indian art, Indian architecture, *etc.* drawing upon ideas and theories that had been discussed in the context of metaphysics and existentialism. Instead of trying to understand their objects of interest through the above mentioned colonial methods, Coomaraswamy, Kramrisch and other scholars referred to texts and used methods such as iconography

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<sup>160</sup> See also Chua, 2012: 101, 2014: 948.

<sup>161</sup> See Mehrotra, et al., 2009: 211-212. According to Mehrotra, Shetty and Gupte, it was also in this context that “architecture was first appropriated to combat imperialism and become the foundation for a new Indian identity” (Mehrotra, et al., 2009: 211-212). Compare with following chapters.

and iconology to decode the objects' *intrinsic meaning*.<sup>162</sup> It is in this context that the idea that there is something *in* architecture that makes it unique was pushed forward.

Drawing from similar concepts and style as Martin Heidegger and Mircea Eliade, Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch used a lyrical and dense language loaded with mystical symbolism and meaning, and coined terms such as using expression such as “spiritual home,” “Essence,” “stratas of existence,” “primal rhythmic energy”, “cosmic acclivity”, “*rishi-artists*” and the like (Kramrisch, 1946: 157, 164 165 168; Coomaraswamy, 1918: 56, 59, 65).<sup>163</sup> Publications such as Coomaraswamy's “Dance of Shiva” and Kramrisch's *The Hindu Temple* are fascinating studies that capture the reader's imagination due this evocative conceptualisation. And, like the colonial studies of India's art and architecture, Coomaraswamy's and Kramrisch's reading of Indian art and architecture have attracted great attention and contributed to how the Indian art, architecture and the Hindu temple are understood today.<sup>164</sup> According to Kaimal, Coomaraswamy's iconographic analysis seems to have been so “satisfying” that “it foreclosed further debate on the subject” (Kaimal, 1999: 391). This notion of closure is a feature that Coomaraswamy's analysis has in common with other existentialist writings. It derives from the premises that an object symbolises something and from the assumption that it is possible to recover/understand the meaning of and object fully and say *what it is*.<sup>165</sup>

Neither Coomaraswamy nor Kramrisch discussed the possibility that a symbol can have several meanings at the same time which might be dynamic and even contradictory. One such example is Coomaraswamy's reading of Nataraja which, as Kaimal points out, is informed by the assumption that “the meaning of Nataraja icons was uniform and static” (Kaimal, 1999: 391).<sup>166</sup> According to these studies, there is only one meaning which is religious and can only be understood religiously. This

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<sup>162</sup> See, for example, Rao, 1997 [1914].

<sup>163</sup> See, for example, Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* and *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, and Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane* (Heidegger, 1967, 2012; Eliade, 1957).

<sup>164</sup> This has also been emphasised by Kaimal with regard to Coomaraswamy's “Dance of Shiva” (Kaimal, 1999).

<sup>165</sup> A premises that has been challenged by thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. For a selection of their writings see bibliography.

<sup>166</sup> Arguably the same holds for Kramrisch's *The Hindu Temple*, in which she studies the temple conceptually (Kramrisch, 1946). Compare with following chapters.

mechanism asserts the idea of essence, spirit, original etc. that is governed by the idea of presence—presence of God, nation, religion, sacred, and so on; more specifically, but generally, the presence of truth and meaning. The idea of *intrinsic meaning* has been opposed in the work of various critical thinkers such as Said, Foucault, Derrida and Rancière emphasising that meaning is always context related.<sup>167</sup> Taking this theory as backdrop, scholars such as Davis and Guha-Thakurta discussed processes of transformation in terms of giving a certain meaning to objects with reference to the Indian context emphasising how the meaning of an object undergoes different readings in relation to different socio-economic, political, religious, and cultural contexts (Davis, 1997; Guha-Thakurta, 2007, 2013; *etc.*). According to their studies, there is no meaning *in* an object, for it is given from *outside*.<sup>168</sup>

It seems therefore as if the problem is not a problem of the *object* but a problem of *giving/fixing* meaning.<sup>169</sup> According to Foucault and Rancière, acts of defining and naming are politically motivated and have to be read as exercise of power and thereby structuring the discourse (Foucault, 1981; Rancière, 2004; *etc.*). Foucault explains the idea of power with reference to the idea of the discourse, according to which all kinds of existing knowledge and perceptions are analysed as a result of “the order of discourse” (Foucault, 1981). As Edward Said in an interview with Sut Jhally noted, the “discourse is a regulated system of producing knowledge within certain constraints whereby certain rules have to be observed” (Jhally, 1998). For Said, colonial scholarship remains fixed to the imperialist context that produced it, making it political and thus intellectually suspect. In this way, it can be argued that what can be shown or said and un-shown or un-said is governed by the discourse.<sup>170</sup> Does not that then also mean that the mentioned concepts can be viewed as constructions that have become *truth* because they have carried on for a longer period of time?<sup>171</sup> It is here that the question of power is linked to the idea of meaning: *Who* decides *what*? And: *Who has the power* to say *what it is*? Postcolonial studies, Gender studies, *etc.* have tried to address the issue of power relations and have tried to create

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<sup>167</sup> For a selection of these scholars’ works see bibliography.

<sup>168</sup> Saussure explains the idea of arbitrariness in his *Course in General Linguistics* (Saussure, 1959).

<sup>169</sup> As, for example, Jones highlights discussing the Indian Census, categories necessitate definitions that impose order (Jones, 1981).

<sup>170</sup> See Foucault, 1981 and Rancière, 2004. Moreover, see Nietzsche’s theory of *will to power* (Nietzsche, 1899).

<sup>171</sup> See Foucault’s *The Order of Things* (Foucault, 1973 [1971]).

alternative readings. But is it possible to break the discourse and to think beyond the given? According to Said, “[t]o think past [this discourse], to go beyond it, not to use it is virtually impossible because there is no knowledge that isn’t codified [...]” (Jhally, 1998).<sup>172</sup> It seems we are trapped, but that does not mean that we should not try.

## ARCHITECTURE AND IDENTITY

As briefly outlined in the thesis’ introduction, since these early beginnings many different studies of India’s architecture and the Hindu temple have been undertaken. Against this backdrop, earlier frameworks have been reviewed and new readings were generated addressing issues that were earlier overlooked such as the architecture/temple’s philosophical, religious and sectarian context, patronage, *etc.* Particularly in the last seven decades or so, scholars have been more critical and careful about the methods applied to *read* architecture. At the same time, the ASI recorded and surveyed an increasing number of architectures and declared them as *monuments* (Dhar, 2009: 336). However, as mentioned earlier, these efforts concentrated on ancient and medieval architecture. In the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century therefore, institutions attesting to India’s rich past by making it visible through the discourses of ‘heritage’ and ‘conservation’ have aimed to strengthen the notion of unity through a narrative of a ‘common’ past.

It is also in this context that scholars have studied architecture with regard to style to find and emphasise regional differences linking them to the idea of regional architectural history, i.e. regional identities.<sup>173</sup> Since the 1960s, the trend has been towards “stylistic classifications based on regional particularities, and not so much on dynastic appellations” (Dhar, 2009: 339). This emphasis on region can also be observed in the organisation of institutions. The ASI, for instance, established the Architectural Survey of Temples in the mid-1950s, with Krishna Deva overlooking North India and K.R. Srinivasan, South India (Dhar, 2009: 337, 2011b: 14). In the context of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, questions and issues around architecture and the Hindu temple often unfolded around questions/issues of origin, style, terminology, typology

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<sup>172</sup> Compare with Derrida’s discussion of the idea that “there is no outside the text” (Derrida, 1997 [1994]: 158-159).

<sup>173</sup> Compare with Dhar, 2009: 335.



and classification in a similar way as was the case during the colonial period. However, with an increasing corpus of studies, these 20<sup>th</sup> century studies were fine-tuned. Here, one only has to think of Dhaky's study of Maru-Gurjara temples and the EITA (Dhaky, 1975; Meister, et al., 1983-2001). As Dhar summarises:

With Krishna Deva, K.R. Srinivasan, M.A. Dhaky, K.V. Soundararajan, S.R. Balasubrahmanyam, S.K. Saraswati, R.D. Banerji, Debala Mitra, Thomas Donaldson, D.R. Das and some others, the study of the history of Indian temple architecture on a regional and chronological basis came of its own focussed upon the development of style, form, regional specificities, influences, and religious and sectarian particularities, etc., with archaeology, epigraphy, and texts as the firm foundation upon which the discipline rested (Dhar, 2009: 337).

What Dhar and other scholars who outlined historiographies of Indian art and architecture failed to discuss is that, until the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, studies on Indian architecture focused mainly on India's religious architecture. Moreover, as stressed upon in the introduction of the thesis, it has been taken for granted that studying Indian (temple) architecture means to study architectures of the past but not contemporary ones.<sup>174</sup> It is by the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that is in the context of discussion around the trajectories of modernism, and as a means of decentring its Eurocentricism, that Indian modern/contemporary architecture draws attention; this new framework helped practicing architects and urban planners such as Charles Correa, Rahul Mehrotra, A.G.K. Menon, *etc.* to reflect on their practice as well as their understanding of 'Indian' architecture.<sup>175</sup>

Lang, Desai and Desai's *Architecture and Independence* is particularly important in this context as it is the first comprehensive study of modern/contemporary architecture in India.<sup>176</sup> However, just as the non-modern/non-contemporary discourse excludes modern/contemporary architecture and focuses on religious architecture, the discourse that unfolds around late architecture marginalises

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<sup>174</sup> Michell's *Late Temple Architecture of India, 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> Century: Continuities, Revivals, Appropriations, and Innovations* that was published only in 2015 is the first study of its kind (Michell, 2015).

<sup>175</sup> See bibliography.

<sup>176</sup> Scriver and Srivastava's analysis of India's modern architecture is organised in a similar way (Scriver and Srivastava, 2015).

religious architecture.<sup>177</sup> Noticeably, following the footsteps of earlier generations, Lang, Desai and Desai argue that “all buildings [...] have a symbolic content” (Lang, et al., 1997: xv). However, speaking of “symbolic content,” Lang, Desai and Desai are not exploring here some kind of transcendental meaning/truth in architecture, unlike Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch. Instead, they underscore the meaning of architecture as an element of the community that *belongs* to the community. It seems, in a similar way as language, architecture is imagined/projected as a feature of the community. In doing so, architecture gets associated with *identity*.

While, scholars such as Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch did not consider the idea that a symbol can simultaneously have several (contradictory) meanings, Lang, Desai and Desai underscore this aspect. They explain: “The same pattern may have different meanings for different people depending on the association they have with it” (Lang, et al., 1997: 3). Moreover, according to them, “the motifs often operated in one way for Europeans and another for Indians, one way today for tourists and another for residents” (Lang, et al., 1997: 3). At the same time, however, they also note that there are “many shared meanings which contribute to the unification of people within a culture” (Lang, et al., 1997: 3). Acknowledging issues with regard to the idea of meaning in architecture, Lang, Desai and Desai insisted that there are certain elements such as material, illumination and colour in architecture that carry meaning (Lang, et al., 1997: 4). For instance, while stone is here considered a local/regional material glass and steel are considered modern and international materials.<sup>178</sup> It is through this framework that the idea of architecture as symbol/representative of the community/nation is established. Mehrotra, Shetty and Gupte emphasise that the idea of the local is hereby of particular significance (Mehrotra, et al., 2009: 199). Rich formulations on identity, and identity as it was formed in the colonial period and continues to operate in the present have been made by scholars of post-colonial and subaltern studies; they have attempted to discuss the

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<sup>177</sup> Compare with the introduction of the thesis. While Khanna, Bansal and Kochupillai included only temples built by modern trained architects Lang, Desai and Desai also include a few other examples of “traditional” temples (Lang, et al, 1997; Khanna, 2008; Bansal and Kochupilla, 2013).

<sup>178</sup> Compare with fourth chapter that discusses the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir and the fifth chapter that discusses temples built by BAPS. This theory seems to hold with regard to the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir in which the creators paid great attention and efforts to using granite from Tamil Nadu to construct the temple, which is also emphasised in the temple’s *Sthalapuranam*. On material (concrete in particular) and its meaning see Forty, 2013 [2012].

issue of identity in relation to race, gender, religion, caste, class, *etc.* locating it in a political context.

However, it can be seen that the question of identity in any context becomes problematic, since it tries to emphasise on the possibility of continuity of self-sameness distinguishing self from the other in order to resist, exclude and avoid the other. It is an attempt, motivated by the very idea which sees other as a threat—to sovereignty and purity. Hence, the question of identity, even within the context of religion, is a question/form of structural violence. The possibility of belonging or owning an identity trembles often due to the very impossibility of continuity in terms of self-sameness. Here, the idea of self is not limited only to the individual; it also can be understood in terms of religion, race, community, *etc.* In that sense, the question to be raised here is whether it is possible for any community to remain self-same. Considering the histories of different communities—religion, nation, caste, *etc.*—each community has managed its survival just because of its weakness to remain self-same; because, each of them has been in relation with the other—communities, religions, ideologies, architectures, *etc.* This relation cannot be undone due to the exposure of the self to outside—other. Emmanuel Levinas terms this relation as ethical responsibility of the self to the other (Levinas, 1979). He explains this idea asserting the impossibility of getting rid of the other and becoming the Self even at death. This exposure of the self to the other disenables the possibility of creating a closure or totality, which finds a powerful centre. Doing so, it undoes the power of any self-centred discourse.

Taking the cue from Levinasian idea of ethics, Jacques Derrida places the question of self-sameness, which is identity, as a question of language, because identity is a construction in and through language as there is the very attempt of appropriating one to another (Derrida, 1997 [1994]).<sup>179</sup> Hence, what is at the base of any identity is nothing but language. Therefore, he pays attention to language and its nature in relation to which he discusses the notion of *différance*—writing.<sup>180</sup> Derrida argues, language as writing is already in relation with the other because writing is

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<sup>179</sup> See also bibliography.

<sup>180</sup> On Derrida's idea of writing see *Of Grammatology* (Derrida, 1997 [1994]).

already known as the other of language, which is speech.<sup>181</sup> Accordingly, there has never been a language which is not already open. In fact, any language has been able to survive precisely due to this exposure to outside. In that sense, it is analogous to being, text, religion, art and architecture.

## LANGUAGE, ARCHITECTURE AND PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION

In what language can Indian architecture and the Hindu temple (*truly*) be discussed?<sup>182</sup> Perhaps this issue seems particularly pressing, because the objects that South Asian art history deals with, are seen as deriving from various languages, for many of which there are no records. Moreover, the question of language has been framed politically due to the reorganisation of states on a linguistic basis. English, as the language of the colonizer remains the dominant one in which academic discourse is conducted. Perhaps, therefore the issue of *language* and *translation* is felt more intensely since the discourse is viewed as taking place in a context that is different from (outside) the context of the object. The *difference* is not only that of linguistic difference but also that of socio-economic, political, historical, religious, cultural, *etc.* difference. In other words, the discourse is viewed as taking place *outside*. Subsequently there are two issues that are closely linked with each other. In what language do and can we speak about Indian architecture and the Hindu temple? Can it be that one language is more ‘appropriate’ than another?

Over time the issue has been approached in different ways. While Fergusson, who wrote in English, tried to avoid all “*technical* and *unfamiliar* names [...] wherever it is possible to do so” scholars such as Raz, Acharya, Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch, who try to understand the *intrinsic meaning* of India’s art/architecture, emphasised the significance of the use of indigenous languages to understand the art’s/architecture’s meaning (Fergusson, 1910 [1876]: 5; italics added).<sup>183</sup> Although, at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Raz found practitioners “totally unacquainted” with

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<sup>181</sup> Derrida discusses this idea with in *Of Grammatology* (Derrida, 1997 [1994]).

<sup>182</sup> Compare also with Ragavan, 2014.

<sup>183</sup> Also Burgess was concerned that only “few of these terms are to be found in our lexicons, and their precise forms can hardly be controlled out of India” and therefore only added Sanskrit terms sporadically (Burgess and Cousens, 1903: v). Chandra criticised Fergusson especially for not referring to texts (Chandra, 1983: 19).

the *Manasara*. However, instead of questioning the role of text as a means of reading architecture, scholars such as Acharya, Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch turned to (*shastric*) texts such as the *Brihatsamhita*, the *Mayamatam*, the *Manasara* and the *Vishnudharmottarapurana* in order to understand Indian art and architecture (Raz, 1834: x-xiii; Coomaraswamy, 1918; Acharya, 1927; Kramrisch, 1928, 1946; *etc.*).<sup>184</sup>

This practice of using, as Dhar says, “authentic technical vocabulary” has been taken further by scholars such as Dhaky and Meister for example in the EITA (Dhar, 2011b: 8). Scholars such as Pollock, Maxwell, Parker and Kaimal, however, have pointed out the limits of the text-based method (Pollock, 1985; Maxwell, 1989; Parker, 1992a; Kaimal, 1999; *etc.*). Parker, for example, remarks that according to his knowledge “no temple structure in South India, ancient or modern, has ever been built by following instruction in a book” (Parker, 1992a: 113). According to Parker, scholars are used to thinking of *shastras* as written text but “in the living tradition, most of those who are expert in the *sastras* have never read a *sastra* in the written form” (Parker, 1992a: 113). At the same time, however, *sthapatis* and their sponsors insist, as Parker and Dalrymple observe, that *shastra* is being followed (Parker, 1992a; Dalrymple, 2013 [2009]: 178, 191).<sup>185</sup> Does that mean that practice is *corrupt* or *violates the rules* or is there a problem in the way these texts and their role have been understood? According to Maxwell, “shastric” does not refer to the “textual

<sup>184</sup> In 1827, the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland sent a circular to the Presidencies of Madras and Bombay in which they express their “desiderata” for investigations, for example, into the history, methods of agriculture, music bands, and antiquities, as well as a translation or abstract of the *Silpa Shastra*. In 1833, a committee of the Society’s members, among them William Wilkins and William Daniell, examined and approved the *Essay* for publication. The Royal Asiatic Society posthumously published the *Essay* in 1834. For a brief biography, see Raz, 1834: vi-ix. See on Ram Raz also Mitter, 1977: 180-188 and Tillotson, 1993. Raz has collected various texts and text fragments that he listed and briefly discussed (Raz, 1834: 1-11). With short summaries that include translated passages of the *Manasara*, Raz leads us through the essential chapters of the *Mānasāra*. According to Acharya, the *Manasara* has seventy chapters. Besides discussing architecture and the planning of villages and towns, Acharya also discussed the iconography, iconometry and making of thrones, ornaments, images, *etc.* (Acharya, 1927). Although Acharya gives a better overall impression of the text, at times, Raz’s translations seem to be more detailed. According to Monier-Williams’ *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, “*śāstra*” can be translated, for instance, as “order”, “command”, “precept”, “institute”, “rule”, “religious or scientific treatise”, “law-book”, “body of teaching”, *etc.* (Monier-Williams, 1986 [1899]: 1003). *Śāstra* derives from *śās* (√ *śams*) that Monier-Williams translates as “to chastise, correct, censure, punish”, “to restrain, control, rule, govern”, “to direct, bid, order, command”, *etc.*

<sup>185</sup> According to Parker, the *rajagopuram* of the Srirangam temple (Tamil Nadu) features an elevator so that visitors can enjoy the spectacular view; confronted with critic, the responsible authority insists that the construction has been undertaken according to *śāstra* (Parker, 1992a: 120). BAPS emphasises that Akshardham was designed “in accordance with the ancient, pristine architecture of India (*sthapati shastras*) [...] with unique additions and changes” (Vivekjiandas, 2009: 28-29).

record but the human transmission of that which at any particular time is considered to be *true* tradition: *authority* stems from a person who best embodies and exemplifies the current perception of cultural convention” (Maxwell, 1989: 14; italics added). In other words, he emphasises the role or authority of the creator of the work of art. Does that imply that in order to understand the work of art (better) we should reach out to its creator, or its *author*? Do we find the *explanation* of a work in the man/men who produced it?

As an example of the ramifications of this discourse, discussed in detail in the fifth chapter, to-date, BAPS puts great efforts in defining and explaining the temples built by it. There are ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ (FAQs) not only on BAPS’ websites but also in its publications indicating that the BAPS is prepared—it anticipates questions and has answers ready. It attentively administers the release of information and images seemingly trying to preside over what is said and not said about Akshardham. In other words, BAPS tries to control the discourse. As will be elaborated upon in the fifth chapter, what makes the case of BAPS and Akshardham interesting is that BAPS not only tries to *control* the discourse but also tries to shape it. BAPS takes on the task to write/theorise its architecture, a task that colonialism and modernism had ‘assigned’ to art historians. Noticeably, following the art historic method of classifying, determining, defining, *etc.*, BAPS tries to *fix* Akshardham’s meaning, explaining each and every detail of its architecture.<sup>186</sup> The narrative that BAPS created of Akshardham and its making speaks the *monumental* language of Akshardham’s architecture. Like popular narratives, BAPS portrays Akshardham and its construction as an epic marvel, built with hard work and strong faith.<sup>187</sup> The perpetual repetition of these tropes through different media makes it easy to memorise the narrative—in conversations, newspaper articles, blogs, *etc.* BAPS’ narrative is often uncritically repeated, and the ban of camera, phone, pen and paper hampers new readings. Arguably, modernity with its ambition to *understand* things has paved the way for BAPS to take this double role of being the artist and reader/explainer of the work of art, at the same time.<sup>188</sup> As, for example, Barthes, Bonnet and Foucault,

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<sup>186</sup> Compare with fifth chapter.

<sup>187</sup> Compare, for example, with a portrait of the Brihadishwar Temple featured in *The Hindu* (unknown author, 2010).

<sup>188</sup> According to Kim, especially the diaspora feels the “desire” to explain “what our religion is about”

discuss it is in the course of modernity that great importance has been attached to the person of the author/artist/architect/*etc.* (Barthes, 1977; Bonnet, 2004: 98-142; Foucault, 2009; Gadanho, 2009: 26; *etc.*).<sup>189</sup> Against this backdrop, the author/artist/architect/*etc.* has not only been hailed as genius but also become *the* ultimate authority who can *explain* his/her work of art—once the author is located we *understand* what it is, so the idea.<sup>190</sup> According to Barthes,

[t]he *explanation* of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end, through the more or less transparent allegory of the fiction, the voice of a single person, the *author* ‘confiding’ in us (Barthes, 1977: 143).

Foucault and Barthes, amongst other scholars, however, have studied the relation between the author and text carefully, taking into account the possibility of the author as explainer to detect several issues (Barthes, 1977: 148; Foucault, 2009). Barthes, for example, emphasises that giving “a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing” (Barthes, 1977: 147). Similarly, in “What is an Author?,” Foucault longs for a discourse that no longer focuses on the author (Foucault, 2009: 333-334). In short, Foucault and Barthes encourage a reading away from the author. Barthes eventually declares “the death of the Author” in favour of “the birth of the reader” (Barthes, 1977: 148). According to Barthes, “a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures [*etc.*]”, all of which converges in one place—that is the reader, not the author (Barthes, 1977: 148).

But what of the question of authorship in the context of the Hindu temple: Can we make the Hindu temple *understandable* by using texts and words extracted from texts? Do we have to turn towards texts in order to read and understand architecture? And how can one find the (*right*) words and language when it comes to *new/modern/contemporary* architecture; especially since this architecture has been

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(young *satsangi* quoted in Kim, 2007: 65).

<sup>189</sup> This also holds with regard to the architect. The ASI, for example, encourages its officers to include the name of architects undertaking a survey of contemporary architecture (Sanderson, 1913: 6). Sanderson describes this task as “extremely difficult” (Sanderson, 1913: 6). According to Sanderson, “several officials [...] ridiculed the idea of asking for their names and addresses; indeed, several of the men themselves, when asked looked on me with suspicion and, thinking that I might be on some other quest, gave me wrong addresses” (Sanderson, 1913: 6). The situation has changed since then. Compare, for example, with the role of the *sthapatis* discussed in the following chapters.

<sup>190</sup> Compare with Barthes, 1977. Foucault highlights that the meaning and value given to a text depended on the *name of the author*, anonymity was only accepted only as a puzzle to be solved (Foucault, 2009: 327).

viewed as *unorganised*, *unorthodox* and *popular* taking on forms unmatched with the *architectural idioms*.<sup>191</sup> How can one find a *text* that makes one understand *what a Hindu temple is*? The concern that runs through this thesis and explored in detail in the chapters that follow, is not a problem of the subject but of reading, which is also writing. Within the modernist framework, different forms of art have been distinguished such as literature, painting, theatre, and architecture. Derrida's idea of the text makes these distinctions crumble and allows us to look and *read* architecture anew. Instead of holding on to this framework and trying to read the world accordingly, we could also question and deconstruct these categories as done here, at least to some extent.

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<sup>191</sup> I am thinking here for examples of the Vaishnodevi/Hanuman Mandir in Jhandewalan or the Sai Baba Mandir on Lodhi Road.



## SECOND CHAPTER

### THE HINDU TEMPLE AND ITS AVATARS IN 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY DELHI

As outlined in the previous chapter, many scholars have taken significant efforts in trying to understand Indian architecture and the Hindu temple, in general and in particular. Much emphasis has been laid on the conceptualisation of Hindu temple, especially on the idea that the temple is a strictly defined and is an extremely symbolical space—that is, if not built according to the *rules*, the temple will not function. Kramrisch, for example, emphasises *verticality*, created through a towering superstructure, as the most important feature of the temple (Kramrisch, 1946: 175-176). The vertical axis of the “Prāsāda leads from the Highest Point, the summit of its finial, above its body, to the centre of the Garbhagrha”, she explains (Kramrisch, 1946: 175). Centrally located within this structure of the temple is the *garbhagraha*, the “womb of the house” or the *sanctum sanctorum* or *sanctuary*—a small cell with plain walls that “*as a rule*, has a flat ceiling” housing the image of god (Kramrisch, 1946: 162, 175; italics added).

However, besides this reading of the Hindu temple, the Hindu temple has been discussed repeatedly through parameters such as religious affiliation, time, location, style, *etc.* Based on stylistic features, the temple has been defined/identified as *Nagara*, *Dravidian* or *Vesara*.<sup>192</sup> Although these terms are still used to refer to a certain style, with regard to modern/contemporary temple architecture, different frameworks have been suggested through which the Hindu temple and its architecture can be understood. Noticeably, conforming to frameworks that have been used in the Western modern context, these categorisations give great significance to the question of the *architect*.<sup>193</sup> As discussed earlier, according to Menon, one can distinguish three categories in contemporary Hindu temple architecture; first “continuity of traditions”

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<sup>192</sup> These styles have been associated with geographical regions. *Nagara* is associated mainly with North India, *Dravidian* is associated mainly with South India and *Vesara*, which is considered a hybrid, mix or fusion of the other two styles, is associated mainly with Karnataka and Deccan. See Kramrisch, 1946: 286-295; Huntington, 1985: 540; Hardy, 1995, 2007; BAPS, 2014: 21-29; *etc.*

<sup>193</sup> Compare with discussion in first chapter.

through the employment of “traditional craftsmen”, second, “proclivity for kitsch”, and third, a “few attempts to develop a ‘modern’ temple building idiom” (Menon, 1997: 26). Hardy too suggests three similar categories: “[1] folk/popular; [2] those designed by ‘traditional architects’; and [3] those designed by architects qualified in the modern profession” (Hardy, 2007: 239). Likewise, Bharne and Krusche hold on to a similar categorisation. According to them, the first “temple identity [...] is the resilient plebeian vernacular identity of temple design and ritual”; the second is “the continuing process of built from scratch canonized temples [...] echoing the attitudes of monumental temple building from the past”; and, the third is “the search for new expressions of temple architecture that both erase traditional concepts even as they seek to maintain selective linkages with canons” (Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 249). In sum, they distinguished the contemporary Hindu temple “[1] as bricolage; [2] as replica; and [3] as polemic” (Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 249). For Mukerji and Basu the line is drawn at Post-Modern architecture, i.e. they too draw a clear-cut line between Traditional and Modern/Post-Modern architecture, thus insisting on the division between the past and present (Mukerji and Basu, 2015).<sup>194</sup> Besides considering the question of whether the temple was built by a professional (traditional or modern) architect or not as significant, these categorisations try to understand the contemporary Hindu temple with reference to some *ideal* or ‘textbook’ Hindu temple such as the Vishwanath Mandir in Khajuraho.

Many of the contemporary temples in one way or the other do not conform to the idea of the Hindu temple as such because, for instance, they do not feature a *shikhara* and *garbhagraha*. In this regard, this chapter will address the problematics of categorisation, naming and defining with respect to binaries such as *sacred/secular*, *Hindu/non-Hindu*, *etc.* that emerged as part of the colonial discourse, in addition to the use or deployment of categories such as *regional*, *national* and *global*. Can these categories or readings be sustained in the contemporary architectural form of the Hindu temple? What is it that makes the Hindu temple a Hindu temple? Is it possible to view the temple through basic architectural features (*shikhara* and *garbhagraha*) as has been suggested by scholars? In so doing, how do such frameworks help us

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<sup>194</sup> According to Mukerji and Basu, “Post-modern architecture is the architectural style which evolved from middle to late twentieth century, as a response to the perceived failure of the modern movement in architecture” (Mukerji and Basu, 2011).

understand the Hindu temple? Is there a particular feature, which is mandatory or fundamental for a temple? What is it that makes a temple a temple? Is there a common underlying feature of *all* Hindu temples? How do we proceed to understand the role that architectural forms, features and elements have in the structure of the Hindu temple? On what grounds do we identify/define the Hindu temple? How do we begin to define/identify a temple and describe *what a temple is*? How do we compare one with the other? Where are lines or boundaries drawn and on what grounds? What role does the temple play in and in relation to a community? What is it that separates the temple from the *everyday*, secular world? Is the temple divorced from the everyday entirely?

This chapter, which is the preliminary outcome of six years of fieldwork will attempt to address these and other questions with Delhi's temple-scape as a case study. As the thesis aims to understand the function and meaning of the Hindu temple in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it focuses on the contemporary form of the temple while taking the temple's historical background into account. This chapter discusses selected examples of temples in chronological order, for their history determines to a large extent, their present function and importance. The temples have been selected in view of distinctive architectural features to represent Delhi's great diversity of architectures. It goes without saying that many more temples deserve to be discussed here. Apart from developing a nuanced perspective on Delhi's temple-scape, this chapter will also attempt to understand how the temple is conceptualised today. In so doing, I will set out to trace the Hindu temple in Delhi in its different *avatars* to understand whether there is a common thread which is emblematic of the Hindu temple. It is here that the idea of the temple, as framed in the art historical discourse that defines/identifies certain characteristics as being different from secular architecture, will be laid out.

## **ANCIENT TEMPLES IN 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY DELHI**

The four volumes of the *List of Muhammadan and Hindu Monuments* record around hundred temples, the majority of which still serve as temples today (Sanderson, 1916; Page, 1919; Blakiston, 1922a, 1922b).<sup>195</sup> A great number of these

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<sup>195</sup> Considering the limitation of time and scope of this thesis I was not able to locate all of these temples most of which are difficult to locate as will be discussed in more detail in this section.

temples can be found within the walls of Shahjahanabad, Shah Jahan's carefully planned capital city that continues to be called Old Delhi.<sup>196</sup> However, Shahjahanabad's urban-scape is visually dominated by mosques; the grandest of these was built by the emperor himself and it crowns the top of a natural hillock overlooking the surrounding city-scape in which the few small temples vanish from sight.<sup>197</sup> Unlike today's temples that are seemingly preferably constructed on highways, the temples in Shahjahanabad are almost never found on a main road but in the city's characteristic narrow *galis*.<sup>198</sup> Contradicting the common notion that visibility is an important feature of the Hindu temple, the most significant feature that most of these temples have in common is that they are melded in their surroundings that they become almost invisible, making it difficult to spot them.<sup>199</sup> Asher notices that, today, some temples try to emphasise their presence through signs written in Hindi (Asher, 2000: 131).<sup>200</sup> In addition to such signs, the entrances of an increasing number of temples are visually emphasised, for example, by painting them in a bright colour, seemingly to distinguish the temple from the surrounding architecture-scape.<sup>201</sup> However, as Asher

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However, Asher has begun to look at few of these temples in her work (Asher, 2000, 2003). Thus, this section draws much from Asher's research.

<sup>196</sup> Much has been written on Shahjahanabad and its construction. See, for instance, Manucci's and Bernier's accounts of the city (Manucci, 1907; Bernier, 1916). See also Blake, 1986, 1991; Gupta 1986 [1981], 2003 [1993]; Naqvi, 1986; Gole, 1988; Varma, 1992; Asher, 2000, 2003; Ehlers and Krafft, 2003a [1993], 2003b [1993]; Malik, 2003 [1993]; Mukherji, 2003 [1993]; *etc.* On architecture built by or under Shah Jahan see, for example, Koch, 2014 [1991]: 93-125 and Asher, 2015 [1992]: 169-251. As mentioned in the introduction, Shahjahanabad has been massively transformed after 1857.

<sup>197</sup> Compare also with Asher, 2000: 125-126. According to Blake, there were approximately two hundred mosques within the boundary walls of the city (Blake, 1991: 51-55, 71-82). See Sanderson's *List of Muhammadan and Hindu Monuments* (Sanderson, 1916). Shah Jahan's mosque that, as it is often emphasised, was at the time of its construction the largest mosque in the subcontinent was named *Masjid-i-Jahannuma*, which has been translated as *Mosque Commanding View of the World* (Blake, 1991: 52-55; Peck, 2005: 206-207; Asher, 2015 [1992]: 202; *etc.*). Like many other mosques in Delhi, the mosque was built of red sandstone. On Jama Masjid's afterlives see Ahmed, 2013.

<sup>198</sup> Compare with Jain, who discusses the location of late temples (Jain, 2016: 329, 2017: S15, S22, S24). See introduction of the thesis.

<sup>199</sup> Asher strongly emphasises this point in her work. According to her, "[m]aps dating between 1756 and 1850 suggest that these temples, regardless of their initial construction date, were not part of the visible landscape" (Asher, 2003: 362). Blake suggests that the lack of monumental (Hindu and Jain) temples in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century might be explainable with regard to the economic and political situation of these communities (Blake, 1991: 110-111). Asher, however, opposes this idea pointing out that even when these communities gained wealth and power the temples continued to be small and lacking "the traditional signifiers" pointing out the numerous temples that have been built after 1958 on Esplanade Road constructed by the British (Asher, 2000: 129-130, 138, 2003: 361, 363). Asher also resists the common explanation that the temple builders tried to hide their temples from Muslim iconoclasts (Asher, 2003: 369-370). Asher suggests that the arrangement, location and prominence are factors of community identity (Asher, 2000: 138, 2003: 370).

<sup>200</sup> She remarks that it is not known whether or not they were marked earlier (Asher, 2000: 131).

<sup>201</sup> That "[t]here is *no great difference* in the style of houses of Hindus and Muhammadans" has also

says, “I found, for example, that as an outsider it was virtually impossible to locate these temples between noon, when darshan ceases, and 5 P.M., when it recommences” (Asher, 2000: 127). Only in the morning and in the evening the heavy wooden doors or shutters are open for each and every one who wants to enter.<sup>202</sup> This is particularly unique as these (public) temples exist within private houses, surrounded by one or several residences (Figure 2.1).<sup>203</sup> Often it is the families living in these houses that take care of the temple—few temples, however, are maintained by trusts. Unlike temples such as the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir and Akshardham, gauging from their size, these temples are not meant to accommodate large gatherings or visitors. These temples seem to be known to and visited by people living or working nearby.<sup>204</sup> Rarely do (foreign) tourists enter these *galis* in which these temples are located; but some people however, insist that their temples are *frequently* visited by foreign tourists. Some of the temples, such as the Sivalaya Ghantesvara Mahadeva, however, are known and visited by residents of the city from different parts.<sup>205</sup>

According to Asher, most of these small temples in Old Delhi are dedicated to Shiva. Many of these small temples feature a circular or polygonal dome (Figure 2.2) carried by pillars reminiscent of *chattri*-like structures.<sup>206</sup> Asher emphasises that “[n]one of these temples [in Old Delhi] is surmounted by a high shikhara (superstructure), which we so often associate with traditional temple construction” (Asher, 2000: 127). Noticeably, unlike other types of temples, this structure is open allowing

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been observed by Ibbeston in the *Gazetteer of Delhi District, 1883-1884* (Ibbeston, (1999 [1883-1884]: 42; italics added). Varma however notices: “It is significant that Hindu and Muslim mansions had little to differentiate them. Havelis, irrespective of the religious persuasion of their patriarch, followed the same essential features, with this difference that sometimes a Hindu *rais* would have a temple near his house, while a Muslim amir, a mosque” (Varma, 1992: 26). According to Asher, “[l]ittle differentiates them from any shop facade on the street,” (Asher, 2000: 130, 2003: 363).

<sup>202</sup> I have been welcomed in most of the temples in Old Delhi. Compare also Asher’s experience (Asher, 2000: 143).

<sup>203</sup> Compare with Asher, 2000: 127.

<sup>204</sup> Asher suggests that the location of the temple within residential neighbourhoods is related to religious practice. According to her, “Hindus and Jains require temples in residential neighborhoods since early mornings and evenings are the timings for *darśan*” (Asher, 2003: 367).

<sup>205</sup> The temple is listed in *List of Muhammadan and Hindu Monuments*. See Sanderson, 1916: 164. See also INTACH, 1999, Vol. I: 32. Noticeably these small temples often exist in a cluster of several other temples. Compare with Akshardham’s architecture that will be discussed in the fifth chapter.

<sup>206</sup> See also Asher, 2000: 136.

access from all sides.<sup>207</sup> Since our knowledge about the development of temples after the 15<sup>th</sup> century is until now very limited, art historians are in the dark about the history and architecture of these temples (Asher, 2000: 136). Besides these small Shivalayas, there are also various temples dedicated to Vishnu (Krishna) which feature a very different architecture (Figure 2.3). These temples are an integral part of the *haveli*, usually separated from the homes with slender pilastered columns. Asher refers to this type of temple as “*haveli* type” (Asher, 2000, 2003). Unlike the Shivalayas, they usually feature a flat roof. A particularly significant architectural feature of these temples is that they are separated from the rest of the house with a colonnade of three or five arches. At times the small *garbhagraha* is preceded by one or several aisles.<sup>208</sup> If the Shivalayas, on the account of its open spatial arrangement in relation to the deity can be approached from any side, in the case of the *haveli* type temple, the spatial arrangement and display of god are such that the deity can only be approached from the front. Moreover, in this arrangement, the *garbhagraha* can be approached by each and every one, but not entered (Figure 2.4).<sup>209</sup> Noticeably, the walls of these *garbhagrahas* are carefully decorated with a combination of vibrant paintings, glass and mirrors that deserve close iconographic and stylistic examination (Figure 2.5).<sup>210</sup> Like in many other contemporary temples, the central *murtis* are often displayed surrounded by an assemblage of god posters, paintings, figurines, *etc.* carefully staged on a stepped podium in artificial light (Figure 2.6). Asher suggests that this form of temple derives from an imperial audience hall (*jharoka-i darshan*) (Asher, 2000: 136-138, 2003: 370-371). However, several such temples have been architectonically arranged in such a way, that the room (*garbhagraha*) in which the deity/deities reside/s can be circumambulated, like in many earlier-built temples.<sup>211</sup> Few temples such as the Charandas Mandir (Chaurwi Bazar) (Figure 2.7), the Agarwal Mandir in Paharganj and the Kunni Ka Shivalaya in the Krishna Gali combine two types of temples, suggesting that Asher’s classification of temple types

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<sup>207</sup> Compare with Akshardham’s architecture that will be discussed in the fifth chapter.

<sup>208</sup> See, for example, the Charandas Mandir (Chaurwi Bazar).

<sup>209</sup> In many temples such as the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir and Akshardham only the priest is allowed to enter the *garbhagraha*. This aspect will be dealt with in more detail in the following chapters.

<sup>210</sup> Similar works can be seen in other Hindu and Jain temples in Delhi some of which are seventy years old while others were made in recent years. However, it seems as if they have not been studied so far. Scholars such as Kramrisch have emphasised that the walls of the *garbhagraha* are plain (Kramrisch, 1946: 162).

<sup>211</sup> See for example the Citragupta Mandir in Paharganj, the Jagannath Mandir on Esplanade Road and the Krishna Mandir in Chaurwi Bazar (near the Charandas Mandir).

has its limitations. Noticeably, these temples are reminiscent of (contemporary) Muslim architecture not only with regard to their architecture but also surface decoration; for instance, Asher notes that the Charandas Mandir and Tahawwar Khan's mosque "belong to a common visual vocabulary" (Asher, 2000: 138).<sup>212</sup>

Scholars such as Fergusson and Kramrisch, have looked at the Hindu temple as the bastion of the past and unchanging tradition, unmoved by socio-economic, political and cultural changes that came along with time.<sup>213</sup> However, these early temples have undergone many changes that constitute or define their contemporary design. Particularly striking is that many temples have experimented with different forms of display. These temples have resorted to modern exhibitionary techniques, such as displaying *murtis* in showcases, adding labels and explanatory texts. Also, they reference modern institutions such as museums; temples such as the Valmiki Mandir on Mandir Marg and the Chhattarpur Mandir, for instance, feature their own museums (or museum-like spaces) in which effects of personages or 'artefacts' are put on display.<sup>214</sup> Among the temples discussed in this section, however, it is more common to see showcases in temples that are reminiscent of the dioramas that can be seen to-date in many of India's natural history museums, meaning to transport its onlooker into a certain *distant* place and time. Similar to their counterparts in museums, these dioramas create illusionist spectacles by displaying deities, for example, in artificially created mountainous landscape. Others, however, are constructed within a modern, 'historical' discourse to 'prove' the existence of events, such as the Samudramanthan (Churning of the Ocean), narrated, for instance, in *puranic* literature.

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<sup>212</sup> On Tahawwar Khan's mosque see Asher, 2015 [1992]: 299-300.

<sup>213</sup> Srinivas observes that according to popular perception the ritual in Hindu temples is "static and unchanging [...] the Hindu Brahmin priests attached to these temples are the keeper of this unchanging tradition" (Srinivas, 2006: 323). Arguably, this is also the case when it comes to the general perception of the Hindu temple. Branfoot's study of the practice of renovating/remodelling temples in South India shows how problematic this general or popular perception of the temple as an unchanging entity or bastion of the past is (Branfoot, 2013).

<sup>214</sup> On the Valmiki Mandir see below. The Chhattarpur Mandir, Delhi, established in the 1970s, has a museum displaying a vacuum cleaner, microwave, thermos flask amongst other belongings of Baba Nagpal, founder of the temple. The Chhattarpur Mandir is among the largest temples in Delhi. It spreads over thirty hectares. The complex consists of several temples, ashrams, a high-school, an Institute of Science and Technology and a poly-clinic (Menon, 1997: 28). According to Menon, the temple "is shoddily built, badly detailed and all of this is camouflaged with expensive surface treatment. These buildings display little or no understanding of the formal language of temple architecture" (Menon, 1997: 27-28). The temple attracts many people. On the temple and its architecture see Menon, 1997: 27-29. This aspect will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

The Gauri Shankar Mandir near the Red Fort, for example, features a large-scale diorama depicting Shiva as Gangadhara that has been embedded in the buildings ground-floor (Figure 2.8).<sup>215</sup> Unlike pre-modern images of Shiva, this image tries to visualise Shiva's power, showing the god with a muscular body and pronounced physical features and raised arms standing in the midst of an artificial cave-scape.<sup>216</sup> Similar dioramas can be found in many other temples such as the Yogmaya Mandir, the Narasimha Mandir (Figure 2.9) and the Caturmukha Mandir (Chauwri Bazar). Some of the temples such as the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir in Jhandewalan, which will be discussed in more detail below, and the Vaishno Mata Mandir in Bhagsunag near Dharamshala (Himachal Pradesh) have integrated this form of display in their architecture. In these temples, the creation of a spectacular illusion is no longer limited by the space of the showcase—a walk-through diorama form of display has become part of the temple and its architecture.<sup>217</sup>

Although the ASI and INTACH work to protect *ancient* architecture, it is common that older structures and elements are replaced with new ones; for instance, a glass-mosaic in the Agarwal Mandir in Paharganj has been replaced (Figure 2.10) with a brightly painted plaster (Figure 2.11) and the (deteriorating) murals in the Narasimha Mandir (Esplanade Road) have been repainted with gold-wash.<sup>218</sup> While these are comparatively superficial enhancements that have little effect on the temple's basic structure or architecture, the architecture of temples such as the Gauri

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<sup>215</sup> According to Sanderson, it is likely that the Gauri Shankar Mandir was built in 1761 by the Maratha Brahmin, Appa Gangadhara (Sanderson, 1916: 151-152; Asher, 2000: 129). However, the temple has been and continues to be enhanced, its *shikhara* and other parts are modern additions (Asher, 2000: 129).

<sup>216</sup> Scholar such as Pinney, Jain and Ramaswamy have discussed modern/contemporary images of deities in the context of popular culture and print media (Pinney, 2004; Jain, 2007; Ramaswamy, 2010; *etc.*). Kapur, Pinney and Jain discuss muscularity in the context of Ram and Hanuman (Kapur, 1993; Pinney, 1997b; Jain, 2001). Little attention, however, as been paid to this issue with regard to sculptures and *murtis*. Compare with Smith, 1978.

<sup>217</sup> Compare with Puri, 2015. While at the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir the thus created landscape means to give the visitor the impression of walking through the *original* Vaishnodevi Mandir comparable displays at ISKCON's Sri Sri Radha Parthasarathi Mandir (East of Kailash), that will be discussed below in more detail, and BAPS' Akshardham, that will be discussed in the fifth chapter, are used to educate the visitor.

<sup>218</sup> As mentioned in the introduction of the thesis, particularly at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, architects and scholars such as Schinkel, Dehio, Riegl and Viollet-le-Duc discussed the idea of the monument and emphasised the need to preserve these monuments (reminders of the past), which became a central objective of art history, archaeology and other related disciplines. See, for example, Riegl, 1903. Compare also with what has been discussed in the thesis' introduction with regard to aesthetics.



Shankar Mandir and the Kalkaji Mandir has been built and rebuilt many times (without much documentation on the process of refurbishment) making it difficult to ‘ascertain’ the temples’ architecture and their architectural history. The Yogmaya Mandir in Mehrauli—attributed to the time of Yudhisthira and hence, considered one of Delhi’s oldest temples—is an exception because the temple has been documented since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>219</sup>

The earliest available depiction of the temple is a picture of the temple, drawn approximately fifteen years after the temple’s construction in 1827, titled *The Jogamaya Temple Near the Qutb Minar* that was commissioned by Delhi’s then Chief Magistrate Thomas Metcalfe.<sup>220</sup> In 2011, a reproduction of this drawing could be found displayed in the temple but it has been removed since then. The drawing captures a temple that is difficult to associate with the temple’s 21<sup>st</sup>-century design. The reproduction shows two temples—one cubical (Yogmaya Mandir), the other octagonal (Shiva Mandir), each surmounted by a whitewashed *shikhara* with slightly curved sides in a picturesque landscape. Perhaps because of the niches with pointed arches, that structure the outer walls of these two temples, one might be reminded of Islamic architecture. Although the image sketches a serene picture of the temple according to Stephen, the Yogmaya Mandir “has not the slightest pretension to beauty” (Stephen, 1876: 29).<sup>221</sup> Because of the angle from which *The Jogamaya Temple Near the Qutb Minar* was sketched, little can be seen of the structure that adjoins the square-shaped temples. However, a photo taken by INTACH in 1997 captures the temple from a different angle from which this structure can be seen (INTACH, 1999, Vol. II: 238-239). The adjacent elongated structure is covered by a gable-roof—reminiscent of the architecture of the Kamakhya Temple near Guwahati

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<sup>219</sup> See, for example, Vats, n.d.; Stephen, 1876: 29; Duncan, 1906: 72; Chopra, 1970: 230

<sup>220</sup> According to Duncan, the temple was built in 1827, “may be, however, on the site of one much more ancient” temple (Duncan, 1906: 72). See also Khan, 1861: 91-92; Cooper, 1865: 90; Cole, 1872: 27; Beglar, 1874: 5; Stephen, 1876: 29-30; Blakiston, 1922a: 86-87; Chopra, 1970: 230-231 and INTACH, 1999, Vol. II: 238-239. Also see Vat’s *Yog Māyā Mandir Kā Itihās*. Around 1840, Metcalfe compiled for his daughter an album of write-ups and paintings titled *Reminiscences of Imperial Delhi* (Gupta, 2003 [1993]: 40). The album that is to date in the possession of the British Library has been digitised and is accessible online. See Add.Or.5475.

<sup>221</sup> This has been repeated by Duncan as well as Chopra (Duncan, 1906: 72; Chopra, 1970: 230). Blakiston, echoing Stephen’s views remarks in ASI’s *List of Muhammadan and Hindu Monuments*: “The temple is [...] of no special interest” (Blakiston, 1922a: 87). See also discussion about appreciation of contemporary architecture in the introduction of the thesis.

(Assam).<sup>222</sup> Today, this elongated structure, which is only accessible from Yogmaya Mandir's *garbhagraha*, is used as the bedroom of the goddess and the temple's storeroom at the same time. The ceiling of the room adjoining the *garbhagraha*, and of the *garbhagraha* itself, are clad in a similar paint-glass-mirror-mosaic as some of the temples in Old Delhi, showing different manifestations of Devi (Figure 2.12). INTACH's photo reveals that in the 1990s the entrance of the Yogmaya Mandir is covered with a porch; there are small *chattris* on pedestals and tiger/lion statues flanking the door.<sup>223</sup> To date, these *chattris*, each of which canopies a statue of a *rishi* (?), are placed in a pavilion made of pink sandstone opposite the temple—now facing the goddess.<sup>224</sup>

According to Stephen, “[f]rom the floor of the temple—which was paved with red stone twenty years ago, and is now covered with marble—to its copper gilt pinnacle, it is about 42 feet high” (Stephen, 1876: 30). Today, these two separate temples are joined under one roof (Figure 2.13). The temple continues to be monitored by the Shree Yogmaya Mandir Welfare and Management Society and maintained, by turns, by members of the joint family living in the surrounding multiple-floor buildings. It is interesting to note that the ground-floor of the building on the western side of Yogmaya Mandir's entrance has some guestrooms and will soon—in two to three years—also have another new temple dedicated to the Devi.<sup>225</sup> Since the 1990s, the southern side of the temple's outer wall as seen captured in INTACH's photo has been clad in carved panels showing images of Durga, Vishnu and a four-armed Gajalakshmi. Moreover, the outer walls of the temple/*garbhagraha* underwent several re-makings. In the course of these re-makings a bi-lingual inscription has also disappeared.<sup>226</sup> Although, fans, lights and air conditioning were

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<sup>222</sup> However, while Guwahati's Kamakhya Temple's architecture is apsidal the Yogmaya Mandir's architecture is square.

<sup>223</sup> In Delhi's Kalkaji Mandir too two statue of a lion/tiger are placed opposite of the temple's entrance. Khan explains: “Les Hindous croient qu'on est transporté auprès de la déesse sur un char traîné par de lions, et c'est ainsi qu'ils ont placé ces figures de lions devant la porte de ce temple” (Khan, 1861: 87).

<sup>224</sup> This structure can be seen in the drawing on the right side. On the photo it can be seen on the left side.

<sup>225</sup> Stephen writes that the temple stands within a 400 feet square enclosure that contains including the temple twenty-two buildings (Stephen, 1876: 29). When the main gate on the Kalka Das Marg is shut no one can enter the neighbourhood. INTACH lists various buildings within this enclosure.

<sup>226</sup> Strangely enough, none of the writers who have discussed the Yogmaya Mandir mentions this inscription. In 2011, the inscription seemed to be in a deteriorating state. While the left side of the

installed in the Yogmaya Mandir's *garbhagraha*, the *garbhagraha*'s architectural features have seemingly been left unaltered.<sup>227</sup> The *garbhagraha* of the temple is accessible to each and every one, even during the approximately thirty-minute long *aarti* the participants can sit inside the *garbhagraha* (Figure 2.14).<sup>228</sup>

Another 'ancient' temple in Delhi is the Kalkaji Mandir. According to Blakiston, the temple, "is said to have a very ancient origin, but the oldest portion of the present building is believed to have been constructed not earlier than 1764 A.D." (Blakiston, 1922b: 10).<sup>229</sup> The Kalkaji Mandir is built on a slight elevation; to reach the temple, one must walk up from the Outer Ring Road on a path sandwiched between shops and stalls (Figure 2.15) that sell plastic images of the goddess, toys, snacks, drinks and other entertainments such as rides on merry-go-rounds and swing-boats, and photographs against a backdrop of the Taj Mahal, Shiva, Ganesha, *etc.*<sup>230</sup>

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inscription was written in Devanagari, the right side was written in Persian. As at the time when the temple was constructed Urdu/Persian were main languages in Delhi it is common to find inscriptions in Urdu/Persian in Delhi's temples such as the Citragupta Mandir in Paharganj as well as in churches, such as St Stephen's Church on Church Mission Marg and St Thomas Church on Mandir Marg. I have showed these inscriptions to various scholars but until date no one could read the inscription. Perhaps that was one of the reasons why the temple authorities decided to cover the inscription. What *value* does an inscription have that no one or only few people can read?

<sup>227</sup> According to an inscription placed above the southern entrance of the temple's Shiv Mandir, the temple's interior was redone in 1942. The Shiv Mandir contains a *kund*, in its centre rises a Shivlinga that is surrounded by marble images of Kartikeya, Parvati, and Nandi. By 2015, a *murti* of Sai Baba had been shifted to a new temple approximately twenty metres south of the Yogmaya Mandir.

<sup>228</sup> Also during the *aarti*, there are no restrictions with regard to photography. The *garbhagraha* provides hardly space for more than fifteen people. Other people gather in the area (*mandapa*) in front of the *garbhagraha*.

<sup>229</sup> Like the Ayyappa Mandir, the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir and many other temples, the Kalkaji Mandir was set up as a small temple (Khan, 1861: 86-88; Stephen, 1876: 27-29; Duncan, 1906: 78-79; *etc.*). On Kalkaji Mandir see also Cooper, 1865: 98-99, Blakiston, 1922b: 9-10; *etc.* For the mythological origin of the temple see, for example, Stephen, 1876: 27-28. The narrative is reminiscent of the story told in the *Devimahatmya* of the *Markandeya Purana* that has been illustrated many a time.

<sup>230</sup> The half-yearly fair at the Kalkaji Mandir that Duncan and Chopra describe seems to have manifested itself as a permanent market. Duncan says that around 1906 "crowds from Delhi and the neighbouring villages flock to the temple" during certain festivals (Duncan, 1906: 79). In 1970, Chopra describes the scene that unfolds around the temple as follows: "After the harvesting [...] also the villagers come in large numbers [...] to the goddess. People come to the shrine in palanquins drawn by camels, on carts pulled by gaily caparisoned bullocks and in tongas, buses and motorcycle rickshaws. The road leading up the hill to the temple is jammed with village elders sporting huge turbans and carrying hookas and women wearing flowering skirts and silver anklets" (Chopra, 1970: 154). On the way to the Kalkaji Mandir one can also pay a visit to a small Bhairo Mandir. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is typical to find such set-ups around temples and pilgrimage sites. See the many shops around the Sai Baba Mandir on Bhishma Pitamah Marg. Arguably, shops, shows, movie screenings, *etc.* that late temples such as the ISKCON Mandir's and Akshardham's feature are manifestations of the same phenomenon. It would be worth exploring this in more depth.

The hustle and bustle that increases closer to the temple give little space and time to linger (and look at architecture, *etc.*) (Figure 2.16). Long before the doors of the temple are opened for *darshan*, people begin to line up in front of the temple. Inside the *garbhagraha* one is hardly left with more than a few seconds to see the goddess before being pushed out by the crowd.<sup>231</sup> More than the temples discussed above, the Kalkaji Mandir has been enhanced over time yet one might still be able to spot, engulfed in cables and other anonymous things/structures, bits and pieces of 18<sup>th</sup>-century ornaments and architecture. Over the centuries, new structures have taken and are still taking over older structures.<sup>232</sup> A significant number of shrines and temples have come up in the temple's surrounding over the centuries. It would take a good amount of time and meticulous research to draw a map of the temple's development. Somewhat in the midst of this architecture rises Kalkaji Mandir's whitewashed *shikhara*. According to Duncan, "[i]n 1816 Mirza Rájá Kedárnáth, the Peshkar of Akbár II, added twelve outer rooms to the temple, and surmounted the whole with a lofty pyramidal dome, after the Hindu style" (Duncan, 1906: 79). The design of Kalkaji Mandir's *shikhara* is simple; unlike the *shikhara* of temples such as Khajuraho's Vishvanath Mandir, the *shikhara* does not feature the complex structure composed through repetition of the same motif in smaller and bigger sizes.<sup>233</sup> However, unlike the modern temples that are hailed for their abstract form, this simple structure seems to have no admirers—according to Sharma, Kalkaji Mandir is "of no architectural importance" (Sharma, 1974: 106).

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<sup>231</sup> Similar to the Yogmaya Mandir and the Kalkaji Mandir that both feature a comparatively small *garbhagraha*, at the Gauri Shankar Mandir (near the Red Fort) space or rather its lack seems to be a great concern. However, to ensure that more people see the temple's central deities the temple authorities have installed a camera in the *garbhagraha* transmitting images in real time to a television placed in the temple's *mandapa*. Contrasting the practice of banning photography implemented at many sites such as the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir and Akshardham, at the Gauri Shankar Mandir as in the Yogmaya Mandir and Kalkaji Mandir, photography is allowed. On the Gauri Shankar Mandir see also above.

<sup>232</sup> It seems as if this was the case already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. See Khan, 1861: 87. In 1922, Blakiston says that it "lies in an extensive enclosure containing a large number of dharamsalas constructed at different times" (Blakiston, 1922b: 9). In the past, the temple had to face charges of illegal allotment of land, unauthorised constructions and other issues related to the public interest. See, for example, an article in *The Indian Express* titled "We Have to Protect the Interest of Deity at Kalkaji: SC" (Anand, 2013). This issue is linked to the question of ownership, as well as the question of the temple as public space. Both Kalkaji Mandir as well as Yogmaya Mandir faced problems with regard to illegal constructions (encroachment).

<sup>233</sup> According to Blakiston, Kalkaji Mandir was "constructed of brick masonry finished with plaster" (Blakiston, 1922b: 9).

These examples demonstrate that there seems to be something beyond specific architectural features, such as the *shikhara* and the *garbhagraha* that defines these Hindu temples; the notion that they are sites of great antiquity is significant. In this context, antiquity seems to be associated with the concept of the *sacred*. It seems commonly accepted that the more ancient a site is, the more *sacred* and powerful it is, not least because it has been worshipped over an extended period of time.<sup>234</sup> Unlike some of the late temples, such as Akshardham, the role of architecture in this context seems to be comparatively insignificant, else temple authorities might be more concerned about preserving the temple's architecture. INTACH remarks: "Even though the structure [of the Yogmaya Mandir] is new, the site of the temple is believed to be very ancient and one of the most important Hindu shrines in the city" (INTACH, 1999, Vol. II: 238-239). How important this notion of antiquity is for today's temple (whether built early or late) shows in the enthusiasm in which temple authorities and devotees claim and emphasise 'their' temple's antiquity.<sup>235</sup> Increasingly in the last years, temple authorities try to underline antiquity of temples including the word "*prācīn*" in 'their' temple's name.<sup>236</sup> For instance, between 2011 and 2016, the sign of the Hanuman Mandir on Baba Kharak Singh Marg was replaced by a new sign reading "*Prācīn Hanumān Mandir*", as it is believed to have been established at the times of Yudhisthira.<sup>237</sup> Further, temples such as the *Prācīn Shiv Mandir* on Aruna Asaf Ali Marg that has virtually emerged out of the walkway in the last five years reinforce the significance of this notion.<sup>238</sup> The claim of a temple's

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<sup>234</sup> Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir's temples authorities, for instance, believe that a poster that shows Balasubrahmaniam and which is exhibited in the temple's Adi Shankar Hall "possesses munificent divine powers (Shakti)" because it has been venerated for over fifty years. Compare also with fourth chapter, which discusses the temple in more detail.

<sup>235</sup> This has also been observed by Prashad in the context of Valmiki Mandirs (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 102-103).

<sup>236</sup> The word *prachin* derives from the Sanskrit adjective *prācīna* that Monier-Williams translates into English as "ancient" (Monier-Williams, 1986 [1899]: 704).

<sup>237</sup> For more information of the temple see, for example, Peck, 2005: 263; Lutgendorf, 2007: 253-255. The Hanuman Mandir is not mentioned in any of the early reports, perhaps indicating that the notion that the temple was established at the times of Yudhisthira is modern. Also Page does not make any reference about the temple's antiquity. According to Page, the temple was built by Raja Man Singh of Jaipur (Page, 1919: 8). According to Lutgendorf, it is widely believed that Delhi contains five temples established during the times of Yudhisthira (Lutgendorf, 2007: 253). While people usually agree that the Yogmaya Mandir, Kalkaji Mandir and Nili Chattri Mandir were established at the times of Yudhisthira there is no consensus about other temples (Lutgendorf, 2007: 253). Devotees of the Hanuman Mandir on Baba Kharak Singh Marg however are claiming 'their' temple's antiquity (Lutgendorf, 2007: 253).

<sup>238</sup> Hoskote discusses this phenomenon with regard to Mumbai. More detailed studies on such roadside temples include Kalpagam, 2006; Bharne, 2008, 2013; Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 19-32; Ghassem-Fachandi, 2012, 2015; etc.

antiquity not only tries to legitimise its presence but also to magnify its meaning in a seemingly ever-increasing market of temples, in which temple authorities want their temple to survive, grow and be venerated.<sup>239</sup>

## TEMPLE-BUILDING AT THE TURN OF THE 20<sup>th</sup> CENTURY

Scholars such as Jones, Prashad and Bapu discuss that at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century many Hindus feared about their future as ‘Hindus’ (Jones, 1981; Prashad, 2001 [2000]; Bapu, 2013: 14-16; Lee, 2014; *etc.*).<sup>240</sup> Addressing this anxiety, organisations such as the Arya Samaj and the Hindu Mahasabha identified the fragmentation of *the* Hindus as fundamental problem hindering the community from having control over India, they felt entitled to, as it is the country of their forefathers.<sup>241</sup> According to these organisations, if the Hindus would be united they would have the power to reclaim their land. Diversity and pluralism were viewed as a problem to be overcome by uniting *all* Hindus.<sup>242</sup> Against this backdrop, the untouchables, who had historically been excluded from the Hindu fold on the basis of the caste system, were now viewed as the decisive element that could tip the scales and twist the nation’s fate.<sup>243</sup> Consequently, various attempts were undertaken to ‘include’ the untouchables within the Hindu fold and hence, unite Hindus/Indians.<sup>244</sup> It is in the context of this configuration of nationalism and Hindutva ideologies that the Hindu temple comes into prominence. Paradoxically, with a few exceptions, scholars (and in particular art historians) have paid little attention to the role of the Hindu temple and its architecture in this context of nationalism and Hindutva.<sup>245</sup> Thus, the picture of Delhi’s temple-scape at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century seems more complicated than that of Delhi’s temple-scape before the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

As scholars such as Jaffrelot, Zavos, Prashad, Kanungo, Joshi and Tartakov discuss, the inclusion of the untouchables and the abolishment of untouchability only

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<sup>239</sup> Compare with Srinivas, who discusses the temple as a site that has to constantly reinvent itself in order to pull visitors/money (Srinivas, 2004, 2006).

<sup>240</sup> Compare with third chapter.

<sup>241</sup> Compare with Savarkar’s definition of Hindu (Savarkar, 1969 [1923]). This will be discussed in detail in the third chapter.

<sup>242</sup> Compare with Davis, 1996: 52-53.

<sup>243</sup> See third chapter.

<sup>244</sup> Compare with third chapter.

<sup>245</sup> Compare also with the thesis’ introduction.

improved the untouchables' conditions symbolically, rather than factually tangible improvement in their social condition (Jaffrelot, 1993, 1999 [1996]; Zavos, 2000; Prashad, 2001 [2000]; Kanungo and Joshi, 2010; Tartakov, 2012b, 2012c; *etc.*).<sup>246</sup> According to Prashad, the untouchables “knew” that the Hindus would not pursue the reforms to its logical end and do away with restrictions set on temple-entry, intermarriage and inter-dining (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 99-100). Nonetheless, some untouchables “turned to the very framework of reform set by militant Hindus” (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: xiii, 99-100). According to Prashad and Lee, some Lal Begis/Balmikis, who have been associated with sanitation work, for instance, embraced the ‘deal’ offered to them. This process required the untouchables to abolish practices such as the worship of Bala Shah Nuri, Baba Shiv and Lal Beg and instead worship the low caste writer of the Sanskrit Ramayana Valmiki (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 91-100, 107, 153; Lee, 2014: 150-154). This also meant that the communities gave up the construction of earthen architectures dedicated to their respective deities and instead build ‘proper’ Hindu temples dedicated to their new caste god Valmiki (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 91-100, 104, 107, 153; Lee, 2014: 150-154).<sup>247</sup>

Similar processes of “inclusion” or Hinduisation of other impoverished and excluded communities fostered by Hindu nationalist organisations into the Hindu fold take place until date. Kanungo and Joshi, for instance, discuss the case of the strategic inclusion of Shabari, a marginal Adivasi woman in the *Ramayana* into the Hindu pantheon, by the Sangh Parivar in Dangs, Gujarat (Kanungo and Joshi, 2010). Like in

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<sup>246</sup> Jaffrelot and Zavos, for instance, point out that the Arya Samaj undid with the caste system to replace it with the older *varna* system that, like the caste system, a system of social stratification based on birth (Jaffrelot, 1993: 518, 521, 1999 [1996]: 15; Zavos, 2000: 46-48). See third chapter. With specific regard to art and visual imagery see Tartakov’s edited volume *Dalit Art and Visual Imagery* (Tartakov, 2012a). On the inclusion of communities into the Hindu fold from the perspective of Dalits see, for example, Ilaiah, 2002 [1996].

<sup>247</sup> On Valmiki see also Leslie, 2003. On the Arya Samaj and the temple entry movement see third chapter. According to Lee, the Lal Begis/Balmikis “practiced a religion uniquely their own, the cult of Lāl Beg” that fit none of the categories used in the Census (Lee, 2014: 145). While Lal Begis were listed as a sect of Sikhs in one report in other reports they were recorded as caste and as Muslim sect, as Lee says (Lee, 2014: 145). Jaffrelot, Zavos and other scholar discuss that although the hierarchies determined by the caste system were removed they were in fact replaced with another systems of social stratification (Jaffrelot, 1993: 518, 521, 1999 [1996]: 15; Zavos, 2000: 46-48; *etc.*). Lal Begis built small earthen temples dedicated to Lal Beg without any iconic or aniconic representation of their god (Prashad, 2001 [2000]:104; Lee, 2014: 146-150). According to Lee, these architectures set themselves “apart from the Hindu temple (*mandir*) and the Muslim (*masjid*)” (Lee, 2014: 148). Lee defines/identifies different types of these structures (Lee, 2014). Compare also with Ilaiah, (2002 [1996]: 71-101).

the case of Valmiki, the goddess, earlier worshipped in the form of a rugged black stone, was given a ‘proper’ shape. The new *murti* of the goddess is made out of white marble, the in North India favoured material for *murtis*. Moreover, a temple that also houses a *murti* of Ram was built for her (Kanungo and Joshi, 2010: 285-289). According to Kanungo and Joshi, however, “Shabari’s rehabilitation remains conditional and strategic. Despite elevation, she and her descendants still remain on the margins of Hinduism” (Kanungo and Joshi, 2010: 296).

As Prashad mentions, it was by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the worship of Valmiki had been formally included within the Hindu fold (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 153-154). Such processes of admission or “readmission” of the untouchables into the Hindu fold is driven by identity politics.<sup>248</sup> In context of vote bank politics, this “integration” practically increases the vote-base and enhances electoral prospects for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Similarly, conversion or “reconversion” of Muslims and Christians into Hindus (*ghar wapsi* which literally means “return home”) is driven by motivation to secure political power for BJP without which nation-building based on ideas of Hindutva cannot be realised in practical term (Kim and Singh, 2016: 62).<sup>249</sup> Interestingly, today, (some) Valmikis imagine themselves as “the real Hindus” as Hindus worship Ram through 16<sup>th</sup> century Tulsidas’ *Ramcharitmanas* and not through Valmiki’s much older *Ramayana* (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 153-154; Rajagopal, 2004 [2001]: 99). Leaving aside the impact of this on electoral politics, the case of Valmikis however indicates that this conversion has not disturbed the status quo and has not led to reorientation of caste relations. As Lutgendorf mentions, it is, for instance, claimed that the “truly ‘dirty work’ of communal massacres” has been assigned to Valmikis (Lutgendorf, 2007: 370). According to Prashad and Lee, this process of ‘conversion’ that took place during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was actively encouraged by militant Hindus, for instance, by spreading stories that framed Lal Beg as Muslim *navab* who had raped women from the “sweeper caste” (Prashad,

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<sup>248</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in the context of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the following chapter.

<sup>249</sup> The *Ghar Wapsi* campaign that was launched in 2014 aimed at Muslims, Christians and tribal population (Kim and Singh, 2016: 62). The campaign was spearheaded by BJP and prominent figures such as Adityanath. See Venugopal, 2014, 2015; Srivastava, 2014. Kim and Singh remark that most analysts believe that the campaign’s objective was “to prepare the ground for national anti-conversion legislation” (Kim and Singh, 2016: 62).



2001 [2000]: 68, 96, 153; Lee, 2014: 152).<sup>250</sup> This is also what seemingly happened in the course of the construction of the Valmiki Mandir on Mandir Marg at the fringes of the newly built Imperial capital.<sup>251</sup>

According to Prashad, around 1918, Prabhu Dayal, who had migrated from Meerut to Delhi, together with Devli Kheema and Nihal Chand established a crude structure that was most likely dedicated to Baba Shiv or Lal Beg on the spot where the Valmiki Mandir stands today (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 105-106).<sup>252</sup> In the course of time, however, activists of the Shraddhananda Dalitdhar Sabha (SDS) convinced the untouchables to worship Valmiki (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 106; Lee, 2014: 150-158).<sup>253</sup> Because the community lacked financial resources, Delhi's Hindu Mahasabha, which was around the same time constructing its headquarters in the neighbourhood, was approached to help with the construction of a temple, a room for a priest, a hall to teach children and a bath with toilet (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 106). Eventually, the Birla family (Jugal Kishore Birla), who played a significant role in the process of nation-building (as will be discussed in the third chapter), also helped sponsor the construction of the temple, which was inaugurated in 1937 (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 106).<sup>254</sup>

The Valmiki Mandir (Figure 2.17) that is placed at the end of a large compound with various facilities, consists of a comparatively small square structure that is not surmounted by a *shikhara* but, like the above-described Shivalayas, by a

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<sup>250</sup> As Lee emphasises, in order to be conceived as 'proper' Hindus, Lal Begis had to discontinue associations and practices that they shared with Muslims (Lee, 2014: 151).

<sup>251</sup> On the construction of New Delhi see, for example, Gupta, 1994; Metcalf, 1984, 1986, 1989: 211-239; Ahuja, 2016 and Mitter, 2016. See also the thesis' introduction.

<sup>252</sup> It is also possible that it was dedicated to Lal Beg but in Meerut Baba Shiv was more popular, as Prashad discusses (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 105).

<sup>253</sup> According to Prashad, the SDS was a militant Hindu organisation that was founded in 1921 (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 81, 91).

<sup>254</sup> As Lee mentions, with regard to Lucknow, Kalyan Singh, Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Ghanshyam Das Birla sponsored the construction of temples that would have been difficult to afford for low caste communities (Lee, 2014: 154). See also Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 109. The Birla family also sponsored other Valmiki Mandirs in Lucknow, the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, the Lord Buddha Mandir and the headquarters of the Hindu Mahasabha all of which are not even one kilometre away from the Valmiki Mandir. Compare with the third chapter, that discusses the role of the Birla family as patrons of temples in detail. On the Birla family see, for example, Piramal and Herdeck, 1985: 57-103; Renold, 1994; Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]; Birla, 2009 [2007] and Świerzowska, 2015.

dome. However, unlike the domes that surmount Shivalayas, the shape of this dome is not reminiscent as much of the Muslim domes as it is of the Buddhist *stupa*.<sup>255</sup> This architectural reference with Buddhist structural principles rather than with Islamic architecture is also supported with the inclusion of four *chaitya* windows. Comparing the design of the Valmiki Mandir with that of architect Sris Chandra Chatterjee's Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, the Lord Buddha Mandir and the Hindu Mahasabha, which were all sponsored by the Birla family, it is possible that the Valmiki Mandir too was designed by the same architect.<sup>256</sup>

If one visits the Valmiki Mandir which is now located in a locality known as Harijan Basti, we find that upon entering the temple one is likely to be directed by Swami Krishna Vidyarthi to begin by visiting the Valmiki Bhavan/Bapu Nivas instead. The temple authorities transformed the room in which Gandhi had lived during his stay in the colony into a museum—which consists of a sitting place, a small desk, a portable spinning wheel and a small bed with a portrait of the Mahatma—cordoning it off from visitors, ‘sanctify’ Gandhi’s presence (Figure 2.18).<sup>257</sup> As Renold and Prashad discuss in more detail, Gandhi’s stay in the temple was a political gesture (Renold, 1994: 19; Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 138).<sup>258</sup> When Gandhi decided to stay in the temple, half the residents were made to vacate their homes. Also, some of the shacks built in the vicinity of the temple were pulled down to be replaced by tiny huts. In addition, the temple was white-washed and a new path was laid (Renold, 1994: 19-20). Prashad emphasises that, contrary to his preaching, Gandhi did not accept food from the untouchables, he received most of his meals

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<sup>255</sup> Compare with Tartakov’s *Dalit Art and Visual Imagery*, in which he discusses the use of Buddhist imagery and forms by Dalits (Tartakov, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d). Compare also with the architecture used by Mayawati in Lucknow and Noida.

<sup>256</sup> On Chatterjee and his architecture see third chapter. Also Swami Krishna Vidyarthi was not sure who designed the temple. Compare with the third chapter, in which the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir’s architecture will be discussed. See also Chatterjee’s sketches in his various publications (Chatterjee, 1942, 1948, 1949). Like the above discussed temples, the Valmiki Mandir too was enhanced over the years; today, the temple is surrounded by an open pillared hall. Chopra’s *Delhi: History and Places of Interest* contains a photo capturing the temple and its architecture before 1970 (Chopra, 1970). The New Delhi Municipal Corporation occasionally gives financial contribution to the temple that is run by the Valmiki Temple Trust (Ranjan, 2014).

<sup>257</sup> According to Ranjan, these objects “bear testimony to Gandhi’s simple lifestyle” (Ranjan, 2014).

<sup>258</sup> By that time the Valmiki Mandir had already become an important institution for/of the low castes in the nearby Bhangi Colony. According to Prashad, Brijkrishen Chandiwala and Ghanshyam Das Birla had decided to locate Gandhi in this colony (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 137). See also Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 138-140.

from the Birla House (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 139).<sup>259</sup>

Besides the effects that remind of Gandhi's stay, various images have been attached to the walls for display.<sup>260</sup> Although some of these images have been provided with explanations in Hindi, Swami Krishna Vidyarthi guides visitors through the exhibition (Figure 2.19) elaborating on the significance of each of the photos, some of which capture him with high-ranking figures such as Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao as well as with the temple's latest prominent visitor, Narendra Modi. Jha adds that days before Modi's visit, the park facing the temple was ceremoniously cleaned and decorated and, the surrounding houses white-washed (Jha, 2014). Like Gandhi's visit to the temple, Modi's visit has political intent. While Gandhi wanted the nation to notice the conditions in which people (untouchables) were living in Delhi/India, Modi tried to attract the nation's attention not to the problems of the "sweeper" community as such but using their status or profession of being sanitation workers assigned by the oppressive caste-based system as a backdrop for his Swachh Bharat Abhiyan (Clean India Movement), which he launched on the day he visited the Valmiki Mandir.<sup>261</sup> While Jha reported for the *Deccan Herald* that amongst the residents of the Valmiki Colony, Modi's visit was seemingly met with disinterest, Swami Krishna Vidyarthi still commemorates Gandhi and Modi's visit to the temple's little exhibition perhaps reckoning that if not the temple itself its prominent visitors might attract attention (Jha, 2014).<sup>262</sup> Taking into account of the temple's two reviews on TripAdvisor, this might not be wrong—both reviewers/users seemingly believe that the temple's significance grew because of Modi's visit.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> As food was identified/defined as a source of pollution, the caste system prohibits higher castes from consumption of food touched by untouchables. As Prashad discusses, inter-dining was a central demand of the movement (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 99). The Birla family were great supporters of Gandhi and his cause (Renold, 1994; *etc.*). See third chapter for more details.

<sup>260</sup> Several of these images depict Valmiki. Other images of this small exhibition show scenes of Gandhi's stay at the temple with visitors such as Lord Mountbatten, Nehru and Sardar Patel.

<sup>261</sup> The campaign was launched on October 2, 2014.

<sup>262</sup> Ramesh Kuar Khiri, for instance, comments Modi's visit as follows: "From Mahatma Gandhi to Arvind Kejriwal to Modi, all have come and gone but our fate has seen any change" (Ramesh Kumar Khiri, retired civic official quoted in Jha, 2014).

<sup>263</sup> See [www.tripadvisor.co.za/Attraction\\_Review-g304551-d9745532-Reviews-Pracheen\\_Bhagwan\\_Valmiki\\_Mandir-New\\_Delhi\\_National\\_Capital\\_Territory\\_of\\_Delhi.html#REVIEWS](http://www.tripadvisor.co.za/Attraction_Review-g304551-d9745532-Reviews-Pracheen_Bhagwan_Valmiki_Mandir-New_Delhi_National_Capital_Territory_of_Delhi.html#REVIEWS). TripAdvisor runs an online platform that hosts information on hotels, restaurants and places-to-see based on 'reviews' written by its users. Unlike long-established guides, such as the Michelin Guide, which rates sites according to strictly defined criteria, at TripAdvisor's website each and every one rates sites according to their personal experience/perception. However, millions of people turn to the website.

Similarly, in a *Daily News and Analysis* article titled “Balmiki Mandir: Bapu’s Forgotten Address in Delhi,” the reporter Ranjan, neither discusses the temple’s religious significance nor its meaning as a space for community, but, stresses on the significance of Gandhi’s stay (Ranjan, 2014).<sup>264</sup> In short, despite the Balmikis’ claim that Delhi’s Valmiki Mandir is the most famous temple dedicated to Valmiki, the temple attracts little attention; also Gandhi’s stay at the temple and other political leaders’ visits did not change the fact that other Hindus almost never worship at Valmiki temples (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 104, 110).<sup>265</sup>

This lack of mass following or only a certain marginal section of Hindus following the Valmiki Mandir contrasts sharply with that found less than a kilometre away, at the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir—ranked after Akshardham as one of Delhi’s most popular (religious and tourist) destinations.<sup>266</sup> The Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir was not only like the Valmiki Mandir sponsored by the Birla family, but its construction also falls in the same period; Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir’s foundation stone was laid on March 26, 1933 and inaugurated on March 18, 1939. Unlike the Valmiki Mandir with its humble architecture, the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir’s architecture has no comparison. As will be discussed in the third chapter in detail, the creators of the temple wanted to raise a monument for *all* (Hindu) Indians in the then Imperial capital. Notably, the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir deviated from the design of Delhi’s ‘traditional’ temple that—as discussed above—blends in with the city’s architecture-scape and does not feature a *shikhara*—instead, the temple features not one but three towering *shikharas* that have been arranged in one line, contributing to the temple’s unusual width.<sup>267</sup> Photographs taken in the 1940s capture

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<sup>264</sup> According to Prashad, some people have suggested that some untouchables were already living here but this is not proven (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 105).

<sup>265</sup> On June 1, 2017, rated by the two mentioned reviewers/users the Valmiki Mandir ranked 272 on TripAdvisor’s list of *422 Things to do in Delhi*. See [www.tripadvisor.co.za/Attraction\\_Review-g304551-d9745532-Reviews-Pracheen\\_Bhagwan\\_Valmiki\\_Mandir-New\\_Delhi\\_National\\_Capital\\_Territory\\_of\\_Delhi.html#REVIEWS](http://www.tripadvisor.co.za/Attraction_Review-g304551-d9745532-Reviews-Pracheen_Bhagwan_Valmiki_Mandir-New_Delhi_National_Capital_Territory_of_Delhi.html#REVIEWS).

<sup>266</sup> See guidebooks such as Chopra, 1970: 161; Horton, et al., 2002: 107; Singh, 2011: 137; Brown, et al. 2008: 101 and Betts and McCulloch, 2014: 38-39. On January 21, 2017, the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir ranked twenty on TripAdvisor’s list of *405 Things to do in New Delhi* ([www.tripadvisor.in/Attraction\\_Review-g304551-d324101-Reviews-Birla\\_Mandir\\_Temple\\_Lakshmi\\_Narayan-New\\_Delhi\\_National\\_Capital\\_Territory\\_of\\_Delhi.html](http://www.tripadvisor.in/Attraction_Review-g304551-d324101-Reviews-Birla_Mandir_Temple_Lakshmi_Narayan-New_Delhi_National_Capital_Territory_of_Delhi.html)).

<sup>267</sup> Textbook temples such as the Kandariya Mahadev Mandir and the Lakshmana Mandir in Khajuraho as well as the Sun Temple in Modhera feature only one *shikhara* and a longitudinal design. Compare, for example, with Kramrisch, 1946: 212, 255 and Huntington, 1999 [1985]: 478, 486.

the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir rising majestically in the surrounding landscape. However, the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir became most famous for having been inaugurated by Mahatma Gandhi on the condition that it would be open to *all* Hindus.<sup>268</sup> That the temple is open to *all Hindus* including untouchables (Dalits) has not only been emphasised at its inauguration but also in various plaques embedded into the temple's exterior walls.<sup>269</sup> Bringing into discussion the social history of the untouchables, Prashad questions:

Why did the Birlas spend a fair sum of money on a temple not a mile away from one of the biggest temples in north India, the Laxmi Narayan Temple? (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 105).

According to Prashad, it is likely that the Birlas, who came to the Valmiki Mandir only on special occasions, supported the construction of the same with the intention that it would prevent the untouchables from frequently coming to the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 105). Prashad's wager that the inclusion of the untouchables into the Hindu fold was on facile grounds, finds affirmation in what Jaffrelot and Zavos have observed concerning the Arya Samaj and its policies (Jaffrelot, 1993: 518, 521, 1999 [1996]: 15; Zavos, 2000: 46-48).<sup>270</sup>

However, in the context of this chapter and its objective, it should be highlighted that in the hands of the nationalist and Hindu nationalist movement, the Hindu temple is viewed as a signifier for Hindu identity and Hindu-ness. Arguably, this notion also becomes evident in the Arya Samaj's line of ideological agenda.<sup>271</sup> While the Arya Samaj rejected several (orthodox) Hindu customs, such as polytheism, elaborate rituals and the Brahmin priests, it did not reject or give up the Hindu (Arya) temple (Figure 2.20) as a physical structure (Singh, 1972: 63-64; Jones, 1976: 32,

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<sup>268</sup> See also unknown author, n.d.: 31; Gopal, 193-: 70; Caturvedi, 1982: 45-46; Horton, et al., 2002: 107; Brown, et al., 2008: 101; Birla, 2009 [2007]: 367; Brosius, 2010: 212; Austen Soofi, 2010; unknown author, 2011; Kudelska, et al., 2014: 42; Jain, 2017: S20; *etc.*

<sup>269</sup> See third chapter.

<sup>270</sup> Compare with third chapter.

<sup>271</sup> The Arya Samaj, founded in 1878 by Dayanada Saraswati, is today considered as one of the most significant organisations of its time (Singh, 1972: 65). For more details on the Arya Samaj see, for example, Farquhar, 1915: 101-129; Jones, 1976, 1986: 335-337, 2006 [1989]: 95-103, 192-199; Jaffrelot, 1993: 518-520, 1999 [1996]: 13-17; Zavos, 2000: 44-50; Smith, 2002: 33, 2003: 38; Jain, 2009: 218; *etc.* For more information see also the third chapter.

2006 [1989]: 97; Zavos, 2000: 49; *etc.*).<sup>272</sup> In fact, as Zavos says, the Arya Samaj Mandir has become the “basic institutional unit of the Arya Samaj; the focal point of each branch organization [...]” (Zavos, 2000: 49).<sup>273</sup> Further, with regard to the question of *what is a Hindu temple* or *what defines a Hindu temple*, the example of the Arya Samaj Mandir is significant as it counters a common definition of the Hindu temple that associates the temple with a *murti*. Kakar, for instance, says:

The Hindu temple like the Hindu religion is a fluid concept where the notion of a temple can be applied both to architectural and non-architectural ritualized spaces created around the *murti* (Kakar, 2009: 394).

While Kakar’s definition might hold true for the majority of Hindu temples, it does not have any bearing on Arya Samaj temples. Having abolished certain practices mentioned earlier, the Arya Samaj also eliminated idol worship (Singh, 1972: 64; Jones, 1976: 32, 2006 [1989]: 97; *etc.*). At the same time, Arya Samaj temples such as the Arya Samaj Mandir on Mandir Marg and, the Arya Samaj Mandir in Green Park, feature a *shikhara* although they do not house *murtis*.<sup>274</sup>

When Prashad refers to the construction of a Valmiki Mandir on land claimed by a Muslim community, he states temple-building to be a political means with a “strong anti-Muslim tendency” (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 109). As the third chapter discusses in detail, since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Hindu temple and its architecture have become focal points of the Hindu nationalist narrative. This also finds expression in the case of the Somnath Mandir (Gujarat). As the nationalist narrative emphasises, the temple had been destroyed by Muslim rulers and rebuilt by Hindus several times. Hence, the construction of a new Somnath Mandir became a central agenda in the early years of the newly formed nation-state (Munshi, 1965

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<sup>272</sup> See third chapter.

<sup>273</sup> Jones mentions: “Opposition mounted as the newly converted [Arya Samajists] threw their idols into the Ravi River or publicly smashed them in the local bazaars” (Jones, 1976: 36). In 1926, Arya Samaj leader Shradhanand was assassinated, followed by attacks on the Arya Samaj and their temples (Jones, 2006 [1989]: 196). However, until date, no research has been undertaken on Arya Samaj with regard to its architecture. As Zavos says, the temple became a “meeting house” where all regular activities, such as the weekly service, were held (Zavos, 2000: 49). The temple was also venue for the Arya Samaj committee meetings, marriage ceremonies and classes (Zavos, 2000: 49).

<sup>274</sup> Compare with third chapter. K.M. Munshi in *Somanatha: The Eternal Shrine* notes that the new temple was built on the ruins of the destroyed temple (Munshi, 1965 [1951]; Caturvedi, 1982: 11-12; Van der Veer, 1992: 93-94; Davis, 1997: 186-221; Smith, 2002: 40; Thapar, 2005; *etc.*).

[1951]; Caturvedi, 1982: 11; Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 283-284; *etc.*). On November 12, 1947, Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel India's first Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs declared that each and every Indian should shoulder responsibility for the construction of Somnath Mandir (Caturvedi, 1982: 11; Van der Veer, 1992: 90). After Patel's proclamation, a trust was formed, whose members included Jam Saheb of Jamnagar, Samaldas Gandhi, K.M. Munshi, N.V. Gadil, D.B. Rege and Brajmohan Birla, to overlook the construction of the temple that was built at an estimate cost of three crore rupees (Patel quoted in Caturvedi, 1982: 11; Patel quoted in Van der Veer, 1992: 90, 93; Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 284, 293; *etc.*).<sup>275</sup> This 'national project' was assigned to the traditional Gujarat-based architect Prabhashankar Sompura propelling the Sompuras as well as the "traditional-style" temple into the national and international arena—Prabhashankar Sompura's descendants, Chandrakant Sompura built prestigious temples such as Birla Mandirs in Gwalior, Nagda and Kalyan, as well as Gandhinagar's Akshardham and the Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden, London (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 284, 293; Scriver and Srivastava, 2015: 314; Inglis, 2016: 7, *etc.*).<sup>276</sup>

Deviating from the modern design of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, Prabhashankar Sompura designed this new temple "on the pattern of Chalukya architecture with a seven storey *Kailash mahameru prasada*", as Kudaisya says (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 284).<sup>277</sup> According to Caturvedi, the construction of the Somnath Mandir signals the revival of the Hindu temple (Caturvedi, 1982: 11). Moreover, Caturvedi emphasises it as the most significant Hindu temple built after eight hundred years of suppression, making it an epitome of the Hindus/Indians' liberation from foreign rule—Muslim and British (Caturvedi, 1982: 11-12).<sup>278</sup> In

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<sup>275</sup> According to Van der Veer, the government did not directly spend money but supported the project (Van der Veer, 1992: 93).

<sup>276</sup> On the Sompura family see Inglis, 2016. Chandra and Inglis emphasise Prabhashankar Sompura's role with regard to art historical writing (Chandra, 1983: 34-35; Inglis, 2016). The Birla family hired his descendants for the construction of few of their temples such as the Vivasvan (Surya) Mandir in Gwalior. See third chapter. Also Akshardham was built by Sompuras. See fifth chapter.

<sup>277</sup> Compare also with Caturvedi, who discusses the architecture in more detail (Caturvedi, 1982: 11-12).

<sup>278</sup> Until date, a similar rhetoric is used. In November 2014, VHP's leader Ashok Singhal frames Modi's victory of the general election in the historical context of Prithviraj Chauhan's defeat: "Eight hundred years after it (power in Delhi) went away from Prithviraj Chauhan, it did not come back into the hands of a proud Hindu. It has happened after 800 years" (Singhal quoted in Vikram, 2014).

other words, the Somnath Mandir-building was considered a project of nation-building and an object of national honor.<sup>279</sup> The Somnath Mandir, today run by the Shree Somnath Trust consisting of Keshubhai Patel, Narendra Modi, P.K. Laheri, L.K. Advani, Amit Shah, Jivan Parmar and Harshavardhan Neotia features a sound-and-light show that attracts hundreds daily (Narain, 2008). Narain reports in *LiveMint* that in five years of the temple's opening, the number of visitors increased from hundred to five-hundred thousand, as did the temple's revenue—from two crores to ten crore rupees (Narain, 2008).

It is against this historical backdrop that the Hindu temple is seen as a symbolic marker of the resurgence of (Hindu) Indian community; perhaps comparable with the conceptualization of a national flag in the process of nation-building.<sup>280</sup> It is thus not by chance that, in September 1990, the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party, Lal Krishna Advani started a 'Ram Rath Yatra' demanding the building of the Ram Janmabhumi Mandir in Ayodhya, the Krishna Janmabhumi Mandir in Mathura and the Kashi Vishwanath Mandir in Varanasi (Davis, 1996: 43; Nandy, et al., 1997 [1995]: 40; Smith, 2002: 40, 2003: 194; Rajagopal, 2004 [2001]: 285-286; 288; Jaffrelot, 2007: 279-298; *etc.*). However, this demand was different from the building of the Somnath Mandir in that it necessitated the demolition of mosques built on the respective sites (Smith, 2002: 40). Davis emphasises that the VHP and Sangh Hinduism do not intend to be *another* religious formation but propounds that Ram's "historical and current claims to be devotional allegiance of all Hindus is singular and unique" (Davis, 1996: 52-53). For the VHP and other right-wing organisations, the new Ram temple will not only be a symbol of liberation but also one of "an encompassing synthesis of all Hinduism into a single organized entity", as Davis says (Davis, 1996: 52-53). This idea has also been emphasised by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which claims that "Hindutva is a unifying principle which alone can preserve the unity and integrity of our nation" (BJP, 1996: 256).<sup>281</sup> In its 1996 Manifesto, BJP promises it voters:

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<sup>279</sup> Compare with Rajagopal, 2004 [2001]: 193.

<sup>280</sup> Compare with Elgenius, who discusses the origin of European national flags in the context of nation-building (Elgenius, 2007).

<sup>281</sup> In its 1996 Manifesto, the BJP also assures that it supports the abolishment of untouchability pointing out that the first brick of the Ram Janmabhumi Mandir was laid by "a member of the Scheduled Castes" (BJP, 1996: 298).



[o]n coming to power, the BJP government will facilitate the construction of a magnificent Shri Rama Mandir at Janmasthan in Ayodhya which will be a tribute to *Bharat Mata*. This dream moves millions of people in our land; the concept of Rama lies at the core of their consciousness (BJP, 1996: 256-257).

In 1998, almost six years after the demolition of the Babri Masjid, Vishva Hindu Parishad's President Ashok Singhal was confident that the construction of the Ram Janmabhumi would start within two years but until date the stones—that are since long prepared—are patiently waiting for the Supreme Court's verdict in the long-standing Ram Janmabhumi-Babri Masjid dispute (Ramakrishnan, 1998; Mukerji and Uprety, 1998).<sup>282</sup> Thus, once again, in 2014, the BJP promised that when in power it will “explore all possibilities within the framework of the constitution to facilitate the construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya” (BJP, 2014: 41). However, after Modi's and the BJP's electoral victory, it appears that they are moving closer to this mission.

In this context of the demolition of the Babri Masjid, scholars such as Jaffrelot and Lutgendorf have discussed in greater detail, the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) founded a youth wing named Bajrang Dal (Hanuman's Army) that introduced young Hindu men to right-wing ideology (Davis, 1996: 47-48; Jaffrelot, 1999 [1996]: 363, 429-430; Bhatt, 2001: 199-201; Smith, 2002: 40; Lutgendorf, 2007: 367-370). On December 6, 1992, the Bajrang Dal converged with the Shiv Sena (Army of Shiva) and other similar organisations/individuals in Ayodhya where they demolished the Babri Masjid and unleashed a wave of violent outbreaks throughout the country (Jain, 2001: 206; Rajagopal, 2004 [2001]; Jaffrelot, 2007: 279-298; Lutgendorf, 2007: *etc.*). As Prashad mentions, identifying themselves as ‘proper’ Hindus and being promised the construction of a Valmiki Mandir within the Ram Janmabhumi Mandir, members of Delhi's Valmiki community also took part in the demolition of the mosque (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: x, xiii-xiv, 166; Lutgendorf, 2007: 368-371).<sup>283</sup>

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<sup>282</sup> In accordance with the the by Chandrakhant Sompura whose grandfather Prabhashankar Sompura built Somnath and who himself built high profile temples such as BAPS' Akshardham in Gandhinagar and BAPS' Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden, London (Ramakrishnan, 1998; Mukerji and Uprety, 1998; Singh, 2010: 74; *etc.*).

<sup>283</sup> Compare also with Davis, 1996: 38.

## TEMPLE-BUILDING IN DELHI AFTER 1947

Energised by the independence movement, India was devoted to building a new nation. In this context, “establishing an ‘Indian identity’ became an important political and aesthetic agenda” to the government of the newly formed nation-state (Menon, 2000: 148). Under the leadership of India’s first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, the government became India’s principle patron of architecture commissioning projects such as the construction of model cities such as Chandigarh (Lang, et al., 1997: 187-189; Menon, 2000: 148-151; Brown, 2009b; Lang, 2010 [2002]: 59-90; Prakash, 2010; Bansal and Kochupillai, 2013: 88-97; Scriver and Srivastava, 2015: 127-170; *etc.*). Thereby, like colonial patrons of architecture, clinging on to the premises that architecture is a signifier of identity, Nehru and the architects of the new nation-state paid close attention to the question of style and what truly constitutes a “national architecture.”<sup>284</sup> There was an overt effort by the government to create “a new ‘Indian’ architecture by looking either further into the past or into the future”, as Menon emphasises (Menon, 2000: 148).<sup>285</sup> Citing the Ashok Hotel and the Headquarters of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) as prime examples of the same, Menon says that the debate resulted “in two styles [Revivalist and International Style] of architecture being built in Delhi” (Menon, 2003).<sup>286</sup> Kuldip Singh, Raj Rewal, Charles Correa, Joseph Allen Stein and other renowned architects dotted Delhi with modern landmarks such as the Palika Kendra on Sansad Marg, the State Trading Corporation on Tolstoy Marg (CP), the Jeevan Bharti on Parliament Street (CP) and the India Habitat Centre in Lodhi Colony.<sup>287</sup> To date, these architectures remain *exceptional* examples of architectures in the backdrop of the ever-expanding city dominated by urban mass housing projects such as RK Puram, Sarjoni Nagar, Lajpat Nagar, *etc.* From the 1950s onwards, Delhi’s government undertook massive development projects in Delhi providing facilities for the constant influx of people from across India’s states (Menon, 2000, 2003; Nath, 2007; Bansal

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<sup>284</sup> In March 1959, the Lalit Kala Akademi organised a Seminar on Architecture that was held at Vigyan Bhavan and was attended by private and government architects, politicians and policy makers to discuss this and related issues (Kanvinde, 1959). See also Menon, 2003 and Brown, 2009b. See also Lang, et al., 1997: 187-189 and Mehrotra, et al., 2009: 212-213.

<sup>285</sup> See also Menon, 2003 and Brown, 2009b. Compare also with Ahuja and Mitter, 2016.

<sup>286</sup> See also Brown, 2009b. For more details on these buildings see, for example, Bansal and Kochupillai, 2013.

<sup>287</sup> For more details about these architectures and Delhi see, for example, Menon, 2000, 2003; Brown, 2009b; Khanna, 2008; and Bansal and Kochupillai, 2013.

and Kochupillai, 2013: 89-90).<sup>288</sup> Sponsored by a government that was functioning through a Soviet-inspired centralised planned economy as a model, which curtailed the scope of creativity these colonies lack architectural imagination, as Menon argues (Menon, 2000: 150-151). In another drive, reacting against this “regimen of austerity”, the rich created their own architectures and architectural style that the architect Gautam Bhatia describes as “the story of conflicting aspirations—where personal, national, regional and international identities *clash* with each other” (Menon, 2000: 151; Bhatia, 2001; italics added).<sup>289</sup> At the same time, contrasting the style of these modern architectures (including the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir) and, drawing inspiration from the ‘traditionalist’/ancient/regional styles of temple building taken by the Somnath Mandir, a number of temples in the city began to feature “traditional” architectural styles.<sup>290</sup> These include the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir (Figure 4.1) (RK Puram), the Durga Mandir (Figure 2.21) (RK Puram), the Ayyappa Mandir (Figure 2.22) (RK Puram), the Jagannath Mandir (Figure 2.23) (Hauz Khas), Devi Kamakshi Mandir (Figure 4.4) (Aruna Asaf Ali Marg), Kali Bari Mandir (Figure 2.24) (CR Park), Vaikuntha Mandir (Ber Sarai), Venkateswara Balaji Mandir (Figure 2.25) (RK Puram) and the Swaminarayan Mandir (Figure 2.26) (near Akshardham). Notably, none of the creators of these temple paid great attention to the “clash” architectural styles (and thus presumably identities) in their temples but designed them in an “authentic” and “pure” style that is never selected arbitrarily but with reference to a specific region, in the community’s respective ‘homeland.’<sup>291</sup>

These temples share the common fact that they were constructed by communities not *native* to Delhi but, who moved to the city at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century or later.<sup>292</sup> The construction of these temples is usually a symbolic outcome of a continuing process of community formation; that is, a small group of people with similar geographic, religious, socio-economic and linguistic backgrounds

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<sup>288</sup> On the growth of Delhi’s population see, for example, Dupont, 2000: 230. As mentioned in the introduction of the thesis, the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) expects a growth of the NCTD’s population from approximately fourteen million in 2001 to twenty-three million in 2021 (Singh, 2007: 18-19).

<sup>289</sup> Bhatia has coined terms such as Chandni Chowk Chippendale, Tamil Tiffany, Early Halwai, Akali Folly, Marwari Mannerism, Punjabi Baroque, Bania Gothic, Anglo-Indian Rococo, *etc.* for these architectures (Bhatia, 2001).

<sup>290</sup> See Menon, 1997: 27.

<sup>291</sup> Compare with Hodges’ theory discussed in the first chapter.

<sup>292</sup> See fourth chapter.

meeting in Delhi and to begin with celebrate festivals together. Some of these groups establish a small temporary architecture that transformed into a full-fledged temple with the sufficient human and financial means, such as the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir in RK Puram. Often, these temples feature not only a temple but a range of other facilities such as a library, wedding hall, kitchen, guesthouse, *etc.*<sup>293</sup> This process of place-making seems to be generally understood as a process of creating a home and community away from home.<sup>294</sup>

Looking at the temples that were built in Delhi after the Independence/Partition, it is striking that many of these communities/Trusts considered it appropriate to employ *sthapatis*/traditional architects from their respective ‘home’ to create a symbolic structure in Delhi to mark their presence—that is, to build temples which are similar to temples in the ‘homeland.’<sup>295</sup> Depending on the political clout of the community’s financial support—some of these temples such as the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir were built with state support. Many of these temples were thus built from stone quarried and prepared at ‘home’ that was then transported across the country to be assembled in Delhi.<sup>296</sup> Owing to the initiative of

<sup>293</sup> Besides, the Trusts also organise weekly meetings and other activities.

<sup>294</sup> Compare with Eck, 2000: 221. Compare also with McDuie-Ra’s discussion of Northeast migrants in Delhi (McDuie-Ra, 2012a, 2012b). See also fourth chapter. See also [www.dakshindelhalibari.com/about-history.asp](http://www.dakshindelhalibari.com/about-history.asp), <http://ayyappatempledelhi.org/about-us/history> and <http://kalimandircrpark.org/mandir-history.html>.

<sup>295</sup> Hauz Khas’ Jagannath Mandir, for example, was built by “masons from Nayagarh, Orissa” (<http://www.shrijagannathmandirdelhi.in/aboutus.html>). The Ayyappa Mandir in RK Puram was designed by the Kanippayyurs and twenty-five sculptors from Kerala “*in accordance* with the Chera Style of temple architecture followed in Kerala” (<http://ayyappatempledelhi.org/about-us/history/>; italics added). As will be discussed in the fourth chapter the temples of the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir were built by V. Ganapathi Sthapati, S.M. Ganapati Sthapati and his younger brother Muthiah Sthapati (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-). Presumably BAPS’ Swaminarayan Mandir was built by Sompuras from Gujarat. Compare with fifth chapter.

<sup>296</sup> According to Kramrisch, the *Mayamata* says that stone “should be used for temples and is allowed to Brāhmaṇas, Kṣatriyas and heretics (pāṣaṇḍin) but one should not use it for Vaiśyas, and Śūdras” (Kramrisch, 1946:113). “The attitude of the ‘Viṣṇudharmottara’ is different. White stones are assigned there to the Brāhmaṇas, red ones to the Kṣatriyas, yellow to the Vaiśyas and black ones to the Śūdras (Pt. III. ch. XC. 2), in exact imitation of the colour of the soil as it is fit for the respective castes” (Kramrisch, 1946: 113). The Jagannath Mandir’s *murti* was made in Puri (<http://www.shrijagannathmandirdelhi.in/aboutus.html>). The stone of Malai Mandir’s *murti* was cut from the bed of the Tamraparni river and sculpted by Ganapathi Sthapati (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 22-24). In “My Hanuman is Bigger Than Yours,” Lutgendorf describes how a 45 foot high granite image of *Hanuman* weighing some 1,300 tons that has been sculpted in Mangalore was sent to Delhi (Lutgendorf, 1994: 211-212, 2007: 3-34). The Ayyappa Mandir was built out of stone from Bharathapuzha (Kerala) (<http://ayyappatempledelhi.org/>). As will be discussed in the fifth chapter, BAPS too gives much meaning to the question of where its stone comes from. Usually the stone is prepared in workshops near the quarry before being sent to the construction site.

these communities, Delhi's temple-scape consists of a unique constellation of temples that look distinct from each other, as these temples are "replications" of temples in Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Bengal, Orissa, Kumaon, *etc.* As in the case of the Valmiki Mandir, such temples too, are dedicated not to 'common' deities, such as Shiva and Vishnu, but to a particular god/goddess (or forms of god/goddess) such as Ayyappa, Jagannath, Subramanya, Swaminarayan and Kali, deities by and large worshipped by specific communities. However, considering that many people chose temples "mainly on the basis of what they had heard about their deities and the efficacy of the prayers offered there [...] combined with the look and the feel of the temple", it cannot be ruled out that these outstanding temples and thus their god/goddess attract new followers.<sup>297</sup> For Menon these temples are:

pale imitations of ancient monuments sitting anachronistically in a new cultural landscape, unable to emulate the spirit that spurred the past, and unwilling to come to terms with the forces fuelling the future (Menon, 1997: 27).

However, they acquire a reputation of being popular landmarks that attract people from across the city. Against the backdrop of Delhi's concrete-scape, temples such as the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir, the Kali Mandir (CR Park) and Akshardham built out of stone and featuring idyllic park-like environments, also take the role of being a small sanctuaries to which one can escape from the hectic, unfriendly and hostile city.<sup>298</sup>

At a time when communities rely on traditional architects to build an "authentic" temple in 21<sup>st</sup> century Delhi, very few communities are open to building modern temples—thus handing over the responsibility of design to modern architects.<sup>299</sup> The Dakshin Delhi Kalibari Trust, for instance, employed the Delhi-

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<sup>297</sup> As scholar such as Eck, Kurien, Vande Berg and Kniss discuss, as the ISKCON temples were among the first Hindu temples built in the United States of America they attracted many migrant Hindus (Eck, 2000: 229; Kurien, 2007: 47; Vande Berg and Kniss, 2008; *etc.*). See also Bhardwaj and Rao, 1998: 129-130.

<sup>298</sup> Vidal, Tarlo and Dupont have discussed Delhi as city "that nobody loves" (Vidal, Tarlo and Dupont, 2000: 16). This image of the city has been reinforced in the last years, especially since the 2012 Delhi gang rape. According to the Secretary of the Chittaranjan Park Kali Mandir Society, the Kali Mandir in CR Park was built by the architect Partha Gosh.

<sup>299</sup> In pre-colonial times, within the caste system, the task to design/built temples had been assigned to the *sthapatis*. In the course of colonialism technical schools were established to train students. Institutes such as Bombay's J.J. School of Art, established in 1857, not only taught students about

based architects Sumit and Suchitra Ghosh, who built, for example, the Talkatora Pool for the Asian Games of 1982, to build for them, the Dakshin Kalibari Mandir (Figure 2.27) on the foot of the hillock crowned by the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir's Subramanya temple. However, as discussed on the architects' website, when Sumit and Suchitra Ghosh were asked by the trust of the Dakshin Delhi Kalibari Mandir "to *replicate* the Dakshineshwar temple" they refused to do so saying "give us the Ganges and we will give you Dakshineshwar".<sup>300</sup> As these modern architects emphasise, instead of replicating the temple they were interested in "reinventing the traditional temple form" (www.sghosh.com; italics added).<sup>301</sup> According to them, this task "was taken up in the explorations of the form of the shikhara in reinforced conoid shells". And, the temple's *garbhagraha* is "designed in traditional architectural style using the 'bengal roof'" (www.sghosh.com). Because of its architecture, the temple has been mentioned in various books on India's modern architecture and was listed by INTACH on *A Tentative List of Post-Independence Buildings to be Notified as Modern Heritage Buildings of Delhi*. However, it does not seem to attract the same number of people the neighbouring Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir does.<sup>302</sup>

The second temple mentioned in publications such as *The Modern Architecture of New Delhi* and *Architectural Guide Delhi* is the Sri Sri Radha Parthasarathi Mandir in Delhi's East of Kailash (Figure 2.28) built by the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) (Khanna, 2008: 170-173;

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Western techniques to produce art and architecture but *what is art/architecture*. On brief overview on architectural education in India see, for example, Lang, et al., Glover and Parimoo (Lang, et al., 1997: 138-146; Glover, 2012; Parimoo, 2015; etc.). However, largely owing to the revivalist movement at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and constructions such as the Somnath Mandir, (some) traditional architects found a place in the context of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. On *sthapatis* see, for example, MacRae, 2004.

<sup>300</sup> See www.sghosh.com; italics added. *Dakshin* can be translated from Hindi into English as "South." *Kalibari* can be translated from Bengali into English as "abode/home of *Kali*."

<sup>301</sup> In the course of modernity, the image/conceptualisation of the *architect* was re-defined/re-imagined—the architect not as a craftsman/labourer/worker/etc. who (merely) executes instructions but as an *artist* who *creates* (Conway and Roenisch, 1995 [1994]: 13-17). As Bonnet discusses, since Antiquity and Renaissance and even more so since the beginning of Modernity, the *artist* has been imagined as *creator* (Bonnet, 2004: 98-142).

<sup>302</sup> For other readings of the Dakshin Kali Bari Mandir and its architecture, see, for example, Lang, et al., 1997: 269-270 and Lang, 2010 [2002]: 124. The temple provides several other facilities such as a *dharamshala*, a library and a party/conference hall. On the temple's history see <http://www.dakshindelhikalibari.com/about-history.asp>. See Menon, 1997: 26; Mukerji and Basu, 2011, 2015; Bansal and Kochupillai, 2013: 179. In 2013, INTACH compiled a list of sixty-two buildings in Delhi that should be recognised by the government as heritage sites. The ISKCON Mandir too has been included in this list. See for example <https://architexturez.net/pst/az-cf-123574-1387520172>.

Bansal and Kochupillai, 2013: 227). What makes ISKCON an interesting study, particularly in the context of identity, is that the organisation was not founded within the geographical, socio-economic, cultural, linguistic, *etc.* boundaries of India (as others which today are significant organisations such as the Arya Samaj, the Ramakrishna Mission and BAPS) but in the United States of America, initially attracting young white Americans promoting Hindu religion, liturgy, art, *etc.*<sup>303</sup> Sent by his *guru* Bhaktisiddhanta Saraswati to spread Vaishnavism in the world, Prabhupada travelled in 1965 to the United States, where he soon found followers to establish ISKCON in 1966 in New York (Rochford, 1991 [1985]: 10; Knott, 1997; Eck, 2000: 228-229; Vande Berg and Kniss, 2008; *etc.*). While Prabhupada's teachings initially attracted young white Americans, the Krishna temples that ISKCON established within five years of its foundation in thirty cities throughout the US, attracted many immigrant Indians—some of whom continue to visit these temples (Eck, 2000: 229; Kurien, 2007: 47; Vande Berg and Kniss, 2008; *etc.*).<sup>304</sup> In the 1970s, Prabhupada travelled several times accompanied by some of his followers to India where he established temples in Mayapur, Mumbai and Vrindavan. According to Rochford,

[w]ithin a decade Prabhupada and his disciples had established a worldwide movement with several thousand committed members and over seventy-five ISKCON communities and preaching centers around the globe (Rochford, 1991 [1985]: 10).

Though the organisation was on the wane in the 1980s, it is since the late 1990s that ISKCON established numerous temples throughout India attracting people from surrounding areas (Vande Berg and Kniss, 2008; *etc.*). According to its website, today ISKCON has millions of congregational members, around five hundred major centres, temples and rural communities around the world (<http://iskcon50.org/about-iskcon/>).<sup>305</sup> However, unlike organisations such as the Ramakrishna Mission and

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<sup>303</sup> Compare with Eck, 2000: 229. See also the following chapter. According to orthodox Hindus, conversion to Hinduism is not possible; one is born a Hindu. Thus, White ISKCON followers have not been allowed to enter the Jagannath Mandir in Puri.

<sup>304</sup> As in the case with contemporary temple architecture, scholars have discussed ISKCON in the context of America and other countries but little in the context of India.

<sup>305</sup> Compare also with [http://centres.iskcon.org/centres/?search\\_keywords=&search\\_region=27&search\\_categories%5B%5D=7&search\\_context=2](http://centres.iskcon.org/centres/?search_keywords=&search_region=27&search_categories%5B%5D=7&search_context=2). Among the most impressive temples and architectures that ISKCON has built in India are the Sri Sri Radha Govind Dham Mandir in Ahmedabad, the Sri Sri Radha Parthasarathi Mandir in Delhi, the Sri Radha Krishna-Chandra Mandir in Bengaluru, the Sri Sri Radha Krishna Mandir in Chennai and the New Vedic Cultural

Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) that have invented their own architectural designs or styles, ISKCON's temples appear to have little in common with each other with regard to their design.<sup>306</sup>

Like many other contemporary Hindu temples, Delhi's Sri Sri Radha Parthasarathi Mandir features three high *shikharas* that can be seen from the nearby Lotus Temple for it was built on a natural elevation in Delhi's East of Kailash. However, the architect Achyut Kanvinde who is known for having introduced the modern architecture in India breaks the 'typical' norm of axial alignment of three *shikharas* that can be seen in temples such as at Delhi's Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir and BAPS' Swaminarayan Mandirs. Instead of following this axial model, Kanvinde's arranges the three *shikharas* in his *avatar* of the temple around an octagonal-shaped *mandapa*, in which devotees could gather during *aarti*. The three *shikharas*—of which the central one is higher than the two outer ones—are the most significant architectural feature of the temple. However, following the principles of modern architecture, Kanvinde maintains the curvilinear shape featured in many temples but rejects lavish ornamentation. Owing to modern construction methods and materials, Kanvinde's version of the *shikhara* is hollow inside. The complex that was inaugurated in 1998 by the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, houses not only a temple but also a multimedia centre called Glory of India Vedic Cultural Centre that consists of a walk-through passage with numerous dioramas and videos intending to educate visitor on moral and ethical values and spread awareness of ISKCON through easily comprehensible features. Although the temples discussed above are very different in their architecture, the common binding feature is that they hold on to the 'typical' architectural structure of the Hindu temple—the *shikhara* and the

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Center in Pune.

<sup>306</sup> According to Mehrotra the ISKCON temple in Bengaluru combines traditional South Indian temple forms with modern forms and materials (Mehrotra, 2011: 278-281). The Sri Sri Radha Parthasarathi Mandir's modern/non-traditional Delhi-based architect Achyut Kanvinde known for having introduced the modern movement into India, however, "incorporates the historical curvilinear towers (*shikhara*) that are typical of temples in Orissa", as for instance Bansal and Kochupillai say (Bansal and Kochupillai, 2013: 227). Compare also with Lang, et al., 1997: 208; Menon, 1997: 27; Khanna, 2008:170-173; Lang, 2010 [2002]: 168 and Basu and Mukerji, 2015. For more details on the temple as well as on Kanvinde see ISKCON, 1994; Lang, et al., 1997: 208; Khanna, 2008: 170-173 and Lang, 2010 [2002]: 168. Sumit Ghosh designed the interior of the temple. According to Khanna, "[a]lthough made to look like an ancient temple, the ISKCON Temple is a modern building" and emphasises that Kanvinde "inventively used an RCC [Reinforced Cement Concert] framed structure that *duplicates* the *traditional* form of the shikhara [...]" (Khanna, 2008: 171; italics added).



## THE SPECTACULAR TEMPLE AS AN ATTRACTION

Jhandewalan's Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir is "nothing resembling a canonized Hindu temple" (Siddiqui, 2010: 6; Pati, 2011: 152; Bhame and Krusche, 2012: 242).<sup>308</sup> The temple is looked after by members of a lower caste community called Gihara. For Siddiqui, the temple's architectural design is "like an architectural labyrinth" (Siddiqui, 2010: 10). Temples, such as the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai (RK Puram), the Ayyappa Mandir (RK Puram), the Jagannath Mandir (Hauz Khas), the Dakshin Delhi Kalibari Mandir (RK Puram) and the ISKCON Mandir (East of Kailash) try to define their "temple-ness," through the use of certain architectural details—drawing from textbook temples. The Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir, however, virtually foregrounds (the *image* of) Hanuman to whom the temple is dedicated—the actual temple/architecture (or what would conventionally be described as such) that houses various shrines is overshadowed by a 108 foot tall brightly painted strikingly muscular image/statue of Hanuman. The *murti* is virtually turned inside out and this facilitates a form of worship well adjusted to modern urban lifestyle. In an age when time is considered a scarce resource to accommodate a temple-visit, the gigantic *murti* of Hanuman—also considered to be an "easy" to worship deity—can be seen and worshipped while passing by in a vehicle and in the metro. This allows *each* and *every one* to have an easy and quick *darshan*.<sup>309</sup> The externalization and magnification of the *murti* renders it more accessible—physically as well as ritually—no longer hidden deep within the *garbhagraha*, the deity as well as the temple appear accessible and spectacular simultaneously.

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<sup>307</sup> However, this is not the case with all contemporary Hindu temples. The architecture of Delhi's popular Sai Baba Mandir on Lodhi Road (Figure 2.29), for example, looks like the architecture of any other modern architecture—that is, none of the structure's architectural features would suggest that it is a temple.

<sup>308</sup> Lutgendorf, who has worked extensively on Hanuman, briefly discusses the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir as well as few other temples in Delhi, such as the Chhattarpur Mandir and Hanuman Mandir in Basant Gaon (Lutgendorf, 2007: 8).

<sup>309</sup> Compare with other chapters. Lutgendorf mentions that in the context of Hindutva ideology and practice, Hanuman was considered "good for 'little' people: children, tribals, Dalits, and unruly urban youth who lack the discipline to join the RSS" (Lutgendorf, 2007: 369-370).

According to an inscription in the temple, the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir began as a small temple.<sup>310</sup> The construction of the temple in the presents form began in the 1990s, initiated by Baba Sevagiri, a Naga Baba belonging to the Juna Akhara of Varanasi (Siddiqui, 2010: 7).<sup>311</sup> According to temple authorities, in 1931, after a long period of travelling, Baba Sevagiri discovered a natural *dhuna* on the spot where now the temple stands and, decided to stay.<sup>312</sup> Although Naga Babas are usually devotees of Shiva, in 1993, Baba Sevagiri was determined to build a fifty-two feet high image of Hanuman instead.<sup>313</sup> The Baba found support from two Delhi-based Member of the Legislative Assembly Kirti Azad and Motilal Sodhi (Siddiqui, 2010: 8). For this, Dinesh Sharma, a *murtikar* from Punjab was hired to build a fifty-two feet high image of Hanuman (Siddiqui, 2010: 8).

The visitor enters the temple through the gaping mouth of a fierce looking face squeezed between Hanuman's muscular legs. The ground floor houses a *samadhi* of the temple's creator, Baba Sevagiri and, a *dhuna* (a flat well-like structure filled with sacred ash). Right next to it a diorama displays a tug-of-war between *devas* and *asuras* as described in *puranic* texts as Samudramanathan (Churning of the Ocean). To reach the second diorama, one must bent over to walk through the narrow, yawning mouth of a *makara* (sea-creature, alligator, *etc.*). At the end of a narrow passage is an artificial grotto in which the four-armed goddess Ganga is displayed standing on her *vahana*. She holds in her front hands a pot from which water falls into a pond (Figure 2.31). In 2006, the temple was enhanced with an artificial subterranean walk-through diorama that is accessible through an entrance, which has been designed to look like the snout of a lion. This cave-scape also houses a replica shrine of Vaishnodevi.<sup>314</sup> The temple also contains a Shivalaya as well as several other murtis of deities such as Krishna, Ram, Devi, Sai Baba, Shani Dev, Ma Bugla Mukhi and Sheetla Devi. Local businessmen contributed towards financial requirements for the construction of the

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<sup>310</sup> Compare also with Siddiqui, 2010.

<sup>311</sup> See also Pati, 2011: 154-155.

<sup>312</sup> According to Siddiqui, this is also the reason for the temple's emphasis of Shiva rather than of Ram (Siddiqui, 2010).

<sup>313</sup> According to the temple authorities, he had a vision/dream of Hanuman. Compare with Pati, 2011: 145-146. On visions and dreams see also the fourth chapter.

<sup>314</sup> Jain discussed the idea of replica temples in the context of Gujarat (Jain, 2009). Compare also with Guha-Thakurta, whodiscussed the idea of replicas in various context (Guha-Thakurta, 2009, 2013, 2014).

temple, which included the acquisition of marble *murtis* from Rajasthan (Siddiqui, 2010: 9). Sridharan identifies such inclusion of many different deities and cults as a result of the “temple becoming a common sacred space for all Hindu communities” (Sridharan, 2003: 272). Although this might well be the intention of the temple authorities, it is doubtful that orthodox and upper-caste Hindus would consider a temple such as the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir a ‘proper’ temple; for these groups, the value of the temple lies more in its status as an urban landmark rather than a ritually sanctified space. The latter question of the temple’s status as a sacred and ritually pure site remains in abeyance. The temple’s popularity may therefore be attributed to its broad base of lower caste and possibly lower class visitors.

The popularity of the temple and its widespread patronage can be explained by the fact that the construction of the temple took place at a time of increasing popularity of Hanuman. This growing popularity is mirrored in the very expansion of the murti—over a period of ten years, the creators of the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir (today also referred to as 108 Foot Sankatmochan Dham) decided to increase its height from fifty-two feet to seventy-five feet and then, to 108 feet (Lutgendorf, 1994, 2007; Siddiqui, 2010: 9; Pati, 2011: 146; *etc.*).<sup>315</sup>

Davis and Jaffrelot emphasise that Hanuman played and continues to play an important role since the 1970s or 1980s increasingly becoming aggressive Hindu nationalism to win over young Hindu male scholars for Hindu nationalist causes, such as the demolition of the Babri Masjid and the construction of the Ram Janmabhumi Mandir (Davis, 1996: 47; Jaffrelot, 1999 [1996]: 35, 38, 46; Lutgendorf, 2007: 367-368).<sup>316</sup> Hanuman, patron deity of Hindu wrestlers, combines celibacy and physical strength, thus making him an ideal god for the militant Hindu organisation Bajrang Dal which promotes a culture of physical strength and spiritual purity (Davis, 1996:

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<sup>315</sup> According to Bharne and Krusche, in 2007, the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir was completed after thirteen years of construction (Bharne and Krusche, 2006: 242-243). According to Pati, Hanuman’s strangely twisted posture results from the decision to depict Hanuman facing the crossing taken when the construction of his legs was already completed (Pati, 2011: 144-145). On the Hanuman’s increasing popularity see below. On the emergence of large scale statues see also Jain, 2016, 2017.

<sup>316</sup> See above.

47; Jaffrelot, 1999 [1996]: 363; Jain, 2001: 204-207; Lutgendorf, 2007: 367).<sup>317</sup> Scholars such as Lutgendorf, Jain and Rajagopal have emphasised the role of visual media and the significance of visibility in this context (Lutgendorf, 1994, 2007; Jain, 2001; *etc.*). For instance, Jain observes that the visual language and iconography of Ram and Hanuman have not only become more muscular and masculine but also more aggressive and, warrior-like (Jain, 2001).<sup>318</sup> For Pati it is obvious: “Of course, at first glance,” Jhandewalan’s Hanuman “comes across as a major instance of Hindutva assertion in North India” (Pati, 2011: 143). Also, she notes that the temple stands first in a predominantly Hindu area in which the BJP enjoys majority support and second within the immediate vicinity of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak’s (RSS) headquarter (Pati, 2011: 144).<sup>319</sup>

Besides its overwhelming height, this image of Hanuman is also immensely popular due to an inbuilt mechanism that allows the deity’s hands—which otherwise cover his chest—to clench, making it look as if he is tearing his chest to give space for the gleaming images of Ram and Sita. These images are a reference to a beloved scene in the *Ramayana*, whereby Hanuman tries to prove his devotion to Ram and Sita.<sup>320</sup> In sum, the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir slips through established categories through which the Hindu temple has been read and imagined. That the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir’s architecture does not follow the standard has hardly deflected its popularity, but, rather contributed to it (Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 242).

## **“HOLY-N-SACRED PLACE: PLEASE DO NOT CLIMB ON WITH SHOES”**

The chapter gives an overview of Hindu temples existing in Delhi, several of which have not been discussed in detail in the academic discourse earlier, and thereby tries to discuss various kinds of Hindu temples to understand what it is that makes a

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<sup>317</sup> Jaffrelot, for instance, emphasises that the youth organisation Bajrang Dal, founded in 1984, was used by the VHP as a “main strike force [...] on the pretext of ‘liberating’ the Ram temple” (Jaffrelot, 1999 [1996]: 363)

<sup>318</sup> Compare also with Kapur, 1993, Pinney, 1997 and Banerjee, 2005: 75-110. For Pati, however, it is obvious: “Of course, at first glance,” Jhandewalan’s Hanuman “comes across as a major instance of Hindutva assertion in North India” (Pati, 2011: 143).

<sup>319</sup> See Siddiqui, 2010: 3-4, 9, 16.

<sup>320</sup> This mechanism is only activated on Tuesdays and Saturdays, particular auspicious days for the worship of Hanuman. For details of the narrative see, for example, Lutgendorf (Lutgendorf, 1994: 229).

Hindu temple a 'Hindu' temple in the contemporary context. What is it that makes all of these structures Hindu temples?

It seems as if the contemporary Hindu temple has not only many *different* sizes but also many *different* forms, designs, exteriors, *etc.* Looking at the innumerable *avatars* of temples, it has increasingly become more difficult to speak of something such as *the* Hindu temple, Hindu temple *proper* or Hindu temple *as such*.<sup>321</sup> Considering how these Hindu temples are discussed or not discussed in the academic discourse, it seems as if existing Hindu temples are usually viewed with reference to a textbook reference of the Hindu temple or an ideal of the Hindu temple to which even those temples that are built *like* traditional temples do not seem to live up to.<sup>322</sup> In other words, it seems as if there is some gap/break between the idea of *the* Hindu temple and what exists, seemingly making it difficult to talk about contemporary Hindu temple. Hence, is there a different way through which we can read the Hindu temple and its *avatars*? Is it possible to discuss these contemporary Hindu temples and their architecture in trying to understand their basic constitutive unit? Or, to put it differently, what defines them as 'Hindu' temple? Is there something that is common if not to all Hindu temples then at least to the places discussed in this chapter?

One feature that all the architectures discussed in this chapter share is that they are understood as a place of/for god—as a *sacred* place. As mentioned earlier, *sacred* can here be understood as something, which is *separate* from what is *secular* or the *everyday*. One could perhaps argue that this is the point where architecture or, to be more precise, certain architectural features (*shikhara*, *garbhagraha*, *etc.*) come into play as signifiers of sacredness; these architectural features literally stand out making architecture distinguishable *for its sacredness*.<sup>323</sup> However, considering what has been discussed above, is that architectural features that have been defined/identified as belonging to, or, symbolising/signifying a particular context are also used in another context (for example in what is considered secular), one could raise questions about

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<sup>321</sup> Compare with the first chapter. See Derrida, 1998 [1996].

<sup>322</sup> Compare with what Menon says about late temple architecture (Menon, 1997: 26).

<sup>323</sup> This is what art historians have done.

this reading. Asher's observation that it is difficult to spot temples in Old Delhi as their architecture is hardly distinguishable from shops, houses, *etc.* can be challenged. If not architecture, then is there something else that indicates this *line* or *boundary* drawn between secular and sacred?

In the past, it has been pointed out that rituals play a significant role in defining a place. In this case, Carol Duncan, emphasises: "A ritual site of any kind is a place programmed for the enactment of something. It is a place designed for some kind of performance" (Duncan, 1995: 12). If so, is it possible to define the Hindu temple with reference to ritual practices? As Kramrisch says, to be able to approach god, man has to undergo a "transformation or regeneration" (Kramrisch, 1946: 314).<sup>324</sup> However, it could perhaps be said that the process of this transformation sets in even prior to that—at the entrance of the temple. For, it is here that each and every visitor of the temple has to take off one's shoes.

Across the boundaries of caste, religion, *etc.*, in India as well as in many other parts of Asia, shoes and feet have significant connotations that are related to the notion of purity and impurity. Feet, as they are the lowest part of the body and as they touch the ground, and even more so shoes are considered dirty/impure.<sup>325</sup> Thus, hitting someone with a shoe is considered disrespectful. Accordingly, the touching of feet, either with one's hand or head, is read as a sign of submission and deference to an authority, usually to elders, gurus and gods. In other words, it is an act of paying respect.<sup>326</sup> According to Babb, the touching of the feet signifies the surrender of the person who touches—obliging the person who is touched, to protect the person who touches and surrenders (Babb, 1981: 395). And, as William discusses, this gesture is also seen to "complete the connection of man with god" (Swaminarayan disciple quoted in Williams, 2001: 119-120).

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<sup>324</sup> Kramrisch discusses this aspect with regard to the door while he [the Bhakta] or the priest is about to enter the innermost sanctuary he too is raised to the status of divinity". According to her, this *transformation/regeneration* is promoted through the ornamentation of the architecture, particularly at the entrance of the *garbhagraha* (Kramrisch, 1946: 314).

<sup>325</sup> In places it is considered insulting to show the sole of one's foot/shoe to people but even more so to god. People generally avoid touching other's shoes.

<sup>326</sup> Babb points out that devotional literature frequently "celebrates the god's feet" (Babb, 1981: 395). Also, he mentions that gods as well as gurus "are sometimes represented iconographically by their feet" (Babb, 1981: 395). In Akshardham, for example, Sahajanand's shoes are put on display.

Within this cultural context, it is habitual to remove one's shoes (and wash one's feet, hands, face and mouth) before entering a house/temple/mosque/*etc.*—in Hindu temples, Jain temples, Buddhist temples, mosques, *gurdwaras* as well as in churches, *etc.* there is usually a specific place to place the shoes. Hence, one could perhaps read the taking-off of shoes as a sign of leaving the dirty, impure, and the outside world behind. The taking-off shoes is emphasised here over other ritual practices, because, unlike many other ritual practices such as the covering of one's head, washing one's feet, hands, face, *etc.*, which distinguishes the differences of communities from each other, the taking-off shoes before entering the sacred place is practised across communities. One could even read the taking-off shoes as a marker of the *sacred* that is more important than the architecture (Figure 2.32). In other words, perhaps comparable in some sense to what architecture is doing, these gestures/practices underscore the line drawn between inside/outside, pure/impure, sacred/secular, *etc.*, sacred as *away*, *separate* or *segregated* from the secular or everyday.<sup>327</sup> If so, then does that mean that if not for these markers all these places are the same? In other words, one can read them as attempts to *define* a place—a cultural and political act.

Besides trying to open up the understandings of contemporary temple architecture, this chapter also attempted to demonstrate the temple as a space by and for the community. The community is defined by a certain notion of *us* and *the others*. If we look at the temple as a place of the community, then how is this notion linked to architecture? In what light can we understand the temple? Thus, the question of belonging/not belonging as well as identity can be understood also to have bearing on the question of who is allowed or not allowed to enter the temple? The following three chapters will try to discuss the linkages between temple construction, architecture and identity politics and its amplifications in the context of the national, the regional and the global. Thereby, the following third chapter will look at the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir that was built, as mentioned above, by the powerful Birla family at the cusp of India's Independence/Partition. The fourth chapter, then,

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<sup>327</sup> Nightingale discusses segregation with regard to space/space-making and social hierarchy (Nightingale, 2013). According to him, segregation is a tool that includes not only monumental architecture, walls, bastions and the like but also road blocks, violent mobs, the polices, curfews, *etc.* (Nightingale, 2013).

will discuss the Uttara Swaminath Swamimalai Mandir that was constructed and continues to be constructed by a Tamil community in “authentic” (regional) South Indian styles. The last chapter will look at Akshardham that was built by the globally active Bochasanwasi Shri Akshar Purushottam Swaminarayan Sanstha (BAPS) as a temple that attracts the masses.



## FIGURES SECOND CHAPTER



Figure 2.1: Entrance to a temple in Old Delhi (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.2: Shivalaya in Old Delhi (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.3: *Haveli* type temple in Old Delhi (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.4: *Garbhagraha* of the Jagannath Mandir on Esplanade Marg (by A. Hartig).

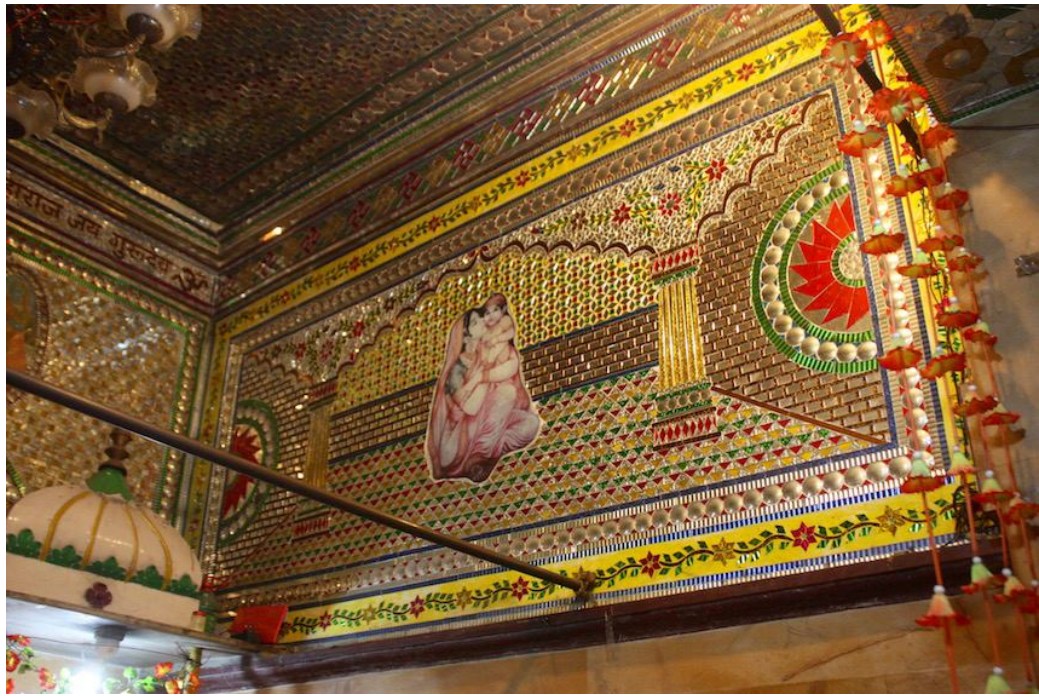


Figure 2.5: Detail *garbhagraha* of the Charandas Mandir in Chaurwi Bazar (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.6: *Garbhagraha* in *Haveli* type temple near the Charandas Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.7: Charandas Mandir in Chaurwi Bazar (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.8: Diorama in the Gauri Shankar Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.9: Showcase in the Narasimha Mandir on Esplanade Road (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.10: Detail of the Agarwal Mandir in Paharganj in 2011 (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.11: Detail of the Agarwal Mandir in Paharganj in 2016 (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.12: Detail of the Yogmaya Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.13: The Yogmaya Mandir in Mehrauli (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.14: The *garbhagraha* of the Yogmaya Mandir during a *puja* (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.15: Way to the Kalkaji Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.16: Kalkaji Mandir (by A. Hartig).





Figure 2.17: Valmiki Mandir on Mandir Marg (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.18: Exhibit in the Museum of the Valmiki Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.19: Museum of the Valmiki Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.20: Arya Samaj Mandir on Mandir Marg (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.21: Durga Mandir in RK Puram (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.22: Ayyappa Mandir in RK Puram (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.23: Jagannath Mandir in Hauz Khas (by Latika Gupta).



Figure 2.24: Kali Bari Mandir in CR Park (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.25: Venkateswara Balaji Mandir in RK Puram (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.26: BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir near Akshardham (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.27: Dakshin Kalibari Mandir in RK Puram (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.28: Sri Sri Radha Parthasarathi Mandir in Delhi's East of Kailash (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.29: Sai Baba Mandir on Lodhi Road (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.30: Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir in Jhandewalan (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.31: Diorama at the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 2.32: "Holy-n-Sacred Place" near the Manu Mandir in Manali (Himachal Pradesh) (by Manoj Pulami).



## THIRD CHAPTER

### A TEMPLE FOR THE (HINDU) NATION: THE LAKSHMINARAYAN/BIRLA MANDIR IN DELHI

In 1936, a certain T.C. Raparia addressed a letter to the *Times of India* on the urgency of building a Jain temple in the imperial capital of Delhi (Raparia, 1936).<sup>328</sup> Raparia pointed out that the new capital now had spaces of worship for “practically all the principal religions of the Empire except one,” i.e. Jainism. Raparia’s letter came in the wake of a new Buddhist temple being built in Delhi.<sup>329</sup> Although Jains had built several temples within the walled city, his appeal to the British government was to allot the Jains a piece of land in New Delhi.<sup>330</sup> He argued that building a Jain temple “at the Imperial Capital [...] is a necessity inasmuch as it concerns the national assembly of creeds”, which would “add to the beauty and amenities of the Imperial Capital of India” (Raparia, 1936).

If a minority community like the Jains felt the need for visibly representing themselves within the Imperial capital through a place of worship, what about the Hindus?<sup>331</sup> The *List of Muhammadan and Hindu Monuments* attests that by the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a number of temples dedicated to Hindu deities existed within and around the walled city; some, such as the Yogmaya Mandir and the Kalkaji Mandir, continue to be considered powerful sacred sites (Sanderson, 1916; Page, 1919; Blakiston, 1922a, 1922b).<sup>332</sup> However, with regard to visibility and

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<sup>328</sup> Although Jains were a minority community they were a “very powerful community in Delhi” that built several temples in Shahjahanabad/Old Delhi (Sanderson, 1916; Singh, 1972: 46-47; Gupta, 1998 [1981]: 40-41, 49; Asher, 2003: 361). As it is the case with most of the late temples, little research has been undertaken on Jain temples in Delhi. Asher and Hegewald discuss some of them (Asher, 2000, 2003; Hegewald, 2009: 53, 102-103, 115-116, 174-175, 183-184, *etc.*).

<sup>329</sup> It is likely that Raparia refers here to the Lord Buddha Mandir that the Birlas built together with the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, both of which were inaugurated by Gandhi in March 1939. See below.

<sup>330</sup> For a list of these temples see Sanderson, 1916. Compare also with Asher, 2000, 2003.

<sup>331</sup> On the Jain community in Delhi see, for example, Singh, 1972: 46-47.

<sup>332</sup> To date, Old Delhi as well as other parts of the city such as Paharganj are home to numerous Hindu temples, some of which were built during pre-colonial times such as the Yogmaya Mandir and the Kalkaji Mandir, whereas others were built after 1857 but before Independence/Partition. For instance, the Valmiki Mandir on the northern end of Mandir Marg (then Reading Road), discussed in the previous chapter. For a list of these temples built prior to the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century see Sanderson, 1916; Page, 1919 and Blakiston, 1922a, 1922b. The majority of these

architecture, these temples could hardly compete with structures such as the Red Fort and the Jama Masjid (which was said to be the largest mosque in Asia at the time of its construction), built by the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan.<sup>333</sup> The majority of these temples were practically invisible—now as then, they disappear amidst the impressive architecture that the Mughal rulers had left behind. As discussed in the second chapter, the majority of the temples in Old Delhi and other parts of the city are usually situated in a private courtyard and features no *shikhara*. The doors to these temples are open only for a few hours in the morning and the evening, making it difficult to spot them. And, the few temples mentioned in guidebooks written at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were portrayed as having “not the slightest pretension to beauty” and as being “of no architectural importance” (Stephen, 1876: 29; Duncan, 1906: 72; Sharma, 1974: 99, 106; Chopra, 1970: 230; *etc.*).<sup>334</sup> In short, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, though Hindus outnumbered Muslims in Delhi in terms of population, visually, the city still seemed to be in the hands of the Mughal-rulers.<sup>335</sup> The lack of a *monumental* Hindu temple that could compete with the Muslim past and its visible presence as well as the upcoming Imperial British architecture/monuments, was presumably a matter of grave concern for many Hindus; at the heart of the issue was demonstrating and representing the significance of Hindus in/to the nation and the world.<sup>336</sup> This became especially important in the face of ‘threats’ to the community’s existence and the perceived dwindling of the number of Hindus, a perception that was fed by the figures provided by the Census (Jones, 1981). One reason for these “lower numbers” was that it was not clear as to who qualified as Hindu. The Lal Begis, for

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temples have never attracted great attention. Guidebooks of the time discussed very few of them such as the Nili Chattri Mandir, the Yogmaya Mandir and the Kalkaji Mandir, appreciating them little, which might have contributed to the urge to build a representative Hindu temple. See, for example, Stephen, 1876: 29; Duncan, 1906: 72; *etc.* This problem of appreciation of contemporary architecture has been addressed in the introduction.

<sup>333</sup> This has also been pointed out by Caturvedi, 1982: 42. Compare also with second chapter.

<sup>334</sup> Compare with Asher, 2000, 2003. Little scholarly attention has been paid to these temples. Compare with introduction.

<sup>335</sup> According to Blake, in 1845/1846, 54 percent of Delhi’s population were Hindus and 45 percent Muslims; in 1864, 60 percent of the population were Hindus and 39 percent Muslims; in 1881, 57 percent of the population were Hindus and 42 percent Muslims in 1881; and, in 1901, 55 percent of the city’s population were Hindus and 42 percent Muslims in 1901 (Blake, 1991: 173-174). On Delhi’s population see also Gupta, 1986 [1981]: 44-48 and Jones, 1986: 333-334. Compare also with Rajagopalan, 2011: 258.

<sup>336</sup> As discussed by scholars such as Jeffrey, Jones and Bapu, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people feared that Hindus might become extinct (Jeffrey, 1976: 8; Jones, 1981: 90-91; Bapu, 2013: 14-16; *etc.*). According to Caturvedi, the construction of a Hindu temple was a necessity as there was a lack of a major (Hindu) place for worship within the layout of the newly planned city (Caturvedi, 1982: 42). The plans for New Delhi included, however, the construction of a cathedral (Caturvedi, 1982: 42; Gupta, 1994: 259).

example, were in one report listed as Sikhs while in other reports they were listed as Muslims, as Lee discusses (Lee, 2014: 145).<sup>337</sup> There was a sense that “Hindus were divided and so there must be an attempt to create a greater degree of unity, and that they must work for the preservation of *sanātana dharma*” (Jones, 2006 [1989]: 78). Thus, the construction of a *representative* Hindu temple in the capital city of India—cradle of Hinduism and home to the largest number of Hindus in the world—may have been felt as a burning need of the hour.

The reason behind Raparia’s epistolary request to the British government for permission to build a temple in the new imperial capital at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century seemed to match that of the creators of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir (Figure 3.1). When the temple came about, it marked a departure from the paradigm of temple-construction in Delhi.<sup>338</sup> If one considers the representation of the temple, from the time of its inauguration to the present, one can contend that this mission has been somewhat successful.<sup>339</sup> In Gopal’s illustrative version of Delhi sketched in the 1930s, the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir that was built at the then fringes of New Delhi dominates Delhi’s city-scape. The cover (Figure 3.2) of Gopal’s travel guide *Delhi in Two Days* shows a drawing of the skyline of the city—the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir which surmounts the Jama Masjid as well as the Council Chamber (Parliament House). According to Gopal, among the temples in Delhi, the “Shri Lakshmi Narayan Mandir is the most popular Hindu temple in New Delhi on Reading Road” (Gopal, 193-: 69).<sup>340</sup>

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<sup>337</sup> Compare with the second chapter.

<sup>338</sup> On Delhi’s temple-scape prior to the construction of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir see previous chapter.

<sup>339</sup> Since then, many temples have been built in Delhi—the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, however, remains one of the popular temples recommended by travel agents and guidebooks as one of Delhi’s must-see sites. On January 21, 2017, the temple ranked twenty on TripAdvisor’s list of 405 Things to do in New Delhi ([www.tripadvisor.in/Attraction\\_Review-g304551-d324101-Reviews-Birla\\_Mandir\\_Temple\\_Lakshmi\\_Narayan-New\\_Delhi\\_National\\_Capital\\_Territory\\_of\\_Delhi.html](http://www.tripadvisor.in/Attraction_Review-g304551-d324101-Reviews-Birla_Mandir_Temple_Lakshmi_Narayan-New_Delhi_National_Capital_Territory_of_Delhi.html)). TripAdvisor runs an online platform that hosts information on hotels, restaurants and places-to-see based on ‘reviews’ written by its users. Unlike long-established guides, such as the Michelin Guide, which rate sites according to strictly defined criteria, at TripAdvisor’s website each and every one rates sites according to their personal experience/perception. However, millions of people turn to the website. See also guidebooks such as Chopra, 1970: 161; Horton, et al., 2002: 107; Singh, 2011: 137; Brown, et al. 2008: 101 and Betts and McCulloch, 2014: 38-39. On Akshardham see fifth chapter. According to Brosius, at Akshardham the number of visitors can go up to five thousand people in a day and even more (Brosius, 2010: 163).

<sup>340</sup> According to Chopra and Time Out, during Janmashtami the numbers of visitors runs into lakhs

From the outset, the Temple endeavoured to distinguish itself within Delhi's topography and its temples. The construction of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir was one, which seemed to bode well for the future of the Hindu community and the nation. It succeeded in adding a Hindu *attraction* to a cityscape that had been dominated by Muslim and colonial architecture. The terms on which it staked so broad a claim are important to note. An inscription engraved on a *stambha* close to the temple park's entrance which could go unnoticed, reminds the reader that the foundation stone of the temple was laid on March 26, 1933. This event took place shortly after New Delhi was inaugurated as the new capital of the British Raj on February 13, 1931, when the idea of a nation was gaining ground and meaning.<sup>341</sup> Moreover, the inscription also reveals some of key people involved in the temple's construction—names that resonate with India's independence movement and the founding figures of modern India—Gandhi, Madan Mohan Malaviya and Baldev Das Birla.<sup>342</sup> At its opening, on March 18, 1939, *The Times of India* reported: "Nearly 50,000 people crowded the 100-foot roadway in front of the newly-built Lakshmi Narain temple [...]" (unknown author, 1939). Significantly, the temple was celebrated as "largest cosmopolitan Mandir for all the non-Muslim and non-Christian religions which originated in India such as Sanatan Dharm, Arya Samaj, Sikh Dharm, Buddh Dharm and Jain Dharm *etc.* [...]" and as a place at which "Harijans the so-called

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(Chopra, 1970: 161; Time Out, 2010: 86). As Caturvedi says, the temple is Delhi's preferred pilgrimage site and describes the temple as being always crowded (Caturvedi, 1982: 49, 55). According to him, people belonging to all faiths come to the temple, which is visited by fifty to hundred tourists in a day (Caturvedi, 1982: 55).

<sup>341</sup> The inauguration of the British Raj's modern capital that completed the government's relocation of its seat from Kolkata to Delhi was celebrated on February 13, 1931. However, by that time, first steps towards India's independence had already been taken. By 1931, the idea of Swaraj (from Sanskrit *svayam* and *rāj* meaning "self-rule" or "self-governance") had already reached London and was debated in three Round Table Conferences organised by the British Government in London between 1930 and 1932. Gandhi, Malaviya and G.D. Birla were present at the Second Round Table Conference in 1931.

<sup>342</sup> Baldev Das Birla's name occurs here because he had permitted his son Jugal Kishore Birla to build the temple. The Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir has been constructed together with the Lord Buddha Mandir, on which little information is available. Like the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, it was sponsored by the Birla family and inaugurated by Gandhi on March 18, 1939. It is run by the Maha Bodhi Society of India, founded by Anagarika Dharmapala in 1891, with its head office in Kolkata. An inscription highlights that its foundation stone was laid on October 31, 1936 by K. Yonezawa Esquire, Consul General of Japan in India. Another inscription outlines principles similar to those of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir. It follows the Arya Dharm and is open to untouchables. These aspects will be discussed in more detail below. Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's *stambha* reminds of this link mentioning "Messages of goodwill" by the Chinese Consul General as well as the Japanese Consul General in India. According to Birla, Jugal Kishore Birla regarded Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism "as branches of a giant tree, which could be called Arya Dharm", which is the same idea that has been promoted by Savarkar (Birla, 2009 [2007]: 367). Moreover, he "regarded Buddhism to be a part of Hinduism, he regarded the Japanese [...], the Chinese, Thais and Sri Lankans very close to him" (Birla, 2009 [2007]: 367).

untouchables, are quite as welcome as high caste Hindus” (Gopal, 193-: 69-70).<sup>343</sup> Through this ‘invitation,’ it attempted to posit a radical departure from the exclusivist politics of entry that had long marked Hindu temples.

This chapter sets out to better annotate this and other departures by raising the following questions: What motivated these figures at the time of significant socio-economic, political and cultural shifts to build a temple? What were the circumstances behind the construction of this temple that motivated this constellation of personalities to rally behind it? Were there not more pressing issues at hand than to construct and inaugurate a temple? What did these figures see in the temple? What ideas and concepts did they associate with the temple? What did they hope to achieve with its construction? What role does the temple play today in the context of Delhi and India? As the chapter will discuss, the building of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir might be understood as an attempt to mark Hindu presence and projecting its future trajectory not only in Delhi but across the nation.

As discussed earlier, the role of temples and religious architecture has received scant scholarly attention in the context of these historical figures as well as the question of nation building, though these figures have been studied by scholars from different perspectives. The chapter thus intends to focus not only on the role of these historical figures through their involvement in the nationalist movement but also to draw specific linkages to the questions of art, architecture and nation-building through the construction of temples.

## **NEW RELIGIOUS FORMATIONS OF COLONIALISM AND THEIR EFFECT ON THE HINDU TEMPLE AND ITS ARCHITECTURE**

The colonial encounter produced a reconfiguration of not just the pre-existing bodies of knowledge but also new categories of subjects. The growth of sectarianism was as much an outcome of this process; equally, the transformations within major religions in India can be understood as responses to the colonial encounter.

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<sup>343</sup> Compare this quote with Savarkar’s definition of Hindu/Hinduism that will be discussed below. Compare with second chapter.

Particularly pertinent to the concerns of this chapter is the fact that this process of social churning engendered the formation of countless religious organisations all over the country. As a result, varied religious denominations competed for social influence and resources. As scholars such as Singh, Gupta and Jones have discussed, conflicts unfolded in Delhi and the rest of the nation, often over issues related to the question of space—not only did Hindus fight *versus* Muslims but also Hindus *versus* British, Hindus *versus* Sikhs, Hindus *versus* Jains, Arya Samajists *versus* orthodox Hindus (Sanatanis), *etc.* (Singh, 1972; Gupta, 1986 [1981]: 73-76; Jones, 1986: 333-334, 336-337; *etc.*).<sup>344</sup> Studies focused on the architecture of New Delhi frequently failed to take into account that this new imperial city was built against a backdrop of changes, violence and great uncertainty.<sup>345</sup> The conflicts mentioned above can be read as factors that triggered this major transformation. How this affected the Hindu temple will be discussed in this section.<sup>346</sup>

The Arya Samaj, one of the most significant organisations of this time, was founded in 1878 by Dayanada Saraswati—“[...] the spiritual father of Hindu nationalism” (Singh, 1972: 65; Jaffrelot, 1993: 518-520, 1999 [1996]: 13-17; Zavos, 2000: 44-50; Jones, 1976, 1986: 335-337, 2006 [1989]: 95-103, 192-199; Smith, 2002: 33, 2003: 38; Jain, 2009: 218; *etc.*).<sup>347</sup> In claiming to practice *pure* Hinduism (“Vedic Hinduism”), Arya Samajists Dayananda Saraswati, Shradhananda and Lajpat Rai publicly criticised and dismissed many (orthodox) Hindu practices such as idolatry, polytheism, elaborate rituals, the Brahmin priests, *sati* and child-marriage but

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<sup>344</sup> According to Jones, the controversies themselves generated the setting up of more local organisations (Jones, 1986: 336).

<sup>345</sup> See for example Hardy, 2007 and Michell, 2015. The Imperial takeover of India was accompanied by great shifts in the existing socio-economic, political and cultural structures that manifested, for example, in the establishing of institutions such as the Indian census, the Archaeological Survey, museums, colleges and other institutions of knowledge. Bernard Cohn has categorized these great shifts through a discussion on the ‘modalities’ of colonialism, viz. historiographic, observational/travel, survey, enumerative, surveillance and museological (Cohn, 1996).

<sup>346</sup> With particular reference to religious institutions see, for example, Farquhar, 1915: 1, 5; Glasenapp, 1922: 406-464; Singh, 1972; Jones, 1981, 1986, 2006 [1989]; Zavos, 2000: 24-67; *etc.* On establishing other institutions such as museums and the Archaeological Survey see also Guha-Thakurta, 2004 and Singh, 2015.

<sup>347</sup> According to Bayly, its ideologies originated earlier (Bayly, 1973: 364). The Arya Samaj did “not openly identify with nationalism, but instead, maintained that they were a strictly religious organisation. Any other stance would have placed them in direct conflict with the British government and threatened the destruction of all they had built”, as Jones says (Jones, 2006 [1989]: 208). On the Arya Samaj see also Monier-Williams, 1891: 529-531; Farquhar, 1915: 101-129; Rai, 1915; Glasenapp, 1922: 443-446. Singh, Jones and Jaffrelot discuss the Arya Samaj in the context of Delhi (Singh, 1972; Jones, 1986; Jaffrelot, 2000).

held on to the physical structure of the Hindu temple (Singh, 1972: 64; Jones, 1976: 32, 2006 [1989]: 96-97; *etc.*). The Arya Samaj Mandir had become the “basic institutional unit of the Arya Samaj; the focal point of each branch organization [...]” (Zavos, 2000: 49).<sup>348</sup> Again, this was a time when many Hindus were concerned about their seemingly small numbers as reported in the census. However, the task of merely ‘counting’ depended on defining the categories under which Hindus and others could be accommodated (Jones, 1981: 73-74, 79).<sup>349</sup> Should the census count Brahmo Samajists, Arya Samajists, Lal Begis, Buddhist, Jains, Sikhs, *etc.* as Hindus? And, should the census count untouchables as Hindus even though the system itself excludes them?<sup>350</sup> Much importance was given to the census, as there were plans to “link the distribution of political power to the decennial census” (Jones, 1981: 88). Thus, the answer to the question, ‘*Who is a Hindu?*’ was and continues to be closely linked to how much power communities will have in the future.<sup>351</sup>

It is within this context that the Arya Samaj presented itself as dismissive of the caste system and untouchability.<sup>352</sup> In the 1880s, the Arya Samaj pushed boundaries further introducing a ritual called *shuddhi*, to *purify* the aspirant (i.e. those who were excluded from the social system and were considered *polluted*) into a (pure) Hindu and thus integrate them (back) into the Hindu fold (Jones, 2006 [1989]: 100-101).<sup>353</sup> This meant a shift in the caste status from one dependent on the older

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<sup>348</sup> Jones mentions: “Opposition mounted as the newly converted [Arya Samajists] threw their idols into the Ravi River or publicly smashed them in the local bazaars” (Jones, 1976: 36). See also Farquhar, 1915: 112. In 1926, Arya Samaj leader Shradhanand was assassinated, followed by attacks on the Arya Samaj and their temples (Jones, 2006 [1989]: 196). However, until date, no research has been undertaken on Arya Samaj with regard to its architecture.

<sup>349</sup> As mentioned in the previous chapter, according to Lee, in the 1901 census in Punjab Lal Begis are listed as a sect of Sikhs (Lee, 2014: 145). In the Bengal census, however, they are listed as a caste (not sect) with Hindu and Muslim branches, and in the Uttar Pradesh census as a Muslim sect (Lee, 2014: 145). See also Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 76, *etc.*

<sup>350</sup> Compare with Jones, 1981: 79; Prashad, 2001 [2000] and Lee, 2014.

<sup>351</sup> Compare with Ilaiah, 2002 [1996].

<sup>352</sup> Arya Samaj founder Dayanada and Arya Samajists such as Shradhananda and Lajpat Rai seem efficient in promoting their ideas among people; G.D. Birla, for instance, says that it was Rai who attracted him towards “the work of the removal of untouchability” (Birla quoted in Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 73).

<sup>353</sup> The idea of purity/pollution in the context of the temple will be discussed in more detail below. The Sanskrit word *śuddhi* has been translated into English as “cleansing,” “purification,” “purity,” *etc.* (Monier-Williams, 1986 [1899]: 1082). As Zavos explains, *shuddhi* is associated “with the natural state of an individual in the performance of dharma” (Zavos, 2000: 87). As Fuller discusses, according to some priests *murtis* can get polluted which requires rituals of purification (*shuddhi*) (Fuller, 2004b: 60). See also Jaffrelot, 1999 [1996]: 13-17, 2011 [2010]: 146-155; Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 91; Lee, 2014: 150-151.

*varna* system, to another system of social stratification, as scholars such as Jaffrelot and Zavos have noted (Jaffrelot, 1993: 518, 521, 1999 [1996]: 15; Zavos, 2000: 46-48). The Arya Samaj mainly introduced the *shuddhi* ritual as means to ‘correct’ the numbers of Hindus reported in the colonial census.<sup>354</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, high caste Hindus who had become outcaste (*polluted*) by going abroad performed purification (*shuddhi*) as an act of reintegration into the community (Jaffrelot, 1993: 519; Zavos, 2000: 87-88). By the 1870s, the Arya Samaj began to present *shuddhi* as a process of conversion for non-Hindus (‘ex-Hindus’) meaning Christians and Muslims and later, for low caste Hindus, to associate them with “full (twice-born)” caste status (Zavos, 2000: 88, 90). Initially, it was performed individually to readmit Hindus who had converted to Islam or Christianity, but, gave way to mass purification rituals wherein untouchables were also ‘admitted’ within the fold (Zavos, 2000: 90; Jones, 2006 [1989]: 100-101, 113-114, 194). Thus we shall see, how the inclusion of people into the Arya (Hindu) fold affected the conceptualisation of the temple.<sup>355</sup> If there is no caste system and thus no notion of *purity/pollution* there is also no longer a ‘reason’ to exclude Aryas/Hindus from the temple.<sup>356</sup> Lajpat Rai, who was not only an Arya Samajist but also a leading figure in the independence movement, clarified the Samaj’s beliefs/practices that seemed to end caste-based discrimination:

The weekly service meetings [and thus the temple] are open to the public, and no distinction is made between members and non-members, or between Hindus and non-Hindus. Into the Church of God anybody can come and occupy any seat he likes (Rai, 1915:

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<sup>354</sup> As Jones discusses, it seems as if over several decades various inner and outer factors contributed to the notion that Hinduism is losing its power—people saw the end of the Hindus coming within a few years (Jones, 1981). See also Zavos, 2000: 108-111. This question was linked also to the question of temple entry; “[i]n those days, a large number of Harijans were converting to Christianity in Travancore, as they were not permitted entry in Hindu temples”, as K.K. Birla says (Birla, 2009 [2007]: 30).

<sup>355</sup> Ambedkar, on the other hand, “wondered whether Untouchables should have their own temples or try to enter the Hindu temple”, as Jaffrelot says (Jaffrelot, 2006 [2005]: 49).

<sup>356</sup> As will be discussed in more detail below, certain people and communities among them the untouchables have been prohibited from entering temples. However, people/communities have opposed related policies. See for instance the temple entry movement that gained momentum at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century turning into a nationwide movement also because of the support of leading figures such as Ambedkar, Gandhi and G.D. Birla (Galanter, 1964, 1971; Hardgrave, 1969; Jeffrey, 1976: 13-14, Fuller, 1979: 464-465; Jaffrelot, 2006 [2005]: 48-51, 69; Birla, 2009 [2007]: 30; *etc.*). An event that is often highlighted with reference to the movement is the Temple Entry Proclamation that was issued by the Maharaja of Travancore on November 12, 1936, opening all government temples in Travancore to all Hindus (Jeffrey, 1976: 22). In 1939, the Madras Temple Entry Authorisation and Indemnity Act were passed. Various acts such as the Bombay and Orissa Temple Entry Act followed later. See also Chatterjee, 1994: 1770 and Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 99-102.



Jaffrelot and Ramaswamy also discuss the salience of the idea of an ‘equal’/non-discriminatory space created by the Samaj concerning Balakrishna Shivram Moonje. Moonje was the leader of the Central Provinces Hindu Sabha, who eventually became president of the Hindu Mahasabha in 1927 (Jaffrelot, 1999 [1996]: 20-22, 2011 [2010]: 61-63; Meadowcroft, 2006; Ramaswamy, 2010: 165; Bapu, 2013; *etc.*). Moonje’s statement of, there being an “absence of a common meeting place in the Hindu polity for the castes from the highest to the lowest on perfectly equal terms” seems to embody the significance of the creation of temples (Moonje quoted in Jaffrelot, 2011 [2010]: 62).<sup>358</sup> Unlike Rai, Moonje contrasts this “absence of a common meeting place” with the design of the *masjid*, a place where the Muslims “vividly visualise and imbibe the feeling of oneness [...]” (Moonje quoted in Jaffrelot, 2011 [2010]: 62). In his book with the title *Hindu Sangathan: Saviour of the Dying Race*, the Arya Samaj leader Shraddhananda argues on similar lines. He proposed that the reluctance amongst the Hindus “to mix with each other” derived from the lack of a “common meeting place” (Shraddhananda, 1926: 139).<sup>359</sup> Like Moonje, Shraddhananda compared the situation of the Hindus to that of the Muslims and their places of worship—specifically the Jama Masjid and the Fatehpuri Masjid in Delhi, which can accommodate thousands of Muslims (Shraddhananda, 1926: 139-140). Thus, Shraddhananda, who is considered by Zavos, as the “architect” of Hindu nationalism, suggested constructing

one Hindu Rasthra mandir at least in every city and important town, with a compound which could contain an audience of 25 thousands and a hall in which Katha from Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads and the great epics of Ramayana and Mahabharat could be daily recited [...]. While the sectarian Hindu temples are dominated by their own individual deities, the Catholic Hindu Mandir should be devoted to the worship of the three mother-spirits the Gau-mata, the Saraswati-mata and the Bhumi-mata.

<sup>357</sup> Like Malaviya and Gandhi, Rai shared his thoughts on issues with Birla, who supported him and the Arya Samaj (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 73-75). Rai seemingly rejects orthodox Hindus and Hinduism so much that he stated: “They cannot go back to the Vedic state; that is dead and gone, and will never revive. Something more or less new must follow. We will hope it may be Christianity, but, whatever it may be, anything seems better than the present intellectually and morally monstrous idolatry and caste” (Rai, 1915: 38-39). As Jones discusses, the Samaj “borrowed the institutional forms and techniques of the Christian missionaries” (Jones, 2006 [1989]: 100). Compare with Zavos, 2000: 49-50 and Jaffrelot, 1999 [1996]: 15-16.

<sup>358</sup> See also Ramaswamy, 2010: 165-166.

<sup>359</sup> He was leading the protests against the Rowlatt Act in 1919 in Delhi.

[...] let a life-like map of Mother-Bharat be constructed in a prominent place [...] (Shraddhananda, 1926: 140-141).<sup>360</sup>

Hence, Shraddhananda believed that the *Bhagavad Gita* would help to mobilise the (Hindu) people and unify the (Hindu) nation (Davis, 2015: 143-145). However, his vision of a network of “Gita Halls” across India did not come into being, although, the Gita Bhavan in the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir is one of the very few Gita Bhavans/Gita Mandirs that have been built (Davis, 2015: 145).<sup>361</sup>

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Shivprasad Gupta built the Bharat Mata Mandir in Varanasi (Figure 3.3).<sup>362</sup> Commenting on the temple, Ramaswamy has noted that the builder Gupta “was already attempting to materialize [Shraddhananda’s] vision”, drawing on Moonje’s and Shraddhananda’s statements (Ramaswamy, 2010: 151-159, 164-166).<sup>363</sup> Gupta’s Bharat Mata Mandir does not house a *murti* of any of the ‘common’ deities, such as Vishnu, Shiva and Devi, but a “life-like map of Mother-Bharat” (Figure 3.4).<sup>364</sup> Like the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, the Bharat Mata Mandir too was inaugurated by Gandhi in October 1936—three years prior to Delhi’s Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir (Ramaswamy, 2010: 151-152; *etc.*). According to Eck, Gandhi’s inaugural message was:

I hope this temple, which will serve as a cosmopolitan platform for people of *all* religions, castes and creeds including Harijans, will go a great way in promoting religious unity, peace and love in the country (Gandhi quoted in Eck, 2012: 100; italics added).<sup>365</sup>

The Bharat Mata Mandir was thus anticipated as a place to bridge the divisive forces (“religions, castes and creeds including Harijans”) that prevented the people of India

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<sup>360</sup> See also Zavos, 2000: 9.

<sup>361</sup> Davis mentions that there are few other temples dedicated to the Gita such as the Gita Mandir in Kurukshetra and Mathura (Davis, 2015: 255). BAPS sadhu Vivekjiandas mentions the Gita Mandir in Ahmedabad (Vivekjiandas, 2011 [2010], Vol. I: 93).

<sup>362</sup> For details on Shivprasad Gupta see Ramaswamy, 2010: 328-329.

<sup>363</sup> The temple was built by Shivprasad Gupta (Ramaswamy, 2010: 152-153 165; Michell, 2015: 40). Ramaswamy discusses the Bharat Mata Mandir (Ramaswamy, 2010: 151-166). Besides, it was mentioned by scholars such as Smith, Brosius and Eck, and discussed by Malviya in his MPhil thesis (Smith, 2003: 192; Brosius, 2010: 172; Eck, 2012: 100-101; Malviya, 2015).

<sup>364</sup> On Bharat Mata’s conceptualisation at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century see, for example, Coomaraswamy, 1909d.

<sup>365</sup> Compare also with Ramaswamy, 2010: 152. According to Ramaswamy, a contemporary visitor emphasised that the temple was “a new kind of shrine [...] without distinction of caste or color or creed, race or sex” (contemporary visitor quoted in Ramaswamy, 2010: 151).

from imagining themselves as community/nation and belonging to the same land. In other words, the Bharat Mata Mandir posited the nation as a geographically bounded entity rather than an ethnic/racial entity as Arya Samajists attempted to do.<sup>366</sup> However, only one more Bharat Mata Mandir has been built until date; its departure from the national imaginary can be evidenced by its low visitor numbers. Thus, the idea of a “national temple” does not seem to have taken root (Smith, 2003: 192).<sup>367</sup> Instead, the articulation of the nation as an ethnically-bound entity appears to have had far greater success, as discussed below.

A more compelling articulation of “Hinduism” which also imbibed the idea of what is a Hindu temple had been formulated by Savarkar in his book: *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?*<sup>368</sup> Savarkar, established a different framework closely associated with that of the (ethnic/racial) nation.<sup>369</sup> In this book, Savarkar attempted to answer questions such as *Who is a Hindu?; What is it that makes a Hindu a Hindu?; Is Hinduism a religion?; etc.* Unlike some scholars, who consider “any clear and simple definition of Hinduism impossible”, Savarkar attempts straightforward answers to these questions (Smith, 2002: 19).<sup>370</sup> Prior to Savarkar’s definition, *Hindus* and *Hinduism* had been variously defined/identified within the framework of religion, devotional practice or cult. According to Savarkar, however, Hindus are “primarily *all* the people who reside in the land that extends from Sindhu to Sindhu” (Savarkar, 1969 [1923]: 104; italics added).<sup>371</sup> He stated that a Hindu “feels attachment to the

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<sup>366</sup> Compare with Coomaraswamy’s ideas outlined in his essay “Indian Nationality” (Coomaraswamy, 1909c: 7).

<sup>367</sup> According to Eck, the temple has never become the “cosmopolitan platform” its creators wanted it to become (Eck, 2012: 101). Until date, it seems as if besides the Bharat Mata Mandir in Varanasi only one more Bharat Mata Mandir has been built, which is located in Haridwar. See, for example, Kakar and Eck on Haridwar’s Bharat Mata Mandir that was built in 1983 (Kakar, 2009: 394-396; Eck, 2012: 101-102). According to Nandy, no branch of the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh was allowed to have any image of any god/goddess except Bharat Mata (Nandy, 2001: 127).

<sup>368</sup> As scholars such as Jones, Jaffrelot and Bapu discuss, Savarkar’s idea found great response and became the theoretical backdrop for Hindu nationalism, Hindutva ideology and institutions such as the Hindu Mahasabha of which Savarkar became the president in 1937 (Jones, 2006 [1989]: 185; Jaffrelot, 2007: 85-87, 2011 [2010]: 189; Bapu, 2013: 4; *etc.*). Compare also with Ilaiah’s understanding of these processes (Ilaiah, 2002 [1996]).

<sup>369</sup> According to Jaffrelot, nationalists outline the concept of nation through the criteria of “a glorious past, a prestigious language and an historical land” (Jaffrelot, 1993: 519).

<sup>370</sup> As Jones discusses, the definition of Hindu/Hinduism must be understood also within the context of the census (Jones, 1981). On a definition of Hinduism see, for example, Zavos, 2000: 25, 58; Smith, 2002: 19 and Scheifinger, 2009a.

<sup>371</sup> Compare also with the idea outlined by Coomaraswamy (Coomaraswamy, 1990c: 7). According to Jaffrelot, Savarkar draws his definition from Dayananda and the Arya Samaj (Jaffrelot, 2007: 15,

land that extends from the Sindhu to Sindhu as the land of his forefathers” (Savarkar, 1969 [1923]: 100). Here, Savarkar establishes and claims that Hindus have various characteristics such as “blood,” “race,” “culture,” “history” and “language” in common, making them a (ethnic) nation (Savarkar, 1969 [1923]: 39, 76, 84, 91, 92, *etc.*).<sup>372</sup> As Jaffrelot points out, Savarkar was likely to have carved this definition “out of the Western theories of the nation” (Jaffrelot, 2007: 15). Savarkar thus writes: “We [Aryas, Satnamis, Sanatanists, Sikhs, Jains, Lingayats, *etc.*] are one because we are a nation a race and own a common Sanskriti (civilization)” (Savarkar, 1969 [1923]: 92).<sup>373</sup> In foregrounding the shared ‘past’ of the Hindus and claiming a universal attachment and sense of ‘belonging’ felt by all inhabitants of “Bharat Mata” despite racial, cultural, or other differences, Savarkar undermined the basis on which the Arya Samaj had been working towards—which is to bring people ‘back’ to the fold; his vision of Hinduism rendered distinctions meaningless through an expansion of the definition of ‘Hindus.’ However, the problem with this broad definition was that it would also enfold Christians and Muslims—which would defeat the purpose of asserting the idea of India as a ‘Hindu’ nation and wresting power and influence for the Hindu majority (Savarkar, 1969 [1923]: 83).<sup>374</sup> Thus, Savarkar returned to the idea of religion and the concept of the “Holy land:” “For though Hindusthan to them [Christians and Muslims] is Fatherland as to any other Hindu yet it is not to them a Holyland too” (Savarkar, 1969 [1923]: 113).<sup>375</sup> This conflation of the future of ‘Hindu’ and ‘India,’ could be achieved if, as per Savarkar, the notion of the ‘Hindu’ could be broadened to encompass *all* religions *native* to India.<sup>376</sup>

How did the temple fare within Savarkar’s schema of Hinduism? To understand this, it is useful to consider the Patit Pavan Mandir in Ratnagiri. Savarkar

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86). This definition includes, for instance, the Sikh community contrary to the Sikh nationalist movement’s call for a nation independent from India (Van der Veer, 1992: 87).

<sup>372</sup> Compare with Coomaraswamy’s explanation of Indian nationality (Coomaraswamy, 1909c).

<sup>373</sup> According to Savarkar, “Sanskriti” means “Hindu culture” (Savarkar, 1969 [1923]: 92). See also Savarkar, 1969 [1923]: 39, 45, 89, 106, 125, *etc.* According to Savarkar, “Hinduism must necessarily mean the religion or the religions that are peculiar and native to this land and these people” (Savarkar, 1969 [1923]: 104). Compare this also with Jugal Kishore Birla’s idea of Hinduism (Birla, 2009 [2007]: 367).

<sup>374</sup> As for instance Jones and Bapu discuss, it seems as if at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Hindu community was greatly concerned about dying out (Jones, 1981; Bapu, 2013: 14-16; *etc.*).

<sup>375</sup> These ideas have been taken up at the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir.

<sup>376</sup> Savarkar noted, “Hinduism must necessarily mean the religion or the religions that are peculiar and native to this land and these people. If we are unable to reduce the different tenets and beliefs to a single system of religion then the only way would be to cease to maintain that Hinduism is a system and to say that it is a set of systems consistent with, or if you like, contradictory or even conflicting with each other” (Savarkar, 1969 [1923]: 104).

motivated a local businessman Bhagojisetth Keer to build a temple in Ratnagiri; this temple was not dedicated to Bharat Mata, Mother of the nation or any other new god, such as the caste god Valmiki, but was dedicated to the ‘proper’ Hindu gods Vishnu and Lakshmi.<sup>377</sup> According to the temple’s website, what is special is neither its architecture nor the gods but that, “this temple would [give] equal rights to *all Hindus*” (www.patitpavanmandir.org; italics added).<sup>378</sup> Opened in 1931, it “is the first temple in India, that offered an unrestricted right to *any* member of *Hindu Community* to enter in the very adytum of the temple and to worship the idols of Lord Laxmi Narayan” (www.patitpavanmandir.org). Savarkar’s choice of patron was also worth noting: the businessman and patron was a member of the Bhandari caste who desired to offer worship *directly* to the idols and thus offered worshippers a chance to do the same, at the temple. In inspiring the building of such a temple that apparently subsumed caste differences within Hinduism, Savarkar seemed to demonstrate the openness of his vision of Hinduism. It is telling that there is little scholarly attention that has been devoted to this experiment undertaken by Savarkar to demonstrate what Hindutva could be. The Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir with its similar premise—of access to *all* Hindus—perhaps finds itself more discussed and upheld as a unique example; this can be explained partly due to the significance of the location, as discussed above, and the profile of the Birla family; the scale and grandeur of the temple also contributes to this heightened emphasis.

## TEMPLE-BUILDING, NATION-BUILDING AND THE ROLE OF THE BIRLA FAMILY

It was the educationist Madan Mohan Malaviya who was also a member of the Imperial Legislative Council, attempted to convince the government to allot a piece of land on behalf of the Sanatan (Hindu) Dharm Sabha for the construction of a Hindu temple in Delhi (Caturvedi, 1982: 42-43).<sup>379</sup> However, by the time the government

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<sup>377</sup> The temple was inaugurated in 1931. There was no more need for a temple like the Bharat Mata Mandir. On the worship of Valmiki see Prashad, 2001 [2000], Leslie, 2003 and Lee, 2014. Compare also with the case of the Valmiki Mandir in Delhi that is discussed in the second chapter. Considering the introduction of Valmiki to replace gods such as Lal Beg, it would be significant to look closer at the circumstance that led to the construction of this temple.

<sup>378</sup> According to its website, even the *pujari* does not have to be Brahmin by birth. Besides, the website emphasises that the temple’s trust has “one member each from the Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and untouchable communities and one representative of Bhagojisetth Keer” (www.patitpavanmandir.org/Pages/temple.html).

<sup>379</sup> As discussed in detail by Renold, Malaviya himself seems to have been much concerned about the creation of Hindu spaces (Renold, 2005). According to an inscription on a pillar on the way to the

agreed, the only land that was available lay on the fringes of the new city at the rocky edges of the Central Ridge, which had earlier been declared a reserved forest in 1913 (Caturvedi, 1982: 42-43; Mann and Sehrawat, 2009: 562).<sup>380</sup> Accordingly, before the building of the temple could set out, the land needed to be prepared, which, as Caturvedi says, exhausted the funds of the Sabha and put the construction on hold (Caturvedi, 1982: 42-43).<sup>381</sup>

Learning about this situation by mere chance, Jugal Kishore Birla was authorised by his father Baldev Das Birla to assist the Sabha in its endeavour, according to Caturvedi.<sup>382</sup> Eventually, the family contributed approximately four lakhs of rupees for the building of the temple, thus becoming the most significant sponsor of the temple (unknown author, n.d.: 30; Caturvedi, 1982: 43; Jones, 1986: 346).<sup>383</sup> But who were the Birlas and what was their interest in the Sabha's grand

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Indraprastha Dharma Vatika, a nine-member strong trust was formed to be responsible for the maintenance of the temple. Members of this committee were: (1) Jugal Kishore Birla, (2) Rameshvar Das Birla and (3) Mulchand Bagrya from Baldev Das Birla's family; (4) Tyagmurti Gosvami Ganesh Datta, (5) R.P. Narayan Das and (6) R.S. Kesarcand Uppal from the Sanatan Dharm Pratinidhi Sabha Lahore and (7) R.S.L. Ramasaran Das, (8) R.P. Melaram Vaidya and (9) L. Haveliram from Sanatan Dharm Sabha New Delhi. Another trust, named Arya Dharm Seva Sangh, was established to overlook properties in Old and New Delhi as well as shares of mills that had been bought in the name of the temple in order to ensure its well being in the future.

<sup>380</sup> According to Peck, the new city was planned so spaciouly that "there were not enough buildings to fill such a huge area [...]" and "[t]he only remedy was the planting of trees to line the roads" (Peck, 2005: 260). See also Mann and Sehrawat, 2009: 558.

<sup>381</sup> According to Mann and Sehrawat, the British faced similar problems; before they could set out with the actual construction of New Delhi they needed to raze existing structures and level the land (Mann and Sehrawat: 2009: 557). See also Caturvedi (Caturvedi, 1982: 42).

<sup>382</sup> Considering the social standing of the family and their close relation to intellectual and political leaders, especially of the nationalist movement, it is difficult to imagine that they were not involved or at least aware of the construction of the temple much earlier. Shifts generated by colonialism and independence affected also the question of the sponsor/patronage of the temple. Who would be responsible for the construction and maintenance of temples? The state? The public? As Bharne and Krusche discuss, when Patel and other leaders decided to rebuild the Somnath Mandir, Gandhi suggested that the funds for its construction should be collected from the public and not the state (Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 249). On the construction of the Somnath Mandir, see also the previous chapter. Compare with Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 283-284. Similarly, it seems Malaviya insisted that BHU's temple to be funded by the public and not by the Birla family, also to give the construction a different meaning (Caturvedi, 1982: 166-167). Bharne and Krusche claim that "[n]o Hindu temple project in post-independent, democratic India has been a State sponsored entity [...]" (Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 249). However, as will be discussed in the following chapters in more detail, politicians, the state, *etc.* continue to support (also financially) maintenances/construction of temples suggesting that matters are not as simple as Bharne and Krusche put them.

<sup>383</sup> After visiting Paris, G.D. Birla wrote: "I realised that a good temple could not be built without 10 lakhs" (G.D. Birla quoted in Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 107-108). According to Kudaisya, among the Birlas, Jugal Kishore was most enthusiastic about the construction of temples (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 393). However, he was supported by his father and brothers (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 393). According to Caturvedi, the Sabha collected fifteen thousand rupees and Naresh Maharaja

project?

Jugal Kishore and his father were descendants of Seth Shiv Narayan Birla, who migrated in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century—like many others of his community at the time—from rural Rajasthan to the British Presidency port city of Bombay.<sup>384</sup> Shiv Narayan established a business in Bombay—signalling “the beginning of the House of Birlas, a name synonymous with nationalism, pioneerism and industrial prosperity, education, hospital and worship places in India and beyond” (Birla, n.d.: 9).<sup>385</sup> With growing success, the Birlas built houses in burgeoning cities of the country, while retaining close ties to their hometown Pilani—a practice and endeavour which continues till date (Piramal and Herdeck, 1985: 103; Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]; Birla, 2009 [2007]: 3-10; *etc.*).<sup>386</sup> Part of the family’s success was linked to the close relationship with prominent intellectual and political leaders of the time (Renold, 1994: 18). For instance, G.D. Birla, Baldev Das Birla’s third son and Jugal Kishore’s younger brother maintained close relations with leading nationalists of the

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Udyabhanu Simhaji of Dholpur as well as Maharaj Darbhanga contributed twenty thousand rupees each (Caturvedi, 1982: 43). However, as per Caturvedi’s estimate, the construction of an average temple ran usually into costs between fifty and sixty thousand rupees (Caturvedi, 1982: 43). Gopal speaks of “a cost of several lakhs of Rupees” (Gopal, 193-: 69).

<sup>384</sup> See also fifth chapter on migration in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>385</sup> On the beginnings of the family business see Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 4-12. The Birlas belong to a *jati* within the Marwari trading community (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 4-14, 2009: 87; Birla, 2009 [2007]: 3). As Kudaisya describes, with socio-economic and political shifts during the 19<sup>th</sup> century the community migrated but stayed within the boundaries of India, unlike communities from coastal Gujarat and South India that migrated to East Africa and Southeast Asia. They flourished in important political and commercial centres like Bombay and Calcutta (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 4-14). According to Kudaisya, their horizon extended from Rajputana to Assam and Burma and touched the fringes of the Deccan (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 6). By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Marwaris had established an extensive internal trading network, from which the Birlas profited (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 6-14).

<sup>386</sup> Around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Birla family moved to Calcutta from where the business empire was further extended; yet “the Birlas never left Pilani”, as Piramal and Herdeck emphasise (Caturvedi, 1982: 57; Piramal and Herdeck, 1985: 103; Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 12-14; Birla, 2009 [2007]: 3-10; *etc.*). With the accumulated fortune, the family built a well in/for their ancestral village, a Shiv temple and a *haveli* for the family. In 1901, Shiv Narain Birla established a *pathashala* in Pilani (Birla, 2009 [2007]: 9). Seemingly inspired by Malaviya’s BHU, the Birlas established the Birla Institute of Technology and Science (BITS) in Pilani (Caturvedi, 1982: 57-59; Birla, 2009 [2007]: 280-286; Świerzowska, 2015: 191; *etc.*). Similar to BHU, the university unfolds around a temple that has been dedicated to Saraswati the goddess of learning (Caturvedi, 1982: 59-76). According to Caturvedi, the temple that was inaugurated in 1960 has been modelled on the Vishvanath Mandir in Khajuraho (Caturvedi, 1982: 9). The temple-centric layout of BHU as well as of Pilani seem reminiscent of the layout that Chatterjee suggested as ideal layout for the “Indian [Village and] Town of tomorrow” (Chatterjee, 1949: 137-140, 143, Plate II and VI). According to Chatterjee, constructing a temple in the centre seemingly ensures that the god to whom the temple is dedicated watches over the people in all directions and protects them (Chatterjee, 1949: 76).

country. He “knew all the important leaders of India like Sardar Patel, Pt Motilal Nehru, Jawaharlal-ji [Jawaharlal Nehru], Madan Mohan Malaviya-ji, Raja-ji, Lala Lajpat Rai, Rajendra Babu (Rajendra Prasad), J.M. Sengupta, Dr Roy and other luminaries” (Birla, 2009 [2007]: 34).<sup>387</sup> He also established close links with Gandhi, supporting Gandhi and his cause financially, and at the latter’s behest in 1932, agreed to become the founding president of the All-India Harijan Sevak Sangh, an organisation founded by Gandhi to abolish untouchability (Piramal and Herdeck, 1985: 69-72; Renold, 1994: 31; Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 91, 162; Birla, 2009 [2007]: 30; *etc.*).<sup>388</sup> Interestingly, on the other hand, G.D. Birla and his brother Jugal Kishore also supported the Hindu Mahasabha (Jaffrelot, 2011 [2010]: 287; Bapu, 2013: 28). According to Renold, supporting the cause for independence was quite logical as “[i]t was clear that big business, including Birla, would stand to profit by independence” (Renold, 1994: 33). Thus, the Birlas “played an integral, if not clearly defined, role in the freedom movement”, as noted by Piramal and Herdeck (Piramal and Herdeck, 1985: 69). Kudelska, Staszczyk and Świerzowska have noted that

[t]he Birla temple complexes are an inexhaustible source of knowledge on contemporary India with reference to social and political relations, cultural changes and the various religious attitudes of the society (Kudelska, et al. 2014: 52).

Even so, the Birla temples share the destiny of most of the late temples—attracting popular attention, not scholarly.<sup>389</sup> How little is known about the Birlas with regard to

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<sup>387</sup> See, for instance, Kudaisya for more details on these relationships (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]). On G.D. Birla see also Świerzowska, 2015.

<sup>388</sup> G.D. Birla provided almost every of Gandhi’s financial needs (Piramal and Herdeck, 1985: 70-71; Renold, 1994: 18-19; Birla, 2009 [2007]: 28). As Renold discusses, Ambedkar was critical of the ties that Gandhi held with the Birla family (Renold, 1994: 16, 31-32). Krishna Kumar Birla remarks that his father tried to convince the Maharaja of Travancore and the Maharaja of Mysore to open their temples to the untouchables (Birla, 2009 [2007]: 30).

<sup>389</sup> Although the title of Caturvedi’s *Nāgar Śailī ke Naye Hindu Mandir (The New Hindu Temple Nagara Style)* might give the impression that the book gives an overview of late Hindu temple, Caturvedi exclusively discusses temples built by the Birla family. Besides discussing Delhi’s Lakshminarayan Mandir, he discusses the Sharada Mandir in Pilani, the Lakshminarayan Mandir in Bhopal, the Vithoba Mandir in Shahad near Mumbai, the Shiv Mandir in Renukoot, the Sheshayi Mandir in Nagda, the Venkateshvar Mandir in Hyderabad and the Vishvanath Mandir in BHU, Varanasi (Caturvedi, 1982: 9). For details on Birla temples in Pilani, Jaipur and Kolkata see Hardgrove (Hardgrove, 1999: 124-127). Jain has briefly discussed the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir in Delhi (Jain, 2017: S20-S21). A collaboration of scholars of the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations at the Jagiellonia University has initiated the project *Birla Mandir: Contemporary Hindu Temple Complexes as an Example of Modernization by the Return to Tradition* aiming to analyse the role and function of the temples in the religious and socio-political life of contemporary India. The project will conclude in 2017. See Kudelska, et al, 2014, 2016. According to them, the “Birla Mandirs have never undergone any systematic research” (Kudelska,



temple-building and patronage is demonstrated by the fact that a definitive figure of the number of temples built by the Birla family is not known.<sup>390</sup> While Jain writes of seventeen temples constructed by the Birla family, Kudaisya notes that by 1983 “the family had endowed more than 40 large temples in almost all the major cities of India [...]” (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 393; Kudelska, et al., 2014: 27, 2016: 150; Jain, 2017: S21). However, it must be pointed out that this number might include those temples that were not initially built by the Birlas, but instead, later renovated with their support.<sup>391</sup>

Noticeably, the temples have only a few features in common with each other. Over the last century, the Birlas have built temples in places of great religious and historical significance such as Varanasi and Mathura, in new industrial towns such as Nagda and Renukoot, in small towns such as Pilani and Amlai, as well as in urban centres such as Kolkata, Hyderabad, and Jaipur and, in New Delhi. Some of the Birla Mandirs, such as the ones built in Patna, Mathura, Kurukshetra, Akola, Bhopal and Varanasi feature a similar “modern” design as New Delhi’s Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, designed by the architect Sris Chandra Chatterjee.<sup>392</sup> Other temples, such as the ones the family built in Gwalior, Nagda, Kalyan and Renukoot were designed by the traditional architect (*sthapati*), Chandrakant Sompura, grandson of Prabhashankar

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et al., 2016: 150-151). See also Świerzowska, 2015: 119.

<sup>390</sup> Unlike, for example, BAPS, the Birla family does not seem to have a publicly accessible archive on their temples.

<sup>391</sup> As already mentioned, Shiv Narain Birla constructed a Shiv temple in Pilani (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 11, 15; Birla, 2009 [2007]: 8). Besides, the family contributed money for the construction of a temple in UK as well as for the restoration of several temples in Varanasi, Mathura and elsewhere, as Kudaisya says (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 71, 107-108, 284). According to Prashad and Lee, G.D Birla also sponsored various Valmiki Mandirs (Prashad, 2001 [2000]: 105, 109; Lee, 2014: 154). See Delhi’s Valmiki Mandir discussed in the second chapter. Moreover, Kudaisya emphasises “substantial responsibility of the reconstruction [of the Somnath temple, which was designed by Prabhashankar Sompura] was taken by the Birla family” (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 284). The Following temples have been built by the Birlas: Lakshminarayan Mandir (1933-1939) in Delhi, Lakshminarayan Mandir (opened in 1946) in Patna, Bhagavad Gita Mandir (1946) in Mathura, Bhagavad Gita Mandir (1956) in Kurukshetra, Saraswati Mandir (1956) in Pilani, Lakshminarayan Mandir (1960-1964) in Bhopal, Vithoba Mandir (1962-1996) in Shahad (Maharashtra), Mahadev Mandir (1966) in Renukoot (Uttar Pradesh), New Vishvanath Mandir (1966) in BHU, Varanasi, Sheshashayin Mandir (1970) in Nagda (Madhya Pradesh), Venkateshvara Mandir (1976) Hyderabad, Radhakrishna Mandir (1970-1996) in Kolkata, Vivasvan (Surya) Mandir (1988) in Gwalior, Lakshminarayan Mandir (1988-1998) in Jaipur, Birla Mandir in Ayodhya, Ganesha Mandir in Alibaug (Maharashtra), Rama Mandir in Akola (Maharashtra), Shiva and Lakshminarayan Mandir in Brajrajnagar (Odisha), Bhavatarini Mandir in Amlai (Madhya Pradesh).

<sup>392</sup> For more details on Chatterjee see below.

Sompura (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 293).<sup>393</sup> These temples are modelled on the textbook temples and ‘superstars’ of Indian architecture—the Rajarani Mandir in Bhubaneswara, the Vishvanath and the Kandariya Mahadev Mandir in Khajuraho and the Sas-Bahu Mandir in Gwalior (Caturvedi, 1982: 9, 62, 108, 125; Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 241; *etc.*).<sup>394</sup>

Another feature that distinguishes the temples built by the Birlas from those erected by organisations such as BAPS and ISKCON is that they are not dedicated to one particular deity but many different gods.<sup>395</sup> Thus, it is important to formulate some basic questions in this light: For whom are these temples built? What motivated the family to build a large number of temples dedicated to various gods across the country? Is this a consistent kind of diversity—whether in terms of the vision or idea? Caturvedi reads the family’s temple patronage as responding to the needs of local people with the construction of such places of worship; other scholars read the family’s endeavour from a more critical perspective (Caturvedi, 1982: 41-42, 55, 77, 126; Renold, 1994; Hardgrove, 1999; Kudelska, et al., 2014, 2016). Hardgrove speaks of a “consciously-national chain” of temples (Hardgrove, 1999: 120). It seems as if the king and the royal family have been replaced by privileged business/industrialist families/communities (Hardy, 2007: 234-235; Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 241; Michell, 2015: 40). Kudelska, Staszczuk and Świerzowska, for example, suggest that the construction of temples “by one of the most powerful families in India may be somehow related to the family intent of strengthening its position within the Indian hierarchy (in a political and religious sense)” (Kudelska, et al., 2014: 52). Renold points out that “[r]eligious patronage was a means to enhance social and economic status in the community”, a point which echoes Kudaisya’s observation—G.D. Birla “is perhaps best remembered as a builder of magnificent temples [...]” (Renold, 1994:

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<sup>393</sup> Compare with Caturvedi, 1982: 126. On the Sompura family see Inglis, 2016.

<sup>394</sup> According to Mukerji and Basu, the Radha Krishna Mandir was designed by Nomi Bose (Mukerji and Basu, 2015). K.K. Birla emphasises that Kolkata’s Radha Krishna Mandir “should be a model of our ancient temple architecture” (Birla, 2009 [2007]: 265). Kudelska, Staszczuk and Świerzowska, point out that at the temple in Pilani, not each and every detail of the Khajuraho temples has been reconstruct (Kudelska, et al., 2014: 44).

<sup>395</sup> Although ISKCON’s temples are all dedicated to Krishna they feature different designs. On BAPS’ architecture see fifth chapter. The Birla Mandir in Shahad, for example, has been dedicated to Vithoba, a god mostly worshipped in Southern India (Maharashtra, Karnataka, Goa, *etc.*) while the temple in Varanasi, known as the City of Shiva *par excellence*, has been dedicated to Shiva and the temple in Gwalior, considered a centre of Sun worship, has been dedicated to Surya.

25; Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: vii).<sup>396</sup> Further, as Hardgrove explains, temples

have traditionally been patronized by royalty and Hindu kings, regal patrons who could access the wealth of a country and afford to build. As such, temple-building went hand in hand with the construction of state power (Hardgrove, 1999: 122).<sup>397</sup>

These readings—that the Birla family’s temple-building projects were a means of accruing power—are substantiated in a statement made by G.D. Birla in an interview with the journalist Margaret Bourke-White. He remarked: “Frankly speaking, we build temples but we don’t believe in temples [...]” (G.D. Birla quoted in Renold, 1994: 25).<sup>398</sup> If G.D. Birla did not believe in temples then why did he build them?<sup>399</sup> Despite this statement, Kudaisya insists that G.D. Birla “did believe in their necessity” (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 393). G.D. Birla explains his and the family’s endeavour: “We build temples to spread a kind of religious mentality” (G.D. Birla quoted in Renold, 1994: 25).<sup>400</sup> In other words, for the Birlas the temple was/is much more than a merely sacred place; it is a means to teach and mobilise people.<sup>401</sup>

The temples built by the Birla family across India have attained “a national iconic status” (Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 241). The family’s role in the construction of temples has been understood as so significant that all of them are not only named after the deity to whom they are dedicated but also after their patrons, as Birla Mandir. Indeed, so pervasive is their influence on temple making that they are

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<sup>396</sup> See also Bayly on religious patronage in Northern India (Bayly, 1973).

<sup>397</sup> However, this idea needs yet to be explored further. The Radhakrishna/JK Mandir in Kanpur, for example, is built by the JK Trust (run by the Singhanian family) in 1960. Similar to the Birlas, Juggilal Singhanian and his son Kamalpat Singhanian founded their business at the turn of the century and supported the independence movement. Another temple built by an industrial family is the Lakshminarayan Mandir in Modinaga, built by the Modi family, looking somewhat similar to Delhi’s Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir. Mayawati’s various projects should also be taken into account in this context. Alfred Brush Ford, great-grandson of Henry Ford, contributed seventy-five million dollars for the construction of ISKCON’s Temple of the Vedic Planetarium at Mayapur (unknown author, 2013).

<sup>398</sup> In a brief note, in which he meditates on the idea of constructing a temple, G.D. Birla concludes: “Is there God in a temple? God is within you!” (G.D. Birla quoted in Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 108).

<sup>399</sup> According to Kudaisya, there is no evidence that G.D. Birla took actively part in decisions on matters of temple-building (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 393). Caturvedi as well as Kudelska, Staszczyk and Świerzowska, however, ascribe the construction of the Shiv Mandir in Renukoot to G.D. Birla (Caturvedi, 1982: 9; Kudelska, et al., 2014: 47).

<sup>400</sup> This aspect will be discussed further later in the chapter.

<sup>401</sup> The need for education to be in the hands of Indians has been emphasised, for instance, by Coomaraswamy (Coomaraswamy, 1909b: iii). According to him, a “National Education” will ensure India’s political unity (Coomaraswamy, 1909a: iii-v). This idea and the definition of Hindu and Indian will be discussed below in more detail as well as the idea of the temple and education. Compare also with the following two chapters.

understood as engendering the creation of a new ‘type’ of temple in post-Independence India. Thus, for example, the Nandalala Temple in Chennai in which, as Sridharan says, Ganapati Sthapati combines Dravidian and Nagara style of architecture has been referred to by local residents of the city as the “Birla Mandir type” (Sridharan, 2003: 273). In the case of the Lakshminarayan temple “[n]o one really calls this temple by its real name: Laksmi Narayan Mandir. Instead it is the Birla Mandir [...]” (Time Out, 2010: 86).<sup>402</sup> In short, the Birlas built a name for themselves with these temples, similar to pre-modern dynasties. The many grand temples constructed by the family all over the country might be read as “[p]erhaps most visible legacy” the family handed down to future generations (Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 393). The idea of ‘religious mentality’ referred to by G.D. Birla, references the idea that the temple, like other institutions such as schools/universities and museums are powerful institutions as they produce knowledge and discourses that define truth on which power is based, an idea that Foucault discusses in his writings.<sup>403</sup> Hence, the Birlas were not only closely interlinked with the nationalist discourse that was unfolding at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century but, also played a significant role in building the nation.<sup>404</sup>

## PERCEPTIONS OF LAKSHMINARAYAN/BIRLA MANDIR’S ARCHITECTURAL LANGUAGE

The temple, heavily patronised by the Birlas, was the work of the architect, Sris Chandra Chatterjee, a member of the Indian Congress Party and a follower of Mahatma Gandhi (Gupta, 1991: 193; Glover, 2012: 43; *etc.*). Chatterjee designed the headquarters of the Hindu Mahasabha (Figure 3.5), located just a stone’s throw from the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir. The architect also built the Arya Dharma Sangha Dharamshala (Birla Dharamshala) in Sarnath and the Deshbandhu Memorial in Calcutta (Gupta, 1991: 198; Lang, 2010 [2002]: 27).<sup>405</sup> In numerous publications on

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<sup>402</sup> Wikipedia features an entry titled “Birla Mandir” ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birla\\_Mandir](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birla_Mandir)). To date, even temples that have not been built by the Birlas might be understood in the light of the Birla Mandirs. See also Caturvedi, 1982: 55.

<sup>403</sup> See, for example, “Order of Discourse” in which Foucault explains the idea of power with reference to the idea of the discourse, according to which all kinds of existing knowledge and perceptions are analysed as a result of “the order of discourse” (Foucault, 1981). Compare also with Rancière, 2004.

<sup>404</sup> Besides temples, members of the Birla family have also built a number of, what Hardgrove calls, “philanthropic institutions” such as hospitals, museums, planetariums, schools, universities, *etc.* (Hardgrove, 1999; Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 390-396; *etc.*).

<sup>405</sup> According to Parimoo, Chatterjee also built the Shiva Mandir in Varanasi for the Pathuriaghat

architecture, he discusses his idea of an Indian national architecture—equating it as a means to unite the Indians.<sup>406</sup> Like his contemporaries such as the Birla family, Malaviya and Coomaraswamy—all of whom believed in the power of education, Chatterjee was similarly passionate about establishing an All India Institute of Architecture and Regional Planning. He envisioned that such an institute would impart architectural training, planning, fine arts and crafts traditions based on ‘Indian’ principles (Glover, 2012: 43).<sup>407</sup>

On the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir and its architecture, Chatterjee notes that it is “a modern development of an ancient Gupta model into a new form of the ‘Sikhara’ temple”, which did not stop people from reading it in a different light (Chatterjee, 1949: 145).<sup>408</sup> Chopra, for instance, says that the temple “is built in the old Orissan style” (Chopra, 1970: 161). Also, the popular city travel guide *Time Out*, informs its reader that the temple “is said to be inspired by the architecture of the ancient temples of Orissa” (Time Out, 2010: 87).<sup>409</sup> The whole idea that the temple has been built in “the old Orissan style” is perhaps linked to Chatterjee’s

desire [...] to symbolize the middle ‘Vimana’ with a stately figure of ‘Surya’ driving seven horses, overlooking the rising sun as the temples face east, provide sun-windows and to carve four wheels like those of a chariot, on the four corners of the stone basement, as are seen in the ‘Surya-temple of Konark in Orissa’ (Chatterjee, 1949: 146).<sup>410</sup>

Peck as well seems convinced that “purely traditional features” have been used for its construction, without getting into the specifics (Peck, 2005: 264). According to Bharne and Krusche, Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir’s “architectural idiom [is] imbued from the Nagara style” (Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 241). The small

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Tagore family (Parimoo, 2015: 66).

<sup>406</sup> Chatterjee worked for the Public Works Department of Bengal and Bikaner as well as for Nehru’s National Planning Committee in the post-Independence period (Gupta, 1991: 191-193; Lang, 2010 [2002]: 27; Glover, 2012: 43; Scriver and Srivastava, 2015: 103-104). For a selection of Chatterjee’s publications on architecture see bibliography. See also below.

<sup>407</sup> According to Glover, his plan was to some extent adopted by the Bengal Engineering College in Calcutta (Glover, 2012: 43).

<sup>408</sup> See on the role of the author the works of Barthes, Benjamin and Foucault (Barthes, 1977; Benjamin, 1991b and Foucault, 2009).

<sup>409</sup> And, *Footprint* claims: “The design [of the temple] is in the Orissan style with tall curved sikharas (towers)” (Betts and McCulloch, 2014: 39).

<sup>410</sup> Chatterjee gives a similar explanation in *Magadha: Architecture and Culture* (Chatterjee, 1942: 83).

guidebook *Birla Temple, Shri Laxmi Narayan Temple: Forever*, sold by street vendors around the temple, on the other hand, seems to see something modern in the temple. It reads: “The temple is built in the *Nagara* style of architecture interspersed with modern influences.” Kudelska, Staszczyk and Świerzowska emphasise that the temple “design uses modern architectural solutions” and Gopal finds it to be “a most modern Hindu monument” (Gopal, 193-: 70; Kudelska, et al., 2014: 42). In addition, he writes that “[i]ts unique design, masterly plan and marvellous architecture provided a happy and unrivalled co-mingling of the Eastern and Western styles built throughout under the direct supervision of Indian Architects” (Gopal, 193-: 70). Hardy offers an even more defined reading, “commissioned in the 1930s [the Birla temples] were rather Art Deco”, as he says (Hardy, 2007: 238). In one of the most referred publication on late architectures in India, Lang and his co-authors write: “The building is a new type in old garb—it is organisationally innovative but symbolically conservative” (Lang, et. al., 1997: 136). The section below explores Chatterjee’s negotiation with tradition and modernity in greater detail.

## **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION OF THE LAKSHMINARAYAN/ BIRLA MANDIR**

As in the case with many grand buildings, the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir’s structural elements have been arranged as per symmetry (Figure 3.1).<sup>411</sup> The architect, Sris Chandra Chatterjee, reduced the architectural elements that he borrowed from the vast repertoire of Indian architecture, in such a way that the temple looks as if built up from modules. However, he tried to balance these massive- and block-like structures with elegant and intricate ornaments such as *jallis* (Figure 3.6). Though, the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir might not feature the sort of monumentality associated with stone temples such as the Swaminatha Swami Mandir, it is still impressive, if not monumental.<sup>412</sup> Unlike many other temples, the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir has three *garbhagrahas* and three *shikharas* arranged in one line, thereby affecting the overall outward appearance of the building.<sup>413</sup> Adding two more *shikharas* broadens

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<sup>411</sup> The temple is adjoined by a Dharamshala as well as a library and reading room. According to an inscription, the Dharamshala was inaugurated in 1940.

<sup>412</sup> Compare with Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 241.

<sup>413</sup> Whereas later temples, such as BAPS’ Swaminarayan Mandirs that will be discussed in the fifth chapter, often feature similar spatial arrangements, it is rarely seen among ancient temples. Compare with BAPS, 2014: 78. See also Caturvedi and Jain (Caturvedi, 1982: 49, Jain, 2017: S21). Neither the Rajarani Mandir in Bhubaneshwara nor the Vishvanath and the Kandariya

or expands the temple and reduces the emphasis of verticality usually noticed in temples with one *shikhara*.

The temple has three floors, the lowest is divided into various rooms used for different purposes such as offices for the temple administration. In addition, this lower floor provides space for small enterprises such as the Mandir Pustak Bhandar, which sells Gita Press publications, the photo studio Amit Studio, the Temple Gift Centre, a travel agency, and a clinic supported by the Fortis Foundation.<sup>414</sup> The structure that houses the temple's main *murtis* is on the first floor and expands over two floors ending in a large terrace. The walls of this massive east-facing block are visually dominated by a sequence of flamboyant arches (Figure 3.7) contrasting with the building's overall massive and voluminous design. As discussed in great detail by scholars such as Meister and Hardy, temples follow sequences of projecting and recessing mouldings and other architectural elements, which might look rather complex although they are repetitions of the same idea or motif: two pillars that are surmounted by a superstructure (Meister, et al., 1983; Hardy, 1999 [1995]: 18; *etc.*). At the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, the arches of the lower floor are covered and, thus, end the floor with a *kumbha*-shaped moulding. The same motif is repeated on the second floor, concluding with the same *kumbha*-shaped moulding. However, instead of continuing to the next architectural element of the sequence (the *ghummat* or the *shikhara*), the building abruptly ends in a flat terrace crested with a balustrade, lending the building a lofty appearance which is reminiscent of some elements of attractive palace architecture.

The most outstanding architectural feature of the temple is its *shikharas*

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Mahadev Mandir in Khajuraho and the Sas-Bahu Mandir in Gwalior, on which some of the Birla Mandirs are modelled, feature such arrangement of three garbhagrahas in one line. However, that is not to say that none of the ancient temples feature such arrangement. Prasat Kravan in Cambodia, built in the 10<sup>th</sup> century, for example, features even five garbhagrahas arranged in one line. Among the later temples this arrangement seems to be more common. See for example Delhi's Radha-Parthasarathi Mandir/ISKCON Temple and Chhattarpur Mandir. Also the Vithoba/Birla Mandir in Shahad near Mumbai and the Radhakrishna/Birla Mandir in Kolkata, all built by members of the Birla family, feature three *garbhagrahas*. See Kudelska, et al., 2014: 46, 2016: 160-161. For earlier examples of this arrangement see Michell (Michell, 2015: 149, 207, *etc.*).

<sup>414</sup> Some rooms of the adjoined Dharamshala, are occupied by ATMs and shops selling sweets and snacks. Mukul discusses the role of Gita Press as an important institution in the making of India (Mukul, 2015).

(Figure 3.8, 3.9). These are square at the base, culminating in curvilinear lines at a truncated top, covered by a large, round, ribbed stone and crowned by a *kalasha*. Compared to the fragmented and complex version of the *shikharas* featured in many ancient, as well as some later, temples, Chatterjee's *shikhara* might appear simple and plain—features often associated with modern architecture. A small comparatively flat niche has been added to each of the sites of the *shikhara*, the one facing eastward containing a *murti* of the god/goddess to whom the respective shrine has been dedicated. Unlike the design in which the *murtis* at the earlier built temples such as the Sun Temple in Modhera have been depicted (Figure 3.10), these *murtis*, like the rest of the images covering the walls of the temple, have been designed in flat relief.<sup>415</sup> The *murtis* depicted in the niches of the *shikhara* (Figure 3.11) have been painted in white colour that contrasts with the red, mistakenly taken to be red sandstone by Bharne and Krusche. These *murtis*, cover the *shikhara* and most other architectural elements (Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 241).<sup>416</sup> Hence, the feature that makes these *shikharas* visually stand out is their impressive height, with the central *shikhara* reaching a height of 165 feet (Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 241; Jain, 2017: S21).<sup>417</sup>

Although overshadowed by the Qutab Minar, which reaches a height of 234 feet, the central *shikhara* of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir ranked amongst the highest architectural structures (not only with reference to religious structures but also otherwise) in Delhi at that time (Blakiston, 1922a: 7; Caturvedi, 1982: 51; Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 241; *etc.*).<sup>418</sup> Taking after spectacular structures in the US at the turn

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<sup>415</sup> Chatterjee has attached motifs, such as the elephant, to the walls. These motifs have also been used and continue to be used in stone temple architecture as well. In these designs they are minor motifs with a fixed (conceptual) position in the temple's overall design. Compared with these designs, Chatterjee's design looks as if he had extracted the motif and attached it like an ornament to the wall without (artistic as well as conceptual) background.

<sup>416</sup> Various people have, in fact, insisted that the temple has been entirely built of stone. According to Caturvedi, the temple has been built of brick, lime and cement (Caturvedi, 1982: 9, 43). Caturvedi, seemingly in favor of temples built of stones, tries to excuse the choice pointing out that at the time when the temple was built, it was difficult to find capable architects/*sthapatis* (Caturvedi, 1982: 9, 43). On the early use of concrete see Tappin, 2002. According to INTACH, brick masonry has been used for the wall and stone for the floor (Gupta, et al., 1999: 151). According to *Birla Temple, Shri Laxmi Narayan Temple: Forever*, Kota stone from Makaran, Agra Kota and Jaisalmer have been used. Over the years the temple has been re-painted several times.

<sup>417</sup> Caturvedi says that the temple can be seen from far, which might have been the case when lesser buildings covered the surrounding (Caturvedi, 1982: 51).

<sup>418</sup> See also *Birla Temple, Shri Laxmi Narayan Temple: Forever* (unknown author, 19-). It supersedes the height of other temples in Delhi (even Akshardham) as well as the minarets of the Jama Masjid



of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, height fascinated the people of the world and concerned its builders, including Chatterjee (Chatterjee, 1949: 55-57).<sup>419</sup> India—as the rest of the world—could not compete with these icons of modernity.<sup>420</sup> Chatterjee saw in the skyscraper and architecture a unity between “architectural art and living,” which he had been trying to create for Indian architecture (Chatterjee, 1949: 57). He found that in the US, “[t]he erection of even a tiny petrol godown is considered there as a national work in which the prestige of the entire nation is awakened” (Chatterjee, 1949: 57). It is here and elsewhere in his writings that Chatterjee links architecture with the nation, comparable with Coomaraswamy’s ideas on Indian Art that have been discussed in the first chapter (Chatterjee, 1942, 1948, 1949).

According to Chatterjee, however, architecture is of national importance and should be controlled by national institutions.<sup>421</sup> Chatterjee was of the view that architectural planning might solve many of the country’s problems, taking the urban poor into consideration. He envisioned India’s future villages, minor towns, industrial towns, *etc.*, to be equipped with modern facilities such as radio stations, fire brigades, schools, military training centres, banks, hospitals, sanitary training centres, museums, post-offices, cinemas, *etc.* that would unfold around a “temple with community hall” (Chatterjee, 1949: 139).<sup>422</sup> However, his conception of modernity and architecture never broadened to encompass architectures for communities other than the Hindu community—there was no space for mosques, churches, Jain temples

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that reach a height of around forty feet but since they rise on an elevated platform they overlook the surrounding city with a height of approximately 130 feet but not the height of the Qutab Minar (Sanderson, 1916: 145-146). The tower of St Martin’s Garrison Church inaugurated in 1931 reaches a height of 128 feet (Khanna, 2008: 17). According to BAPS, Akshardham’s height is 141 feet (Vivekjivandas, 2009: 11). Even compared to some of the classics of Indian architecture such as the Sun Temple in Konarak the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir’s height is impressive.

<sup>419</sup> The fascination for height continues until date and seems to have become a significant feature/characteristic of contemporary (temple) architecture. ISKCON has started with the construction of the Vrindavan Candrodya Mandir in Vrindavan that will feature, in ISKCON’s words, a “skyscraping shikhara” of 557 feet ([www.vcm.org.in](http://www.vcm.org.in)). As will also be briefly discussed in the fifth chapter, like other markets, the religious/temple market is highly competitive thus the spectacle (for example in the form of height) has seemingly become a central feature of contemporary temple architecture. See Lutgendorf, 1994, 2007: 3-4; Srinivas, 2004, 2006; Nanda, 2009; Jain, 2014, 2016, 2017; Mathur and Singh, 2007; *etc.*

<sup>420</sup> However, it did not stop Chatterjee from associating the *shikhara* to these technological wonders by using the word “sky-scraping” to describe the temple’s *shikhara* (Chatterjee, 1942: 44, 83). Chatterjee visited New York and the 1,250-foot high Empire State Building that was inaugurated in 1930/31 (Chatterjee, 1949: 55-57).

<sup>421</sup> Chatterjee tried to establish a School of Indian Architecture and Regional Planning (Chatterjee, 1949: xiv-xvi; *etc.*).

<sup>422</sup> See also above and Chatterjee, 1949: 137-147. Compare also with Lang, 2010 [2002]: 27.

and the like in Chatterjee's vision of India. In other words, Chatterjee seemingly imagined India—its cities, towns, villages, *etc.*—as the Hindu nation that Savarkar has described, unfolding around Hindu religion/culture/practices/*etc.*—a *world* unfolding around the Hindu temple. With regard to his architecture, it seemed, Chatterjee tries to “avoid aping European styles” and instead create “an altogether new style” that would suit the Indian context (Chatterjee, 1949: 45). Such a context-based architectural response, emerging from Indian conditions, for Chatterjee, was one that could participate in “the evolution of a New Order, through one World-Architecture and Human Planning [...] [will be] emblematic of the coming human family, and help in its advent” (Chatterjee, 1949: 122).<sup>423</sup>

## EXPERIENCING THE TEMPLE

As a temple that deemed itself to be on the cusp of inaugurating a new set of relations, the new nation and the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir also set out to define who was allowed within its precincts. Who is allowed into the temple and who is not—this has been worked into the surface of the temple, in the form of plaques literally plastering the temple's outer and inner walls. Thus, for instance, a plaque at Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's entrance reads:

[...] All Hindus (i.e. all branches of Shri Sanatan Dharam including Arya, Baudh, Jain, Sikh) may participate in the daily worship, satsang and kirtan [...] This temple is open to all Hindus (including Harijans) [...].<sup>424</sup>

This plaque as well as other plaques attached to the outer and inner walls of the temple are particularly specific about the definition of “all Hindus.”<sup>425</sup> The idea has

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<sup>423</sup> Taking the comments that are published in his books into account, it seems as if his ideas and architecture were appreciated by architects, scholars and politicians worldwide (Chatterjee, 1942: 91-112; 1949: 181-186). That he has been selected to build such an important temple speaks for itself. Nehru says that he is “very much interested” in Chatterjee's work but commissions Le Corbusier with the construction of Chandigarh (Chatterjee, 1949: 186). Until date, Chatterjee and his work drew little scholarly attention. Also with regard to the construction of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, his name is hardly ever mentioned; even though Jugal Kishore Birla seemed pleased with the temple and Chatterjee (Chatterjee, 1942: 104).

<sup>424</sup> A second inscription with the same message has been engraved on the right site of the entrance in Hindi. Many of the inscriptions at the temple are given in Hindi, at times accompanied by a translation into English. Compare with the Patit Pavan Mandir that has been briefly discussed above.

<sup>425</sup> A notice at the temple's entrance, for instance, says as follows: “All Hindus (i.e. all branches of Shri Sanatan Dharam including Arya, Baudh, Jain, Sikh).”As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, this aspect was also emphasised by Gandhi during the inauguration of the temple. See Caturvedi, 1982: 46.

been found worthy of repetition in the form of a *yantra*-like image titled “*Mahan Arya [Hindu] Dharm Chavi*” (Figure 3.12) that defines/identifies Sanatanis, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs and Arya Samajists as five branches of Arya [Hindu] Dharm calling on them as “brothers” to work together.<sup>426</sup> The inspiration of the idea that has been visualised here can be traced to Savarkar, who popularised it in the 1920s.<sup>427</sup> However, at the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir the boundaries have not been pushed as far as they have been pushed at the above-discussed Patit Pavan Mandir built at Savarkar’s behest. The Patit Pavan Mandir emphasises that “any Hindu even if he has not had a bath shall have the right to perform their puja” (www.patitpavanmandir.org). The Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, however, does not allow “[p]ersons suffering from infectious diseases and beggars [...] in or near the temple [...]” Not only here but through various other plaques as well, the concept of *purity* has been underscored. Consider, for instance: “It is the religious duty of the visitors, to see that they are mentally and physically pure and cleanly dressed.”<sup>428</sup> One contends with the ideas of ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ objects, desirable and undesirable possessions immediately while attempting to enter the temple. Shoes are to be deposited at the shoe-counter and a security check at the entrance ensures that visitors do not carry unwanted items such as cameras and phones into the temple. Foreigners are asked to deposit their shoes, phones and cameras in a separate room with lockers. A noticeboard reminds the reader: “You are entering a place of worship. Devotees are therefore required to be suitably attired as a mark of respect. Visitors in short pants or ladies with bare shoulders are respectfully requested to dress appropriately before entering the temple.”

One can access the different shrines dedicated to gods and goddesses which have been placed on the first level via a staircase covered by an impressive marble gateway, crowned by a small *shikhara* (Figure 3.13). At the first level of the building, the central shrine that houses the *murtis* of Lakshmi and Narayan is situated on the western end; this makes it impossible to circumambulate the shrine on the platform

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<sup>426</sup> This image can also be seen at the Chatterjee’s headquarter of the Hindu Mahasabha and at BHU’s Vishvanath Mandir.

<sup>427</sup> This aspect has been discussed above.

<sup>428</sup> As discussed above and as will be discussed below, the idea of purity is closely linked to the temple as well as to the caste system and the resulting repression of people born into lower castes. See here, for example, Fuller, 1979. Compare also with Srinivas, 2006: 339-342.

itself.<sup>429</sup> Two subsidiary shrines, facing this main shrine, have been placed in the corners on the eastern side of this high platform, which at the same time also functions as a huge terrace.<sup>430</sup> The shrine in the southern corner—to be approached first by devotees in the course of circumambulation—houses an image of Ganesha, god of beginnings and remover of obstacles.<sup>431</sup> Its equivalent in the opposite north-eastern corner houses an image of Hanuman.<sup>432</sup> Unlike the main *garbhagrahas* that are surmounted by *shikharas*, these subsidiary shrines (Figure 3.14) are surmounted by a hemispherically-formed superstructure that is reminiscent of the form typical of the architecture of the *stupa*.<sup>433</sup>

This arrangement, in which shrines occupy the corner of a plinth, surrounding the usually bigger, elevated shrine in the middle, is reminiscent of the “*pañcāyatana*,” according to Kramrisch and Reitz, this is a widely used arrangement in northern India and the Deccan (Reitz, 1999: 3-4; Kramrisch, 1946: 200; *etc.*). The Vishvanath Mandir in Khajuraho that has been used as model for later Birla Mandirs (such as the Sharada Mandir in Pilani) has been discussed by Reitz as one of the examples of this arrangement (Caturvedi, 1982: 9, 57-76; Reitz, 1999: 107-110; Kudelska, et al., 2014: 44).<sup>434</sup> The Birla Mandirs, at Pilani, Renukoot and Jaipur for instance feature *chattri*-like structures in the front corners of the large terrace housing statues of the temple’s patrons instead of *murtis*.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> However, the three shrines can be circumambulated within the shrine itself.

<sup>430</sup> There are several seating facilities on this terrace that seem to be used by visitors.

<sup>431</sup> On Ganesha and his iconography see, for example, Rao, 1997 [1914], Vol. I: 35-67. As mentioned earlier, since the worship of Ganesha has been promoted by Tilak, it seems as if Ganesha has become more popular (Zavos, 2000: 71-74). Compare also with Fuller, who discusses the celebrations of the Ganapati Utsav in Tamil Nadu (Fuller, 2001).

<sup>432</sup> Taking into account the number of temples that have been built in the name of Hanuman over the last thirty years or so, it seems as if Hanuman has been given more meaning within comparatively recent times (Lutgendorf, 2002a: 71). Lutgendorf discusses the role and meaning associated with Hanuman in today’s context in several of his publications. See, for example, Lutgendorf, 1994, 2002a and 2007. See also Smith, 2003: 188.

<sup>433</sup> Compare this design also with the design of the Valmiki Mandir on Mandir Road. Various other elements of Chatterjee’s design are reminiscent of Buddhist architecture. For example, the balustrades that crest the platform as well as the roof are reminiscent of the *vedika* surrounding the stupas in Sanchi, Bharhut and Amravati. Many other architects including Lutyens have also used this motif.

<sup>434</sup> Reitz undertook a detailed survey of this form (Reitz, 1999).

<sup>435</sup> See descriptions of the temples by Caturvedi as well as by Kudelska, Staszczyk and Świerzowska (Caturvedi, 1982: 57-76, 105-124; Kudelska, et al., 2014: 44-45, 47; 2016: 151-156).

The temples' main building progresses in the same spatial configuration as many of the temples built earlier: *ardhamandapa*, *mahamandapa*, *antarala*, *garbhagraha*.<sup>436</sup> The *garbhagraha* situated on the central axis is the largest amongst the three of the temple's *garbhagrahas*. It contains the temple's central *murtis*: Lakshmi and Narayan (Figure 3.15), after which the temple has been named.<sup>437</sup> Narayan is shown four-armed, holding the usual *vyuhas* (*gada*, *shanka*, *cakra* and *padma*) in his hands. His consort Lakshmi has been positioned on his left.<sup>438</sup> The two adjoining *garbhagrahas* contain *murtis* of a two-armed Shiva in his "yogirāj rūp", as noted by Caturvedi, and an eight-armed Durga is sitting on her *vahana*, the tiger (Caturvedi, 1982: 47, 49).<sup>439</sup> The *garbhagrahas* have been designed similarly as the remaining interior, which seems to be a rare practice among earlier-built temples.<sup>440</sup> Also, unlike many temples that display the *murtis* in the dim light of a candle, at the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir the *murtis* are exhibited in modern artificial light.<sup>441</sup> As it has been common on the subcontinent for centuries, *dvarapalas* are depicted flanking the doorways meaning to protect the gods/goddesses residing in the *garbhagrahas*.<sup>442</sup> Also, like in many other temples, at the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, a permanent barrier and priests prevent people from entering the *garbhagraha* and thus touching the *murtis*—an arrangement that is linked to the idea

<sup>436</sup> Compare this description also with Caturvedi, 1982: 47-51.

<sup>437</sup> Lakshmi, goddess of wealth and success, is often to be found in places of business (Smith, 1997: 36). According to Caturvedi, the *murti* of Narayan has a height of 7.5 feet and the *garbhagraha* has a size of 21.5 square feet (Caturvedi, 1982: 47, 49). All *murtis* at the temple, including the ones at the Gita Bhavan, have been made out of white marble. According to *Birla Temple, Shri Laxmi Narayan Temple: Forever*, the *murtis* "are in marble brought from Jaipur" (unknown author, n.d.: 30). Caturvedi too says that the *murtis* have been made by artists from Jaipur (Caturvedi, 1982: 47-49). As per the information I was given at various temples in Delhi, the *murtis* of many temples in Delhi have been made of marble from Jaipur/Rajasthan. Parker, who discusses the value given to different stones, mentions that marble is imported from Rajasthan to create *murtis* commissioned by North Indians based in Tamil Nadu (Parker, 1992b: 99). Compare with fourth chapter. According to Tamil sculptors, however, the quality is less than the quality of Tamil Nadu's granite (Parker, 1992b: 99).

<sup>438</sup> Lakshmi is shown with the *abhayamudra* and holding the *padma*. On Narayan's and Lakshmi's iconography see, for example, Rao (Rao, 1997 [1914], Vol. I: 73-279). Compare also with Caturvedi (Caturvedi, 1982: 31-33).

<sup>439</sup> On Shiva's and Durga's iconography see Rao and compare with Caturvedi (Rao, 1997 [1914], Vol. I: 327-400 and Vol. II: 39-411; Caturvedi, 1982: 33-36).

<sup>440</sup> It is a significant feature of earlier *garbhagrahas* that there is no or little ornamentation. Compare also with the following chapters.

<sup>441</sup> Compare, for example, with Kramrisch's description of the *garbhagraha* (Kramrisch, 1946: 163-164). The display of gods/goddess in the *garbhagraha* will be discussed in the following two chapters as well.

<sup>442</sup> Compare for example with Pitalkhora Cave 4 (Maharashtra) and Cave 6 in Udayagiri (Madhya Pradesh). All *dvarapalas* at the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir can be identified because of labels. The *dvarapala*'s on Durga's shrine are "Bhairava" and "Yogini." Lakshmi and Narayan's shrine is guarded by "Sarasvati" and "Narada" and Shiva's shrine by "Virabhadra" and "Swami Kartik."

of purity, which, as Fuller discusses, must be looked at in the context of power relations.<sup>443</sup> When one considers the scale of the murtis, accentuated due to their placement on a high platform, the barriers placed at the doorframes capture the limitations set on the policy of access that has been discussed above. As mentioned, this temple foregoes the dark *garbhagraha* through its use of modern lighting which leaves no detail hidden.<sup>444</sup> Does this mean the emphasis of the *murti* has shifted from *Kultwert* (cult value) to *Ausstellungwert* (exhibition value)?<sup>445</sup> The scale of the *murtis*, the use of bright, almost garish lighting, and the barriers lay bare the limitations of this policy of access. How to read this exclusion at a temple that supposedly welcomes all Hindus?

According to Fuller, “[a] temple must always be kept in a high state of purity (*cuttam*=Sanskrit *suddhi*). Only sites which are *very pure* are suitable homes for the gods or, more exactly, suitable sites for images of the gods” (Fuller, 1979: 464; italics added).<sup>446</sup> Thus, the maintenance of *purity*, which is always linked to the idea of *pollution*, becomes a primary concern—various temples in India have been prohibiting certain people such as untouchables (Dalits), women and non-Hindus to enter the temple beyond a certain point, based on the idea of pollution.<sup>447</sup> In other

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<sup>443</sup> Compare also with Parker, 1992b and Nightingale, 2013. Nightingale discusses how architecture and other means have been and continue to be used as tools of segregation to create/maintain power relations such as domination and hierarchy (Nightingale, 2013).

<sup>444</sup> Compare for example with Kramrisch’s and Eck’s descriptions of the *garbhagraha* (Kramrisch, 1946: 161-174; Eck, 1985 [1981]: 63).

<sup>445</sup> Compare with Benjamin’s theory outlined in “*Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit*” (The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction) (Benjamin, 1991a: 481-484).

<sup>446</sup> As Fuller describes, each and every one see/thing coming in touch with the images of the gods/goddesses must be purified (Fuller, 1979: 466-468). See Babb with regard to the meaning of preparation and consumption of food in this context (Babb, 1970). See also Bhartiya’s discussion of menstruation in the context of religion (including the temple) and society (Bhartiya, 2013).

<sup>447</sup> Comparable rules/guidelines/restrictions are not only implemented in the context of the Hindu temple but also in the context of other religious places. In churches, for example, the access to the choir is often restricted. Women are often not allowed to enter the most sacred section of *dargahs*, for example at the Nizamuddin Dargah. Non-Muslims are usually not allowed to enter mosques during prayer times and only Parsis are allowed to enter the Towers of Silence. In short, segregation seems to play a significant role when it comes to the conceptualisation of *the sacred*. See also above discussed temple entry movement. To date, by law each and every Hindu must be granted access to a temple. Compare with Chatterjee, 1994: 1770. However, many temples in India continue to have policies/guidelines regarding access to the temple and/or certain sections of the temple that are outlined along the line of pure/impure and its variants such as clean/unclean. To date, notice boards near the temple’s entrance outline dos and don’ts for those who want to enter. See noticeboards at the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, Ayyappa Mandir in RK Puram and regulations at Akshardham (Brosius, 2010: 233-241; *etc.*). Generally, unclean and/or intoxicated people are not allowed to enter and some temples do not want menstruating and pregnant women

words, the degree of *purity/pollution* is defined by birth. Monier-Williams explains that the caste system is the product of the claim of superiority “based upon greater purity of blood”—the higher the caste, the higher the degree of *purity* (Monier-Williams, 1877: 154). Although the degree of *purity of blood* is defined by birth, the higher castes are living with the threat of pollution since it is believed that each and every one/thing defined/identified as *impure* is a potential source of contamination.<sup>448</sup> According to scholars such as Monier-Williams and Fuller, this system is a means to reinforce social segregation and sustain existing asymmetrical power relations implemented through the idea of *pollution* (Monier-Williams, 1877: 154; Fuller, 1979; *etc.*).<sup>449</sup> In the context of the temple, only a person of the highest level of *purity* (the temple’s main priest) may touch the *murti* whereas *untouchables*, women and

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to enter (Bhartiya, 2013: 524-525; K., 2016; *etc.*). As already mentioned, according to an inscription near Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir’s entrance, persons with diseases and beggars “are not allowed in or near the temple.” In November 2015, a controversy over the question whether women should be allowed to enter the Sabarimala Mandir in Kerala, which has been banning women between the age of ten and fifty years to enter the temple, erupted after Travancore Devaswom Board President Prayar Gopalakrishnan said that on the day “when a machine is invented to scan if it is the ‘right time’ (not menstruating) for a woman to enter the temple [...] we will talk about letting women inside” (Gopalakrishnan quoted in unknown author, 2015a). This practice of not allowing women to enter the temple in general or at the time of menstruation has been practiced, in several other temples in India. In April 2016, the Bombay High Court ordered the Maharashtra government to assure the constitutional right of (Hindu) women to enter all temples in Maharashtra. According to Kurien, BAPS does not want menstruating women to enter their temples (Kurien, 2007: 102). At most temples, such as at the Ayyappa Mandir in RK Puram, eatables and intoxicating substances, which includes alcohol, cigarets cigarettes, *beedis*, *paan*, *etc.*, are not allowed to be taken inside. Besides, it is not allowed to take photos inside the temple. Akshardham has been particularly strict. In sum, each and every one/thing that might pollute the temple’s purity must be denied access, so that the purity and sacredness of the place is maintained, so the argument goes. In some contexts these conceptualisations do not hold. Temples such as the Bhairon Mandir near Pragati Maidan in which the god is offered alcohol are usually read as exceptions but nevertheless exemplifying the fluidity of these rules/guidelines, perhaps even exposes the notion of pureness/impureness as socially constructed. Although the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1985 defines cannabis as an illegal substance, among some communities the smoking of cannabis particularly in the temple (in the *dhuna*) is understood as sacred practice. At the Kamakhya Temple in Assam, animals are sacrificed. Fuller describes that within the boundary walls of the temple there are further boundaries that will not be passed by Hindus when polluted (Fuller, 1979: 465). Fuller suggests that “the boundaries do [...] define a purity gradient ranging from the highest state in the Temple’s innermost areas to the lowest outside the Temple walls” (Fuller, 1979: 465). Compare also with Brosius, who discusses the question of access with reference to othering and security taking the example of Akshardham (Brosius, 2010: 233-241).

<sup>448</sup> Thus, the lower the caste, the higher the degree of pollution—the socially higher positioned must fear pollution. If superiority is “based upon greater purity of blood” then this blood-purity must be maintained, and accordingly intermarriage with the lower classes must be forbidden, as Monier-Williams explains (Monier-Williams, 1877: 154). This idea was expanded to other fields; food and touch have been identified/defined as sources of pollution leading to strict rules regulating eating, drinking and touching habits as well as access to places such as wells, schools and temples (Monier-Williams, 1877: 64, 154-157; Babb, 1970; Srinivas, 2006: 340).

<sup>449</sup> Compare with above-discussed issues on untouchability and caste in particular regard with the question of temple entry.

non-Hindus may not even be allowed to enter the temple and the surrounding area.<sup>450</sup> Attempts to cross these boundaries are understood as sacrilege/profanation, punished with fines and violence, but this does not prevent people from trying.<sup>451</sup> Although, as mentioned above and as will be discussed in more detail below, the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir explicitly allows *all* Hindus to enter the temple at the same time, it still seems to hold on to the idea of *purity/pollution* as well.<sup>452</sup> Thus, the spatial segregation at the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir perhaps implies that even in a temple that is open to all Hindus there are still differences.<sup>453</sup>

Due to the unusual spatial arrangement of in this case, three three separately standing *garbhagrhas*, as opposed to the standard found in most temples, the *mahamandapa* is much wider than usual and overlaps the *ardhamandapa* by several feet, creating a T-shape.<sup>454</sup> The surrounding walls hold a sequence of arches and windows allowing light and air to flood the interior. This adds to the open and lofty feeling of the space, as do the slim eight-faceted pillars that surround the *mandapa*.<sup>455</sup> Instead of supporting domes, as it is the case in many stone temples, these pillars support a gallery (accessible via staircases flanking the shrines of Durga and Shiva)

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<sup>450</sup> See, for example, Fuller, 1979: 464. It seems to be common practice that only the priest is allowed to enter the *garbhagrha*, the most sacred part of the temple. Only a particular priest is allowed to touch the *murtis*, as Fuller says (Fuller, 1979: 462).

<sup>451</sup> The seriousness perhaps shows in the brutal conflicts, some of which have ended deadly. According to newspaper articles, in October 2015, an untouchable was burnt alive when he tried to enter a temple in Bilgaon, near Kanpur (Uttar Pradesh) (Naqvi, 2015). Similar reports exist of children, men and women who tried to enter a temple being beaten. Further, instances have been reported of non-Hindus (foreigners) being manhandled by priests of the Jagannath Mandir in Puri. According to *The Times of India*, the Shree Somnath Trust put up a notice saying that non-Hindus will only be allowed for Darshan in the Somnath Mandir after they have taken permission for General Manager's office (Parmar, 2015). On June 4, 2017, Somnath Mandir's official website, however, reads: "People of any race and religion can enter the temple. But no one is permitted to enter the main Sanctum Sanctorum except the Priests" (<http://www.somnath.org/Home/FAQ>). As an result of such an event, the temple must be closed for physical and ritual cleaning ("sanctification")—yet another tool to enforce the segregation and thus maintain the asymmetrical power relations (K., 2016). A "purification ceremony" is conducted in case some one/thing considered impure/polluted enters the as sacred defined/identified space. See, for example, K., 2016 and Azadl, 2016.

<sup>452</sup> Compare with above mentioned Patit Pavan Mandir.

<sup>453</sup> This aspect will be elaborated below.

<sup>454</sup> Each *garbhagrha* has its own *parikramapada*. As Caturvedi says and as an old photo in *A Glimpse of the Lakshminarayan Temple* shows, during special occasions the *mahamandapa* is filled with people singing *bhajans* and *kirtans*, and listening to *pravacans* (Caturvedi, 1982: 47; All India Arya (Hindu) Dharma Seva Sangha, 19-: 7). On temples with multiple *garbhagrhas* see for example Bharne, Krusche and Bunce (Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 102; Bunce, 2014; *etc.*).

<sup>455</sup> The pillars at the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir stand on a low square base that unlike the rest of the pillar is made of red stone, and are crowned by a round pot-like capital.



and a flat ceiling, thereby lending impressive height to the open and vast hall.<sup>456</sup> Although some of the earlier temples (such as the Sas-Bahu Mandir in Gwalior) feature upper floors that allow visitors to view the temples' interior mainly due to their openness and vastness, the spatial arrangement of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's interior is perhaps more reminiscent of the galleries featured in many of the (colonial) museums and other sites of exhibition.<sup>457</sup>

Another temple that comes to mind when looking for a comparable spatial arrangement is the earlier mentioned Bharat Mata Mandir (Figure 3.3) in Varanasi.<sup>458</sup> Unlike the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir and most other temples, the Bharat Mata Mandir at Varanasi houses none of the common iconic and aniconic *murtis* but instead a cartographic depiction of Bharat Mata (a.k.a. India) in marble (Figure 3.4). The map which is in the centre of the temple occupies the maximum space of the building, an unusual arrangement for temples.<sup>459</sup> Unlike the Mandirs that Shradhananda had imagined—as places for people to gather and unite—the Bharat Mata Mandir has clearly not been designed to gather/unite people in a physical congregation. Instead, the temple was created to foster the conceptual idea of unity amongst Hindus/Indians, with the map occupies the Bharat Mata Mandir's centre.<sup>460</sup> The image of Bharat Mata is meant to be viewed/studied from various vantage points such as from the upper gallery (Figure 3.16) as well as from a small window below the ground-floor level (Figure 3.17). In addition to this image, the surrounding walls of the temple have been covered with images that outline Bharat Mata/India through “facts and figures” (Figure 3.18). These images are reminiscent of charts used in schools and those displayed in museums for their tags read: “*krpā kar hāth na lagāiy*” (“please do not

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<sup>456</sup> The Gita Bhavan that adjoins the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's central shrine as well as some other Birla Mandirs such as the Vishvanath Mandir in Varanasi feature comparable spatial arrangements.

<sup>457</sup> Compare, for example, with the Madras Government Museum in Chennai and the Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum (formerly Victoria and Albert Museum) in Mumbai.

<sup>458</sup> For more details see above.

<sup>459</sup> As already mentioned, with regard to the spatial arrangement of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, many temples in India feature the *garbhagraha* as the last structure in an axial arranged sequence of structures such as *ardhamandapa*, *mahamandapa*, etc.

<sup>460</sup> As mentioned above, the map occupies most space in the architecture. The word *darshan* derives from Sanskrit word *darśana* (root *drś*), which has been translated into English as “showing,” “seeing,” “looking,” etc. (Monier-Williams, 1986 [1899]: 470-471). For its meaning in the religious context see, for instance, Babb and Eck (Babb, 1981; Eck, 1985 [1981]: 3-10). To date it is also used in the context of the exhibition. See fifth chapter.

touch”).<sup>461</sup> In other words, the Bharat Mata Mandir—like the National Museum— attempts to teach each and every visitor that Bharat Mata/India is eternal and had eternally been great.<sup>462</sup> This interpretation echoes Eck’s impression of the temple, where visiting the temple “is certainly an educational venture [...] but there is little ritual weight here” (Eck, 2012: 101).<sup>463</sup> This small exhibition works at rationalising and thus legitimising veneration of the goddess to whom this temple has been dedicated. That is, it defines the goddess with methods of Western thinking/education/epistemology and thus presumably acceptable in a modern world.<sup>464</sup> If the national museums are meant to showcase the nation’s veritable past through the very institution of the national museum and the objects within, the Bharat Mata Mandir, through its citation of the ‘mandir’ form produces ‘knowledge’ about the nation, with the clear goal of veneration.<sup>465</sup>

At the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, the arrangement, however, seems to be slightly different. Here, an overhead gallery runs around the main hall, and it is reported that this gallery features images of mythological scenes and the ‘great men’ of India.<sup>466</sup> However, this part of the temple’s didactic programme now remains obscured from view for reasons pertaining to the ‘unintended’ use of this space. During hot Delhi summers, at a time when the city was not crawling with malls and other air-conditioned spaces, the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir and this gallery might

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<sup>461</sup> However, the labels did not prevent these wall paintings from deteriorating. For a more detailed description see also Ramaswamy, 2010: 151-177 and Malviya, 2015: 73-96. As Ramaswamy says, Gupta got the idea to build the Bharat Mata Mandir after seeing a map made out of mud and clay laid out on the ground in a school for widows in Pune and after visiting the British Museum in London (Ramaswamy, 2010: 153-154). As mentioned above, the meaning of education as means to create a feeling of belonging to unite the Indians cannot be underestimated, as Coomaraswamy emphasises (Coomaraswamy, 1909b: iii-v).

<sup>462</sup> See Ramaswamy, 2010: 151-177. Compare with Singh, 2015: 109. In India, the museum was a successful institution that attracted masses. In 1913, the Indian Museum in Calcutta (to date Kolkata) and the Victoria and Albert Museum in Bombay (to date Mumbai) claimed over eight hundred thousand visitors more than all other museums in the world, as Singh highlights (Singh, 2009: 52).

<sup>463</sup> See also Ramaswamy, 2010: 154. Ramaswamy emphasises that “even today visitors are asked not to offer fruits or flowers to ‘the murti’” (Ramaswamy, 2010: 160).

<sup>464</sup> It would be worthwhile exploring this relation of the temple and education/educational spaces in more detail, thinking also about institutions such as BHU and Pilani that both feature temples in contrast to JNU that has been refraining from giving its permission to construct a temple. According to Sutton, at JNU, shrines were commonly cleared (Sutton, 2013).

<sup>465</sup> On the idea of the national museum with regard to India, see Singh (Singh, 2015).

<sup>466</sup> This information was provided by one of the temple’s priests. According to the guide book *Illustrated Delhi Guide*, “there are numerous wonderful paintings and epitomes of all the great teachings of Hinduism” (unknown author, n.d.: 31). Moreover, it is mentioned that the paintings and the sculptured panels have been done by artists from Jaipur (unknown author, n.d.: 31).

have been a good place to spend some time away from the heat and the congested city. The utilisation of the space in this manner became so popular that this hideout has been locked up by the temple authorities approximately thirty years ago.<sup>467</sup> Thus, none of the temple's upper storeys are currently accessible to the public, which prevents viewing the exhibition of images on the walls of the gallery. The exhibitionary scheme of the temple, however, is not just restricted to these upper storeys but also runs within the main hall. In fact—much to the dislike of its architect—the number of pictures on the lower floor is so high that one suspects the interior designer tried to make up for the lack of the spectacular exhibition of creativity and skilled craftsmanship for which India's temples are known around the world (Chatterjee, 1942: 83, 1949: 146). According to Chatterjee, “[h]owever attractive may have been the exterior character of the massive group, the interior has been spoiled by garish over-ornamentation and inferior [elsewhere he uses the word ‘cheap’] oil-painting due to ignorance (?) in the course of construction” (Chatterjee, 1949: 146).<sup>468</sup> Chatterjee's dismissal of the temple's interior is based on the lack of cohesion—a prominent feature especially of stone temples.

The images, some of which look more like reliefs than paintings, have been created in so many different techniques/styles and vary so greatly in quality that the overall image they create resembles that of an assemblage of pictures or an exhibition format.<sup>469</sup> The impression of an exhibition is reinforced by the frames encasing some

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<sup>467</sup> At the Bharat Mata Mandir, the upper gallery has been locked up as well.

<sup>468</sup> Considering that Chatterjee seemingly tried in his architecture to get rid of what he considers as non-essential elements, this reaction was to be expected. Compare with what he writes in an earlier version of the text (Chatterjee, 1942: 83). According to Chatterjee, a better result would have been achieved “had simpler, congenial elements been introduced in decorating the interior and in places of the exterior” (Chatterjee, 1942: 83).

<sup>469</sup> A detailed study of the images and even the exhibition/program remains outstanding, firstly, because the administration neither granted access to the upper gallery nor gave the permission to take photographs inside the temple. Some of the images at the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir are reminiscent of the images of the adjoining Buddha Mandir, which was also sponsored by the Birlas and even shared one entrance (that is currently blocked) with the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir. Besides, it seems that the images—both of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir as well as at the Buddha Mandir—have also been used at BHU's Vishvanath/Birla Mandir and perhaps other Birla Mandirs such as the ones at Patna, Mathura, Kurukshetra, and Bhopal as well. Perhaps it is worth mentioning that it seems as if, like so many artists at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the artists responsible for the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's interior design too seem to have drawn inspiration from the murals of the caves at Ajanta as well as from Japanese art. According to scholars such as Mitter, turning away from the techniques and styles promoted by the Western colonisers, looking for alternatives within India's own history as well as turning towards the East was a response to Westernisation (Mitter, 2007). See similar looking images at BHU's Vishvanath

of the pictures and, perhaps even more so, by the display of gifts such as a marble globe, a Japanese drum and a bell, all of which, like objects in the museum, are fenced off from the visitor.

Several of the images, particularly the framed paintings facing the *garbhagrahas*, have been labelled with short explanatory texts (Figure 3.22).<sup>470</sup> Further, elements/figures are tagged within the image, as if to erase each and every doubt and prevent misreading of the image by the reader/onlooker.<sup>471</sup> These labels also spell out even commonly known gods/goddesses such as “Mahalakshmi,” “Mahakali,” “Saraswati,” “Krishna” as well as “Buddha.”<sup>472</sup> Together with images or, to be more precise, sandstone sculptures displayed on bulky pedestals in the temple’s adjoining park (Figure 3.23, 3.24), the images displayed inside the temple create a dense assemblage of images, bringing together some of India’s historical figures or ‘national heroes’ such as Ashoka, Chandragupta, Shivaji, Govinda Singh, Tilak, Gandhi and Malaviya.<sup>473</sup> What remains missing from this assemblage, which is however not surprising, is any reference to Muslim rulers, including Mughal rulers such as Akbar and Shah Jahan, among others, as well as any of the pre-Mughal Muslim dynasties that ruled India.<sup>474</sup> This exclusion of non-Hindus manifests itself at

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Mandir and the Lord Buddha Mandir (Figure 3.19, 3.20 and 3.21). Several mirrors have been attached to the walls not only in this central building but also other parts climaxing, as the name indicates, in the temple’s Shish Mahal that adjoins the Gita Bhavan. A *murti* of Krishna has been placed in its centre so that the figure reflects seemingly infinitely in the mirrors covering the walls of this little octagonal shrine. According to one of the priests, the shrine was renovated some thirty years prior.

<sup>470</sup> See also Figure 3.19 and 3.21.

<sup>471</sup> This seems to become more and more common practice. See for example images with labels that have been added at the Agarwal Mandir in Paharganj.

<sup>472</sup> Several of these images depict puranic stories such as the story of Shabari and the story of Savitri and Satyavan, seemingly trying to provide some kind of ideal or role model for women. See also Caturvedi, 1982: 53.

<sup>473</sup> According to the inscriptions engraved into the bulky pedestals, these images in Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir’s Indraprastha Dharm Park depict for example “Vikramaditya the Great Hindu Hero,” “Arya Samrat Candragupta,” “Ashoka the Great Arya (Hindu) Emperor,” “Prithviraj Chauhan,” “Shivaji Saviour of the Arya (Hindu) Religion” and “Maharan Pratap”. This list could be expanded including names and images such as Guru Teg Bahadur and Lakshmi Bai depicted on the “Kirtistambha.” Many of these figures such as Vikramaditya, Ashoka and Prithviraj are linked with Delhi’s past. See, for example, Cunningham, 1865 and Gopal, 193-. Compare with Akshardham’s Bharat Upvan that contains a similar collection of over-life sized statues made out of bronze ([www.akshardham.com/explore/thematic-gardens/](http://www.akshardham.com/explore/thematic-gardens/)). On the Bharat Upvan, see for instance Vivekjiandas, 2009: 17; Singh, 2010: 53 and Pati, 2011: 127-129. According to Singh, the exhibition at Akshardham’s Bharat Upvan avoids Islamic figures and inserts Gujarati kings into the line of ‘nationally important’ rulers (Singh, 2010: 53).

<sup>474</sup> Compare also with Caturvedi, 1982: 53. Besides depicting usual figures such as the Dikpalas on the outer walls of the temple, the Lakshminarayan Mandir in Jaipur as well as the Saraswati

the temple also in economic terms; according to an inscription at the park's entrance gate: "During the celebration of fairs and festivals only Hindu-shops, see-saws, merry-go-round and swinging apparatus *etc. etc.* will be permitted." Here, the temple strongly echoes the Hindutva ideology of Savarkar and the Hindu Mahasabha, with its purging of vast swathes of Indian history, through the construction of the discourse of the Muslim-as-the-outsider.<sup>475</sup>

In the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, much emphasis is given to the *Vedas* as well as the *Bhagavad Gita*, in line with the then contemporary discourses around the reinterpretation of the *Vedas* and desire to reassert the relevance of the *Bhagavad Gita* as a text of modern living.<sup>476</sup> Thus some of the images at the temple reproduce verses in Sanskrit from these texts and other holy books as well as their translation/explanation in Hindi and sometimes in English (Figure 3.25, 3.26).<sup>477</sup> Moreover, two "Gita Stambhas" engraved with quotes from the *Bhagavad Gita* and their translations/explanations have been set up on the platform.

The primacy of these discourses around these texts for the temple and the currency they had acquired at the time is further attested by the fact that the temple features, a "Ved Mandir" as well as a "Gita Bhavan." The first is a small shrine (facing north) that occupies the southern end of the axis on which the three central shrines have been aligned.<sup>478</sup> In accordance with its name, this small shrine does not contain the image of a god/*murti* but contains a *vedi* on which a copy of the *Vedas*, wrapped in cloth, has been placed.<sup>479</sup> The Gita Bhavan is situated north-east of the

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Mandir in Pilani include depictions of Jesus, Moses, Zarathustra, Lincoln, Einstein, Lenin, G.D. Birla, Kennedy, *etc.* See Caturvedi, 1982: 57-76; Kudelska, et al., 2014: 44-45, 2016: 151-156.

<sup>475</sup> See discussion above.

<sup>476</sup> The meaning of the *Vedas* as a central text for Hindus has been pushed by the Arya Samaj (Jaffrelot, 1993: 519; *etc.*). In 1900, in the wake of a national conference held in Delhi, Darbhanga, who had contributed money for the construction of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, led a procession of sixty thousand people barefoot with a copy of the *Vedas* in his hand through Delhi (Singh, 1972: 66). According to Davis, the *Bhagavad Gita* was vastly distributed and was translated in many vernacular languages, and acquired the label of the "Hindu Bible" (Davis, 2015: 25, 89, 101-119, 145). According to Smith, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the *Bhagavad Gita* was elevated to the status of a kind of a "New Testament of Hinduism" (Smith, 2003: 33-34). David emphasises, the *Gita* played "a crucial role on the thinking and discourse of leaders of the Indian independence movement" (Davis, 2015: 145).

<sup>477</sup> Compare also with All India Arya (Hindu) Dharma Seva Sangha, 19-.

<sup>478</sup> Compare also with Caturvedi, 1982: 49-51.

<sup>479</sup> Although, books are treated—like gods and kings—with great respect books (they are not touched

main shrine. It is connected to the temple's Dharamshala and faces south. The Gita Bhavan has an elongated shape and provides sufficient space for people to gather and listen to recitations from the holy books—just as the leading Arya Samajist Shradhananda envisioned (Shradhananda, 1926: 139-141).<sup>480</sup> Like the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's main shrine, this smaller shrine features a gallery and here too the walls are covered with paintings, displaying scenes from Indian mythology.<sup>481</sup>

The Gita Bhavan contains a *murti* of Krishna placed on the northern end of the hall (Figure 3.27) (Gopal, 193-: 69).<sup>482</sup> The over-life-size, two-armed *murti* of Krishna stands with its left foot firmly on a globe while the right leg is lifted as if dancing. This *murti* is accompanied on its right and left by *murtis* of the flute-playing Krishna and his consort Radha on the right and by a group of *murtis* of Lakshman, Rama and Sita on the left. Unlike the *murtis* shown in the central shrine, the *murtis* displayed in the Gita Bhavan are not locked away in the *garbhagraha* but stand freely, so that each and every visitor is able to touch the *murtis*, as captured by Margret Bourke-White for *LIFE* (Figure 3.28). This seems to suggest that untouchables and low caste Hindus are no longer excluded—all *Hindus are the same*.<sup>483</sup> However, this overlooks the fact that unlike the *murtis* kept in the main temple, according to Caturvedi, no *pratistha* has been performed on these *murtis* (Caturvedi, 1982: 55).<sup>484</sup> If so, then what has actually changed? Does the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir hold its promise and include all Hindus? And, does the access to the temple and the worship of god solve the problems of people at the

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with feet, put on the floor, *etc.*), add they are rarely given a separate shrine the way it has been done here. See also Caturvedi's description (Caturvedi, 1982: 49-51).

<sup>480</sup> Shradhananda wanted Kathas from the Bhagavad Gita as well as from the Upanishads, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata to be recited daily (Shradhananda, 1926: 140-141). As mentioned above, Shradhananda imagined the Bhagavad Gita as tool to mobilise and unify the Hindus (Davis, 2015: 143-145). Few Gita Mandirs have been built but not on the scale that Shradhananda was wishing for, as Davis says (Davis, 2015: 145, 255).

<sup>481</sup> Compare with Gopal, 193-: 69, as well as Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 241. Like the gallery in the main temple, the gallery in the Gita Bhavan is currently not accessible for the public.

<sup>482</sup> Compare this description with unknown author, n.d.: 30-31.

<sup>483</sup> Compare with Caturvedi, 1982: 55. One explanation given for the 'locking away' of *murtis* is to avoid the touch of the common man and thus ensure its purity.

<sup>484</sup> Smith emphasises: "In brahmanical Hinduism, manmade images of the divine are considered to be mere mundane objects until they have been sanctified by the divine presence, invoked through [...] *pratishtha*" (Smith, 1997: 37). Fuller discusses the different hierarchies of images according to which it is common to find different categories of images in one temple—the most sacred always as the central (Fuller, 1979). See also Parker, 1992b.

margins of the social system? According to Jeffrey, “[t]o allow men into a temple to offer food to a god was small comfort when they had no food for themselves” (Jeffrey, 1976: 23).

## ENVIRONS OF THE TEMPLE: THE INDRAPRASTHA DHARMA VATIKA

In a similar way in that much care has been paid to the temple’s design, considerable attention has been and continues to be given to the temple’s surroundings—many Birla Mandirs are adjoined by a park.<sup>485</sup> In the case of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, this park, which is situated on the western side of the temple, has been named Indraprastha Dharma Vatika—after the city Indraprastha “the oldest capital of Hindustan” built by Vishvakarma for the Pandavas (Gopal, 193-: 92). After 1947, ASI has attempted several times to excavate Indraprastha and prove that Indraprastha was the original Delhi—to prove that Indraprastha was an imperial Hindu city “to match (and possibly surpass) the grandeur of all the Islamic cities [...]” (Rajagopalan, 2011: 270).<sup>486</sup> This can be read in an image on a column at the park’s southern gate, labelled as, “Dharamaraj Yudhishtir laying the foundation stone for the construction of Delhi” (Figure 3.29).<sup>487</sup>

The Indraprastha Dharma Vatika spreads over a sprawling area of the foothills of Delhi’s Ridge that has been enclosed by a high wall, reminiscent of the wall of the Lal Quila/Red Fort. The spatial arrangement of the park has been designed

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<sup>485</sup> Compare with Jain, 2017. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the garden/park is seen as become imperative within the city-space. It was and continues to be projected as space to retreat and recover from the hectic, un-healthy, modern, urban life and enjoy some leisure time (Lewis, 1916: 130-148). New Delhi itself with its wide roads, fountains and trees was designed like a park. Singh mentions that it was common that museums in India were often adjoined by parks, zoos, botanical gardens, *etc.* (Singh, 2009: 52). The park has been opened in 1943/44.

<sup>486</sup> In 2014, Union Urban Development Minister Venkaiah Naidu says that Indraprastha or Hastinapur would have been more appropriate names for Delhi (unknown author, 2014, Smith, 2015). However, naming Delhi after the Hindu city *par excellence* might not only be read as an attempt to rewrite (purify) history and erase certain people, communities and events but also an attempt to create a certain future. This idea has been discussed by Appadurai with reference to the renaming of Bombay as Mumbai (Appadurai, 2002: 73).

<sup>487</sup> The image refers to a popular story of the construction of the magnificent and flourishing city Indraprastha by Vishvakarma the “Principle Architect of the Universe” for the Pandavas, as it is described in the Mahabharata. On Indraprastha with reference to Delhi see Cunningham, 1865: iv-vii; Stephen, 1876: iii, 1-6; *etc.* Rajagopalan, who looks the “redefinition of the urban landscape of Delhi via the ideology of Hindutva,” believes that this notion has been in circulation “at least since the colonial period” (Rajagopalan, 2011: 269). There are no references of Indraprastha in Bernier’s *Travels in the Mogul Empire* and in Manucci’s *Storia do Mogor*. Cunningham’s reference is the earliest reference (Cunningham, 1865: iv-vii; Manucci, 1907; Bernier, 1916). See also Dalrymple quoted in an interview with *The Times of India* (Chowdhury and Gohain, 2014).

corresponding to the temple and its architecture; one arm of the artificial waterway (Figure 3.30) that runs through the park functions as an extension of the central axis running from the gateway through the *garbhagraha* ending in a *gopuram* (Figure 3.31) that surmounts a little hillock at the end of the compound.<sup>488</sup> Apart from several structures such as a few houses, a *yajnasala* (Figure 3.32), a *vyayamshala* (Figure 3.33) and a stage (Figure 3.34), used today for religious functions, the landscape of the park is dominated by some other smaller structures.<sup>489</sup> For instance, the naturally rocky landscape has been enhanced by an artificial massif with caves/shrines some of which seemingly trying to create—like Metcalfe with his follies—an ancient aura (Figure 3.35, 3.36) while others feature imaginatively designed entrances (Figure 3.37).<sup>490</sup> “Touching strictly prohibited”-signs have been attached here and there trying to remind the visitor of the value of the exhibits, like in the museum. When one considers the space of the Gita Bhavan where the *murti* can be touched, this presents an interesting confident *working-through* of the precepts of Hindu dharma. Moreover, sandstone statues displayed on bulky sandstone pedestals dot the park (Figure 3.23, 3.24), transforming it into an exhibition that seemingly tries to map out India’s history as inspired by resistance against Muslim and British invasion. In this the older temple, the Birla temple, shares significant similarities with the exhibition of “great role models of India” in Akshardham’s Bharat Upvan—also missing from that display are India’s Muslim and British historical figures.<sup>491</sup>

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<sup>488</sup> In 1971, the “Kirtistambha” that once marked the eastern end of this waterway has been shifted some meters to be replaced by a statue of Jugal Kishore Birla. And, in 2007, a small Sai Baba Mandir has been built within the compound.

<sup>489</sup> The southern part of the compound is used as parking lot. There is also a small canteen. All of the mentioned buildings feature the same design as the temple. They are locked up for public use but are occasionally used by the temple, for example, for the performance of special rituals and the singing of *bhajans*.

<sup>490</sup> One of the entrances has been designed to look as if one enters the cave/shrine through the gaping mouth of a fierce looking *rakshas*. Some of the ancient temples such as Cave 12 in Udayagiri (Odisha) feature comparable creative designs. Over the last decades this motive seems to have become quite popular. People who want to enter the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir in Jhandewalan must do so via the gaping mouth of a similarly fiery-looking monstrous creature. While I was told that this face is the face of Hanuman or a *rakshas* according to Pati, the face at Jhandewalan’s Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir is that of the female demon Suras (Pati, 2011: 144). Puri discusses in his article similar structures made of fibreglass, ceramic jagged-edged stones and painted rocks creating artificial landscapes that can be entered through “oversized faces of demons” that have come up since the 1990s in Haridwar (Puri, 2015: 257). See also the recently built Vaishno Mata Mandir in Bhagsunag (Himachal Pradesh). On Metcalfe’s follies see Peck, 2005: 236. For a brief description of Metcalfe’s follies see for example Peck, 2005: 236.

<sup>491</sup> For details see description above.



Apart from this didactic project, some colourful cement-statues (Figure 3.38) in the form of wild-animals (tiger, rhino, bear, *etc.*) populate the scenic park-scape. Ever since the park has been opened, people have been using these eye-catchers as backdrops for photographs (Figure 3.39). Some professional photographers have also set up their business in the park, replacing their indoor studios and poster-backdrops with this artificial outdoor setting (Figure 3.40).<sup>492</sup> In the eyes of digital natives, the temple and the adjoining park might seem old-fashioned. The itinerant photographer, for example, must have once been in high demand. Now, in the age of the ubiquitous mobile phone cameras, he seemingly waits in limbo, sitting near the colourful cement-statues of exotic animals and looks, at best, like an artefact himself. As the small exhibition of photos displayed by one of the photographers shows, also the temple itself seems to be a popular backdrop for staging these photographs.<sup>493</sup>

An inscription at the park's entrance is a reminder that besides attracting people to the park—and subsequently to the temple—for walks and small picnics, the temple tries to attract bigger audiences by organising fairs and festivals.<sup>494</sup> Concerning the Sheshashayin/Birla Mandir in Nagda, Pinney emphasises that the temple “is viewed by the vast majority of Nagdarites as a place of *tamasha* (fun) rather than worship” (Pinney, 1997a: 116). Indeed, the park can be understood as a space for/of spectacle/display/entertainment, like other institutions, such as fairs,

<sup>492</sup> According to Pinney, in 1997, about a dozen independent photographers have mobile studio in the garden of the Sheshashayin/Birla Mandir in Nagda (Pinney, 1997a: 114). Almost adjoining the temple's administrative office, the temple has given space for a permanent photo-studio. Among the souvenir shops and restaurants that unfold in front of BHU's Vishvanath/Birla Mandir too is a photo-studio. However, in times at which snapshots have become a daily routine of many people, the photographers with their boards advertising “instant color photo ready in just five minute” might seem like relics of times bygone.

<sup>493</sup> Although not identified by Pinney the temple in the background of the photo is Delhi's Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir. According to Pinney, the photo, which belongs to Sunil Chhajer, “was prepared from paper negatives in Delhi's Chandni Chowk and shows Sunil on a motorbike outside a large temple” (Pinney, 1997a: 183-184). According to Pinney, the “space outside the temple (where the drama of the decision whether to enter or not is placed out), that becomes the space for the articulation of those moral dilemmas implicating ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ [...] will Sunil zoom away for the temple, abandoning his duty, or was the motorbike a means of arriving at the temple more speedily?” (Pinney, 1997a: 183-184). According to Sharma, who briefly speaks about this phenomenon, “the temple is the backdrop to a [...] kind of theatrical performance” (Sharma, 2000: 178). In the same article Sharma uses the word “*leela*” that he translates into English as “religious theatrical performances” talking about the enactments in studios for prints (Sharma, 2000: 177-178).

<sup>494</sup> According to an inscription, at the time of fairs and festivals, Hindus are allowed to set up shops, see-saws, merry-go-round and swinging apparatus. How closely festivals are linked with temples will be discussed in the following chapter as well. Compare also with the Kalkaji Mandir discussed in the previous chapter.

festivals, temples, museums, *etc.*, means to attract people but that should not make us overlook its potential.<sup>495</sup> Comparable to the festival, the social hierarchical orders at work in many places are seemingly overcome in the park, trying to create the image of unity.<sup>496</sup> Thus, Singh, Shukla, Zavos and other scholars emphasise the spectacle (in whatever form it comes) as an effective means to determine identity and mobilise people (Singh, 1972: 85-91; Shukla, 1997; Fuller, 2001; Viegas, 2001; Zavos, 2000: 72; Jain, 2007; Jain, 2014, 2016, 2017; *etc.*).<sup>497</sup>

## A TEMPLE TO (RE)CLAIM DELHI AND INDIA?

Considering that the powerful Birla family contributed much to the construction of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, it stands to reason that Kudelska, Staszczyk and Świerzowska suggest that the building “may be somehow related to the family intent of strengthening its position within the Indian hierarchy (in a political and religious sense)” (Kudelska, et al., 2014: 52). However, considering the architectural features of the temple and G.D. Birla’s stand on temples, it appears that the Birla family and the many other benefactors were aiming for something beyond strengthening the Birla’s family position within Indian society. Taking into account that India is said to have 330 million deities and innumerable temples, what does G.D.

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<sup>495</sup> According to *Illustrated Delhi Guide*, “the garden contains caves, scenes of falls, canopies, yagyashala, *etc.* all which present a grand spectacle” (unknown author, n.d.: 31).

<sup>496</sup> Scholars such as Fuller, Guha-Thakurta and Jain discuss the festival as a space of open unbound movement (Clothey, 1969: 247; Fuller, 2001; Guha-Thakurta, 2014: 203; Jain, 2017: S19).

<sup>497</sup> Singh discusses how at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in Delhi, public speeches, processions, festivals, *etc.* are used to mark the community’s presence and territory (Singh, 1972: 85-91, *etc.*). See also Gupta, 1986 [1981]: 73-76, *etc.* According to Jain, events “enact a physical assertion of territorial claims both by occupying specific neighbourhood spaces and through the noisy immersion procession, often provoking antagonism by passing through non-Hindu localities” (Jain, 2017: S19). As Zavos explains, Tilak tried to promote and restructure the Ganapati Utsav as community celebration (instead of the tradition family celebration) in order to strengthen the idea of a Hindu community (Zavos, 2000: 72). See also Smith, 2002: 40. The Ganapati Utsav, earlier only popular in Maharashtra, is to date one of the largest Hindu public religious festivals celebrated in India on a national scale (Zavos, 2000: 72; Fuller, 2001; Smith, 2003: 182). Ganesha has been considered as a god that “simple men may worship” as he is “easy to reach” (Coomaraswamy, 1909e: 20). To date, many temples within and outside India are dedicated to Ganesha, god for good beginnings and remover of obstacles. Jain discusses the Ganapati Utsav in relation to the concept of “*sārvajanik*” emphasising that it encourages “participation of people other than elite landowners, princes, and wealthy merchants in creating, installing, and worshipping idols in publicly accessible spaces” (Jain, 2017: S18). Compare also with Brahmviharidas (Brahmviharidas, 1996: 202). With reference to the museum, Viegas emphasises that unlike places such as the temple, *melas, etc.*, there are no class or caste barriers at the museum, which makes it particularly popular among the rural visitors (Viegas, 2001: 19). And, Brahmviharidas insists that festivals are “not wasteful expenditures of energy and money [...] but rather [...] provide a powerful means for the transmission of traditions” (Brhamviharidas, 1996: 206).

Birla mean when he says: “Frankly speaking, we build temples but we don’t believe in temples. We build temples to spread a kind of *religious mentality*” (G.D. Birla quoted in Renold, 1994: 25; italics added). To what kind of religious mentality is Birla referring?

Birla’s statement pinpoints a significant facet of the Hindu temple, i.e. beyond its status as a merely *sacred* space, but as a powerful institution akin to other institutions of knowledge such as the museum, it produces and disseminates knowledge. Thus, through the temple’s architecture, images and texts, the temple’s reader was introduced to a definition of Hinduism that claims, in a supposedly modern, democratic way, to include/unite each and every Indian (including those earlier considered outside the system). This idea was introduced/taught to the temple’s reader through its architecture, images and explanations, a method used by museums and other exhibitionary practices. However, as discussed above, Savarkar’s definition of a ‘Hindu,’ for instance, did not include every Indian in this narrative; only those Indians ‘originating’ from the Indian soil could be considered as ‘Indians.’ It is here that religion and nation have been identified/defined as intertwined. Hence, Birla’s message and idea of ‘religious mentality’ is then the idea of India as an ethnically pure (that is, cleansed) sacred national space.

This national sacred space needed to be enshrined within the heart of the nation for its significance to be underscored. The construction of a modern temple like the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir in Delhi, the centre of political power, must not only be understood as an attempt to mobilise Hindus but also as an effort to visualise the presence and influence of Hindus in the imperial capital city—no other religious community had been able to ‘convince’ the British rulers and the builders of New Delhi to allow them to construct a structure comparable to Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir within the newly built colonial capital.<sup>498</sup> Consider for instance, Gopal’s image of Delhi (Figure 3.2) in which the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir overshadows the city’s non-Hindu landmarks; the construction of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir represented a critical step to free the city from non-Hindu rule. The weekly *Hindu*

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<sup>498</sup> Compare with Raparia’s appeal to the British Raj’s government to construct a Jain temple in New Delhi that has been see above mentioned in the chapter’s introduction (Raparia, 1936).

*Outlook*, founded by Bhai Parmanand, President of the Hindu Mahasabha, a central voice of the Hindu Mahasabha until the 1950s, welcomed the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's construction and inauguration as the first "big and beautiful Temple" built in Delhi "since the days of the last Hindu Emperor—Prithvi Raj Chauhan" (*Hindu Outlook* quoted in Jones, 1986: 346).<sup>499</sup> In other words, it appears as if the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's construction was widely anticipated with high hopes that it would pave the way for Delhi and India to be (again) a Hindu nation ruled by Hindus. For the creators of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, the temple served as a unifying matrix that not only brings together Hindus/Indians within its space but also defines and propagates Indian History, Indian Culture, Indian Art and Indian Architecture; thereby, national identity is imbued with a certain *sacredness*.

As a plaque inserted into one of the temple's walls says, the temple and its images/texts are meant "to awaken the Aryadharami Hindus to regain their ancient glory and power."<sup>500</sup> Thus, the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir has been designed as a call for the Hindus or more precisely, the Hindu nation to wake up. As one temple will not be enough to do so, another plaque tries to appeal to other creators—including

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<sup>499</sup> Compare also with Caturvedi, 1982: 41. Also Caturvedi, who writes about the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir more than forty years after its inauguration, draws attention to this 'fact,' writing: "The Lakshminarayan Mandir's historic significance is that after 1193 [year of Mahmud Ghori's conquest of Delhi], it was the first big temple to be built in Delhi after 750 years" (Caturvedi, 1982: 41; my translation). Compare this idea with Taneja, Kumar, Pati and Rajagopalan who discuss the idea of reclaiming Delhi with regard to other structures in Delhi (Taneja, 2008; Kumar, 2011 [2002]a, 2011 [2002]b, 2011 [2002]c; Pati, 2011; Rajagopalan, 2011). Also the naming of Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's park as Indraprastha Dharma Vatika might be read in these terms. Among the heroes displayed in Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's park is also an image of Prithvi Raj Chauhan. The projection of Prithviraj is in many ways comparable to Shivaji for Bombay/Mumbai. Tilak assigned Shivaji to play for Mumbai and Maharashtra, a local national hero and, using Hansen's wording, a "demigod" (Hansen, 1999: 109). As Hansen discusses, the projection of Shivaji as national hero plays a significant role in the Hindutva fold. According to Hansen, "the 'nationalization' of Shivaji started in the late nineteenth century" (Hansen, 1999: 109). In 1896, Tilak invented the annual celebration of Shivaji's birthday that according to Hansen "contributed significantly to an assertion and creation of Hindu identities in Western India" (Hansen, 1999: 75). Hansen also points out that Rai's publication on Shivaji contributed to Shivaji's increasing popularity in North India (Hansen, 1999: 75). See also Smith, 2002: 40, 2003: 182. See also Zavos, 2000: 73-74. Compare also with Rajagopalan who highlights that Prithvi Raj Chauhan has become "a prominent figure in Hindutva histories" (Rajagopalan, 2011: 273).

<sup>500</sup> An aspect that could not be addressed here but would be worth exploring further is the idea of Greater India and Pan-Asia with regard to Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir. According to inscriptions, some of the images (reliefs, paintings, miniature temple) at the temple show the Prachin Caṇḍin Mandir (Borobudur Temple) in Java, the Bauddha Mandir in Cīn Desh (China), the Bauddha Mandir in Burma (Brahmdesh), *etc.* As mentioned earlier, the foundation stone of the adjoining Lord Buddha Mandir was laid by the Japanese Consul General in India. See also what Birla says about his uncle's idea about Buddhism (Birla, 2009 [2007]: 367). See also All India Arya (Hindu) Dharma Seva Sangha, 19-: 18-20.

potential benefactors of temples—to follow Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir’s footsteps; this plaque reads as follows:

All persons erecting places of public worship should likewise inscribe Ved Mantras, Upanishadas, Shlokas, Bhajans and Artistic Life Pictures With a View to Improve the religious life of the Aryadharmi Hindus (including Sanatanists, Aryasamajists, Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs *etc.*) and to develop among them a spirit of fellow feeling and close co-operation which may in turn lead to consolidation and mutual service.

As crucial as it was to announce the Hindu nation through a ‘big and beautiful’ temple in the heart of the imperial and later, national capital, it was equally important to convey Hinduism’s appeal as extending beyond the borders of the nation; it further required a demonstration that the temple, and by extension, Hinduism, was a religion of and for *modern* times and the modern nation-state. Thus, the temple’s appeal was not only meant to attract and impress Hindus as well as foreigners but also to present Hinduism (and India) as an old but forward-looking religion that is compatible with the modern world order.<sup>501</sup> In other words, the creators of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir position Hindu India so as to be recognised as a respected member of that elusive community of nations. This is further demonstrated by the fact that *foreigners* are allowed to enter Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir no matter what religion they follow, which has been captured in another plaque:

With the exception of all foreigners belonging to Europe, America and Africa *etc.*; and distinguished and famous Indian gentlemen, no *local* Muslim and Christian Gentlemen should enter the temple Gardens on Sundays, Days of Fairs and Special Occasions without the permission of temple Authorities. Suspects may be prohibited at any time.<sup>502</sup>

While, as discussed in the chapter, many plaques attached to the temple’s walls call attention to the question of who is allowed to enter the temple, this plate addresses the issue of who is *not* allowed to enter the temple. In line with Savarkar’s definition, the message of the plaque is clear “Muslims and Christian Gentlemen” may not enter the temple without permission.<sup>503</sup> At the same time, in a somewhat twisted way, the

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<sup>501</sup> Compare with Świerzowska, 2015: 119-120.

<sup>502</sup> Italics added. This inscription has been engraved into the Park’s entry-gates in English and Hindi. It is also found near the entrance to the temple’s offices.

<sup>503</sup> Although, as Jain remarks, today’s temple authorities insist that this rule/regulation is never

inscription underlines that foreigners (that means those who stay only for a short period and then leave the country) are exempted from this regulation. In short, as outlined here, it seems as if the temple authorities are determined that the temple is an ethnically (nationally) pure space, at the same time it aspires to earn respect and gain cultural clout within the global community of nations.

The creators of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir intended to shape the present, aiming towards a better future. The Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir is imagined as a model on which future Hindu temples should be built. As briefly mentioned in this chapter and as will be discussed in more detail in the fifth chapter, there seem to be a great number of parallels between the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir and Akshardham, though BAPS seems to be pushing boundaries further with regard to utilisation of technology, scale and ritual practice. Does Akshardham follow Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's footsteps? And, does this mean that the blurring of boundaries between the *sacred* and the *secular* religious architecture so pronounced in the case of Akshardham, can actually be traced earlier? Does the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir mark the beginning of a new (modern) type of Hindu temple? How can these two moments of temple making and their blurring of the orders of secular and sacred architecture be better annotated? The following chapters delve into this.

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enforced, it is still worth paying attention to this plaque (Jain, 2017: S20).

## FIGURES THIRD CHAPTER



Figure 3.1: Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir on Mandir Marg in Delhi (by A. Hartig).

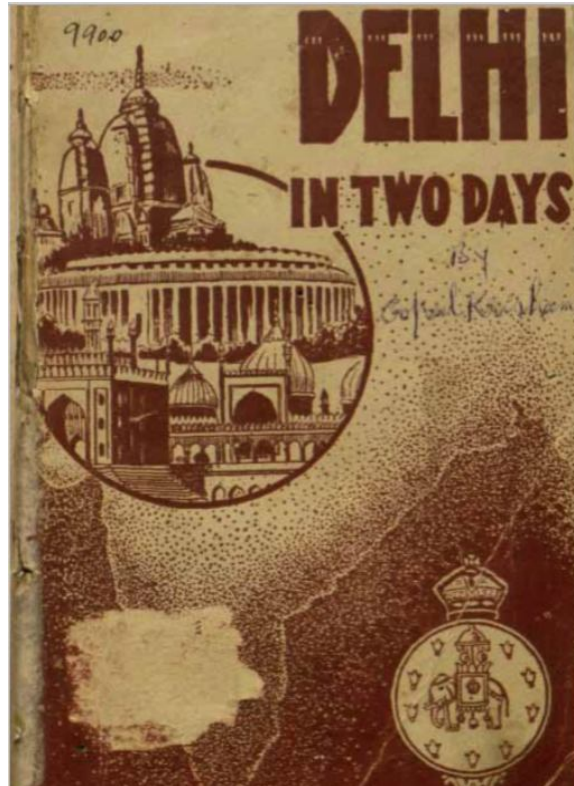


Figure 3.2: Cover of Gopal's *Delhi in Two Days* (Gopal, 193-).



Figure 3.3: Bharat Mata Mandir in Varanasi (by A. Hartig).



Figure 3.4: Map of Bharat Mata in the Bharat Mata Mandir in Varanasi (by A. Hartig).





Figure 3.5: Hindu Mahasabha on Mandir Marg in Delhi (by A. Hartig).



Figure 3.6: Detail Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 3.7: Detail Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 3.8: Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's *Shikharas* (by A. Hartig).



Figure 3.9: Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir in ca. 1945 (by Rodger Dodger, <http://www.ipernity.com/doc/rogerdodger/31439653>).



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Figure 3.21: Image at Buddhist/Birla Mandir on Mandir Marg in Delhi (by A. Hartig).

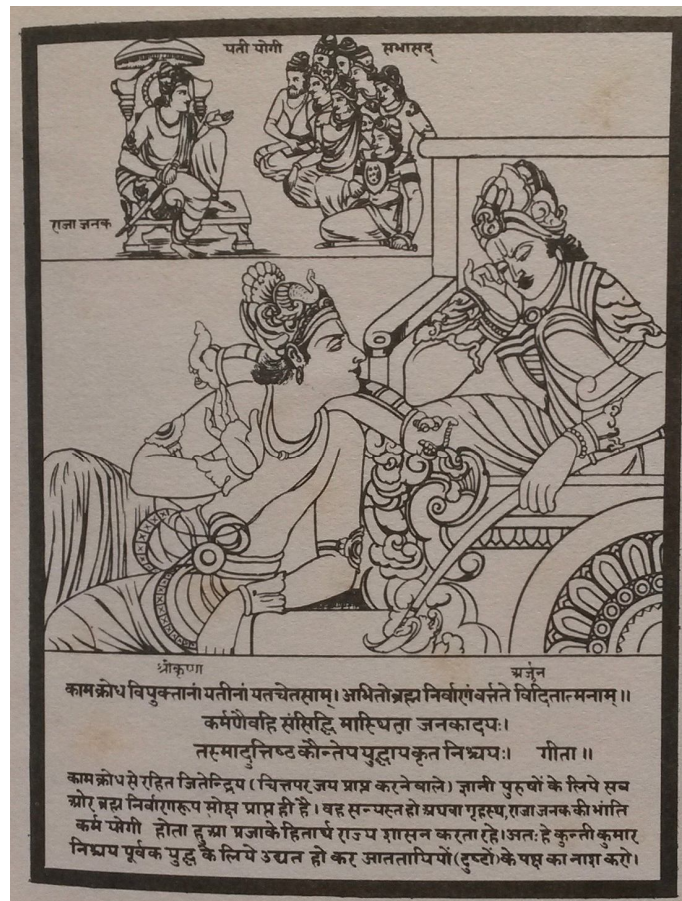


Figure 3.22: Image at Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir Sketched by Caturvedi (Caturvedi, 1982: 44).



Figure 3.23: Prithvi Raj Chauhan in Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's Indraprastha Dharma Vatika (by A. Hartig).



Figure 3.24: Ashoka in Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's Indraprastha Dharma Vatika (by A. Hartig).

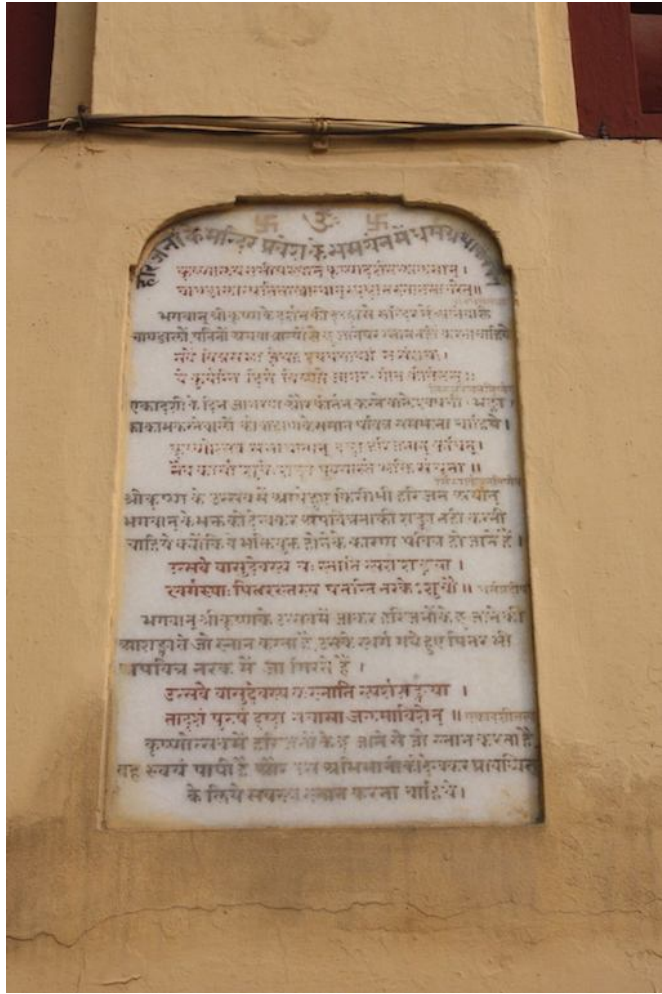


Figure 3.25: Plaque at Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's Exterior Wall (by A. Hartig).



Figure 3.26: Plaque at Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's Exterior Wall (by A. Hartig).

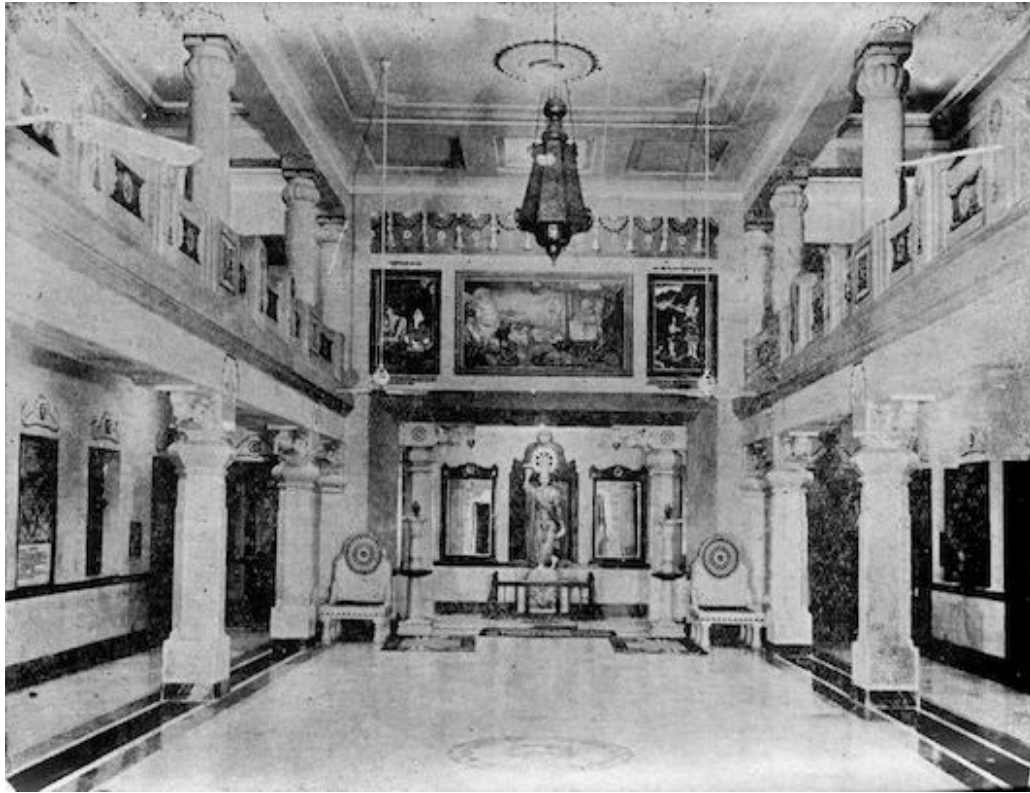


Figure 3.27: Interior of Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's Gita Bhavan (All India Arya (Hindu) Dharma Seva Sangha (19-).



Figure 3.28: Women Touching *Murti* of Krishna in the Gita Bhavan (by M. Bourke-White, <https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/beta/asset//kAHbhHNbGmiDZw>).

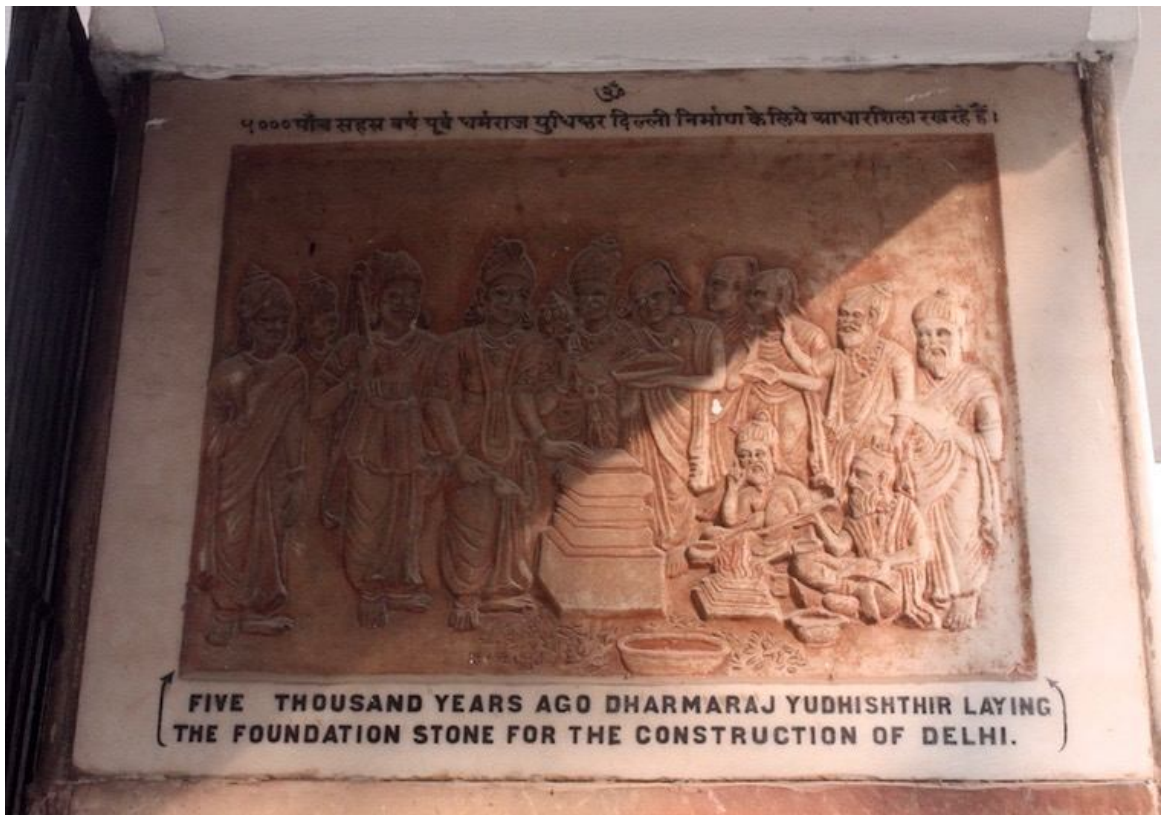


Figure 3.29: Image at the Indraprastha Dharma Vatika's Entrance Gate (by A. Hartig).



Figure 3.30: Indraprastha Dharma Vatika at Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir (by A. Hartig):



Figure 3.31: Gopuram at Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's Indraprastha Dharma Vatika (by A. Hartig).



Figure 3.32: Yajnasala in Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's Indraprastha Dharma Vatika (by A. Hartig).



Figure 3.33: Vyayamshala in Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's Indraprastha Dharma Vatika (by A. Hartig).



Figure 3.34: Stage at Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's Indraprastha Dharma Vatika (by A. Hartig).



Figure 3.35: Artificial Cave Landscape at Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's Indraprastha Dharma Vatika (by A. Hartig).



Figure 3.36: Miniature Temple at the Indraprastha Dharma Vatika (by A. Hartig).





Figure 3.37: Entrance to a Small Shrine in Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's Indraprastha Dharma Vatika (by A. Hartig).



Figure 3.38: Girls Posing with Cement Tiger in the Indraprastha Dharma Vatika (by A. Hartig).



Figure 3.39: Families Taking Photos in the Indraprastha Dharma Vatika (by A. Hartig).



Figure 3.40: Photographer in the Indraprastha Dharma Vatika Waiting for Clients (by A. Hartig).

## FOURTH CHAPTER

### A NATION TRANSPOSED: UTTARA SWAMINATHA SWAMIMALAI MANDIR, A TAMIL TEMPLE IN DELHI

As outlined in the previous chapter, the idea of the Indian nation as formulated in the course of the independence movement was delineated by encompassing all ‘Hindus’ ignoring cultural, linguistic, socio-economic, *etc.* differences between the many different communities inhabiting the Indian subcontinent.<sup>504</sup> However, as Barnett points out, the emphasis on “developing attachments to a territorially defined nation-state is accompanied by attempts to undermine or destroy tribal, ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities and loyalties” (Barnett, 1976: 4). Thus, around the time when the nationalist movement was organised to fight for an independent nation for the (Hindu) Indians, movements that foregrounded forms of regional, linguistic and ethnic/racial identity also asserted themselves.<sup>505</sup> The Dravidian movement is one striking example of linguistic bonds strengthening a lower caste movement (Barnett, 1976; Pandian, 1996; *etc.*). Naga tribes seeking to assert their ethnic/racial identity in the Northeast, prior even to the exit of the British from India can be read as another kind of an example where resistance to a hegemonic and largely north-India based nationalist movement. Like the Indian nationalist movement, these movements asserted the idea of *a nation* and promoted the unity of its people. However, the *identity* these movements insisted on have been often at odds with the pan-Indian identity and the political entity called India.<sup>506</sup> Moorti notes, “these regional identities have long histories of separatist tendencies, as is the case with the Tamil identity asserted in South India” (Moorti, 2004: 550). Since Independence/Partition and until date, the independent nation faces problems with separatist movements, weakening and blurring of territorial nationalism. Perceiving these sentiments that were evolving into distinct political movements, in 1961, Nehru appealed in a letter to India’s Chief Ministers writing:

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<sup>504</sup> Compare also with Barnett, 1976: 4.

<sup>505</sup> With regard to the formation of Dravidian/Tamil nationalism see, for example, Barnett and Pandian (Barnett, 1976; Pandian, 1996).

<sup>506</sup> This has been discussed, for example, by Moorti, 2004.

Communalism is one of the obvious examples of backward-looking people trying to hold on to something that is wholly out-of-place in the modern world and is essentially opposed to the concept of nationalism. In fact it splits up nationalism into a number of narrower nationalisms (Barnett, 1976: 4).

In the case of Tamil Nadu, an identity based on racial and regional distinction was put forward as the true Tamil identity. Drawing upon colonial period ethnology, the Dravidian race was positioned in opposition to the Aryan one, and in the process, the upper-caste Brahmins were cast as ‘outsiders,’ and as not belonging to the pure Tamil, Dravidian identity and their influence within the sphere of culture was to be undermined by turning to Dravidian examples of art, culture and architecture. In the process, the effect on temple architecture was, as Sridharan notes,

Temple architecture and sculpture began to be patronized following the government’s project of reviving the indigenous cultural past and architectural motifs. They were largely derived from Dravidian temples and also were introduced into secular spaces. Dravidian architecture made available to all Hindu communities is a notion of authenticity in art tradition and thus became a common expression for the various cults and communities” (Sridharan, 2003: 266).

As outlined in the previous chapters, the city’s architecture-scape changed drastically in the years following the country’s Independence/Partition, in part because of the constant influx of people coming from different parts of the newly established nation to settle in the national capital city.<sup>507</sup> Eventually Delhi’s temple-scape was affected by the turn of events—Delhi became a place to build temples dedicated to deities, such as Ayyappa, Kali, Swaminarayan, Venkateshwara and Subramanya that were earlier found only in certain regions in India.<sup>508</sup> Unlike temples built earlier, the temples built for these ‘migrant’ gods no longer disappear in the

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<sup>507</sup> On the growth of Delhi’s population see, for example, Dupont, 2000: 230. As mentioned earlier, the DDA expects a growth of the NCTD’s population from approximately fourteen million in 2001 to twenty-three million in 2021 (Singh, 2007: 18-19).

<sup>508</sup> According to a popular conception, there are 330 million deities in Hinduism. Besides deities such as Shiva, Vishnu, Krishna, Hanuman, Ganesha, Parvati and Durga that are popular throughout India, in many regions local/regional gods/goddesses are worshipped that are often also associated with the main deities. Gods such as Ayyappa, Mariamma, and Karuppu Sami have been worshipped in South India. Swaminarayan has been worshipped in Gujarat and Jagannath in Orissa. Other gods such as Valmiki, Shabari and Hanuman are worshipped by people belonging to the lower socio-economic strata as well as those belonging to the lower castes. Shabari, for instance, has been worshipped by the forest settlers or *adivasis* and finds worship in almost no other contexts. See also second chapter. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rao emphasises that Subramanya is “almost exclusively a South Indian deity [...] less worshipped in Northern India” (Rao, 1997 [1914]: 415).

city's landscape but now rise confidently at prominent locations featuring impressive architecture, each different from the other.<sup>509</sup> Most of these temples trace the origin of *their* temple not to a dream, vision or the like but to the meeting of a group of people (usually young men) sharing a similar religious, geographic, socio-economic, linguistic and cultural background.<sup>510</sup> In accordance with Hodges' theory that when *nations* emigrate, their architecture will follow, these migrant communities hold on to their *national architecture* building temples outside the boundaries of their homelands—this tendency can be observed not only in the context of Delhi but around the globe (Hodges, 1787: 3; italics added).<sup>511</sup> Particularly with regard to temples built by South Indian communities and their distinctive features now dotting the globe, Michell notes: “Temples in the Southern Indian manner are currently in use for worship all over the world, from Pittsburgh and Malibu to Durvan and Singapore” (Michell, 1995: 276). However, this movement—of regional native architecture inhabiting the migrants' new context—has been studied in some depth in research undertaken on Hindu temple architecture in the diaspora.<sup>512</sup> With regard to the ‘Tamil style’ temples within India, however, the proliferation of this style or the

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<sup>509</sup> Consider, for example, the location of the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir overlooking the metro line that connects the western part of the city to Delhi's centre. Similarly, the Jagannath Mandir has a prominent location on the way to Delhi's popular Hauz Khas Village. See also Uttara Swaminarayan Swamimalai Mandir's location discussed in more detail below. Compare with temples discussed in the second chapter.

<sup>510</sup> Dreams and visions of religious authorities are often considered a reason to build a temple. See Parker, 2003: 15; Waghorne, 2004: 26, 70-71, 187; Kurien, 2007: 88; Lutgendorf, 2007: 241 and Pati, 2011: 145-146. In the case of Malai Mandir as well as many other temples that have been built in Delhi and elsewhere, however, the temple's origin traces back to a different reality that is, the moment when a group of usually young men from the same location/region/community following the same belief, met and started performing rituals/festival/etc. as a community together. Initially these meetings are small informal gatherings that turned into organised meetings. Soon, the notion that there is a need to give these meetings a *proper form* seems to have settled in and is taken forward by registering an organisation/trust/etc. and constructing a temporary shrine. See, for example [www.dakshindelhikalibari.com/about-history.asp](http://www.dakshindelhikalibari.com/about-history.asp). See also the Jagannath Mandir in Hauz Khas. According to the temple's website, a group of “non-resident Odias in Delhi” formed a Society in 1968 discussing the construction of a temple ([www.shrijagannathmandirdelhi.in/history/](http://www.shrijagannathmandirdelhi.in/history/)). Compare also with the Ayyappa Temple (RK Puram) built by a community from Kerala and the Kali Mandir in CR Park ([www.ayyappatempledelhi.org/about-us/history/](http://www.ayyappatempledelhi.org/about-us/history/); [www.kalimandircrpk.org/mandir-history.html](http://www.kalimandircrpk.org/mandir-history.html)).

<sup>511</sup> As the temple's website emphasises, the Ayyappa Mandir in RK Puram was built in the *chera* style of Kerala. The Jagannath Mandir in Hauz Khas was built in the tradition of Orissa's temples. Compare also with temples discussed in second chapter. As, for example, Knott, Eck and Younger discuss, many Indian communities try to hold on to *their* architectural style crossing India's national borders to settle in foreign countries such as Sri Lanka, Thailand, the UK and the US (Eck, 2000; Knott, 2000; Younger, 2010). See also publications listed in the bibliography by Kim.

<sup>512</sup> According to Michell, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, temples built by the Tamil community of Sri Lanka are “typically Southern Indian in style” (Michell, 1995: 276). See, for example, Bhardwaj and Rao, 1998; Eck, 2000: 220-221; Knott, 2000: 91-92; Barot, 2002: 204; Younger, 2010 and Reddington, 2014: 61-62. See also Kim's various publications on BAPS listed in the bibliography.

developments within it, has received little scholarly attention.

Amongst the South-Indian communities patronising these temples, the Tamil speaking communities have been at the forefront in building temples; many of which are dedicated to the god Subramanya variously known as Murugan (also Murukan), Kumar, Skanda, Kartikeya, *etc.*<sup>513</sup> At the beginning of the 20th century, in south India, Subramanya was so popular that “[t]here is not a village, however small, which does not possess a shrine for Subrahmanya” (Rao, 1997 [1914], Vol. II: 415). According to Clothey, “there has been a growing feeling in Tamil Nadu that there is a Dravidian distinctiveness and pride in a cultural heritage that has roots partially independent of the Sanskrit mainstream” (Clothey, 1969: 237). According to Geaves, “the south Indian cult of Murugan has emerged historically as one of the most powerful regional expressions of Indian religiosity” (Geaves quoted in Reddington, 2014: 57). Fifty years later, it seems as if this setting has not changed; throughout the state there are countless temples dedicated to Subramanya that “attract huge numbers of worshipers” (Clothey, 1969: 236). Clothey emphasises Subramanya’s popularity and significance remarking that “three of the six busiest and wealthiest temples in Tamil Nad [sic, Nadu] are temples dedicated to Murukan; each of these temples has an annual income of over one million rupees” (Clothey, 1969: 236). According to Orr, of all the temples in Tamil Nadu, the temple dedicated to Subramanya in Palani, “receives the largest number of pilgrims and the greatest quantity of gifts” (Orr, 2014: 21). Over the centuries, Subramanya has been more and more associated with Tamil identity, as Clothey and other scholars discuss (Clothey, 1969, 1972, 2005 [1978]; Trouillet, 2012: 6-7; Orr, 2014: 21, 24; Reddington, 2014: 57; *etc.*). In other words, against the backdrop of India’s process of nation-building, Subramanya was firmly established as the god of the Tamil nation.

For the Tamil diaspora—dispersed nationally as well as internationally—Delhi is seen as a city in which, according to Subramaniam, “[t]he [Tamil] community finds itself transplanted in an unfamiliar and hostile environment where their identity is at

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<sup>513</sup> For a detailed description of Subramanya’s iconography see, for example, Rao (Rao, 1997 [1914], Vol. II: 415-451). With regard to Subramanya in the particular context of Tamil Nadu see Clothey, L’Hernault, Zvelebil and Orr (Clothey, 1969, 1972, 2005 [1978]; L’Hernault, 1978; Branfoot, 2003; Orr, 2014; *etc.*).

stake” (Subramaniam, 1996: 669).<sup>514</sup> Can the construction of a temple dedicated to no other god than to the Tamil “national god” Subramanya be read as attempt to ensure the community’s and thus the god’s survival? On what ground are the (Tamil) community and their identity at stake in the national capital and the nation? If the creators of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir meant to not only mark the Hindu presence in the capital city and nation but also to turn Delhi’s landscape into a Hindu-*scape*, then can the construction of a Tamil temple dedicated to the Tamil national god be read in the same light?<sup>515</sup> According to Nietzsche, god exists as long as the community exists and this god will always be with his people/nation (Nietzsche, 1899: 234). Arguably, there is a link between a certain community or group of people and god that is imagined as ‘belonging’ to them—a national god.

Against the backdrop of these issues, the chapter transposes the question: What role does the Hindu temple play in the context of tensions between regional nationalisms and an idea of India that privileges territorial integrity? This raises the following questions: How is the nation linked with god? How does the community imagine their temple within the context of the capital located far away from the regional context of Tamil? How does the community imagine itself within the nation? How much space can and must the national capital provide or (national/regional) gods? What role does religion, architecture and art play in this context? Why do communities hold on to a particular style of architecture and not follow a new modern national style, as, for instance, imagined by the architect Sris Chandra Chatterjee? How is the community linked to architecture? Can architecture, art, cloth, food, language, *etc.* ‘belong’ to a community/nation exclusively? How does the idea of community and identity of the community affect the making of architecture? Although the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir is intended to be a temple for all (Hindu)

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<sup>514</sup> He “enjoys immense popularity in Tamilnadu today and is virtually an emblem of Tamil identity”, as Orr puts it (Orr, 2014: 21). Reddington seemingly agrees with this reading emphasising: “Devotees are highly conscious of [Subramanya’s] strong ties to Tamil Nadu” (Reddington, 2014: 57). Waghorne, however, observes that out of the 108 newly built temples in Chennai that she surveyed for her study only three have been dedicated to Subramanya which might indicate that Subramanya is at the moment less popular than other gods but her study says little about Subramanya’s association with Tamils as ethnic community/nation—making him a national god (Waghorne, 2004: 183).

<sup>515</sup> Compare also with Taneja, Rajagopalan and Pati all of whom discuss examples of architecture in Delhi with regard to identity politics observing a tendency to make Delhi a Hindu city (Taneja, 2008; Rajagopalan, 2011; Pati, 2011).

Indians, it seems as if many people/communities still felt the *need* to build their own temples for their own gods. Why is there a need for creating communal space within the space of the capital city? Where is the line between *us* and *the others* drawn within a nation and the national capital city? What does that say about the concept of nation, the idea of a Hindu nation and the idea of India as nation? Is it at all possible that people within a nation believe in different gods? How many gods can a nation have? What might be the consequences?

In the light of these complex questions, this chapter sets out to investigate the founding of the first Tamil temple built in the heart of the national capital, viz. the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir (Figure 4.1). In studying its founding narratives—a mix of community influence and ‘divine’ signs—the chapter intends to analyse how communities have relied on temple architecture in creating a distinct space within the competitive urban-scape of Delhi. In the process, it also reflects on the power of ‘regional’ pontiffs and religious leaders and the means through which temple architecture—its initial establishment, its repeated sanctification and its association with powerful religious orders and leaders—is marked and read in the capital. The chapter begins by locating the construction of the temple not only within the context of the city but also in the context of the nation—i.e. the process by which the Tamil-speaking regions have negotiated their relationship with the north-Indian centres of power. For this, the chapter looks at different agents involved in the temple-building which includes the local Tamil community, the temple’s patrons and sponsors, as well as its architects. From there, the chapter sets out to analyse the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir’s architecture, following a chronological order. In tracing the various architectural elements within the complex, the chapter intends to critically foreground how the development of religious architecture responds to complex conditions including a community’s negotiations with its religious ‘leaders.’

## **LOCATING THE UTTARA SWAMINATHA SWAMIMALAI MANDIR WITHIN DELHI AND CONNECTING IT WITH SOUTH INDIA**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Subramanya was not particularly popular in North India and no temple dedicated to Subramanya was built in Delhi; this was



despite the tremendous popularity of the god in Tamil-speaking regions of South India, as the number and profile of the various temples dedicated to him attested. A temple in North India had to wait until a community of Subramanya devotees from South India (Tamil Nadu—had sufficient human and financial power and support to erect a temple dedicated to the deity (Rao, 1997 [1914], Vol. II: 415; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 17, 39, 53).<sup>516</sup> These young south Indian male devotees of Subramanya had migrated to Delhi in the 1940s due to their careers in the Indian bureaucracy and government services. According to the temple authorities, the origin of the temple traces back to the time when these young men began to celebrate together the Skanda Shashti festival, popular in Tamil Nadu, in their homes in Delhi (Venkataraman, 20-: 11).<sup>517</sup> This festival celebrating Subramanya’s conquest over the *asura* Surapadma gained in popularity and numbers of attendees grew; eventually, it became inconvenient to conduct the celebrations at private homes and the community felt the need for a temple (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 17; Subrahmanian, 20-: 12; *etc.*).<sup>518</sup> Thus, the community began to search for a site to build a temple for

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<sup>516</sup> Subramanya has many names such as Murukan (also spelled Murugan), Skanda, Kartikeya, Kumara, *etc.* Compare for instance with Branfoot, 2003: 177. For a detailed description of his iconography see, for example, Rao (Rao, 1997 [1914], Vol. II: 415-451). With regard to Subramanya in the particular context of Tamil Nadu see Clothey, L’Hernault and Orr (Clothey, 1969, 1972, 2005 [1978]; L’Hernault, 1978; Branfoot, 2003; Orr, 2014; *etc.*). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rao emphasises that Subramanya is “almost exclusively a South Indian deity [...] less worshipped in Northern India” (Rao, 1997 [1914]: 415).

<sup>517</sup> As Subrahmanian emphasises, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the South Indian population of Delhi “was just a handful”, which agrees with the situation that Fuller and Narasimha outline (Subrahmanian, 1990; Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 96, 165). From 1947 onwards, many Tamil Brahmins have been employed by the central government and thus moved to Delhi (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 96). Dupont emphasises that most people who have been coming to Delhi are young male looking for work (Dupont, 2000: 236-237). On Tamils in Delhi see also Subrahmanian, 1996 as well as Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 96, 238. For a detailed description and analysis of the festival see Clothey, 1969. See also below.

<sup>518</sup> According to Iyer and Pattabhiraman, a turning point for the community was when a South Indian industrialist offered to donate a metal *murti* of Subramanya and his consorts Devasena and Valli to the Sabha especially since the Sree Shanmukhaanda Sangeeta Sabha was not able to provide an appropriate place/temple for the deities (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 17). Subrahmanian provides a slightly different version of the events; according to him, “an ardent devotee of Lord Swaminatha, who was worshipping an emerald idol of the Lord given to him by Bhagawan Ramana Maharishi, organised public celebration of Śrī Skanda Shashti” (Subrahmanian, 1990). According to Subrahmanian, “[t]he attendance [of people during the festival] swelled into thousands and the need for a temple began to be keenly felt” (Subrahmanian, 1990). As mentioned earlier, India’s Independence/Partition and Delhi’s becoming the capital of the country was one of the reasons that caused people from the different parts of India to settle in Delhi (Dupont, 2000). According to Dupont, the time from 1941 until 1951 “is the period of the highest demographic growth in the history of the capital which expanded from almost 7,00,000 inhabitants in 1941 to 1.4 million in 1951 [...]” (Dupont, 2000: 229). As Fuller and Narasimhan discuss, among the people that shifted to Delhi from 1947 onwards were many Tamil Brahmins with central government jobs (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 96). According to them, it is almost impossible to estimate the number of Tamils and Tamil Brahmins that lived and continue to live in Delhi (Fuller

Subramanya (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 17).<sup>519</sup>

In 1961, the Sabha identified a suitable site “in the heart of a vast thicket of berry trees” at the top (Figure 4.2) of a ninety foot high hillock southwest of Central Secretariat (Subrahmanian, 1990; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 18).<sup>520</sup> As the construction of Malai Mandir slowly progressed, from the 1970s onwards, the barren land that surrounded the hillock was developed into one of Delhi’s largest townships named RK Puram, which “has more than a thousand of [modern] 2 or 3 bedroom houses for clerks and junior officers, several small markets, places for schools [...] and a number of offices of the Government of India” (Nath, 2007: 248).<sup>521</sup> It is not least because of this location, overlooking this modern architecture-scape and now one of the city’s busiest commuter arteries the Outer Ring Road that the Uttara Swami Malai Mandir has become the landmark that it is to date (Figure 4.3).<sup>522</sup>

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and Narasimhan, 2015: 238). However, according to estimates, by the 1960s, forty thousand south Indians lived in Delhi, “as many as 75 percent of them were probably Brahmans, especially Tamil Brahmans” (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 96, 165). In the 1980s, around fifty five thousand Tamils lived in Delhi, approximately half of them were Brahmans (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 96). According to Fuller and Narasimhan, Tamil Brahmans believe that since fewer Tamils were working for the central government the number of Tamils in Delhi has reduced (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 238). According Fuller and Narasimhan’s estimation, currently at least twenty-five thousand Tamil Brahmans are living in Delhi, more Tamil Brahmans are living in Bengaluru and Mumbai (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 165, 238). According to *The Times of India*, around half-million Tamils are living in Delhi (Ganesh, 2002).

<sup>519</sup> In 1949/50, the Sree Shanmukhananda Sangeeta Sabha was formed to organise the celebrations (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 17). As discussed in the previous chapter, whereas at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Sanatan (Hindu) Dharm Sabha was at the mercy of the British colonisers to grant permission for the construction of a temple and allot a piece of land by the time the south Indian community planned to construct Malai Mandir the context had changed.

<sup>520</sup> Then, there was only a village called Vasant Gaon in the vicinity ([www.murugan.org/temples/malaimandir.htm](http://www.murugan.org/temples/malaimandir.htm)). Compare also with Dupont, 2000: 240, Map 13.1 and Mehra, 2013: 372. As mentioned earlier, for the construction of the Hindu temple there are many rules/regulations also regarding the location of a temple (Kramrisch, 1946: 3-7; Eck, 1985 [1981]: 59-75). See also BAPS, 2014: 59-63.

<sup>521</sup> The constant influx of people requires the government to constantly build/provide necessary infrastructure, which includes housing areas (Menon, 2000: 150-151; Bansal and Kochupillai, 2013: 89-90). According to Nath, the first extension of New Delhi was the development of Chanakyapuri (Nath, 2007: 248, 250). The second phase of development, that began in the late 1950s and continued through the 1970s, concentrated on urban mass housing projects (colonies) such as RK Puram and Lajpat Nagar (Menon, 2000: 150; Nath, 2007: 248; Bansal and Kochupillai, 2013: 89-90). From the 1970s until the 1990s, the Delhi Development Authority, that was founded in the late 1950s to implement Delhi’s first master plan, built townships such as Vasant Kunj, Rohini and Dwarka, each of which contains hundreds of houses, as well as markets, schools, parks, health centres, places of worship and *etc.* (Nath, 2007: 251).

<sup>522</sup> Jain notices that with modernism and mobility the significance of the space along the highways as a location for the temple as it is quickly accessible is becoming increasingly important (Jain, 2014: 139, 2016; 2017: S15, S22, S24).

For the Sabha, however, there is more meaning to this elevated location. Firstly, as Iyer and Pattabhiraman emphasise, it “admirably conforms to the traditional practice of building temples for the Lord on hillocks in South India” (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 19).<sup>523</sup> Secondly, it substantiates the claim of the Uttara Swami Malai Mandir of being the seventh Padai Veedu, a location of high religious significance was being in search for a long period of time; the poet-saint Nakkirar identified/defined only six Padai Veedu all of which are located in Tamil Nadu (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 52-60).<sup>524</sup> Thereby Malai Mandir being the only Padai Veedu located outside the borders of Tamil Nadu that also in the national capital city seems like an effort to link the Tamil with the body politics of the nation and at the same time within the idea of pan-Hindu identity. The Samaj stresses the significance of the temple with regard to its location, naming the temple “Swamimalai” or “Malai Mandir,” which according to Iyer and Pattabhiraman is “a happy union of a Tamil word [*malai* translated into English as “hill”] and a [H]indi word [*mandir* translated

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<sup>523</sup> Although Rao describes Subramanya as so popular that “shrines for him in all places such as tow the question of visibility of the central temple/deity is given more significance, villages, gardens, mountain tops and other odd places” Iyer and Pattabhiraman emphasise that “temples dedicated to the Lord in South India are usually built on a hill or hillock or an elevated spot” (Rao, 1997 [1914], Vol. II: 415; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 17, 19). Clothey too says that temples dedicated to Subramanya are found “on or near a hill as prescribed in the Śivāgamas” (Clothey, 1969: 236, 1972: 88, 2005 [1978]). And, also those temple that are not located on or near a hill are nonetheless linked to the hills symbolically (Clothey, 1972: 88). For more details of this issue see Clothey, 1972: 88-90 and L’Hernault, 1978: 190-195.

<sup>524</sup> The Padai Veedus are six important sites for the worship of different manifestations of Subramanya in Tamil Nadu (Clothey, 1972: 82, 88, 2005 [1978]: 116-131). Clothey has doubts that the six centres of this century are the same as those to which Nakkirar author of *Tirumurukarrupatai* refers (Clothey, 1972: 85). According to Clothey, “devotees are virtually unanimous in acclaiming the existence of *six* pilgrimage centers of special sacrality [...but] only five of these sites are accepted as authentic without dispute” (Clothey, 1972: 81-82). Many people identify (1) Tirupparankundram, (2) Tiruchendur, (3) Palani, (4) Swamimalai and (5) Tiruttani as Padai Veedus (Clothey, 1972: 82, 2005 [1978]: 116-131; L’Hernault, 1978: 185-189; Branfoot, 2003: 148-149; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 52-60; Waghorne, 2004: 190; Orr, 2014: 23-24; Reddington, 2014: 60). As Clothey explains, the sixth site has been described as *kunrātal*, which he translates as “every hill on which the god dances” (Clothey, 1972: 82, 2005 [1978]: 117). Thus, the sixth site is not to be identified with any specific site but with each and every other Subramanya shrine/temple (Branfoot, 2003: 148; Clothey, 2005 [1978]: 128-131; Reddington, 2014: 60). Although various temple authorities tried to stake claim on this title, people have not come to consensus about the location of the sixth abode (Clothey, 1972: 82, 85, 2005 [1978]: 128-131). Some people such as Iyer and Pattabhiraman define/identify Palamutircholai as the god’s sixth abode (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 52; Branfoot, 2003: 177; Waghorne, 2004: 190). Besides, Iyer and Pattabhiraman explain that each of the Padai Veedus is associated with one of the “seven Chakras” of the yogin’s spiritual body: (1) Tirupparankundram with Mooladharam; (2) Tiruchendur with Manipporakam; (3) Palani with Swadishtanam; (4) Swamimalai with Anagatham; (5) Tiruttani with Visuddhi; and, (6) Pazhamudirsholai with Aagna (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 52-53). According to some traditions there are six chakras while according to other traditions there are seven chakras. Clothey discusses this association of the six sites with the six (not seven) *cakras* in the symbol-system of yoga (Clothey, 1972: 81, 87-88, 2005 [1978]: 175-177).

into English as ‘temple’]” (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 37).<sup>525</sup> Moreover, naming the temple Swamimalai might be understood as an attempt to associate and link Delhi’s Malai Mandir with the Subramanya temple in Swamimalai, Tamil Nadu and thus as an attempt to insert Malai Mandir, located in Delhi, into the Tamil’s sacred geography.<sup>526</sup> In order to distinguish one Swamimalai Mandir from the other, the Samaj added “Uttara” (translated into English as “North”) to the temple’s name, thus making it complementary to the well-known Dakshina Swamimalai (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 19). This reading of the temple from a South Indian/Tamil perspective becomes even more interesting when compared with the Dakshin Delhi Kalibari dedicated to Kali built by a Bengali community in close proximity to the Uttara Swami Malai Mandir—calling it “Dakshin Delhi.” Arguably, the Bengali community locates the temple and meaning within the context of the city whereas the Samaj locates its Malai Mandir in the context of the nation and the North versus South rivalry.<sup>527</sup>

## PERMISSIONS/BLESSINGS/AUTHORISATION AND TEMPLE-BUILDING

The temple’s founding narrative begins as follows: one of the devotees had a dream about an old man taking him to a hillock which he would later identify as the hillock that had been selected for the construction of the temple (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 18). This dream was seen as expression of the divine will and Iyer and Pattabhiraman note: “Lord Swaminatha Himself had manifested before the devotee and confirmed duly the location that had been in the minds of his devotees” (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 18).<sup>528</sup> For the community, the construction of a temple

<sup>525</sup> Elsewhere Iyer and Pattabhiraman refer to the name as “bilingual” (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 53). In Delhi, however, non-Tamil speakers, unaware of the meaning of the Tamil word *malai* that might be translated into English as “hill,” find a rather different resonance with the name—the word *malai* in Hindi translates as “cream.”

<sup>526</sup> Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir’s Tamil namesake was identified as one of the Padai Veedus, where Subramanya taught his father Shiva the meaning of *om* (Clothey, 1972: 84, 2005 [1978]: 127-128; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 52-60; Branfoot, 2003: 148-149; *etc.*).

<sup>527</sup> As discussed below in more detail this is a significant aspect of the temple and its conceptualisation. On the Dakshin Delhi Kalibari Mandir see the temple’s website ([www.dakshindelhikalibari.com/about-history.asp](http://www.dakshindelhikalibari.com/about-history.asp)).

<sup>528</sup> Dreams and visions of religious authorities are often enough reason to build a temple. See Parker, 2003: 15, Lutgendorf, 2007: 241 and Pati, 2011: 145-146. According to Waghorne and Kurien, it seems as if the impetus for the construction of a temple in India and abroad is often the result of a vision or dream (Waghorne, 2004: 26, 70-71, 187; Kurien, 2007: 88; *etc.*). In the case of Malai Mandir as well as many other temples that have been built in Delhi and elsewhere, however, the temple’s origin traces back to a different reality that is the moment when a group of usually young

needed permissions/blessings/authorisation from various authorities before proceeding with the construction. However, for the community founding the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir, it needed not only the vision of god in a devotee's dream to construct a temple but also the permission/blessings/authorisation of religious 'leaders,' who in turn were able to draw upon their varied networks of influence, especially with the political class.<sup>529</sup>

Thus, the community approached the Shankaracharya Chandrasekharendra Saraswati of the Kanchi Kamakoti Math to give his permissions/blessings/authorisation for the construction of the Swaminatha Swami Mandir, marking the beginning of an association that continues to date between the Samaj and the Shankaracharyas of Kanchi (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 20-21, 45).<sup>530</sup> Although other religious leaders such as the Shankaracharyas of the Sringeri Math, Kasivasi Arul Nandi Thambiran of the Kasi Math in Thiruppanandal (Tamil Nadu) and Gokulananda of the Ramakrishna Math in Delhi have been welcomed by the Samaj, when it comes to religious issues such as performance of rituals and fixing of dates

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men from the same location/region/community following the same belief meet and start performing rituals/festival/etc. as a community together. Initially these meetings are small informal gatherings that sooner turned into organised meetings. Soon, the notion that there is a need to give these meetings a *proper form* seems to settle in and is taken forward by registering an organisation in the form of a *trust* or *association* and by the construction of a temporary shrine. According to the website of the Dakshin Delhi Kalibari Mandir that has been built at the foothills of the same hillock as Malai Mandir, members of the Phalguni Sangh Club began to think about building a temple in 1967 ([www.dakshindelhikalibari.com/about-history.asp](http://www.dakshindelhikalibari.com/about-history.asp)). See also the Jagannath Mandir in Hauz Khas. According to the temple's website, a group of "non-resident Odias in Delhi" formed a Society in 1968 discussing the construction of a temple ([www.shrijagannathmandirdelhi.in/history/](http://www.shrijagannathmandirdelhi.in/history/)). Compare also with the Ayyappa Temple in RK Puram built by a community from Kerala and the Kali Mandir in CR Park ([www.ayyapatempledelhi.org/about-us/history/](http://www.ayyapatempledelhi.org/about-us/history/); [www.kalimandircrpk.org/mandir-history.html](http://www.kalimandircrpk.org/mandir-history.html)). Compare also with temples that have been built outside India (Eck, 2000: 220-221; Knott, 2000: 91-92; Barot, 2002: 204; Reddington, 2014: 61-62; etc.).

<sup>529</sup> This is not something specific to Malai Mandir. Waghorne for instance discusses incidences of people approaching the Shankaracharyas for permission/blessing/advice with regard to the construction of temples and installation of *murtis* (Waghorne, 2004: 29-30, 65, 238-239). According to her, it is difficult to say what the role of the Shankaracharya is in this context but suggests that the blessings "lend a particular prestige to that temple" (Waghorne, 2004: 238). Besides, she observes that with an increasing demand to legitimate projects the number of *sthapatis* as well as religious functionaries seems to shrink (Waghorne, 2004: 239).

<sup>530</sup> According to Presler, Chandrasekharendra Saraswati was "one of the most revered south Indian Brahmin leaders" (Presler, 1987: 119). And, according to Parker, "[a]t the moment [that was before Chandrasekharendra Saraswati passed away in 1994] there is no one in South India who can challenge [his] sacred authority" (Parker, 1992a: 121). See also Parker, 1992a: 113; Smith, 2003: 176-177 and Waghorne, 2004: 238. For more details on Chandrasekharendra Saraswati and Jayendra Saraswati see for example Smith, Mines and Gourishankar, Cenkner, and Fuller (Smith, 1978: 51-54; Mines and Gourishankar, 1990; Cenkner, 1996: 55-57, Fuller, 2004a: 127-130; Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 199-200; etc.).

for consecrations, festivals, *etc.* the Samaj has been following instructions given by Shankaracharya Chandrasekharendra Saraswati and his successors Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati and Shankaracharya Vijayendra Saraswati (Subrahmanian, 1990; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 32, 39, 43, 45, 65; Venkatesan, 2014).<sup>531</sup>

## UTTARA SWAMINATHA SWAMIMALAI MANDIR UNDER POWERFUL PATRONS

According to scholars such as Monier-Williams, Cenker and Bhatt, it is generally believed that by establishing a “sricakra” Adi Sankara, the 8<sup>th</sup> century religious leader of the Advaita Vedanta school of philosophy, known for having spread the concept of Sanatana Dharma and reviving Hinduism, founded four *maths* situated in four directions of the subcontinent, each headed by a Shankaracharya in order to strengthen Advaita Vedanta and Sanatana Dharma (Monier-Williams, 1891: 55; Cenker, 1996: 53, 312; Yocum, 1996: 68; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 44-45; Bhatt, 2001: 183-184; Scheifinger, 2006: 205; *etc.*).<sup>532</sup> Contested by the Sringeri Math in Karnataka, the Kamakoti Math in Kanchi (Tamil Nadu) insists that Adi Sankara established the Kamakshi temple at Kanchi by consecrating the “sricakra” (Cenker, 1996: 53, 312).<sup>533</sup> Backed up by the south Indian upper-middle-class Brahmins, the

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<sup>531</sup> According to Subrahmanian, Chandrasekharendra Saraswati “has been the guiding star of Malai Mandir” (Subrahmanian, 1990). Chandrasekharendra Saraswati retired from the Math’s management in the 1970s (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 200). In 1973, R. Venkataraman invited Chandrasekhar Saraswati to perform Swaminatha Swami Mandir’s Kumbhabhishekam who sent Jayendra Saraswati to perform the required rituals (Cenker, 1996: 55; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 35-38; Kannan, 2015: 55-63). When Jayendra Saraswati disappeared in 1983 for some days from the *math*, Vijayendra was installed as seventieth Shankaracharya (Cenker, 1996: 62).

<sup>532</sup> Bhatt remarks that “[t]he legitimacy of the *shankaracharyas*, or the authority of any one of them, can be questioned” (Bhatt, 2001: 183-184). However, to date, the Sharada Math in Dwaraka (Gujarat) is generally identified as western *math*, the Jyotir Math in Jyotirmath near Badrinath (Uttarakhand) as northern *math*, the Govardhana Math in Puri (Orissa) as eastern *math* and Sringeri Sharada Math in Sringeri (Karnataka) as southern *math* (Bhatt, 2001: 183-184). Also other *maths* have been highly contested, at least three *swamis* claim the succession of the Jyotir Math, as Bhatt says (Bhatt, 2001: 183-184). See also Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 774; Cenker, 1996: 53; Yocum, 1996: 81-82; Fuller, 2004a: 126. Some Hindus refer to their religion as Sanatana Dharma, which has been translated as the “eternal way of life” and “the eternal religion”, and not Hinduism (Smith, 2002: 18; Scheifinger, 2006: 15; *etc.*).

<sup>533</sup> According to the Math’s website, the Math “was established by Sir Adi Sankara [...] and has the distinction of an unbroken line of 70 Acharyas (spiritual leaders)” (<http://in.kamakoti.org/>). Moreover, the Kanchi Math also insists that Adi Sankara had attained *siddhi* in Kanchi (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 774). As scholars such as Yocum outline, the Sringeri Math rejects the Kanchi Math’s claim to an unbroken disciple lineage back to Adi Sankara; there has been a long rivalry between the Kanchi Math and the Sringeri Math (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 766, 774, 777-778; Yocum, 1996: 81-82; Bhatt, 2001: 183-184; Fuller, 2004a: 126; *etc.*). According to followers of the Kanchi Math, Adi Sankara established the four *maths* to later establish the *math* in Kanchi to head the other four *maths* (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 774). Since both Maths are active within the same constituents/territories the rivalry unfolds around religious issues but are closely

Kanchi Math's power and influence gained momentum in the 20<sup>th</sup> century with Chandrasekharendra Saraswati's becoming the sixty-eighth Shankaracharya of the Math (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 775; Smith, 2003: 176; Fuller, 2004a: 127-128; Waghorne, 2004: 238; Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 199).<sup>534</sup> As Fuller and Narasimhan say,

Chandrasekharendra held extremely conservative views [... and] was virtually the only prominent, public figure who consistently defended Brahmans, Brahmanical Hinduism, and Brahmanism in general against Dravidianists, non-Brahman politicians, and progressives of all stripes" (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 199).<sup>535</sup>

Also Jayendra Saraswati, who had been installed as sixty-ninth Shankaracharya in 1954, gained great popularity also among the people and the leaders of the country across India, though "along quite a different path", as Mines and Gourishankar say (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 779-780; Cenker, 1996: 55-56).<sup>536</sup> Whereas

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linked with the Maths' socio-economic and political power and thus with the survival of the Math (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 777-778).

<sup>534</sup> Compare with the development of BAPS under Pramukh Swami as discussed in the fifth chapter. According to Mines and Gourishankar, it is only since 1863 that the Kanchi Math controls the Kamakshi Mandir in Kanchipuram, as Mines and Gourishankar remark (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 775). As it seems to be the case with Malai Mandir and in the following chapter discussed with regard to BAPS, the Shankaracharyas and the Math majorly benefited from followers/volunteers who "have held influential positions in government service, the armed forces, or banking", helping the Shankaracharyas/Math with financial and legal problems and create connections with important institutions and leading political figures (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 778; Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 199). According to Fuller, the Shankaracharyas enjoy great support from Tamil Nadu's elite so that politicians cannot ignore them (Fuller, 2004a: 127). According to Smith, Shankaracharya Chandrasekharendra was "[t]he most famous of these Shankaracharyas" (Smith, 2002: 31). Other scholars such as Waghorne, Fuller and Narasimhan draw a more balanced picture (Waghorne, 2004: 238; Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 199-200). Mines and Gourishankar emphasise that Chandrasekharendra Saraswati and Jayendra Saraswati are recognized throughout India as "both religious leaders and as potent political figures" (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 766). According to Fuller and Narasimhan, "[t]he majority of Tamil Smartas recognizes Kanchipuram's primacy, but a significant minority has always looked to Sringeri" (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 199). Fuller and Narasimhan, however, also noticed that among the Tamil Brahmins Chandrasekharendra Saraswati's popularity could never be reached by the Shankaracharya at Sringeri, which changed with Jayendra Saraswati's installation (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 200). Fuller and Narasimhan remark that to date the Sringeri *math* has an active presence in Chennai as elsewhere in Tamil Nadu (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 199). Waghorne has noticed this as well, she emphasises that the Sringeri Math has built various "meeting halls [Adi Sankara shrines/temples] with an attached temple in upscale neighbourhoods" within the city (Waghorne, 2004: 238, 257).

<sup>535</sup> Mines and Gourishankar mention that Chandrasekharendra Saraswati appealed to intellectuals (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 779).

<sup>536</sup> Smith emphasises that Jayendra Saraswati is "widely respected, and a national figure" (Smith, 2003: 177). As Mines and Gourishankar remark, in the mid-1970s, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi sought blessings from the Shankaracharyas although to be refused by both (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 779). She also comes to see Jayendra Saraswati during his stay at Malai

Chandrasekharendra Saraswati opposed untouchability but nevertheless supported the caste system and thus appealed to many Tamil Brahmins. Jayendra Saraswati “accepted Temple Entry and the transgressions of purity rules Entry generates”, which according to Mines and Gourishankar particularly attracted many non-Brahmins (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 779; Cenkner, 1996: 55-57, 62, 65; Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 199-200).<sup>537</sup> As scholars such as Presler, Jaffrelot, Bhatt, Fuller and Narasimhan highlight, the Shankaracharyas do not only enjoy power and respect in the religious but also in the political arena (Presler, 1987: 119, 131; Jaffrelot, 1999 [1996]: 355-357; Bhatt, 2001: 183-184; Fuller, 2004a: 126-130; Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 199).<sup>538</sup> Fuller stresses: “[P]oliticians in Chennai, and even New Delhi, cannot afford to ignore the Shankaracharyas” (Fuller, 2004a: 127).<sup>539</sup>

The Kamakshi Temple and the Kanchi Math in Kanchipuram are the backbone of the Shankaracharya’s and the Math’s spiritual, socio-economic and political power—they are at the centre of the Shankaracharya’s “galaxy”, to use a term by Mines and Gourishankar (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 770, 773-775; Cenkner,

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Mandir in June 1973 to perform the temple’s Kumbhabhishekam (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 37). According to Fuller and Narasimhan, many Tamil Brahmins regarded Chandrasekharendra Saraswati as divine (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 199). According to Cenkner, Jayendra Saraswati “brings together people from all sectors of society, rich and poor, high caste and low caste, literate and illiterate, Saiva and Vaisnava” (Cenkner, 1996: 55-56). Smith and Scheifinger emphasise that headed by Jayendra Saraswati the Math began to focus on the use of modern technology (Smith, 2002: 31-32, 2003: 177; Scheifinger, 2006: 205-208).

<sup>537</sup> Temple Entry and the question of purity with regard to caste as well as the temple have been discussed in the third chapter. According to Fuller, though the Shankaracharyas seemingly are against untouchability and try to support lower castes “they have not attacked the caste system itself” (Fuller, 2004a: 129).

<sup>538</sup> According to Fuller and Narasimhan, “[i]t owes much to Chandrasekharendra’s authority that even the DMK and ADMK [short for All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK)] governments of Tamilnadu have regularly taken heed of Kanchipuram’s views when formulating policy on religious matters, especially temples” (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 199). The power of the Shankaracharyas shows also in a case mentioned by Waghorne; due to a request from the Shankaracharya, Chief Minister M.G Ramachandran provided Alagappan land for the construction of a temple (Waghorne, 2004: 189). Mines and Gourishankar discuss such social dynamics and power relations with regard to Jayendra Saraswati (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990).

<sup>539</sup> According to Bhatt, “some *shankaracharyas* make the same demands as the Hindutva movement but also contest the hegemonic encroachments of the VHP in its claim to represent ‘pan-Hinduism’” (Bhatt, 2001: 184). Compare with BAPS that will be discussed in the following chapter. According to Fuller and Narasimhan, by 1990s, Jayendra was involved in Hindu nationalist politics (Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 200). See also Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 781. As Smith emphasises, when Jayendra Saraswati took over the new watchwords were ‘culture of one’s own land and technology from abroad’ (Smith, 2002: 31-32, 2003: 177). Mines and Gourishankar emphasise that Jayendra Saraswati denies any connections with the RSS (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 781). How closely religion and politics are at times linked shows in the outcome of the Uttar Pradesh Legislative Assembly election, 2017 through which Adiyath Mahant of the Gorakhnath Math was appointed as the Chief Minister of UP.



1996). This galaxy or territory consists of various institutions such as temples as well as *maths*, charities, and schools that are directly and indirectly under the Shankaracharyas' control and thus are—like the Kamakshi Temple—spiritual, socio-economic and political resources (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 770, 775).<sup>540</sup> According to Mines and Gourishankar, since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Shankaracharyas have tried to push the boundaries of their territory and thus strengthen their power through different means (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990). As Smith says:

An important feature of the spiritual rule of the Shankaracharyas, whose title is Jagadguru ('Guru of the World'), is that, like Hindu kings of old, they spend much time touring the country, and the terms of these tours, *vijaya-yatra*, has implications of spiritual conquest (Smith, 2003: 176).<sup>541</sup>

Institutions acknowledging Jayendra Saraswati's "religious headship" are located throughout Tamil Nadu as well as Orissa, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Delhi (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 768-769; Cenkner, 1996: 54-55; Jaffrelot, 1999 [1996]: 355-357; *etc.*). Comparing this information with official information provided on the Math's website, it seems as if in the last thirty years the Shankaracharyas and the Kanchi Math might have been successful in their mission to expand their galaxy further within the boundaries of India with a strong focus on the states in northeast India and Kashmir.<sup>542</sup>

Temples seem to play a significant role in outlining the Shankaracharya's territory (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990; Cenkner, 1996; Fuller, 2004a: 128, 130;

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<sup>540</sup> Foremost, the Shankaracharyas have—like BAPS—been encouraging the worship of images, the renovation and building of temples (Cenkner, 1996: 62, 65; Fuller, 2004a: 126-130). As Parker discusses, Chandrasekharendra Saraswati kick started the renovation of Srirangam's Mottai Gopuram in 1963 by announcing sorrow over the Gopuram's incompleteness (Parker, 1992a: 113-114). Cenkner, however, mentions also that according to an article in *Hinduism Today* Chandrasekharendra criticises in 1986 the construction of temples in the US (unknown author, 1986b; Cenkner, 1996: 66).

<sup>541</sup> As Mines and Gourishankar discuss, the Shankaracharyas use the temple and various symbols of kingship such as royal umbrellas to dramatise religious leadership (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 768, 770, 774). For an account of *yatras* that Jayendra Saraswati has undertaken see Kannan (Kannan, 2015). According to Kannan, Jayendra inaugurated the Malai Mandir during his fourth *Vijaya Yatra* (Kannan, 2015: 55-63). During the same *yatra*, he also visited the mentioned Ayyappa Mandir in RK Puram ([www.ayyapatempledelhi.org/about-us/history/](http://www.ayyapatempledelhi.org/about-us/history/)).

<sup>542</sup> According to the Math's official website, to date, it has branches, schools, temples, *etc.* in places such as in Ayodhya, Varanasi, Ranchi, Siliguri, Rishikesh, Noida, Baramulla, Gangtok, Guwahati and Shillong (<http://in.kamakoti.org/kamakoti/details/branches.html>).

Fuller and Narasimhan, 2015: 199-200).<sup>543</sup> But, unlike BAPS that puts great efforts into the construction of temples, it seems the Shankaracharyas and the Kanchi Math rather try to reach out and control temples ‘belonging’ to other communities/organisations/trusts (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990; Fuller, 2004a: 128).<sup>544</sup> Clearly, in ‘adopting’ new temples, the influence of the Math and of the Shankaracharya stands to grow. In fact, some temple authorities keep a close eye on what the Shankaracharya does/does not do in their temples; some other temple authorities have agreed to exchange “their autonomy [meaning also losing control over sources of socio-economic and political benefits and power] for the prestige of the Kanchi Periyavar brings” (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 775-777; Fuller, 2004a: 128; unknown author, 2005; *etc.*). Accordingly, the Sree Swaminatha Swami Seva Samaj’s decision

<sup>543</sup> At least since the 1960s, the Shankaracharyas have been building their own temples, of which the Adi Sankara Vimana Mantapa in Allahabad that houses separately a *murti* of “the Supreme God of each of the major Hindu sects [Shakti, Vishnu and Shiva]” (unknown author, 1986a; Cenker, 1996: 62; Kannan, 2015: 93). Besides, as per the article, there are “[w]all panels [that] depict each of the important shrines of India” and “a life-size image of Adi Shankara in worship” (unknown author, 1986a). According to *Hinduism Today*, the temple “is an abrupt and intentional departure from traditional temple architecture” (unknown author, 1986a). Reminiscent of Gandhi’s speech at the Bharat Mata Mandir and the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, during the inauguration of the temple, Jayendra Saraswati said that he hoped the temple will “serve the cause of national integration” or “national unity” (unknown author, 1986a; Cenker, 1996: 62). But, how can a temple that houses only Hindu gods bring about national unity in a country such as India? Compare with Savarkar’s idea of who is a Hindu discussed in the third chapter. See also fifth chapter. Unlike other organisations such as Ramakrishna Mission and BAPS, the Shankaracharyas do not seem to hold on to this particular type of temple but built also other temples such as the Devi Kamakshi Mandir in South Delhi (Figure 4.4). Nevertheless, as discussed above, the Shankaracharyas have inspired the construction of various temples and installation of *murtis*. Although the Shankaracharyas seem to support the efforts of Tamil *sthapatis* (S.M. Ganapati Sthapati’s Sankara Silpa Sala stresses that it works under the guidance of the Shankaracharyas), compared with organisations such as BAPS, the Shankaracharyas have paid little attention to the construction temple ([www.sankarasilpasala.com/](http://www.sankarasilpasala.com/)). According to MacRae, when plans were made to establish a government institution to train students in traditional arts/craft, because of the presence of the Shankaracharyas people wanted this institution to be located in Kanchipuram (MacRae, 2004: 224). However, eventually, the Sculpture School was founded in Mahabalipuram, initially headed by Vaidyanatha Sthapati, in 1961 until 1988 and was followed by his son V. Ganapati Sthapati (MacRae, 2004: 224-225).

<sup>544</sup> Compare with fifth chapter. According to Mines and Gourishankar, the Shankaracharyas claim “an interest in all Kamakshi temples by asserting his right to install the *Sri Chakra Yantra* wherever the goddess is installed” (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 777). According to the Kanchi Kamakshi Temple’s legend, by placing a Sri Chakra in front of Kali, Adi Sankara tamed the goddess and transformed her into Kamakshi (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 774, 777). Also, it is believed that Adi Sankara calmed the goddess residing at the Jambukeswaram Mandir in Thiruvanaikaval giving her Sri Cakra earrings (Smith, 2003: 176). As Adi Sankara’s successors the maintenance of the earrings has been the Shankaracharya’s responsibility and they see it as their right to install the Sri Chakra in temples (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 777; Smith, 2003: 176). Temple authorities have not only rejected the Shankaracharya to install the Sri Chakra Yantra but also to enter their temples. As discussed in the previous chapter, the significance of who is allowed/not allowed entry might be understood in the context of power relations (Fuller, 2004a: 128). Not allowing authorities to enter a temple is a powerful (political) statement. See, for instance, when Jayendra Saraswati was denied entry to Ramanathaswamy Mandir in Rameswaram (unknown author, 2005).

to not only link/associate themselves with the Kanchi Math but also with the Sringeri Math might be understood as a strategy to obstruct Kanchi's Shankaracharyas from gaining absolute power over 'their' Malai Mandir.<sup>545</sup>

However, after receiving Shankaracharya Chandrasekharendra Saraswati's blessings/permission/authorisation, unlike some other creators of temples in Delhi and other cities, the Sabha followed the official path and approached relevant authorities in Delhi.<sup>546</sup> The Department of Archaeology cleared the site that the Sabha had selected as location for the construction of the temple (Subrahmanian, 1990; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 19). Thus, under the condition that the Sabha would register as Society, B. Gopala Reddy, Union Minister of Works, Housing and Supply, allotted the site to the Sabha for a cost of twenty-five thousand rupees, which had been mobilised from the "devotee public" (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 20).<sup>547</sup> Hence, on October 18, 1961 the Sabha registered itself under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 as Sree Swaminath Seth Samaj with T.L. Venkatarama Iyer, judge at the Supreme Court, as President, signalling the community's social, political and financial clout (Subrahmanian, 1990; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 20, 64).<sup>548</sup> Around this time the Samaj also set up a small temporary structure (Balalayam) that housed a wooden

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<sup>545</sup> And, although Delhi's Sree Swaminatha Swami Seva Samaj seemingly associates itself as just mentioned with the Kanchi Math and its Shankaracharyas, at the same time, it also seem to keep close ties with the Shankaracharyas of the competing Sringeri Math and other religious authorities (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 6-9, 32, 33). In 1970, for instance, Abhinav Vidya Tirtha and Bharati Tirtha of the Sringeri Math paid a visit to Malai Mandir that was still under construction and gave their blessings (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 32). For the Sringeri Math see for example Yocum (Yocum, 1996). According to Mines and Gourishankar, "some non-Brahmans support both" Shankaracharyas/Maths (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 777). See also Waghorne, 2004: 29-30. When in 1973 Jayendra Saraswati came to Delhi on his Vijaya Yatra he not only inaugurated the Malai Mandir's Swaminath Swami Shrine but also visited other communities/temples such as the south Indian community from Kerala and their temporary Ayyappa Shrine in RK Puram ([www.ayyappatempledelhi.org/about-us/history/](http://www.ayyappatempledelhi.org/about-us/history/); Cenker, 1996: 55).

<sup>546</sup> Hoskote and Kalpagam amongst others discuss the issue of illegal construction of temples (Hoskote, 2004; Kalpagam, 2006; Rao, 2008; Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 19-24; Ghassem-Fachandi, 2012, 2015; *etc.*). Also the Dakshin Delhi Kalibari Mandir, situated at Malai Mandir's foothills, had initially no clearance ([www.dakshindelhikalibari.com/about-history.asp](http://www.dakshindelhikalibari.com/about-history.asp)). BAPS has been suspected to have built Akshardham without required clearances. On January 7, 2011, Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh publicly announced that BAPS never had environmental clearance (unknown author, 2011a). The following day, Delhi's Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit dismissed Ramesh's statement (unknown author, 2011b).

<sup>547</sup> According to Subrahmanian, the cost of the site was twenty-one thousand rupees (Subrahmanian, 1990).

<sup>548</sup> The Samaj also established a Pooja Trust, with a Board of Trustees elected by the General Body of the Samaj (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 39).

*murti* of Swaminath (Subrahmanian, 1990; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 20).<sup>549</sup> In 1963, the next high-profile office-bearer was O.V. Alagesan, Union Minister of Petroleum and Chemicals, as President of the Samaj. His presence on the Committee resulted in a fundraising campaign among temples in Tamil Nadu, led by none other than the then Chief Minister of Madras M. Bhaktavatsalam, it was a highly successful campaign (Subrahmanian, 1990; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 20, 64).<sup>550</sup> Thus, in addition to establishing a sacred link, through the citing of Padai Veedu for instance, it is obvious that temples as institutions need to relate to the very geographies within which they are based and powerful patrons—whether politically connected or financially capable—help establishing such ties. While various institutions in the South contributed large amounts of money, according to Subrahmanian, neither the Delhi Government nor institutions in Delhi or the city’s citizens supported Malai Mandir’s construction with financial means (Subrahmanian, 1990). Later, however, when the Samaj faced difficulties during the actual construction of Swaminatha Swami Mandir, the State Government stepped in with financial support (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 28).<sup>551</sup>

In 1980, on the advice of Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, R. Venkataraman then the Finance Minister in the Indira Gandhi government to take over the position of the president of Malai Mandir (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 21, 64).<sup>552</sup>

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<sup>549</sup> According to the *Sthalapuranam*, following the advice of Jayendra Saraswati the wooden *murti* of Swaminath that had been worshipped in this Balalayam has been placed below the pedestal of the main *murti* of Swaminatha Swami in Swaminath shrine’s *garbhagraha* (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 29, 34). Savashri Sarve Sadakam Siva Ayyamani Sivam, who prepared the *yantram* placed in the Garbhagraham, and V. Ganapati Sthapati had suggested the Samaj to immerse the *murti* in the Yamuna river, burn it or bury it (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 34). On disposal of *murtis* compare with Parker (Parker, 2009). Setting up such small temporary structures seems to be common practice. Compare, for example, with the Ayyappa Mandir in RK Puram ([www.ayyappatempledelhi.org/about-us/history/](http://www.ayyappatempledelhi.org/about-us/history/)). As, for instance, Fuller describes, also during renovation work deities are shifted to such temporary structures (Fuller, 2004b: 48).

<sup>550</sup> According to Subrahmanian, “[t]hanks to the help rendered by the [Hindu] Religious [and Charitable] Endowment Department of the State Government [HRCE], the temples in Tamil Nadu came forward to help [...] with Rs. two lakhs” (Subrahmanian, 1990). On HRCE in Tamil Nadu see Presler (Presler, 1983, 1987). The Andhra Pradesh Government as well as the Tirupathi Devasthanam each gave twenty-five thousand rupees (Subrahmanian, 1990).

<sup>551</sup> Facing financial difficulties the Samaj approached the Shankaracharyas of the Kanchi Math, who advised the Samaj to approach the Chief Minister C. Brahmananda Reddy and P.V. Narasimha Rao, the Minister of Religious Endowments of Hyderabad (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 28). Thus the Samaj was given money from the Common Good Fund maintained by the State Government, as Iyer and Pattabhiraman say (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 28).

<sup>552</sup> With this posting, Venkataraman reentered the arena of national politics. He later served as the President of India from 1987 until 1992.

Venkataraman's taking up the post of president helped the Samaj and Malai Mandir in its growth and significance, as well as its financial backing (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 22). On Venkataraman's orders, V. Ganapati Sthapati, who had been the Principal of the Government Sculpture Training Centre in Mahabalipuram (served 1961 until 1988), was entrusted with the construction of the Swaminatha Swami Temple (Subrahmanian, 1990; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 22).<sup>553</sup> Later, however, for the construction of the Meenakshi, Sundareswara and Vinayakar Mandir and the sculptural work of the Adi Sankara Hall, the Samaj employed S.M. Ganapati Sthapati and his younger brother Muthiah Sthapati; both, are renowned architects, like V. Ganapati Sthapati himself (Subrahmanian, 1990; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 42, 46).<sup>554</sup>

<sup>553</sup> See MacRae and Sridharan for more details on V. Ganapati Sthapati and the College (Sridharan, 2003; MacRae, 2004). See also unknown author, 2012a, 2012b and [www.vastuved.com](http://www.vastuved.com). MacRae emphasises that the College, which was founded with the support of the state government in 1957, aims to revive “the ancient traditional art of Sculpture and Architecture of the Tamils” (MacRae, 2004: 223). Since 1991, it is also “patronized as a cultural institution, aiding “to promote Tamil and Tamil Nadu’s art”” (Sridharan, 2003: 270). Setting aside the political aspect of such institutionalisation of art/architecture, Michell points out that the “growth of art colleges in the region” is the outcome of “a newly awakened interest in stone carving, resulting in a conscious revival of past forms” (Michell, 1995: 276). As *Hinduism Today* highlights, V. Ganapati Sthapati belongs to a family of *sthapatis* who trace their lineage to Kunjaramalan Rajaraja Perunthachan, who designed the Brihadeswara Temple in Thanjavur (unknown author, 2012b: 34). After his retirement, V. Ganapati Sthapati founded the Vaastu Vedi Trust and Vaastu Vedic Research Foundation aiming to spread traditional architecture ([www.vastuved.com](http://www.vastuved.com)). V. Ganapati Sthapati built various temples around the world. He has become known especially for making the Valluvar Kottam in Chennai, a 133-foot statue of the Tamil saint Thiruvalluvar in Kanyakumari and the Iraivan Mandir in Hawaii (Sridharan, 2003; MacRae, 2004: 229-230; *etc.*). For other projects see [www.vastuved.com/projects/](http://www.vastuved.com/projects/). He has been awarded with the Padma Bhushan. Other communities/societies in Delhi as well emphasise that their temple has been built by traditional *sthapatis*. See for example [www.shrijagannathmandirdelhi.in/aboutus.html](http://www.shrijagannathmandirdelhi.in/aboutus.html).

<sup>554</sup> For many *sthapatis* business is fairly precarious, as MacRae says (MacRae, 2004: 226). According to Waghorne, “[t]he much-bemoaned middle-class predilection [...] for brand names seems to cross over to sacred spaces and holy persons” (Waghorne, 2004: 239). V. Ganapati Sthapati, S.M. Ganapati Sthapati and Muthiah Sthapati, however, are well established *sthapatis* to which Waghorne refers as “modest but jet-set shilpis” (Waghorne, 2004: 239). Parker notices great social distinctions among *sthapatis* (Parker, 1992b: 99). S.M. Ganapati Sthapati and Muthiah Sthapati are descendants of Muthu Sthapati family that originated from Rameshwaram but are to date—like the Shankaracharyas—based in Kanchipuram (unknown author, 2012b: 34). The website of S.M. Ganapati Sthapati's Sri Sankara Silpa Sala that has been established for the promotion of “Silpa Shastra and for sculpting in traditional temple architecture” emphasises that the institute “works under the guidance and blessings of” Chandrasekharendra Saraswati ([www.sankarasilpasala.com/](http://www.sankarasilpasala.com/)). Andhra Pradesh's State Government created a post of Chief Sthapati under the Endowments Department for S.M. Ganapati Sthapati to look over all temple related projects in the state ([www.sankarasilpasala.com/founder1.html](http://www.sankarasilpasala.com/founder1.html); MacRae, 2004: 222; Waghorne, 2004: 189). In 1990, S.M. Ganapati Sthapati was awarded the Padma Shri by India's President R. Venkataraman. His younger brother Muthiah received the award in 1992, as Iyer and Pattabhiraman emphasise (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 42). The *Sthalapuranam* contains a short article written in Tamil by Muthiah Sthapati, in which he discusses architecture of the temple he has built. Like V. Ganapati Sthapati, the two brothers have been involved in the construction of many temples in India and abroad such as the Bhaktanjaneya Swami Temple in Nanganallur that houses a thirty-two-foot-

Venkataraman continued to support Malai Mandir as Patron-in-Chief and as lifetime nominee chairman of the Board of the Trustees of the Uttara Swamimalai Trust, nominated by Chandrasekharendra Saraswati—also during his time as President of India (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 40, 64). To date, the post of the patron-in-chief has been taken over by Sheila Dikshit former Chief Minister of Delhi.<sup>555</sup> According to Iyer and Pattabhiraman, the temple’s “sanctity and dignity” as well as the Samaj’s finances have increased with a seemingly ever-increasing “number of devotees belonging to all classes of the public” (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 40).<sup>556</sup> However, it is clear that while its base amongst the masses is important, the support of high-profile patrons—especially those holding public office and politically connected—has propelled the growth of the temple. It has raised the temple’s profile as one extending/exceeding the tag of the ‘regional/local.’<sup>557</sup> In short, as in the case of Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir and Akshardham, the speedy growth of the Uttara Swaminatha Swami Mandir must be understood as a result of its close links to the great support that the temple received from powerful men.

The setting up of a temporary Balayalam at the beginnings of the 1960s was soon followed by the laying of the foundation stone for the Swaminatha Swami Mandir on September 8, 1965 (Subrahmanian, 1990; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-:

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high of Hanuman, the Arupadai Veedu Temple in Chennai and the Manimantapam in Orikkai constructed “in honour of Chandrasekharendra Saraswati” (Sridharan, 2003, 272; Waghorne, 2004: 6, 29-30, 173, 210; [www.sankarasilpasala.com/projects.html](http://www.sankarasilpasala.com/projects.html); [www.manimantapam.org/index.php](http://www.manimantapam.org/index.php)). Muthiah Sthapati was responsible for the renovation of Kamakshi Mandir’s *gopuram* in Kanchipuram (Sridharan, 2003: 269). According to Waghorne, Muthiah Sthapati seems to be “the new star in temple architecture” (Waghorne, 2004: 173).

<sup>555</sup> The post of the President is held by S. Pattabhiraman; Justice M. Karpaga Vinayagam holds the post of the Patron. See [www.malaimandir.org.in/Board\\_of\\_management.html](http://www.malaimandir.org.in/Board_of_management.html).

<sup>556</sup> According to *The Times of India*, Malai Mandir “draws large crowds of devotees” (unknown author, 1990).

<sup>557</sup> Also, taking into account that within a period of less than six years the Samaj had the human and financial resources to build the Administration Block, the Vedic Cultural Block, two *gopurams*, renovate the temple’s Parikrama and celebrate its fourth Kumbhabhishekam for a cost of around 1.25 crores rupees, it might assumed that the Samaj and Malai Mandir are doing well. The Administration Block was inaugurated on December 4, 2010. The Vedic Cultural Block was inaugurated on February 20, 2011 by Sheila Dikshit. The estimated costs for the fourth Kumbhabhishekam in June/July 2014 has been given in one of the Samaj’s pamphlet (*Punarudharana, Ashtabandhana, Noothana Rajagopura Maha Kumbhabhishekam at Sree Swaminatha Swami Temple, Ramakrishna Puram, New Delhi. From 29<sup>th</sup> June to 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2014*), available for download on the temple’s website. According to a Tender Notice, dated January 28, 2016, by the Malai Mandir’s Board of Management, the estimated cost for the renovation of the Parikrama, the construction of the Chariot Shed and other smaller works comes up to almost two crore rupees ([www.malaimandir.org.in/](http://www.malaimandir.org.in/)). A notice at the temple’s website suggests that the temple is receiving money also from abroad.

27).<sup>558</sup> This event coincided with an attack on India by the Pakistan Air Force during the Indo-Pakistan War that took place between April and September 1965. As Iyer and Pattabhiraman recall, it was on the day of ceremony that the Pakistan Air Force attacked India, “[t]he balls of fire of the falling planes of the Pakistan Air Force could be seen from the temple site by the few devotees who were engaged in making the preparations for the morning’s function” (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 27). The Sree Swaminath Seth Samaj had invited India’s Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri to participate in the ceremony that Sundara Bhattra Chief Sivacharya of the Meenakshi Mandir in Madurai performed but Shastri had to cancel because of the impending war (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 27). Thus, M. Bhaktavatsalam, Chief Minister of Madras, who had been supporting the Samaj and the construction of Malai Mandir, laid the temple’s foundation stone (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 27-28). However, Shastri addressed the temple and its followers in a letter that also discussed the symbolic charge of the new temple. In this letter that Venkataraman read out to the attendees of the ceremony, Shastri addressed Subramanya not as philosopher and *yogi* but as “Devasenapathy”, the leader of the army of gods: “Lord Swaminatha Devasenapathy had assumed command and had ended the war with Pakistan the moment it began [...]” (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 28).<sup>559</sup> In order to place this statement and its relevance for the temple in the context of Delhi and the nation, it is helpful to briefly discuss the role Subramanya plays as god of/for the Tamil people as they defined the contours of this linguistic/cultural identity.

As mentioned above, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Subramanya was an extremely popular deity in South India (Rao, 1997 [1914], Vol. II: 415).<sup>560</sup> According

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<sup>558</sup> Other communities/society outline similar developments. See, for instance, the Kali Bari Mandir in CR Park, the Ayyappa Mandir in RK Puram, the Dakshin Delhi Kalibari in RK Puram and the the Jagannath Mandir in Hauz Khas ([www.kalimandircrpk.org/mandir-history-details.html](http://www.kalimandircrpk.org/mandir-history-details.html); [www.ayyapatempledelhi.org/about-us/history/](http://www.ayyapatempledelhi.org/about-us/history/); [www.dakshindelhikalibari.com/about-history.asp](http://www.dakshindelhikalibari.com/about-history.asp); [www.shrijagannathmandirdelhi.in/history/](http://www.shrijagannathmandirdelhi.in/history/); *etc.*).

<sup>559</sup> He is also depicted in this form in one of the reliefs of the temple that will be discussed below. Compare with Hanuman’s and Ram’s role as discussed for example by Jain and Lutgendorf (Jain, 2001; Lutgendorf, 2007).

<sup>560</sup> And, also fifty years later, it seems as if this situation has not changed; throughout the state there are countless temples dedicated to Subramanya that “attract huge numbers of worshippers”, as Clothey says (Clothey, 1969: 236). Clothey emphasises Subramanya’s popularity and significance remarking that “three of the six busiest and wealthiest temples in Tamil Nad are temples dedicated to Murukan; each of these temples has an annual income of over one million rupees” (Clothey, 1969: 236). Clothey adds that “at least half a dozen other Murukan temples have an annual income of over a half million rupees” (Clothey, 1969: 236). According to Clothey, its budget exceeds two

to scholars such as Clothey, Trouillet and Orr, this popularity only increased in the context of the 20<sup>th</sup> century during which the deity was slowly associated with Tamil land, Tamil language, Tamil people, Tamil literature, Tamil culture and Tamil history—in short, Tamil identity (Clothey, 1969, 1972, 2005 [1978]; Trouillet, 2012: 6-7; Orr, 2014: 21; Reddington, 2014: 57; *etc.*). As Trouillet puts it, Subramanya “is so well known as the Tamils’ regional deity that he is considered to be ‘the Tamil God’ (*tamiḷ kaṭavu!*) *par excellence*” (Trouillet, 2012: 6-7). In a similar way in which scholars such Kanungo, Joshi, Prashad, Lee, Lutgendorf and Jain have observed how deities such as Valmiki, Shabari, Hanuman and Ram have been deployed within certain political movements and linked to the emergence of political and social identities—Subramanya is understood as “riding the crest of Tamil self-consciousness” by the 1970s. This coincided with the time when the DMK [Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam] government came into power (Clothey, 1969: 237).<sup>561</sup> The foundation of the DMK in 1949, as a breakaway faction from Erode Venkatappa Ramasamy’s (better known as Periyar) Dravidar Kazhagam, was a turning point in political history of Tamil Nadu since “it ushered in the era of Tamil cultural nationalism”, which became an ideology of mass mobilisation (Barnett, 1976: 3; Pandian, 1996; *etc.*). Seemingly believing that “national integration” will destroy *Tamil identity*, the central government has faced difficulties exercising its power within the state (Barnett, 1976: 4; Pandian, 1996; *etc.*).<sup>562</sup> As Pandian discusses in detail, there has been, for example, great resistance to the imposition of Hindi (Pandian, 1996: 3323; Sridharan, 2003: 266; Moorti, 2004: 553; *etc.*).<sup>563</sup> The assertion

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million rupees every year and it is visited by over one million people (Clothey, 1972: 79, 82). According to Orr, of all the temples in Tamil Nadu, the temple dedicated to Subramanya in Palani, “receives the largest number of pilgrims and the greatest quantity of gifts” (Orr, 2014: 21). See also Clothey: 2005 [1978]: 1972: 82

<sup>561</sup> According to Clothey, “there has been a growing feeling in Tamil Nad that there is a Dravidian distinctiveness and pride in a cultural heritage that has roots partially independent of the Sanskrit mainstream” (Clothey, 1969: 237). According to Geaves, “the south Indian cult of Murugan has emerged historically as one of the most powerful regional expressions of Indian religiosity” (Geaves quoted in Reddington, 2014: 57). He “enjoys immense popularity in Tamilnadu today and is virtually an emblem of Tamil identity”, as Orr puts it (Orr, 2014: 21). Reddington seemingly agrees with this reading emphasising: “Devotees are highly conscious of [Subramanya’s] strong ties to Tamil Nadu” (Reddington, 2014: 57). Waghorne, however, observes that out of the 108 newly built temples in Chennai that she surveyed for her study only three have been dedicated to Subramanya which might indicate that Subramanya is at the moment less popular than other gods but says little about Subramanya’s association with Tamils as ethnic community/nation—making him a national god (Waghorne, 2004: 183). Compare with the conceptualisation of *national* as discussed in the previous chapter. See also Nietzsche, 1899.

<sup>562</sup> Compare with the chapter’s introduction.

<sup>563</sup> That the *Sthalapurānam* was published in (sometimes faulty) English might also be understood in this context.



of linguistic pride and its translation into a broader kind of cultural nationalism is in tension with the ‘Indian’ identity, however, did not prevent right-wing organisations and Hindutva ideology to get a foothold in Tamil Nadu from the 1980s/1990s onwards, as Fuller discusses (Fuller, 2001).<sup>564</sup> These hyphenated identities—such as the commonly used appellation, ‘south Indian’—for instance, suggest that ‘national’ identity remains a contingent one and has to contend with competing and ascribed forms of identity such as regional, ethnic and linguistic.

By addressing Subramanya as “Devasenapathy” and framing him as the one who has defended the *Indian nation* against the nation’s archenemy, Shastri attempted to integrate Subramanya’s established identity—and thus Tamil people—into the larger Hindu India fold. This imbued the temple and its foundation with a significance that transformed it into a *place* suffused with narratives and cultural constructions of (Hindu) national identity. This was particularly crucial at a time when the assertions of Tamil identity—through parties such as the DMK—were becoming particularly strident. This act of enfolding within the larger Hindu/Indian imaginary can be read as efforts at containing these tendencies, i.e. the central government was forced to acknowledge these hyphenated forms of identity. At the same time, the creators of the temple seem to understand *their* Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir as an opportunity and a means to establish the worship of Subramanya (as it is already the case with the worship of his brother Ganesha) beyond Tamil Nadu’s regional borders and within India’s borders; that is, for Subramanya to become a pan-Indian or Indian national god (Clothey, 1969: 255; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 39, 53).<sup>565</sup>

## **THE UTTARA SWAMINATHA SWAMIMALAI MANDIR AND ITS ARCHITECTURE**

Perhaps in some ways comparable with temple complexes in the Tamil region, the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir has been developing over the years,

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<sup>564</sup> According to Fuller, the Hindu Munnani, RSS and BJP established themselves and Hindutva ideology through the celebration of the Vinayaka Chaturthi Festival across the state (Fuller, 2001). Fuller emphasises that although the BJP never won many votes in Tamil Nadu the party is firmly entrenched in many areas of the state (Fuller, 2001: 1607-1608).

<sup>565</sup> In Iyer and Pattabhiraman’s words, “[t]he Lord has manifested Himself before His devotees all over India, showing His Pan Indian presence” (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 53). Compare with Padma’s discussion of a shift in meaning when goddesses move from the rural to an urban context (Padma, 2001).

turning the once deserted location (Figure 4.2) into one of the popular religious centres of Delhi.<sup>566</sup> Beginning with an analysis of the Swaminath Swami Mandir that has been inaugurated in June 1973, the following section will discuss the temple and its architecture in detail.

The east-facing Swaminatha Swami Mandir that stands on the top of the hillock consists of a single-celled *garbhagraha* preceded on the east by an *antarala* (Figure 4.5) that connects the *garbhagraha* with a *mandapa* that exceeds the width of both *garbhagraha* as well as *antarala*. It seems as if after reaching the platform on the top of the hillock most people do a half circumambulation of the temple to then enter the *mandapa* that has three entrances, through the north-facing entrance.<sup>567</sup> Unlike the elaborate design of the *garbhagraha's* outer wall that will be described in detail below, the interior design of the *mandapa* might be described as rather simplistic. As is the case in many other temples such as in the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, only priests may cross the threshold that separates the *garbhagraha* from the *mandapa*, which can accommodate approximately fifty people, and enter the *garbhagraha* that houses Malai Mandir's central *murti* of Subramanya, discussed further below (Figure 4.6, 4.7).

Reminiscent of temples built earlier, such as the Arjun Rath and the Dharmaraja Mandir at Mahabalipuram, the temple's exterior wall follows the standard division of base, wall and superstructure (Figure 4.8).<sup>568</sup> The base that runs, like the other elements, continue around the temple, consists of a sequence of projecting and recessing mouldings. As it is the case with many temples in South India, the lowest recess of the *antarala's* and *garbhagraha's* sub-base that has been topped by a *kapota*

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<sup>566</sup> On January 21, 2017, out of 405 *Things to do in New Delhi* visiting Malai Mandir ranks position fifty-two ([www.tripadvisor.in/Attraction\\_Review\\_g304551-d2476325\\_Reviews-Malai\\_Mandir\\_New\\_Delhi-New\\_Delhi\\_National\\_Capital\\_Territory\\_of\\_Delhi.html](http://www.tripadvisor.in/Attraction_Review_g304551-d2476325_Reviews-Malai_Mandir_New_Delhi-New_Delhi_National_Capital_Territory_of_Delhi.html)).

<sup>567</sup> Many people also seem to enjoy the view, take photos and have a chat after which they proceed. Most people seem to exit the temple via the south-facing entrance. Chandrasekharendra Saraswati had recommended to shift the intended position of this east-facing entrance by a few feet to ensure that sun-rays will fall on the *murti* that has been erected inside the dark *garbhagraha* (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 39). By god's will, as Iyer and Pattabhiraman says, a member of the Samaj discovered that by the end of March in the early morning hours the *murti* is covered with sun-rays (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 38-39). Since then the temple performs annually Surya Puja from March 19 until 23 (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 38-39).

<sup>568</sup> Compare with the Shikharbaddha Mandirs that have been built by BAPS. See fifth chapter. On South Indian architecture see for example Michell, 1995 and Huntington, 1999 [1985].

with *nasis* each of which is carried by two *gana*-like figures has been filled with a figurative relief showing for example images of Subramanya's fights with demons (Figure 4.9).<sup>569</sup> Also, the lower part of the *antarala* and the *garbhagraha* has been covered with two more less elaborately designed friezes.<sup>570</sup> Slender pilasters with bracketed capitals rhythmically divide the wall that rises above the base into segments of different width—a typical feature of South Indian architecture, as for example Huntington points out (Huntington, 1999 [1985]: 511; *etc.*). Some of the so created spaces or gaps have been filled with niches housing *murtis* (Figure 4.11) that have been made out of black granite, like the temple's central *murti*.<sup>571</sup> This pilastered wall is topped by a *kapota* ornamented with *nasis* and is surmounted by a one-tiered superstructure while the *mandapa* has been covered with a flat roof. Resembling superstructures of South Indian temples, the tier of the Swaminath Swami Mandir's superstructure (Figure 4.12) consists of a rectangular barrel-vaulted miniature shrine in the centre that is bridged by pilastered niches to a square miniature shrine in each corner which rises above the square *garbhagraha*.<sup>572</sup> The tier has been covered with another scale-reduced *kapota*, creating the typical pyramidal shape of South Indian *vimanas*. Small *gana*-like looking figures flanked by peacocks are depicted as sitting at each corner of the roof that is capped by a solid octagonal bell-shaped dome crowned by a golden *kalasha*. The surface of many of the architectural elements such as the bell-shaped dome has been elaborately ornamented with intricate carvings.<sup>573</sup> Unlike other buildings on the Mandir's premises, the Swaminatha Swami Mandir's *garbhagraha* has been left unpainted, exhibiting bare stone and lending the building a monumental look.<sup>574</sup> Inside the temple, the connection with Tamil culture,

<sup>569</sup> As the darkened surface of a Gajalakshmi image of this frieze suggests the meaning even of these lower-placed images might be understood more substantially (Figure 4.10).

<sup>570</sup> These are common elements in south Indian architecture. Compare with Branfoot, 2002: 191, 203-204.

<sup>571</sup> The niches on the *antarala* house *murtis* of Ganesha facing towards south and, as a label in Tamil and English attached above the goddess reads, Vishnu Durga facing towards north. The niches on the three sides of the *garbhagraha* house *murtis* of Subramanya. On the order see Huntington, 1999 [1985]: 514. Like the main *murti*, these *murtis* are dressed in cloth. Whereas the regulation of not taking photos is seemingly strictly followed inside the different shrines, many people still take photos of these *murtis*.

<sup>572</sup> For a brief description see Hardy, 1995: 18 and Branfoot, 2002: 199-200.

<sup>573</sup> Compare the design of the temple especially of the superstructure with the design of the Iraivan Mandir that has been built by V. Ganapati Sthapati in Hawaii.

<sup>574</sup> As scholars such as Guha-Thakurta, Singh and Sutton emphasise, the monument is a conceptual idea or reading of architecture that has been introduced in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Riegl, 1903; Guha-Thakurta, 2004; Singh, 2010; Sutton, 2013; *etc.*). As its name tries to indicate, stripped off earlier meanings the monument means to be a reminder and preserver of the past. Compare also with fifth chapter.

architecture and practices of worship are echoed at the heart of the temple- the *garbhagraha* and the *murti* within.

The Samaj not only paid great attention to making an *authentic* temple but also to the making of an *authentic murti*. Because Subramanya is displayed dressed in cloth and decorated with ornaments, standing at a distance in the dark *garbhagraha*, illuminated by dim candle light, it is not possible to see the details of the sculpture that has been created by Ganapati Sthapati.<sup>575</sup> Instead of adjusting with the north Indian context and making the *murti* of white marble from Rajasthan, the central *murti* has been made of black granite from Tamil Nadu; to be more precise, following Chandrasekharendra Saraswati's and Arul Nandi Thambiran's advice, the *murti* has been made out of the same stone out of which the Subramanya *murti* at the temple in Tiruchendur, that was rebuilt between 1848 and 1941, has been made around sixty years earlier (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 22).<sup>576</sup>

The central *murti* of a temple is usually considered most powerful and should be made with uttermost care (Fuller, 1979; Parker, 1992b: 99; Ganapati Sthapati, 2002; Jain, 2016: 340-341; *etc.*).<sup>577</sup> Among Tamil *sthapatis*, "a black granite that

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<sup>575</sup> Like at the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, at Malai Mandir photography is not allowed without permission. However, it seems this rule/regulation is not implemented strictly. I noticed various people taking photos outside the temple without being interrupted. Inside the temples, however, photography is strictly prohibited. The only images of the *murti* available are images of the *murti* before the installation such as Figure 4.6 and drawings such as Figure 4.7. On the experience of the Hindu temple see Kramrisch's and Eck's descriptions (Kramrisch, 1946: 163-164; Eck, 1985 [1981]: 11-12). Compare also with third and fifth chapter. Also compared with descriptions of *murtis* by art historians such as Rao, it is striking that Subramanya's iconography is hardly of concern for Iyer and Pattabhiraman who foreground issues related to materiality and the making of the *murti* (Rao, 1997 [1914], Vol. II: 415-451; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 24-25). This does not only seem to hold with regard to the making of *murtis* but also with regard to architecture, as will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>576</sup> As mentioned in the third chapter, according to various scholars, North Indians seem to prefer *murtis* to be made of white marble (Parker, 1992b: 99-100, 2010: 51; Bhardwaj and Rao, 1998: 129-130; Kanungo and Joshi, 2010: 288, 296; Burkhalter Flueckige, 2015: 35, 103; *etc.*). On the temple in Tiruchendur see, for example, Clothey, 1972: 82-83, 2005 [1978]: 121-123 and Branfoot, 2013: 45. Initially the members of the Samaj had been unsuccessful to locate the by Chandrasekharendra Saraswati and Arul Nandi Thambiran suggested stone found at a place *ghat* called Kurukkuthurai at the Tamraparni river, as Iyer and Pattabhiraman say (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 22-23). However, with the support of Sundara Dikshitra, who had cut the stone earlier, they finally succeeded to do so (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 23). On the making of images and iconography see Ganapati Sthapati, 2002.

<sup>577</sup> However, it does not mean that *murtis* made of other materials (even cement) cannot also be considered powerful. Sridharan for instance mentions the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam in Chennai that houses a cement *murti* of Venkatesvara that is most popular among people

produces a clear, metallic ring when struck with a chisel” is considered the stone with the greatest power, as Parker says (Parker, 1992b: 99, 2009: 130).<sup>578</sup> However, before being sent and installed in Delhi, the *murti* was sent to Kanchi for the Shankaracharya to perform the Vibhuti Abhishekam (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 25).<sup>579</sup> Although at the time when plans for the construction of Malai Mandir were laid out, many people as well as the Indian government settled for an economical modern architecture, the Samaj followed the tradition of Tamil architecture.<sup>580</sup> Thus, the Samaj decided to not build the temple out of concrete or a locally available stone such as sandstone but out of the *same* grey coloured granite that has been used by their ancestors to build temples—an ambitious undertaking for which, according to Subrahmanian, the Samaj spent fourteen lakhs rupees (Subrahmanian, 1990).<sup>581</sup>

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(Sridharan, 2003: 273).

<sup>578</sup> Like the South Indian community that shifts stone from the south of India to Delhi, North Indians building temples and installing *murtis* in South India seemingly demand the *sthatipatis* to prepare the *murtis* from stone from Rajasthan (Parker, 1992b: 99-100). As will also be mentioned in the following chapter, it has become common to shift stones not only across the Indian subcontinent but also across the world (Eck, 2000: 220; Waghorne, 2004: 171; *etc.*). On the use of granite in Tamil Nadu see also Branfoot (Branfoot, 2002: 198). Materials such as plastic, cement and other modern materials are often considered having little intrinsic value for worship (Jung, 1987; Jain, 2016: 340-341). On the use of concrete and other modern materials for the making of images and temples see for example Parker, 1992a: 120; Jain, 2009: 220; Mehrotra, 2011: 254-255, 278; Jain, 2016, 2017: S22-S23. According to the US Geological Survey, India is the largest producer of cement after China (Forty, 2013 [2012]: 309). When V. Ganapati Sthapati began to work on the stone that the Samaj had sent to his workshop in Mahabalipuram the desired sound did not emanate and thus leaving him doubtful whether to go against the *shastras* and continue his work. However, he continued because Chandrasekharendra Saraswati had told him to not worry about the sound—eventually, “neutral stone transformed itself into a right choice stone” (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 24-25). Maxwell, among other scholars, suggests that “shatric” does not refer to the “textual record but the human transmission of that which at any particular time is considered to be *true* tradition: *authority* stems from a person who best embodies and exemplifies the current perception of cultural convention” (Maxwell, 1989: 14; italics added). See also Pollock, Kaimal, Parker and Sridharan (Pollock, 1985; Kaimal, 1999; Parker, 1992a: 120, 2003; Sridharan, 2003: 268-269). In other words, the issue might be understood in the context of power relations.

<sup>579</sup> Similarly also the central *murtis* of the Jagannath Mandir in Hauz Khas have been made in Orissa and were then sent to Delhi ([www.shrijagannathmandirdelhi.in/history/](http://www.shrijagannathmandirdelhi.in/history/)). See also Lutgendorf, 1994: 211-212, 2007: 3. With the presence of the Shankaracharyas of the Kanchi Math, the Puri Math, the Bhadri Math and the Dwarka Math the Nayanonmeelanam was performed on June 5, 1973, followed by the performance of the Kumbhabhishekam two days later (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 33-38).

<sup>580</sup> See for example Menon, 2000: 150-151. The stones were prefabricated by around seventy five sculptors at a workshop in Walajabad, Kanchipuram District (Subrahmanian, 1990; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 22-23, 28). In December 1968, five train wagons of semi-finished stones reached Delhi, followed by another fourteen wagons that reached in May 1969 (Subrahmanian, 1990; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 28; [www.murugan.org/events/malaimandir-kumbhabhisekam.htm](http://www.murugan.org/events/malaimandir-kumbhabhisekam.htm)). According to Subrahmanian, fifty-two *sthatipatis* came to Delhi to give the stones the finishing touch and assemble the nine hundred massive granite stones like a jigsaw puzzle without the use of cement or mortar (Subrahmanian, 1990; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 28). According to Subrahmanian, the crevices have been filled with a lime-sand mixture (Subrahmanian, 1990).

<sup>581</sup> In Tamil context, it seems common practice to use black granite for the making of *murtis* and grey

How does it matter where the stone comes from and how many regional and national borders it crosses? Although a wide range of construction material is available extending beyond pragmatic concerns, it is arguably in the vein of patriotism/nationalism that the Sree Swaminath Samaj takes great pride in the fact that *their* temple was built out of ‘local stone,’ meaning stone coming from their respective homelands.<sup>582</sup> Forty, however, observes that while building materials, “rely upon human labour to acquire value as building materials”, concrete is distinguished by its workability on-site (Forty, 2013 [2012]: 44). Thus,

with ‘natural’ materials, a considerable amount of their value lies in their preparation before they arrive at the site, whereas with concrete most of the work occurs at the place where the concrete is to be formed. The ‘hard-won’ element of natural materials is what has often made them more valued than concrete” (Forty, 2013 [2012]: 44).

Taking this into account, clearly in the context of contemporary (temple) architecture, the meaning associated with construction material is far from a secondary element in the design.<sup>583</sup>

[T]he geological history of a site or geographic region and, along with it, the potential use of a locally available resource like stone [...] can be interpolated into complex strings of imaginative associations (Martin, 2007: 57).<sup>584</sup>

Unlike concrete that is generally imagined as global material without any local associations, it seems as if stone tends to be associated not only with specific locations/regions but also with communities and (ethnic) national identities.<sup>585</sup> A

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coloured granite for the making of *mandirs*. As Hardy emphasises, Pallava stone temples have been mostly built in granite (Hardy, 1995: 314). See also Michell, 1995: 25-26. Similarly, the *murtis* of other temples such as the Ayyappa Mandir in RK Puram and the Jagannath Mandir in Hauz Khas have been sent from the community’s respective homeland to Delhi. See [www.ayyapatempledelhi.org/history/](http://www.ayyapatempledelhi.org/history/) and [www.shrijagannathmandirdelhi.in/history/](http://www.shrijagannathmandirdelhi.in/history/). Compare also with BAPS Shikharbaddha Mandirs, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>582</sup> See Thomas, 1993/1994: 59. According to Adhyayas 89 to 91 of the *Vishnudharmottara Purana*, temples may be constructed of wood, stone and brick (Shah, 1961: 193-196). Compare also with above mentioned temples.

<sup>583</sup> Kanungo and Joshi discuss the case of a local marginalised goddess that has been added/uplifted to the Hindu pantheon which included using white marble for the *murti* (Kanungo and Joshi, 2010).

<sup>584</sup> Compare with Thomas, 1993/1994.

<sup>585</sup> Compare also with Lang, et al., 1997: 4. On concrete and its various associations see Forty, 2013 [2012]. Compare with Thomas, who discusses the use of marble in the context of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC (Thomas, 1993/1994). Thomas says: “Coloradans swelled with pride that marble from their state was being used” for the construction of the Memorial and adds that it

rather simplistic symbolic link between material and identity are outlined here.<sup>586</sup> In other words, it is believed that there is something *essential*—a certain *Tamilness*—not only in people but also things such as in stone that is not found in other stones outside the Tamil’s homeland. The choice of grey coloured granite over any other material such as pink sandstone commonly used in Delhi, might be understood not simply as a question of taste or economics but also as a sign of acceptance or resistance of a certain cultural dominance; it is thus a deliberate political choice.<sup>587</sup> Can this be read as (ethnic/racial) national identity being produced *against* a national and/or global identity?<sup>588</sup> What kind of locality is produced here?

Crowning the top of the hillock and overlooking the surrounding modern architecture-scape, Malai Mandir with its monumental and massive look seemingly trying to continue traditions of the ‘*old*’ literally stands out. However, a chain of lights tangled around the *mandapa* and a neon *om* in Tamil above the *mandapa*’s entrance illuminates the presence of the Tamil community and their national god *per excellence* in the 21<sup>st</sup> century national capital city.<sup>589</sup>

The design of the exterior walls of the *mandapa* is dominated by large sculptural panels or images reminiscent of reliefs seen in temples such as at the Varaha Cave and the Mahisasuramardini Cave in Mahabalipuram though the style is different (Figure 4.13).<sup>590</sup> Beginning at the corner of the south wall and proceeding clockwise around the shrine, the images on the *mandapa*’s south-wall the first image (Figure 4.14) at the wall’s southern edge seemingly displays the circumstances of his

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might also be understood with regard to economic gains (Thomas, 1993/1994: 59). Such associations of the nation with construction materials might also be noticed in other contexts. According to Forty, the US for example “[w]as identified as the nation of steel, and Europe the land of concrete” (Forty, 2013 [2012]: 107).

<sup>586</sup> Compare with Mehrotra, *et al.*, 2009: 200.

<sup>587</sup> This has been discussed by Forty (Forty, 2013 [2012]: 109). See also Martin, 2007.

<sup>588</sup> Moorti has tried to discuss this issue studying the role of Games Shows (Moorti, 2004).

<sup>589</sup> According to Clothey, “[m]odernity is a neon lance emblazoned on the gopuram at Tiruchendur and a neon *om* blinking on the gopuram at [Dakshin] Swamimalai. Modernity is the construction of hostel and choultries for pilgrims; it is traveling to a pilgrim center by bus or train” (Clothey, 1972: 94).

<sup>590</sup> The style in which these panels might perhaps be reminiscent of the style in which gods have been depicted in posters, cinema and other modern media. Compare, for example, with Smith, Sridharan, Pinney and Jain (Smith, 1978; Pinney, 1997b, 2004; Jain, 2001, 2007; Sridharan, 2003: 272;*etc.*). See also discussion below.

birth.<sup>591</sup> Following the sequence of events, the next image depicts the two-armed Subramanya showing *abhayamudra* with his right hand and holding a *shakti* in his left hand as surrounded by the Krittikas, each nursing a baby Subramanya (Figure 4.14).<sup>592</sup> Unlike in the second image, in which Subramanya has been depicted dressed as a prince, in the third image Subramanya has been depicted as shaven-headed, dressed only in a loincloth and holding a *danda* in his right hand (Figure 4.15).<sup>593</sup> The lower half of the fourth and last image of the south-wall seemingly displays Subramanya as teaching his father the meaning of the syllable *om* after he had imprisoned Brahma for not knowing its meaning, which has been depicted in the upper half of the same image (Figure 4.15).<sup>594</sup>

If proceeding as mandated by ritual, the ritual of the clockwise circumambulation of the temple, the first image on the north-wall of the *mandapa* seems to depict Subramanya as fulfilling the purpose of his birth that is to kill the *asuras* (Figure 4.16). Armed with the weapons that the *devas* have given to him, on the sixth day of his life, he kills various *asuras*.<sup>595</sup> When the chief *asura* Surapadma realises

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<sup>591</sup> As mentioned above, on Subramanya see for example Rao and Clothey (Rao, 1997 [1914], Vol. II: 415-451; Clothey, 1969, 1972, 2005 [1978]; L'Hernault, 1978; *etc.*). On Subramanya and his birth see for instance Clothey, 1969: 240-241, 2005 [1978]: 163-167. According to one versions, the *asuras* had become very powerful and the *devas* feared that they might lose their power without the help of Shiva, who was in a deep meditation. Brahma, however, ensured the *devas* that Shiva's son would be able to kill the *asuras*. Thus, the *devas* send Kama to shot an arrow at Shiva, and make him fall in love with Parvati to create a child that would kill the *asuras*, as seemingly displayed in the upper half of this first image. Shiva falls momentarily in love with Parvati making her feel humiliated. This might explain the unusual position in which the goddess has been depicted, kneeling on the ground, touching with her forehead Shiva's thigh. Eventually, Shiva marries her but the son the *devas* had been waiting for is still not born. Thus, Agni catches Shiva's seed, spills it into the Ganga, who carries it for him. This seems to be the moment that has been shown in the right half of the image, there six babies have been depicted as lying on lotus beds flowing in water.

<sup>592</sup> In this form he is named Kartikeya, son of the Krittikas. Compare with Clothey, 1969: 241, 2005 [1978]: 137, 163-167.

<sup>593</sup> Shiva and Parvati seem to have been depicted twice in this image: as sitting in the upper background and as standing next to their son though much smaller in size in the foreground. Like his parents, Subramanya seems to have been depicted a second time in this composition. This time, however, in his child-form, sitting on his *vahana* the peacock. Besides, his elder brother Ganesha has been depicted. Perhaps the male figure standing behind the image of Kumara on the peacock means to show the sage Narada.

<sup>594</sup> On the concept of sonship see Clothey, 2005 [1978]: 152-154. The panels on the east-facing wall as well depict Subramanya as teacher. Compare with descriptions given by Rao and Clothey (Rao, 1997 [1914], Vol. II: 443-444; Clothey, 2005 [1978]: 80). Clothey emphasises that "[a]s a philosopher-teacher, he came to be accepted as the author and inspiration of Tamil language and literature" (Clothey, 1969: 239-240, 2005 [1978]: 86-88).

<sup>595</sup> See Clothey, 1969: 241.



that he is likely to lose the battle, he tries to escape by becoming a mango tree.<sup>596</sup> However, as depicted in the upper half of the image, Subramanya, who is for the first time in this series of images shown four-armed, splits the tree with his spear and thus kills the *asura* who has been depicted as wielding his machete-like knife. The two halves of the split tree, however, turn into Subramanya's peacock and a cock, depicted at the right side of the image. In the foreground of this image, Subramanya is then shown sitting in *lalitasana* on his *vahana* (Figure 4.16). He has been depicted with four arms, with his two front hands he shows *varadamudra* and *abhayamudra* while he holds in the uplifted back hands a *shakti* and a *vajra*. Besides he is equipped with *shakti* and *dhvaja*, both of which stand on the ground but lean against his shoulders with crossing shafts. Upon his conquest, Indra gave Subramanya Devasena as wife, as depicted in the following sixth image.<sup>597</sup> The seventh and last image of this series (Figure 4.17) seems to display how Subramanya with the help of his brother Ganesha tries to get involved with Valli, the daughter of a hunter, to whom he later gets married.<sup>598</sup> In sum, the sculptural program seems to depict the myth of Subramanya's birth/creation, maturation, triumph over evil forces and marriage that are associated with him for saving *dharma* and creating a new cosmic cycle which makes it comparable with the sequence of the Skanda Shashti festival, that had brought the young men and the community together after moving to Delhi.

The Skanda Shashti festival, which is celebrated over seven days, "is a reenactment of the mythical six-day career of the god"; simultaneously, it "is a dramatizing of a people's own identity; it is a recollection of a collective heritage" (Clothey, 1969: 236, 240). The festival is associated with the god's triumph over Surapadma and his marriage to Devasena and Valli, during which the god rides on a golden chariot (Clothey, 1969: 252, 256).<sup>599</sup> On each day of the festival, a cycle of

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<sup>596</sup> Clothey remarks that in different versions of the story the *asura* has different names (Clothey, 1969: 241, 254). As Clothey discusses this version is closely linked to Tiruchendur (Clothey, [2005] 1978: 121-123). See also [www.tiruchendur.org/sashti.raghavan.htm](http://www.tiruchendur.org/sashti.raghavan.htm).

<sup>597</sup> According to one of the priests, Indra is depicted here together with his *vahana* the elephant and his consort Indrani.

<sup>598</sup> Compare also with Clothey, 1969: 241. The marriage of Subramanya to Devasena and Valli is celebrated on the seventh day during the festival (Clothey, 1969: 255). See also his interpretation of the meaning of both marriages (Clothey, 1969: 255-256).

<sup>599</sup> On the earlier days of the festival the god usually rides simpler chariots (Clothey, 1969: 252). The Samaj has been collecting money for the construction of a golden chariot for more than six years. As I was told the chariot would be prepared somewhere in Tamil Nadu and then send to Delhi.

rituals including, for example, the *abhishekam* ritual is performed (Clothey, 1969: 245). An important element of this festival as well as other festivals is that *murtis* are taken out of the temple and rituals are performed in public. Such public displays that include processions (Figure 4.18) have been particularly meaningful at times when people from low-castes were not allowed to enter temples (Clothey, 1969: 247; Fuller, 2001; Guha-Thakurta, 2014: 203; Jain, 2017: S19; *etc.*).<sup>600</sup> The significance of the festival and public display for the Samaj is demonstrated in the construction of a slightly elevated stage-like structure that is used for the performance of rituals such as *abhishekam* during festivals (Figure 4.19).<sup>601</sup> Another significant element of the Skanda Shashti festival is the procession—at most temples, each day of the Skanda Shashti ends with a procession that in course of the festival become more splendid, ending with an enactment of the Subramanya’s triumph over the *asura* Surapadma. According to Clothey, the procession

is the focal point through which the myth of the god’s rise to power has been ritually re-enacted. Now a fully sacralized representation of the Divine, the symbol is processed through the streets, symbolizing the god’s domain over the world (Clothey, 1969: 247).

At Malai Mandir, however, the procession stays within the premises of the temple. In comparison, Hauz Khas’ Jagannath Mandir annually organises a Ratha Yatra that begins at the Jagannath Mandir in Hauz Khas and moves through surrounding areas passing Safdarjung Bus Terminal, Vikas Sadan, INA Market and Dilli Haat before returning to the temple, suggesting that the concept of the *rath yatra* enjoys currency also within Delhi’s urbanscape, prompting us to question why the Malai Mandir does not take its gods out. While the reasons may be multifarious including the sheer logistical effort that goes into organising such a ‘public’ event on an arterial road, it is also worth positing that the community perhaps feels no need to crossover into these spaces, having already secured a space within the city. Additionally, it suggests that at a time when the temple is legally bound to admit persons irrespective of their caste or

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Currently, the Samaj constructs a Parikrama within the temple compound for the chariot to move during procession and a depot in which the chariot would be kept when not in use.

<sup>600</sup> This has been discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>601</sup> *Vyalas* composite pillars that seem to support its *kapota*-shaped roof that is crowned in its centre by a rectangular barrel-vaulted miniature shrine in its centre flanked on each side by three niches, each containing one or several *murtis*. Like most structures at the Malai Mandir, the lower half has been painted in the blue-grey while the upper half has been painted polychrome. This structure has not been discussed in any of the sources.

creed, the importance of an event such as the ‘rath yatra’—which allowed those who were ritually barred from entering temples—to also seek ‘*darshan*,’ reduces the ‘functional’ aspect of the *yatra*. While the preparations for the golden chariot suggest that the *yatra* still holds a significant place within the ritual context, its social one has been considerably reduced.

### **Silpa Kala Mandapa**

Shortly after the inauguration of the Swaminatha Swami Mandir, the Sree Swaminatha Seva Samaj decided to respond to Chandrasekharendra Saraswati’s desire to install a musical pillar (Figure 4.20) modelled on the musical pillar in the Nellaiappar temple at Tirunelveli at Malai Mandir.<sup>602</sup> However, instead of integrating this pillar as usual in a building, an entirely new building named Silpa Kala Mandapa was constructed.<sup>603</sup> It is one of the most interesting structures at Malai Mandir with regard to the question of conceptualisation of temple architecture. Whereas at the Nellaiappar Temple as well as at other temples a musical pillar seems to be a showpiece of great craftsmanship and at the same time a small element within a larger architectural temple complex, at Malai Mandir the musical pillar is extracted from the architectural context and made the main showpiece of the Silpa Kala Mandapa (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 41).

Unlike the Swaminatha Swami Mandir, the Silpa Kala Mandapa’s exterior design (Figure 4.21) cannot be described as particularly spectacular. This is despite the fact that the west entrance is preceded by a porch (Figure 4.22) whose design harmonises with that of the main temple, the Meenakshi, Sundareswara and

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<sup>602</sup> According to Iyer and Pattabhiraman, after five years of construction work and at a cost of around ten lakh rupees, R. Venkataraman inaugurated the Mandapa on September 18, 1983 (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 41).

<sup>603</sup> Compare with Branfoot, 2002: 198. According to Iyer and Pattabhiraman, Malai Mandir’s musical pillar has been made of the same granite that has been used for the construction of the Swaminatha Swami Mandir (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 41). Though musical pillars might look as if created of a set of detached slender pillars, like other composite pillars, the musical pillars are made of one piece. On musical pillars see also Branfoot, 2002: 191-192. Whereas figurative composite pillars such as the ones supporting the Silpa Kala Mandapa’s porch mean to fascinate by intricately carved musical pillars try to impress onlookers beyond look—when struck they create different frequencies of sound. Around the same time the Samaj also began to plan the construction of temples/shrines dedicated to Meenakshi, Sundareswara and Vinayakar (Subrahmanian, 1990; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 42-43). The musical pillar in the centre of the Mandapa is fenced. Within the enclosure area there several smaller bronze images.

Vinayakar Mandir, which will be discussed below.<sup>604</sup> What makes the building unique, is that it has not been built “to house any deity but [...] several e[x]quisite sculptural pieces like the trellised window, the music pillar, the stone chain and the stone bull” made by V. Ganapati Sthapati (Subrahmanian, 1990).<sup>605</sup> The Sthapati, with the support of the state was instrumental in promoting Tamil art/architecture and Vishvakarmas within and outside India by displaying masterful craftsmanship mainly in the construction of temples.<sup>606</sup> The Silpa Kala Mandapa creates a different context for these creations framing them arguably as exhibits, showpieces and works of art, and their makers/creators as artists.<sup>607</sup> The Silpa Kala Mandapa not only houses Delhi’s first and only musical pillar but also various other similarly impressive demonstrations of craftsmanship. These include, for instance, a large bell made out of stone (Figure 4.24) and four chains that surround the musical pillar hanging from the ceiling. These objects play with the onlooker’s eyes by creating the illusion that they have been made out of metal, though in fact they are made out of stone. The Mandapa also houses a sculpture of a ten-armed and four-headed Vishvakarma (Figure 4.25), the divine artificer to whom *sthapatis* trace back their descend.<sup>608</sup>

Moreover, at the Silpa Kala Mandapa paintings by N. Ramakrishna adorn the walls (Figure 4.26).<sup>609</sup> While the images on the ceiling display different Tandavas and

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<sup>604</sup> The main entrance consists of a heavy projecting roof topped by a rectangular barrel-vaulted miniature shrine that is supported by elaborately designed composite *vyala* pillars for which south Indian architecture has become famous around the world. The two *vyalas* that have lion-like heads with bulging eyes, long horns and a mane have been depicted as raising themselves upright on their hind legs. Besides, the mouth of these *vyalas* are carved wide open mouth with a stone ball rolling around in it. For a detail analysis of composite pillars see Branfoot, 2002.

<sup>605</sup> See [www.vastuved.com/projects/](http://www.vastuved.com/projects/). According to Iyer and Pattabhiraman, the trellised window has been modelled on a similar window seen at the temple in Tiruvalanchuzhi around two kilometres from the Swamimalai temple near Kumbakonam in Tamil Nadu’s Thanjavur District (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 41). A sculpture “of exceptional sculptural excellence” of a bull (Figure 4.23) has been installed on a pedestal in one of the Mandapa’s corners—“[i]f a thin stick is inserted in one ear of the calf it will emerge out of the opposite nostril” (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 41). Compare with Branfoot, 2002: 198.

<sup>606</sup> This has been briefly discussed above. See also [www.vastuved.com/projects/](http://www.vastuved.com/projects/) and compare with unknown author, 2012a and 2012b. V. Ganapati Sthapati emphasises “Indian culture is *Visvakarma* Culture” (V. Ganapati Sthapati quoted in MacRae, 2004: 233).

<sup>607</sup> Branfoot emphasises, in the context of the temple “[o]rnamentations or decoration is never a meaningless veneer but an integral element of the artistic project in the Indian tradition” (Branfoot, 2002: 198).

<sup>608</sup> Compare for example with Parker and MacRae (Parker, 1987: 123-124, 128, 2003: 11; MacRae, 2004: 232-234 *etc.*).

<sup>609</sup> N. Ramakrishnan, a “government approved sthapati” from Akkatur in Tamil Nadu. According to Parker, the State Governments has tried to interfere with the older system trying to introduce a system of licensing *sthapatis*; licensed *sthapatis* are titled “government approved sthapati”

are accompanied by bilingual labels (Figure 4.27) the images on the surrounding walls cover a different range of topics such as narratives associated with Subramanya.<sup>610</sup> Besides, there are also images that depict according to labels written in Tamil few Tamil saint such as Sampanthar, Sundara, Appar, and Manikavasagar (Figure 4.28).<sup>611</sup> Another unlabelled image depicts an ascetic figure sitting in *padmasana* on a tiger-skin holding an *ekadanda*, a book and showing with his right hand the *jnanamudra* (Figure 4.29).<sup>612</sup> Since the image shows a close resemblance to the images of Adi Sankara, it might be assumed that this image also depicts Adi Sankara (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 3).<sup>613</sup> Finally, there are three images painted in what could perhaps be called photorealistic-style. Like the above-mentioned image, these images have not been labelled, as if assuming onlookers would recognise the Shankaracharya Bharati Tirtha (Figure 4.26) of the Sringeri Math, Chandrasekharendra Saraswati (Figure 4.26) and Jayendra Saraswati (Figure 4.30) both of the Kanchi Math.<sup>614</sup>

Unlike at the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir and at Akshardham where arguably the distinction between the temple and the museum blur, the creators of Malai Mandir insert the museum within the temple trying to maintain these distinctions. That is, like Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir and Akshardham, the Malai

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(Parker, 2009: 129-130). According to Parker, painters and paintings have a comparatively low status within this system (Parker, 1992b: 100-101). On contemporary wall paintings in Tamil Nadu see Sathish, 2014.

<sup>610</sup> The images include for example Tandavas of Shiva such as “Gauri Tandava” and “Kali Tandava”. Several of the images seemingly display different narratives associated with Subramanya such as a teaching the meaning of *om* to his father Shiva and Subramanya’s marriage to Valli that have also been depicted on the outer walls of the above discussed Swaminatha Swami Shrine. See also Sathish: 2014.

<sup>611</sup> Other images depict the 15<sup>th</sup> century saint Arunkirinatar, who has composed until date popular hymns in praise of Subramanya, and Kumaragurupara the 17<sup>th</sup> century saint and founder of the Kasi Math at Varanasi. On Arunakirinatar see for example Clothey, 1972: 81, 2005 [1978]: 87, 109-112 and Orr, 2014: 21. On Kumaragurupara see for example [www.murugan.org/bhaktas/kumaragurupara.htm](http://www.murugan.org/bhaktas/kumaragurupara.htm).

<sup>612</sup> All labels are written in Tamil.

<sup>613</sup> See for instance, the image titled “Adhi Sankara” in Malai Mandir’s *Sthalapuranam*. According to Smith, such images are the outcome of modern technologies such as the camera (Smith, 1978: 41).

<sup>614</sup> In the last hundred years or so many new images of deities/saints/*gurus/etc.* have been created. According to scholars such as Smith, Waghorne, Pinney and Jain printing, photography, film and other modern/contemporary technologies greatly affected on these ways deities are depicted nowadays (Smith, 1978; Pinney, 2004; Waghorne, 2004: 162-163; Jain, 2007; *etc.*). It is common to find not only photos and photorealistic images but also three-dimensional images in the context of the temple. Mines and Gourishankar for instance mention, that in the Coimbatore temple “three portrait statues [of Chandrasekharendra Saraswati, Jayendra Saraswati and Vijayendra Saraswati] have been installed” (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990: 776-777). BAPS’ Swaminarayan Mandirs contain comparable portrait statues of the *guruparampara* and at ISKCON temples one can find portrait statues of ISKCON’s founder Prabhupada.

Mandir makes use of the modern institution of the museum, using it according to their own terms and needs *within* the space of the temple. While the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir and Akshardham are trying to reference the idea of India, the exhibition at Malai Mandir instead tries to emphasise the regional and thus attempts to bring its homeland/original context within that of India's capital Delhi. However, according to the temple's priest, since the musical pillar broke, the Mandapa has been locked up and is used as storehouse for images, posters, photos, *etc.*<sup>615</sup> Why do the creators no longer give priority to this space of display? Does the Samaj's indifference to revive the Mandapa indicate that the community no longer feels that their identity needs to be underscored and marked within the nation and the national capital city?

### **Meenakshi, Sundareswara and Vinayakar Mandir**

Chandrasekharendra Saraswati not only advised the Samaj to construct the Silpa Kala Mandapa but also a temple dedicated to Meenakshi, Sundareswara and Vinayakar (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 42-43).<sup>616</sup> Thus, around the same time when the Silpa Kala Mandapa was built plans to build such temple(s) were also made. However, unlike the Swaminatha Swami Mandir, this structure has not been built out of costly granite but out of brick and mortar (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 42).<sup>617</sup> Nevertheless, according to information published by the Samaj, twenty-five thousand lakhs to thirty thousand lakhs rupees were spent for the construction of the Mandir that has been inaugurated in June, 1990 (Subrahmanian, 1990; unknown author, 1990; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 42-43).

Similar to the Swamimalai Mandir in south India, in Delhi's Malai Mandir the separate temples dedicated to Meenakshi, Sundareswara and Vinayakar have been built on the foothills of the hillock (Figure 4.31), few meters south-west of the Silpa Kala Mandapa and facing, like the temples in Madurai towards the east (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 42).<sup>618</sup> Although, these three temples have been built as separate architectural units, they have been united by a pillared *mandapa*. The temples

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<sup>615</sup> According to the priest, the pillar broke in during the 1990s.

<sup>616</sup> See also Subrahmanian, 1990. An article in *The Times of India* describes the temple in detail (unknown author, 1990).

<sup>617</sup> According to *The Times of India*, a "unique past of lime mixed with jaggry and harad ('kadukkai' in Tamil) has been used (unknown author, 1990).

<sup>618</sup> On the Meenakshi Mandir in Madurai see Fuller, 2004b.

dedicated to Meenakshi and Sundareswara (Figure 4.32) that are both rectangular in plan have been placed in the front of the structure, each featuring its own entrance; the temple dedicated to Vinayakar has an apsidal plan that has been placed behind these in the back of the Mandir. Like the Swaminatha Swami Mandir, these three temples have been built referring to/drawing from South Indian temple designs. As Subrahmanian as well as Iyer and Pattabhiraman emphasise, while the Swaminatha Swami Mandir has been built in the Chola style, the Meenakshi Mandir has been built in the Pandya style and the Sundareswara Mandir has been built in the Pallava style (Subrahmanian, 1990; unknown author, 1990; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 42).<sup>619</sup> Differences in the design might also be seen in the superstructures that tower through the flat roof of the surrounding, pillared *mandapa*. The superstructures of the Meenakshi and Sundareswara temple have been designed featuring a similar pyramidal shape as the superstructure of the Swaminatha Swami Mandir.<sup>620</sup> The superstructure that towers above the Vinayakar shrine however is capped by a rounded superstructure (Figure 4.33), like the Nakula-Sahadeva Shrine at Mahabalipuram.<sup>621</sup>

Moreover, there are differences in the sculptural programs of these temples. While the sculptures or *murtis* in the wall niches and on the superstructure of the Meenakshi Mandir are distinctively goddess related *murtis*, the *murtis* of the Sundareswara Mandir depict different forms of Shiva. Besides these *murtis*, the temple houses two reliefs made out of black granite. Modelled on an image in the Meenakshi Mandir in Madurai, one depicts Meenakshi Kalyanam (Figure 4.34), the second that Muthiah Sthapati created from his imagination depicts Valli Kalyanam (Figure 4.35).<sup>622</sup> Like the *murtis* of the Swaminatha Swami Mandir, the *murtis* of these temples have been made out of black granite. These were prepared by S.M. Ganapati Sthapati and his brother Muthiah Sthapati and were sculpted at the latter's workshop in Palavakkam after which they were taken to the Kanchi Math to receive blessings from Chandrasekharendra Saraswati to then be sent to Delhi

<sup>619</sup> See also [www.murugan.org/events/malai-mandir-kumbhabhisekam.htm](http://www.murugan.org/events/malai-mandir-kumbhabhisekam.htm).

<sup>620</sup> Meenakshi Mandir's superstructure however consists of only one tier whereas the superstructure towering the Sundareswara's temple consists of two tiers.

<sup>621</sup> This shape has been referred to as Gajapristha Vimana ([www.murugan.org/events/malai-mandir-kumbhabhisekam.htm](http://www.murugan.org/events/malai-mandir-kumbhabhisekam.htm)). See also Huntington, 1999 [1985]: 311.

<sup>622</sup> Compare with unknown author, 1990.

(Subrahmanian, 1990; unknown author, 1990; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 42, 46).<sup>623</sup>

Similar to the entrance of the Silpa Kala Mandapa, the entrances leading towards the Meenakshi Mandir and the Sundareswara Mandir feature figural composite pillars, though less impressive ones. While the pillars of the entrance to Meenakshi's temple feature *vyalas* (Figure 4.36) the pillars of the entrance to Sundareswara's temple feature another popular motif for such composite pillars that Branfoot refers to as "horseman composite column" (Figure 4.37) (Branfoot, 2002: 202, 205-206). Similar to the already described buildings, the pillars support a *kapota* that is topped by a row of square and rectangular miniature shrines and niches some of which contain *murtis*—for instance, the one above Meenakshi's entrance contains a *murti* of the goddess and the one above the Sundareswara's entrance contains a *murti* of Somaskanda (Figure 4.38). In a similar way that these *murtis* indicate the position of their respective shrines inside the building, the *murti* of Vinayakar placed in the central niche indicates the location of his shrine.

The shape and form (*style*) of architecture and architectural elements have been linked to the concept of identity and must be understood in the context of identity politics. In the case of Tamil temples, Sridharan notes, "Tamil Nadu [...] portrays its identity as "Dravidian" State and temple architecture is used as an important portal to display this identity" (Sridharan, 2003: 265).<sup>624</sup> It is against this backdrop of identity politics that creators of the Uttara Swamnatha Swamimalai Mandir such as the Sree Swaminath Seth Samaj, the Shankaracharyas as well as V. Ganapati Sthapati, S.M. Ganapati Sthapati and Muthiah Sthapati built the Mandir's different temples in three Dravidian styles.<sup>625</sup> The Swaminatha Malai Mandir dedicated to Subramanya on the hillock features a design different from the design of the two ancillary temples within the complex. Although it has been emphasised that the Meenakshi Mandir is built in Pandya style and the Sundareswara Mandir in

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<sup>623</sup> As a *murti* of Vinayakar had already been worshipped at the temple no new *murti* was prepared and this old *murti* was shifted.

<sup>624</sup> According to Michell, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards, temples in "typically" Southern Indian style have been built in Sri Lanka (Michell, 1995: 276).

<sup>625</sup> According to Sridharan, "there are many hybrid styles existing and interacting under the common bracket of Dravidian style, and contemporary architecture does not follow a deterministic pattern that can be defined in time and space" (Sridharan, 2003: 266)



Pallava style with regard to their stylistic features, and the overall effect, one can hardly be distinguished from the other (Subrahmanian, 1990; unknown author, 1990; Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 42). Parker and Sridharan have discussed comparable cases in their studies (Parker, 1992a: 111; Sridharan, 2003: 268-269). Sridharan, for example, writes:

Interacting with a few *sthapatis* involved in the contemporary practice, one understands that their idea of following an authentic style or deviating form it is not exactly similar to a historian's perception of the same (Sridharan, 2003: 268-269).

How problematic the idea and discussion of style is also shows in Menon's reading of such "neo-traditional temples." While the style in which temples such as the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir, the Jagannath Mandir in Hauz Khas and others are commonly considered "traditional" and "authentic" for Menon these temples are

[...] pale imitations of ancient monuments, sitting anachronistically in a new cultural landscape, unable to emulate the spirit that spurred the past, and unwilling to come to terms with the forces fuelling the future (Menon, 1997: 27).

Menon's modernist longing for temples that can embrace the future aside, contemporary temple architecture seems far more interested in recreating these 'pale imitations' of ancient architectural marvels. Falling firmly on the side of 'tradition,' Akshardham—through its sheer scale and its profile—represents the apogee of this move towards the past. This deployment of the past, however, appears in ways and for means that echo the agendas of the Hindu nationalist right-wing to scrub the nation's past clean of any 'foreign,' read Muslim and Christian references, as will be discussed in the fifth chapter.

### **Navagraha Mandir, Idumban Mandir, Naga Mandir and Pipal Tree**

The building that was built next to the premises of the temple, in 1995, is the Navagraha Mandir, dedicated to the nine planets as well as directions (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 43). It has been built next to the staircase that leads towards the Swaminatha Swami Mandir on the top of the hillock. Reminiscent of the style in which the Meenakshi, Sundareswara and Vinayakar Mandir have been built, the temple consists of four pillars standing on a slightly elevated platform. However,

unlike the other buildings, these pillars carry a protruding modern roof made of metal that protect the nine gods that have been installed on a pedestal (Figure 4.39). Ascending the staircase further towards north, a small temple dedicated to Idumban has been erected next to a Pipal tree, under which a small shrine for Nagas has also been installed (Figure 4.40).<sup>626</sup> A second much bigger shrine dedicated to a Naga can be seen further up towards the top of the hill (Figure 4.41).<sup>627</sup>

## Adi Sankara Hall

On November 9, 1997, the Samaj celebrated the inauguration of the Adi Sankara Hall (Figure 4.42), so far the largest and probably the costliest building that has been built on Malai Mandir's premises.<sup>628</sup> As it is the case with the described buildings, the Samaj followed the instruction given by the Shankaracharyas of the Kanchi Math also with regard to the construction of this building (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 46). The Adi Sankara Hall, situated east of the Swaminatha Swami Mandir, is rectangular in plan and has two floors, the lower of which is used as kitchen. The staircase that ascends towards the top of the hill not only passes the Navagraha Mandir, the Pipal tree and the Idumban Mandir but also leads to the first floor of the Adi Sankara Hall/Mandapa (Figure 4.43) (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 44-46). Its exterior has been designed not very differently from the main temple. For instance, the exterior wall of the first floor is dominated by pilasters, carrying a *kapota*-shaped roof that is crowned by a sequence of colourfully painted alternating square and elongated miniature shrines that are connected to each other through small miniature niches. The gaps in between the pilasters that divide the hall's exterior wall have been filled with miniature shrines or niches consisting of two pillars covered by a heavy *kapota*-shaped roof and an elongated barrel-vaulted roof. As described earlier

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<sup>626</sup> Iyer and Pattabhiraman point out that this tree has been growing there since the time the Sabha had selected the spot (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 18). According to Bharne and Krusche, temple complexes such as Madurai's Meenakshi Mandir often began with the worship of a stone or a tree to develop into bigger complexes (Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 19-31). The tree seems to be a popular spot also for depositing old images. On Idumban see Clothey, 1972: 90 and [www.murugan.org/kavadi.htm](http://www.murugan.org/kavadi.htm).

<sup>627</sup> According to Iyer and Pattabhiraman, during the time when temple was constructed a snake was seen and offered milk at this spot (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 29-30). In order to not disturb the snake, which is also closely associated with Subramanya a shrine was built and Naga Pooja is now performed regularly (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 30).

<sup>628</sup> According to a commemorative inscription attached to the wall near the Adi Sankara Hall's entrance, the hall has been inaugurated by Jayendra Saraswati and Vijayendra Saraswati of the Kanchi Math. The costs came up to sixty-five lakhs rupees ([www.murugan.org/events/malaimandir-kumbhabhisekam.htm](http://www.murugan.org/events/malaimandir-kumbhabhisekam.htm)). See also Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 46.

such miniature shrines usually function as niches for *murtis*, here however the niches frame modern glass windows (Figure 4.44). The entrance to the Hall is lying on the central axis of the building and is preceded by a massive pillared porch that carries a superstructure exceeding the roof of the Hall.

Although the temple authorities emphasise their Tamil-ness—for example by using as discussed above a specific architectural vocabulary—at the same time this (Hindu) Tamil-ness seems to be defined within Indian-ness, echoing Hindu nationalist thinkers who stressed the unity of India as a race and nation.<sup>629</sup> In the temple's *Sthalapurana*, Iyer and Pattabhiraman outline their understanding as follows:

The people may belong to different religions but that has not changed their *oneness as a race*, having deep roots in India's ancient civilization deep cultural unity amidst diversity. In the past over five thousand years of Indian history, several dynasties have ruled in different parts of the sub-continent but its innate basic cultural unity/affinity has never been broken amongst the majority of its inhabitants. Indianness or Bharatiyata has always prevailed (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 44; italics added).<sup>630</sup>

This idea also finds expression in the conceptualisation of the Adi Sankara Hall. Noticeably this space is not dedicated to any 'proper' god but to Adi Sankara who is considered to have introduced Sanatana Dharma, as mentioned above. According to Lutgendorf, the term Sanatana Dharma came into use in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as a term to distinguish image-worshipping (orthodox) Hindus from organisations such as the Arya Samaj that had done away with idol-worship and other practices (Lutgendorf, 2007: 387-388).<sup>631</sup> Later, however, Sanatana Dharma that has been translated as "eternal religion" in the context of the VHP and other right-wing organisations, the term replaces the term Hinduism emphasising the idea of a Hindu unity (Davis, 1996: 52-53).<sup>632</sup> On the same axis as the entrance, at the other end of the hall a shrine (Figure 4.45) that houses a fifteen-inches high quartz *murti* of Adi

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<sup>629</sup> See Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 44.

<sup>630</sup> According to Nietzsche, god exists as long as the community exists and this god will always be with his people/nation (Nietzsche, 1899: 234). Arguably, there is a link between a certain community or group of people and god that is imagined as 'belonging' to them—a national god.

<sup>631</sup> Compare with second and third chapter.

<sup>632</sup> Compare also with Van der Veer, 1994: 66, 174.

Sankara has been embedded in the wall (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 46).<sup>633</sup> That the Adi Sankara Hall is not a temple like the other temples of the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir but rather a space of the community is also understood by the Adi Sankara Hall's size. Reminiscent of the Gita Bhavan of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, the spacious Adi Sankara Hall provides much space to hold a large number of people (Figure 4.46). The presence of this hall and its use as a cultural venue suggests the vision of the temple's founders, in large part 'guided' by the Shankaracharyas of the Kanchi Math to position the temple as a site of/for the Tamil community as well as for other followers of Sanatana Dharma (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 45).<sup>634</sup>

## Gopuras

Another 'typical' South India architectural element, featuring in any large contemporary South Indian temple, is the temple's enclosure wall and *gopuras*. Unlike other South Indian temples in South Delhi such as the Venkateswara Mandir (RK Puram) and the Vaikunatha Mandir in Ber Sarai, for the longest time, the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir featured two insignificant modern gates. Eventually, however, as in the case of any large South Indian temple, the Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir was also provided with two impressive Gopuras.<sup>635</sup> In 2014, the Raja Gopura (Figure 4.49) consisting of a high granite base towered by a two-tiered superstructure with gradually receding tiers ending in a barrel-vaulted roof took the place of an unremarkable modern gate. Each tier consists of the same arrangement of the barrel-vaulted rectangular miniature shrine in the centre bridged by small niches to square shrines in the corner. Unlike some of the more recent examples of *gopura* such as the one at the Kapeleshvara Temple in Chennai, Malai Mandir's Raja Gopura

<sup>633</sup> Besides housing this *murti* of Adi Sankara, the Hall also houses various other images and small shrines among them a printed image of Balasubramania (Figure 4.47). Like an exhibit in the museum, this image that is still worshipped on important days and festival has been put on display in a showcase and is believed to possess munificent divine powers. According to a notice board titled "Heritage Picture of Lord Balasubramania", this image has been brought from Chennai to Delhi in 1951 to be taken for processions and worshipped especially during the Skanda Shashti festival. Later, it has been kept in the *garbhagraha* of the Balasthapanam from where it was removed after the first Kumbhabhishekam in 1973 (Figure 4.48). According to Cenker it is not uncommon among followers of the Shankaracharyas to see images of Adi Sankara installed in their houses (Cenkner, 1996: 61). See also Waghorne, 2004: 257. Also the Kanchi Math's websites refers to various Adi Sankara Temples (<http://www.kamakoti.org/kamakoti/details/branches.html>).

<sup>634</sup> Their ability to marshal resources for such a venture suggests their interest and ability to be actors within the cultural arena of the capital.

<sup>635</sup> As for instance Bharne and Krusche point out, "with the increasing importance of the temple, larger complexes surrounded by courts enclosing great corridors and pillared halls became common features of the Dravidian vocabulary Highly advanced designs of gopurams became a trademark for this architectural language" (Bharne and Krusche, 2012: 75).

is populated with only a few deities. In 2016, the unimpressive metal gate that faces the Outer Ring Road and serves as the temple's main entrance was replaced by a gate that seems stylistically and aesthetically appropriate (Figure 4.50). This gate consists of two sturdy double pillars that are covered by a *kapota*-shaped roof and crowned by miniature shrines that contain images of Subramanya and other deities. Both gates have been painted in the typical bright colours (each colour contrasting with the adjacent one). Not only do these Gopuras attract and hold a viewer's gaze from a distance, the surrounding enclosure wall that is painted with white-red stripes, typical to South Indian temples, visibly marking the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir as a sacred space away from the surrounding everyday (Figure 4.1) (Parker, 1992a: 116).<sup>636</sup>

## MAKING DELHI HOME

This chapter has traced the movement by which 'regional' identities are negotiated within the space of the capital city, and symbolically, therefore, within the space of the nation by charting the temple building process. Using the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Temple as a case-study, the chapter analyses the architectural choices that were exercised by the community at the time of founding the temple and until the present, to understand the process by which varied communities have 'settled' in the city. This also helped to understand the complex relationships between the centre and state, metropolitan and regional within the nation.

Central to the chapter's concerns are questions around regional identity; these issues were particularly pertinent at the time that the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Temple was conceived of—just after the passing of the States Reorganization Act of 1956, which organised Indian states on linguistic basis. In the 1960s, Tamil-speaking peoples who had shifted to Delhi on account of their employment with the national government and the bureaucracy as well as those having come to Delhi driven by private enterprise, sought to establish a temple in the young nation's capital. Largely

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<sup>636</sup> Compare with Parker's description of polychrome painted *cutai* images (Parker, 1992a: 116, 1992b: 101). According to Parker, in Tamil Nadu such bright colours are aesthetically appreciated and are needed because they fade quickly under the burning sun and monsoon rains" (Parker, 1992a: 116). Compare with the idea of segregation in the context of cities as discussed by Nightingale (Nightingale, 2013).

belonging to upper castes and the middle-class, these men—the founding narrative being conspicuously silent on any involvement of women—decided to erect a temple to the Tamil ‘national’ god, Subramanya. As the chapter has demonstrated, the choice of this ‘regional’ god—rather than deities from the Hindu pantheon of a more pan-Indian nature, such as Vishnu or Shiva—was critical. The temple’s founding vision thus foregrounds an insistence on the Tamil identity, while simultaneously seeks to place it alongside the ‘Indian’ one, albeit in tension with it.

The chapter has endeavoured to read these tensions through the architecture of the temple complex. This is seen in the prominent site chosen and acquired for the temple—atop a hillock and overlooking a busy, arterial road in the capital. Also, important to strengthen the Tamil identity was the temple’s citing of varied architectural styles from the Tamil-speaking regions such as the Chola, Pandya and Pallava, giving it a distinct visual profile. The insistence on the use of stone—transported all the way from the southern part of the country—further attests to the means by which the temple’s founders and the founding moment threw their weight on the side of ‘tradition’ to assert a Tamil identity. Rejecting popular and cheaper choices of the time such as concrete, the community demonstrated not just the resources at their disposal to employ traditional crafts persons who could work stone into building material, but also their insistence on claiming a space within the capital on the basis of this architectural heritage. The community’s clout—financial as well as political and bureaucratic—continues to be demonstrated through the additions it makes to the temple complex. One such structure is the Adi Sankara Hall, which is named after the founder of the sect and the Math, viz. Adi Shankaracharya. However, the Hall remains open to all members of the ‘Santana Dharma,’ demonstrating the temple’s ability to facilitate and host a number of religious-cultural events. If the community chose to take the path of stone architecture and therefore of ‘traditional’ building methods, its modern sensibility is seen in the Silpa Kala Mandapa wherein this architectural heritage is displayed so as to be ‘studied’ and appreciated within a museum-like context; it also prides itself as a space displaying the workmanship of V. Ganapati Sthapati and thereby indicates its backing of Tamil architectural heritage. In doing so, the temple complex becomes a space not just for ‘worshippers’ but offers an enriched version of what constitutes a temple visit, to include the didactic and preservationist functions of the museum.

In this, the temple demonstrates a grasp over present-day concerns, attracting youngsters, for instance, to the temple by offering more than narratives of faith, while also attesting to its ambitious growth. This has been, in part, possible due to a number of high-profile patrons. The temple was supported by and derived its ritual legitimacy through its association with the Kanchi Kamakoti Math. Once designated as ‘blessed’ by and under the leadership of this powerful *math*, the profile of the temple was raised to include high-ranking government officials, politicians and holders of public office, including former Chief Ministers, Governors, and the like. This made it possible not only to ease the matter of seeking governmental permissions and funding for the site, but also ensured that the community and its efforts at temple building were marked within the space of the capital. Indeed, this backing by the powers-that-be is woven within the founding narrative of the temple. Invited to the foundation-stone laying ceremony, the then Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri was forced to cancel his visit at the last minute as India faced conflict with Pakistan. However, Shastri’s message to the temple invoked one of the many avatars of Subramanya—as the commander of the gods—and attributed to the de-escalation of the conflict to the divine intervention of Subramanya himself. Thus enfolded within the pan-Indian pantheon, the temple and the community by extension received affirmation and support within the capital and within the national imaginary.

Communities and trusts such as the Sree Saminatha Swami Seva Samaj justify the construction of temples usually by emphasising the lack of and thus the need for a place of worship. While this might be seen as a legitimate concern in view of protecting and promoting one’s identity, it does not explain what necessitates/justifies the building of such a place in a particular way or style. Does a deity care about the style/design of the place of worship? Or, does a deity care about of which material the place of worship is build or in which style? What is the need in transporting stone over several thousands of kilometres across the nation? What makes this stone different from *local* stone? The great efforts and means that not only the Samaj but also other bodies involved in the temple-building have put and continue to put into the temple suggest that other mechanisms are at work. According to McDuire-Ra the making of religious spaces can be part of an attempt or process of creating “a little piece of home” away from home but what does that actually mean (McDuire-Ra,

2012a: 69, 152, 159)? Does McDuie-Ra's explanation make us understand the reasons and purpose of the making of such a place within the capital city? What does it mean to create for oneself *a little piece of home*? Considering the great efforts that have been put into the construction and making of the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir and the involvement of high-profile politicians, religious leaders and architects in the making of the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir, it appears as if the place-making goes beyond processes that McDuie-Ra has described as creating a little piece of home—the construction of the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir is a political gesture that comes in the form of a religious structure.

As discussed in the chapter, the construction of the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir must be understood as a political act, which holds eventually for the construction of any religious building. Nightingale has looked at the urban fabric of cities emphasising them by their very nature as spaces of segregation (Nightingale, 2013). Cities' outer wall, for instance, "divided the urban and the urbane from the rural and the rustic", as he explains (Nightingale, 2013). According to Nightingale, also

battlements, bastions, fences, gates, guard shacks, checkpoints, booms, railroad tracks, highways, tunnels, rivers, inlets, mountainsides and ridges, buffer zones, free-fire zones, demilitarized zones, *cordon sanitaires*, screens of trees, road blocks, violent mobs, terrorism, the police, armies, curfews, quarantines, pass laws, labor compounds, building clearances, forced removals, restrictive covenants, zoning ordinances, racial steering practices, race-infused economic incentives, segregated private and public housing developments, exclusive residential compounds, gated communities, separate municipal governments and fiscal systems, discriminatory access to land ownership and credit, complementary rural holding zones, influx control laws, and restrictions against overseas immigration

are tools of domination and sustaining hierarchy that constitute the urban-scapes (Nightingale, 2013). He also mentions "monumental architecture" (Nightingale, 2013). Against this theoretical backdrop religious building can never be sacred as such but is always secular and is an outcome of forces which are located within the contingent political and economic realities.



## FIGURES FOURTH CHAPTER

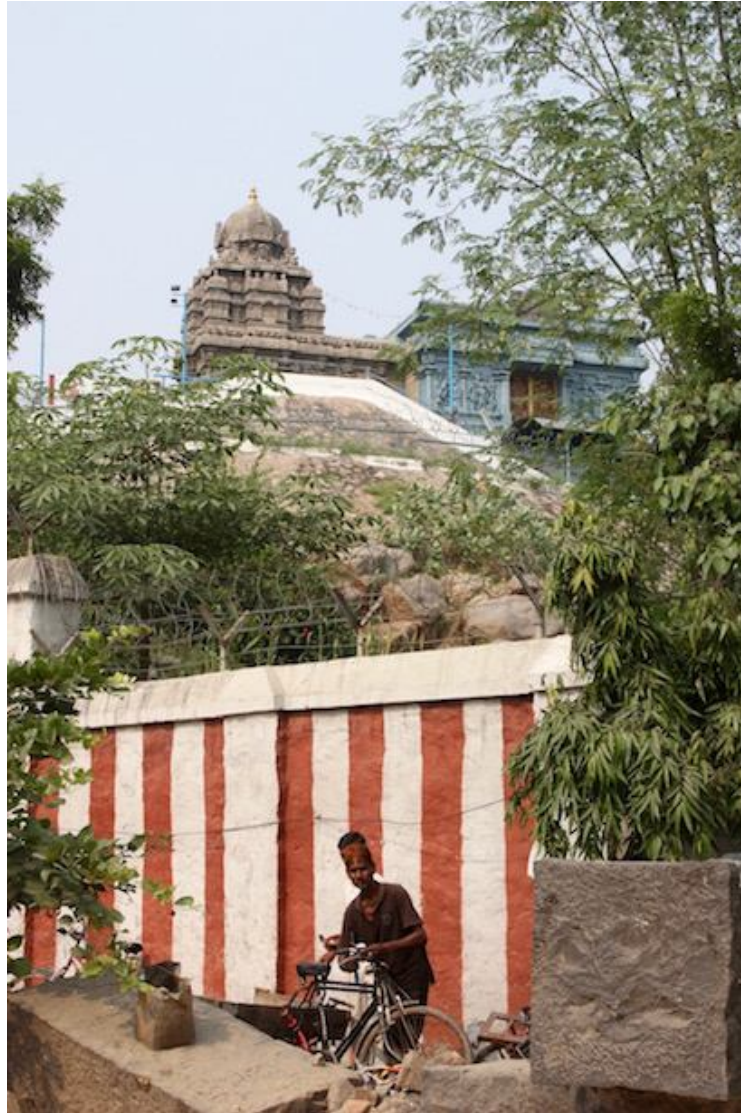


Figure 4.1: Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.2: Mound Selected for the Construction of the Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir as seen in 1961 (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 18).



Figure 4.3: Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir seen from the Outer Ring Road in 2010 (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.4: Devi Kamakshi Mandir on Aruna Asaf Ali Marg in Delhi (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.5: Swaminatha Swami Mandir of the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir (by A. Hartig).

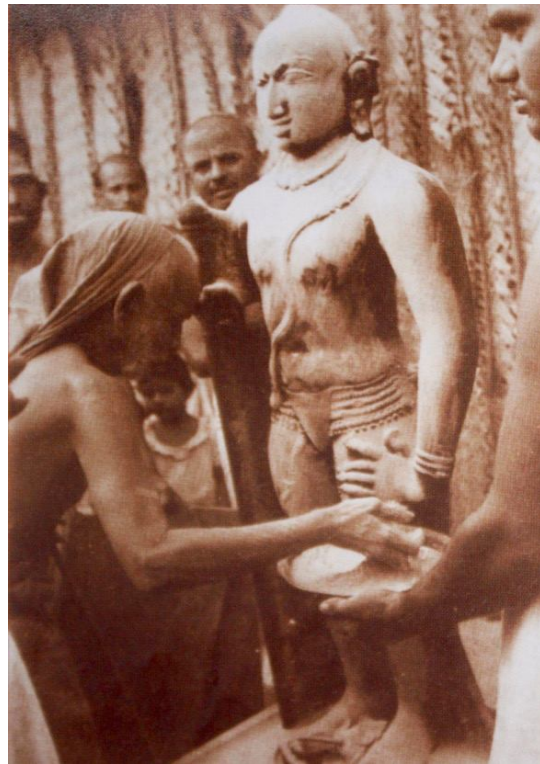


Figure 4.6: Central Image of Subramanya of the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 24).



Figure 4.7: Image of Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir's *Murti* of Subramanya (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 60).



Figure 4.8: Mandovar of the Swaminatha Swami Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.9: Detail of the Swaminatha Swami Mandir's Base (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.10: Gajalakshmi at the Base of the Swaminatha Swami Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.11: *Murti* of Subramanya at the Swaminatha Swami Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.12: Superstructure of the Swaminatha Swami Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.13: Relief of Mahishasuramardini in the Mahishasuramardini Cave in Mahabalipuram (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.14: Detail of Swaminatha Swami Mandir's Mandapa (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.15: Detail of Swaminatha Swami Mandir's Mandapa (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.16: Detail of Swaminatha Swami Mandir's Mandapa (by A. Hartig).





Figure 4.17: Detail of Swaminatha Swami Mandir's Mandapa (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.18: Small Procession Observed at the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir in 2010 (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.19: Stage-like Structure opposite of the Meenakshi, Sundareswara and Vinayakar Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.20: Musical Pillar in the Silpa Kala Mandapa (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.21: Silpa Kala Mandapa (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.22: Porch of the Silpa Kala Mandapa (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.23: Bull in the Silpa Kala Mandapa (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.24: Bell Made of Stone in the Silpa Kala Mandapa (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.25: Detail of the Silpa Kala Mandapa showing Vishvakarma (by A. Hartig).

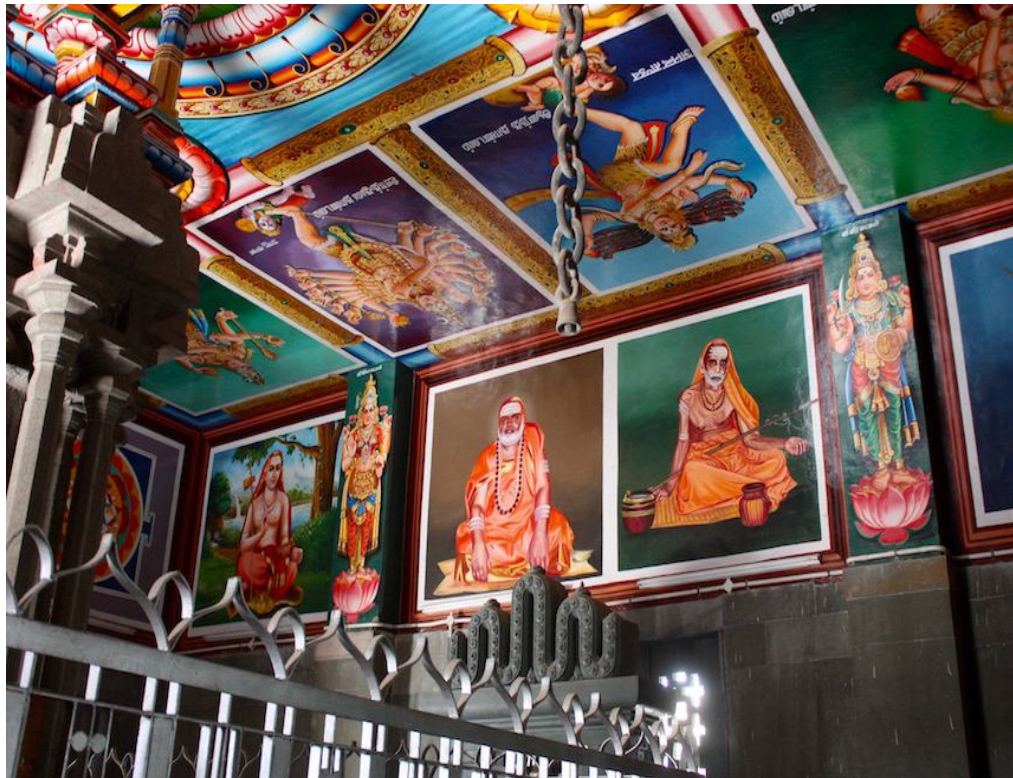


Figure 4.26: Wall Painting in the Silpa Kala Mandapa (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.27: Detail at the Silpa Kala Mandapa (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.28: Detail at the Silpa Kala Mandapa (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.29: Detail at the Silpa Kala Mandapa showing Adi Sankara (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.30: Detail at the Silpa Kala Mandapa showing Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.31: Meenakshi, Sundareswara and Vinayakar Mandir at Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.32: Murtis of Meenakshi and Sundareswara in the Meenakshi, Sundareswara and Vinayakar Mandir (by Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-).





Figure 4.33: Superstructure of the Vinayakar Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.34: Detail of the Meenakshi, Sundareswara and Vinayakar Mandir showing Meenakshi Kalyanam (by Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-).



Figure 4.35: Detail of the Meenakshi, Sundareswara and Vinayakar Mandir showing Valli Kalyanam (by Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-).



Figure 4.36: Column at the Meenakshi, Sundareswara and Vinayakar Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.37: Column at the Meenakshi, Sundareswara and Vinayakar Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.38: Detail of the Meenakshi, Sundareswara and Vinayakar Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.39: Navagraha Mandapa (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.40: Naga Mandir and Idumban Mandir at the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.41: Naga Shrine near the Swaminatha Swami Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.42: Adi Sankara Hall of the Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.43: Detail of the Adi Sankara Hall (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.44: Detail of the Adi Sankara Hall (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.45: Small Gathering at the Adi Sankara Hall (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.46: Adi Shankara Shrine in the Adi Sankara Hall (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.47: Printed Image of Balasubramanya displayed in the Adi Shankara Hall in 2010 (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.48: Printed Image of Balasubramanya as displayed in the Balalayam in the 1960s (Iyer and Pattabhiraman, 20-: 21).





Figure 4.49: Raja Gopuram at Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir (by A. Hartig).



Figure 4.50: Gopuram at Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir (by A. Hartig).

## FIFTH CHAPTER

### AKSHARDHAM: AN INTERFACE BETWEEN THE REGIONAL, THE NATIONAL AND THE GLOBAL

The final chapter will discuss a temple built by the religious organisation, BAPS, viz. Akshardham (Figure 5.1). Inaugurated in November 2005 by the leaders of the country, Akshardham is the youngest of the temples studied in the thesis.<sup>637</sup> Moreover, it is a temple that attracts most national and international attention because the government seems to have recognised it as an impressive showpiece presentable to the country's official visitors.<sup>638</sup> For instance, during his last visit to India in April 2017, Australia's Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull was taken to Akshardham by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi.<sup>639</sup>

Akshardham holds the distinction of being "one of the largest Temples in the world," as noted in posters put up around the city by Delhi's state government to promote local attractions (Figure 5.2).<sup>640</sup> However, such statements of scale also come at a staggering price. The cost of building "one of the world's largest temples," range, as newspaper reporters inform the public, from approximately two hundred to four hundred crores of rupees (Sengupta, 2005). That Akshardham's size has been highlighted to define and market it of all the things is telling. The poster brings to

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<sup>637</sup> The inauguration ceremony was attended by the President of India Abudul Kalam, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (Congress), and Leader of the Opposition L.K. Advani (BJP).

<sup>638</sup> Many international authorities visited Akshardham, particularly during the Commonwealth Games in 2010. See <http://akshardham.com/news/>.

<sup>639</sup> See Narendra Modi's official website: <http://www.narendramodi.in/pm-modi-and-australian-pm-turnbull-take-a-metro-ride-to-akshardham-temple-535013> and Akshardham's website: <http://akshardham.com/indian-pm-narendra-modi-and-australian-pm-malcolm-turnbull-visit-swaminarayan-akshardham/>.

<sup>640</sup> Delhi's state government has been putting up posters trying to promote Delhi's tourist attractions attempting to draw attention to an outstanding feature of the advertised site. Akshardham's poster reads: "Did you know? Akshardham Temple is one of the largest Temples in the world." In 2007, Guinness World Records recognised Akshardham as the "largest Hindu Temple in the world" ([www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/largest-hindu-temple](http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/largest-hindu-temple)). BAPS frequently tries to attract attention by competing for different awards and recognition. See [www.baps.org/About-BAPS/WhatPeopleSay/AwardsandRecognitions.aspx](http://www.baps.org/About-BAPS/WhatPeopleSay/AwardsandRecognitions.aspx). Akshardham has also been promoted in other campaigns. It was featured as cover image of a Delhi Tourism's pamphlet titled *Dream Destination Delhi: Faith* and it was shown in at least two times in Delhi Tourism's calendar. Besides, its image has been featured at Delhi's newly built Indira Gandhi International Airport juxtaposing images of the Lotus Temple and other 'classic' sites as well as at Delhi's domestic airport (Figure 5.3).

mind the image sketched by Jain, with regard to what seems to be going on in India:

[A] mute but monumental battle is being waged: a war, in fact, of monuments and statues, proliferating virally and on an ever-increasing scale, silently competing to assert their presence in an *image-saturated* visual landscape (Jain, 2014: 139).

It is difficult to not think about this battle while considering Akshardham and raise a host of questions: What is the purpose of building the largest temple in the world? Since when has religion become part of the race? Since when has it become necessary to market a temple? Was it necessary to build the temple so grand and lavishly in a city and country in which the majority of people lives in poverty?<sup>641</sup> From where do the funds for such a project come? Does God want to live in a place like Akshardham, whose name has been translated by its creator into English as “divine abode of God” (www.akshardham.com/)? Is this *sacred*? Is Akshardham the future of the Hindu temple? In short, looking at Akshardham it is perhaps impossible to not question the relation of money, power and politics, which are per definition understood as facets of the *secular* that is separate and removed from the *sacred*.

As mentioned earlier, it is only over the last twenty years or so that scholars have been looking more seriously at the Hindu temple in the framework of the contemporary. Consequently, many issues in the context of the Hindu temple have either not been addressed at all or not in depth. Central to this chapter is the complex of concerns around money, politics and the distinction between the sacred and the secular. The temple, like other institutions, needs to survive and must, like other institutions, financially sustain itself—this already constitutes the first step into the world of money, power and politics i.e. the *secular*?<sup>642</sup> As discussed in the previous chapters, overall the Hindu temple and its architecture have been looked at as bastion of the past and unchanging tradition, unmoved by socio-economic, political and cultural changes that came along with time.<sup>643</sup> And, scholarship has turned a blind eye

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<sup>641</sup> This question not only unfolds in the context of Akshardham but also in the context of other projects such as the Srirangam Rajagopuram, discussed by Parker (Parker, 1992a: 111-112).

<sup>642</sup> See Mondzain’s discussion of the *sacred* and *economy* (Mondzain, 2005).

<sup>643</sup> Srinivas observes that according to popular perception, the ritual in Hindu temples is “static and unchanging [...] the Hindu Brahmin priests attached to these temples are the keeper of this unchanging tradition” (Srinivas, 2006: 323). Arguably, this is also the case when it comes to the general perception of the Hindu temple. Branfoot’s study of the practice of renovating/remodelling

to the temples' need to continuously customise it and to make it attractive in order to attract people/money.<sup>644</sup>

Outside of academia, however, the loosening hold of religion over society has produced anxieties about the contemporary role of the temples. If the temples do not adjust even in small steps to the ever-changing context, people will stop going to temples, as Bangalore-based priest Ghani Shastry fears (Srinivas, 2006: 329).<sup>645</sup> According to scholars such as Srinivas, Mathur, Singh, Nanda and Jain, it seems as if the religious market is growing, which means it will presumably also become more stiff and competitive (Srinivas, 2004, 2006; Mathur and Singh, 2007; Nanda, 2009; Jain, 2007, 2014, 2016, 2017; *etc.*). At the same time, as Srinivas says, temples “can no longer assume a guaranteed sectarian or caste-based devotee group” (Srinivas, 2006: 328).<sup>646</sup> According to Srinivas, many people no longer follow sectarian affiliations but choose to go to a temple, based on what they have heard about it, as well as its look and feel (Srinivas, 2006: 327-328).<sup>647</sup> Although BAPS' followers go exclusively to BAPS' temples, BAPS feeds this modern desire, which is based on democratic ideals, persistently announcing: “Akshardham Mandir is a temple that welcomes all” ([www.akshardham.com/explore/](http://www.akshardham.com/explore/)).<sup>648</sup> Although Akshardham is conceptualised as a modern democratic place where the performance of *abhishek* is “open to all visitors”, its openness comes with limitations—BAPS expects visitors to pay a “Abhishek donation” of fifty rupees per person.<sup>649</sup>

Even so, especially in metropolis like Bangalore or Delhi, not only does a temple have to compete with other temples but also with other sites and

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temples in South India shows how problematic this perception of the temple as an unchanging entity or bastion of the past is (Branfoot, 2013).

<sup>644</sup> Srinivas discusses two cases in which the priests constantly improve their temples, which made the temples according to other people “very rich and powerful” (Srinivas, 2006: 329).

<sup>645</sup> Even temples such as the Jagannath Temple in Puri known as an orthodox temple, not allowing any non-Hindu to enter, customise certain practices, as Scheifinger discusses now one can have *darshan* online (Scheifinger, 2009b).

<sup>646</sup> Compare with what has been discussed in the two previous chapters.

<sup>647</sup> Srinivas grounds this statement on an interview-based survey conducted among residents of Bangalore (Srinivas, 2006: 327-328).

<sup>648</sup> The case of BAPS arguably opposes Srinivas' findings. Swaminarayan's followers worship only one deity and go exclusively to BAPS' temples. See Shah, 2006: 213. According to BAPS, this is not only the case at Akshardham but all of its sites; see [www.baps.org/Global-Network.aspx](http://www.baps.org/Global-Network.aspx)

<sup>649</sup> Also, unlike in other temples, *prasad* is given based on the amount of money donated.

commodities.<sup>650</sup> Why should people choose to go to Akshardham and not to the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, the Uttara Swaminatha Malai Mandir, the Jama Masjid, the Red Fort, CP, Ambience Mall, a bar, a restaurant, *etc.*? According to the principles of the free market economy, especially when the market is flooded with offers, one has to study the market and people’s desires/needs, and eventually learn how to sell oneself (Srinivas, 2006: 328). In an interview with Srinivas, Ghani Shastry emphasises: “We must do this. Otherwise, they will all go to other temples. Or there will not be any temples at all. Then we will not be able to do anything” (Ghani Shastry in an interview with Srinivas, quoted in Srinivas, 2006: 329). Taking into account what scholars such as Fuller, MacRae and Srinivas have discussed, the religious market follows the same logic as other markets—the greatest spectacle promises considerable attention and thus profit, a race in which one has to constantly try harder to outrun competitors (Fuller, 2001; MacRae, 2004; Srinivas, 2004, 2006; Jain, 2007, 2014, 2016, 2017; Nanda, 2009; Mathur and Singh, 2007; Rajagopalan, 2011; *etc.*). In this race, it seems great trust is being put on superlatives—whatever is latest, strongest, faster, highest, best, *etc.* sells.<sup>651</sup> Why? What are the claims that are associated with this practice?

As of now, Akshardham seems to do fine. Its popularity and power materialise in many different forms. It attracts thousands of visitors daily.<sup>652</sup> In TripAdvisor’s list of *405 Things to Do in Delhi*, Akshardham ranks second after the Gurudwara Bangla Sahib, and according to *Time Out Delhi* “Akshardham has swiftly become a must-see on the tourist circuit” (Time Out, 2010: 200).<sup>653</sup> Besides, it is frequently featured in

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<sup>650</sup> Jain mentions “colourful cars and advertising billboards” (Jain, 2014: 139).

<sup>651</sup> See for example Lutgendorf, 1994, 2007; MacRae, 2004: 229; Srinivas, 2004, 2006; Bhatia, 2009; Nanda, 2009; Jain, 2014, 2016, 2017; Mathur and Singh, 2007 and Roy, 2016.

<sup>652</sup> As it is the case with regard to other statistics such as number of members, *sadhus*, *etc.*, BAPS does not provide any official statistics about visitors. However, BAPS says that until 2010 “over 20 million pilgrims and visitors from throughout the whole of India and over 130 countries have been inspired by their experience at Akshardham” (BAPS, 2010a: 6). According to Singh, in its first two years it has been visited by six million people (Singh, 2010: 47). On a weekday, it attracts approximately two thousand people while on weekend-days the number of people can go up to five thousand and even more, as Brosius says (Brosius, 2010: 163). However, it is likely that the numbers have gone up since then. ACC is often imagined as a site of/for the urban middle class, non-resident Indians and non Indians (Srivastava, 2009; Nandy, 2010; *etc.*). According to Brosius, this is not the case (Brosius, 2010: 163). According to her, ACC is increasingly visited by people from abroad but more so by Indians, many among the visitors come from Delhi itself, from all religious and class backgrounds (Brosius, 2010: 161, 163-166).

<sup>653</sup> In July 2012, out of 387 registered users, 272 rated Akshardham as “excellent”—Akshardham ranked first amongst on TripAdvisor’s list of *Things to Do in Delhi* (Hartig, 2012: 96). However,

local, national and international media and continues to be looked at by scholars across different fields.<sup>654</sup> On October 5, 2007, Joydeep Ray reported for NDTV that the Chinese government invited BAPS to build a “replica” in China.<sup>655</sup> While this project has not been executed various people in different parts of India have made *pandals* on the occasion of Durga Puja, Ganapati Utsav, *etc.*, modelled on Akshardham, as reported by newspapers; this has amplified its hold on the public imagination.<sup>656</sup> One of the most spectacular (re-)constructions to date has been a marriage *mandapa* for Ajay Krishnan Prakash, son of Kerala’s former minister Adoor Prakash (Philip, 2016).<sup>657</sup> If Srinivas’s theory that even small changes will lead to “large-scale structural changes in the Hindu religion” holds, then there can be little doubt that Akshardham will affect perception and experience of (religious) architecture as well as behaviour and practices (Srinivas, 2006: 343). Then, BAPS’

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on January 21, 2017, Akshardham is outranked by the Gurudwara Bangla Sahib. Out of 6,850 reviews 4,886 rate Akshardham as “excellent,” 1,406 as “very good,” 352 as “average,” 115 as “poor” and 91 as “terrible” ([www.tripadvisor.in/Attraction\\_Review-g304551-d626913-Reviews-Swaminarayan\\_Akshardham-New\\_Delhi\\_National\\_Capital\\_Territory\\_of\\_Delhi.html](http://www.tripadvisor.in/Attraction_Review-g304551-d626913-Reviews-Swaminarayan_Akshardham-New_Delhi_National_Capital_Territory_of_Delhi.html)).

<sup>654</sup> Mathur and Singh’s article seems to be the first reading of Akshardham that tries to locate Akshardham, as well as few other projects such as the Maitreya Project in Kushinagar, within the framework of the museum (Mathur and Singh, 2007). Singh returns to Akshardham to explore its “meanings—as architecture and as idea,” as she says (Singh, 2010: 47). She elaborates on the idea of Akshardham as a museum and place to create a Hindu nationalist narrative. Similarly, Jain adduces Akshardham to discuss the use of architecture as means to spread a Hindu nationalist ideology particularly with reference to Gujarat (Jain, 2009). In comparison with the construction of replicas of national pilgrimage sites in Gujarat that he reads as “localization of pan-Indian Hinduism in Gujarat,” he reads Delhi’s Akshardham, which he views as “replication of the Akshardham complex of Gujarat,” as “a process of reverse religious mobility—from local to national” (Jain, 2009: 218). In the same year, Srivastava discusses Akshardham with regard to India’s middle class and the issue of urban spaces (Srivastava, 2009: 338). In her book *India’s Middle Class*, Brosius dedicates an entire chapter on Akshardham and its creator BAPS from the perspective of a visual anthropologist (Brosius, 2010). Mukerji and Basu are seemingly little concerned about socio-economic, political, cultural and religious issues addressed by other scholars but are rather interested in trying to define/identify its “architectural language” as “Traditional,” “Modern” or “Post-Modern” (Mukerji and Basu, 2015). Similarly, the architect Mehrotra is rather concerned about locating Akshardham in the context of Indian architecture that has been built since 1990 (Mehrotra, 2011: 270-273). According to his reading, Akshardham like Bengaluru’s ISKCON Temple and Auroville’s Matri Mandir, is an example of “Counter Modernism” (Mehrotra, 2011: 307). Kim too has discussed BAPS and its temples in numerous articles, none of which specifically looks at Akshardham (Kim, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, *etc.*). Akshardham has generated and continues to generate many more (scholarly) readings, too many to discuss each and every one of them here in detail.

<sup>655</sup> See the video on <http://m.ndtv.com/video/news/news/china-hankers-after-akshardham-17774>. This news has also been reported by *Hinduism Today* (unknown author, 2007b).

<sup>656</sup> See Guha-Thakurta, 2014: 201; Bhelari, 2010; Nair, 2011; *etc.*

<sup>657</sup> According to newspaper reports, the entrance of the wedding venue in Thiruvananthapuram, resembles the Mysore Palace (Philip, 2016). Not even a month ahead of this mega wedding, G. Janardhana Reddy had set up a 36-acre large venue for the wedding of his daughter on the Bangalore Palace Ground in Bengaluru, “which replicates the ancient city of Hampi” as well “Cowl bazaar, a village in Bellary and the school in which Reddy studied” (Swamy, 2016). The costs for the wedding ran into estimated five hundred crore rupees, as newspapers report (Swamy, 2016).

catchline “[Akshardham] celebrates the past, addresses the present and shapes the future” might be spot on (Vivekjivandas, et al., 2009: 8).<sup>658</sup> Accordingly, talking about Hinduism and the Hindu temple in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, this fascinating *avatar* of the Hindu temple should be studied carefully.

One of the aspects that seemingly distinguish Akshardham from the two examples discussed in the previous chapters is that the temple has been built as an element of a much larger worldwide project. This global presence has been made possible by an organisation that has transformed, over nearly two hundred years, from a small local movement into an UN-recognised NGO that has built nearly thirty-seven grand temples around the world. The chapter will try to interrogate Akshardham and its creator BAPS in terms of a community that invariably seeks to negotiate its identity and position in relation to the regional, national and global contemporary. It will argue that BAPS understands architecture as a means of power to define and represent its identity and ideology both *within* and *outside* the nation. The chapter will seek to address the questions: How does the community define and represent itself *within* and *outside* the nation? And, with the *border-crossing*, in what way can we hold on to the idea of *Indian* Architecture that is identified with a certain *Indianness*? What role does the temple play with regard to the nation and its capital? Besides, it will discuss the interpretations of many scholars and visitors that see in Akshardham the blurring of boundaries particularly with regard to the question whether Akshardham is a temple or not and provide a new reading.

## SWAMINARAYAN AND BAPS

As already mentioned, the driving force behind this ambitious project is an organisation named BAPS, which dedicates itself to supporting the belief in Swaminarayan.<sup>659</sup> Swaminarayan—in whose name Delhi’s Akshardham as well as two more Akshardhams (in Gandhinagar and Robbinsville, New Jersey (USA)) and several hundreds of temples have been built around the world—was born in 1781 in

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<sup>658</sup> According to Singh, Akshardham “may well be the archetype for the Hindu temples to be built in the third millennium” (Singh, 2010: 76)

<sup>659</sup> BAPS defines itself as a “socio-spiritual Hindu organisation with its roots in the Vedas” ([www.swaminarayan.org/introduction/index.htm](http://www.swaminarayan.org/introduction/index.htm)).

Chhapaiya, a village in Uttar Pradesh.<sup>660</sup> After going on a pilgrimage through South Asia, Swaminarayan settled in Gujarat as a disciple of Swami Ramanand; in 1802, he succeeded Ramanand and took the name Sahajanand. Soon some people deified Sahajanand, named him Swaminarayan and built several temples in his name.<sup>661</sup> This expression of devotion translated itself into a temple as early as 1822 in Ahmedabad, followed by the construction of temples in Bhuj (1823, destroyed during an earthquake in 2001, reconstructed and inaugurated in 2010), Vadtal (1824), Dohlera (1826), Junagadh (1828) and Gadhada (1829) (Burgess, 1872: 333; Jones, 2006 [1989]: 127; Kim, 2009: 364 and BAPS, 2014: 162-165). In these initial years, the Swaminarayan *sampradaya* was comparatively small and confined to Gujarat and the Deccan—“[e]lsewhere in India they are unknown”, as Monier-Williams emphasises (Monier-Williams, 1877: 145).<sup>662</sup> However, with waves of migration Swaminarayan’s followers drifted from Gujarat to different corners of the world (Markovits, 1999: 87; Williams, 2001: 197-231; Barot, 2002; Dwyer, 2004: 191-193; Younger, 2010: 208-210, 265-266; *etc.*).<sup>663</sup> Whereas some among the migrants, for example Shiv Narain Birla and his family, stayed within the boundaries of the India subcontinent that is within comparative proximity of their homelands, others crossed seas and lands

<sup>660</sup> Sahajanand’s life is a leading theme of the Swaminarayan *sampradaya* and as such repeatedly narrated for example in the movie *Mystic India*, which is screened at ACC’s Neelkanth Darshan continuously throughout the day. On Swaminarayan’s life see for example Williams and Jones (Williams, 2001: 13-32; Jones, 2006 [1989]: 125-126; *etc.*). According to Schreiner, the “SSJ [*Satsaṅgijīvanam*] is one of the oldest and most authentic sources on the life and person of Swami Sahajānanda [...] written during the lifetime of Sahajānada from 1814 onwards” (Schreiner, 2001: 156). Yet, as Schreiner adds, “it would be false to consider the SSJ as primarily historical document; on the other hand, there can be little doubt that the author had a sense of historical reality” (Schreiner, 2001: 157). According to Williams, “it is impossible to construct from the [existing] materials a biography in the modern sense” (Williams, 2001: 12). The construction of Akshardham in Gandhinagar was followed by the construction of Akshardham in Delhi that opened in 2005 and the construction of Akshardham in Robbinsville, New Jersey, its completion is still awaited. According to BAPS’ website, on October 15, 2016, Padmashila Pujan and Sthapan were performed by one of the senior Swamis ([www.baps.org/News/2016/Akshardham-Groundfloor-Padmashila-Pujan-Ceremony-10406.aspx](http://www.baps.org/News/2016/Akshardham-Groundfloor-Padmashila-Pujan-Ceremony-10406.aspx)).

<sup>661</sup> To date, all of these temples are seemingly looked after by the Swaminarayan Sampradaya. According to his followers, Sahajanand himself helped to build the early temples, as Dwyer says (Dwyer, 2004: 190).

<sup>662</sup> Heber, who met Sahajanand on March 26, 1825, mentions that Sahajanand was escorted by two hundred armed horsemen (Heber, 1856: 108). Only a few years later, Burgess says that “about 500,000 head of families hold his [Swaminarayan’s] tenets” (Burgess, 1872: 336). According to Monier-Williams’ account published in 1877, around 200,000 people had joined the movement (Monier-Williams, 1877: 145). More than a hundred years later, Williams, however, says that “[t]he attempt to estimate the number of followers of the movement, both then and now, is surrounded with great difficulty [...]” (Williams, 2001: 20).

<sup>663</sup> According to Markovits, Gujarat and Tamil Nadu are regions from where the largest number of merchants migrated (Markovits, 1999: 87). Towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, the pace of migration picked up as people were looking for a better life (Williams, 2001: 200-203; Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 4-6; Markovits, 1999: 89-90; *etc.*).



looking for a future far away from home (Williams, 2001: 202-204; Barot, 2002: 199; *etc.*). Many Gujaratis—among them also Swaminarayan’s followers—moved to East Africa (Williams, 2001: 201-205; Barot, 2002: 198-199, 202-205; Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 6; Dwyer, 2004: 191-193; Younger, 2010: 199-230, 265-266; *etc.*). However, with the end of the Second World War, India’s Independence/Partition, Britain’s post-war economic boom and Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and other African countries becoming independent states, many of the Indians who had settled in East Africa shifted to the UK and the USA (Williams, 1984, 183-184, 2001: 197-231; Knott, 2000; Eck, 2000; Barot, 2002: 203; Kurien, 2007: 105; Nussbaum, 2008: 304-305; Younger, 2010: 219; Kim, 2016: 52; *etc.*).<sup>664</sup> Williams estimated that, at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there are around five million followers of Swaminarayan in the world, of which approximately one and half a million people follow BAPS (Williams, 2001: 68).<sup>665</sup> Swaminarayan’s followers and temples dedicated to Swaminarayan are scattered around the world and can be found in countries as distant as Australia, Canada, Fiji, Mauritius, Pakistan, Tanzania, Thailand, Uganda, Oman, Sweden, the UK and the USA.<sup>666</sup>

It seems as if this process of migration has been looked upon with mixed feelings by BAPS and its followers; on the one hand, migration might well improve not only an individual’s but the community’s socio-economic conditions, but on the other hand, it might be detrimental to the community. Those members of the

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<sup>664</sup> According to Williams and Younger, the situation for Indians in East Africa became increasingly difficult (Williams, 2001: 211-215; Younger, 2010: 218-220). By the 1980s, half of the 366,000 Asians in East Africa had left the continent (Younger, 2010: 219). According to Williams, “[i]n 1945 there were only about 7,000 Asian residents in the UK, but the next fifteen years saw a dramatic increase” (Williams, 2001: 215). According to Kim, by the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, BAPS has approximately forty thousand followers in America and thirty thousand in Britain (Kim, 2010: 209).

<sup>665</sup> There are no accurate accounts for the numbers of BAPS’ followers. According to BAPS’ website, BAPS has “a million or more followers” ([www.baps.org/About-BAPS/WhoWeAre.aspx](http://www.baps.org/About-BAPS/WhoWeAre.aspx)). However, as Kurien emphasises, they still make up only a small percentage of Hindus outside India (Kurien, 2007: 101). As, for example, Dwyer points out with regard to the Swaminarayan Mandir in Neasden, the temple and religious activities may also be attended by non-BAPS members (Dwyer, 2004: 180). According to Srinivas, who looks at Hindu temples in Bangalore, unlike it has been believed for long, devotees do not only go to temples according to their traditional caste affiliation but decide to go to a temple “mainly on the basis of what they had heard about their deities and the efficacy of the prayers offered there [...] combined with the look and the feel of the temple” (Srinivas, 2006: 328).

<sup>666</sup> See for example BAPS’ website ([www.baps.org/Global-Network.aspx](http://www.baps.org/Global-Network.aspx)). See Srivastava, 2009: 339. As William mentions there are also Swaminarayan temples built by independent communities (Williams, 2001: 229-230).

community that left the homeland are expected to do well—as has been the case with the Gujarati migrants—and consequently, support the community at home.<sup>667</sup> At the same time, those members living away from the community and even more so their children and grandchildren born and raised away from their (ancestors), homeland are considered highly susceptible to the culture of the Other (Brahmviharidas, 1996: 204; Williams, 2001: 209-210, 226-227; Barot, 2002: 209; *etc.*).<sup>668</sup> Putting it differently, the community seems to fear that members slowly estrange and detach, which is considered a threat to the community's existence and survival.<sup>669</sup> However, although the risk of losing members in this migratory context is perhaps higher, the loss of members concerns any community, as discussed in earlier chapters as well, and it centres on the question: How to ensure survival of a community? Then as now, the answer seems to be linked to the questions how well can the community generate/create/build its image/identity as a cohesive whole, over time and distances and what could be the singular and enduring idea that unites all members?<sup>670</sup>

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<sup>667</sup> Many scholars link BAPS' growth with the economic success of its members abroad. According to Williams and Barot, for instance, many of the families who are settled abroad did well enough to play a significant role for India's economy (Williams, 2001: 210, 225; Barot, 2002: 205-208). Williams emphasises that "[t]he major source of income for some villages [...] is the foreign exchange sent home by husbands, fathers, or sons" (Williams, 2001: 210). According to Dwyer, the remittances that were sent to Gujarat from East Africa contributed to the *sampradaya's* growing status within Gujarat (Dwyer, 2004: 193). As Kurien mentions, when a temple should be built, money for its construction is collected from BAPS' members around the world (Kurien, 2007: 103).

<sup>668</sup> According to Eck, there is a point when migrant families realise "that their children would have no cultural or religious roots at all unless they began to plant the seeds" (Eck, 2000: 220). Similarly, according to Williams, young people "experience some alienation from their Gujarati roots" and "[t]he recurring requests that Pramukh Swami visit often and that he permit *sadhus* to reside abroad [...] are parental cries for help in instructing and inspiring their children" (Williams, 1998: 856, 857). See also Kim, 2007: 63. In BAPS' publication, *Hindu Rites and Rituals*, Mukundcharandas describes the diasporic youth as suffering from obesity, inferiority complexes and cultural identity crises as well as ignorant of their cultural roots and rejecting their Indian identity (Mukundcharandas, 2010 [2007]: 30a-39a). He tries to address these assumed issues in his book presenting BAPS' ideology as the ultimate solution. Swami Vivekjiandas discusses the difficulties growing up in the UK and becoming a BAPS *sadhu* (Vivekjiandas, 1996).

<sup>669</sup> Williams says that BAPS "is formed on a regional-linguistic basis" (Williams, 1998: 847). Compare also with Dwyer, 2004: 196-197. Williams too emphasises that many of the youngsters do not know Gujarati, which becomes problematic in case they want to become *sadhus* (Williams, 1998: 846, 852, 2001: 226-227). See also Brahmviharidas, 1996. Creating and maintaining the notion of community/unity among the followers which today come from diverse backgrounds—from an American metropolis to a remote Indian village—seems one of the biggest challenges that BAPS faces, as Williams says (Williams, 1998: 847). Compare also with what has been discussed in the previous chapter in the context of Tamils in Delhi (Subramaniam, 1996: 669).

<sup>670</sup> According to Williams, BAPS paid and continues to pay great attention to stay in touch with those abroad (Williams, 1998: 845, 2001: 205-206, 231, *etc.*). Barot discusses that in the recent past, religious organisations organise trips to their headquarters, towns and villages in Gujarat "like Hindu pilgrimages to sacred places" (Barot, 2002: 207-208). It is common for BAPS' followers to travel across national borders to meet and help other BAPS' communities (Kurien, 2007: 103-104; Hartig, 2012: 42; *etc.*). According to Kurien, this feeling of belonging allows followers around the

According to Williams, communication between those in Gujarat and those abroad was and still is frequent (Williams, 2001: 205-206, 231). But to what extent? How can the seemingly growing linguistic, cultural, intellectual, financial, socio-economic and political gap be bridged?<sup>671</sup> As discussed in the third chapter, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Shradhdhananda, Savarkar, the Birla family and other people had put high hopes on the temple as a space that would unite *Hindus*. But, is building a temple enough to unite a community? For BAPS, the strongest and most modern line of response has been through educating its followers about the tenets of the faith. BAPS seems convinced that the issue is a question of *understanding*, which is imagined as closely linked to education, since understanding is supposed to be generated by education.<sup>672</sup> As will be discussed in detail below, when Pramukh Swami overtook the leadership of BAPS, he specifically looked into the issue of teaching also with regard to the temple.

Many scholars highlight BAPS' emphasis on Gujarati identity and at the same time describe BAPS as "transnational," "cosmopolitan," "deterritorialized," "global," *etc.* (Williams, 2001; Van der Veer, 2002: 182; Dwyer, 2004: 181; Kurien, 2007: 103; Kim, 2007: 63, 2016; Brosius, 2010: 144; Singh, 2010: 76; Brahmhatt, 2014: 99; *etc.*). How is that possible? Dwyer, for instance, says that this identity is "associated with language and religion [...], but not with a nation or a geographical region" (Dwyer, 2004: 196).<sup>673</sup> Is this not a contradiction? How can a community hold on to a

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world "to take pride" in temples around the world (Kurien, 2007: 104). As reported by *Swaminarayan Bliss*, for the Commonwealth Games in Delhi, the "permanent staff" of 850 people was joined by twenty-four from India and additional forty-seven volunteers from countries such as the UK, the USA, South Africa, and Botswana (BAPS, 2010b: 16-17). Shukla describes similar practice with regard to unclear BAPS organised Cultural Festival of India that took place in 1991 in Edison, Unites States (Shukla, 1997: 307-308). Brosius, for instance, highlights the case of an industrialist from Nairobi who settled with his family in Delhi after being called on by Pramukh Swami for *seva* at Akshardham (Brosius, 2010: 161-162). In some, mobility seems to be a great concern within the community. For more examples see also Williams, 2001: 177, 231, Kurien, 2007: 103-104 and Kim, 2008: 237.

<sup>671</sup> Compare with Brahmviharidas, 1996: 202-203.

<sup>672</sup> The need for education to be in the hands of Indians has been emphasised, for instance, by Coomaraswamy (Coomaraswamy, 1909b: iii). Compare with third chapter. BAPS' Swami Mukundcharandas explains that "[...] understanding rituals makes them more meaningful, helps clarify misconceptions, increases respect for Sanātan Dharma and inspires them [the younger generation] to imbibe these rituals in their own lives. It also increases their pride in belonging to the most ancient tradition in the world. It even helps them to tolerate insults" (Mukundcharandas, 2010 [2007]: 30a).

<sup>673</sup> Thus, according to Dwyer "[t]his Gujarati identity can be incorporated into national identities, so it is possible to be a British Gujarati, and Indian Gujarati, etc." (Dwyer, 2004: 196).

specific local identity and be transnational, cosmopolitan, deterritorialised and global at the same time? How is a geographic location linked with a certain culture? Schreiner emphasises that Sahajanand “is a focal point for the identity of the movement” (Schreiner, 2001: 155).<sup>674</sup> The belief that Sahajanand is the supreme ontological entity with none above him correlates with accepting him as absolute and ultimate authority—his word is truth and must be followed. The *Shikshapatri*, which was written by Sahajanand in 1826 and is one of the central texts for BAPS’ followers, holds 212 verses containing regulations expected to be followed by each and every member of the community.<sup>675</sup> According to Hardiman, the *Shikshapatri* has been “written as it was at the dawn of the capitalist age in Indian history, yet revealing a clear grasp of essential bourgeois values” (Hardiman, 1988: 1908). Also, Schreiner emphasises that the belief in Swaminarayan came about not naturally but was institutionalised (Schreiner, 2001). Similar to other religious movements/organisations that had been established in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, BAPS has adopted many features of modern institutions.<sup>676</sup> Also, it has not gone unnoticed by scholars that Swaminarayan, as well as BAPS’ *gurus*, seemingly understand the significance of keeping close ties to those in power—political, economic and intellectual.<sup>677</sup>

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<sup>674</sup> According to Williams, “virtually all followers are Gujaratis” (Williams, 1998: 847, 2001: 230; Kim, 2016: 53). See also Schreiner, 2001: 155 and Dwyer, 2004: 180. The majority of BAPS’ followers were born into the community and no substantial efforts have been undertaken to foster conversion, as scholars explain. See Williams, 1984: 82, 202; Llewellyn, 2004: 238; Nussbaum, 2008: 324; *etc.* It has been emphasised that conversion, though possible, is generally unattractive for non-Gujaratis and not fostered by BAPS (Williams, 1984: 202; Llewellyn, 2004: 238). At the same time, Williams mentions that in the 1990s some people from other Indian ethnic groups also joined BAPS (Williams, 2001: 225). According to Williams, until 1984 there was only one Western convert in the Sanstha (Williams, 1984: 202). On the question of intermarriage see Ternikar, 2005.

<sup>675</sup> Other important texts associated with Sahajanand are *Vachanamrut* and *Satsangijivan*. See Williams, 2001: 184-196; Schreiner, 2001; Dwyer, 2004: 187-188; *etc.* Besides commanding its reader on moral and ethical issues (forbidding to kill, steal, bribe, *etc.* and instructing to follow the *guru*, work hard, *etc.*), it also commands its reader on career-related issues (“[o]ne should engage in an appropriate business or [p]rofession, according to one’s means and abilities,” *etc.*) as well as on finance related issues (“[o]nly spend in accordance with one’s income,” *etc.*) (BAPS, 2010 [2002]: 9, 11-12). *Sadhus* must follow an additional set of rules (Williams, 2001: 149-158).

<sup>676</sup> Compare for instance with Jones, 2006 [1989]: 1-4.

<sup>677</sup> According to various scholars such as Hardiman, Jones and Kim, Swaminarayan attempted to maintain good relations with those in power, an approach that has been continued until date (Hardiman, 1988: 1909; Williams, 2001: 210, 212-213; Jones, 2006 [1989]: 126; Kim, 2007: 77-78; *etc.*). Noticeably, BAPS invites leading international politicians to visit its temples, which become iconographic cornerstones in BAPS’ narrative. Many people suspect that BAPS has associations with “*diasporic* nationalism,” Hindu nationalism, Hindu fundamentalism, Hindutva ideology, right wing politics and the BJP. Compare, for example, with Shukla, 1997: 309; Mukta, 2000: 457-462; Jaffrelot, 2003: 19-20; Sengupta, 2005; Kim, 2007: 77; Nussbaum, 2008: 25, 303, 324-329 and Irwin, 2009. However, BAPS is also interested in dialogs with other religious organisations and tries to participate in academic discourse. See for example Brahmviharidas’ and

However, over the years, groups split from the *sampradaya* and established their own organisations (Williams, 2001: 33-68, 229; Barot, 2002: 200-201; *etc.*). BAPS originated in 1905, when its founder *sadhu* Shastriji Maharaj disagreed with the *sampradaya* over the reading of the *Vachanamrut* (Vivekjiandas, 2011 [2010], Vol. II: 198-199; *etc.*).<sup>678</sup> If an ever-increasing number of followers, *sadhus* and temples can be read as one indicator of success, BAPS has been seen as hugely successful as compared to other branches of the Swaminarayan *sampradaya*.<sup>679</sup> Scholars have noted that although a comparatively small organisation, BAPS seems to be one of the most influential Hindu spiritual-religious organisations in the world—it has been referred to as “face of Hinduism”—and is thus a key player when it comes to the definition and representation of Hinduism and India within and outside India (Williams, 2001: 230-231; Dwyer, 2004: 180, 181, 193; Kurien, 2007: 101, 105; Singh, 2010: 76; *etc.*).<sup>680</sup> In fact BAPS is so successful that it not only had the human

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Vivekjiandas’ articles published in Williams’ *A Sacred Thread: Modern Transmission of Hindu Traditions in India and Abroad* (Brahmviharidas, 1996; Vivekjiandas, 1996). Besides, some of BAPS’ followers participated in a series of seminars examining the “public representation of a religion called Hinduism,” as Reddy and Zavos mention (Reddy and Zavos, 2009: 242-244). Besides, BAPS tries to make their publications look scholarly using academic methods—some of its publications refer to scholars such as Acharya, Brown, Flood, Kramrisch, Hardy and Michell. See for example Mukundcharandas, 2010 [2007]: 3-5, 442-450 and Vivekjiandas, 2011 [2010]; Vol. I: 179, 230, 363. It would be worth exploring this aspect further, for example studying the role of scholars and academia with regard to religion and religious practices at large and BAPS in particular.

<sup>678</sup> See also Williams, 2001: 54-55; Kim, 2009: 363-367; Dave, 2012 [1985]: 62-63; *etc.* According to BAPS, Purushottam (also referred to as Parmeshwar, Paramatma, Bhagwan, *etc.*) is the ultimate form of God while Akshar (also referred to as Aksharbrahm, Parabrahma, Brahman, *etc.*) is the divine abode of God and Purushottam’s ideal devotee. Kim points out that BAPS stresses that Swaminarayan is Purushottam and neither a human nor an *avatar* (Kim, 2009: 362). Akshar is manifested in Gunatitanand Swami (1785-1867), a close associate of Swaminarayan and first in the line of succession of the *guruparampara* (Mukundcharandas, 2004: 162-164; Vivekjiandas, 2011 [2010], Vol.II: 203-204). Aksharbrahman manifests only once at a time, always in the form of a celibate man (Williams, 2001: 88, 94). The other *gurus* in the *guruparampara* are: (2) Bhagat Maharaj (1829-1897), (3) Shastriji Maharaj (1865-1951), (4) Yogiji Maharaj (1892-1971), (5) Pramukh Swami (1921-2016) and (6) Mahant Swami Maharaj (1933). For more details on BAPS’ philosophical framework see, for example, Mukundcharandas, 2010 [2007] and Vivekjiandas, 2011 [2010]. Dwyer provides a detailed explanation of BAPS’ philosophy within the larger framework of Indian philosophy (Dwyer, 2004: 183-186). According to its philosophy, unlike in other temples dedicated to Swaminarayan, in BAPS’ temples Swaminarayan and Gunatitanand Swami are worshipped side by side. Moreover, *murtis* of the *gurus* have been installed in all of BAPS’ temples and Akshardham.

<sup>679</sup> Among the many Hindu organisations in the world, BAPS seems to be the fastest-growing and most influential (Williams, 1998: 842, 2001: 229-230; Kurien, 2007: 51; Mathur and Singh, 2007: 155; Singh, 2010: 48; *etc.*).

<sup>680</sup> It is not surprising that Kurien says, it is one of the most studied groups within American Hinduism (Kurien, 2007: 101). Already during his lifetime Sahajanand understood it to attract attention not only from followers but those in power, which includes intellectuals. In March, 1825,

and financial means but also the political backing to build “one of the largest temples in the world” as the posters in Delhi declare—nearly the size of the smallest state in the world, the Vatican—in the middle of India’s capital.

BAPS’ success seemingly overthrows the popular modern Western notion that modernity, secularism and capitalism are likely sooner or later to eliminate religion.<sup>681</sup> The idea that people want to be part of a community controlled by strict rules and regulations under an authoritarian leader arguably affronts ideals of the modern world, which is to follow ideals such as equality and freedom of the individual.<sup>682</sup> BAPS seems highly aware of ongoing discourses and makes full use of human resources, always with the focus on its survival and growth. Fostering identification, social cohesion and conformity amongst its followers, it replies to questions of human existence and offers an alternative model of living. The increasing number of members demonstrates that BAPS understands how to address, engage and satisfy its

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Sahajanand met for example Bishop Heber, who provides a detail description of this meeting in his travel journal (Heber, 1856: 108-111). Also, scholars such as Burgess and Monier-Williams were keen to study Sahajanand and the movement that unfolded around him (Burgess, 1872; Monier-Williams, 1877: 145-146, 1882). These early accounts speak highly of Sahajanand. Monier-Williams, for example, calls him a “remarkable man” and describes him as determined to cleanse the Vaishnava faith of impurities and corruption (Monier-Williams, 1882: 309; Glasenapp, 1922: 389). Various other scholars have studied the movement since then. Williams’ *A New Face of Hinduism* and *An Introduction to Swaminarayan Hinduism*, however, have been widely accepted as authoritative references especially on BAPS. Since the inauguration of the Swaminarayan Mandir in London, Akshardham in Gandhinagar and in Delhi, the movement or, to be more precise, BAPS has managed to attract even more attention from scholars, especially among those working in the field of art/architecture and (popular) culture. Among these scholars, who worked on BAPS, are for example Kim, Zavos, Brosius, Singh, Reifenrath, Srivastava, Jain, Nussbaum, Kurien, Irwin, Jones, Schreiner, Barot, Brahmhatt, Dwyer and Hardiman. For a selection of their publications see bibliography.

<sup>681</sup> This theory has been discussed focusing on the power of the church, for example, by Wilson and Luckmann (Wilson, 1966; Luckmann, 1967). See also Srinivas, 2006: 325. In the 1970s, Clothey too wonders about the future of Subramanya in the context of modernity, secularism and technology (Clothey, 1969, 1972).

<sup>682</sup> While some of the precepts, such as non-violence, might even be viewed as conforming to modern moral, ethical and humanitarian values and life-style, other precepts, such as prohibition of pre-marital, extra-marital and homosexual sex, might be viewed contrary to contemporary thinking. According to BAPS’ rules, *sadhus* must avoid any form of interaction with women (touching, talking, looking at, *etc.*) (BAPS, 2010 [2002]: 21-26; Williams, 2001: 150; *etc.*). Williams describes that “[w]hen ascetics enter a room recently occupied by a woman, they purify the area by sprinkling water over the floor” (Williams, 2001: 152). On the conceptualisation of purity/pollution see third chapter. This practice is closely linked to the question of purity that has been discussed in previous chapters. In a world that thinks of itself as emancipated and tries to advocate gender equality, some of BAPS’ rules such as gender segregation might be read as unacceptable, sexist, discriminatory, offensive, *etc.* While progressive with regard to the use of up-to-the-market technology, BAPS’ stand with regard to these issues seems rather reactionary. On the role of women in BAPS see for example Williams, 2001: 150-153, 165-169; Rudert, 2004; Seth, 2007; BAPS, 2010 [2002]: 18-19; Reifenrath, 2010 and Pandya, 2016: 3-4.

target audience in today's context.

What is it that distinguishes BAPS not only from other Swaminarayan organisations but also from organisations such as Arya Samaj, Ramakrishna Mission, ISKCON, *etc.*? What is the secret of BAPS' success? According to Williams, BAPS' success is directly linked with Pramukh Swami becoming BAPS' president in 1971 (Williams, 1998: 845, 2001: 60-61; Kim, 2016: 53). Since his installation, Pramukh Swami, who passed away on August 13, 2016, had seemingly tried to modernise BAPS, trying to improve BAPS' productivity and efficiency in particular through the means of education/training to ensure the community's survival.<sup>683</sup> Perhaps comparable to autocracy, BAPS has a centralised administrative structure that is under the control of one absolute authority.<sup>684</sup> BAPS has adjusted its own discourse, placing it historically, culturally, aesthetically and politically in a larger (global) context, which speaks of a good understanding and sensibility for socio-economic, political, cultural and religious contexts, of its own and the other.<sup>685</sup> Besides, it has welcomed technological innovations and tried to make use of them to support its course.<sup>686</sup> It seemingly tries to portray/market (Swaminarayan) Hinduism to both in- and out-siders as an attractive, approachable and appealing religion with great success. BAPS gives Hinduism a face and makes it 'acceptable' in a larger discourse.<sup>687</sup> These practices are embedded in modernist ideas, definitions, images and discourses on what religion is, how religion should be and how religious organisations should present themselves. In short, BAPS has found a way not only of theorising and speaking about itself, its faith and ideology for its followers, but also to communicate to a diverse audience to ensure the survival of the community.<sup>688</sup> In this context, the temple plays a significant role that will be discussed in detail below.

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<sup>683</sup> Williams discusses Pramukh Swami's reforms with regard to training/education (Williams, 1998). Compare also with Mines and Gourishankar's discussion of leadership and individuality in the context of Jayendra Saraswati (Mines and Gourishankar, 1990).

<sup>684</sup> As Jones discusses, many of the religious movements/groups that were established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century have modern institutional structures (Jones, 2006 [1989]: 1-4). See also first chapter.

<sup>685</sup> Building religious architecture within different religious and cultural (non-Hindu) contexts is a challenging task that requires thorough understanding of the context.

<sup>686</sup> As mentioned in the third chapter, printing was an important technology for the organisations that came up at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Glaserapp, 1922: 408-409; Jones, 2006 [1989]: 1, 213-214). To date, the internet and other digital means have become important means of communication, also in the religious sphere. See Scheifinger's publications listed in the bibliography.

<sup>687</sup> Kim mentions BAPS' followers show an interest in explaining their religion to out-siders (Kim, 2007: 65).

<sup>688</sup> BAPS seems to invest great efforts into publication of books seemingly addressing different readership such as children, Gujarati readers, English readers, *etc.*

Similar to Thomas Babington Macaulay, Madan Mohan Malaviya and the Birla family, BAPS seems to believe in the power of education especially in the context of creating an identity and notion of sameness among its followers. Pramukh Swami paid great attention attempting to reform the traditional *guru-shishya* system into a system that is more efficient, timely and effective.<sup>689</sup> *Sadhus* are BAPS' spiritual as well as administrative backbone that are also responsible for mobilising people—presumably the better *sadhus* are trained, the better they can perform their duties (Williams, 2001: 62; Reifenrath, 2010: 98).<sup>690</sup> In Pramukh Swami's system, students are, as Williams and Reifenrath discuss, trained according to their interests and abilities as well as according to BAPS' requirements (Williams, 1998: 848, 853; Reifenrath, 2010: 98-101).<sup>691</sup> BAPS, however, seems not only interested in well-educated and trained *sadhus* but also *satsangis* and supports their education, for example, through publishing books, establishing schools, providing scholarships, organising seminars for parents and teachers, *etc.*<sup>692</sup> If it holds true for the *sadhus* that the better they are trained, the more efficient and effective they are, the same might hold for *satsangis*. Mainly owing to this system, BAPS has today an army of experts and specialist enabling the organisation to execute the construction of temples around the world as well as mammoth projects such as the building of Akshardham in the capital of India's capital Delhi in a speed that stands without comparison.<sup>693</sup> Besides, BAPS runs many other programmes many of them health-related seemingly trying to support the well-being of its followers—in a similar way in which the ideal modern state should. Although just compared with organisms such as the state, what

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<sup>689</sup> According to the *guru-shishya* system, students follow their *guru* anywhere. However, as Williams explains, this proved to be logistically difficult with an increasing number of students (Williams, 1998: 845). More students means more *sadhus* in future that can tour villages, build temples, run programs, *etc.* (Williams, 1998: 843). According to Williams, “[e]xpansion of the sadhu corps and institutional growth are symbiotic” (Williams, 1998: 842).

<sup>690</sup> According to Williams, they play a significant role in maintaining the community's “unity” across generations (Williams, 1998: 856).

<sup>691</sup> For instance, a student interested in cooking will be trained in the field of cooking to help with the preparation of food in the temple and events (Williams, 1998: 853). Williams emphasises that BAPS pays more and more attention to give *sadhus* a “transcultural” training (Williams, 1998: 857).

<sup>692</sup> Also, BAPS encourages followers to graduate accepting “only university graduates over 21” into the order (Srivastava, 2009: 339). Similar to *sadhus*, Pramukh Swami appoints (well-trained) *satsangis* according to their skills and interests (Reifenrath, 2010: 97). Positions, also those on voluntary basis (*seva*), are appointed by Pramukh Swami only after a long selection procedure (BAPS, 2010b: 16-17).

<sup>693</sup> The construction of ACC was completed within five years; it took the Sree Saminatha Swami Seva Samaj eight years to construct the much smaller Swaminatha Swami Mandir.



distinguishes religious organisations such as BAPS from these institutions is that they usually do not have defined territories—the Roman Catholic Church being an exception.

An interview with Williams, Pramukh Swami, however, states that one of the reasons for BAPS' rapid growth "is the success of the mega-festivals" (Pramukh Swami in an interview with Williams, quoted in Williams, 2001: 177).<sup>694</sup> BAPS has arranged such festivals in India and abroad attracting hundreds of thousands of people (Brahmviharidas, 1996; Shukla, 1997; Williams, 2001: 176-181; Kurien, 2007: 104).<sup>695</sup> As discussed in the third chapter with reference to the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, festivals, as well as other forms of spectacle, might be understood as institutions trying to not only educate but also mobilise people, also because it is understood as a space in which social barriers, such as caste, are seemingly overcome.<sup>696</sup> This also seems to hold with regard to the festivals organised by BAPS. According to Shukla, "the festival 'welcomed' and pretended to include everybody" (Shukla, 1997: 299).<sup>697</sup> As Williams explains, the festivals attract new followers, and especially abroad many people get in personal touch with Hinduism for the first time (Williams, 2001: 177-178). In other words, BAPS' festivals are essential elements in a larger machinery, attempting to create a larger discourse that will be discussed in more detail below taking the example of Akshardham. According to Williams, it "was primarily religious, and the basic purpose was to transmit the message of the religion" (Williams, 2001: 178).<sup>698</sup> About the question of the conceptualisation of the contemporary Hindu temple, it might be noticed that architecture and the Hindu temple seem to play a significant role in these festivals. For the Cultural Festival of India in 1991 in Edison, New Jersey, BAPS put four *mandirs*, gardens, fountains and

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<sup>694</sup> Pramukh Swami might be correct in holding these festivals responsible for its success, however, without an efficient organisation that includes an army of well-trained followers—twenty-two thousand BAPS volunteers helped to set up a festival in Mumbai for over eight million people—it would not be possible to put up such an events (Williams, 2001: 176-181). Compare also with the festivals that Art of Living has been organising.

<sup>695</sup> According to Williams, a festival that has been organised in honour of Pramukh Swami's seventy-fifth birthday in Mumbai was attended by over eight million people (Williams, 2001: 179).

<sup>696</sup> See third chapter. Compare also with what Brahmviharidas, Williams and Kurien say with regard to festivals and BAPS (Brahmviharidas, 1996: 202; Williams, 2001: 176-181; Kurien, 2007: 104). See also Jain, 2017: S15-S16. This idea will be discussed in more detail below.

<sup>697</sup> Shukla refers to an incident during which a Sikh was led by the police to the exit (Shukla, 1997: 308-309). Compare with Brahmviharidas, 1996: 203.

<sup>698</sup> According to Shukla, a large part of the exhibition was occupied by texts and explanations (Shukla, 1997: 299).

other attractions on display.<sup>699</sup> However, comparing festivals with the temples that have been built, it seems clear that BAPS has shifted its focus, now creating spaces that are permanent.<sup>700</sup> The following section will look at these places more closely.

## BUILDING TEMPLES BEYOND THE NATION?

A fascinating aspect of BAPS is undoubtedly its ability to build temples around the world. That is, it is seemingly growing within different political, socio-economic, cultural and linguistic contexts within and outside India.<sup>701</sup> Similar to the Sree Swaminath Seth Samaj that built Delhi's Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir, BAPS traces back the origin of its communities/temples in locations around the world to the moment when a small group of like-minded people conducts weekly meetings that are followed by the temporary installation of a small structure at some one's home that BAPS names "Centers."<sup>702</sup> What these Centers fall short of regarding size, impressiveness, *etc.*, they seemingly make up for in terms of number; BAPS operates 3,850 such Centres around the world—each of which might develop into a full-fledged temple which seems to have taken an average of thirty to forty years.<sup>703</sup> If

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<sup>699</sup> See for example [www.baps.org/cultureandheritage/ExperienceIndia/FestivalsCelebrated/CulturalFestivalofIndia-Edison,USA1991.aspx](http://www.baps.org/cultureandheritage/ExperienceIndia/FestivalsCelebrated/CulturalFestivalofIndia-Edison,USA1991.aspx). Shukla, who analyses the festival, that came at a cost of thirty five million dollars, with regard to the idea of nation, adds that there were "featured dance and musical performances, educational workshops, shopping displays and a food bazaar [*etc.*]" (Shukla, 1997: 297). See also Brahmviharidas, 1996: 203 and Williams, 2001: 178.

<sup>700</sup> According to BAPS' website, it seems as if the cultural festival in 1991 was the last festival of its kind that BAPS has organised ([www.baps.org/cultureandheritage/ExperienceIndia/FestivalsCelebrated.aspx](http://www.baps.org/cultureandheritage/ExperienceIndia/FestivalsCelebrated.aspx)). At the beginning of the year 2016, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar's Art of Living organised a comparable festival called The World Culture Festival on the banks of the Yamuna river in Delhi leaving people concerned that the festival might be the beginning of another permanent structure on the Yamuna river's ecologically sensitive floodplains ([www.artofliving.org/world-culture-festival](http://www.artofliving.org/world-culture-festival); Roy, 2016; *etc.*). Although there is little space here to discuss the issue in depth it should be mentioned that BAPS has not only focused on the Hindu temple in that it builds temples (these days seemingly without a break) but also on theorising the temple and its meanings in various publications, which is part of a larger understanding/conceptualisation of the temple and the notion that it is possible to say *what each and every detail of the Hindu temple is*. See also below.

<sup>701</sup> As, for example, Schreiner discusses, the temple is a significant aspect of the Swaminarayan sampradaya introduced during Sahajanand's lifetime (Schreiner, 2001: 164-166). Many scholars have discussed BAPS as diasporic community (Barot, 2002; Jae-Sook, 2007; Kim, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2016; Kurien, 2007: 101; Nussbaum, 2008: 322-329; Reifenrath, 2010; Younger, 2010: 208-210, 213-215, 220, 265-266; Brahmabhatt, 2014: 99; *etc.*).

<sup>702</sup> Compare with information given on [www.swaminarayan.org/globalnetwork/center.htm](http://www.swaminarayan.org/globalnetwork/center.htm). In 2010, BAPS speaks of "more than 800 mandirs and 3,300 centres" ([www.baps.org/Global-Network.aspx](http://www.baps.org/Global-Network.aspx)). Six years later it speaks of "more than 1,100 temples and 3,850 centres" around the world—most of them, however, located in BAPS' heartland—Gujarat ([www.baps.org/Global-Network.aspx](http://www.baps.org/Global-Network.aspx)).

<sup>703</sup> See [www.baps.org/Global-Network.aspx](http://www.baps.org/Global-Network.aspx). Compare with the ways in which the construction of the Uttara Swaminath Malai Mandir unfolded. When, by the 1930s, Swaminarayan's followers settled in East Africa they started to hold regular meetings and set up modest places of worship (Williams,

it is the wish of Pramukh Swami, these communities will try to set up a bigger permanent structure (Kurien, 2007: 103). As the case may be, the community might purchase a property (house, warehouse, church, *etc.*) to “convert” it into a temple or build a temple out of cement, concrete and steel.<sup>704</sup> According to BAPS’ typology, these temples are “Hari Mandirs.” A more costly but also more prestigious alternative to the construction of a Hari Mandir is to build a temple of stone featuring a line of three *shikharas*, the central of which higher than the flanking, that BAPS names “Shikharbaddha Mandir” which has been translated into English as “line of *shikharas*.”<sup>705</sup> The number of these Shikharbaddha Mandirs is with thirty-seven

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1998: 846, 2001: 205; Younger, 2010: 215). In 1945, the first temple dedicated to Swaminarayan in East Africa—and the first to be built outside India—was built in Nairobi. It did not contain statues but pictures that were consecrated in India. According to Younger, the most remarkable feature of these first Swaminarayan Mandirs in East Africa is the “heavy and elaborate carved wooden doors” (Younger, 2010: 209). As Younger says, by the 1950s the communities had been able to set up more elaborate temples (Younger, 2010: 215). As discussed above, Indians faced many difficulties in East Africa in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the community seems to have recovered from the backlash—BAPS inaugurated in 1999 a Shikharbaddha Mandir in Nairobi. For more details on the Swaminarayan sampradaya in East Africa see, for instance, Brahmhatt, 2014: 101-102. With the situation in East Africa turning difficult, the majority of families moved to the UK and the US. Unlike Sikhs or Muslims, Hindus had not build temples in the UK until then (Knott, 2000: 91). Around the 1960s, some graduate students and earlier migrants began to have regular meetings and set up small private shrines (Knott, 2000: 91; Williams, 2001: 218 and Barot, 2002: 204). By the early 1980s, the community had sufficient funds to purchase a warehouse in Neasden, which was transformed into a temple (Williams, 2001: 218). Approximately thirty years after the small group of Swaminarayan’s followers started to have regular meetings, in 1995, BAPS inaugurated the largest temple outside India a Shikharbaddha Mandir in Neasden (Mukta, 2000: 457-458; Knott, 2000: 89; Williams, 2001: 217-220; Barot, 2002: 204; Dwyer, 2004: 192-193; Kim, 2008, 2009: 376-377; Zavos, 2009: 886-887; *etc.*). According to Kim, who discusses the temple in her article, the Neasden Mandir attracts five hundred thousand visitors annually (Kim, 2007: 64). Williams dates the beginning of Swaminarayan Hinduism in the US in the 1970s (Williams, 2001: 223). As, for example, Nussbaum explains, before the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 had been passed, it was difficult to immigrate to the US (Nussbaum, 2008: 304-305). See also Eck, 2000: 220; Williams, 2001: 224-225; Kurien, 2007:105-106; *etc.* In 1970, Yogiji Maharaj had asked one of his followers to establish the Swaminarayan *sampradaya* in the US and send some *sadhus* to support him (Williams, 2001: 223; Kurien, 2007: 105). Like it had been the case in East Africa and the UK, inspired by the *sadhus*, in the US too, small groups of people started to regularly gather at someone’s home (Williams, 2001: 223; Kurien, 2007: 105). According to Williams, “[t]he first Swaminarayan temple in the United States was a small shrine installed in the basement of a house in Flushing, New York [...] The first building newly constructed as a temple is next door, where, in August 1977, Pramukh Swami installed the pictorial images [...]” (Williams, 2001: 227). The first Shikharbaddha Mandir in the US was inaugurated in Chicago in 2004.

<sup>704</sup> According to BAPS’ website, in 2016, there are around four hundred Hari Mandirs worldwide. For more details see [www.swaminarayan.org/globalnetwork/harimandir.htm](http://www.swaminarayan.org/globalnetwork/harimandir.htm). Because of dropping numbers of members and lacking means, many churches in Europe are used for different purposes (gallery, shop, yoga centre, *etc.*). In 1982, a synagogue in Preston was transformed into a Hari Mandir. Also other communities have been following this practice. See, for example, the Highgate Hill Murugan Mandir in London that Waghorne and Reddington discuss (Waghorne, 2004: 196-203; Reddington, 2014).

<sup>705</sup> Over the years, the construction of Shikharbaddha Mandirs has increased its pace. Lately, BAPS inaugurated a Shikharbaddha Mandir almost annually and in some years, such as in 2014, several. See [www.baps.org/Global-Network.aspx](http://www.baps.org/Global-Network.aspx) and for BAPS’ definition of a Shikharbaddha Mandir.

which is much smaller than that of the Centers; however, they compensate for it with their impressive and grand design.<sup>706</sup>

Compared with the temples built by the Birlas, each of which seems to look quite different from the other, the temples built by BAPS look similar to each other.<sup>707</sup> Unlike the temples built by the Birlas that are dedicated to different gods, each and every of BAPS' temples is dedicated to Swaminarayan and houses a fixed set of images that include, for example, an image of Akshar (Gunatitanand Swami) together with Purushottam (Swaminarayan), an image of Swaminarayan as Neelkanth, a sequence of images of BAPS' *gurus* (*guruparampara*) and images of Shiva, Parvati, Vishnu, Lakshmi, Hanuman, Ganesha, *etc.* Contrary to what Srinivas observes with regard to temple worship in Bangalore, it seems for BAPS' followers the sectarian affiliation is most significant (Srinivas, 2006: 327-328).<sup>708</sup> According to Shah, Swaminarayan's followers worship only "one deity and its associates, and they go exclusively to the temple belonging to their own sect" (Shah, 2006: 213). At the same time, as mentioned above, "all" are welcome to come to the temple.

Moreover, the Shikharbaddha Mandirs seem to be lookalikes of each other and

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See also Vivekjivandas, 1996: 192-193; Williams, 2001: 123-124 and Mukundcharandas, 2010 [2007]: 8-9. As explained on this website, there are few other features that distinguish the Shikharbaddha Mandir from the Hari Mandir. At Hari Mandirs as well as at Akshardham Mandir/Monument *arti* is performed twice a day (in the morning and in the evening). At Shikharbaddha Mandirs *arti* is performed five times a day. Moreover, unlike at Hari Mandirs where *sadhus* stay only for few nights, *sadhus* permanently live in Shikharbaddha Mandirs. Also, Shikharbaddha Mandirs house *murtis* made out of metal or marble, while Hari Mandirs house only small *murtis*.

<sup>706</sup> Kurien describes the evolution of the Swaminarayan Mandir in Los Angeles (Kurien, 2007: 106-108). Unlike the Birla family, which does not keep any publicly accessible records or documents of their temples, BAPS not only documents and archives its performance meticulously but also uploads great amount of information and photos accessible online. Until date, Pramukh Swami constructed following Shikharbaddha Mandirs around the world: Mumbai (1983), Mahesana (1994), London (1995), Amalner (1996), Surendranagar (1996), Surat (1996), Navsari (1997), Nadiad (1997/1998), Rajkot (1998), Mahelav (1999), Nairobi (1999), Tithal (1999), Anand (2000), Sankari (2001), Dhokla (2001), Bharuch (2001), Delhi (2003), Houston (2004), Chicago (2004), Jaipur (2005), Junagadh (2006), Bhavnagar (2006), Toronto (2007), Atlanta (2007), Bhadra (2010), Limbdi (2010), Bodeli (2011), Godhra (2011), Los Angeles (2012), Himmatnagar (2013), Silvassa (2013), Nagpur (2013), Robbinsville (2014), Mahuva (2014), Kolkatta (2014), Jamnagar (2014) and Dhari (2015).

<sup>707</sup> Kurien highlights an unusual aspect of BAPS that is the "[t]emple worship is not central to most guru-centered traditions, but it is at the center of the BAPS practice" (Kurien, 2007: 102).

<sup>708</sup> This has been discussed above.

thus arguably connecting themselves to each other.<sup>709</sup> It is here that a certain architectural style seems to be taken as something that *belongs* to the community that cannot be left behind—like language, food, *etc.*<sup>710</sup> Putting it differently, all BAPS’ temples follow the same style, similar to the temples built under great dynasties such as the Chandellas, Chalukyas and Cholas, each had not only its own territory but also a flourishing culture, and regarding art/architecture ‘own’ *style*.<sup>711</sup> As discussed in the first chapter, generations of art historians have relentlessly been defining/identifying/reading/writing art/architecture and thereby emphasising the meaning of style also as marker of identity. As already discussed with reference to the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir, style seems to be understood as a signifier or means of communication that speaks of belonging/not-belonging, like a language that unites/divides one community from the other.<sup>712</sup> BAPS, however, rules no territory in the way ancient kings/dynasties or modern government do. However, style, so it seems, is understood as something that expresses identity. It connects each and every BAPS temple with the others across regional, national and international boundaries.<sup>713</sup>

Similar to some of the Birla Mandirs, such as the Saraswati Mandir in Pilani and the Surya Mandir in Gwalior, these Shikharbaddha Mandirs not only feature *shikharas* but also other architectural elements such as *garbhagraha*, *pradakshina*, *antarala* and *mandapa*, drawing these as essential elements of the Hindu temple identified/defined elements from some masterpieces of the enormous catalogue of Indian architecture.<sup>714</sup> However, the arrangement of the temple seems to be dominated by a powerful sense of order—cleanliness, trimmed bushes, geometrically arranged flower beds, clean walkways and ponds completing the image of an ideal modern/

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<sup>709</sup> This is particularly interesting with reference to Hodges’ theory of architecture and its origin (Hodges, 1787).

<sup>710</sup> It is the same idea that has been discussed by Hodges (Hodges, 1787: 3-4). Compare with first chapter.

<sup>711</sup> The previous chapters have addressed this idea of national architecture and the modern nation. Chatterjee, for example, wanted to introduce a national architecture. Also Nehru was interested in the idea.

<sup>712</sup> Williams, for instance, claims that “all the temples of the Swaminarayan religion contain messages in physical form” (Williams, 2001: 180).

<sup>713</sup> Many BAPS followers travel long distances and even shift their home/work place to participate in BAPS events and projects (Kurien, 2007: 104; Kim, 2008: 236-237; Brosius, 2010: 161-162; Hartig, 2012: 42; *etc.*).

<sup>714</sup> For more details see BAPS’ publication *Mandir: Faith, Form, Function*. As mentioned in the third chapter, Pilani’s Saraswati/Sharada Mandir has been built modelled on the Kanariy Mahadev Mandir as well as on the Vishvanth Mandir in Khajuraho and Nagda’s Sheshayi Mandir on the Sas-Bahu Mandir in Gwalior (Caturvedi, 1982: 9, 62, 108, 125; Kudelska, et al., 2014: 45; *etc.*).

contemporary temple.<sup>715</sup> Although the Shikharbaddha Mandirs are often viewed as “traditional” temples, they hold up to today’s standards powered by green energy and equipped with facilities such as lifts, as BAPS highlights on its websites.<sup>716</sup>

An important feature of BAPS’ Shikharbaddha Mandirs which deserves a closer look is that they are built of stone—sandstone and/or marble.<sup>717</sup> As discussed earlier, great prestige has been associated with the construction of a stone temple and people to date generally seem to favour a temple built from stone over a temple built from materials considered modern such as concrete and steel.<sup>718</sup> Considering the case of Malai Mandir, it seems some communities give great meaning to the location from which the stone for the images as well as the temple has been taken. However, in contrast to other communities, such as the South Indian community that built the Swaminatha Swami Mandir, and which emphasises that the stone has been extracted from their respective homeland, BAPS stresses that the stone used for the construction of their temples has been mined from different countries around the world—limestone from Turkey and Bulgaria, marble from Carrara (Italy), pink sandstone from Rajasthan, *etc.*<sup>719</sup> If the stone from one’s respective homeland is read as its representative then can it here be read as representing these different countries/the world? BAPS only highlights the fact but remains silent on what it thinks it *means*.<sup>720</sup> Instead of emphasising the fact that the material out of which the temple is made comes from locations across the world by giving it some meaning, BAPS explains the meaning of the stones based on their colour: “[P]ink stone is a symbol of bhakti in eternal bloom and white marble that of absolute purity and peace”

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<sup>715</sup> See also Reddy and Zavos’ description of ACC (Reddy and Zavos, 2009: 241). Compare with Bhatia’s description of India’s architecture-scape (Bhatia, 2001, 2012, 2013, *etc.*).

<sup>716</sup> The word “traditional” has been used frequently to describe the Shikharbaddha Mandir. See for example Mukta, 2000: 458; Williams, 2001: ix; Smith, 2002: 32; Barot, 2002: 204; Kim, 2007: 64, 67, 2008: 225-226, 228; Brosius, 2010: 200; *etc.*

<sup>717</sup> The Swaminarayan Mandir in Delhi was built of marble. Several other temples such as the Swaminarayan Mandir in Jaipur, however, were built of sandstone.

<sup>718</sup> Meaning is not only given to form but also to material. With particular regard to concrete see Forty, 2013 [2012]. According to BAPS, stone is “traditional, add comma” while concrete, steel and glass are “modern” (Vivekjivandas, et al., 2009: 25).

<sup>719</sup> See, for example, <http://londonmandir.baps.org/the-mandir/how-it-was-made-in-detail/> and [www.baps.org/Global-Network/North-America/Atlanta/Mandir-Info.aspx](http://www.baps.org/Global-Network/North-America/Atlanta/Mandir-Info.aspx).

<sup>720</sup> On its website, BAPS states: “[t]he Mandir’s journey consists of many continents from the origination of each stone to the craftsmanship of ancient traditions to volunteerism” ([www.baps.org/Global-Network/North-America/Houston/Mandir-Info.aspx](http://www.baps.org/Global-Network/North-America/Houston/Mandir-Info.aspx)).

(Vivekjivandas, et al., 2009: 11).<sup>721</sup> Assuming interest in figures and facts, BAPS continues its narrative by unravelling technical and logistic details such as that after the stone is cut to the required size and is numbered, it is transported over sea and land to one of the various workshops in Western India where it is prepared by Indian artists to be sent then to the respective construction site in or out of the country where it is arranged like in a jigsaw puzzle, as BAPS explains (Vivekjivandas, et al., 2009: 29-32).<sup>722</sup>

Beyond South and Southeast Asia, the Hindu temple is seen as a ‘migrant architecture’ that travels with Indians across borders.<sup>723</sup> It seems common understanding that the “[c]onstruction of a proper temple in the traditional Indian style is the final step” for a community settling somewhere (Barot, 2002: 204). Thus, building a temple is seen as an ultimate marker that a community has accrued sufficient power, means, and the influence to build a place according to its wishes and visibly mark its presence, which might not always be appreciated. Eck, for instance, says that “the process of building a temple is simultaneously the process of building a community” (Eck, 2000: 221-222). Taking into account local resistance to the construction of a temple, it must be understood that the construction of a temple is a sensitive matter that requires thorough understanding of the context, tact and

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<sup>721</sup> The construction of a stone temple requires specific knowledge that traditional architects would have. Although BAPS seems equally concerned about the matter as Malai Mandir’s creators and others, similar as in the context of the Birla Mandirs, BAPS does not particularly emphasise the role of the architect. According to Singh, BAPS’ temple in Neasden as well as the first Akshardham in Gandhinagar were built by Chandrakant Sompura, who has also designed some Birla temples (Gwalior, Nagda, Kalyan and Renukoot) as well as the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya for the VHP (unknown author, 1998; Mukerjii and Uprety, 1998; Kudaisya, 2006 [2003]: 293; Singh, 2010: 74). See also Menon, 1997: 26. He belongs to the Sompura family that dominates this business in Gujarat and Rajasthan. On the Sompura family, see Inglis, 2016. The Birla Mandir in Kolkatta was also built by a member of the Sompura community. As mentioned earlier, his grandfather, the late Prabhashankar Sompura rebuilt the Somnath Temple (Singh, 2010: 74-75). According to Singh, in about 1990, Amritlal Trivedi began to plan Delhi’s Akshardham together with his son Krishnachandra and his grandson Virendra, who completed the project after Amritlal’s demise (Singh, 2010: 60). Amritlal Trivedi also reconstructed and renovated the Vimala Vashi Temple in Dilwara (Singh, 2010: 74-75). According to an article published in *Hinduism Today*, the Swaminarayan Mandir in Robbinsville was designed by Prakashbhai Sompura (unknown author, 2015b).

<sup>722</sup> According to the different temple websites, it ships the stone to Kandla and from there to twenty-six workshops in Rajasthan. According to Mehrotra, BAPS runs workshops in Pindvara and Sikandra, Rajasthan (Mehrotra, 2011: 254). For a detailed description of this process see, for example, Kim, 2008: 229. However, as mentioned in the previous chapter, it seems as if for this kind of temple this is common practice. See also MacRae, 2004: 230.

<sup>723</sup> Compare this idea with Hodges’ theory (Hodges, 1787).

negotiating skills.<sup>724</sup> BAPS' proposals try to highlight that the construction of a temple will not only benefit its creator but also the locality; communities (and nations) however at times oppose the construction of a temple reading it as an intrusion into *their* space and threat.<sup>725</sup> However, the number of BAPS' impressive temples that have come up around the world speaks for itself—if BAPS had not a thorough understanding of the context, it would not have been able to build as many temples as it has done so far.

As if building a network of out-standing architecture is not enough, BAPS tries to outshine its own temples; building in the name of god even more spectacular architecture for the world—Akshardham. As, for example, Eck discusses with regard to Varanasi, meaning and significance of temple architecture has been closely linked to its location (Eck, 2012). However, arguably reminiscent of the Sanatan (Hindu) Dharm Sabha's decision to build a temple in the newly built capital of India, instead of building its Akshardham at a site considered particularly sacred, BAPS built its first Akshardham in Gandhinagar, the newly built capital of Gujarat.<sup>726</sup> If, as discussed earlier, processions and *melas* are associated with some territorial claim, then must the construction of architecture also be understood as such?<sup>727</sup> How can there not be a BAPS temple dedicated to Swaminarayan in Gujarat's capital? Gandhinagar without Akshardham might send out wrong signals, also for the future.

As emphasised on its website, BAPS has built Gandhinagar's Akshardham (Figure 5.4) according to the *shastras*.<sup>728</sup> Its structure, however, does not follow the

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<sup>724</sup> In 2007, local and even nation-wide controversy unfolded over the proposed construction of the DITIB-Zentralmoschee in Cologne (Cologne Central Mosque) in Germany.

<sup>725</sup> For instance, BAPS' plans to construct a Swaminarayan Mandir in Chino Hills, Los Angeles unfolded a controversy. According to an article in the *Los Angeles Times*, some people opposed the construction as they feared “the project would turn Chino Hills into a “Third World city” and a haven for terrorists” (Martin, 2004). However, the city approved the construction and the temple was inaugurated in 2012. Compare also with previous chapters. As Singh, Fuller and Jain discuss conflicts erupt frequently over processions that are read as intrusion into a communal space (Singh, 1972: 46-47, 66, 85-93; Zavos, 2000: 72; Fuller, 2001; Jain, 2017: S19; *etc.*).

<sup>726</sup> Gandhinagar, like Chandigarh and Bhubaneshwar, has been built on modern principles of planning, as for example Lang discusses (Lang, 2010 [2002]: 73-74; *etc.*). Moreover, since his term as Chief Minister of Gujarat, from 2001 until 2014, Narendra Modi has been promoting Gandhinagar, that has besides Akshardham not many other attractions to offer, as model for Indian cities.

<sup>727</sup> Compare for example with Singh, Fuller and Jain (Singh, 1972: 46-47, 66, 85-93; Fuller, 2001; Jain, 2017: S19; *etc.*).

<sup>728</sup> According to its website, Gandhinagar's Akshardham was built of pink sandstone from



temple's common longitudinal plan but a square plan.<sup>729</sup> Also, Akshardham does not feature the *shikhara*, which is commonly identified/defined as a temple's most significant architectural element, but instead, its central section is covered by a dome.<sup>730</sup> According to Brosius, the architect created "the monument in the Haweli tradition" and Singh remarks that some of its elements might be mistaken for Mughal elements (Brosius, 2010: 154; Singh, 2010: 60). Besides housing a *murti* of Swaminarayan, the two upper tiers of Gandhinagar's Akshardham house exhibitions dedicated to Swaminarayan's life and his teachings.<sup>731</sup> Moreover, it features various attractions such as a walk-through diorama, an audio-animatronics show, a movie screening and a garden. As per its website, Gandhinagar's Akshardham is opened throughout the day except for Monday. This schedule is reminiscent of the timings of museums around the world but not of temples, which are usually open in the morning and the evening.<sup>732</sup>

In sum, BAPS seems to have well understood the surrounding discourses and found a way of becoming an essential part of them.<sup>733</sup> Its distinctive design is memorable and easily recognisable. Be it with regard to the festival, the temple or Akshardham, BAPS consciously selects established and successful modes of architecture such as monumentality, authenticity, technology and other forms of spectacle to attract a large audience wherever the temples are located. Moreover, BAPS presents the architecture in an aestheticised manner, by implementing characteristics such as cleanliness, silence, dress codes and accuracy in each and every detail.

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Bansipahadpur, yellow stone from Jaisalmer, white marble from Makrana, maroon granite from Jhansi and white marble from Ambaji ([www.akshardham/gujarat/monument/index.htm](http://www.akshardham/gujarat/monument/index.htm)). Pollock, Parker, Maxwell and other scholars have thrown new light on the discussion of the idea and meaning of *shastra* (Pollock, 1985; Parker, 1987, 1992a: 113, 116, 2003; Maxwell, 1989; *etc.*).

<sup>729</sup> This is also the case with Delhi's Akshardham that will be discussed below.

<sup>730</sup> Compare with the architecture of Old Delhi's Shivalayas, discussed in the second chapter.

<sup>731</sup> For more information see [www.akshardham/gujarat/monument/index.htm](http://www.akshardham/gujarat/monument/index.htm).

<sup>732</sup> Akshardham is closed on Mondays for the purpose of cleaning. See also Srivastava, 2009: 340. Compare with Singh, 2010: 57 and Hartig, 2012: 99.

<sup>733</sup> This perhaps also shows in BAPS' attempt to provide answers to questions such as "Why build mandirs?," "Why spend so much on building big, elaborate mandirs? [...]," *etc.*, which speaks of a certain awareness of the larger discourse in which these temples are constructed (BAPS, 2014: 207-208).

## DELHI'S AKSHARDHAM

While the construction of Gandhinagar's Akshardham attracted great (international) attention, the constructing a temple of Akshardham's dimensions in the capital of the country even more attention and involves higher stakes.<sup>734</sup>

As outlined above, BAPS is not native to Delhi. Comparable to migrant communities such as the South Indian community that has built the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir, BAPS seemingly tries to trace back the beginning of Akshardham to the moment when the first BAPS follower settled in Delhi, which was, according to Akshardham's websites, in 1948 ([www.akshardham.com/about-us/timeline/](http://www.akshardham.com/about-us/timeline/)).<sup>735</sup> However, as it is the case with other communities such as the Tamils, no formal records on how many BAPS followers have settled in Delhi then as well as to date are available; presumably the number of BAPS members was smaller than the number of South Indians.<sup>736</sup> Until Akshardham's construction, BAPS has been rather invisible in Delhi.<sup>737</sup> According to Akshardham's "Timeline", it was in 1968 that Yogiji Maharaj expressed his wish to build a temple on the banks of the Yamuna and instructed BAPS followers in Delhi to acquire land ([www.akshardham.com/about-us/timeline/](http://www.akshardham.com/about-us/timeline/)).<sup>738</sup> However, it was not until April 21, 2000, that the DDA sold land on the eastern side of Yamuna river to BAPS that was then already under Pramukh Swami's lead ([www.akshardham.com/about-us/timeline/](http://www.akshardham.com/about-us/timeline/)). What BAPS does not mention is that these hundred acres of land were situated in an area that had been declared as important to the natural river eco-system which was not to be developed, creating controversy and making BAPS' achievement either miraculous and/or is explained by strong connections to those in power.<sup>739</sup>

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<sup>734</sup> In 1998, Gandhinagar's Akshardham "has attracted over 2.3 million visitors from 74 countries" (Williams, 2001: 122). According to Williams, it is "the largest monument and the most popular tourist/pilgrimage center in Gujarat" (Williams, 2001: 122).

<sup>735</sup> As mentioned earlier, according to Monier-Williams, in the initial years the *sampradaya* was confined to Gujarat and the Deccan and was elsewhere unknown (Monier-Williams, 1877: 145).

<sup>736</sup> Compare with previous chapter.

<sup>737</sup> Until date, most people I have spoken to have never heard of BAPS and many people are convinced that Akshardham was built by BJP.

<sup>738</sup> See also [www.swaminarayan.org/news/2000/11/delhi/index.htm](http://www.swaminarayan.org/news/2000/11/delhi/index.htm).

<sup>739</sup> According to BAPS' *Timeline*, Pramukh Swami searched for a piece of appropriate land in different parts of the city. In a city congested like Delhi, land is a precious commodity that must be allotted in consensus with the government. From an early point of time onwards, the construction of Akshardham created public controversy mainly as it was suspected that the then ruling National Democratic Alliance, which had close ties with BJP, had "smoothed the way for BAPS to take over

Considering the scale of the project, it seems as if the construction of Akshardham happened in the blink of an eye—although the planning took comparatively longer, its construction took only five years. Akshardham is the result of controlled designing and extensive planning. As emphasised in *Swaminarayan Akshardham: Making and Experience*, while a group of specialists travelled to Angkor Vat, the Kailash Mandir in Ellora, Disneyland and the Universal Studios seeking for inspiration, a second team was engaged in analysing the soil and finding a solution to build Akshardham “so that it survives for thousands of years” (Vivekjivandas, et al., 2009: 24, 28; Srivastava, 2009: 340).

Akshardham, which is the main attraction of a complex named after it, Akshardham Cultural Complex, was opened on November 7, 2005, in a grand and spectacular ceremony attended by the leading politicians of the country as well as by twenty-five thousand people.<sup>740</sup> Reminiscent of amusement parks, theme parks, museums, zoos, *melas*, malls and other spaces of spectacles, Akshardham seems to be a well-organised assemblage of attractions and displays, seemingly open to *all*. On its hundred acres it accommodates comfortably various ticketed indoor attractions such as an audio-animatronic show (Sahajanand Darshan—Hall of Values) that portrays “values like non-violence, perseverance, prayers, morality, and family harmony” as well as Swaminarayan’s life, an IMAX cinema (Neelkanth Darshan—Giant Screen Film) that screens the story of the Swaminarayan’s life and a boat ride (Sanskriti Darshan—Cultural Boat Ride) “through thousands of years of ancient Indian history,” and some free of charge attractions such as the Charnavind (Holy Footprints), Bharat Upavan, Yogi Hriday Kamal and most importantly Akshardham ([www.akshardham.com/explore/exhibitions/](http://www.akshardham.com/explore/exhibitions/)).<sup>741</sup> After spending an estimated time of

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the land,” as Srivastava says (Srivastava, 2009: 339). As mentioned in the previous chapter, BAPS has been suspected to have built Akshardham without required clearances. On January 7, 2011, Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh publicly announced that BAPS never had environmental clearance (unknown author, 2011a). The following day, Delhi’s Chief Minister Sheila Dikshit dismissed Ramesh’s statement (unknown author, 2011b). For more details and other issues that, for example, concern the effect of Akshardham’s construction on the ecological environment and slum demolition, see Sengupta, 2005; Dupont, 2008; Srivastava, 2009; Baviskar, 2011; *etc.*

<sup>740</sup> As mentioned in the chapter’s introduction, the inauguration ceremony was attended by the President of India Abudul Kalam, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (Congress), and Leader of the Opposition L.K. Advani (BJP).

<sup>741</sup> According to Brosius, fewer than 50 percent of people buy tickets for the theme hall (Brosius, 2010: 163). Akshardham’s official website provides detailed descriptions of these attractions ([www.akshardham.com/](http://www.akshardham.com/)).

three to four hours to see all attractions, those who wish to see more may see the multimedia water-show (Sahaj Anand), running daily at sunset.<sup>742</sup> Towards the end of the tour, each and every visitor is most welcome to perform *abhishek* at the Abhishek Mandap at the cost of fifty rupees, enjoy some snacks at the Food Court and buy posters, postcards, t-shirts and other souvenirs from the Books and Gifts Shop.<sup>743</sup>

The different attractions are arranged in such a way that they might be visited sequentially one after the other, an example of well-executed management of crowds. The systematically arranged attractions are connected to each other via wide straight well-maintained walkways (Figure 5.5). From the tight security checks at its entry, the notice boards, the volunteers, the trimmed grass, the architecture and the information provided about it to its photo-shopped images (Figure 5.6, 5.7)—everything at and about Akshardham seems meticulously planned, thought-out and curated, like at the ideal museum/monument/*etc.* And, like these spaces, it also tries to quench people's (supposed) thirst to look at things and hunger for information in order to *understand*, as will be discussed in more detail below. Also, Akshardham seemingly perfectly fits the government's bill for Delhi to become a modern cosmopolitan green and clean city. Besides trying to fascinate and please visitors with these numerous attractions ACC or to be more precise its creator, just like the creators of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir and the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir, seem to hold on to maxims of modernity—order, cleanliness and safety.<sup>744</sup>

According to Singh, twelve drawings of Akshardham (Dravida-style, hybrid

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<sup>742</sup> On its website, BAPS knows/informs visitors almost to the minute how much “Time to See” each attraction will take; it takes, for example, forty-five minutes to see the Mandir ([www.akshardham.com/explore/Mandir/](http://www.akshardham.com/explore/Mandir/)). Today, time is taken as one of the most valuable resource that is often measured against money.

<sup>743</sup> Although it is common to donate some small amount of money to the temple to perform *abhishek*, there is usually no fixed price or cost. BAPS also charges money for *prasad* that is, besides *darshan*, considered a key motivation to go to a temple and like *darshan* commonly free of charge. Taking into account that in other temples, including BAPS' Shikharbaddha Mandirs, only the priests are allowed to enter the *garbhagraha* and touch the *murti*, one could get the impression that at Akshardham this social hierarchy has been eliminated—even non-Hindus can participate in the ritual. However, in a similar way in which each and everybody can touch the *murti* of Krishna situated in Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's Gita Bhavan as no *pratistha* has been performed on the image, the *abhishek* at Akshardham is performed over a *murti* of Swaminarayan as a young wandering ascetic and not in the form in which the god is worshipped at BAPS' temples.

<sup>744</sup> This will be discussed in more detail throughout the chapter.

styles combining Dravida with West Indian and late Mughal styles) were made, to construct Akshardham, “to be a pure Hindu temple design deriving from the distant past [which] was to have no trace of hybridity” (Singh, 2010: 60).<sup>745</sup> Unlike most other plans of temples in India, Akshardham’s plan is based on a system of two intersecting axes of equal lengths. Instead of *shikharas*, an octagonal two-storied *chattri* with a saucer-shaped dome decorated with a chain-bell motif rises over the central section of the architecture and is surrounded by four smaller *chattris* carried by four pillars (Figure 5.1, 5.7). Each of the four arms is covered by a one-storied diminutive *chattri*.<sup>746</sup> *Chattris* are a popular architectural element that can be found throughout India’s architecture—one needs not travel far to see *chattris* used in a similar way as in Akshardham. The Shivalayas (Figure 2.2), some of which have been dated back to the late Mughal period, dotting Old Delhi too do, not feature a *shikhara* but feature the dome carried by eight pillars of which a typical *chattri* is made.<sup>747</sup> At Akshardham each of the domes is—like the typical *shikhara*—crowned by *griva*, *amalak*, *chandrika* and *kalash*, and Pramukh Swami has performed *kalash puja* rituals on each of them.<sup>748</sup>

Perhaps comparable to temples such as the Vishvanath Mandir in Khajuraho, Akshardham was built on a comparatively high (ten-foot) lower plinth, named by BAPS Gajendra Peeth (Figure 5.8) seemingly after its leading motif, the Asian elephant that for thousands of years has been and continues to be a popular motive in India’s language, art, literature, *etc.* BAPS seems to hit the nail on the head deciding to give more space to the elephant than it has ever been done in India’s architecture before. It seems as if for BAPS the Gajendra Peeth is much more than just a part of

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<sup>745</sup> Similar to Malai Mandir, Akshardham was built by a family of traditional architects. See Singh, 2010: 60, 74-75.

<sup>746</sup> According to Singh, “this square-plan building, topped with a family of domes, resembles the *dādābāris*, memorial shrines that are sometimes built in Jain complexes in honour of departed gurus” (Singh, 2010: 59). Similar octagonal structures with five domes can be found in Rajasthan from the 16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, constructed as cenotaphs in memory, for example, of the king, as Belli discusses (Belli, 2007: 127, 131). Belli refers to these structures as *chattris*, a Sanskrit term that has been translated into English as “umbrella,” a symbol for “heavenly and temporal authority” (Belli, 2007: 129).

<sup>747</sup> As discussed earlier, not much research has been undertaken on these small temples in Old Delhi. For an (outdated) list and definition of Shivalaya see Sanderson, 1916: 65. Asher mentions them in her work and so does Peck (Asher, 2000: 135-136; Peck, 2005: 195).

<sup>748</sup> See also BAPS, 2014: 23, 89-97.

the architecture, it is a popular attraction in itself.<sup>749</sup> As Brahmaviharidas explains, while “ancient temples have honoured elephants, as small symbols or at big entrances or as monotonous and routine rows of replicas” BAPS attempted to give “*life* to all the elephants” (Brahmaviharidas, 2013 [2012]: 7, 9).<sup>750</sup> And Singh uses the word “naturalistic” trying to describe the style in which they are depicted (Figure 5.9); although they are as natural as the manicured green grass, the trimmed bushes and the geometrically arranged flower beds that are seemingly trying to set Akshardham in a green and clean environment (Figure 5.10) (Singh, 2010: 56).<sup>751</sup>

However, in a century in which vegetarianism has been put on a moral and ethical high-ground and into the realm of identity politics, it seems as if the petrified elephants, models of rectitude, are seen as appropriate replacements of the antiquated teachers such as the stuffed animals in museums and caged animals in zoos.<sup>752</sup> Especially looking at the administered short texts, that are reminiscent of labels used in modern places of learning (museum/exhibition/zoo/park/*etc.* as well as at temples) to teach/explain *what it is*, have been engraved into stone right below the respective scene (Figure 5.11) this comparison is less than far-fetched.<sup>753</sup> Like story-books and fables, unlike the creators of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, who tried to teach its onlookers/readers moral and ethical values drawing examples from Hindu stories, BAPS seemingly tries to teach its reader/onlooker lessons of moral and ethical values (within the framework of its own ideology) through images of the elephant, whose

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<sup>749</sup> A relatively recently published booklet that exclusively pictures the Gajendra Peeth might indicate that there was a demand for it. The Asian Elephant is listed by the World Wildlife Fund as endangered animal ([www.worldwildlife.org/species/asian-elephant](http://www.worldwildlife.org/species/asian-elephant)).

<sup>750</sup> On its website, BAPS emphasises that the plinth is an “inspiring revival of an ancient architectural tradition” and explains that whereas at the ancient temples the motif is characterised by “sequential replication” at Akshardham it “comes with a new inspirational, artistic innovation” ([www.akshardham.com/explore/Mandir/gajendra-peeth/](http://www.akshardham.com/explore/Mandir/gajendra-peeth/)). It refers to elephants depicted at the Kailash Mandir in Ellora as well as to the elephants depicted in Mahabalipuram ([www.akshardham.com/explore/Mandir/gajendra-peeth/](http://www.akshardham.com/explore/Mandir/gajendra-peeth/)). However, they could also be compared with the elephants in Karla and Angkor.

<sup>751</sup> As already mentioned in the third chapter, according to the *shastric* literature, such as the *Brhatsamhita* and the *Vishnudharmottara Purana*, since gods like to be in groves, gardens, near rivers and mountains the temple should be built at such a spot. See, for example, Kramrisch, 1946: 3-7. See also BAPS, 2014: 59-60. Jain has discussed this issue taking up the example of the Manyavar Shri Kanshi Ramji Green (Eco) Park in Lucknow, one of several sites by Uttar Pradesh’s former Chief Minister Kumari Mayawati (Jain, 2014).

<sup>752</sup> Compare also with Mayawati’s park built in Lucknow.

<sup>753</sup> Today, some museums/curators hold the method to tag objects with explanatory labels as anachronistic. Contemporary museums such as Kolumba in Cologne (Germany) no longer label objects.

qualities have been compared to human.<sup>754</sup> One of BAPS' followers explains the Gajendra Peeth has

taught me how to stay low even if you reach the echelons of power. It was a great learning experience in terms of what a Hindu is and what Hindu culture is about (Parashar Pandya quoted in BAPS, 2010c: 21).<sup>755</sup>

Smaller in scale, yet no less fascinating, another relief tries to catch its readers'/onlookers' attention on the second level of Akshardham's platform (Figure 5.12).<sup>756</sup> According to its creator, it illustrates "divine incidents in the life of Bhagvan Swaminarayan" and has accordingly been named Narayan Peeth (Vivekjivandas, et al., 2009: 13).<sup>757</sup> If one agrees to describe the Gajendra Peeth as designed in a naturalistic manner, then one might tend to explain the Narayan Peeth using the same words.<sup>758</sup> Similar to the Gajendra Peeth, the Narayan Peeth is not an element typically featured at temples that had been built earlier.<sup>759</sup>

Against the scenic backdrop of little houses (Figure 5.13), trees and animals, the Narayan Peeth seems to depict a simple but peaceful, moral and spiritual life in which villagers dressed in neat local costumes listen to Swaminarayan's teachings—an image that contrasts description of Gujarat as uprooted, chaotic and insecure (Heber, 1856: 105-106). This image of rural (primitive) life could perhaps be compared with the romantic image that, for instance, Rousseau drew of the 'primitive

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<sup>754</sup> Such combination of entertainment and education, commonly referred to as *edutainment*, has been excessively used in museums/zoo/park/etc. as a method to teach visitors. It has also been used by governments to spread information and influence people's opinions and behaviour. At Akshardham the elephants have been clustered into sections according to themes: "Elephants with nature," "Elephants with Man" and "Elephants with the divine" (Brahmaviharidas, 2013 [2012]). See also [www.akshardham.com/explore/Mandir/gajendra-peeth/](http://www.akshardham.com/explore/Mandir/gajendra-peeth/). It would be interesting to compare these visual narratives with earlier visual narratives that have been discussed, for example, by Dehejia (Dehejia, 1997).

<sup>755</sup> Compare with Kim, 2007: 65-67.

<sup>756</sup> Compared to the information and photos provided by BAPS online and in publications on attractions such as the Gajendra Peeth, the Mandova and the Mandapas, for some reason not as much attention has been paid to the Narayan Peeth.

<sup>757</sup> See also [www.akshardham.com/explore/Mandir/](http://www.akshardham.com/explore/Mandir/).

<sup>758</sup> Compare with Singh's reading of the platform (Singh, 2010: 56).

<sup>759</sup> Although, as BAPS also points out in *Swaminarayan Akshardham: Experience and Making*, the use of metal to make images on the Indian subcontinent has a long tradition, the way it has been used at Akshardham seems new to me (Vivekjivandas, et al., 2009: 40-42). The juxtaposition of different materials is one of Akshardham's significant features. Notably, the choice of material has been based as well on practical considerations—as marble does not heat up very much even in strong sunlight, it has been used for the staircase and the floor.

man’ in *A Discourse Upon the Origin and Foundation of the Inequality Among Mankind*—poor from a materialistic point of view but all the richer when it comes to moral/ethical/spiritual/*etc.* matters.<sup>760</sup> Such idealised images of the village and village life have been used to promote authoritarian and nationalist ideologies and regimes around the world.<sup>761</sup> Waghorne emphasises “the independence movement under Mahatma Gandhi glorified rural life, where ‘real India’ and by extension ‘real’ Indians lived” (Waghorne, 2004: 11).<sup>762</sup>

At Akshardham, the onlooker/reader is put into a dialogue with India’s *past* through different media. If the Gajendra Peeth means to teach onlookers/readers something about morals and religion, the Narayan Peeth—as well as the show at the Sahajanand Darshan and the movie *Mystic India* screened at ACC’s Neelkanth Darshan—seemingly try to educate the onlooker/reader with the history of Swaminarayan and the movement that unfolded around him. Although, as mentioned above, various scholars have tried to frame BAPS as an organisation that emphasises its Gujarati-ness over Indian-ness, at Akshardham BAPS outlines a much larger historical narrative of India and the Indian (Hindu) nation through attractions such as the Bharat Upavan (Figure 5. 14), the Yogi Hriday Kamal and boat ride through “thousands of years of ancient Indian history” at the Sanskruti Darshan ([www.akshardham.com/explore/exhibitions/sanskruiti-darshan/](http://www.akshardham.com/explore/exhibitions/sanskruiti-darshan/)).<sup>763</sup> That is, these exhibitions seemingly try to teach onlookers/readers what (Bharat) the Indian nation is through India’s history.<sup>764</sup> Such narrative is particularly powerful since having carried on for a longer period it becomes the *truth* and *real* that decides and shapes all kinds of discourse and knowledge. With regard to the history that is displayed at

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<sup>760</sup> See discussion of the idea of the *primitive* that has been discussed in the first chapter.

<sup>761</sup> Compare, for example, with art that was promoted in Germany during the Nazi regime and contemporary art of North Korea. Within such discourse art is didactic and used to promote certain ideologies/ideas and demonise alternative ideologies/ideas. Not only is only art promoted that agrees to the framework/ideology outlined by the fascist regime but also no alternative form of art may exist within this discourse. In Nazi Germany, art that did not agree to the Nazi definition of art was defined/identified as *Entartete Kunst* (Degenerate art), at the very best ridiculed. See exhibition *Entartete Kunst* held in Munich in 1937. Artists were subjected to sanctions (forbidden to sell their works, teach and even produce art), persecuted and killed.

<sup>762</sup> On similar lines, Gooptu says that “the rural poor were often idealised and romanticised [...] under a Gandhian influence” (Gooptu, 2003 [2001]: 14).

<sup>763</sup> Compare with the discussion of Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir and its Indraprastha Dharma Vatika in the third chapter.

<sup>764</sup> As scholars such as Hobsbawm and Thapar discuss in detail, history and history-writing are powerful tools to create notions of belonging/not-belonging and unite/divide people, communities and nations (Hobsbawm, 2013 [1990]; Thapar, 2016; *etc.*).



Akshardham's Bharat Upavan, Singh observes that "this selective group [at the Bharat Upavan] avoids Islamic figures" and "inserts Gujarati kings into the line of 'nationally important' rulers" (Singh, 2010: 53).<sup>765</sup> According to her, this "selective list of heroic figures reflects a Hindutva-inflected history, which its anachronistic list of 'national' heroes who fought against 'outsiders', Muslim and British" (Singh, 2010: 53).<sup>766</sup> In other words, history is constructed in a way that stresses the importance of a single history of one religious community (Hindu) "as being the pre-eminent history of the nation", denigrating and distorting the history of other communities (Thapar, 2016).

According to Singh, Akshardham's Mandovar that has been made of sandstone follows "the aedicular pattern seen on the walls of the eleventh-century Sun Temple at Modherā" (Figure 5.15) (Singh, 2010: 56). And, as BAPS emphasises, Akshardham was built without the use of modern steel, like the ancient temples (Vivekjivandas, et al., 2009: 11, 19, 25). However, undoubtedly without modern technology and engineering, the construction of Akshardham would have taken as long as earlier generations took to build such colossal architecture.<sup>767</sup> What difference would it have made to use steel for its construction? How does the use/not use of material define its meaning and *what it is*? Can *authenticity* be identified/defined through the use of a certain material?

In comparison with the Sun Temple's Mandovar, it becomes clear that Akshardham's creator refrains from following the ancient ('traditional') design when it comes to erotic images (Figure 5.16, 5.17).<sup>768</sup> According to the information given in *Swaminarayan Akshardham: Making and Experience*, after extensive research and thought, a total of two hundred *murtis* (*dikpals*, *avatars*, devotees, *acharyas*, *rishis*,

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<sup>765</sup> See third chapter.

<sup>766</sup> Compare with Thapar's account of Hindutva, nationalism and the nation (Thapar, 2016).

<sup>767</sup> However, according to the information given in *Swaminarayan Akshardham: Making and Experience*, concrete was used for Akshardham's construction (Vivekjivandas, et al, 2009: 26). Compare with MacRae, 2004: 231-232. See also fourth chapter. According to *Hinduism Today*, V. Ganapati Sthapati has tried to replace modern tools/methods with authentic/traditional tools/methods (unknown author, 2012a: 69).

<sup>768</sup> Compare, for example, with Guha-Thakurta's discussion of the approach to the nude and erotic in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Indian context (Guha-Thakurta, 2003a: 362-365). On Gujarati architecture see Dhaky, 1975.

*etc.*) have been included in the design of the Mandovar (Vivekjivandas, et al., 2009: 34-35). Akshardham's Mandovar (Figure 5.17), unlike the Sun Temple's Mandovar (Figure 5.18) that could perhaps be described as showing a vivid, dynamic and compact design, has many unornamented spaces and appears more systemic and ordered, but also more technical and less dynamic (Hartig, 2012: 80-81).<sup>769</sup> Can we read the conceptualisation and the design of Akshardham as attempt to structure, order and represent Hinduism to a modern public? Does this make the design better, legible, and therefore consumable for 21<sup>st</sup> century eyes?

Similar to some of the temples constructed earlier such as the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir in Jaipur, seemingly presuming that the onlooker no longer knows/understands *what/who it is*, at Akshardham's Mandovar the main images are tagged with nameplates or to be more precise the pedestal on which they stand has been inscribed with a name.<sup>770</sup> Seemingly, BAPS tries to leave no room for ambiguity—as per the principles of a modern world, if the onlooker/reader does not know/understand (correctly) he should be educated. Lubin notices a comparable practice of labelling in the context of the performance of a Vedic ritual in 1992; he describes:

Each item in the ritual arena itself was clearly labeled with a plaque giving its technical name [...]. This didactic dimension gave the ritual arena something of the feeling of a museum (Lubin, 2001: 400).

That is, by inscribing names into stone, BAPS tries to make Akshardham readable/understandable by trying to translate it. Under the pretence of making what is depicted readable, BAPS tries to hand the explanation in form of a name to the onlooker/reader. However, recalling Derrida's discussion of naming and translation, one might wonder how a name tag can make one understand (Derrida, 1985, 101-104, 1995, 2002; *etc.*).

Because of the ancient-looking exterior design of Akshardham, people might

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<sup>769</sup> Compare with the Birla Mandirs that have been built in Pilani, Jaipur, Kolkata, *etc.* Compare also with the style in which Somnath Mandir was built.

<sup>770</sup> Compare with Coomaraswamy, 1986 [1977]: 80.

expect the interior to look ancient too. However, Akshardham does not meet such expectations but rather welcomes each and every one who enters with an interior design competing with the grandest most awe-inspiring interior design seen only at residences of the world's greatest emperors. Its interior is entirely made of intricately carved ornamental marble (Figure 5.19). In its centre stands an eleven-foot high golden image of Swaminarayan (Figure 5.20). Unlike pre-modern temples, in which usually more attention has been paid to designing the exterior, at Akshardham the aesthetic experience of the exterior is heightened by an even more elaborate and sophisticated design of the interior. Many people seem overwhelmed seeing Akshardham's interior, which BAPS tries to capture in photos that can be seen on Akshardham's website.

Akshardham's plan is drawn on a nine-square grid, the sanctum surrounded by eight Mandapas, each crowned by a dome lying in its centre.<sup>771</sup> When Akshardham was opened in 2005, its interior was designed as an airy light-flooded pillared hall, and *murtis* of Swaminarayan and the five *gurus* were placed on a wooden platform in the centre (Figure 5.21)—that is at the intersection of two axes of equal length—covered by a two-storied dome. There were no walls that separated the outer Mandapas from the centre; accordingly, one could circumambulate the centre (or Garbhagruha as BAPS names it) and look at the *murtis* from all sides.<sup>772</sup> If one would compare this design with the design of earlier constructed temples such as the Sun Temple at Modhera and the Vishvanath Mandir in Khajuraho as well as the Swaminatha Swami Mandir that follow the design described in *shastric* literature (enclosed, small, rectangular, dark, *etc.*), one might want to describe this (initial) spatial arrangement at Akshardham as: *opening of space*.<sup>773</sup> Akshardham, however, is not the first temple (in Delhi) in which the *garbhagruha* was designed in such an *open* manner. Delhi's Dakshin Delhi Kalibari Mandir, for instance, which draws its design from Bengali temple architecture, as its creators say, has been designed as a hall, of which at one end stands on a pedestal a *murti* of the goddess Kali under a kind

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<sup>771</sup> According to Singh, Akshardham's domes are reminiscent of the domes at Humayun's Tomb or even at the Taj Mahal (Singh, 2010: 72).

<sup>772</sup> See Benjamin's discussion on *Ausstellungswert* (exhibition value) and *Kultwert* (cult value) (Benjamin, 1991a: 482-485).

<sup>773</sup> Compare with Lang's discussion of the Dakshin Delhi Kalibari Mandir (Lang, et al., 1997: 269-270).

of canopy designed using the Bengal roof.<sup>774</sup> Thus, if we define whether architecture qualifies as Hindu temple or not based on whether it follows the spatial arrangement and design that can be seen in many ancient temples, then the Dakshin Delhi Kalibari Mandir cannot be defined as Hindu temple.<sup>775</sup>

At Akshardham, however, in 2009, walls were raised between the pillars, disrupting the view and creating a *separate* octagonal Garbhagruha (Figure 5.22).<sup>776</sup> In line with Kramrisch's reading of the *garbhagraha*, BAPS discusses the *garbhagraha* as "a sanctuary from which outside influences are cut off [...]. The interior is kept secret and its sacredness is protected from mundane external influences" (Kramrisch, 1946: 163; BAPS, 2014: 78). Arguably, this conceptualisation has been pushed to an extreme—not only are, as discussed in the previous chapters, 'normal' people not allowed to enter the *garbhagraha*, but also there are no priests, no incense sticks, no chanting, no music, no *prasad*, no flowers, *etc.*<sup>777</sup> In short, the experience at Akshardham is rather reminiscent of that of the modern white-cube space in which *what is seen* is consumed and appreciated privately rather than that of the sensory experience of most other 21<sup>st</sup> century temples.<sup>778</sup> At the same time, little of Akshardham's newly designed Garbhagruha (Figure 5.20, 5.22) seems reminiscent of the dark, unornamented, cave-like *garbhagraha* of the textbook Hindu temple—the floor and walls are covered with highly polished marble, colourful panels, gold leaves, gems and diamonds; light from

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<sup>774</sup> See second chapter.

<sup>775</sup> I am grateful to Amrita Banerjee for discussing this issue with me.

<sup>776</sup> In 2009, the design of Akshardham's Garbhagruha was modified substantially after the outbreak of a fire. According to a newspaper article, the fire destroyed the wooden platform and parts of the statues (Sharma, 2009). As Parker discusses, a faulty image is considered dangerous and might bring bad fate to the temple and the community (Parker, 2003: 26, 2009: 123). See also Fuller, 2004b: 60. Akshardham opened again on July 13, 2010. Besides, the interior houses a small exhibition in the surrounding Mandapas—Swaminarayan's sandals and other items have been put on display in showcases, secured with a red rope from being touched, like in the museum (Figure 5.23). And, perhaps comparable with the exhibition of craftsmanship in Malai Mandir's Silpa Kala Mandapa, the intricately carved interior means to display master craftsmanship.

<sup>777</sup> As described in my MPhil thesis, similar to disciplinary institutions, volunteers and signboards try to ensure Akshardham's "dignity and peace" reminding visitors to be silent and behave appropriately (Hartig, 2012: 111-115). However, when Australia's Prime Minister Turnbull and Modi visited Akshardham they were allowed to enter its Garbhagruha and offered prayers. See Modi's official website: <http://www.narendramodi.in/pm-modi-and-australian-pm-turnbull-take-a-metro-ride-to-akshardham-temple-535013> and Akshardham's website: <http://akshardham.com/indian-pm-narendra-modi-and-australian-pm-malcolm-turnbull-visit-swaminarayan-akshardham/>.

<sup>778</sup> Compare for instance with Eck's description of the sensual experience of the temple space (Eck, 1985 [1981]: 11-12).

spotlights and a chandelier intensifies the sparkling effect and lends a dramatic accent to the Garbhagruha and the golden image of Swaminarayan, which depicts him as a young man (Figure 5.20) rising on a marmoreal platform.<sup>779</sup> Similar to Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir's *garbhagrahas*, Akshardham's *garbhagraha* is flooded with artificial light, which seemingly contradicts earlier notions of *what the garbhagraha is* as per earlier articulated definitions. According to Kramrisch for instance, the "darkness in the Garbhagruha is a necessary condition for the transformation which is wrought in the devotee. In darkness his change is effected and a new life is attained" (Kramrisch, 1946: 164). If so, does it mean that at Akshardham such transformation does not take place? And does that mean that Akshardham cannot be considered as a temple, as several people have claimed?<sup>780</sup> According to BAPS, this modern set-up enables "darshan of the consecrated deity throughout the day" (BAPS, 2014: 78). If we compare this design with what we have so far thought of as *garbhagraha*, in other Hindu temple architecture—an unornamented and dark space open only to one side in which the image of God is lit by candlelight—then probably it cannot be defined as *garbhagraha*, which then also challenges the whole reading of Akshardham as temple and sacred space; but who says we should *compare*?

Whatever the purpose of other temples may have been, Pramukh Swami created Akshardham as a site that tries to attract the masses mainly through the displaying or staging of a grand (visual) spectacle in which Akshardham and its architecture play a chief part. During its inauguration, for example, Akshardham's spacious staircase that is unusually wide compared to staircases in earlier temples turned into a ceremonial stage while the temple functioned as an impressive backdrop for a spectacular show in which the leaders of the country took part (Figure 5.24).<sup>781</sup>

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<sup>779</sup> Unlike in other temples that pay great attention to the dressing of god/goddess, BAPS does not dress this *murti* of Swaminarayan. With few exceptions, such as Hacker's study, the issue of dressing has attracted little scholarly attention (Hacker, 1997). BAPS pays great attention to *murtis'* cloth, trying to dress the *murtis* according to season and occasion (Hartig, 2012: 70-71). See also Mukundcharandas, 2004: 93-106. Srinivas emphasises that dresses and other decorations of the temple are important means to attract crowds that bring money to the temple (Srinivas, 2004: 67-68, 2006: 334-338). According to Kakar and Waghorne, today the dresses of gods might even draw from popular culture (Bollywood, fashion design, *etc.*) (Waghorne, 2004: 162; Kakar, 2009: 393-394).

<sup>780</sup> This will be discussed in more detail below.

<sup>781</sup> On the annual World Diabetes Day that has been organised by the International Diabetes

Unlike some of the ancient temples that are difficult to look at closely because of their location, architecture, *etc.*, Akshardham was built to be looked at conveniently from near and from far—in fact, visibility seems to be the most important features of Akshardham. Noticeably, BAPS published many (photoshopped) images of Akshardham and its architectural details but only a few images/photos of Swaminarayan.<sup>782</sup> As a *sadhu* quoted in Williams emphasises, “[p]eople come to the temples for darshan to the develop their spirituality; they come to the exhibitions for pradarshan in order to gain understanding” (*sadhu* quoted in Williams, 2001: 180).<sup>783</sup> Does this mean that at Akshardham the temple has become more relevant than God? Taking the above mentioned aspects into consideration, it seems as if institutions of modern display such as photography, the museum and the monument continue to affect the Hindu temple and its architecture.

## A TEMPLE TO (RE)CLAIM DELHI AND INDIA?

As discussed in the third chapter, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the fear of losing power generated strong forces within the Hindu fold that identified the role of Delhi, then seat of the colonial ruler, for their cause as utmost vital. Thus, leaders of this movement put great efforts into the construction of a temple in the centre of power anticipating with it great hopes that the temple would not only give rise to a feeling of unity amongst Hindus but also mark the Hindu presence in the imperial capital city and perhaps even pave the way for India to be (again) a Hindu nation

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Federation, Akshardham, like other landmarks in Delhi, is illuminated in a blue light to increase awareness. And, during the Earth Hour, generally towards the end of March, at Akshardham all lights, *etc.* have been switched off stressing environment issues. On the use of illumination as a means of symbolic meaning see also Lang, Desai and Desai (Lang, et. al., 1997: 4). It seems as if Akshardham hovers between being architecture and an exhibit itself—a characteristic that is usually associated with the monument but not with the temple. Singh tries to understand Akshardham through the notion of monument discussed by Riegl, who tries to distinguish and draw a line between what he calls *intentional monument* and *unintentional monument* (Singh, 2010: 57). However, Riegl also mentions that intentional (*gewollte*) monuments can at the same time be also unintentional (*ungewollte*) monuments (Riegl, 1903: 6). According to Singh, “[b]oth of Riegl’s terms seem to apply here, for Akshardhām is an intentional monument built to look like an unintentional one” (Singh, 2010: 57). In other words, unlike the ancient temples that were constructed as temples and later turned into *monuments*, Akshardham was intentionally built as *monument*. According to Kim, it has also been referred to as *smarak* (Kim, 2007: 67). The Sanskrit word *smarak* that has been translated into English as “memorial” derives from the Sanskrit root *smṛ* that has been translated into English as “remember” and “think of.”

<sup>782</sup> In Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir’s Sthalapuranam, on the other hand, there are more images of gods than of the temple’s architecture. The architecture is represented in an aestheticised form; anything disturbing has been removed. The buildings in the background, for instance, are usually replaced by a bright-blue cloudy sky, showing a picture-perfect temple.

<sup>783</sup> Williams explains the word *pradarshan* as “to see an exhibition” (Williams, 2001: 180).

ruled by Hindus.<sup>784</sup> Although, not long after the doors of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir had been opened to the public, India claimed independence, this dream of India as Hindu nation as formulated by Savarkar has still not come about.<sup>785</sup> As the capital of independent India, more than ever, Delhi has been seen in the light of national and global power—“[s]chool textbooks have taught generations of students that those who ruled Delhi ruled India”, as Menon remarks (Menon, 2000: 147). And, although many temples have been built in the city, in the eyes of Hindutva agents Delhi still seems to occupy “a precarious position within the master narrative of Hindutva due to its long history as the centre of Islamic power”, as Rajagopalan says (Rajagopalan, 2011: 258). As scholars such as Taneja, Kumar, Pati and Rajagopalan discuss, since India’s Independence/Partition various attempts to “reclaim” Delhi have been undertaken trying to turn Delhi into the Hindutva vision of an ethnically cleansed nation-space (Taneja, 2008; Kumar, 2011 [2002]a, 2011 [2002]b, 2011 [2002]c; Pati, 2011; Rajagopalan, 2011: 258; *etc.*).

As discussed in this chapter, at Akshardham, too, the Indian nation has been sketched as *pure* Hindu nation, proposing ideas within the framework of Hindutva ideologies. In 1969, thirty-six years before Akshardham’s inauguration, Yogiji Maharaj then BAPS’ leader outlined his vision of Akshardham’s role within the context of Delhi and arguably India as follows:

Delhi is the throne. The flag should fly high in Delhi. A pinnacled monument will rise. The land which has been performing penance shall be acquired. Now Yamunaji is waiting. She has become restless. With certain surety, land on the banks of Yamunaji will be acquired. The Lord will fulfil this in his divine way [...] (Yogiji Maharaj quoted in [www.swaminarayan.org/news/2000/11/delhi/introduction.htm](http://www.swaminarayan.org/news/2000/11/delhi/introduction.htm)).

Reading Yogiji Maharaj’s words, it sounds as if Akshardham is Delhi’s new centre of power even before it has been built. According to his vision, it seems as if Akshardham is the ultimate answer to *recapture* and *free* the land, as signified by the “flag” that, according to BAPS, symbolises the “the victory of good over evil”

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<sup>784</sup> Compare with third chapter. See also Rajagopalan, 2011: 258.

<sup>785</sup> See third chapter. See also Savarkar, 1969 [1923].

(BAPS, 2014: 97).<sup>786</sup>

This image of Akshardham as centre of power also fits the way in which Akshardham has been situated within the city's layout (Figure 5.25)—taking into account how much planning was involved in the construction of Akshardham, it is perhaps no coincidence that it was built on one axis (vista) with the seat of the highest constitutional power, Rashtrapati Bhavan yet open to each and every one. This could be read as follows; a literal alignment of constitutional and sacred power meant to create a Hindu nation.<sup>787</sup> Moreover, arranging national and international events (such as the meeting between the Indian and Australian Prime Minister) at Akshardham contributes not only to Akshardham's popularity but also to its image as an official representative of India.

## WHAT IS AKSHARDHAM? IS IT A SACRED SITE?

One should assume that such a technically as well as theoretically carefully constructed and context-tuned architecture should convince and impress each and every one. It seems to work to some extent, the vast majority of people say that Akshardham is “overwhelming,” “breath taking,” “mind blowing,” comparing it to the Vatican and calling it “a wonder of the modern world”. However, even though Akshardham's creators BAPS and Delhi's government are seemingly determined that Akshardham is “one of the largest *temples* in the world” there are a few people claiming that Akshardham is “fake,” “inauthentic,” “not real,” *etc.* (Hartig, 2012: 97-98, 114-115).<sup>788</sup> One of TripAdvisor's reviewers/users with the user-name Gavin O writes: “This is not a site of any cultural or historical significance, can't comment on

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<sup>786</sup> According to BAPS, “[j]ust as kings exhibit their lordship over their kingdom by hoisting a special flag [...] the *dhaja* [flag] over a mandir signifies the sovereignty of God” (BAPS, 2014: 97).

<sup>787</sup> Unlike other communities that, as discussed earlier, specifically use stone extracted from their respective homelands it seems as if BAPS tried to attune Akshardham to Delhi's specific architectural aesthetic by using the red and pink sandstone that is commonly used in Delhi's architecture. The Qutab Minar, numerous Mughal buildings, colonial New Delhi, Rewal's Standing Conference of Public Enterprises Office Complex and Correa's Life Insurance Corporation and many other significant landmarks have all been built in red, beige and pink sandstone (Martin, 2007: 58).

<sup>788</sup> Brosius, who dedicated an entire section on the question of authenticity with regard to Akshardham, says: “A question asked repeatedly by outsiders with a critical stance is whether the emphasis on ritual spaces and the practices tied to them only hides the fact that the complex is inauthentic, or even ‘fake’” (Brosius, 2010: 178-179). See, for instance, [www.tripadvisor.in/Attraction\\_Review-g304551-d626913-Reviews-Swaminarayan\\_Akshardham-New\\_Delhi\\_National\\_Capital\\_Territory\\_of\\_Delhi.html](http://www.tripadvisor.in/Attraction_Review-g304551-d626913-Reviews-Swaminarayan_Akshardham-New_Delhi_National_Capital_Territory_of_Delhi.html).



religious significance but a temple that is built with a hotel, food court and animatronic shows didn't feel right.”<sup>789</sup> Another reviewer/user with the name Babeline says about Akshardham:

Huge money has been invested 10 years back to build this temple. It is very nice and has great sculpture but I was just asking myself why money is invested in sculptures in a country which has so much poverty?<sup>790</sup>

On similar lines, in the year of Akshardham's inauguration, Sengupta published an article in *Tehelka* in which he asks: “How many crores does god want us to spend on him so that he can possess a swanky, sprawling mansion which dominates the skyline?” (Sengupta, 2005). Nussbaum too notices the hypocrisy, that the “temple in Gujarat is a stunning sight, glorious in the midst of poverty” (Nussbaum, 2008: 25). On humanitarian grounds it would have perhaps been better to invest the hundreds of crore rupees to fight poverty; this, however, has little to do with the question whether Akshardham is a temple i.e. a sacred site or not. What links these statements with each other is the presumption that lavishness cannot be *sacred*. The *sacred* is here defined/identified as opposed to and separate from the *secular*—a world driven by politics, money, power and meaningless consumption. In Nandy's words:

A bhavya temple has nothing to do with size. [...] The Akshardham temple in Delhi is grand, but it is characterless and tasteless and caters mainly to tourists from the urban middle class. [...] On the other hand, the temple at Sabarimala is small but exudes sacredness. Its pilgrims are moved rather than awed by it (Nandy, 2010).

As already mentioned, the name of Akshardham says it is “abode of God” yet Sengupta, who like Nandy seemingly criticises Akshardham's lavishness, provocatively claims in the title of his article: “God Lives Elsewhere” (Sengupta, 2005). But how does he or anyone else know where and how God lives? How can what he says be any more right or true than what BAPS and its followers say? Is there or can there be any *proof* that God is living lavishly? Perhaps—if God lives at all—

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<sup>789</sup> Gavin O's post dates April 3, 2016, with the title: Awful Commercialised Temple ([www.tripadvisor.in/ShowUserReviews-g304551-d626913-r361163208-Swaminarayan\\_Akshardham-New\\_Delhi\\_National\\_Capital\\_Territory\\_of\\_Delhi.html#REVIEWS](http://www.tripadvisor.in/ShowUserReviews-g304551-d626913-r361163208-Swaminarayan_Akshardham-New_Delhi_National_Capital_Territory_of_Delhi.html#REVIEWS)).

<sup>790</sup> Babeline's post dates March 1, 2016 ([www.tripadvisor.in/ShowUserReviews-g304551-d626913-r352114013-Swaminarayan\\_Akshardham-New\\_Delhi\\_National\\_Capital\\_Territory\\_of\\_Delhi.html#REVIEWS](http://www.tripadvisor.in/ShowUserReviews-g304551-d626913-r352114013-Swaminarayan_Akshardham-New_Delhi_National_Capital_Territory_of_Delhi.html#REVIEWS)).

God lives even more lavishly? Temples and other religious spaces have always attempted to answer the question of where God lives—why is ACC’s interpretation so galling to some people? According to *Time Out Delhi*, the most pressing question with regard to ACC remains: “Is Akshardham a monument to piety or ostentation?” (*Time Out*, 2010: 200). Ignorant of the complexities that this question opens up, the magazine’s answer is simple: “You decide” (*Time Out*, 2010: 200). Arguably, more fruitful than trying to define/identify what defines and distinguishes “a monument to piety” from “a monument to [...] ostentation” is to understand that no matter what one’s answer is, it must be understood as coming from a certain pre-defined notion about what a temple (or for that matter any sacred/spiritual space) is or should be like. After all, it seems as if it is only possible to call something “fake,” “inauthentic,” “not real,” “pretentious,” *etc.* with reference to its supposed opposite opponent—the “true,” “authentic,” “real,” “pure,” *etc.*, and vice versa. Both presume that it is possible to say *what Akshardham is*. But is it possible to say *what Akshardham is*? Is it at all possible to draw a line between *sacred* and *secular*? Is the line drawn between *sacred* and *secular* itself not an outcome of modernity known to be driven to identify/define/explain/understand each and every thing and body? Is it possible for something to be *either sacred or secular*? How can we distinguish the *sacred* from the *secular*? Isn’t there always something *secular* in the *sacred* and something *sacred* in the *secular*? Can we ever say *what a specific architecture or architecture in general is*? Who has the power to say *what architecture is* and *what Akshardham is*?

As mentioned earlier, by now, many scholars have twisted and turned their mind trying to make sense of Akshardham and capturing in words *what it is*.<sup>791</sup> Seemingly unable to find a clear-cut answer, they try to define/identify what Akshardham and other (comparable) architectures are by using words such as *fusion*, *hybridity*, *juxtaposition*, *etc.* and try to name it and other similar places “temple-cum-exhibition,” “temple-cum-museum,” “temple-cum-shopping mall,” “temple-monument-complex,” “temple-museum-theme park,” “hi-tech religious and nationalist them park,” “museum-temple,” “exhibition-temple,” “museum-like structures,” *etc.* that seemingly mean to reflect this reading (Menon, 1997: 28; Mathur

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<sup>791</sup> The lack of a *shikhara*, Akshardham’s schedule and BAPS’ initial resistance to call Akshardham as “temple” let scholars wondering *what Akshardham is* and how to define/read it.

and Singh, 2007; Kakar, 2009: 392; Srivastava, 2009: 338; Kim, 2010: 142; Singh, 2010: 47, Jain, 2011: 52, 54; Puri, 2015: 257; Mukerji and Basu, 2015; *etc.*).<sup>792</sup> But, what do these words tell us besides saying that two (or more) distinct things have come together? Is it at all possible to say what something is? How do they help us to understand architecture? Do they not leave us with the same problem?

However, as Benjamin, Foucault, Rancière, and other scholars discuss in different contexts, meaning varies on its context and is given from outside then how does it matter what/how scholar name it?<sup>793</sup> And, context and the perception of something seem to be depending on the context, which has been defined/identified as ever changing. Taking into consideration that, as discussed earlier, BAPS changed Akshardham's name from Akshardham Monument to Akshardham Mandir, one could get the impression that even its creator/author BAPS cannot name it, say *what it is*. Thus, the problem is whether it is at all possible to say *what Akshardham is*.

## READING AKSHARDHAM

It seems as if Akshardham has been constructed as “*Abode of God*” and, at the same time, as place of learning. Visibility, guidebooks, signboards, guards and CCTV are a few of the indicators of these modes that underline a particular view of knowledge and learning. Akshardham lays out knowledge for the visitor to consume in a way that is seemingly easily digestible. Information is spread from an authoritative source to an (often uninformed) reader/onlooker presented as objective and value-free, and in that way comparable to the information provided by 21<sup>st</sup>-century (secular) institutions such as the museum. The communicative aim of Akshardham is to educate and to lay out knowledge for the visitors such that it may be absorbed in practices outside and within. The architecture controls the experience and transmits signals to the visitor of what to do and what not to do, how to behave and what to think. Through pamphlets, information boards, guides and the exhibitions, BAPS sets its own frame of discourse and creates its own narrative. Everything has been fixed/said—photos, texts, etc. are distributed, there is no need/room for anyone to come up with another reading with their own pen, and paper,

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<sup>792</sup> See also Shukla, 1997: 298. Compare with Derrida's discussion of meaning of the hyphen (Derrida, 1998 [1996]: 10-11).

<sup>793</sup> See the first chapter.

or camera.<sup>794</sup> Hereby, BAPS chooses its language carefully. In writings it tries to utilise a ‘scholarly’ and ‘technical’ sounding language style, representing ‘facts and figures’ without being too theoretical and abstract, suggesting objectivity, wide acceptance and validity.

At Akshardham, each and every thing seems to have meaning—the problem of legibility and readability is omnipresent. On its website, BAPS declares confidently: “[E]very carving carries meaning” ([www.akshardham.com](http://www.akshardham.com); [www.akshardham.com/gujarat/monument/](http://www.akshardham.com/gujarat/monument/)). Akshardham is densely conceptualised and highly emblematic in nature. As discussed above, each architectural detail is presented by BAPS as having a particular meaning, which in itself is represented as an integral part of the architecture with no room for ambiguity. This highly self-conscious approach leads to a technically perfect construction; however, it is not always the perfect and ideal that attracts; chaos, uncertainty and asymmetry have their own attractiveness. BAPS not only explains Akshardham in inscriptions engraved in its stone but also provides a wide range of facts and figures about Akshardham, such as the numbers of stones, sculptures and pillars that have been used as well as the hours spent in its construction. Moreover, BAPS tries to uncover the meaning of different architectural elements by explaining: “The elephant [...] is a symbol of strength” and white marble symbolises “absolute purity and peace,” *etc.* (Vivekjivandas, et al., 2009: 11-12). The perpetual repetition of these tropes makes it easy to memorise the narrative. As mentioned earlier, such a detailed analysis of the temple by the creator/author is not present at other temples in India.<sup>795</sup> But, does one need to understand/read each and every detail of the temple to understand it? And, can one understand/read each and every detail of the temple? How does a tag help us to understand it any better?

As outlined in this and the previous chapters, it seems as if it is commonly understood that architecture represents something and that it is a means of communication. For a long time, the task of translating this architecture or text and

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<sup>794</sup> For “security” reasons, Akshardham does not allow people to carry a range of items—amongst them pen, paper and camera—into the compound. See [www.akshardham.com/visitor-info/#security](http://www.akshardham.com/visitor-info/#security). Brosius discusses Akshardham’s security measures with regard to othering, exclusion and inclusion (Brosius, 2010: 233-241).

<sup>795</sup> Compare, for example, with Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir and Malai Mandir.

making it readable/understandable to educate others about its meaning has been handed over a translator, in this case, art or architectural historians.<sup>796</sup> However, in the case of Akshardham the creator (BAPS) itself tries to say what it is—as if the work of art itself tries to translate itself contradicting any logic.

Considering that Akshardham welcomes thousands of people every day, one could assume that there must be thousands of readings of Akshardham. However, the ban of pen and paper, phones and cameras limits the means of engaging with Akshardham. If the possibilities of alternative readings of Akshardham seem limited, it is because BAPS wishes to have the last word about it.<sup>797</sup> BAPS' reading of Akshardham creates a powerful truth effect—it can make one feel as if there is nothing left to say about Akshardham that has not been said by its creator or author. In short, BAPS constructs Akshardham within the conceptual framework created over centuries repeating the idea that there is something *in* architecture that if we are willing to explore it carefully we will be able to understand and say *what it is*. BAPS tries to ensure that we *read* and *understand* all of Akshardham's bits and pieces *correctly*.

As described earlier, Akshardham is literally covered with labels, similar to those used at the (modern) museum, seemingly providing information on what it is that is shown and what it is that we see. These texts are trying to name what specific elements are, and consequently, what Akshardham is. Thus, one could even argue that Akshardham loses whatever it is that makes it architecture and becomes something else—perhaps an object like the objects in the museum that have seemingly turned into exhibits and even works of art. For centuries, the museum has been considered one amongst various other institutions that have the power to define and say what something is. However, the very idea that it is possible to define and say, for example, what art is—on which the institution of the (modern art) museum is built—has been shaken many a time.<sup>798</sup> With this attempt, it seems as if BAPS tries to take matters

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<sup>796</sup> The task of the translator and the problem of translation have been discussed, for example, by Benjamin and Derrida (Benjamin, 1991b; Derrida, 1985, 1995, 1998 [1996]: 56-58, 2002; *etc.*).

<sup>797</sup> Compare with Singh, 2010: 53.

<sup>798</sup> At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Marcel Duchamp, for example tries to challenge with his *readymades* the institutionalisation of art and the possibility of defining art.

into its own hand taking the object out of the museum into life. Noticeably, BAPS neither challenges the conceptual framework nor the possibility to define what art is, rather BAPS tries to use it on its own terms to enforce the meaning of its belief. One could perhaps even argue that by doing so, it challenges the sovereignty of the museum and the framework in which it functions by its own means.

Akshardham is a policed space. Contradicting BAPS' framing of Akshardham as space that is not only accessible to all but as space in which "all are *welcome*," high walls, tight security checks and regulations ensure that no one and nothing *unwanted* enters the compound; visitors are not allowed to carry phones, cameras, umbrellas, *etc.*, not even pen and paper—only a bottle of water and wallet are allowed.<sup>799</sup> Through omnipresent CCTV, invisible eyes—the panopticon—watch each and every thing in and around ACC.<sup>800</sup> *Who* is watching *whom* and *why*? Maybe we do not understand how real the threat is? Moreover, we might believe that such measures can be excused as a response to the attack on Gandhinagar's Akshardham in 2002. Even so, we cannot stop asking: *who* or *what* needs this kind of security? God? BAPS? Visitors? What is the threat? If *death* is the threat, then why are visitors not allowed to carry at least a pen and a paper? Why is BAPS afraid of the photographic image? What has BAPS got to hide? Can religion and God be killed with pen and paper?

Reddy and Zavos' description of Akshardham as, "a space which is different, although in many ways recognizably familiar" summarises in one sentence the problem (Reddy and Zavos, 2009: 241). Many of Akshardham's features seem to fit perfectly the categories and frameworks created over the centuries, which makes it appear so familiar, but at the same time, there are many features that do not quite fit into these boxes and, therefore, seemingly contradict them. Thus, Akshardham slips out of our grasp and our desire to fix its meaning. And, it seems we are not alone with this problem. As mentioned earlier, BAPS initially named and presented Akshardham as "Monument," which is considered by BAPS as one of the several categories of

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<sup>799</sup> Compare with Brosius who discusses Akshardham's rules/regulation with regard to the inclusion and exclusion of specific communities such as the Muslim community (Brosius, 2010: 235-241). Compare with Guha-Thakurta, 2014: 203.

<sup>800</sup> The idea of the panopticon has been discussed by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1995: 194-228).

architecture, as discussed in one of the previous sections of this chapter (Singh, 2010: 57). Nevertheless, according to Singh, “most visitors refer to the central shrine as a ‘temple’” (Singh, 2010: 57). However, in recent years, BAPS has reconsidered its reading and naming of Akshardham as “Monument” now to refer to it as “*Mandir*.” Considering the efforts that BAPS has put into making each and every stone of Akshardham legible and readable, it seems paradoxical that now BAPS struggles to give a finite and final reading of Akshardham—the author’s reading of his creation seems to have its limits.

One could perhaps read the decision to call Akshardham a “*Mandir*” with regard to socio-economic, historic, cultural and political developments. This would imply that the idea that there is nothing *in* an object that makes it what it is but that the object is made through meaning given from the outside, which means that once the context changes, meaning also changes.<sup>801</sup> However, if we consider what Benjamin and Derrida discuss with reference to translation, we might look at BAPS’ indecisiveness to define Akshardham either as a “Monument” or as a “*Mandir*” in a different way (Benjamin, 1991b; Derrida, 1985, 1995, 1998 [1996]: 56-58, 2002).

It could be argued that these issues are problems of reading and translation. Translation is the attempt to convert something from one form to another, which means attempting to fix meaning of architecture through reading and writing. But, how much can be translated? According to Benjamin and Derrida, there is something *in* the text, something between the lines that cannot be translated. Thus, it seems as if there is always something that *remains* obscure or unsaid within the *said*. In other words, there is always the *outside*—outside of any *given*. It means, even if we are ready to go beyond the question whether Akshardham is *secular* or *sacred* to the extent of questioning whether Akshardham is *architecture* (isn’t it in many ways more like an image, sculpture or even object exhibited in the museum?), or even further, we will not be able to give a final word saying *what it is*. Then, we might have to read the inability to define Akshardham within the *given* categories, as an impossibility of defining Akshardham *entirely*. In that way, we could read the indecisiveness also as

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<sup>801</sup> This idea that has been discussed in different contexts by Davis, Flood and Rancière (Davis, 1997; Flood, 2002; Rancière, 2004; *etc.*).

facing the impossibility to say *what exactly Akshardham is*.

*Sacred* is understood as something that goes beyond fixed structures, something that is untranslatable, something that we cannot put into words. Perhaps we could think of *art* along the same lines? As Derrida emphasises, translation is an attempt to appropriate, which has its limits. It also means that no matter how often we try to read and translate and how much we read and translate the *text*—that is in our case Akshardham—it cannot come to a particular end. But, if our translation will be no better—no more true—than other translations, isn't one *good* translation, such as by Akshardham's creator, enough? Then why don't we stop?

According to Benjamin and Derrida, every *text* needs translation in order to survive.<sup>802</sup> If a text is not read or translated, it will be forgotten. In that sense, there is, unlike to what Benjamin suggested, no such thing as *good* or *bad* translation. Thus, if it is exposed to all kinds of *readings* from different people of different genres, of different cultures and religions, what kind of limited role does BAPS have, despite it being the one who created Akshardham—BAPS as the creator or author of the work—*work of art*? However, it might be an impossible task to stop people from reading and writing by having a high barbed-wired wall, a panopticon and a ban on pen and paper.

The experience by some people of Akshardham as “inauthentic” or “fake” is itself problematic, for the particular reading is a result of an attempt to tie down architecture to one fixed meaning. Hence, it is better and more accommodative if it is considered as a work—a work of art—that goes *beyond* the hands which created it; thereby, through passing on to many hands, Akshardham also, in its exposure, becomes a host that welcomes any guest who comes to its door, blurring the borders of religion, culture, gender, nation, *etc.*

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<sup>802</sup> Derrida speaks here of the imperative “[T]ranslate me, don't translate me” (Derrida, 1985: 102).



## FIGURES FIFTH CHAPTER



Figure 5.1: Akshardham (by BAPS, <http://akshardham.com/download/photo-galleries/moods-of-akshardham/#&gid=1&pid=11>).

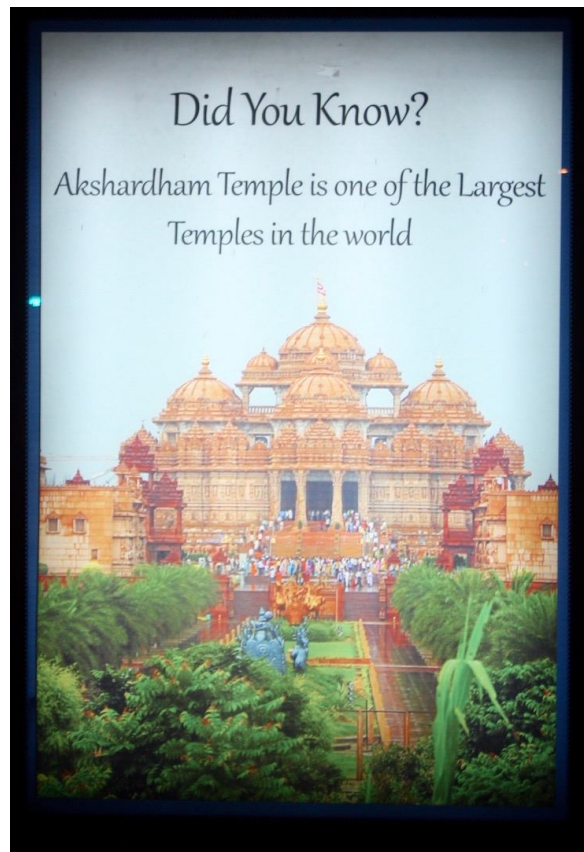


Figure 5.2: Poster of Akshardham in Delhi (by A. Hartig).



Figure 5.3: Posters of Akshardham at New Delhi's Airport (by A. Hartig).



Figure 5.4: Akshardham in Gandhinagar (by BAPS, <http://www.akshardham.com/gujarat/photogallery/index.htm>).





Figure 5.7: Photoshopped Image of Akshardham (BAPS, 2010 [2007]: 14).



Figure 5.8: Akshardham and its Gajendra Peeth (by BAPS, <http://akshardham.com/download/photo-galleries/gajendra-peeth/#&gid=1&pid=9>).



Figure 5.9: Detail of Akshardham's Gajendra Peeth (by BAPS, <http://akshardham.com/download/photo-galleries/gajendra-peeth/#&gid=1&pid=10>).



Figure 5.10: Akshardham with "Garden" (by BAPS, <http://akshardham.com/download/photo-galleries/moods-of-akshardham/#&gid=1&pid=7>).



Figure 5.11: Woman reading explanations of a scene of Akshardham's Gajendra Peeth (by BAPS, <http://akshardham.com/download/photo-galleries/gajendra-peeth/#&gid=1&pid=4>).



Figure 5.12: Narayan Peeth (by BAPS, <http://akshardham.com/explore/Mandir/>).

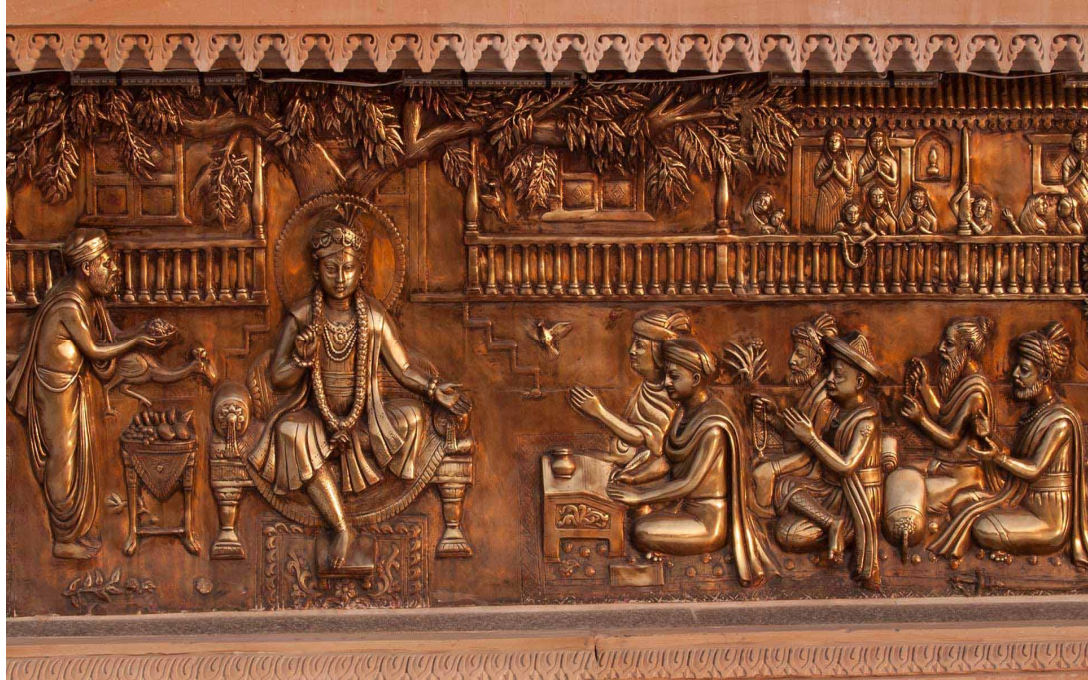


Figure 5.13: Detail Narayan Peeth (by BAPS, <http://akshardham.com/download/photo-galleries/carvings-of-akshardham/#&gid=1&pid=13>).



Figure 5.14: Bharat Upavan (by BAPS, <http://akshardham.com/download/photo-galleries/gardens/#&gid=1&pid=4>).



Figure 5.15: Mandovar of the Sun Temple in Modhera (by A. Hartig).



Figure 5.16: Detail of Modhera's Sun Temple (by A. Hartig).



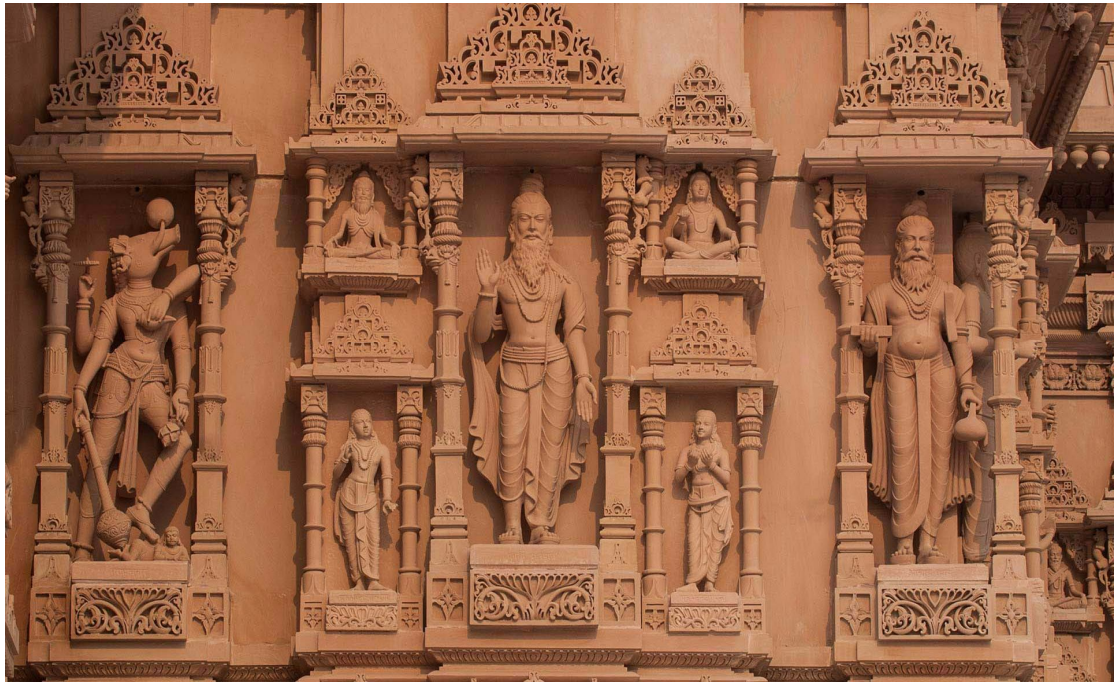


Figure 5.17: Detail of Akshardham's Mandovar (by BAPS, <http://akshardham.com/download/photo-galleries/carvings-of-akshardham/#&gid=1&pid=11>).



Figure 5.18: Detail of Mandovar of the Sun Temple in Modhera (by A. Hartig).



Figure 5.19: Akshardham's Interior (by BAPS, <http://www.akshardham.com/photo-gallery/mandir/mandapams.htm>).

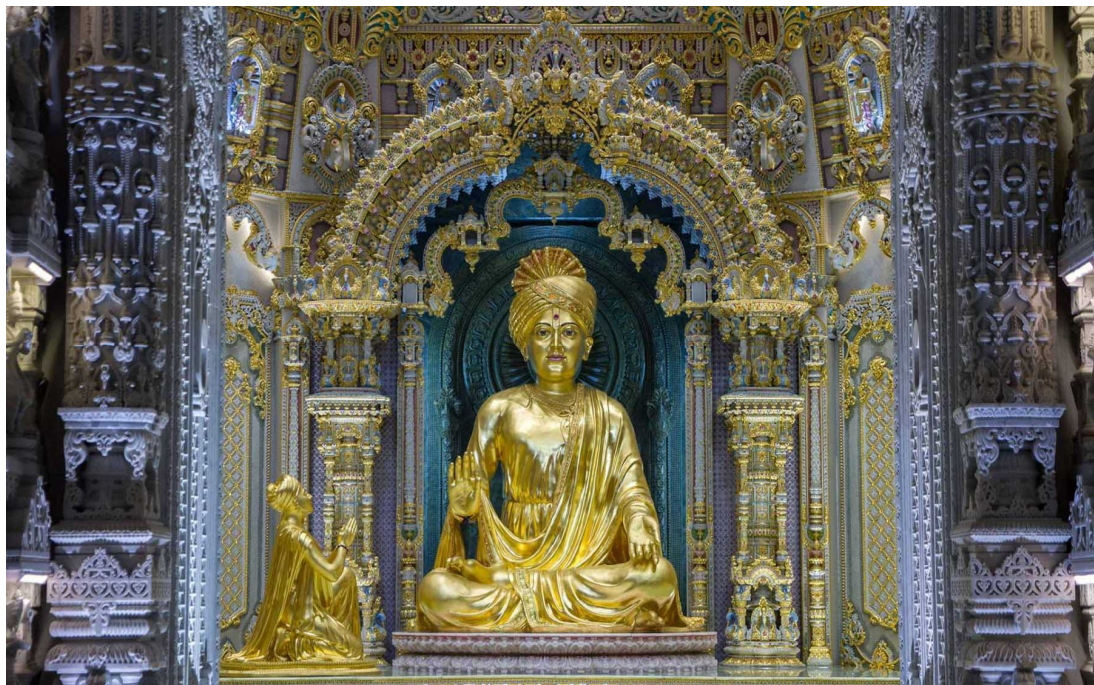


Figure 5.20: Swaminarayan in Akshardham's Garbhagruha (by BAPS, <http://akshardham.com/download/photo-galleries/garbhagruh/#&gid=1&pid=3>).



Figure 5.21: Akshardham's Garbhagruha prior to 2009 (by BAPS, <http://www.akshardham.com/photogallery/monument/garbhagruh.htm>).

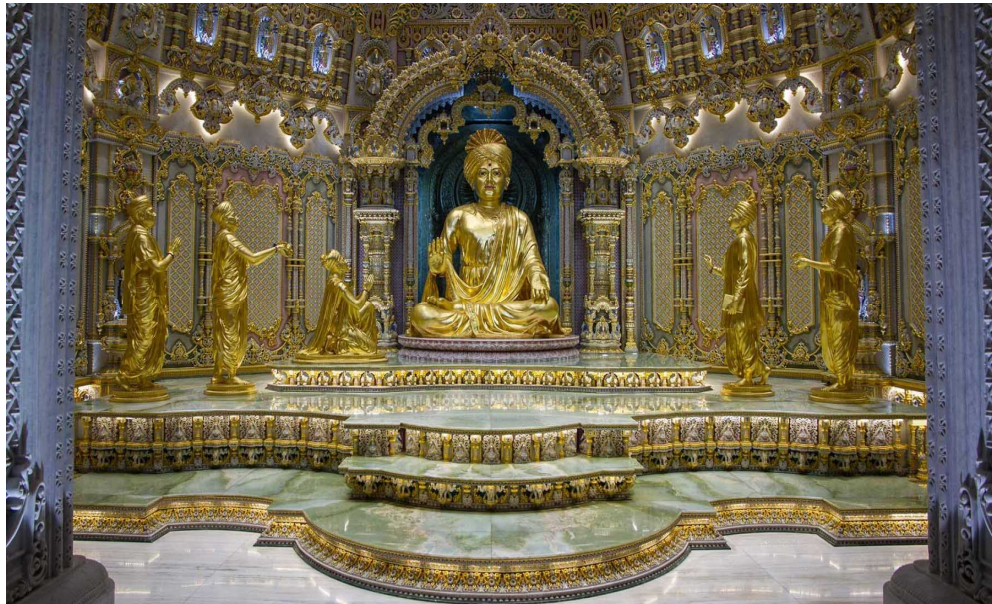


Figure 5.22: Akshardham's Garbhagruha after 2009 (by BAPS, <http://akshardham.com/download/photo-galleries/garbhagruh/#&gid=1&pid=2>).



Figure 5.23: Exhibition of "Holy Relics of Bhagwan Swaminarayan" at Akshardham (by BAPS, <http://akshardham.com/explore/Mandir/garbhagruh/>).



Figure 5.24: Scene of Akshardham's Inauguration in November, 2005 (by BAPS, <http://www.baps.org/photos/2005/6-Nov-Opening-Ceremony-1836.aspx?mid=3657>).

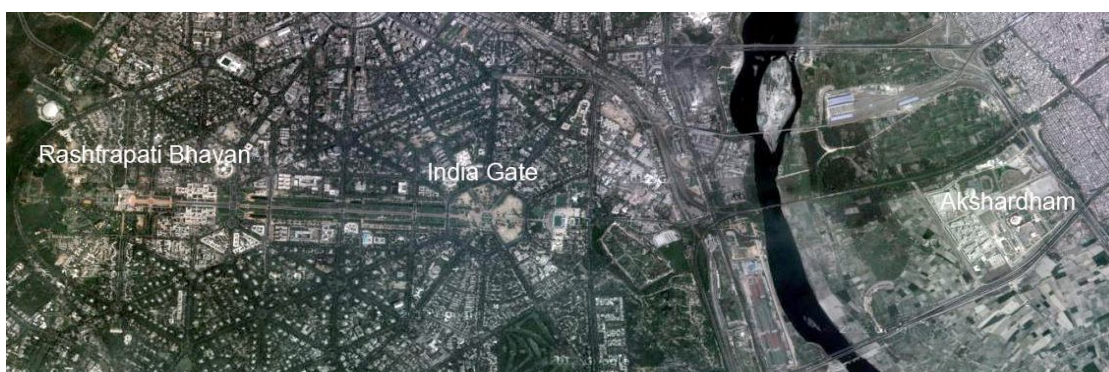


Figure 5.25: Location of Akshardham in Delhi (Google Maps 2012).

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has been concerned with annotating the discourse of power with regard to the Hindu temple from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a period which includes India at the cusp of nationhood to its renewed profile in the age of globalisation. The focus of this investigation has been the nation's capital, Delhi, and the study has focused on individual temples as case-studies to map the temple-scape of the city in the period mentioned. In doing so, the thesis has laid out a set of interrelations between urban and national history, the discourse of Indian art history and issues around architectural heritage as it came to be codified in the colonial period. The study has operated from the baseline that temples—in the Indian context—continue to be powerful institutions that have ‘modernised’ to augment their influence within communities in India. The study thus sought to recalibrate the understanding of the Indian temple—beyond sterile discussions of architectural ‘style’ to place it within the context of identity politics and process of nation-building and how these prerogatives had impacted in the architectural-scape of the capital city.

Attempting to study the role and meaning that the Hindu temple plays in the contemporary period, the first chapter of the thesis laid out the ground for the case-studies that followed with respect to how architecture in general and the Hindu temple in particular have been discussed over time in the academic context. It argued that the colonial forms or modes of knowledge are constitutive of the field of Indian architecture; these discourses around Indian architecture and religious architecture in particular have contributed not only to enabling how the Hindu temple is read today but also to the ways in which temples are built in recent times. Thus, categories and their valences—with regard to what is ‘authentic’ temple architecture, as well as questions around what constitutes ‘ancient’ Indian or ‘Hindu’ architecture are ones which continue to dictate the discourses around present-day temple architecture. So formed under the impress of western knowledge and categories, Indian architecture and temple architecture in particular came to be read through texts and discourses that had also undergirded western architecture. Thus, the first chapter focused on texts discussing architecture, history of architecture and architectural practices. Beginning

with Vitruvius' *De Architectura* in which Vitruvius defines/identifies certain architectural features as Doric, Ionic and Corinthian, the first chapter outlined a history of reading architecture and the Hindu temple through the concept of identity of community, religion, region, nation, *etc.* Another foundational text discussed in the chapter is Hodges' *Dissertation*; it lays out how tightly architecture is tied to identity through his thesis that each and every *nation* has its own architecture to which it will hold on to across geographies. Hodges' observations were made at the dawn of colonialism, a response as much to rapidly changing geographies as much as it was to an acquaintance with varied architectures; that is to say, Hodges' very observations and his desire to bring this diversity under a unified schema were produced by the same conditions, viz. of a changing world order presaging colonialism. The idea that architecture is linked to identity has been further deepened by 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars, such as Fergusson, Zerffi and Coomaraswamy, who discuss the meaning of style in relation to race. The framework of scholars such as Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch differs from the fact- and figure-based framework used by the colonial scholars in that these scholars searched for the object's *intrinsic meaning* in their works. Nevertheless, like the colonial scholars, Coomaraswamy and Kramrisch pinned down objects to a particular meaning, which is problematic as meaning is always given in a certain context from the outside and is thus political in nature. As scholars, such as Davis and Guha-Thakurta have discussed the meaning of objects is constituted in relation to the context and is hence dynamic than static. It is against this backdrop of the unfolding debates on the act of giving meaning that art and architecture are not imagined as things that live beyond boundaries but things that are defined by boundaries of the community, the religion, the region, the nation, *etc.*

While the first chapter outlined a framework that allows engagement with all kinds of architectures and critically discussed the very discourse that unfolds around architecture, especially Indian temple architecture, the second chapter introduced a selection of temples shaping Delhi's contemporary temple-scape consisting of comparatively 'young' architecture. Temples such as the Yogmaya Mandir, the Hanuman Mandir and the Kalkaji Mandir that are considered to be Delhi's oldest temples feature architecture that was not built prior to the Mughal period. With regard to the argument of the thesis, these temples are significant as their architecture differs

from the ‘typical’ Hindu temple architecture discussed and defined in the academic discourse. While in the academic discourse, the Hindu temple defined/identified features, such as the *shikhara* and the *garbhagraha*, as essential architectural elements/features of the Hindu temple, the majority of these old temples do not feature these ‘typical’ architectural elements/features.

Studying Delhi’s Hindu temples chronologically, the second chapter discussed how against the political, socio-economic and cultural backdrop of the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Hindu temple became a significant symbol of/for Hindu/Indian identity. It is in this context of emerging nationalism and Hindutva ideology that Delhi’s Hindu temples ‘step out’ of their shadowy existence—inaugurated in 1939, Delhi’s Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir was not only built to mark the presence of Hindus in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Delhi and India but also to (re)claim it. It is in the context of this configuration of nationalism or reconfiguration of nationalism on Hindutva ideologies that the Hindu temple comes into prominence. Moreover, taking up, for instance, the example of Delhi’s Valmiki Mandir that was, like the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, sponsored by the Birla family, the second chapter highlighted the role of the Hindu temple as a means resorted by Hindu organisations to (symbolically) include untouchables and Adivasis into the larger Hindu fold.

The majority of temples constituting the city’s diverse 21<sup>st</sup> century temple-scape, however, were built after India’s Independence/Partition. Delhi owes this to its status as the capital of British India and later, its continued all-India profile due to its position as the capital of independent India as well. Thus, Delhi pulled and continues to pull Indians across the country to the city—many of Delhi’s temples were built by communities not ‘native’ to the city. Whether built in a ‘traditional’ or modern style, what these temples have in common is that unlike the city’s older temples these temples take recourse to the essential and defined architectural elements/features such as the *shikhara*. However, at the same time, temples such as the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir and the Sai Baba Mandir on Lodhi Road that do not feature ‘classical’ architectural elements and features can also be found in Delhi.

Reading the Hindu temple in the context of identity politics, another interesting aspect about Delhi is that although Delhi has been identified as the Pandava's capital Indraprastha, Delhi has long history of Muslim and colonial rule. Such a fraught past, however, has not stopped people/communities/Trusts/*etc.* from building temples in Delhi. On the contrary, it seems as Delhi has at times been deliberately selected as the ideal location for the construction of temples for this very reason of lack of Hindu presence in the architectural-scape of the city: Pertinently how can there not be an impressive Hindu temple in the capital city of India, homeland of the Hindus?

As discussed in the third chapter, the construction of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was an outcome of a strategic agenda spearheaded by leading figures of the nationalist/independence movement, coming at a time when certain Hindu leaders and organisations believed that in order not to lose their power in the context of electoral democracy, it was necessary to modernise the existing socio-economic system and include the earlier excluded communities into the Hindu fold as to ensure numerical strength of the Hindus. While the Arya Samaj and other organisations 'Hinduised' people and communities, it was Savarkar who formulated a definition of "Hindu" that by its very definition included each and every Indian who follows a religion *native* to India. In defining Hindu in this way, not only were the untouchables and Adivasis embraced as *Hindus* but also Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, *etc.* At the same time, Savarkar's definition paved the way for fomenting Hindu nationalism and propagating Hindutva ideology, which excludes all Indians following Christianity or Islam.

As discussed in detail in the third chapter, it is this definition that has been at worked in the conception of the architecture of the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir—for instance, various plaques that have been embedded in the temple's exterior and interior walls echo Savarkar's definition. The temple tries to familiarise its visitors with this pan-Indian religion, i.e. Hinduism through images and statues exhibited in the temple and its adjoining park. Reminiscent of modern exhibitions, labels and texts have been attached to these images/statues so as to explain the onlooker/reader what



is being depicted. The park adjoining the temple further emphasises this concept: its exhibition of historic figures lacks any Muslim and British/Christian figures, implying that ‘Hindu’ and India are synonymous. The temple’s architecture was designed against the same matrix that homogenises India, Indian art, Indian architecture, Indian religion, Indian culture, *etc.* Unlike many later creators of temples, Sris Chandra Chatterjee designed Delhi’s Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir not in reference to any particular (regional) Hindu temple or architecture. Instead, Chatterjee extracted certain ‘typical’ elements/features of the Hindu temple, transformed them in a modernist visual language and assembled them in the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir. Chatterjee’s vision for Hindu temples to follow this particular amalgamated design as a prototype of an Indian temple in future was only partly fulfilled; although the Birla family sponsored a few other temples, such as the Birla temples in Bhopal and Varanasi’s BHU holding on to Chatterjee’s design, other temples, such as the Birla temples in Nagda, Kalyan and Renukoot, however, were designed in a ‘traditional’ design.

Although the practice of constructing temples in ‘traditional’ (regional) designs also existed earlier, this idea and practice was undoubtedly promoted through the construction of the Somnath Mandir shortly after India’s Independence/Partition on May 8, 1950.<sup>803</sup> As discussed earlier, the government and leading figures of the newly formed country framed the construction of the Somnath Mandir as a significant national project. It is against this historical backdrop that the idea of the Hindu temple as a (national) symbol of/for India took on a concrete shape. Moreover, the construction of the Somnath Mandir by Prabhashankar Sompura manifested another idea—the significance of style. In the case of the Somnath Mandir, the old-look style was imagined as adding to the temple’s meaning that goes beyond the meaning of the temple as a sacred space. The construction of the Somnath Mandir is a political gesture, a gesture of victory. Assigning the task to create such a symbol to a *sthapati* implied an unbroken and eternal ‘Indian’ civilisation and identity. By the end of that very decade, however, a reorganisation of Indian states on the basis of language/linguistic differences became an insistent demand from several regions of the country.

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<sup>803</sup> Michell mentions, for example, that from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards temples in South Indian style were built in Sri Lanka (Michell, 1995: 276).

While language operated as a means of cohesion to bolster regional identities, it threatened to rupture the largely north-Indian hegemonic narrative of a pan-Indian identity.

The tension between this pan-Indian identity and regional cultures, undergirded by language, has been explored in the fourth chapter, using the case of a Tamil temple in the capital. This idea that a particular architectural design/style *belongs* to a certain community, has been pushed forward in the context of Tamil nationalism. The various governments of the state of Tamil Nadu, which was formed in 1969, have been heavily supporting the revival of traditional Tamil language/literature/art/architecture through varied measures. For example, the establishment of the Government College of Architecture and Sculpture was done so as to educate students in ‘traditional’ craftsmanship. The College trains its students in a codified style of architecture that has now been understood as ‘Tamil’ architecture, deriving elements from varied styles and periods, but which have now been collated to produce a distinct visual identity, as ‘Tamil’ architecture. This utilisation and insistence of identity through architecture is observed not only with regard to the Tamil community but also other communities’ contribution to the mosaic of Delhi’s diverse temple-scape.

This diversity, however, produces conditions akin to the market, wherein varied sects and organisations and their temples must compete in a growing (religious) market and the temple must use means to attract people’s attention. Financial backing and political support are key aspects in raising the profile of the temple, and temple authorities presumably have limited resources. However, an increasingly globalised market and the movement of large numbers of Indians as skilled workers in developed countries, has helped organisations such as the BAPS to expand and strengthen their base and operations. Having put great efforts into establishing a strong network of supporters and establishing close ties with those in power around the world for a long period of time, BAPS clearly had the power to build one of the most impressive temples in the world in India’s political centre. Like the creators of temples such as Sree Saminatha Swami Seva Samaj, BAPS turns to

ancient temple architecture for designing its temples. However, Akshardham has much more to offer than a masterfully crafted, impressive temple—opposing the practice of quick pass-by worship, one can easily spend up to four hours visiting Akshardham’s various attractions. What temples such as the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, the Valmiki Mandir, the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir, the ISKCON Mandir and the Uttara Swaminatha Swamimalai Mandir tried to do on a much smaller scale with limited means, BAPS has brought to new dimensions making use of new forms of media and cutting-edge technology. It addresses popular contemporary expectations across caste, class, age, gender, nationality, *etc.* and plugs into contemporary forms of leisure, as well as attitudes towards worship through a canny use of its resources towards creating a spectacle and producing an ‘event’ out of the visit. If the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir’s park already shows signs of forlorn abandonment, it drives home the point that a visit to the temple—at least for non-tourists remains mainly guided by the idea of worship, albeit in pleasant surroundings. BAPS differs in this—not in the least due to its scale, but also due to its harnessing of technology to retain and engage people for several hours within the site. Attracting several thousand people daily, the Akshardham Cultural Complex must be understood as an institution with considerable impact on the contemporary discourse with regard to ideas of religion, identity, nation, history, *etc.* Akshardham provides definitive answers to questions on Hinduism and its pantheon, entirely read through the organisation’s ideology; the sheer scale and authoritative tone of its material—whether on the site or elsewhere—lends a veneer of legitimacy to the discourse being put forth by the organisation. In doing so, however, BAPS feeds today’s unquenchable thirst for explanations and information which itself is the outcome of a discourse that emphasises *knowledge as power*. Comparable with the conception of Hinduism on display at the Lakshminarayan/Birla Mandir, at Akshardham, visitors are confronted with a conceptualisation of India as a ‘Hindu’ nation, wherein other religious communities have no space and place. It proposes such a view by utilising the methods that follow the contours of ‘western,’ i.e. of ‘rational’ discourse as it governs academic research and writing. BAPS explains/defines every detail of its architecture, rituals, *etc.* eliminating all potential uncertainties and at the same time robbing Akshardham of the inexplicable, unknowable force that has been associated with the idea of the sacred. Through these means, Akshardham often becomes the public face of Hinduism in the world, which it owes to its size as well as to its

location in the capital city. However, as mentioned earlier, other communities/ organisations are following suit. On March 5, 2012, east of the nation's capital, the groundbreaking ceremony for the construction of the "world's largest Hindu temple" was performed in Bihar.<sup>804</sup>

This plan to construct the world's largest temple in one of India's most underdeveloped states is spearheaded by Kishore Kunal and the Patna-based Mahavir Mandir Trust that is in charge of Patna's Mahavir Mandir, one of the most important Hanuman temples in India today.<sup>805</sup> This reflects clearly in the scale of the temple's income.<sup>806</sup> Besides monitoring this flourishing temple, Kunal and the Mahavir Mandir Trust also look after various other temples and run various charitable institutions, such as the Mahavir Cancer Institute and Research Centre, trying to help impoverished people including those from marginalised communities such as the Dalits. The execution of this extraordinary plan of constructing the world's largest temple that will come at an estimated cost of five hundred crore rupees is viable because of the increasing popularity of the Mahavir Mandir since the late 1980s (unknown author, 2015d, Jha, 2015).<sup>807</sup>

The proposed temple—and Kunal Kishore's conception of it—envisions Dalits as one of its largest constituencies, and finds expression in the fact that since 1993, Dalit priests have served at Patna's Mahavir Mandir (unknown author, 2007a).<sup>808</sup> Echoing Ratnagiri's Patit Pavan Mandir that was built at the behest of Savarkar, the Mahavir Mandir's website specifies: "The temple has got the 'pandits' (Sanskrit scholars) of the highest calibre and Bairagi sadhus of the Ramanand sect as

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<sup>804</sup> Some sources speak of the event as foundation stone-laying ceremony.

<sup>805</sup> See <http://www.mahavirmandirpatna.org/index.htm>.

<sup>806</sup> According to *The Times of India*, in 2008, submitted a budget of 35.13 crore rupees to the BSBRT; in comparison, the budget of other temples in Bihar and Jharkhand comes in a range of ten to forty lakh rupees (unknown author, 2008a). Kunal said the Trust spends approximately two crore rupees on health and other welfare measures (unknown author, 2008a). Whereas in 1987 the annual income of the temple was around eleven thousand rupees, in 2017, the Mahavir Mandir Trust submitted 215 crore rupees to the Bihar State Board of Religious Trusts (BSBRT), making it currently the temple with the highest budget in North India after the Vaishno Devi Mandir (unknown author, 2009; unknown author, 2017).

<sup>807</sup> The costs were earlier estimated lower.

<sup>808</sup> Kunal appointed the Dalit priest Phalhari Suryavashi Das from the Ravidas Mandir in Ayodhya as priest at Patna's Mahavir Mandir (unknown author, 2007a). See also <http://www.mahavirmandirpatna.org/Acharya%20Kishore%20Kunal.html>.

well [as] dalit priest, who all perform with highest harmony” (<http://www.mahavirmandirpatna.org/index.htm>).<sup>809</sup> As administrator and chairman of the BSBRT, Kunal has also ensured the appointment of Dalit priests and trustees at important temples throughout the state.<sup>810</sup> That in Kunal’s version of empowerment of the Dalits the integration and acceptance of the community within the Hindu fold is of utmost importance is also evident in other structural changes. Besides, ensuring the presence of Dalit priests in Bihar’s temples, he also changed the Mahavir Mandir’s ritual structure by introducing a “Brahmanical structure”, as Lutgendorf was told by a Bihari acquaintance (acquaintance quoted in Lutgendorf, 2007: 242). Going against an earlier-mentioned trend towards a quick passing-by worship, in the course of the Mahavir Mandir’s renovation, Kunal ensured that the *murti* of Hanuman of the temple that is situated right next to the Patna Junction railway station can no longer be seen from the road (Parker, 2003: 15; Asher, 2003: 367; Jain, 2017: S22, S24).<sup>811</sup> Now, one must enter the temple to “do *namasate*”, as Lutgendorf’s acquaintance emphasises (acquaintance quoted in Lutgendorf, 2007: 243). Taking these changes into account, it appears that Kunal has been altering Hanuman’s image as god of/for ‘little’ people to an ‘orthodox’ god (Caturvedi, 1982: 107; Lutgendorf, 2007: 369-370).<sup>812</sup>

Coinciding with a number of constructions of gigantic Hanuman statues and temples across North India, the turn of Patna’s Mahavir Mandir’s fate—from a seemingly neglected temple to one of the most popular Hanuman temples in North India—is perhaps not only the result of Kunal’s and the Mahavir Mandir Trust’s hard work but also that of Hanuman’s increasing popularity from the 1980s onwards which was fostered by Hindu nationalists.<sup>813</sup> Kunal is guided by right-wing Hindutva

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<sup>809</sup> In 2006, Bihar’s Chief Minister appointed Kunal as administrator of the Bihar State Board of Religious Trusts. Later, in 2010, Kunal became BSBRT’s chairman. However, in 2016, he resigned from the post in order to supervise the construction of the Viraat Ramayan Mandir. Moreover, according to *The Times of India*, Kunal wanted to pursue his academic interest and write several books about Ayodhya (Kumar, 2016). During Kunal’s tenure, more than hundred large temples were built throughout Bihar (Kumar, 2016).

<sup>810</sup> See, for example, <http://www.mahavirmandirpatna.org/Acharya%20Kishore%20Kunal.html>.

<sup>811</sup> Compare also with the discussion of the Hanuman/Vaishnodevi Mandir in the second chapter.

<sup>812</sup> As mentioned earlier, in *Hanuman’s Tale*, Lutgendorf points out that Hanuman has been “considered good for ‘little’ people: children, tribals, Dalits, and unruly urban youth you lack the discipline to join the RSS” (Lutgendorf, 2007: 370).

<sup>813</sup> As mentioned in the second chapter, since the 1980s, various Hanuman statues and Hanuman temples were built through the county such as the Hanuman Mandir in Vasant Gaon in Delhi, the Hanuman in the Chhattarpur Mandir and the Hanuman Mandir in Sidhabari (Himachal Pradesh). Compare with second chapter. On Hanuman in the context of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century refer to

ideology, as is attested by his prominent involvement with the Vishwa Hindu Parisad (VHP) and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) during the Ayodhya controversy (Lutgendorf, 2007: 243). That the construction of the Ram Janmabhumi Mandir is close to Kunal's heart is seen in his book, *Ayodhya Revisited*, published in 2016, in which he argues that the Babri Masjid was built on a Ram Mandir housing a *murti* and marking Ram's birthplace (Kunal, 2016: 78).<sup>814</sup> Kunal's apparent fascination for the construction of the Ram Janmabhumi Mandir in Ayodhya explains, perhaps at least partly, why the world's largest temple will not be dedicated to Hanuman (considering that the financial support for the Viraat Ramayan Mandir's construction comes from the Mahavir Mandir, it arguably stands to reason that the new temple would also be dedicated to Hanuman) but to Ramayana's lead characters Ram and Sita, their twin sons Luv and Kush, and Valmiki.<sup>815</sup> However, while the construction of the Ram Janmabhumi Mandir was undergirded by a highly antagonistic and conflictual attitude between the Hindus and the Muslims, the construction of the Viraat Ramayana Mandir has been presented as "demonstration of communal harmony"—the "Muslims in Bihar" have donated land and money for the construction of the temple (unknown author, 2015d). Kunal announces: "Without the help of Muslims, it would have been difficult to realise this dream project" (Kunal quoted in unknown author, 2015d).

Unlike other creators of Hindu temples, who modelled their temples on classics or textbook temples *within* the geo-political boundaries of contemporary India, Kunal crosses these boundaries in search for a model for his temple, the Viraat Ramayan Mandir. Interestingly he finds this *model* in Southeast Asia, a region that has been repeatedly discussed and referred to in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by scholars such as Havell and Coomaraswamy as demonstrative of the idea of 'Greater India' and pan-Asia (Guha-Thakurta, 2004: 187).<sup>816</sup> Even in the Lakshminarayan/

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Lutgendorf's publications many of which are listed in the bibliography. See also Jain, 2001: 204-210.

<sup>814</sup> See also article in *The Times of India* that discusses Kunal as key figure of the "inscription as key" theory in the Ayodhya debate (Sahay and Pandey, 2001). According to another article published by *The Times of India*, Kunal is planning to publish more books on the issue (Kumar, 2016).

<sup>815</sup> See, for example, <http://www.viraatramayanmandir.net/site-plan/>.

<sup>816</sup> The theory of Indianization that discusses India as a nation which spread over a vast domain to the Southeast Asia has been discussed in great depth, for example, by Coèdes (Coèdes, 1968). Taking the example of Bayon, Maxwell discusses various problems of the Indianization theory in his publications (Maxwell, 2007).

Birla Mandir draws upon this idea. In its park, for instance, it features a miniature replica of, as its label says, “an old Hindu Temple of Vishnu on Java.”<sup>817</sup>

Against this backdrop, Kunal, however, considered the 12<sup>th</sup> century Angkor Wat, generally considered the grandest temple in the world as the model for his Ram temple.<sup>818</sup> Although as the Viraat Ramayan Mandir’s architect Piyush Sompura mentions that the temple will have Dravidian and Nagar styles of architecture, ignorant of the possibility that his plans might generate diplomatic tensions, Kunal persistently frames the proposed temple as larger than life replica of Angkor Wat, naming the temple also Virat Angkor Wat Ram Mandir (Buncombe, 2012; David, 2012; unknown author, 2012c; Jha, 2015; *etc.*).<sup>819</sup>

Kunal has been either oblivious or unconcerned as to the consequences of creating this “replica” of the Angkor Wat on the diplomatic relations between Cambodia and India. The construction of the “world’s largest temple” was pushed forward and the temple’s ground-breaking ceremony was performed on March 5, 2012 at a site near Ismailpur, approximately thirty kilometres from Patna.<sup>820</sup> Predictably, the Cambodian government took exception to the proposed project and registered their protest by turning to the central government asking India/Kunal to refrain from the construction of this temple. Perhaps, if plans would have been discussed with the Cambodian government, the diplomatic tension that Kunal’s

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<sup>817</sup> The park contains several other images of temples in Southeast Asia. A comparable miniature replica of Angkor Wat built by king Mongkut, who had earlier tried to dismantle Ta Prohm in Angkor and rebuilt it in Thailand, in Bangkok’s Wat Phra Kaew, the royal family’s temple was interpreted in a similar way. According to Ünalı, “Rama IV [Mongkut] was obviously trying to symbolically reinforce his claim to Angkor” (Ünalı, 2008: 15, italics added). Also for Peleggi the model of Angkor Wat is a “symbolic claim to the Siamese ownership of Angkor” (Peleggi, 2013: 13).

<sup>818</sup> Scholars frequently confuse Angkor and Angkor Wat. The name Angkor refers to the capital city of the Khmer Empire expanding over an area of several hundred square kilometres that includes numerous smaller temples and bigger temple complexes such as Bayon. As the word “*wat*” (temple) indicates, the name Angkor Wat refers to Angkor’s central temple.

<sup>819</sup> According to *The Telegraph*, the Ahmedabad-based architect Piyush Sompura, who belongs to the Sompura community, approached Kunal after learning about the project offering him to execute the construction of the temple free of cost (unknown author, 2012d; Verma, 2012). See also Sompura’s official website (<http://www.maadesignertemple.com>). Similar to BAPS and other contemporary creators of temple architecture, Kunal and Sompura visited temples such as the Kashi Vishwanath Mandir in Varanasi, Akshardham in Delhi and the Brihadeswara Temple in Thanjavur (unknown author, 2012d).

<sup>820</sup> See <http://www.viraatramayanmandir.net/category/bhoomi-puja/>.

undertaking entailed could have not only been avoided but turned into a project from which both nations would have “profited.” Cambodia’s ambassador Hun Han, for example, pointed out that the Cambodian government had welcomed official requests by countries such as China, Japan and Thailand to build replicas of Angkor Wat in their countries (Jha, 2015). Also the Indian government undertook a comparable project not only sanctioning but also sponsoring the construction of an “Indian-style Buddhist Temple” in Luoyang (China).<sup>821</sup> However, learning about India’s plans to build a full-scale “replica” of Angkor around the time of the temple’s ground-breaking ceremony in early March, the Cambodian government reacted in a similar way the Indian government reacted when it learned, in 2008, about the construction of a “replica” Taj Mahal in Sonargoan near Dhaka. While the Indian High Commission in Dhaka fumed in 2008: “You can’t just go and copy historical monuments,” the Cambodian government called the plans to build a replica of Angkor in India a confrontational act and “a deliberate attempt to undermine its universal value” (Guha-Thakurta, 2009: 1-2, 6-8, 2013, 2014; David, 2012; Murdoch, 2012; unknown author, 2008b; unknown author, 2012c; *etc.*).<sup>822</sup> This reaction appears even more curious when taking into account that the Indian government welcomed the idea to build a replica of the Sanchi Stupa in China and the Cambodian government seemingly had no objection when, in 1994, the Indo Khmer Theravada Buddhist Society of New Delhi appropriated Angkor Wat’s architecture building the Wat Khmer New Delhi (Kururath Khemeraram) near Chhattarpur Metro Station in Delhi (Figure 6.1). This arguably suggests that a decisive factor in this context is the question of *who* appropriates a certain architecture, architectural elements and style and in what context. It underscores the notion outlined and promoted by the art historical

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<sup>821</sup> The plans for the construction of this temple in China were announced by Prime Minister Vajpayee during his official visit to China in 2003. According to official sources, India provided the funds, the material, the architectural design and an Indian-style Buddha image, China provided the land for the project. See, for example, [www.indianembassy.org.cn/DynamicContent.aspx?MenuId=80&SubMenuId=83](http://www.indianembassy.org.cn/DynamicContent.aspx?MenuId=80&SubMenuId=83) and [www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/11360/Q+2145+Building+Indian+Buddhist+Temple+In+China](http://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/11360/Q+2145+Building+Indian+Buddhist+Temple+In+China). Through an architectural design competition by the Ministry of External Affairs, Akshaya Jain and Raka Chakravorty’s design that “draws inspiration from the Sanchi Stupa” was selected for the construction of the temple ([www.akshayajain.com/indian\\_style\\_buddhist\\_shrine\\_luoyang\\_china.htm](http://www.akshayajain.com/indian_style_buddhist_shrine_luoyang_china.htm)). Under the supervision of Kapila Vatsyana the construction work began in 2006 (Guha-Thakurta, 2009: 2). Similar to cases discussed in other chapters, the pink sandstone used for the construction of the architecture was mined from Rajasthan and sent to China (Guha-Thakurta, 2009: 3). The building was inaugurated in May 2010, by President Patil presenting it as “a *gift* from the people of India to a sister civilization [China]” and a sign for the “*friendship* between the people of India and the people of China” (<http://pratibhapatil.nic.in/sp290510.html>; italics added).

<sup>822</sup> See also article by Buncombe published in the British online newspaper *The Independent* (Buncombe, 2012). The Taj Mahal is often understood as a symbol of India (Lang, et al., 1997: 1).



discourse, which since Vitruvius considers architecture as *belonging* to certain communities/nations. The act of appropriation of art, which has become a widespread phenomenon in the contemporary world has triggered debates on whether it is ethically correct or incorrect to lay an arbitrary claim on art belonging to another culture.<sup>823</sup>

In the course of events unfolding around Kunal's plans, the Cambodian government officially raised its concern with the Indian government that then approached Kunal. Eventually Kunal changed the name of the proposed temple from Virat Angkor Wat Ram Mandir to Viraat Ramayan Mandir and adjusted the proposed temple by increasing its size (David, 2012; unknown author, 2012d; *etc.*). He argues:

Since [the Viraat Ramayan Mandir] is going to be the largest temple in the world, and hence larger than even the Angkor Wat temple, it can't be an exact replica of the Angkor Wat temple [...] (Kunal quoted in Drennan and Seangly, 2012).<sup>824</sup>

Seemingly understanding the issue as solved, Kunal and the Mahavir Mandir Trust went ahead with their plans; with the change of plan, the initially selected site had become too small for the much larger prospectively temple and another site was located at Janaki Nagar, approximately 120 kilometres from Patna and another Bhumi-pujan along with Dhvaja-pratishtha ceremony was performed on June 21, 2012.<sup>825</sup> For Cambodia, however, the issue remained unsolved. Still outraged at the course of events, the Cambodian ambassador Hun Han went to the site to provide Cambodia with a first-hand report (Jha, 2015). According to Hun Han, "the temple's model had a 60 to 65 percent resemblance" with Cambodia's Angkor Wat (Jha, 2015). Thus, the Cambodian government urged the Indian Ministry of External Affairs to stop the construction work of the temple (Jha, 2015; Jose, 2016). According to the Indian media, in 2015, Kunal and the Ministry of External Affairs had sent the plans for the proposed temple to the Cambodian government (Jose, 2016). Still awaiting the Cambodian government's response in December 2016, it was decided to begin with the temple's construction as soon as possible (Jose, 2016).

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<sup>823</sup> See Young, 2010 [2008]. Compare also with Michell, 2015: 87-89.

<sup>824</sup> The aspect of size seems to be playing a significant role in this context. See also below.

<sup>825</sup> Compare with a brochure titled *Viraat Ramayan Mandir*, available for download on the temple's official website (<http://www.viraatramayanmandir.net/>).

In a comparable way in which the Hindu temple has been tied to identity in the Indian context, Angkor and Angkor Wat have been considered “*the* focal point of Cambodian identity” (Ünaldi, 2008: 5).<sup>826</sup> As Winters says, Angkor Wat is “revered by Khmers as a deeply symbolic *icon* of national, ethnic and cultural unity” (Winter, 2007: 133; italics added). The nation’s identification with the 12<sup>th</sup> century temple features prominently in the country’s national flag; the Angkor Wat has been the central motif that graces the Cambodian flag since 1953 (through Royalist, Republican and Khmer Rouge governments and the Kingdom of Cambodia) (Fletcher, et al., 2007: 386-386). Comparable with Indian temples, Angkor and Angkor Wat are incorporated into Cambodia’s 21<sup>st</sup> century architectural, religious, cultural and political-scapes (Fletcher, et al., 2007: 385; Winter, 2007; Ünaldi, 2008; *etc.*). The Cambodian economy depends on Angkor and Siem Reap as tourist attractions and thus the Cambodian government sees the sites as critical to improving the country’s socio-economic condition (Fletcher, et al., 2007: 387).<sup>827</sup> After learning about Kunal’s plans, Cambodia’s Ministry of Culture and Fine Arts Secretary of State Thai Norak Satya said: “If [someone] wants to build a smaller model of Angkor Wat to showcase Cambodia, that is okay, but if they want to build it bigger—they cannot” (Thai Norak Satya quoted in David, 2012).<sup>828</sup> Kunal’s plan to build a temple that is even bigger than Angkor causes concerns that such a temple might weaken Cambodia’s economy. Yet, there seems to be little that Cambodia—like any other country—can do to *protect* ‘its’ architecture.

For Kunal, however, it is the temple’s role in the context of India’s temple-scape that is of foremost importance. He explains, “[m]y competition is not with Cambodian culture, it’s with the Hindu religious structure” (Kunal quoted in Murdoch, 2012). Although right-wing politics have long understood the significance of the untouchables and Dalits and thus included them through various means into the Hindu fold, as has been discussed in this study, to-date, this inclusion is problematic,

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<sup>826</sup> See also comment by Damian Evans, director of Sydney University’s project at Angkor Wat (Murdoch, 2012).

<sup>827</sup> According to newspaper reports, in 2011, Angkor attracted nearly three million foreign tourists (Buncombe, 2012; unknown author, 2012c).

<sup>828</sup> As mentioned earlier several miniature replicas of Angkor Wat can be found in countries such as China, Japan and Thailand.

with the Dalits getting the short end of the stick. This shows, firstly, in the impoverished socio-economic conditions in which Dalit communities live. However, it also shows in the belittling of gods such as Valmiki, Shabari and Hanuman that although appropriated into the Hindu pantheon, are considered deities good for the ‘little’ people (Lutgendorf, 2007: 370).<sup>829</sup> Similarly, as mentioned in the context of Delhi’s Valmiki Mandir, it is the exception rather than the rule that non-Dalits worship at these temples dedicated to ‘Dalit’ gods. One way to make sense of Kunal’s project is to understand that unlike the upper castes, there has never been a “Dalit temple building tradition” as such. If there is no ‘glorious’ past or tradition that can be revived, then, which architecture could the Dalit community *continue*? Kunal’s project is a conscious turning away from the Ambedkarite or Dalit monument-making that has been operationalised by political parties such as the Bahujan Samaj Party, particularly its current leader, Mayawati. The latter was responsible for the construction of gigantic Dalit theme-parks in the state of Uttar Pradesh while inserting herself and her mentor, Kanshi Ram within this Ambedkarite pantheon. Kunal’s project thus brings into play a strategy that has long been deployed by Hindu ‘reformist’ organisations such as the Arya Samaj, in bringing Dalits ‘back’ into the fold of Hinduism. The replica project also performs another significant function, at least symbolically—bringing ‘back’/claiming the grandest of all Hindu temples in the world, believed to have been dedicated to Vishnu, and ‘liberating’ it from its current use as a Buddhist temple.<sup>830</sup> In Kunal’s conception, through the replica, the world’s grandest Hindu temple, comes ‘home’ to the Hindu nation and will be rightfully dedicated to the Hindu gods. In this context, Kunal emphasises: “We’ll make this temple the pride of the Hindu temples in the world” (Kunal quoted in Tewary, 2012). Critically, these historic tasks are to be carried out by a community that stands strong with its wide base of Dalits, even as it will likely be administered by Brahmanical rituals and worship. Whether, how and by whom Kunal’s Viraat Ramayan Mandir will be welcomed and what effects it will have on the construction of future architecture and Hindu temples remains to be seen. Within the context of this study, the project serves to underscore the importance of temple-building within a globalised world and its deep and enduring ties with questions of identity; this operates within and outside

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<sup>829</sup> Compare also with Prashad, 2001 [2000]; Kanungo and Joshi, 2010 and Lee, 2014.

<sup>830</sup> In a country that is today dominated by Buddhists Angkor Wat (commonly imagined as Vishnu Temple) is today a site of Buddhist veneration. Compare, for example, with Murdoch, 2012.

the nation, as Dalits—once barred from entering temples—are now actively addressed as patrons and supporters of a temple-building project of this scale.

Having thus consolidated the Hindu fold, the identification of this gigantic project with the Ayodhya Ram Mandir reconstruction is based on another trope, viz. reclaiming ‘Hindu’ temples from other communities, and in the case of the Viraat Ramayan Mandir from the Buddhists. If the Muslims have been taken ‘on-board’, it is from the Buddhists that Angkor Wat, and the title of the ‘world’s largest temple’ has to be claimed. In this context it is worth recalling that the state of Bihar has also been aggressively promoting tourism in the state on the basis of sites such as Bodhgaya and the newly built Bihar Museum in Patna, which was opened partially in August 2015. In 2000, as the new state of Jharkhand was carved out of the erstwhile state of Bihar, the latter lost a significant portion of its mineral resources, leaving it even more impoverished than before. This meant that tourists, especially the global Buddhist circuit of pilgrims, are being wooed to Bihar. As Geary notes,

Through image-building and vigorous marketing of ‘brand Buddhism’, not only does the government seek to capitalize on spiritual tourism and push certain development agendas, it also sees Buddhism as a platform from which to boost the stagnant economy of Bihar (Geary, 2008: 11).

What does this say about a project such as the Viraat Ramayan Mandir? The proposed temple can be read as directly competing with this flow of Buddhist pilgrims. It is highly likely that in the future state support for the project will be leveraged on the basis of the temple’s ability to draw tourists to Bihar. Whether the attempt to mix a historical reference such as the Angkor Wat and its dedication to the protagonists of the Ramayana will be able to produce enough of a pull of the sacred, remains to be seen.

What the case of this most current *avatar* of the Hindu temple exemplifies is how fluid and arbitrary meaning is. However, it is due to this arbitrariness that architecture, like art and language, is able to survive into infinity without letting itself be *reduced* to one *fixed* form or meaning. It is the arbitrary nature that allows it to move across and through the strictly marked borders of religion and nation without

getting imprisoned. This openness to undergo changes, thereby constantly becoming something different, is the *singularity* that the art and architecture hold in possession in order to appear relevant in time and space, not only that this tendency has come so far in terms of the *past*, but also the future *to come*. When this idea is discussed in relation to architecture, more specifically architecture of temples, it can be viewed that there is no pre-defined and pre-shaped sacredness or religiousness intrinsically available in their materialised form, for there is no such sacredness or religiousness that is already defined.

Considering the general understanding of the idea of sacred, *sacred* can be viewed as something *untouchable*, *ungraspable* and *undefinable*: therefore, it is also distant and outside. It is this unavailability for the touch, grasp and so on, which makes something *sacred*. Further, due to this unavailability for a complete and final recognition, definition and naming, the *sacred* becomes that which cannot be governed by any set of given rules, identifiable in the context of religion or community, because, the belief in God or religion itself is something which cannot be reduced to one definition, image, meaning or form, since religion is the sacred. Therefore, this impossibility to reach, conquer and occupy the very sacred, which resists confining into one particular space and time also confirms the very nature of the *secular*.<sup>831</sup> This detachment and displacement from the tangibles or the ground is what makes the “God” or religion *sacred* and *secular* simultaneously. Yet, this impossibility or unavailability should not be viewed in a negative sense, because it is this very nature which demands the need to strive to grasp, touch, or name the very unnameable and ungraspable, in order to see, understand, give form and meaning to it. On the other hand, this attempt itself has to be understood as something that can never end, for it cannot achieve its goal fully and completely. Rather, it is an effort that comes to assert the very impossibility of *naming* the “God,” religion, sacred or art. According to Derrida, it is this impossibility that lies in a text, which constantly makes it escape from the capturing hand or eyes.<sup>832</sup> It manages to escape the *point* of view. Doing so, it detaches and rushes out from the given space, since sacred and

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<sup>831</sup> Secular is considered as something that cannot be religious or cannot be governed by any rule. Thus in general, secular is considered to be the opposite of sacred and that cannot be included in the sacred.

<sup>832</sup> Derrida discusses this idea in his *Roundtable on Translation* that published in *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation* (Derrida, 1985).

secular always *exist outside* the given. It is this existence of *outside* that makes the text survive for infinity. Therefore, the sacredness or the secularity cannot be seen within the constructed or given space, i.e. neither within the architecture of a temple despite the efforts taken on going through the way it is constructed nor by studying and analysing each detail that appears in the structure. Moreover, architecture of a temple cannot be discussed only in terms of sacred in *exclusion* of the secular, considering the secular as being in opposition to the sacred. Instead, what can be seen is, as argued above, the cohabitation of the sacred and secular that can be understood only in terms of the *secular* in *sacred* and the *sacred* in *secular*, making the text move beyond and across the borders—borders that lie in the formulation of binaries.

According to this analysis, religion or God cannot be institutionalised to differentiate religion from non-religion or the sacred from secular, for religion and God are passive entities that do not act, unlike other institutions. Through this passivity, religion can be addressed in terms of art, for art is the space of *passivity*.<sup>833</sup> Consequently, architecture cannot be institutionalised to decide, define and form the formulas to differentiate *secular* from *sacred*, *ancient* from *modern*, *etc.* Instead, architecture is another institution which overflows its boundaries and overcomes the given. Therefore, architecture needs to be seen as a “fictive institution”<sup>834</sup> which keeps deconstructing its forms, while opening up to the outside, without having prejudices prior to events.

Accordingly, the study discussed the notion of architecture with reference to the Hindu architecture unfolding in Delhi. Any metropolis is shaped by its openness towards people and (invisible) information from different parts of the country with different backgrounds, histories, ideologies, religions, castes, class, languages, *etc.*<sup>835</sup> With these incoming and outgoing movements, the city becomes a space of *constant transformation* in terms of economy, politics, society, culture, architecture, art, space

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<sup>833</sup> The idea of *passivity* is extensively discussed in post-structural approach to art and literature.

<sup>834</sup> Derrida analyses this idea with reference to literature in his *Acts of Literature* (Derrida, 1992).

<sup>835</sup> As mentioned earlier, according to the *Master Plan for Delhi*, since 1981 the population of the National Capital Territory Delhi (NCTD) increased by 39 percent or more every ten years due to Migration (Singh, 2007: 19). The Delhi Development Authority (DDA) expects a growth of the NCTD’s population from 13.8 million in the year 2001 to 23 million in 2021 (Singh, 2007: 18-19).

and so on while assigning a given space as the sacred and the secular. Moreover, the city also gets connected with other spaces *outside* the city and the nation. Delhi's vast history has left its trace in the architecture across the city, it (re)moved boundaries and empty spaces between, at least eight distinct cities and various villages, the Colonial Capital city and post-colonial constructions to become a complex entity of a diverse architecture and urban-scape; that is, the city is in an infinite process of transformation. In such a complex and heterogeneous space, *Hindu architecture* is only one amongst many other given institutions, structures or architectures that has been mapping and controlling the space that has been there and the spaces that are to appear in the future.

In this discussion, the study questioned the notions that define and differentiate binaries such as ancient/contemporary, traditional/modern, authentic/inauthentic, monumental/minor, sacred/secular, original/copy, *etc.* with reference to Hindu architecture. Doing so, it also tried to understand architecture as a space that is constantly opening up to the outside. Consequently, the sphere of art and architecture can be seen as a text that produces many other texts. Thus, due to its exposure to the outside, of which it has no understanding due to its unpredictability, it can always become something other than what it is. Hence, art and architecture are viewed as a phenomenon that emerges with *force* that creates an effect, irreducible to one meaning or image; consequently, it always appears to be in a flux in its utter most singularity, which never gets exhausted. Thus, if there is no such possibility of defining anything *as such* and if anything at all continues to be the same in its infinity, then it should not be able to get detached from the ground, since grounding stops the movement and gives finiteness. Thus, it is a movement towards infinity—infinity of religion, sacred, secular, art and architecture, so that it can travel beyond geo-political borders. Thereby, the sacred becomes a kind of nomad that can reside everywhere and anywhere: not only in a one particular centre.<sup>836</sup> Therefore, architecture itself is not a structure that can be defined once and forever, but a text or a language that is open to the outside and grows in a rhizomatic manner.

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<sup>836</sup> See for discussions on architecture and the idea of migration *Drifting in Architecture* (Cairns, 2003).

The aim of the thesis is then to study architecture as a field of art, which is constantly moving beyond any given boundaries in order to welcome every kind of form moving away from the machinery/politics of inclusion and exclusion. Thus, architecture will be seen as another sphere that lies always outside representative politics and law. Also, architecture as art will be seen as the most potent power that encompasses all kinds of earthly power due to its ability to pass through the surveillance of recognition. Consequently, it also will be seen as a space for experiencing freedom breaking away from all the given and defined norms, ethics, and forms.



## CONCLUSION



Figure 1: Wat Khmer in New Delhi (by A. Hartig).

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