The Journal of Hindu Studies 2019;12:339–360 doi:10.1093/jhs/hiy023
Advance Access Publication 24 December 2018

'Out-of-the-Box' Hinduism: Double Diaspora and the Guyanese Hindus of Queens, NY

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Abstract: New York City is home to a thriving immigrant community of Guyanese Hindus. Descended from indentured laborers who left India in the 19th and early 20th centuries, these Hindus moved again to New York in the second half of the 20th century. They have roots in both India and Guyana, and are thus in a position of "double diaspora." In New York, they now have many more opportunities to meet and interact with recent Indian immigrants in their new home. This paper examines how members of this religious community understand themselves and their relationship with their own past and future, how they think and feel about India and the Indians that they meet in New York, and how their situation of double diaspora shapes both their anxieties and their hopes for their community.

Introduction

The Vishwanath Mandir[1] looks like any number of other Hindu temples scattered across Queens, New York. It is square and simple, with a flat front of beige stucco. Om symbols hover over the three front doors, and two small images of Shiva and Durga flank a sign reading 'Queens Branch of Vishwanath Mandir: "Let noble thoughts prevail"'. It was on a cool and moonless night in April that we first came to the temple, invited by a friend to take part in the opening ceremony of a nine-day festival, *Vasant Navaratri*. We left our shoes at the foyer and climbed a few steps into the main hall. Wisps of incense curled in the air. Precious floor space was hidden under piles of bananas, mangoes, pomegranates, apples, grapes, and more, offerings overflowing in bounty. Devotional songs called *bhajans*, pleasant though they were, blasted from too-loud loudspeakers. We sat on the floor and faced the altar, which housed all the deities—not literally the 330 million gods and goddesses of mythic enumeration, but rather the major deities of what is commonly held to be 'popular Hinduism'. Men, women, and children, all dressed to the nines in elaborate *saris, salwar kameez*, and *kurta-pajama*, flowed in like streams of colour.

The head priest began his service, playing the harmonium and singing a Hindi-language *bhajan* in dulcet tones. Then came the sermon (*pravacan*). Referring to his

audience repeatedly as 'my dear ones' and speaking in Guyanese-accented English, the priest talked about *Vasant Navaratri* and its importance to the community. It is a festival for spiritual readjustment, the priest declared, a time to reflect and reassess what's actually important. Smiling, he teased the audience about their partiality to the Indian-influence Caribbean dance-music genre called Chutney: 'it is a time to take out those Chutney CDs from your car, and put in some *bhajans*'. According to him, it was devotion more than dance that really mattered. In particular, the priest explained that *Vasant Navaratri* was a time to devote oneself to Rama, the great Hindu god whose birthday falls on the festival's ninth and final night. And finally, it was a time to reflect upon India, Rama's homeland and just as importantly, the place from which the ancestors of the temple's audience emigrated. Rama's homeland, the priest argued, was their homeland too.

Indeed, the majority of the Guyanese Hindu[2] community are descendants of indentured servants shipped to the Caribbean from ports in Calcutta and Madras during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[3] Hinduism in Guyana remains rooted in its Indian-ness, though multiple generations in the Caribbean have shaped religious life in indelible ways: prayer services (*pujas*) and devotional songs (*bhajans*) are still performed in the original Indian languages, but most devotees can no longer understand those languages; brahman priests continue to exert authority as ritual specialists, but the structures of caste hierarchy diminish with each successive generation; devotees go to temple, but the services they attend are now in the format of a Sunday church-service, complete with a weekly 'sermon'; and although a general respect for, and awareness of, Indian heritage is evident throughout such services, few in Guyana have actually been to India.[4]

This in itself represents a significant historic dislocation, and even more so for those Guyanese Hindus who have moved to New York City.[5] These are folks whose distant ancestors called some small corner of the Indian subcontinent 'home', but whose parents or who themselves decided to move to the USA. They did so for any number of reasons, such as to escape adverse circumstances, to seek new opportunity, or to join family. This group is currently living through a second dislocation, adjusting to a new home and a new way of life in Queens and other boroughs, where they are a large (and growing) group.[6] Academics have developed many names for such people: 'doubly displaced', 'twice removed', 'twice migrants', 'the second diaspora', and 'the double diaspora', among others (Bhachu 1985; Verma 2008, pp. 2, 17; Younger 2010, p. 12; Parmar 2013). In our own fieldwork, an informant most memorably described his community as 'out of the box, and then out of the box again'. This is an apt metaphor for life in a double diaspora and for the loss of stability it can bring. Familiar and by now time-worn adaptations to the non-Indian environment of Guyana have been thrown into disarray again with the second migration, and the community has to adapt all over to a new environment, this time without firm living memories of India or 'original' Indian traditions, but also with an earned confidence that such dislocations can be

navigated, that traditions can go on. A double diaspora is thus not categorically different from a single diaspora, but it does bring with it certain intensifications and complexities, which the community itself seems highly aware of, and which we wish to explore in this article in their lived particularity.

One way to do this is to recognise and keep in mind the nuances of what diaspora actually is. As many of the names above suggest, diaspora is often thought of as being synonymous with displacement (Clifford 1994; Lavie and Swedenburg 1996). In this thinking, diasporic individuals harbour an enduring and existential absence, removed as they are from their homeland. But such situations can also become the impetus for creation. According to scholars of the Hindu diaspora in particular—and including those of the double diaspora—displacement brings about anxieties, yes, but also opportunities for innovation, adaptation, fluidity, and change (Fenton 1988; Wuaku 1995; Pearson 2001; Hawley 2004; Verma 2008, pp. 3–7). Said differently, this body of academic work tends to focus on the condition of displacement, and the response to that condition. While undoubtedly important, these issues are now well-trodden. Here, we have chosen to adopt Jacqueline Nassy Brown's intervention, which argues that diaspora 'is better understood as a relation rather than a condition' (2005, p. 49). By this, Brown is not suggesting that diasporic people 'do not suffer displacement', but rather that the narrative of displacement becomes so overwhelmingly emphasised in scholarly literature that it can obstruct attention to local specificity and historical nuance (2005, p. 49). The focus on displacement can sometimes work to homogenise a community (or communities) when we as scholars should aim to interrogate the ways in which individuals and communities attend both 'to the production of affinities and the negotiation of antagonisms' (2005, p. 17). So, for example, we might note that many Guyanese Hindus living in New York do in fact have an affinity or a longing for India, but often in varying or even ambivalent ways, and not in the same way that East Indian Hindus living in New York do. Whereas Purushottama Bilimoria, in his study of the multi-generational Hindu diaspora in Fiji, portrays a simple and uniformly positive attitude towards Indian immigrants and the 're-enculturative impact' they have on Fijian Hindus (2015, pp. 21–22), we find that among the Guyanese Hindus in New York there is not a single attitude towards India or Indians, nor even a single Hindu diaspora. Rather, there is a complex and plural set of Hindu diasporas, constantly constructed and reconstructed in response to a variety of possibilities, anxieties, hopes, and circumstances.

It is these reconstructions, and the conditions that shape them, that we want to explore in this article. Thus, instead of employing the condition of displacement as our lens, we choose here to explore the complex and messy series of relations—to homeland, co-religionists, and spiritual leaders—that people within the Guyanese Hindu community nurture, cultivate, and sometimes avoid. In this case study, for example, being 'out of the box, and then out of the box again' entails, among other things, a proximity to India, Indian ideas, and Indian people that is greatly amplified by the environment of New York City. Guyanese Hindus here can visit Indian-

built temples, follow Indian-born gurus, see India-based fortune-tellers, and make friends with immigrants from India. With higher American wages, they can even travel to India far more easily than their Guyanese ancestors. More importantly, double diaspora deepens the impact of such interactions, since they take place at a critical moment of flux and change in Guyanese Hindu traditions and habits.[7] So in many ways, Guyanese Hindus in New York are closer to India than they have ever been before. But double diaspora also implies more distance from India than ever before, generationally and culturally, and these complicated and sometimes-untidy relations with peoples and places often leads members of this community to experience a wide range of anxieties: Are they really Indian? Are they less than or better than their far-off kin? Who is qualified to speak for Guyanese Hindus? Who has authority over the community and who *should* have it?

The fieldwork that led to this article spanned the spring and summer of 2016, as we visited Guyanese Hindu temples, listened to Sunday sermons, went to shops selling religious paraphernalia, chased down fortune tellers on Liberty Avenue in Queens, ate amazing Caribbean curries, were invited into people's homes, and drank many a cup of chai. Our temple-based work was situated principally at the Vishwanath Mandir, though we spent considerable time at three other temples as well. Like any immigrant community whose members have arrived over a period of several decades—and in this particular case, from the 1980s on—the Guyanese community of New York includes individuals from varying class backgrounds. However, we found that the community of people we most closely engaged with, all of whom were regular temple goers and most of whom were based in Queens, were primarily part of an upwardly mobile, lower-middle class. The older generation hold jobs that are comfortable and generally require a bachelor's degree or higher, but are not highly prestigious—sales representatives, office administrators, accountants, nurses, high school teachers, etc. The children go to New York City public schools and then usually go to college. Often they go to a public college but occasionally they go to nearby prestigious colleges such as Columbia or NYU. This younger generation is starting to move up and fan out professionally, and occasionally includes lawyers, bankers, filmmakers, and choreographers. These jobs show a certain degree of professional ambition and success, or else a certain degree of idealism and economic security. This is a sign of the community's upward mobility, and in general people in this community are hopeful about their children's and grandchildren's lives being better than their own or their parents' in Guyana.

There is, in addition to class, a significant line within the community between the descendants of north Indians and Tamil-speaking south Indians.[8] But although this distinction produces its own tensions and complexities, these are outside the scope of this paper, and in fact we found that they did not affect the attitudes we are analysing in any predictable or stable way. What we found instead is a community negotiating its identity and grappling with a set of circumstances peculiar to their shared position. Ultimately, we seek not to generalise or essentialise this community, but to tell individuals' stories and to locate their ideas about the world

and themselves within a shifting constellation of pressures, histories, possible futures, and relationships.

Roots in India, Routes to India

For Guyanese Hindus in New York, being "out of the box, and then out of the box again" means having three homes: The United States, Guyana, and India. The way people measure out this triangular relationship, or place value on the relative significances of the three locations, depends largely on the individual. But in almost everyone's estimation, India looms large. Among other things, India is most principally where members of the community trace their "roots." These roots are not only genealogical, but spiritual too, as many within this double diaspora see the subcontinent as both the home of Hindu religion, and perhaps most importantly, as the home of the gods. For these reasons and more, the vast majority of our informants expressed a desire to see it for themselves. At the same time, others maintain their interest in visiting India while pushing back against the allure of a purer, more authentic homeland. For them, India may be a route to their roots, but its appeal stops there. Thus, in the following pages, we explore India's many significances, and what India as both idea and destination means to this Queens community.

Savita is a young woman who, like many of her peers in the Guyanese Hindu community, was born and raised in New York. Coming to the Vishwanath Mandir in jeans and an Indian-style *kameez* shirt, Savita speaks with a New York accent that slips effortlessly into Guyanese creole when talking to her father. She has been to Guyana a number of times, but sees travel to India as especially important, in part due to its potential to recuperate her otherwise-diluted sense of cultural identity:

> When you grow up in Guyana, it was India[n culture] that came to Guyana, that was adapted to the West Indian culture. When you come to America, it's the Indian culture which was adapted by the West Indian culture which was adapted by the American culture; so you're getting a very diluted sense of the culture. So I think that if any of us were to go to India, we would get a much cleaner, different, fresher perspective of the culture, as it's supposed to be.

For Savita, the culture she recognises as her own is 'Indian'. This culture has been twice 'diluted', first by her ancestors coming to Guyana, and then by her parents coming to New York. Going to India circumvents this century-long dilution, where she one day hopes to see the culture as 'it's supposed to be'. Although perhaps more forthright than whatever else we heard, Savita's thinking echoes a fairly common sentiment. Indeed, while none of our informants used the loaded language of a 'cleaner, different, fresher perspective of the culture, as it's supposed to be', many shared a powerful interest in India, and considered visiting it as a way to connect with their 'roots' and discover their 'heritage'.

This attitude towards India is partially due to the fact that our primary field-site, Vishwanath Mandir, is led by an ardent Indiaphile by the name of Amit.[9] His father was the leader and founding member of the Vishwanath Mandir in 1984. Lauded as a guru to many—and greatly missed since his death in 2009—Amit's father was known for saying that in order to be "truly happy," Guyanese Hindus have to spend at least one year in India. And so, after his father's passing, amid a crisis of leadership in what would become Vishwanath's tumultuous interregnum, a young and spiritually-questing Amit decided he needed a change: 'So February 2011 came and I made the decision. You know how? That was the time that the Jennifer Aniston movie just came out, *Just Go With It* . . . So I'm driving down the road, and I'm thinking, thinking, thinking. And I look up [at a billboard], and I see "Just Go With It." So I was like, "this is a clear sign!"' Thus, he told us with a laugh, he went with it. Within a few weeks Amit was in India, eventually heading to study at the Chinmaya Mission in Mumbai. He learned Hindi and Sanskrit, read the *Bhagavad Gita*, and immersed himself in the philosophy of Advaita Vedanta. When he returned to New York two and a half years later, the tumultuous times at Vishwanath were coming to a close, and soon enough—in August 2015—he took the position his father once held. He became 'spiritual leader' of the temple community.

We asked Amit to explain what India means to both him and his community. This was his response:

> India simply means *janmabhumi* [birthplace]. See, *janmabhumi* is Guyana for most Guyanese. But where their grandparents, great grandparents came from, even great great grandparents for some people, that is where the root is. . . and to go back there, it's like going full circle, back to our roots. So that's the attraction. That's why all these Guyanese are going there. They're trying to going back to their roots. They're trying to do their genealogies. They're trying to see where they come from. . .And they're highly into *bhakti*, they're into devotion. So when they hear about Sri Rama, 'oh, he came from a place called Ayodhya.' When they hear Ayodhya, they're like, 'that's an actual place?' Some of them don't even know it's an actual place. But through correct leadership, they come to realize that that place still exists. Brindavan! Where Sri Krishna spent his childhood. These places that are in all of the scriptures, all the *puranas*, they want to see for themselves what that is.

Indeed, during his Sunday morning sermons—where men with sharp haircuts sit on the floor beside *salwar kameez*-clad women who wrestle with their sleepy-eyed children—Amit talks often of India. And he frequently echoes the exact sentiments quoted above: firstly, India is 'where the root is', a place to learn something about your past in order to better understand your present; second, and pertaining to Hinduism in particular, it is what the great heroes and gods of the Hindu epics long ago called home.

Of course, Amit's ideas are not new. Clem Seecharan has shown that as early as the 1890s, the Guyanese conception of India 'tended to assume mythical dimensions: the heroic, ethereal, idyllic Aryan India of the Hindu epics—a Golden Age—lodged permanently in the Indo-Guyanese psyche' (1993, p. 10). Such mythic imaginings rendered the subcontinent a sacred landscape upon which the gods acted out their divine play. Fast forward a century or so, and for many members of the double diaspora who are also a part of an upwardly mobile middle class, India maintains its mythic qualities while being increasingly accessible. It can be reached, its food eaten, its water drunk, its soil tread on. At the Vishwanath Mandir, we met several people with this very thought, approaching India as a way to connect their lives with the epic world. For example, we spoke with Prea, a widowed mother of two who described herself as still trying to find out who she is, and who only recently, after a years-long hiatus, decided to return to the temple community. She imagined India as both a path forward and a way to commune with the divine: 'To me, the root is in India. Because that's where Sri Rama was born. I would love to go there, to see where he sat under that mango tree, I'd like to see where he walked, I'd like to see the village where he used to walk around and shop . . . I would be so blessed to just get a piece of dirt in my hand.' That dirt, Prea explained to us, would be an even more precious gift for her elderly mother in Canada, a woman who grew up poor in Guyana, and worshipped gods and goddesses from a place so impossibly far away. For Prea, though, India is not nearly as far as it was for her mother. Her sense of the culture may be—in the words of Savita—'diluted' twice over, but with better incomes in the U.S. and air travel becoming more accessible in the last generation, the chance of touching that dirt is better than it's ever been.

Attitudes in the community, however, are not all so effusive. Instead of seeing India as panacea to a disconnected cultural malaise, some within the community harbour less favourable views of the subcontinent. Roy, who works as a part-time emcee for Vishwanath's Sunday services, set out the following dichotomy:

> I haven't been to India, but there are a couple of people who have gone there, especially those who have studied there, and they come back, and feel in touch with their roots or something, closer to their heritage. So I guess everyone really wants to go. And then there are those people who never want to go to India, who are like 'we're not Indians, we're different from Indians, we've evolved as something different. And, you know, thanks for sending us away from India.'

When we asked Roy which side of the debate he was on, he shrugged: 'neither'. He feels a real connection to India, and even looks forward to going one day; at the same time, like so many we talked to, he is also glad to have been born in Guyana—growing up 'in the Western world'—and not in India. Here, Roy's own reality, nuanced and complex, belies the dichotomy he himself set up. Truth be told, we

never actually met a person from this latter group that Roy mentions, who categorically refuse Indian identity and who 'never want to go to India'.

Far more common were those who, like Roy, held genuine interest in the subcontinent while refusing to accept wholesale the kind of exceptionalism that imagines India as a sacred land marked by the footsteps of the divine. Vijay, who works as an assistant priest at a local Kali temple, framed his desire to visit India in this very way. Here, his 'return to roots' reasoning pushes back against any romantic appeal:

> I do [want to go]. I do. Not for any purpose, just to visit it. I don't consider it home. I don't consider it anything, it's just another place to go . . . I don't think it's more pure there, or it's more authentic there, or it's better there. No. But I would like to go to see where my ancestors came from. My ancestry came from. I want to go see where this religion originated.

Like many others, Vijay really does want to go to India. He wants to see where his ancestors came from, where his religion 'originated'. However, he asserts that it is neither 'more pure' nor 'more authentic' than anywhere else. He offered this assertion freely and with no prompt at all, suggesting that the opposite view—held by the likes of Savita and Amit—is widely pervasive. The differences here are important, showing that one's relationship with India need not be dichotomous, but can put on display a vast range of ambivalences.

Another woman, Sita, echoed a similar suspicion to that of Vijay. She visited the subcontinent for a few weeks as a college student while attending a friend's wedding, and even enjoyed it, but she is also virulently against the idea of a 'pure' or 'authentic' India: 'It's not like, you know how people put it on a pedestal. Anywhere can be special. It's how you make it.' And 'make it' Sita has most definitely done, as when she performed a ritual years ago at the holy *Ganga* (i.e., the Ganges river in North India), just off of the coast of Florida. To our question as to how the *Ganga* could find its way to the Sunshine State, Sita simply replied: 'Does the ocean ever stop? It goes into another one, and into another one. So wherever you are, that ocean in India is all around in the world.' Patrick Eisenlohr has written about yet another *Ganga*, this time a lake in Mauritius—called the Ganga Talao—demonstrating both the prevalence and importance of 'the re-creation of an Indian Hindu sacred geography' in the diaspora (2006, p. 247; Hawley 2004, p. 128). Indeed, scholars across traditions have shown that religious communities often create, and even re-create sacred space the world over (Chidester and Linenthal 1995; Feldhaus 2003; Pena 2011).

Perhaps more important, though, and related to Sita's general theory of spatial reproducibility, is that if sacred space can be anywhere, then India itself need not be inherently special: 'Just because you go to India, doesn't mean anything to me.' Another informant from the Vishwanath Mandir, Ganesh, had a similar critique. He explained that as a kid growing up in Guyana, before the internet and in an economy where very few could afford a plane ticket abroad, he only knew a few

things about India: first, it was the home of Bollywood; second, it was the home of the gods; and third, because it held a status somewhat akin to Mecca for Muslims, a person who went to India and came back was surely 'blessed'. Upon their return, though, these 'blessed' people would proudly talk up their incense—from India—and their new clothes—from India—and malign their Guyanese equivalents. Today, Ganesh still wants to go to India, and still sees it as a special place, but disagrees now with the 'older, uneducated' Guyanese who held so high a significance for all those 'blessed' people and things. Sita's frustration is somewhat more pointed, in that she is less critical of people trying to connect with their roots for devotional purposes, and more bothered by the common idea that *study* in India sets a person apart: 'If you say you went to India to study, people are like, "oh my God, you're, like, God, or you're a different category".' And for her, the topic is deeply personal: Sita's husband, a local priest in charge of a small but growing temple community, never went to India. His qualifications for being a spiritual leader, she argues, is that he 'captivates the hearts' of his followers, not that he managed to buy a plane ticket to India and then stay a while.

All of these fascinations, ambivalences, and concerns highlight an important point—or really, a series of points—that we would like to make explicit. First, no matter one's opinion, India and its imagined qualities serve as a kind of discursive lodestone; it is a topic on which all have an opinion, and on fairly strong terms. Moreover, the discourse is so fraught and complex, in part, because there are a number of different questions internal to the community that remain entangled. Perhaps the first, most fundamental question is so basic as to remain largely unspoken: What does it mean to be a Guyanese Hindu? Roots, purity, authenticity, heritage, ancestry—how people think of these things shapes the way they understand themselves and their community. And, we argue, India's role in that thinking is of paramount importance.

But there seems yet another issue highlighted by Sita's comments, namely, that conversations about India are inseparable from issues of authority; issues that, of course, become ever more poignant among a group of immigrants adjusting to a new home, preserving their past and steering into the future. Thus, sometimes hidden within that first question—of what it means to be a Guyanese Hindu—are also these questions: Who speaks for Guyanese Hindus in New York? What should a spiritual leader look like in the double diaspora? What qualifications—learned and innate—should they possess? And finally, to what extent and in what way do India, Indian culture, and Indian people play a role in answering these questions?

Authority Figures, Authority Roles

One way to begin to see what is at stake in questions of leadership in the double diaspora is to look at debates about the value of rhetorical skills. Scholars have already pointed out that conditions in Guyana led pundits there to develop well-honed leadership and speaking skills, suited both to congregational and political

demands (Younger 2010, pp. 76–85; Vertovec 1996, pp. 119–123). The Guyanese Hindus we met were generally proud of this development, and they often noted and remarked on their own superiority to Indians in this respect. This continues in New York City. In fact, Satish, the Guyanese head priest of the local branch of the Arya Samaj who spent years studying Hindi and Sanskrit in India, gave this as one reason why the Guyanese need to go to India: Indian pundits, he explained, 'can't come here, because they don't have the linguistic tools to preach here'. So rather than importing Indian gurus, the Guyanese need to have their religious leaders go to India to get the knowledge held by Indian gurus, and then bring it back.[10] Significantly, neither Satish nor anyone else we spoke to listed travelling to Guyana as an important way to get in touch with one's roots or gather useful spiritual knowledge. And, as an anonymous reviewer for this article pointed out, this attitude extends towards Guyanese Creole, whose increasing loss in the double diaspora seems to generate no anxiety or desires to preserve it.

On the other hand, these 'linguistic skills', and the broader skills needed to entertain an audience, have themselves aroused suspicion in the community. Many Guyanese we met lamented to us that in Guyana, anyone who can sing well can become a spiritual leader.[11] New York, then, represents an opportunity to move beyond this; to find learned and inspiring spiritual leaders, and to no longer 'settle' for anyone who can simply sing well. Roy, who as mentioned earlier, works part-time at the Vishwanath Mandir, recently took full advantage of this opportunity when he pushed for an addition to the temple's by-laws requiring that the spiritual leaders there have a bachelor's degree from an American or European university *and* have spent time studying at an Indian *gurukul*. The first provision is due to his suspicion that an undergraduate degree in India or Guyana can be 'bought', and therefore a potential leader might not actually have the education needed to communicate effectively with a modern, urban audience. What does it matter, he asks, if you know Hindi and Sanskrit if you can't speak English properly? The first provision is designed to filter these people out. But the second provision, about studying in an Indian *gurukul*, is specifically meant to counteract the first. That is, Roy fears that many Guyanese will confuse clever rhetorical skills for spiritual authority, and settle simply for someone who knows how to give a good speech, not someone who has actually learned the 'authentic' Indian tradition. Even when Roy acts as an emcee at ceremonies, he says, people come up to him and tell him he should be a pundit because he speaks so well. This surprises and frustrates Roy, who feels quite certain that he does not have the knowledge needed to be a real, authoritative, spiritual leader. And yet, he tells us, his speaking skills can fool the Guyanese Hindus into thinking otherwise.

When talking about patterns of authority within Hindu traditions, and especially alongside the issue of spiritual leadership, it is impossible to avoid the subject of caste. This is especially the case because caste, for Guyanese Hindus in New York, is not only about the community's relationship with its own authority figures. It is also about the authority of the community itself as 'authentically' Hindu

vis-à-vis other Hindu groups who do still observe caste. But the tensions over authority, caste, and authentic Hindu-ness are complex and multivalent in the context of the Guyanese double diaspora in New York, and this at least partly because the question of caste is, for this community, a fuzzy one.

Hindus in Guyana did, at one time, recognise caste difference, despite the fact that, by traditional Brahmanical standards, anyone who crossed the 'black waters' of the ocean was formally understood to have lost their caste status. But over the course of the community's time there the structures of caste hierarchy—especially related to endogamy and commensality—began to weaken. In the double diaspora this process has only accelerated. The end result of this process was immediately apparent at Vishwanath Mandir's week-long summer camp, hosted in July of 2016. Ostensibly designed to 'put the youth forward' and teach kids of the community something about Hinduism, the camp was also a wondrous madhouse of errant cartwheels, singing, and conga lines. Amidst all of this, and with the help of Amit, we managed to sit down in a circle with eight older campers, ages from 15 to 19. We talked about growing up in New York City, about what it's like being American and Hindu and Guyanese—but also Indian too. We talked about going to India. And then came the topic of caste. We wondered aloud: Did they know about caste? Had they heard of it before? One camper looked at us and simply said: 'Yeah, from AP World History.' Nods on all sides. Two of the campers—in fact, the only two there that were born in Guyana—had heard a little about the caste system before school, but only from their grandparents. The remaining six, all New Yorkers from day one, came to understand caste entirely within the confines of a classroom: 'The only reason we know about the caste system is because of a textbook.'

Though fascinating in and of itself, this is not the full story. While the influence of caste has indeed dwindled among Guyanese Hindus in New York, it has done so in ways both knotty and contested. It is, in other words, imperfectly erased, and in some cases subject to a kind of forceful forgetting that is not always entirely successful. To see this, however, requires looking at the longer history of caste in Guyana.

With its attendant concerns of purity, pollution, non-commensality, and carefully regulated rules of marriage, the Indian caste system was almost immediately transformed upon its arrival in the Caribbean. Many of the Guyanese with whom we spoke argued that some significant portion of caste was, in fact, changed even before the trip across the ocean. Among our informants, it was a widely held belief that 'real' brahmans never came to Guyana in the first place, as they would never have been in the type of financial straits that would lead them to indentured servitude. Brahmans, people felt, must have been well-off enough to stay in India. And without the hereditary purveyors of purity and pollution, this line of thinking goes, a few opportunistic labourers simply took on brahman names and identities in order to make a grab for power and authority. Thus, any person claiming to be brahman was doing just that—making a claim, and not much else.

Historically speaking, however, this is not accurate. Radica Mahase (2004) explains that the decision to leave India as an indentured servant 'was not [a]

situation where only those from the lower castes were suffering and therefore needed to find a way out of their impoverishment' (205). Brahmans were farmers too, and a drought or famine that affected poor farmers also affected poor brahman farmers. British colonial documents from 1874 to 1917 show 11.7% of the migrant community to Guyana being from the category of 'brahmans, high caste', a trip across the 'black waters' notwithstanding (Van der Veer and Vertovec 1991, p. 151). Interestingly, it is indeed true that *some* people from other castes took on brahman names upon settling in Guyana—that is, were not 'real' brahmans—but to assume such large-scale deception from several thousands of migrants is unlikely (Younger 2010, pp. 76–77).

Still, this common misperception remains significant because of how it guides the way people, both Guyanese and Indian, think. Guyanese Hindus—and in particular, those outspokenly against the caste system—argue that the 'brahmans' who asserted their authority for generations, and often at the expense of others, were really nothing but phonies, and thus deserve no special consideration. The flip side of this same argument, however, has at times resulted in the mistreatment of Guyanese by Indians. Roy explained it like this: 'Indians tend to look down on Guyanese . . . when you go to the Ganesh temple [an Indian Hindu temple in Queens], or deal with Indians, they're like . . . "oh, you must be a third-class citizen, because I assume only third or fourth-class citizens left India".' The tensions between Indo-Caribbeans and subcontinental Indians represent a common feature of this double diaspora, one in which caste and class together form an often ambiguous social barrier. In an article for the magazine *Little India*, Gaiutra Bahadur offers a sense of this fraught and elusive relationship:

> But the embrace by immigrants directly from the subcontinent, when it has been offered to Indo-Caribbeans, has never been simple. In it, there was always a certain superiority, a sinuous thing that kept eluding the grip, flitting into and out of your hands, giving tenderness a subtle edge . . . . The embrace was like one extended to a poor cousin, not denying kinship but certainly aware of its relative power (1998, p. 20).

Bahadur's reference to the 'poor cousin' is a metaphor entirely too apt, as Indo-Caribbeans in New York tend to occupy a place on the class ladder a rung or two lower than immigrants from India do. The community of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent is far more stratified in terms of class and occupation than that of Indo-Caribbeans, but even still the unavoidable presence of Indian doctors, lawyers, and professors puts on display for the Indo-Caribbean community a social reality that remains largely aspirational. When coupled with assumptions about caste status and whose ancestors would or wouldn't end up being indentured labourers, such an economic imbalance might also in certain circumstances make Indians believe that they are not only better off, but just plain better, than their Caribbean kin. Indeed, Roy sneered at such a situation, reflecting on

the fact that 'Guyanese don't have to go to India to experience' caste prejudice; one need not even leave the five boroughs.

From this, we can see the powerful consequences of a narrative suggesting that brahmans never came to the Caribbean. But in truth, the story of the brahmans-that-never-were offers us an incomplete image of Guyanese social formation in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and doesn't hold up to historical scrutiny. 'Real' brahmans did, in fact, go to Guyana. Still, caste as it existed in India could not be fully reproduced in the Caribbean. Individual migrants to Guyana came from a number of different areas of India, and so the titles, hierarchies, responsibilities, and expectations surrounding caste rules would have varied to the point of near incomprehensibility. But the largest transformations related to caste were in large part due to the 'incorporation of the indentured laborers into the occupational system of the plantation' (Jayawardena 1968, p. 441). On the sugarcane plantations, labourers all lived in the same barracks and ate together regardless of supposed caste status. In the fields, most of the indentured were treated as 'equal units in the organization of production', and plantation managers had little love for taboos or traditions that got in the way of work (Jayawardena 1968, p. 442). As Satish explained to us, if you were to tell the plantation manager that you were so-and-so from so-and-so caste, you would more often than not receive a single response: 'Cut the cane!' With the arrival and growth of the Arya Samaj—an ardently anti-caste Hindu reform movement—in the early twentieth century, caste was dealt with another major blow. These factors, among others, contributed to the formation of a Guyanese Hindu community for whom caste mattered less and less in each successive generation.

And yet, despite this decline in caste-based distinctions among the vast majority of the labourers (and despite being bluntly ordered to 'cut the cane' along with their lower-caste compatriots), brahmans nevertheless managed to retain both their identities as ritual specialists, and some degree of authority over the larger community. The most important factor in this respect was, ironically, Christian missionising. As Christian missionary success grew among labourers of an African background, it portended similar success among the Guyanese Hindus. Brahmans took the opportunity arising from this threat to shore up their leadership, presenting themselves as the only ones properly able to address the religious needs of the Hindus. They declared themselves defenders of the Hindu community, boosting the resistance against Christian missionaries while simultaneously laying claim to a position of power. In the interest of mitigating potential dissent or hostility, plantation managers became increasingly 'inclined to honor' that claim (Younger 2010, p. 76), thus cementing the structures of brahmanical leadership. And so, as van der Veer and Vertovec explain, this small but consolidated community of brahmans came to occupy a central and multi-faceted position in the religious life of Guyanese Hindus:

> Through their monopoly on ritual knowledge and guarded access to ritual texts, Brahmans multiplied their functions to serve simultaneously as teachers and

> spiritual guides (*gurus*), family priests (*kul-purohits*), temple priests (*pujari*), ritual specialist (*sic*) (*karmakandin*), funeral priests (*mahapatra*), astrologers, healers, exorcists, and even practitioners of black magic (*ojha*) . . . Since plantation days, Brahmans in the Caribbean have continued to protect their position by (*varna*) endogamy as well as by insisting upon their own right-through-birth to fulfill all these specialist roles (Van der Veer and Vertovec 1991, p. 157).

While this has changed drastically among the Guyanese Hindus of New York, echoes can still be discerned. The title for the type of person who fulfils a number of the roles mentioned above is 'pundit'. Derived from the Sanskrit verb *pand*—meaning 'to collect' or 'to pile up'—pundit simply connotes a person who is learned, or as it were, a person who has piled up knowledge. Importantly, for Guyanese Hindus in New York, 'pundit' is inconsistently synonymous with 'brahman'. Sometimes, the expectation is that the term 'pundit' merely represents a learned leader. But as Roy explained, even though his community in New York is generally 'anti-caste', there still remains debate as to whether pundits need also be brahmans. We were never actually privy to this debate, and another collaborator made sense of why no one we spoke with seemed to be against non-brahman priests: 'They won't admit it. They're being recorded!' This is probably true, though the vast majority of people with whom we spoke were vigorously (rather than incidentally) opposed to the notion that brahmans alone own the 'right-through-birth' to lead the community. Still, informants did vaguely mention others—the 'older generation' or 'some pundits'—who still 'believe in it'.

Interestingly, only Vishwanath Mandir's spiritual leader, Amit, actively defended the idea of caste. Sitting just outside that same circle of campers in July, and after hearing them talk about what they've read in their AP World History textbooks, Amit interjected: the caste system, he explained, 'has been misconstrued'. He cited the *Bhagavad Gita*, chapter 18, verse 42, which details the qualities of a brahman:

> Tranquility, control, penance,
> purity, patience and honesty,
> knowledge, judgement, and piety
> are intrinsic to the action of a priest (Miller 1986, p. 141).

From this, Amit thus concluded that the 'caste system is a classification of people based on mindset' and not birth. The fact that he made such a loaded statement in front of a group of teenagers is far from incidental. Indeed, with such an argument, Amit does a lot of subtle discursive work. First and foremost, he quietly asserts his own brahman-ness, ignoring ties to blood or family—which he cannot claim—and focusing instead on his own, individual qualities. He thus becomes a brahman, bearing all of the *gravitas* of that title and tradition. In the same vein, he addresses any possible detractors, those conservative pundits or older folks who might still

believe that brahman-ness is hereditary; he doesn't simply reject their claim, but far more importantly, does so through reference to the *Bhagavad Gita*. Lastly, and again by calling upon a text as widely authoritative as the *Gita*, Amit puts on display that the present and oppressive instantiation of caste in India is wrong. In his own words, the Indian version of caste is 'misconstrued'. And this highlights yet again an extremely common belief among the people with whom we spoke: on the question of caste, the Guyanese Hindus of New York are superior to Indians, not only because of their morals, but also because of their adherence to a more 'authentic' version of Hindu religion. Thus, as individuals within the Guyanese community both come to understand their own sense of identity, and seek to interrogate the desired qualities of a spiritual leader in the doubly diasporic context of New York, reflection upon topics like caste can help toward putting some distance between themselves and the broader Indian community.

The Vulnerabilities of Longing, or, The Condemnation of the Astrologers

Nevertheless, the search for authenticity does not always blend so cleanly with a sense of superiority over Indians. It can contribute to a sense of insecurity as well, one which contrasts sharply with the feelings of pride surrounding caste. This insecurity is both provoked and complicated by the situation of double diaspora, in which Guyanese Hindus long to connect with an 'authentic' Indian past that neither they nor their families have direct memories of. On top of this, renegotiating relationships to multiple homelands and new possible futures provokes a high degree of self-reflection and self-criticism, so that when a sense of insecurity arises or is perceived in the community it is reflected on, judged, and factored in to future plans to a high degree. It is this combination of longing, inexperience, and self-reflection that gives the Guyanese Hindus to a keen awareness, perhaps even a fear, of the vulnerabilities and dangers that can arise when they look too naively to India for answers. It also stimulates them to protect against these vulnerabilities and think around them, often by creating discourses that can seem self-derogatory but may actually be protective and hopeful about the future.

The fear in question, of the vulnerabilities of longing for authenticity, crystallises most clearly in the discourse surrounding the scores of inexpensive Indian fortune-tellers who line Liberty Avenue in Queen's Richmond Hill. Every fourth or fifth store in this area has a small sign outside of it with a painted red hand, a picture of an Indian *sadhu*, and a description of various services available, such as astrological readings, palm readings, and the removal of black magic. If you enter these stores, which are usually clothing or music stores, you can find a small area at the back, cordoned off, where an Indian astrologer sits, surrounded by religious posters, waiting for customers. These astrologers are virtually all from South India. Very few of them speak English well, and many of them speak only rudimentary Hindi, being fluent instead in their various Dravidian mother tongues, such as Tamil, Telugu, or Kannada. This raises the baffling question of who exactly

visits them. The fact that the astrologers cycle rapidly in and out of the country and seem to set up only temporary shops suggests that not many people actually do. Certainly among the Guyanese Hindus we spoke to, very few had ever been to one of these astrologers, and the ones that had been went once and never went again. And yet almost all of them seemed to worry quite a bit that *other* Guyanese Hindus were doing that very thing.[12]

The worry stems from the fact that our informants almost all believed these astrologers to be frauds, charlatans, and greedy crooks. The Trinidadian owner of a store on Liberty Avenue selling various religious implements was vituperative on the subject. He waved his hand when we asked about the astrologers and warned us 'don't bother with those guys. They're all crooks'. According to him, the reason they all leave after a few months—or sometimes even weeks—is that they skip town before they are exposed as frauds. Shanti was also dismissive, and claimed she would never go to one herself: 'I don't believe in that', she said, and shared the story of an astrologer who came up to her unbidden and took her hand back before she was married and told her, based on her palm lines, that she will have three kids. 'Yeah', she snorted, 'if I can find him I'll tell him I have two!' Vijay, who is sympathetic to the idea that the planets can influence our lives, nevertheless has nothing but contempt for the astrologers on Liberty Ave. He calls it 'pure garbage' and explains that the astrologers are there because Guyanese are infatuated with Indians:

> The [astrologers] realized, on Liberty Avenue it's a lot of West Indian people, and guess what? Our culture of people are very gullible. They are very gullible because Indians are 'more real.' 'Why would I go to a Trinidadian priest when I could go to an *Indian* priest?! He speaks Hindi actually, he *really* speaks Hindi. He knows Sanskrit, so he must *really* know what he's doing.' This [is] how they think.

What Vijay is expressing here is precisely the worry that a fascination with India combined with distance and unfamiliarity will leave his community dangerously vulnerable to being conned. There may well be authenticity in India that is worth connecting to, but Guyanese Hindus, he implied, are prone to forgetting that this is not all there is in India, or among Indians; their longing is dangerously un-tempered by experience and scepticism. Indian immigrants, he thinks, are not so credulous, presumably because they are more in touch with India themselves and so are less needy, as well as better equipped to recognise frauds. Indian immigrants, in other words, are out of the box, but they still have a shared memory of what the box might look like. But when you're out of the box and out of the box again, things get trickier. Mimicking an Indian astrologer talking about Jackson Heights, a neighborhood full of Indian immigrants, he says: '[In] Jackson Heights they all know you're a fraud. Come to Liberty Avenue. They're all gullible.' Roy is more succinct in his assessment of the astrologers: 'I think they're preying on Guyanese people.'

This attitude is distinctly different from the criticism of traditional Guyanese pundits described above. The criticism of Guyanese pundits reveals a hopefulness that the second diaspora in New York will allow the Guyanese Hindu community to leave bad Guyanese habits behind and push their pundits to new heights of sophistication. The criticism of the astrologers reveals almost the inverse. That is, it reveals a threat in the centre of the community's new hopes; that their very aspiration itself might be dangerous. Guyanese Hindu pundits chosen for their singing skills were not considered con-men by our informants, nor was their appeal related at all to their perceived authenticity. The threat they represent is one of stagnation and backwardness. The astrologers, however, represent a different kind of anxiety.

What they both share is a worry about straying, in one direction or another, from true spirituality, and one important solution to this problem, we came to see, was the very practice of self-criticism itself. The complaint that Guyanese Hindus were falling prey to Indian astrologers was so widespread among the people we spoke to that we became convinced that this self-criticism was more widespread than the actual practice being criticised. Perhaps constantly telling themselves they are prone to gullibility is a successful way to inoculate themselves against gullibility. This could be why the self-criticism was never articulated explicitly in class terms, even by our educated, upwardly mobile middle-class informants. We never heard anyone say that it was the uneducated or uncultured who were susceptible, nor was the criticism directed at anyone depicted as straying too far from their roots or trying to put on airs. The criticism was always one of the Guyanese Hindu community as a whole, and always in terms that implicated the longing for India itself, which was felt to be common to the whole community. Of course, putting this kind of energy into becoming respectable and sensible, to rationally raising oneself above 'foolish' superstition, may itself be a class-based attitude, and may well be rooted in the upwardly mobile middle-class milieu of our informants. But it is important that it was articulated in general terms, applying to the community as such. This gave it a very widespread and deeply felt appeal, which rested at the level of 'common sense' rather than of open debate or discussion. Ravina, one of the few Guyanese Hindus we met who seems to like the astrologers, dropped her voice to a whisper when we first asked her about them, explaining that many others in the temple do not agree with her. She had clearly internalised the universal narrative here, and it was functioning to deter her from enthusiastically embracing the astrologers, even if it was not entirely effective.

Amit was the only other Guyanese Hindu we spoke with who took a mildly positive attitude towards the astrologers, and surely this is connected to his full-throated praise of India as a place of authenticity and spiritual tradition. But even his approval was immediately qualified. When we first asked him about the astrologers he immediately responded 'They're Indian-born *purohit* [priests], er, astrologers. So, they're legit!' And then after a pause he added, ' . . . some of them. Some of them'. His criticism of the non-legitimate astrologers,

interestingly, was not that they are frauds, but rather that they use their (very real) powers for the corrupt purpose of making money, and not simply for helping people.

Although his general conclusions regarding the astrologers may have been unusual among the Guyanese Hindus we spoke to, this suspicion of money was not, and it represents one of the complex ways in which insecurity and anxiety can quickly shift back into confidence and aspiration for Guyanese Hindus in New York. All the criticisms of the astrologers we heard involved the assertion that they were only interested in money (albeit with the assumption that they got that money through entirely fraudulent means). This conviction that money and religion should not mix, or that charging money for religious services is suspect, was even more widespread than the condemnation of the astrologers. Not a single Guyanese Hindu we spoke with expressed any comfort at all with the idea that religion should cost money. Many of them took care to point out that the financial structure of their temples meant that the priests didn't handle any of the money, or proudly pointed out that they asked for nothing in return for services and depended only on donations, or used this as criteria to prove that such-and-such a person was legitimate and properly spiritual and therefore praiseworthy, or else that they were suspect and illegitimate. Many also seemed aware that this was an important distinction between them and Indian Hindus, who generally take it as a given that priests will charge money for their services, and accept that this is a legitimate way to earn a living.[13] One of our informants, a young professional named Anil, pointed out that the Ganesh temple in Flushing, Queens, which serves mostly Indian immigrants and which charges specific (and large) amounts of money for various services, is a business, and, he added, that's why it is corrupt. Often this suspicion of money was also tied directly to caste, and to a criticism of the role of Brahmins in Hinduism. Vijay, for example, with a perspective typical of those we spoke to except for its sensationalism, essentially asserted that Brahmanism was nothing but a huge, historical, money-making scam. Needless to say the astrologers, though not Brahmins themselves, are implicated in this critique as well. So here we see that the fear of the astrologers, which indicates insecurity and a sense of threat rooted in the heart of the community's hopes and aspirations, can quickly shift, through the discourse of money and the related discourse of caste, back into a sense of confidence and superiority. And these complex dynamics are affected by the situation of double diaspora in more than superficial ways.

Conclusion

A 'box', in our informant's metaphor, is a set of traditions that lays out guidelines for how to behave and who is in charge—or at least has set the terms for debates over these issues. In a single diaspora, when a community is 'out of the box', they are faced with constant choices between the new and the old. Do we update a tradition, or even abandon it entirely, doing something new in our new homeland, or do we remain steadfast and adhere to the rules of life back home? A double

diaspora greatly complicates these sorts of questions, because there is no longer a neat dichotomy of choices between staying traditional or changing. The 'traditions' that have been inherited by those in the double diaspora are already themselves marked by almost 150 years of adaptation and change. The original 'box' is no longer in living memory, even among grandparents back home. What is remembered and passed down is an out-of-the-box-ness that must again be updated and changed, while still maintaining some sort of authenticity and power. Among other things, this forces the community into a high degree of self-reflection, as they identify and debate weaknesses and flaws that should be fixed, and whether they should be fixed by hewing to the standards set in Guyana, or by abandoning those and embracing an Indian past that they do not know directly.

The anxieties this produces, and the hopes, are palpable in the Guyanese Hindu community in New York, as it assesses its past and plans its future, trying to foresee and forestall dangers while taking advantage of opportunities. The multiple and conflicting sets of relationships that characterises a 'double diaspora', are, for them, a part of their daily lives. They are two migrations removed from India and living next door to 'real' Indians (who are themselves changing and adapting). They look for ways to move forward with a sense of authenticity and tradition that feels real to them, even as they are acutely self-aware that their imperfect, groping efforts might sometimes make them vulnerable. For scholars of Hindu traditions, such a situation illuminates the rich diversity within the category of 'Hindu diaspora'.' For Guyanese individuals on the ground, this encounter creates possibilities, longings, and fears, as well as numerous occasions for ambivalence and numerous occasions for pride. It also forces questions of identity, and the issue of where to call home is clearly both poignant and complicated for Guyanese Hindus. Without simple answers, individuals come to different conclusions depending on their circumstances and proclivities. Travelling to India is of course part of this process, but even here there are strong differences of opinion. Some Guyanese Hindus are eagerly travelling there, while others more actively resist its allure. And, it is worth repeating, they are doing all this not in Guyana, where by 2018 family and cultural practices have attained relative stability and the patina of tradition, but in New York City, where much about the way of life their ancestors negotiated in Guyana now has to be rethought, where authenticity needs to be both preserved and redefined, and where the future looks less and less like the Indian and Guyanese past.

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Notes

1 In order to protect the identities of our informants, we have used pseudonyms for both temples and people's names.
2 In this article we will use the term 'Guyanese Hindus' rather than the more common 'Indo-Guyanese'. This is because a number of Muslims also came from India to Guyana, and although this group is also Indo-Guyanese, their situation is different enough that most of the issues applying to what we call the Guyanese Hindu community do not apply to them. In a different vein, it is also noteworthy that there is, in fact, a contingent of Guyanese Hindus who do not share Indian ancestry, but whose ancestors are instead from Africa. Afro-Guyanese Hindus are a small minority in New York. Our informants were all Hindus, and all of Indian ancestry.
3 The 'Madrassi' community, descended from Tamil and Telugu-speaking indentured servants from South India, form a minority of the Guyanese Hindu community but have a visible presence in the religious landscape. Madrassis worship the South Indian goddess Mariamman and other related gods and goddesses, and perform rituals of spirit possession still common in South Indian villages. On the topic of Madrassis in New York, and in particular their practice of spirit possession, see Reich and Thomases (2017).
4 For more discussion of these changes, and similar ones in other diasporic contexts, see Younger (2010) and Vertovec (1996). Vertovec in particular points out (1996, pp. 112–14) that Hindu immigrants to Guyana came from parts of India with a variety of Hindu traditions, and that the mixing and blending of these different traditions—traditionally kept separate in India—constitutes, in and of itself, a significant change.
5 According to New York City's Department of Planning, in 2011 there were 139,000 Guyanese-born immigrants living in the city (https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/data-maps/nyc-population/nny2013/nny_2013.pdf, p. 23). Only 30% of those arrived after the year 2000, with the bulk arriving in the 1980s and 1990s (ibid, p. 30), which means that there has now been plenty of time for second and third generations to develop. The New York Times has reported that 43% of this population is Black, a population not generally Hindu, and presumably a large part of the remainder is Hindu, though these may also be Christian or Muslim. Unfortunately more detailed information on profession and economic status is not available. Guyanese are scattered across the city, but most live in Brooklyn or Queens, with an especially significant presence in the neighborhoods of Richmond Hill, Ozone Park, Flatbush, and East Flatbush.
6 We should emphasize, for added clarity, that this second dislocation happens across generations, rather than within a single lifetime. That is, we are not referring to people who were born in India, moved to Guyana, and then moved again to the

USA. All of our informants were born in either the USA and Guyana, and they all have ancestors tracing back to both Guyana and India.

7 Contact between subcontinental Indians and Indo-Guyanese is not limited to New York, or even the double diaspora elsewhere. Migration between India and Guyana still happens today, so this type of cultural contact happens in the single diaspora. In the double diasporas, these relations are triangulated (between, in this case, the USA, Guyana, and India), which means the contact zone is in the USA, and which adds to the complexity of the situation.

8 We should note the constructed-ness of designations implying a uniquely 'North Indian' versus 'South Indian' type of Hinduism. Within the Guyanese Hindu community, Kali worship is synonymous with South Indian, or 'Madrassi' practice, while Kali enjoys worship in all areas of India—North, South, East, and West. It was also the case that in our research we met people "from the North" who worshipped in a Madrassi temple, and vice versa.

9 It is worth noting that the priest who appears in the introduction of this article was not Amit. Vishwanath Mandir actually invited a number of different visiting priests for the *Vasant Navaratri* festivities. Amit, then, is far from the only Indiaphile within the community

10 Anil, the leader of a Madrassi temple, actually gave this as the reason why right-wing Hindu groups like the RSS and the VHP have made few inroads with the Guyanese. 'If you want to brainwash somebody ... you gotta be tough with me. You gotta really know your p's and q's,' he explains, implying that Indians simply don't have the rhetorical skills to sway the Guyanese. The actual situation in Guyana regarding the VHP seems to be a bit more complicated, but it is still significant that Anil made such a statement.

11 Verma notes the same anxiety in her fieldwork among Guyanese Hindus in Queens (2010, p. 282).

12 Of course, in a place as diverse as Little Guyana these astrologers have many types of customers, including Afro-Caribbeans. But since we are interested more in the way Guyanese Hindus perceive these astrologers, rather than in the businesses that the astrologers actually run, we will focus only on what our informants had to say about them.

13 Actually, here we can also see an incipient split within the Guyanese Hindu community itself. For the North Indian Guyanese Hindus, this suspicion of material concerns extends not only to the priests but to the supplicants themselves who, like the priests, are supposed to leave practical concerns aside when they engage in religion. The Madrassis we spoke with, on the other hand, deliberately and repeatedly connected their worship to the goals of healing and worldly happiness and prosperity. This difference is just one component of a larger and more complex set of tensions between the two groups, but unfortunately this goes beyond the scope of this article.