practicalmatters

Across Boundaries and Borders: Religion, Migration, and Belonging in a Toronto Hindu Temple Community

Nanette R. Spina

University of Georgia

ABSTRACT

The topic of this article is focused within the broader context of transnational religion and migration. The article examines how innovation and performance interact in the context of a North American Hindu temple community and the ways in which belonging and community identity have been cultivated in the diaspora through praxis. The Adhiparasakthi temple society in Toronto, Canada is part of the transnational Adhiparasakthi organization, a South Indian guru-centered tradition with both local and global dimensions. The primary Mother temple for this tradition is located in Melmaruvathur, India its founding location. The temple society in Toronto draws largely from the Sri Lankan Tamil population, a relatively recent diaspora community that has received waves of refugees as well. Many Tamils arrived during the 1990s and early 2000s due to the complexities of civil war. One of the most prominent aspects of this goddess tradition is that women are privileged in positions of ritual authority and leadership. While male Brahmin priests traditionally hold religious authority in orthodox traditions, this innovation represents an extraordinary shift in ritual performance for women. Focusing on the Toronto Adhiparasakthi community, this discussion highlights the role of caste and gender inclusive ritual performance in temple praxis and the ethical preferences of this diaspora community in cultivating a sense of belonging that is both local and transnational. The article further illustrates some of the prominent ethno-cultural facets of the temple community that have vitalized diasporic place-making abroad.

INTRODUCTION

F ocusing on the topic of transnational religion and migration, this article examines how innovation and performance interact in the context of a North American Hindu temple community and the ways in which belonging and community identity have been cultivated in the diaspora through praxis. The Adhiparasakthi temple society in Toronto, Canada is part of the transnational Adhiparasakthi organization, a South Indian guru-centered tradition with both local and global dimensions. The primary Mother temple for this tradition is located in Melmaruvathur, India its founding location. The Toronto temple maintains transnational connections to the organization's headquarters and central temple in India and devotees from Toronto travel there as well on ritual occasions and whenever possible. The temple society in Toronto draws largely from the Sri Lankan Tamil population, a relatively recent diaspora community that has received waves of refugees as well. Many Tamils arrived during the 1990s and early 2000s due to the complexities of civil war (1983-2009). Toronto is now home to the largest Sri Lankan Tamil population outside Sri Lanka and a major focal point in the diaspora. The Toronto Adhiparasakthi *mandram* was established in 2002 and is located in the eastern district known as Scarborough where many Sri Lankans have settled.[1] Many of the devotees began practicing this tradition in Canada.[2] One of the most prominent aspects of this goddess tradition is that women are privileged in positions of ritual authority and leadership. This leadership represents an extraordinary shift from orthodox tradition wherein religious authority is primarily held by male Brahmin priests. Focusing on the Toronto Adhiparasakthi community, this discussion highlights the role of caste and gender inclusive ritual performance in temple praxis and the ethical preferences of this diaspora community in cultivating a sense of belonging that is both local and transnational. The article further illustrates some of the prominent ethno-cultural facets of the temple community that have vitalized diasporic place-making abroad.

This article is based on ethnographic fieldwork from 2007-2009 and 2017. The broader project combined both quantitative and qualitative methodologies incorporating participant observation, personal interviews, informal group discussions, and survey data. I have used pseudonyms for all informants except the president of the Adhiparasakthi Temple Society who is a public figure in the community; almost everyone knows her by her first name, Vasanthi. At the time of my fieldwork, the community consisted of approximately two hundred fifty to three hundred people, although attendance averages range on a spectrum from those who attended daily or weekly or particularly on special holidays. The Ādi Pūram festival (2017) for example, drew upward of eight hundred people during the course of the day.

A significant element of recent research in human geography has looked to belonging as performance, refocusing belonging not as a status or position that one might attain (or be denied) but rather as a set of practices and processes.[3] In this approach, the focus in on the multiple ways in which belonging is enacted, bracketing the question of 'what it means to belong.' Such approaches foreground the active and ongoing ways that people engage places, processes, and forms of conduct as they navigate the world and negotiate their place in it.[4]

The significance of migration studies has increased in recent years as media reports of migrants and refugees remain consistent in the news. Hundreds of thousands of people each year encounter

challenges due to migration spanning several regions of the world, including refugees from Africa and the Middle East to the European Union 2015-2016 and refugees from Myanmar to Bangladesh in 2017. At the same time, migration is a key interest among ethnographers in the humanities and social sciences whose research aims to seek a better understanding of how the global intersects with the local through society and the lives of individual agents.[5] This article is further situated within Hindu Studies on women in religion and takes seriously Peggy Levitt's call for more empirically grounded studies of lived religious experiences and beliefs in the everyday lives of individuals.[6]

The Toronto Adhiparasakthi community is part of the transnational Adhiparasakthi (Ātiparācakti) organization, also known as Om Sakthi, founded in the 1970s under the leadership of Indian guru, Bangaru Adigalar.[7] Actively working for social change, the Om Sakthi organization has founded medical, educational and vocational training institutions, and a number of charitable foundations. The organization has established a large hospital in Melmaruvathur as well as many schools for primary and secondary education, a school for children with special needs and colleges for professional training in fields such as engineering and medicine. Outreach service programs are an important aspect of the humanitarian service effort. In addition to operating a local hospital, the organization has established outreach programs in India including free medical camps, ecology awareness organizations, blood donation camps, food and clothing distribution, and AIDS-awareness outreach. The Om Sakthi organization continues to expand transnationally and now includes religious centers in several countries around the world including North America, Europe, the UK, Australia, Malaysia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Dubai.

The main temple to the goddess Adhiparasakthi draws visitors and devotees to the village of Melmaruvathur throughout the year. High points in the ritual calendar such as major religious festivals bring many devotees from the diaspora and tens of thousands of visitors from within India as well. The village of Melmaruvathur becomes especially lively during the days before festival occasions when chartered busses begin to arrive from various regions of India bringing devotees to the *siddha pīṭham* (abode of *siddhas*) and main temple complex. Festival decorations and strings of light turn ordinary thoroughfares and ancillary halls into aesthetic delights. As the festival anticipation expands it seems as though the entire village is caught up in the goddess' embrace.

Some of the prominent social and humanitarian concerns within the Adhiparasakthi tradition include a focus on nondiscriminatory ethics and special attention to improving social and educational conditions for women. The mission objectives as noted in the book *Glory of Mother Divine- Amma Melmaruvathur* emphasize the inculcation of faith and spiritual well-being, a commitment to uplifting the educational and social status of women, and a practical dedication to improving the health and social conditions among weaker sections of society both structurally and through self-help methods.[8] This movement has also sought to reconfigure paradigms of gendered religious leadership and democratize ritual participation. One of the ways this objective has been implemented is through ritual praxis that demonstrates 'inclusivity' ethics regarding caste and gender. These practices are set within the theological framework of this Śākta (goddess-centered) tradition and performed daily through a system of temple rites that include both ritual specialists and devotee participants. Ritual performance at the *mandram* highlights how women's leadership and a collective style of *puja* (rituals) has been reconfigured, revising

a traditionally gendered framework in both form and praxis, from priest-mediated ritual performance to a collective style of ritual participation.[9] Through acts of ritual performance and *seva* (service), devotees have fostered a sense of community and belonging that brings them together in a performance context focused on devotion. This belonging converges in the space of the temple on both collective and individual levels. In this space, one can cultivate a relationship with the goddess (through devotion and ritual) and offer (*seva)* within the context of the temple community.

As Sarah Wright (2015: 400) notes, "An emphasis on the doing of belonging brings attention to the ways belonging is nurtured and performed in different contexts."[10] Through performance, the innovations in worship afford members of the community more opportunity to become active in formal *puja* (devotional ritual) and a number of other attendant daily rites. In this way, we see that attention to practice is useful in foregrounding the ways that belonging is continually (re)made and (re)constituted.[11] Innovations in praxis have been instrumental in shaping the identity of this particular temple community in the urban context where there are numerous Hindu temples. The identity of this temple community has been cultivated by emphasizing 'inclusivity' ethics regarding caste and gender in communal rituals. This is one of the ways in which the 'doing of belonging' has brought attention to the ways that belonging is nurtured and performed in a particular context. These inclusivity ethics have become a clear preference within this community and a distinguishing characteristic of praxis at the Toronto Adhiparasakthi temple.

Performance and Belonging

In Toronto, there are a multiplicity of Hindu temples. This advantage differs from smaller locals in other parts of Canada where there may or may not be a single Hindu temple. Commenting on the variation of temples and ritual styles in the Toronto area, Paul Younger notes that alongside grand orthodox temple traditions, there are numerous "ethnic or regional temples" founded by immigrants from India and other parts of the Hindu diaspora who have made Toronto their home in Canada.[12] On the development of ritual systems in the Canadian setting over many years, Younger notes that, "It would be a mistake, however, to think that the ritual of these temples involved an effort to produce 'authentic' examples of ritual systems of India. These newer temples continue in the now-established Canadian tradition of inviting worshippers to design a ritual tradition that meets their needs as a community."[13]

Additionally, as Hindu practices may vary in North America depending on the tradition or guru's teachings, ritual performance may vary in length and design as well. As ritual performance in the Adhiparasakthi tradition is highly significant, it requires a time commitment on the part of devotees. In the *mandram* context, devotees generally look to the ritual specialists' example, in that ritual practice like other forms of *sādhanā* (spiritual practice) is not only worthy of time and dedication but brings spiritual benefit as well. In this regard, the commitment to ritual praxis on the part of devotees is something this temple has in common with another goddess temple in the Great Lakes Region just over the border in upstate New York, the Sri Rājarājeśwarī Temple in Rush, New York. Although the ritual tradition is distinct from that of the Adhiparasakthi ritual tradition, the Rush temple has incorporated female ritual specialists as well. While a full description would exceed the scope of this article, it is significant to note

that the Sri Rājarājeśwarī temple also attracts a number of devotees from Toronto, many of whom are Sri Lankan.[14]

When members of the temple community spoke to me about their tradition, several people described the characteristics of the temple that they felt were most significant. These characteristics included: nondiscriminatory practices or "inclusivity" ethics regarding ritual participation, the opportunities for women to assume leadership roles in the temple and as ritual specialists, and the use of Tamil (rather than Sanskrit) as a ritual language (i.e., the opportunity to worship in their native language). The first point refers to the fact that all people, (regardless of caste or non-caste, class, status, age, sect or gender) may perform rituals in the Melmaruvathur Adhiparasakthi temple and the many *mandrams* around the world. The aspects noted by practitioners are multivalent in scope. From one angle, the temple is the heart of this particular community and has not only provided numerous Sri Lankan Tamil immigrants and refugees with a space to worship, but a place of belonging within a devotional community joined in service to the goddess. From another angle we see that by extending such performance opportunities to practitioners without regard for social or gender-related restrictions, relatively new modalities in worship have been implemented.

The clear appreciation for inclusivity as noted above appealed to both the women and the men of this community. Prioritizing these ritual innovations extended ritual authority and the opportunity for ritual participation to a broader spectrum of society and removed a historically embedded form of social discrimination.[15] These ethics of social equality and an increase in women's leadership have been identified and articulated by the devotees to whom I spoke both in Toronto and Melmaruvathur (2017) as prominent aspects of this tradition. In this way, we see as Wright aptly notes, "Belonging, then, is at once emotional and political, and personal and societal. Belongings emerge at the intersection of these trajectories, as multiple and complicated, mediated by relations of power as well as personal experience and affiliation."[16] For Vasanthi and a number of women, these aspects of tradition seemed not only innovative but had a striking appeal as they were aligned more closely with their ideals. From one perspective, by inviting women to perform rites in the temple, access had been granted to a portion of society accustomed to being excluded from this ritual arena and field of expertise.

In the context of Hindu traditions more broadly, we see a momentum building for Hindu women in leadership in several spheres as well. For example, there are a number of twentieth and twenty-first century global guru-led movements, women gurus and renunciants, and also independent programs in India that train women ritual specialists, including the Sankara Seva Samithi in the mid-1970s and the Jnana Prabhodini School (Pune) among others.[17]

More specifically, within the Om Sakthi tradition, we see the intentional instantiation of women's ritual authority as a concrete example of support (for women) as well as a protest against gender inequality in both social and religious domains.[18] The implementation of these initiatives denote both the democratizing influence of modern Hinduism and articulation of socio-religious concerns rooted in history.[19] In this way, the ritual system signifies and substantiates the values of the people within the tradition. As Catherine Bell has observed, "Hence, rituals as a performative medium for social change emphasizes human creativity and physicality: ritual does not mold people; people fashion rituals that mold

their world."[20]

While women are extended priority as ritual performers, men are not excluded from these opportunities. On the occasions when I have spoken to men regarding ritual performance in the Adhiparasakthi tradition, very often one of the first points they mention is that 'anyone may perform rites in the temple without discrimination based on caste.' In Melmaruvathur the issue was phrased somewhat differently by visitors from the diaspora and couched in terms of occupation. In this regard the comments emphasized that people of all professions were there working together, participating in the same ritual contexts, serving together towards the same humanitarian goals without regard for distinctions of status they may hold in their everyday lives. This attitude and perspective reminded me of a particular slogan from the tradition, one that I had heard from devotees back in Toronto, "One Mother, One Family."

Last, for some members of the community, the idea of worshipping in one's language rendered the language of liturgy more "down to earth," in other words, it made ritual participation more accessible, meaningful and familiar. As some devotees expressed, hearing their language during worship added a certain personal appeal to formal worship. Many devotees expressed that they appreciated the use of Tamil in the temple. While the use of Sanskrit as a ritual language is traditional in most Hindu temples, the devotees I spoke with conveyed that they felt both languages were efficacious in worship. One of the community members, Mr. Thevaram (pseudonym), expressed his perspective in this way: "I am an educated man, but I do not understand Sanskrit. Here, we chant and worship in my own language. I can speak to Amma [Adhiparasakthi] in my *own* language; this, I prefer." For a number of devotees, the opportunity to worship in their language inspired a profound sense of devotion bringing the ritual acts of puja closer to the worshipper. These two aspects comprise a holistic experience that at once, instantiates a sense of familiarity and belonging as it brings the worshipper closer to the divine through performance (chanting and puja).[21] In this way, we can see some of the elements present in reconstructing spaces in the diaspora that embody "psycho-cultural religious landscapes." On this point, Fred Clothey aptly notes "That religion should be one of the responses to the diaspora experience is consistent with the sense that religion, and especially ritual, is, as Jonathan Z. Smith has noted, a matter of 'emplacement,' being placed in the context of the entire, of mapping one's place in life and cosmos."[22] For many devotees, the community at the Adhiparasakthi temple has become their extended family away from home.

Identity, Place-Making and Belonging

While the Tamil community has been a minority group in terms of religion and culture in Sri Lanka, in Toronto, they are keenly aware that they are one among many Hindu groups including Indian Tamils as well. When speaking with participants at the temple several people (middle-aged and older) took time to point out and clarify some of the differences in history, culture, linguistic dialect, and even cuisine. While these distinctions remain important, perhaps the most notable one has been the Sri Lankan concern about the homeland conflict, its aftermath, and the political future. In this way we see some of the specific distinctions relevant to this particular community in the greater Toronto area (GTA) that more consciously address the climate of the local landscape; namely, that they are Tamils yes, but even more

specifically that they are Sri Lankan Tamils.

While speaking with some of the women at the temple in Toronto, I asked if they could recall what their initial expectations were as they thought about what their lives would be like once they settled in Canada. Some imagined that the socio-cultural expectations would be somewhat different, as would the climate and landscape, and perhaps the pressures of daily life would be less pronounced. Additionally, several women noted that migrating to Canada has provided "more opportunities," for work, for their family's future and their children's education, and with these opportunities, they are choosing to make positive changes in their lives.

In a number of cases within the community, women have been able to find work more easily than men perhaps reflecting a broader configuration in the Toronto area wherein many immigrant women have found full-time employment more readily than men.[23] This factor in employment opportunities has not only caused a strain on the household division of labor but has also posed some issues between spouses as well. Traditional notions about family models or gender expectations such as the "male breadwinner" may not work well after immigration, and alterations to former lifestyles become imperative. In various ways, as social and familial expectations shift to adapt to new environments, or are at least temporarily unsettled, a space of transition in the diaspora opens as well.[24]

In the case of émigrés, the immediate effect due to national and global forces of change in their lives may be more direct. In some ways, the diaspora setting constitutes a *liminal* space (at least provisionally), to borrow a term from Victor Turner,[25] where the social mores from the homeland are less rooted, and in a state of flux in the host country. For Turner, liminality signifies a generative quality lending motion to a society which forces it out of a rigid system and into a flowing process. In the new diaspora setting, it is likely that over time some observances may give way to permanent change. It is also true that attitudinal changes may more easily take root in a new setting. New attitudes and personal priorities may be forged, to a certain degree, in the process of transitions during which negotiations between one's former 'location' or social role within the homeland culture shifts to a new social context with different cultural norms and expectations in the host country.[26] It is not surprising that in the process of resettlement, one might re-evaluate former notions of self-identity, religious attitudes, and social orientations.

With regard to the Adhiparasakthi community and women's leadership roles in the temple, the success of the Toronto temple has a great deal to do with the concern and leadership of the women there. The leadership ability of Vasanthi to act as president (since 2002), the dedication of the women ritual specialists, and the sincere desire of the community to support one another through periods of transition have all added to the character and stability of the temple in the community. The leaders at the Adhiparasakthi temple have created a local space that welcomes all. More than that, however, it is a place where women, in particular, can expand the parameters of ritual participation through performance in the public sphere and in some ways renegotiate aspects of religious identity as well. At the same time, their participation creates a place of belonging in the diaspora setting and moves our analysis closer to what Peggy Levitt calls an "attempt to understand how identity and belonging are being redefined in this increasingly global world."[27]

For a number of women, the temple is a place where they can communicate with other like-minded women, take on leadership roles and participate in ritual performance. Most significantly, it is a place where they are entrusted with ritual authority outside the home. By participating in a community where women are empowered to empower others, there is also an opportunity to promote positive change. The women of the temple meet together regularly for both worship and *seva* (volunteer service). In both capacities, the temple provides a supportive environment where they can utilize their skills and creativity in meaningful ways.

More broadly, performance in a community such as this integrates several levels of belonging including individual/personal, social and transnational. For example, devotees from the Toronto temple travel back and forth to the Adhiparasakthi temple in India to attend religious festivals, participate in rituals, learn ritual procedures, fulfill vows, receive teachings from their guru, perform spiritual practices, and to offer their service whether general or specialized, in a number of different ways.[28] Additionally, the Toronto temple follows the same ritual calendar as the Mother temple in India and the various satellite *mandrams* around the world. In this way, rites are conducted on special dates and annual holidays uniting devotees in celebration and worship around the world. Devotees derive a sense of transnational community through a number of different means and sources as well, including literature, social media and art forms to name of few. Many devotees subscribe to the monthly magazine called Sakthi Oli, published by the Adhiparasakthi Charitable, Medical, Educational and Cultural Trust in Melmaruvathur; others maintain and follow social media such as the *mandram* Facebook pages from centers around the world with weekly updates, photos, posted video and podcasts of holiday celebrations, or by sharing devotional music and DVDs of major ongoing events in the Melmaruvathur temple.[29]

Among the foremost ways in which the community of women devotees benefit in particular is through the support and recognition of women's authority and leadership that they receive both locally and transnationally, from the Toronto temple community, the Om Sakthi organization, and their guru, Bangaru Adigalar. This recognition is substantiated through their participation and acknowledgment on a transnational level, and it is bolstered by a transnational community of devotees with whom they are connected directly or indirectly, whether attending the local temple, through social media, while on pilgrimage in India or visiting the Adhiparasakthi centers abroad. The acknowledgement they receive for their active roles in leadership and performance is further fortified by the inclusivity ethics of the community and the mission aims of the transnational Om Sakthi organization.

The women's participation at once establishes a sense of belonging within the local temple society and at the same time establishes belonging within a transnational community, a socio-religious community that transcends national borders. As Levitt aptly notes, "The globalization of religion produces a climate that encourages transnational religious connections and creates elements needed for their enactment. Transnational religion is one, grounded strand of religious globalization that migrants further through their everyday lives."[30] Whether connected directly or indirectly, on social media, through material culture or while visiting Melmaruvathur during festivals and other occasions, this community is connected both locally and globally through their activities. Connections may be further established through commitments devotees share in common, through Om Sakthi outreach and volunteer services

in India or by offering service in their respective temples. Whether sharing communication exchanges or traveling to Melmaruvathur, there is a notable flow of information, communication, and contact between devotees that travels in multiple directions rather than simply back and forth between one local *mandram* site and the central Mother temple.

Whether visiting Melmaruvathur or following *mandram* social media sites, devotees meet from various cities around the world. People make new acquaintances, others form lasting friendships in Melmaruvathur, and enduring bonds take shape as they keep in touch through media and networks year after year. In a number of different ways, Adhiparasakthi practitioners form relationships with one another through ongoing activities, from outreach *seva* opportunities to social media. In this regard, these transnational connections travel in multiple directions not only from the sacred center but between the satellite *mandrams* as well. This phenomenon is not unique to this tradition but can be recognized in other transnational organizations and religious traditions as well.[31] Whether devotees live in India or the diaspora, some of the most prominent factors unifying devotees both in Toronto and Melmaruvathur are a grounded sense of religiosity and devotion to the guru's teachings, common values for humanitarian outreach, and a shared commitment to move in the direction of greater social equality regardless of caste, ethnicity, socio-economic status, or gender.

As Peggy Levitt has argued, "Transnational religious activities are part and parcel of religious globalization. As such, they cannot be viewed in isolation but must be understood within the context of these broader, global processes."[32] Migration is an ongoing global process that affects millions of people. Migration streams are in flux and can shift and change directions sometimes unexpectedly. In the Toronto mandram the devotees' participation in various activities, ritual and otherwise, establishes a sense of belonging within the local temple society and at the same time establishes belonging within a transnational community, a socio-religious community that extends beyond India into the diaspora. They are reminded through performance that they have a role and a place, that they too belong to a broader community.

Performance in this context encompasses not only the practices of individuals in local places but also the objectives of institutions in performing, mobilizing and restraining belonging.[33] In this respect, Wright comments that performance "has the capacity to bring structural, personal/affective and collaborative aspects of belonging together."[34] From one perspective, the Toronto Adhiparasakthi temple marks a locality, a place within a network of transnational space; that is to say, it is one way in which the global intersects with the local in the lives of individuals through place-making and belonging. Within the Adhiparasakthi temple society, the opportunities for envisioning and/or re-shaping diasporic identities through performance and in resonance with multiple layers of belonging have occurred in a relational context through which association with like-minded others has opened a space for discourse and praxis, where shared ethics, values and community transverse national borders to create an 'alternative cartography of belonging'.

Endnotes

      1   When devotees from the community are speaking English, the word "temple" is often used interchangeably with the word "mandram," which implies a smaller worship center, satellite to Melmaruvathur. The village of Melmaruvathur is located in the state of Tamil Nadu, about 93 km southwest of Chennai (Madras).

      2   For more information on the Adhiparasakthi temple society in Toronto, Canada. See Nanette R. Spina, *Women's Authority and Leadership in a Hindu Goddess Tradition*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

      3   See for example in Faith Curtis and Kathleen J. Mee, "Welcome to Woodside: Inverbrackie Alternative Place of Detention and Performances of Belonging in Woodside, South Australia and Australia," *Australian Geographer* 43, no.4 (2012): 357-375; Tovi Fenster and Ilan Vizel, "Globalization, Sense of Belonging and the African Community in Tel Aviv-Jaffa," *Hagar* 7, no. 1 (2007):7-24; Lesley Instone, "Northern Belongings: Frontiers, Fences and Identities in Australia's Urban North," *Environment and Planning* A 41, no.4 (2009): 1796-1810; Kathleen Mee, "A Space to Care, a Space of Care: Public Housing, Belonging, and Care in Newcastle, Australia," *Environment and Planning* A 41, no.4 (2009): 842-858; Catherine Veninga, "Fitting In: The Embodied Politics of Race in Seattle's Desegregated Schools," *Social and Cultural Geography* 10, no.2 (2009): 107-129.

      4   See Sarah Wright, "More-Than-Human, Emergent Belongings: A Weak Theory Approach," *Progress in Human Geography* 39, no. 4 (2015): 391-411; Mee, 842-858.

      5   See for example: George E. Marcus, "Ethnography in/of World System: The Emergence of Multi-sited Ethnography," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24, no. 1 (1995): 95-117; Arjun Appadurai, Frank J. Korom, and Margaret Ann Mills, *Gender, Genre, and Power in South Asian Expressive Traditions*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1991; Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, *Anthropological Locations: Boundaries and Grounds of a Field of Science*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997; Michael Buroway, ed. *Global Ethnography: Forces, Connections and Imaginations in a Post-modern World*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000; Zsuzsa Gille and Seán Ó Riain, "Global," *Annual Review of Sociology* 28, no.1 (2002): 271-295; David Fitzgerald, "Towards a Theoretical Ethnography of Migration," *Qualitative Sociology* 29, no. 1 (2006):1-24.

      6   Levitt Peggy, *Between God, Ethnicity and Country: An Approach to the Study of Transnational Religion*. University of Oxford. Transnational Communities Programme, 2001.

      7   Alternatively transliterated Ātiparācakti in Tamil and Ādiparāśakti in Sanskrit. Here, I have selected the spelling that is used by the community in Toronto.

      8   See E.C. Chandrasekharan and C. Thirugnana Sambandam, *Glory of Mother Divine- Amma Melmaruvathur, Melmaruvathur,* India: Adhiparasakthi Charitable, Medical, Educational and Cultural Trust, 2004, 88–89. For more information on the history of this tradition see for example: K.K. Moorthy, *Mother of Melmaruvathur and Her Miracle,* Tirupati: Adhiparasakthi Charitable, Medical, Educational and Cultural Trust, 1986; Chandrasekharan, E.C., and C. Thirugnana Sambandam, *Glory of Mother Divine-Amma Melmaruvathur,* Melmaruvathur: Adhiparasakthi Charitable, Medical, Educational and Cultural Trust, 2004; Vasudha Narayanan, "Melmaruvathur Movement," in *Brill's Encyclopedia of Hinduism,* volume 5 *Religious Symbols, Hinduism and Migration: Contemporary Communities outside South Asia, and Some Modern Religious Groups and Teachers*, eds. Knut Jacobsen, Angelika Malinar, Vasudha Narayanan, and Helene Basu (Brill, 2013), 531-534; Nanette R. Spina, *Women's Authority and Leadership in a Hindu Goddess Tradition,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

9   Spina 2017.

10   See also Mary Adams, "Stories of Fracture and Claim for Belonging: Young Migrants' Narratives of Arrival in Britain," *Children's Geographies* 7, no.2 (2009): 159-171; Vikki Bell, "Performativity and Belonging," *Theory, Culture & Society* 16, no.2 (1999): 1-10; Curtis and Mee 2012; Anne-Marie Fortier, "Re-membering Places and the Performance of Belonging(s)," *Theory, Culture & Society* 16, no.2 (1999): 41-64; Kathleen Mee and Sarah Wright, *Geographies of Belonging, Environment and Planning* A 41, no.4 (2009): 772-779.

11   See also Sarah Wright, "More-Than-Human, Emergent Belongings: A Weak Theory Approach," *Progress in Human Geography* 39, no.4 (2015): 391-411.

12   Paul Younger, "Hindu Ritual in a Canadian Context," in *Hindu Ritual at the Margins: Innovations, Transformations, Reconsiderations*, ed. Linda Penkower and Tracy Pintchman, 126–147. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2014: 145.

13   Ibid.

14   See Corinne G. Dempsey, *The Goddess Lives in Upstate New York: Breaking Convention and Making Home at a North American Hindu Temple*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006; Corinne G. Dempsey, "Women, Ritual, and Ironies of Power at a North American Goddess Temple," in *Hindu Ritual at the Margins: Innovations, Transformations, Reconsiderations*, ed. Linda Penkower and Tracy Pintchman, 106–125. Columbia: University of South Carolina, Press, 2014; Spina 2017.

15   Spina 2017.

16   Wright, 400. See also Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (2004): 117-139; Mick Smith, Joyce Davidson, Laura Cameron and Liz Bondi, "Geography and Emotion: Emerging Constellations," in *Emotion, Place and Culture*, edited by Smith Davidson Cameron and Bondi, 1-20. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009; Divya P.Tolia-Kelly, "Affect: An Ethnocentric encounter? Exploring the 'Universalist' Imperative of Emotional/Affectual Geographies," *Area* 38, no.2 (2006); 213-217.

17   See also Lawrence A. Babb, "Indigenous Feminism in a Modern Hindu Sect," *Signs* 9, no. 3 (1984): 399–416; Vasudha Narayanan, "Diglossic Hinduism: Liberation and Lentils," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 68 no. 4 (2000): 761–779; Vasudha Narayanan, "Gender and Priesthood in the Hindu Traditions," *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies* 18, no. 1 (2005): 22-31; Karen Pechilis, ed. T*he Graceful Guru Hindu Female Gurus in India and the United States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004; Dempsey 2006; Antoinette E. De Napoli, *Real Sadhus Sing to God: Gender, Asceticism, and Vernacular Religion in Rajasthan*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014; Amanda J. Lucia, *Reflections of Amma: Devotees in a Global Embrace*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014; Spina 2017.

18   A number of women at the temple support the empowerment of women; however; they do not necessarily align themselves with particular Western or South Asian feminist movements. While there are differences in the way the term "feminism" is conceptualized in India and the West, a detailed discussion of the subject would exceed the scope of this article. For scholarship on how Indian feminism has developed differently, see: Chandra T. Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism,* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991; Chandra. T. Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity,* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003; On Indian feminism and Hinduism, see: Madhu Kishwar. "Yes to Sita,

No to Ram," in *Questioning Ramayanas: A South Asian Tradition*, edited by Paula Richman, 285-308. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001; Madhu Kishwar. "Why I Do Not Call Myself a Feminist," *Manushi* 61, no. 3 (1990): 2-8; On women and goddesses, see: Alf Hiltebeitel and Kathleen M. Erndl, eds. *Is the Goddess a Feminist? The Politics of South Asian Goddesses*. New York: New York University Press, 2000; Tracy Pintchman and Rita D. Sherma, eds. *Woman and Goddess in Hinduism: Reinterpretations and Re-envisionings*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

19   Spina 2017.

20   Catherine Bell, *Ritual Perspectives and Dimensions*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997: 73.

21   On the Śrī Vaiṣṇava community in South India, Narayanan writes of the Tiruvāymoḻi as the first work in a mother tongue to be introduced as part of domestic and temple liturgy. She notes, "Unlike the Sanskrit Vedas, which could only be recited by male members of the upper castes, the Tiruvāymoḻi has been recited by men and women of all castes in Śrī Vaiṣṇava society." See Vasudha Narayanan, *Vernacular Veda: Revelation, Recitation and Ritual*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994, 2.

22   Fred W. Clothey, "Ritualizing on the Boundaries: Continuity and Innovation in the Tamil Diaspora," ed. Frederick M. Denny, *Studies in Comparative Religion. Columbia*, S. C.: The University of South Carolina Press, 2006: 20.

23   Vappu Tyyska, "That's Family Love: Gender and Division of Work among Teens in Śrı Lankan Tamil Families," in New Demarcations: Essays in Tamil Studies, edited by R. Cheran, Darshan Ambalavanar, and Chelva Kanganayakam, 67-81. Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, Inc., 2008.

24   Spina 2017.

25   For Turner, liminality (also liminoid) signifies a generative quality lending motion to a society which forces it out of a rigid system and into a flowing process. (For these qualities when found outside the ritual context, he uses the term liminoid). See: Victor Turner, "Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology," *Rice University Studies* 60, (1974): 53-92.

26   Spina 2017.

27   Levitt, 27.

28   The Melmaruvathur Adhiparasakthi temple has become an increasingly well-visited pilgrimage site among Toronto devotees (Spina 2017). While many devotees from the Toronto temple have visited the Melmaruvathur temple, some devotees including the president of the temple society attend more regularly and others make plans to visit as funds become available.

29   For example, at the Toronto temple during the communal meal following the Sunday puja, such videos are often shown on a large screen in a corner of the hall so that community members can listen, watch, and enjoy a vicarious visit to the Melmaruvathur temple as they share a Tamil vegetarian meal in the company of friends.

30   Levitt, 20.

31   Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996; Steven Vertovec, "Three Meanings of Diaspora Exemplified among South Asian Religions," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 6, no. 3 (1997): 277–299; Levitt 2001.

32   Levitt, 20.

33   Mee and Wright 2009.

34   Wright, 401; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, London: Routledge, 1990; Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, New York: Routledge, 1993; Nicky Gregson and Gillian Rose, "Taking Butler Elsewhere: Performativities, Spatialities and Subjectivities," in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 18, no.4 (2000): 433-452.